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Boys will be “Proud” Boys:
Securitizing masculinity in the Proud Boys movement

Master's Thesis

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In Prague on 27th July 2024

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References

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Abstract

The Proud Boys are a far-right Western Chauvinist group, famous for their involvement in the January 6th Insurrection, their reactionary and violent behavior as well as for their only-men policy. Masculinity is at the core of their ideology, they aim for the return of a society where men are celebrated and women are housewives. Their version of masculinity is rooted in the traditional genders roles, and they believe that societal order is at risk with the third wave of feminism being a threat to the existence of white men. This research argues that the creator and former leader of the Proud Boys is securitizing masculinity through his discourse, based on data collected from YouTube videos of Gavin McInnes. The securitization of masculinity through the speech act is made by the former leader by linking masculinity and violence, with the use of warfare vocabulary and using the victimhood narrative in order to legitimize the actions of the group. All of it under the umbrella of framing feminism for the demise of masculinity and white men and their traditions. This research finds that the securitization process is successful in its process, with the existential threat being the feminist movement, white men as the referent actor and finally the Proud Boys as the securitizing actors.

Abstrakt

Proud Boys je krajně pravicová západní šovinistická skupina, která proslula svou účastí na povstání 6. ledna, reakčním a násilným chováním a také politikou jediných mužů. Jádrem jejich ideologie je maskulinita, usilují o návrat společnosti, kde jsou muži oslavováni a ženy jsou ženami v domácnosti. Jejich verze maskulinity je zakořeněna v tradičních rolích pohlaví a věří, že společenský řád je ohrožen třetí vlnou feminismu, která je hrozbou pro existenci bílých mužů. Tento výzkum na základě dat získaných z videí Gavina McInnese na YouTube tvrdí, že tvůrce a bývalý vůdce skupiny Proud Boys svým diskurzem sekuritizuje maskulinitu. Sekuritizaci maskulinity prostřednictvím řečového aktu provádí bývalý vůdce propojením maskulinity a násilí, přičemž používá válečnický slovník a využívá narativ viktimizace, aby legitimizoval jednání skupiny. To vše pod záštitou kádrování feminismu za zánik maskulinity a bílých mužů a jejich tradic. Tento výzkum konstatuje, že proces sekuritizace probíhá úspěšně, přičemž existenční hrozbu představuje feministické hnutí, bílé muže jako referenční aktéry a nakonec Proud Boys jako sekuritizující aktéry.

Keywords

Proud Boys, masculinity, securitization, feminism, discourse

Klíčová slova

Proud Boys, maskulinita, sekuritizace, feminismus, diskurz

Název práce

Chlapci budou „hrdými“ chlapci: *Sekuritizace maskulinity v hnutí Proud Boys*

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Introduction

“The history of men's opposition to women's emancipation is more interesting perhaps than the story of that emancipation itself.”

Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 1929

American politics have faced a fundamental change in November 2016, as the results of the election announced Donald Trump as the new president of the United States. This event reunited a lot of supporters of the far-rights under the scope of Trump's political movement. These groups recognized themselves in his aggressive politics, and felt represented. This turnpoint in American politics led to the rise in activity during Trump's presidency, with one of the most active group being the Proud Boys. The Proud Boys are among a few militant right-wing groups that saw Donald Trump's election as a chance to reclaim their authority to rule through force, especially in defense of "the West". Events such as the Charlottesville rally, the acknowledgment of Donald Trump during a 2020 presidential debate, with the order to “stand back and stand by” for the members, or finally the events of January 6th 2021 have made them known in the public eye.

The Proud Boys' main ideology is based on the superiority of the Western civilization, known as Western Chauvinism. Their famous credo is “I am a Western chauvinist who refuses to apologize for creating the modern world.” Being a male-only group, masculinity is at the core of the Proud Boys identity. Their version of masculinity is rooted in the traditional genders roles, meaning of the man as the bread-winner, and women as housewives, and believe that the patriarchal system. They argue that men should reclaim their lost dominant position in society, going back to what they consider traditional male virtues such as strength, leadership, and authority. Thus, both masculinity and Western chauvinism are intertwined in the Proud Boy's ideology, creating the core of their identity that guides their actions and ideas.

Masculinity is one of the main features of the Proud Boys, but the group is also known for their violent nature. Thus, studying and researching the process of securitizing masculinity is important, as the effects of such a process can be devastating for society. Indeed, researching the process can help better understand the dynamics of the Proud Boys

and their use of the notion of masculinity in order to justify some of their actions. In addition, analyzing the securitization of masculinity can help shed light on the social and political impact of these movements, showing how they contribute to the polarisation and fragmentation of society. But most importantly, the importance of researching this topics lies in the violent nature of the group.

Furthermore, researching this subject is particularly important due to the violent nature of the group. Traditional gender roles are deeply rooted in the Proud Boys' notion of masculinity, fostering a patriarchal vision where men are dominant and women subordinate. This way of thinking not only reinforces negative stereotypes but also creates an atmosphere in which using violence to uphold one's ideals is justified. We can acquire insight into the manner in which these beliefs might inspire violence and destabilize societies by comprehending how the Proud Boys securitize masculinity. Investigating how the Proud Boys securitize masculinity might shed light on broader issues, such as the rise of right-wing extremism and its implications. As these groups acquire influence and awareness, it is vital to understand what attracts people to their radical views. finally, the Proud Boys' securitization of masculinity emphasizes the potentially harmful connection of gender, power, and violence. By critically evaluating this process, we can gain a better understanding of the challenges posed by such groups.

Gender can shape political attitudes and behaviours, and the failure of political scientists to interrogate the role of men as men within the radical right means that masculinity within these organisations remains invisible (Kimmel, 1993). This oversight means that the ways in which masculine identities and ideals are constructed, reinforced, and mobilized within radical right groups are not fully understood or addressed. By neglecting to analyze how notions of masculinity influence the motivations and actions of these groups, researchers miss important elements that drive their appeal and radicalization processes. For example, the focus on old-school masculine traits like being in control, violence and dominance can make members feel a sense of belonging and independence, especially when they see threats from progressive movements like feminism. This can create situations where aggressive and excluding behaviors aren't just accepted, but also seen as signs of 'real' masculinity. Furthermore, comprehending the function of masculinity in extreme right groups can shed light on the ways in which gender influences political

ideas through interactions with other elements like nationalism, racism, and class. It can assist in explaining why some stories appeal more to men and how these stories are employed to draw in new members and keep existing ones.

The Proud Boys actions are largely helped by a broader socio-political environment that amplifies and legitimizes their beliefs. Prominent political figures and media personalities often propagate narratives that align with the Proud Boys' ideology, such as claims of widespread electoral fraud, the threat of radical leftist agendas, and the erosion of traditional American values. Gavin McInnes, as the creator and former leader of the movement, will be at the core of this research and our main source of data. His position in the group makes him the spokesperson for the group's ideology and beliefs.

This analysis focuses on the movement of the Proud Boys, however it is important to acknowledge that this group does not operate outside other events in their domestic politics, and the two are linked. They are heavily influenced by the politics of their country at the time, notably during the era of Donald Trump's presidency. This paper aims to study the securitization process of masculinity by the Proud Boys movement, through the discourse of Gavin McInnes, creator of the Proud Boys. The main argument of this paper is that the process of securitization of masculinity is made through the link with a violent vocabulary and lexical field. By using such vocabulary and linking violence and masculinity, the danger is to increase the risk of violence in the name of manhood, by targeting the group they consider as the existential threat.

This thesis is divided into five different parts. First, we will review the existing literature concerning the Proud Boys, their recruitment process and their political violence, as well as literature concerning the far-right movements and Trumpism, and toxic masculinity in this political context. The theoretical framework of this research is based on the securitization theory of the constructivist Copenhagen School of thought, coupled with a gendered perspective of identity politics and post-structural feminism. This research is based on a Critical Discourse Analysis method in order to categorize Gavin McInnes' discourse, the leader of the Proud Boys. The analysis is thus based on the data collected from McInnes' YouTube videos, that will lastly lead us to understand and discuss the process of securitization of masculinity of the Proud Boys members.

1. Literature Review

This part of the study has for aims to describe in length the foundation on which the research is based. First, the history of the Proud Boys movement will be explained in detail, from its creation, its recruitment process to a recollection of their most notorious violent actions. In order to better understand where the Proud Boys come from, we will describe far-right organizations and movements in the era of Trumpism and populism, and its link with masculinity. Finally, research on the link between toxic masculinity and Trump will be recollected in order to lay the groundwork for our later analysis.

1.1 The emergence of the Proud Boys

1.1.1 Background

In 2016, the Proud Boys was created by Gavin McInness, with its first-ever branch located in New York City. McInness, former co-founder of the media VICE, defined it as a men-only “drinking group”, for men sharing the same ideas and beliefs such as their enthusiasm for Western culture. Their famous credo “I’m a Western chauvinists who refuse to apologize for creating the modern world” sets the tone for their belief and their mentality. The announcement of the creation of this drinking group, The name, heavily focused already on the masculine side of the group, apparently started as a joke in reference to the song “Proud of Your Boy” from Disney’s musical Aladdin as explained by McInness. (Dowless, 2022, p.19). Despite its seemingly lighthearted beginnings, the group quickly evolved into a more organized and politically active entity. The Proud Boys' activities expanded beyond social gatherings to include rallies, protests, and a significant online presence, where they promoted their views and recruited new members.

Proud Boys are openly pro-Trump, and the group actually started as a support group for the presidential candidate Donald Trump during the 2016 campaign for men to share their ideas and support for the politician and his program. The Proud Boys' ideology can be defined as racist, anti-semitic, homophobic, misogynist, and transphobic, who believe in white supremacy. They long for the days when ‘girls were girls and men were men.’ (Dowles, 2022, p.19). They recognise Donald Trump as the pioneer of the new

golden age of the United States, and the savior of the white identity and the return of the traditional social and gender values.

Based on 2020 data, it is believed that there are 119 official Proud Boys members across 46 states of the United States. The year 2021 was the most active period of the group, as they were recognized as the most active far-right group in North America (Dowless, 2022, p.77), and other antennas were created in multiple parts of the world, such as Great Britain, Australia, Germany, Ireland, Norway, the Philippines, and Sweden (Anti-Defamation League, n.d). Proud Boys has chapters all over the United States, with one division per state. The most active divisions are the ones of New York and Florida, they are also the most violent (Jensen, Yates & Kane, 2022)

To understand the dynamic and belief system of the Proud Boys it is important to look into its leaders and creator. Gavin McInnes is a Canadian citizen, and is the creator and has been the leader of the movement for the first five years of its existence. He was the co-founder of Vice Magazine, which he left in 2008 because of creative disagreements for the future of the magazine. He later linked himself closer to right-wing movements which led to the creation of the Proud Boys during the 2016 election campaign. McInness described himself as a part of the Alt-Lite movement, and a fiscal conservative and libertarian (Feuer, 2018). He resigned from the leadership in order to avoid deportation after the violent outbursts of the group in 2018 when he was replaced by Enrique Tarrío as chairman. Tarrío initially joined the Proud Boys in 2017 at the Miami division but became a full member in 2018 after completing the fourth degree of initiation. He stayed at the head of the movement until 2021, when he was destitute because of the implications the Proud Boys had in the Capitol Hill attack of January 6th. In May 2023, he was sentenced to 22 years of prison for multiple felonies, including seditious conspiracy for his actions before and during the attack (U.S. Department of Justice, 2023). Nowadays, the group changed its leadership style and opted for a more state-centric approach, with heads of division rather than a national leader.

1.1.2 Recruitment

The recruitment process of the Proud Boys is fundamental to their group dynamic. Indeed, the group requires a strong belief in their ideology to join. The group dynamic and hierarchy are as follows: a leader that represents the group publicly, and then multiple subgroups divided by states. Their recruitment is mostly done in far-right rallies directly, coupled with a strong online presence.

In order to join the Proud Boys, McInness and its members created different degrees and steps to test the allegiance of the future recruits: The first degree of membership is reciting the Proud Boys fraternity creed "I'm a proud Western chauvinist, I refuse to apologize for creating the modern world". The second degree, which is the one in which men can become official members, involves being punched until the person can name five brands of breakfast cereals. The third degree requires getting a tattoo of something significant for the group, which ranges from the usual "Proud Boys" of "PB", but also "Uhuru," the Swahili word for "freedom". Finally, the last degree is to engage in violence on the group's behalf, which can take different forms against different communities considered against the Proud Boys' beliefs. Originally, this last part was not a part of the founding manifesto of the Proud Boys, but it was later added by McInness who stated in an interview that it is considered as "a major fight for the cause. You get beat up, and kick the crap out of an antifa, it obviously doesn't mean you go to someone's house or even pick a fight with one at a rally. The fourth degree is a consolation prize for being thrust into a shitty situation and surviving." (Anti-Defamation League, n.d).

Kutner (2022) highlighted five different reasons that push men to join the Proud Boys in her research; based on interviews with members: the counterculture appeal of joining (1), dissatisfaction with conservative policies (2), familiarity with and appreciation for Gavin McInnes before joining (3). The camaraderie and brotherhood of being a member has been mentioned multiple times (4) and a shared sense of precarity (5). This research highlights a new brand of far-right extremism, based on precarity and male grievances.

1.1.3 Violence

In addition to their recruitment process that already leads to violent outcomes, what

made the Proud Boys famous during their prime was their tendency to turn to violent behavior during far-right organized rallies. Whether it was planned or in reaction to counter-protestors, in the name of self-defense, or fully planned, the far-right group has been notorious for its recurrent turn of events, both physically and psychologically. This section is a non-exhaustive list of some of the most known incidents that involved the Proud Boys.

The ‘Unite the Right’ rally in Charlottesville took place on August 11-12th 2017, where a gathering of predominantly white people, predominantly men, marched towards the statue of Robert E. Lee, commander of the Confederate State Army during the American Civil War, that was requested to be removed because of his side of the war (Lee, 2020). Multiple far-right extremists groups gathered to protest against the removal, with the main organizer being the Alt-Right accompanied by groups such as Rise Above Movement, Vanguard America, Nationalist Front, Klansmen, Proud Boys. The rally is basically a regroupment of all neo-nazis movements of the United States. The presence of counter-protestors led the demonstration to turn violent, with clashes between the two political sides. These violent confrontations led to the death of Heather Heyer, and numerous injured. The Charlottesville incident have been heavily talked about in domestic debates, with the majority of the people being unhappy with Trump’s response to the events. The far-right, on the other side, was generally content. Andrew Anglin of the neo-Naz website called “The Daily Stormer” commented: ‘Trump comments were good. He didn’t attack us. He just said the nation should come together. Nothing specific against us. He said that we need to study why people are so angry, and implied that there was hate... on both sides! So he implied the antifa are haters. There was virtually no counter-signaling of us at all. He said he loves us all. Also refused to answer a question about White Nationalists supporting him. No condemnation at all. When asked to condemn, he just walked out of the room. Really, really good. God bless him’ (Anti-Defamation League, n.d).

The Capitol Hill attack is one of the biggest events of recent American history, and took place with the Proud Boys at its participants. The year 2021 was rich in events from both political parties due to the presidential elections, with exiting president Donald Trump campaigning and Democrat Joe Biden, both running to be the elected leader of the United

States. Narratives about the elections being rigged traveled on social media, and were supported by Donald Trump himself, with the famous ‘Stop the Count’ tweet (Trump X account, 2020), which led to many citizens' distrust in the system. On January 6th, 2021, the world watched as the Capitol in Washington DC was raided by thousands of protestors against the ‘fraudulent’ win of Joe Biden in the elections of November 2020 during the investiture. According to research, 54 Proud Boys defendants participated in the Capitol breach. Proud Boys Enrique

In their research, Jensen, Yates, and Kane (2022) looked into the violent crimes committed by the Proud Boys. They studied that most of the violent acts committed by the Proud Boys weren't planned, and that most of them were sudden bursts of violence, not including January 6th 2021. Their research discovered that most acts were based on spontaneous violence rather than plotting, and from which out of their eight violent plots, two of them were successful. Most members who were arrested for violent acts already had a criminal record, with eight of them having already who committed violent crimes. Overall, eighty-three Proud Boys members have allegedly carried out crimes in the United States, and at least fifty-four Proud Boys have been charged for participating in the January 6, 2021. This event stands as a pivotal moment in illustrating the group's capacity for large-scale violence and disruption.

One important fact to keep in mind for this thesis is that violence is not reprimanded in the Proud Boys. Meanwhile, Gavin McInness condemned some acts of violence against members, no clear guidelines are preventing the use of violence and it is sometimes even encouraged as we have observed with the recruitment process, with the beating of the members until he successfully named five brands of cereal, or even inciting members to commit violent acts to prove their allegiance to the group. Thus violence is deeply embedded with the identity of being a Proud Boy. In the minds of Proud Boys members, violence is merely a self-defense response. However, it is important to note that most members have criminal records for violent behavior. Indeed, multiple members have been convicted of attempted assaults and riots. This shows the dichotomy between the mindset of the Proud Boys and their actual behavior.

Due to all of those incidents and the repeated appeal to violence that seems to

thrive in the Proud Boys members, the group has been considered a terrorist group by two countries, namely Canada in February 2021 (BBC, 2021) and New Zealand in June 2022 (Perry & Kunzelman, 2022). Both of these countries' Proud Boys chapters have since then stopped their activities. The United States Homeland Security Department also issued a warning of a rise in domestic terrorism threat, without naming the group directly but closely after the events of Capitol Hill with which the group is linked (PBS, 2022). Mainstream social media access has also been restricted, and the members are banned from platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram due to their hate speech. On June 12, 2020, Meta announced that they had deleted 358 Facebook and 172 Instagram accounts in relation to the Proud Boys group (Mosk & Osborne, 2020).

1.2 The Far-Right, a manly movement

1.2.1 The far-right, populism and movements

The far-right ideology ranges from political parties, such as Rassemblement National in France, AfD in Germany, or Viktor Orban's Fidesz in Hungary, to social groups and conspiracy theories. Such differences in group patterns mean that defining the far right has been a hassle for recent scholars and created a debate about what to include and to reject in this ideology. The far-right, the radical right, ultra-nationalism... A lot of denominations have been assigned to the phenomenon that has witnessed a resurgence in Europe but is now spreading worldwide (Rydgren, 2018, p.1). Despite the debate surrounding the definition, Rydgren (2018, p. 2) scholars agree on two main characteristics: First that far-right and right-wing extremism is an ideology. The concept of ideology explains the phenomenon of those groups and parties being viewed as belonging to one distinct party family, which displays ideological coherence. The second characteristic is that the far right is a continuum of right-wing ideas. Right-wing ideas are characterized by the belief that most inequalities are natural and that it is not the state's responsibility to reduce social inequalities and are based on a capitalist and corporate stance on economics (Rydgren, 2018, p.2). Socially, right-wing parties and groups believe in the traditional, stereotypical household. The far-right being an extension of right-wing ideas shares the same beliefs, and stretches it to other social issues, from racism, xenophobia, homophobia, anti-democracy... Different parties and movements of this

political spectrum share an emphasis on ethnonationalism rooted in myths about the past (Rydgren, 2018, p.1). The far-right's ideology is directed toward the restoration of a strong nation-state by returning to traditional values. However, having too much pride in your nation can be a double-edged sword. That's when some far-right extremist groups can turn to violence as a means to protect their nation-state.

With the ongoing debate surrounding a clear definition of the far-right phenomenon, Carter (2018) gathered and compared most definitions and research done on the topic to come up with a consensus. The most common term that is included in most of the research done is nationalism. Mudde (2017) defined nationalism as “a political doctrine that proclaims the congruence of the political unit, the state, and the cultural unit, the nation”. Far-right extremists draw their ideas from “the ideological criteria of populist and romantic ultra-nationalism, that is a myth of a homogeneous nation that puts the nation before the individual and his/her civil rights is characterized by the effort to construct an idea of nation and national belonging by radicalizing ethnic, religious, lingual, other cultural and political criteria of exclusion, to bring about congruence between the state and the nation, and to condense the idea of a nation into an image of extreme collective homogeneity” (Minkenberg, 2018, p.4). Nationalism on the far right is thus based on the ethnic homogeneity of the state, with citizens of the same color, same ethnic background, and same language and religion (Minkenberg, 2018; Mudde 2017)

The notion of nationwide cultural homogeneity often goes hand-in-hand with racism and xenophobia (Carter, 2018, p.164). For some scholars, racism is at the core of the right-wing extremism ideology (Minkenberg, 2018) but Carter (2018, p.173) argues that this dynamic is true only for a few number of parties of this political spectrum that articulates their ideas around racism, xenophobia, and immigration, and instead are more focused in nostalgia for the authoritarian, ultra-conservative regimes in their respective countries. However, most far-right political parties have a history of racism or xenophobia, for example, the Rassemblement National, formerly known as the Front National, was created by neo-Nazis in 1972, with a clear racism and antisemitic discourse. The same goes for Trump's politics, with a clear stance on immigration that drew in most of his voters back in 2016. The Southern Poverty Law Center stated that ‘Trump's run for office electrified the radical right, which saw in him a champion of the idea that America is fundamentally a white man's country’. (SPLC, n.d).

When dealing with far-right ideas it is important to define the notion of populism that it is linked to more and more. In Europe, most far-right political candidates are considered populists, meanwhile in the United States, both end of the political spectrum, Bernie Sanders for the Left, and Trump for the Republicans, have been referred to as such. However, this political concept has diverse interpretation and definition, most of them depending on the global region it affects (Mudde, p.2) Populism refers to a mobilization, a phenomenon, more than a person, as no politicians ever proclaimed themselves as a populist. So what defines populism? Michael Kazin (2016) defined it as “contested and ambiguous concept, a creed, a style, a political strategy, a marketing ploy.” Populism is based on a political discourse: a rhetorical discursive practice centred on the elites vs. the people, the anti-establishment. There are different types of populism, and the one that interests us here is from the right-wing perspective. It is referred to by scholars under different names: “right-wing populisms,” (Aciksoz, Yildirim, 2016), “cultural nationalism” (Evans, 2017), or “nationalist populism” (Gusterson, 2017). This form of populism is pushed mainly by economic and immigration reasons (Gusterson, 2017). Populist ideas find their support at the mass level, blue collar, and middle-class level (Mudde, 2017, p.20), and that’s what Donald Trump managed to do in his campaign in 2016, become a billionaire with blue collar’s support. Populist rhetoric, or more precisely Trump’s rhetoric in the United States, claims to ‘make men great again’ (Pascoe, 2017), and is usually made in opposition to movements for racial and gender equality and is thus grounded in an ideology of masculinism and hegemonic masculinity (Pease, 2020, p.55)

1.2.2 Alt-Right/ Alt Lite

Contrarian groups, i.e. groups belonging to the extreme right that reject and oppose mainstream ideas (Matos, Lima, Almeida et al., 2024, p.2; Ribeiro et al., 2020, p.2), such as the Alt-lite and Alt-right, have a massive presence on mainstream social media and fringe websites. This online presence raises major concerns, as these groups often engage in the dissemination of conspiracy theories and hate speech against particular groups of people (Matos, Lima, Almeida et al., 2024, p.1).

This group's skill in using digital platforms to spread their toxic messages is a big

threat. Social media have become powerful tools for them, as they use these tools to attract and radicalize new members, targeting vulnerable people or those searching for identity and a sense of community that the group can offer to them. Moreover, social media algorithms make it easier for extremist ideas to spread, thanks to echo chambers.

“Race matters. Race is the foundation of identity”, this is what Richard Spencer, the creator of the term “Alt-Right” wrote in the “Charlottesville Statement” when trying to define what the Alternative Right entails (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d, Hawley, 2018, p.10). Different labels create the far-right ideology. While being the same in essence, they each have important different characteristics making them stand out from each other. The Alternative-Right, most commonly known as the “alt-right” is characterized by its heavy use of social media to spread its ideology focused on white identity and the need for its preservation, and the preservation of a white civilization that is under attack by multiculturalism (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d; Hawley, 2018, p.8). Its main ideologies are the need for mass deportation of undocumented migrants, and protection of trade policies while opposing feminism, gun control, diversity, and multiculturalism (Main, 2018, p.4). They are Western Chauvinists who have the hope of creating a white ethnostate in North America (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d). Race is at the core of their identity as a movement, considering racial hierarchy as natural, a legitimate biological condition (Hawley, 2018, p.8). Main (2018, p.8) summarizes the features of the Alt-Right in his book: rejection of liberal democracy, with the belief that not all men are created equal and that liberal democracy and its principles are obsolete by creating such equality. White superiority, and anti-Americanism when it comes to racial equality of the country. They argue that the United States as they are today has declined from its supreme form with white dominance, with merits to white citizens. Vitriolic rhetoric, meaning the use of intemperate language for the rejection of the standard of ethics of controversy and indulges in race-baiting, coarse ethnic humor, and prejudicial stereotyping, with the use of extremist symbols. The demographic of the Alt-Right settles itself as a youthful movement, with most supporters being white millennial men (Hawley, 2018, p.9).

The 'Alt-Lite' appeared in reaction to the Alt-Right, trying to stay away from the white supremacist stuff that the Alt-Right is known for (Anti-Defamation League, 2017).

This group wants to separate people who don't openly support racist views from other Alt-Right groups (Matos, Lima, Almeida et al., 2024, p.3). Greg Johnson, a writer connected to the Alt-Right, says that 'the Alt-lite is about civic nationalism, not racial nationalism, which is what the Alt-right is all about' (Anti-Defamation League, 2019). This difference shows how Alt-Lite tries to look more acceptable by focusing on citizenship and culture instead of race. Even though they try to look different, Alt-Lite still shares a big love for conspiracy theories with the Alt-Right. These theories spread easily among Alt-Lite members on their social media pages (Dowles, 2022, p.22). Digital platforms become places where these ideas are not just shared but also get bigger, reaching lots of people and making social divisions worse.

Alt-Lite often gets supporters with populist and anti-establishment talk. They seem more moderate and attract more people by rejecting racial labels, which might scare away people who don't like the extreme views of the Alt-Right. But under this moderate look are really conservative and intolerant views. The Alt-Right's use of social media to spread their ideas and conspiracy theories has real-world effects. These views create distrust in authorities, the media, and democratic processes, leading to violent or illegal actions. These ideas spread easily online, showing how digital tools help spread Alt-Lite beliefs.

In the end, even though Alt-Lite tries to look different from the Alt-Right with moderate views and civic nationalism, the two ideologies and methods are alike (Dowles, 2022, p.22). The rise of conspiracy theories and the smart use of social media stay big themes, showing the need to understand and counteract these movements' impact on society (Anti-Defamation League, n.d).

Both the Alt-Right and the Alt-Lite are part of the "anti-politically correct" culture that came up online in the 2010s (Nagle, 2017), a time when social movements like pro-LGBT and trans rights were getting more attention and support. Both groups saw these social movements as crazy and over-the-top (Nagle, 2017, Ribeiro et al., 2020, p.2). The ideas of the two groups are so similar that the line between them often blurs. They both embrace xenophobia, misogyny, Islamophobia, and are anti-globalization.

The Proud Boys call themselves part of the "Alt-Lite" movement, but the group is a good example of crossing the line between Alt-Right and Alt-Lite. Even though they say

they are Alt-Lite, some members support Alt-Right ideas, people, and events (Anti-Defamation League, 2019).

1.3 Performing Masculinity in the United States

1.3.1 Toxic Masculinity

Masculinity is a dynamic concept, that can be shaped and changed over time, however, there exist different forms of masculinity, some that can bring privilege or subordination of others (Schrock and Schwalbe, 2009; Carrigan et al.,1985). Men are pressured by social cues to ‘be a man’ and ‘man up’, because not all masculinities are praised (Morrow, 2022, p.30). This is what led to the term “hegemonic masculinity”, which is considered as the highest and most praised form. “Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.” (Connell, 1995, p. 77).

The term “toxic masculinity” has been used more and more in recent years, with the emergence of feminism calling out certain types of improper behavior of men, either towards women or even towards other men. For the aim of this research, it is key that the academic sense of the term shall be defined. Masculinity has been socially taught that it needs to be earned through life stages (Thompson & Pleck, 1995). Michael Kimmel (2018), one of the predominant scholars on the topic of masculinity, focused some of his research on toxic masculinity. In his work, he explains that there are different types of masculinity, in which some can even be beneficial, and usually follow a pattern of the successful man. This pattern is highly race-oriented as it only includes white cisgender men as providers of their families. Toxic masculinity appeared in reaction to feminism, due to the asymmetry it created in the pattern. Men were not the sole and only providers of the household contrary to what they had been socialized to believe, women started emancipating, with men left to feel like they were robbed of their primary duties (Kedrowski, 2022; Kimmel & Wade, 2018). It manifests itself in the need for overcompensation of manhood that men feel will bring back their gender identity, which is

threatened by the rise of feminism (Cassino, 2018, p.50).

Toxic masculinity can be displayed as different acts, such as dominance, self-reliance, exclusion of outgroups, pursuit of status, and violence. Other characteristics of toxic masculinity can be misogyny and gendered violence towards women (Harrington, 2021), and is sometimes used to explain and justify political extremism (Pearson, 2019), mass shootings (Marcotte, 2018; Scott-Coe 2020), the “incel” (involuntarily celibate) movement (Haenfler 2020), domestic violence (Scott-Coe, 2020), and sexual assault (Kimmel & Wade, 2018). Scholars have also experimented on induced threats to masculinity, that led to aggressive cognitions (Vandello, Cohen, & Ransom, 2008), physical aggression (Bosson & Vandello, 2011), and aggression toward other competitors (Cohn, Selbert, & Zeichner, 2009). Thus, there is academic proof that toxic masculinity is closely linked to the notion of violence in these studies.

The rhetoric behind toxic masculinity is based on the idea of a “crisis of masculinity”. Dorais (1992), explains it and is a firm believer in this said crisis and describes it as the role of men being stolen from them. He argues that this crisis of masculinity is not a social movement but the result of personal disarray, and that the sole cause of this unhappiness is feminism. Social movements seeking to empower marginalized communities, from racial and ethnic minorities to women, and immigrants, become the reasons for their unhappiness, and thus targets (Kedrowski, 2022, p.49). Dupuis-Déri (2012) explains that this idea of a crisis of masculinity is nothing new nor exceptional, and is actually rather a common conception that has long existed in the West. Contrary to popular belief, this crisis did not start in reaction to the feminist movements of the '60s but was already mentioned all throughout history, surely based on different logics and backgrounds, but this caused Judith A. Allen (2022) to interrogate herself during her research, aren't men endlessly in crisis? Dupuis-Déri (2018) explains that the very notion of a “crisis” is not appropriate for the phenomenon, and the discourse around it is make-believe to convince men that there is indeed a crisis that needs solving. This entire mechanism is articulated around the creation of a mobilization of men reclaiming and defending their privileges and rights, by passing them as self-defense. The idea of a “crisis” is obsolete. This represents the loss of traditional values and privileges that men possess. This crisis is orchestrated by the supposed feminine domination of both public and

private spheres (Blais & Depuis-Déri, 2012), which are invading the political discourse in order to replace men, thus reversing the patriarchal order to the detriment of men. Feminism is considered a new dictatorship, ridding men of their rights. The entire idea of this crisis is based on the end of patriarchy, that men “experienced feminism violently” (Castelain-Meunier, 2005, p.135), “the masculine order is forever changed” (Bombardier, 1993, p.100), and that men are victims of misandry and are “mute, dominated and feminized” (Sauvé, 2005, p.9; Zemmour, 2006, p.18-19). They sometimes draw attention to health problems and shorter life spans, and custodies usually advantageous to women to back this idea (Pease, 2020, p.61) Some scholars argue that these men use feeling as a way to create a sense of crisis rather than to simply express them, thus framing themselves as victims and legitimizing the crisis, even by mentioning suicide, an issue that is often used to prove that men are struggling more (Allen, 2016).

An important notion to keep in mind is that this concept of a crisis of masculinity on which toxic masculinity resides is a fantasy. As Dupuis-Déri (2018, p.91) explains, men are still largely in control in society, in political, economic, scientific, or media institutions, and also in sports, the military, and in religion. In contrast to what the discourse says, men do not lack representations and models of masculinity culturally: presidents and warlords and their enemies, sportsmen that remain more prestigious and more profitable than women's sports, the richest men in the world... Institutionally and socially, men still have more advantages than women in terms of wages and job opportunities, but also on a more personal level where men have less risk of being victims of aggression than women. Dupuis-Déri (2018, p.92) also observed how the United States usually considers itself a regular victim of this crisis of masculinity, despite being the first economic, political, military, and cultural power in the world, and despite becoming the superpower of the Western bloc during the Cold War. He also highlights the importance of the crisis discourse (Dupuis-Déri, 2018, p.93), and that these discourses can have huge consequences on the sociopolitical level, which serves to encourage and legitimize a mobilization to their advantage.

There are different narratives on masculinity which can possibly lead to violence extremism that Roose explains in his book entitled “Masculinism and violent extremism” (2022). First, there is the Male protector, which puts family and traditional values at the

core of this narrative. An heteronormative family in which the natural gender role of the man is the sole provider and protector of the household, while the woman is here for social reproduction. The manifestation of violent extremism for this narrative is understood as the protection of white families. The second narrative is based on restoring a lost patriarchy, which can only be done through violent extremism to restore the social order of things. This is linked with the clash of civilisations narratives, but based on a gendered decline, that needs to be solved. Thirdly, male crusaders are the epitome of heroic symbolism for far-right men, historical warrior defending the West and Christianity, projecting a “warrior masculinity” (Roose, 2022, p.35). Finally, the last narrative is the one of men’s suffering. This has been the focus for recruitment in the far-right, by spreading the message of the end of men’s suffering. This spread has occurred on social media and online spheres, most commonly known as the manosphere. The manosphere is based on the belief that men are oppressed by feminism and women. This practice of ‘revelation’ is referred to as ‘red-pilling’.

This practice of red-pilling is in reference to the movie *The Matrix* (1999), in which the main character gets told the truth about the universe by consuming, and choosing, the red pill that he was offered, or stay in his current life, and slavery, with the blue pill. The Red Pill forum on reddit was created in 2012, by Robert Fisher, also known as “pk_atheist” (Dignam & Rohlinger, 2019, p.595) This analogy is like enlightenment for men, as in their suffering and reality is revealed to them thanks to these forums, that they are in reality enslaved by feminism (Dignam & Rohlinger, 2019, p.595). Ging (2017, p. 3) explains the concept by writing, “purports to awaken men to feminism’s misandry and brainwashing, and is the key concept that unites all of these communities”.

1.3.2 Trumpism and Masculinity

Men’s identity is often the primary motivation that attracts them to right-wing movements, explaining the overwhelming number of male voters, activists and party members (Kimmel, 2013; Ralph-Morrow, 2020, p.1). For example, the Alt-Right is obsessed with a loss of the traditional manhood, which these men frame as emasculation (Grant and MacDonald, 2018; Pease, 2020, p.57). This phenomenon is called ‘aggrieved entitlement’ (Kimmel, 2013) and refers to the idea that a man is more entitled and legitimate to power by his masculinity than any other person would be due to their

experience with power. This loss of opportunity of grasping power is what explains this feeling of being emasculated (Pease, 2020, p.57), and is how they justify any actions taken. Some extreme forms of masculinity, such as sexual conquest, dominance, and aggression, are accentuated in the Alt-Right movement (Pease, 2020, p.58). Such behaviors, the brute, aggressive, and violent type, are considered the credo of being “real men” in contrast to being too soft or feminine, and by joining right-wing groups, men are promised to regain their masculine entitlement (Pease, 2020, p. 59). Traditional models of men and women are highlighted as the only right models, without any negative connotations to them.

Ralph-Morrow (2022) theorizes that radical right organizations and parties have masculinist discourses and practices and they are likely to resonate with individuals who have masculine personality traits and wish to feel like men (Ralph-Morrow, 2022, p.28), and his research, Pease (2020) highlights the gendered dimension of populism, and how “angry white working-class and middle-class” (Pease, 2020, p.55) men can find answers to their grievances in such movements. These two studies show that men are generally more attracted to the radical right not necessarily for their ideas, but because of what it represents for them and how it affects their masculine side and status.

Van Berkel and al (2017) conducted a revealing study of perceptions of masculinity and femininity in the context of American and patriotic identity. They found that, among both men and women, masculinity was perceived as an inherently more 'American' or patriotic trait than femininity. This perception has profound implications for the way in which gender identities are linked to notions of citizenship and nationalism. The results of the study also show that men are more often identified as examples of 'Americans' than women. This association between masculinity and Americanness reinforces traditional stereotypes that value qualities perceived as masculine, such as strength, courage and independence, as emblematic characteristics of national identity.

In addition, the study revealed a significant correlation between men's identification with their gender and their identification as Americans or patriots. In other words, the more strongly a man identifies with his masculine gender, the more likely he is to see himself as a patriot or a typical representative of America. This relationship suggests that gender norms play a crucial role in the formation of national and patriotic identity, particularly

among men.

This leads us to the political context of the United States back when the Proud Boys emerged and to the persona of Donald Trump. During both elections, Trump received outstanding support from men Trump received a majority of votes cast by men (52% in 2016 and 51% in 2020 for all races) and a supermajority of votes cast by specifically White men (61%; Center for American Women and Politics, 2020; Kedrowski, 2017, p.50). This results in votes is explained by the masculine charisma that Trump transpires. In his dominant and masculine persona, Trump and his followers do not aim only at achieving dominance over women, but also towards other men, whom they would consider as weak, feminine, or not masculine enough (Pascoe, 2017). As it was illustrated in the October 2016 release of the Access Hollywood video, in which Trump talks crudely about grabbing a woman by her private parts, he demonstrates his domination of the feminine gender and his toxic masculinity. Johnson (2017, p.1) argues that is it because of these different claims, rather than in spite of, that Trump was elected in 2016. After all, Trump is the perfect example of what a man should be according to far-right men: a white, masculine, self-made man who became one the most powerful men on the planet, and who is not afraid of saying what he thinks. He is the perfect success story.

During both his campaign and his manda, Trump continuously compared femininity to weakness, with analogies from wearing a mask to being weak, belittling his female opponents such as Hillary Clinton and Carly Fiorina using sexist language, and bragged about sexual assault (Kedrowski, 2017, p.50). His gender-biased attacks are also focused on women's age and physical appearance and tend to attack women of color (Dowless, 2022, p.8). Dignam & Rohlinger (2019) argue that the Red-Pill practice helped elect Trump during the 2016 elections. Indeed, Trump's candidacy was seen as an opportunity for them to reclaim their masculinity, but mostly to spread the "truth" about feminism. He represents the potential push back against feminism, represented by Hillary Clinton, who they see as an "emasculating" figure for this community. The presidential election was framed by Red-Pill truthers as a "war on men", and Trump as an alpha male who would fight for men's political fortune (Dignam & Rohlinger, 2019, p.604). The rhetoric behind Trump's campaign is based on hyper-masculine language and metaphor for his new politics. For example, the use of words such as being 'tough' on international

politics, as well as a lot of provocateur outbursts by not being afraid of saying what he think, fit with the ideology of toxic masculinity who are “unapologetically who they are”.

Trump is considered as the ultimate savior of both the United States, and of masculinity : “This war on masculinity has gone on for far too long, and our only hope of stopping it right now is Donald Trump” (“Oxykitten80mg,” Men’s Rights, 10/14/2016), and the image of a strong leader is very important for populism. Overall, the performance of toxic masculinity was favorable to Trump, rather than having disastrous consequences, by winning the most powerful political seat in the world, at the White House.

1.3.3 January 6th Insurrection - a male experience

Kedrowski (2022) researched the link between toxic masculinity and the January 6th Insurrection in their research. In this study, they argue that the attack on the Capitol was a representation of toxic masculinity in multiple ways. Most of the argument put forward by Kedrowski is based on language and the allegory between femininity and of what the act of voting, democracy and the Capitol represent, and general behavior based on the association made. Indeed, all of the symbols that are linked to the Capitol, which are democracy, liberty and peace transfer of power are generally considered as gendered female (in French, “la démocratie”, “la paz” in Spanish...). These values are thus understood as weak and soft meaning accepting them would be considered being dominated by women. The threats made to Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a liberal democrat, can be seen as an illustration of the opposition to female power. Pelosi became a prime target for the insurrectionists' anger because she represented both female leadership and democratic norms. This animosity stems from the idea that democratic methods are inferior because they are perceived as feminine, and that the only way to achieve legitimate authority is through violent, masculine combat. This is contrary to masculine warfare, considered as the only legitimate way of gaining power for toxic men.

The study also highlights the lack of repercussion that men can face when performing bad behavior, with sentences such as “boys will be boys”, shielding them from any consequences (Kedrowski, 2022, p.52). This has been the defence adopted by most of the arrested men during the event as to explain their actions during the Capitol attack. As

we mentioned earlier in the state of the art, the Proud Boys had an impactful role in the January 6th attack, for which three of their member, including their leader at the time Enrique Tarrio, were convicted.

As Kedrowski explains, “Toxic masculinity explains not only violence against women, misogyny, and authoritarianism, but also violence against democracy herself” (Kedrowski, 2022, p.53). This quote captures the notion of toxic masculinity and its effects, connecting it to more widespread acts of political and social violence, explaining that it is a threat to modern societies and democracies.

1.4 Concluding thoughts

This review of the literature on the Proud Boys, violence and masculinity reveals that this group's association with violence is intrinsically linked to their identity. Their conception of masculinity is also centralised around the idea of the group, given that it is an all-male organisation that celebrates attributes and behaviours strongly marked by exacerbated virility. As this review has shown, masculinity is deeply rooted in the social norms we instil in children, influencing the way we teach and transmit these norms across generations. The notion of toxic masculinity is key to analysing the Proud Boys movement, as it lies at the heart of their vision of the ideal man and the perfect human. This toxic masculinity values aggression, domination and the absence of traits perceived as feminine, which shape their behaviour and ideology.

However, the existing literature shows a notable lack of research on the link between security and masculinity in the context of the far right. While a lot of research looks at the socio-political and ideological sides of groups like the Proud Boys, not many studies dig into how their ideas about masculinity shape their views and actions related to security and violence. Donald Trump's policies are tightly connected to the ideology of far-right groups like the Proud Boys. His tough, hyper-masculine language is seen by these groups as freeing them from the limits set by feminism, boosting their sense of legitimacy and power. This association not only galvanised their base, but also normalised behaviour and discourse that would have been deemed unacceptable in more moderate political contexts.

In conclusion, this literature review highlights the importance of further research into the links between toxic masculinity and security dynamics within far-right movements. Understanding these links is crucial to developing effective strategies to counter the harmful influence of these groups on society and to promote more balanced and inclusive models of masculinity.

This research aims to contribute to the existing literature regarding the Proud Boys and masculinity, with the securitization framework in order to fill the gaps regarding gender and security regarding American politics and far-right extremists and violent movements.

2. Theoretical Framework

This research aims to understand the link between masculinity and violence in the Proud Boys group, and how the two came to be so intertwined and so indispensable for the members. In order to conduct this research, the appropriate framework needs to be determined. Due to the social constructivist perspective, we will consider the discursive nature of the analysis, and the urge to understand the root causes of the need to over-masculinize. For this research, the securitization theory is thus the better-suited theory. Securitization is based on the interaction between actors, where an issue that is not security-related at first sight, is still presented as such to an audience, which will lead to this issue being put on the security agenda. This research argues that this is the process that the Proud Boys have been keen on using with its members when it comes to the “others”, the out-group.

This section presents the theory of securitization, with the specific framework of the speech act in order to later apply it to our research. The absence of the gender issues being represented by this theory forces us to also combine our framework for analysis with gender-related literature, by linking identity politics, focusing on group dynamics and white identity, with post-structural feminism.

2.1 The Rise of Securitization

Traditionally, security was thought of in very black-and-white terms. Only the security of the State, and its survival mattered when it came to policymaking. Realists such as Mearsheimer and Waltz believe that the state is the only relevant actor when it comes to security, and its survival is at its very core, it remained the dominant theory until the end of the Cold War when it was challenged by emerging theorists. Constructivism started to gain importance as a theory in the 90s after the fall of the Soviet Union, and its main feature is that international reality is a social construction driven by collective understandings, including norms, that emerge from social interaction (Wendt, 1992, p.2). It is based on social, cultural, and historical perspectives of international relations. According to constructivists, the relations and shared understandings between states, but most specifically state's interests are constructed by historical, cultural, and social explanations and are not only based on power and security. This new way of thinking led to the emergence of the Copenhagen School, with Buzan and Waever as their headlining scholars. Other schools of thought derived from the constructivist theory have emerged in Europe at the same time, like the Paris School or the Aberystwyth School, but for the sake of this research, we shall solely focus on the Copenhagen School.

This research is based on the securitization theory of the Copenhagen School. This theory is based on the explanation of the process of how low or non-politics issues and topics can become topics of high-politics, and security, through language. The Copenhagen School, with Buzan and Waever as the most influential, considers security as a social construct, and not as a naturally given aspect of a nation, despite it being the primary concern of a nation-state (Buzan, 1991, p.1).

Studying securitization is looking at discourse and political constellations and actions: When The emergence of securitization and the Copenhagen School is recent. Scholars have long argued that the scope of security studies and actions was only limited to military-related topics. This was the theory of realist scholars, where security, as in war, was their primary concern. Traditionally, security has always been understood in terms of the military of nuclear affairs and its invocation is used as a legitimizing tool for the

deployment of extreme measures for existential threats to the state (Buzan, Wæver, Wilde, 1998, p). However, security studies have experienced a shift after the Cold War, dividing the community more and letting new theories emerge. Indeed, a debate regarding the “wide” and “narrow” narrative of the field emerged in the 1990s. Emerging scholars argued that the theories of security studies were too narrow and niche, and should encompass more fields of potential threats. This group of scholars led a revolution in security studies, and to the consideration of multiple new categories to be considered as security challenges: from migration to natural catastrophes and environmental issues to criminal activities. This shift in academia permitted the agenda of security to be broadened and deepened, thus allowing more reflection and hypothesis. The widening conceptual net of this theory changes the focus from being state-centric to being a predetermined assumption and becomes a possibility instead of a given.

Language is a strong tool of politics, and as Buzan and Wæver argue, is relevant in security studies. For the authors, security threats arise through the power of the discourse you associate with the issue. Securitization is the ability to make an issue an absolute priority through the arguments you put forward: Calling something a security threat and naming it as such in your discourse, makes it become one (Buzan, Wæver, Wilde, 1998, p.25-26). Security becomes thus very self-referential as a framework, a threat may not exist, but presenting something as such makes it become one. With the securitization theory, any issue can go from non-politicized, meaning that the state does not deal with it and it is not relevant to public debate and decision-making, to politicized where it becomes an issue for the government, to finally securitized, where the issue becomes an existential threat requiring emergency measures and actions outside normal bounds of political procedure (Buzan, Wæver, Wilde, 1998, p.25). As Balzacq (2005) puts it, “The enunciation of security itself creates a new social order wherein ‘normal politics’ is bracketed.” This quote describes the securitization theory perfectly, that discourse affects the ways of politics and security.

Securitization, and ‘security’ as argued by the Copenhagen School, is about survival, but also but it's also a rhetorical exercise, based on successfully convincing an audience of a potential threat to a particular group's survival. This entails convincing that the threat is serious and big enough to suspend the normal way of things and to employ

outstanding actions in order to counter it. Without this convincing, no change of course of action will take place.

The securitization theory has multiple layers and divisions within it. The main thesis of Wæver (1995) is that security should be considered as a speech act, putting the issue of the social construct at the core of the concept of security. The speech act does not depend on whether an actual security existential threat is there, but rather how, thanks to social interaction, a threat can be built socially. In the speech act framework, the simple fact of speaking about a potential security issue makes it a threat. “To securitize an issue not previously deemed to be a security issue is to challenge society to promote it higher in its scales of values and to commit greater resources to solving the related problems” (Sheehan, 2005, p.52).

2.1.1 Speech Act

The securitization theory is based on the social interaction between individuals. Based on this, the speech acts inherently involve multiple parties in order to make the threat become real through discourse, it is a tool to transform non-political issues into political and security-related issues via human communication, and cannot survive without the latter as it is what brings it into existence. The speech act framework disposes of three types of units that need to be involved for an issue to be considered in a security analysis. The first unit is the referent object (Buzan, Wæver, Wilde, 1998, p.25). The referent object represents the things that are considered to be threatened and that have a legitimate claim to survival. These are the actors for which the security actions are being taken on behalf of, it usually is represented by a community. Second is the securitizing actor who officially declares an issue as a security threat, and finally, the functional actors, who influence sectorial dynamics and decisions of security. When these three actors are reunited, three steps need to be undertaken for the securitization to be complete. The securitizing actor has to call an issue a threat, then the issue at hand has to be backed up with evidence in order to legitimize the need for acting measures, and finally, those measures need to affect the relation between all the parties, namely the functional actor, the securitizing actor and the referent object. When all of those conditions and actors are reunited, an issue is securitized.

The referent object is the most crucial part of the securitization process, as the entire process could not exist without the discursive existence of the referent. The referent object is the community or individual that claims that its survival is compromised by an existential threat, which justifies the use of extraordinary means. When this referent is mentioned to an audience as a security threat, that's when the securitization process starts. "The constitution of referent objects, is in other words, closely linked to the practice of securitization; they do not exist independently of discursive articulation, it is through discourse that security is defined, and where actors successfully manifest their position and capacity." (Hansen, 2000, p.288) Securitizing actors are usually referring to political actors such as "political leaders, bureaucracies, governments, lobbyists, and pressure groups", and that their identification depends less on "who performs the speech than of what logic shapes the action" (Buzan, p.21). Their goal is to perform a successful securitization, meaning to get the audience to legitimize the seriousness of an existential threat. Therefore, the link between the securitizing actor and the audience to which the issue is presented is more than crucial. Without the approval of the audience and its recognition, an issue is not considered a threat and thus not put on the security agenda. Weaver explained, The entire securitizing process is reliant on them, as, without the consent of the audience, the means employed to counter the threat will be small, thus considering the threat as a minor inconvenience. As Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde explain it, 'The field is structured or biased, but no one conclusively 'holds' the power of securitization' (Buzan, Wæver, Wilde, 1998, p.31), power is shared between the parties in the speech act framework.

The notion of size and scale is also important when dealing with securitization, most specifically with the securitizing actors. It would seem obvious that the bigger the community of the securitizing actor, the more likely it is to have a successful securitization. But Buzan, Wæver, and Wilde, (1998, p. 36) argue that it is actually the middle, limited communities who have the most durable securitization. Indeed, "one explanation for this success is that such limited collectivities engage in self-reinforcing rivalries with other limited communities, and such exchange strengthens the "we" feeling. Because they involve a reference to a "we" they are social constructs operate in the interaction among people." (Buzan, Wæver, Wilde, 1998, p. 36) Smaller groups, individuals, or at the other end of the spectrum big communities struggle when it comes to legitimacy.

2.2 The Gender Issue

In order to properly address this research question and this study as a whole, it is important to introduce a gender perspective, as it is central to this analysis. Although this theory is rooted in critical security studies and post-structuralism, the gender dimension has been completely neglected. Securitization theorists have been criticized for failing to integrate the notion of gender into their approach to security.

In order to fill this gap, this theoretical framework will be complemented with literature on gender and identity. The goal is to understand how social constructs are influenced by gender as well as clarifying the role of gender in international relations, particularly in the context of this case study. From adding a gender perspective, this research aims to develop a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis of security dynamics, as well as the biases currently present in theories of securitization.

2.2.1 Identity Politics

Identity politics emerged in the 1970s, when social and political movements were on the rise; second-wave feminism, Black Civil Rights movement, queer liberation... In response Growing demand for recognition of difference, of certain identities, often from groups considered to be minorities, a philosophical body of literature that addresses issues regarding the nature, origins, and futures of the identities being defended served as the foundation for these social movements. This literary movement is called identity politics. This movement is based on social injustice that can lead up to group membership based on the same experiences. Identity politics is also known as politics of differences, politics of recognition or politics of multiculturalism.

Tajfel and Turner (1979) developed Social Identity Theory for identity politics in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is a social psychological paradigm that investigates how people perceive and derive their identities from their group affiliations. Their theory is divided into three different categories: social categorization, social identity and social comparison.

Social categorization is defined as the process by which people divide themselves and others into different social groups based on shared factors such as ethnicity, gender, religion, or political beliefs (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). This technique establishes a framework for defining people's roles and identities. It establishes a "us" against "them" dichotomy, an ingroup and an outgroup, which is essential for intergroup interactions, referred to as social comparison. Social identity is the part of an individual's self-concept derived from their membership in social groups, it consists of cognitive, evaluative and emotional elements. It encompasses the emotional significance and value that individuals attach to their group affiliations.

The emergence of Trumpism and far-right populism saw the hypothesis of the rise of a new kind of identity politics: white identity politics. This is a new form of identity politics in response to minority demands, and more specifically to the increasing numbers in immigration. Jardina (2019) argues that this white identity is not just about racial resentment or prejudice, but also about a sense of solidarity and perceived threats to the status and privileges historically associated with being white. All of the recent demographic and economic changes, as well as cultural shifts, make people lean into white identity politics by fear of change and loss. Moreover, this sense of threat is accentuated by the media and political rhetoric that frames diversity as a zero-sum game. The portrayal of immigrants and minorities as competitors for jobs, social services, and cultural dominance is acting as fuel in order to create anxieties among white populations. These changes in society affect political landscapes, leading to the rise of populism and ethno-nationalist movements, such as the started by Trump in the United States (Jardina, 2019; Kaufmann, 2018). Movements like Trumpism use these fears by promising to restore the perceived lost status and privileges of the white majority.

2.2.2 Post-Structural Feminism

Feminist post-structuralist theory can be viewed as a third wave of feminism, historically succeeding but not supplanting liberal and radical feminism (Kristeva et al., 1981). While liberal feminism pushes for individual rights to ensure women can access the public sphere, and radical feminism highlights womanhood to fight against negative portrayals of women in a male-dominated society, feminist post-structuralism questions the

rigid categories of men and women, male and female. It highlights the significant role that linguistic practices play in shaping these categories and works to deconstruct their seeming inevitability (Davies & Gannon, 2005, p.1). By scrutinizing and disrupting the traditional gender binaries, feminist post-structuralism reveals how deeply entrenched linguistic and societal norms perpetuate gender inequalities, thereby opening up possibilities for more fluid and inclusive understandings of gender.

Post-structural feminism is based on people's understanding of reality that is rooted in language, and by the way it is used. Gender is a social construct, different from assigned sex, and is purely performative (Butler, 1988). It is an identity socially constructed and associated with real, perceived, or taught differences between genders and sexes, based on the expected behavior of one's sex. Butler, one of the most predominant scholars of the post-structural feminism school, claimed that 'gender is not something we are, but something we do' (Butler, 1988, p.520).

This school of thought examines the societal structure in which men typically hold higher positions and are perceived as possessing greater knowledge and authority, consequently marginalizing women (Kinsella, 2017, p.185). There are some social and societal expectations about how men and women should behave, based on gendered masculine and feminine features. According to social conventions, people must behave in a certain manner depending and based on their biological sex. Living in a patriarchy puts expectations on both men and women, and the males can carry out their gender roles but also embody toxic masculinity, which is an especially violent and harmful kind of masculinity (Butler, 1988, p.522). These social constructs and conventions lead to judgment, and establish a hierarchy of sex and gender, which positions men's values and characteristics as superior and women's as inferior, creating an opposition between the two. Post-structural feminism critically examines these binary constructs that underpin the dominance of masculinity over femininity. Examples of such constructs include order versus anarchy, strong versus weak, public versus private, and rational versus emotional (Kinsella, 2017, p.190). By deconstructing these, post-structural feminism seeks to reveal how these distinctions reinforce the empowerment of men and the subjugation of women. They are advocating for a more nuanced understanding of gender that transcends categorizations and the constructed nature of gender roles and expectations (Kinsella,

2017, p.190).

Therefore, the analysis focuses on the impact of these gender roles and expectations on the securitization process. By recognizing gender as an ever-evolving flexible social construct, the study aims to illustrate the potential influence of gender in securitization and highlight the importance of closing the gender gap in this context Hansen refers to this “intimate inter-linkage between the subject’s gender identity and other aspects of the subject’s identity” as the “subsuming security” problem (Hansen, 2000, p.287).

3. Methodological framework

3.1 Research aim

The purpose of this research is to analyze the mechanisms of securitization of masculinity within the Proud Boys movement. This effort is to understand the discourse surrounding the threatened masculinity of the Proud Boys with its context and implications. The aim of this research is to prove that linking masculinity with certain narratives within their discourse, eventually leads them to securitize their own masculinity against the ones they see as threats. Our analysis is based mostly on the words and speeches of the leaders as they are the ones with the most influence on the audience, meaning other members.

To conduct this research, we will answer the following research question:

How does the Proud Boys securitize their masculinity? What consequences does it have on their actions as a group, and as individuals?

To answer this question, we will be using a Critical Discourse Analysis as described by Van Djick (1993), using data from the YouTube videos released by the leader and creator of the Proud Boys movement Gavin McInnes between 2015 and the January 6th, 2021 Capitol Hill attack.

3.2 Case justification

This choice of case study is justified by the growing misogynist discourse in American politics and public opinion since the 2016 presidential elections, and the Proud Boys movement being so closely linked to this rise in statistics. They are also known for committing violence during rallies, most famous for the Charlottesville rally and the January 6th Capitol Hill attack, leading them to be considered as a terrorist group by two countries, namely Canada and New Zealand. Their relation with masculinity is also another reason that this group has been chosen for this analysis, as being a man is the primary reason that members consider potential recruits because of their only-man policy.

The timeframe for this research spans from the period before the onset of the 2016 presidential campaign in the United States up until the Capitol Hill attack on January 6th, 2021. This timeframe is significant. This period is important as it marks the height of activity for the Proud Boys, both publicly and online. Over these specific years, the Proud Boys became more visible with their rallies, and protests. These events had a lot of media attention and played a big role in shaping how the public viewed the group.

This timeframe covers key events that show how the group has evolved, has affected, and was affected by their domestic politics. Starting just before the 2016 presidential campaign, it captures the group's creation, influenced by the political climate and the rise of Trumpism. It includes major incidents like the Charlottesville rally in 2017 and various violent clashes with counter-protesters, mainly Antifa, and their willingness to use violence as a mean to an end.

Concluding with the Capitol Hill attack on January 6th, 2021, this timeframe captures the height of the Proud Boys' influence and their part in one of the biggest domestic terror incidents in recent U.S. history. This period helps provide a thorough look at the group's strategies, activities, and the sociopolitical factors that helped them rise and stay active.

3.3 Data Selection and Collection

As this research is a single case study analysis, an extensive amount of data is required. Due to the difficulties, and potential danger, of acquiring primary data from interviews with the concerned group, this research is based on online public resources

from the group. The data is based mainly on primary data, mostly Youtube videos from the channel Rebel News, published by the leader and creator of the movement, Gavin McInnes. Nineteen videos from the Rebel News channels were chosen for this research, all of them starring Gavin McInnes. The reason behind choosing to focus on YouTube videos come from the feeling of Proud Boys members that the position of leader is important to the Proud Boys, seen as their rallyer. The video format creates an intimate link between the maker and the viewer, thus creating a stronger cohesion in the group in the name of the leader. These videos were picked because of their provocative titles, often making reference to feminism and masculinity and McInnes's despise for it. All of the videos are dealing with the topics of masculinity and/or feminism.

The scope of the selected videos extends itself from April 25, 2015 to August 17, 2017. This is justified by the fact that mainly by their active social media presence and as a public persona like Gavin McInnes, McInnes, as a key figure, not only articulates the group's ideology but also plays a crucial role in the securitization process by identifying and amplifying perceived existential threats. His influence is nationwide on members. His rhetoric and actions in this timeframe give insight on how he mobilizes and galvanizes the Proud Boys. By looking at his videos, we can better see how he convinces group members of the need to resist these threats, thus reinforcing their commitment to the group's cause. Besides the primary video sources, we also gathered some secondary sources and data to understand better the Proud Boys' ideology and their place in the far-right. These sources include articles, books, and reports that analyze the group's activities, beliefs, and impact on the broader socio-political landscape. By mixing these secondary sources, the research aims to put the Proud Boys in the larger picture of far-right movements, showing how their specific masculinity and anti-feminist talk fits and influences the wider alt-right ideology. This detailed approach allows for a more nuanced look at the group's internal dynamics and external impact, revealing the strategies they use to keep and grow their influence. In the end, this study tries to highlight the key role of McInnes in shaping the narrative and actions of the Proud Boys. Following the securitization framework, he are the ones holding the reins of the movement and thus have the most influence when it comes to convincing others of a potential existential threat. Some additional secondary sources and data have been, acquired to understand the ideology of the Proud Boys' members and the Proud Boys as a far-right group.

3.4 Methodology

As anti-feminist, anti-Islam, anti-communist, and Western Chauvinists, the Proud Boys believe that these communities are threats to their positions in society as white cisgender men, and this fear and hatred transpire through their discourse whether it is publicly or in private. Their framing of themselves being defenders and victims at the same time shows a form of dominance of their discourse, all the while being detrimental to other communities and groups. We will follow a qualitative analysis for this research, using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method of Proud Boys members and leaders, based on the model of Van Djick (1993). According to Van Djick, Critical Discourse Analysis is pushed by critical social issues and should be used in order to scrutinize power relations and abuse that leads to injustice and inequality. It is usually used to analyze power relations between two groups. Discourse analysis aims to explore how discourses and sentence structures influence the construction of identities and social relations.

The goal of this method is to analyze power elites and the discourse strategies that they use to maintain their dominance or to keep control of the other groups by influencing their audience (Van Djick, 1993, p.261). In this research, the Proud Boys can be considered as such, being an exclusively male group with a white majority in a patriarchal society. There are two dimensions to take into consideration when dealing with discourse analysis: production and reception, in other words, expression, and consequences (Van Djick, 1993, p.259).

Our data has been analysed as followed: all scripts from the videos have been transcribed, from which any word or expression or sentence having some link to masculinity and security has been coded into a category. These categories are divided into fives, which have been named based on our findings. The categories are: victimhood, hatred for other masculinities, feminism as evil, saving masculinity and link with warfare. It is also important to note the gendered dimension of this research, especially when it comes to discourse, for which the Critical Discourse Analysis fits perfectly as “it focuses primarily on social problems and political issues rather than the mere study of discourse structures outside their social and political contexts.” (Van Djick, 1993). As some parties of

the power relation might not have equal access to discourse, it is important to consider it when researching, and this research aims to do so. The notion of narratives will also be central to this research, as explained by De Fina and Johnstone (2015, p. 158), that narratives are embedded in social activity.

4. Analysis

This analysis focuses on the discourse of Gavin McInnes, the leader of the movement, and his social media presence, more specifically on YouTube. This choice in the main focus decided for this analysis is justified by identity politics, where the idea of group and how it works is important, especially with hierarchies. In identity politics, knowing what the main figures and leaders say is crucial since they shape and show the group's identity and values. For the Proud Boys, a far-right group, their identity is clearly stated in their motto, "I'm a Western Chauvinist," which shows their shared beliefs. The group's identity is set by these leaders, making what they say key in this analysis. By naming a common enemy, leaders can convince the group that their existence is in danger and that changes in society and politics would help them. This part of the research looks at this process in the movement, breaking down their speech into categories to get a clearer idea of the securitization process. This analysis is split into five different speech categories, all leading to the securitization of masculinity by Gavin McInnes and the Proud Boys: victimhood, link with warfare, saving masculinity, hatred for other men and feminism portrayed as evil.

4.1 Patterns in discourse

When closely examining the discourses of Proud Boys leader Gavin McInnes, whether while addressing his followers directly or speaking through public channels such as his YouTube channel, distinct patterns emerge in their discussions of masculinity-related topics. This part of the analysis will break down the different categories that we identified in our coding, and analyze the wording of the discourse that the former leader used to securitize masculinity.

4.1.1 Victimhood

The first identified narrative in discourse that is recurrent for the Proud Boys leaders is victimhood. This narrative frames the group and its members as persecuted individuals, unjustly targeted by the government, media, and leftist groups. Out of our 88 sampled codes we have for this analysis, 32 of them fall into the category of victimhood, this represents 73,3% of our sampled analyzed codes (See Appendix 1). This narrative is prominent within the far-right ideology as a whole. They attempt to justify and legitimize their actions by representing themselves as victims of oppression by political elites and the media. This narrative of victimhood also helps the group's internal unity by creating a sense of togetherness and resistance against a common enemy.

This portrayal of victimhood serves several strategic purposes: it galvanizes support by appealing to those who feel marginalized or oppressed, it justifies their aggressive tactics as necessary self-defense, and it seeks to deflect criticism by recasting their actions as reactions to external threats. 'gendered sense of entitlement thwarted by larger economic and political shifts, their ambitions choked, their masculinity lost' (Kimmel, 2018) and concerning certain spaces and narratives linked to important real and imaginary anchors to play into symbolic and mythical narratives resting on the imaginaries of a secure and stable past.

There is a pattern in McInnes' discourse: he often uses specific arguments and statistics to legitimize his beliefs, particularly concerning suicide and trauma among men. For example, Gavin McInnes frequently uses data to assert that men face greater difficulties than women. "Men have it worse by every metric, we're more likely to get raped if you include prison, we're more likely to get assaulted, we're more likely to die, we're more likely to commit suicide" (McInnes, Rebel News, 2018). This rhetoric serves several purposes: it consolidates the group's narrative of male victimization, reinforces their identity as defenders of traditional masculinity, and provides a seemingly empirical basis for their broader ideological claims. By consistently using these figures, McInnes and other leaders seek to justify their position on gender issues and rally their supporters around a common sense of male grievance and solidarity.

However, it is important to note that victimhood is different from victimization as a process. One person can have an ongoing feeling that the self is a victim, which is generalized across many kinds of relationships, without being victimized. The reality of the situation doesn't matter, because it's just about personal perception and thus, it is highly biased (Marcks & Pawelz, 2020). Gavin McInnes even goes so far as to claim that "White men are a minority" (McInnes, Rebel News 2017), despite the societal structure being a patriarchy where men, especially white men, occupy many of the highest and most powerful positions. This declaration by McInnes is inconsistent with the current reality, as it contradicts the male dominance in political, economic, and social spheres. White men still to hold the main influence and authority in many key domains. This narrative strategy aims to recast white men as unfairly treated, victims, in order to justify the group's reactionary stance on social and political issues.

4.1.2 Feminism portrayed as evil

The perception of the Proud Boys' masculinity being threatened is central to their ideology and inherently means that they have an enemy undermining their manhood. According to our analyzed data, 57,9% (See Appendix 1), of the discourse from McInnes which is related to masculinity involves depicting feminism as evil. This framing positions feminism not just as a differing perspective, but as an active enemy seeking to dismantle traditional masculine roles and values. McInnes frequently employs vivid inflammatory and demonizing language to emphasize this point and even goes as far as using strong connoted metaphors such as: "Feminism is it's a giant suicide bomber that's meant to blow up tradition" (McInnes, Rebel News, 2017) This metaphor evokes a sense of imminent danger and destruction, suggesting that feminism is an existential threat to the traditional social order and the very essence of manhood, which is the essence of the far-right group.

The Proud Boys' hatred and hostile against feminism is a fundamental element of their ideology. Third-wave feminism emerged in the 1990s, and continues to this day, which advocates for diversity and breaking the traditional gender roles of women. All of these are seen as dangerous by the far-right group. The Proud Boys consider this third wave "useless", and argue that the first wave of feminism was sufficient for women's rights and was done in 1979. They believe that this wave of feminism promotes anti-male

sentiments and fosters a culture of victimhood that unfairly vilifies men. Their point of view is rooted in fear of the societal change that could lead to the downfall of the patriarchal order that is beneficial for men, and even for women according to the group. Feminism is seen as eroding the power and privilege traditionally held by men, especially white men, leading to a loss of identity and status for the Proud Boys members. Feminism according to McInnes, is even detrimental to women themselves, creating lies regarding metrics and statistics of rape and assaults to “justify their existence”. Third-wave feminism challenges traditional binary conceptions of gender and promotes equality and the breakdown of patriarchal structures. These ideas are seen by the Proud Boys, who worship traditional masculinity and fixed gender roles rooted in the superiority of men, as efforts to undermine the foundations of society as a whole. They argue that by promoting the concept of gender equality, third-wave feminism is stigmatizing men, and it goes against their belief that the current order is already beneficial to both genders, men and women. Gavin McInnes argues that “Feminism isn't about equality anymore it's about taking masculinity away from men” (McInnes, Rebel News, 2017).

4.1.3 Hatred for other masculinities

The Western man that Proud Boys are most concerned about preserving is based on the concept of "Man," which is founded on the Western bourgeois view of the human being (Wynter, 2003). This ideal emphasizes traits such as independence, rationality, dominance, and a commitment to traditional gender roles, reflecting a narrowly defined and exclusionary version of masculinity, explaining our next categorization: hatred for other masculinities. According to our analysis, 47.4% (See Appendix 1) of the retrieved data from Gavin McInnes' discourse reveals a pronounced disdain for other types of masculinities, which do not conform to this rigid ideal. This rhetoric targets most times non-traditional and non-Western masculinities.

First, it includes not only a rejection of feminized or androgynous expressions of masculinity, but also a direct targeting of men within the LGBT community, particularly gay men and trans men. McInnes explicitly articulates this disdain, as seen in his derogatory statement, "a nurse is queer...a man should not be a nurse" (McInnes, Rebel

News 2017). Such rhetoric underscores a broader contempt for any deviation from their rigid, traditional views of masculinity. McInnes' speech polarizes and marginalizes individuals who do not fit inside the Proud Boys' restrictive concept of manhood. By denigrating male nurses as "queer" and unmanly, he perpetuates negative stereotypes and stigmatizes occupations that do not fit typical masculine roles. This exclusionary stance is part of a larger campaign to delegitimize and undermine the visibility and acceptance of LGBT people, whom McInnes believes are antagonistic to the Proud Boys' vision of society.

In one video entitled "Feminism makes women ugly", he claims that feminism not only devalues traditional feminine beauty but also promotes unattractive and undesirable traits among women, thereby threatening the established gender norms. This argument extends to his views on men, where he sees the acceptance of non-traditional gender expressions as a direct assault on the core values of masculinity. His argument in the video extends to people of color, especially Black men, he claims "i don't like black guys either, they're too athletic and ladies like them they don't even have to try, especially a black guy with green eyes that guy he gets too many". This rhetoric reveals a deep-seated contradiction: despite a Black man embodying the Proud Boys' ideal of manhood—athletic, desirable, and effortlessly attractive—he is still perceived as a threat solely because of his skin color. This demonstrates that the group's valorization of traditional masculinity is ultimately racialized, privileging white men even when non-white individuals meet their standards of masculinity.

McInnes further villainizes Black culture and Black men, stating, "Black culture ends up being anti-gay" (McInnes, Rebel News 2016). This comment serves a dual purpose. First, it attempts to deflect accusations of homophobia directed at the Proud Boys by suggesting that Black culture is more homophobic, thereby positioning the group as relatively more progressive. Second, it reinforces negative stereotypes about Black communities, portraying them as inherently intolerant and oppositional to the values that McInnes claims the Proud Boys uphold.

Another dimension of this hatred for other masculinity, and other culture, is islamophobia. Gavin McInnes openly proclaims his islamophobic views, and often cites

Muslims communities and the Middle East in order to prove his point of the West already benefiting from gender equality. This framing not only vilifies Muslim men, depicting them as hyper-masculine oppressors, but also contrasts them with the Proud Boys' idealized version of Western manhood, which they claim to defend. By setting up parallels between the West and Muslim-majority cultures, they hope to create a narrative in which the Proud Boys are the guardians of a threatened yet naturally just and egalitarian society. This story not only perpetuates their cultural chauvinism, but also serves as a convenient scapegoat for the perceived deterioration of conventional gender norms in their own culture.

4.1.4 Link with warfare

The third theme that comes across in our analysis, representing 47,4% (See Appendix 1) of our analysed data is categorized under the pattern “link with warfare”. Indeed, our analysis showed that this trend of association men’s condition to an attack, or the use of the phrase “war on masculinity” is extremely recurrent in McInnes’ discourse. This notion of war on masculinity is actually part of the ideology of the Proud Boys, and is one of the reason Gavin McInnes claims that have created the group. The recurrence of the image of an “attack”, “Feminism is an attack of legitimizes the Proud Boys' ideology by casting their movement as a necessary defense against an existential threat. This aligns with the discourse of warfare, where the identification of a clear enemy is essential for rallying troops and justifying aggressive actions. The militarized language underscores the Proud Boys' self-conception as defenders of a besieged tradition, lending a veneer of legitimacy and nobility to their cause: “We are constantly under attack, doesn’t mean we’ll lose, we’ll win” (McInnes, Rebel News, 2017). This sentence from McInnes shows the intentions of the Proud Boys, of defending themselves from feminism and regaining their lost glory.

This link between masculinity and warfare can be associated with militarized masculinity. “Militarized masculinity” can be defined as “the assertion that traits stereotypically associated with masculinity can be acquired and proven through military service or action, and combat in particular” (Eichler 2014, p.81). In many culture, notably the Western culture of the Proud Boys, the picture of the ideal man is portrayed as a

protector and defender, with the image of the soldier and the military as heroic and honorable. These masculinities emphasize traits such as physical strength, aggression, emotional stoicism, and the readiness to engage in violence. The valorization of militarized masculinity by the Proud Boys reflects broader societal patterns where military virtues are elevated and associated with true manhood. This not only reinforces traditional gender roles but also perpetuates a cycle where violence and aggression are seen as appropriate responses to perceived threats.

Their position can be compared to soldiers in a cultural battle against forces such as feminism, leftists, and antifascists. Proud Boys members perceive these groups as existential threats to traditional masculinity, which they believe is under siege. To combat this perceived threat, they are committed to spreading their ideology and raising awareness among other men through the process of "red-pilling."

4.1.5 “White Knight” and Saving Masculinity

Lastly, the category of "saving masculinity" is closely linked to the previous themes discussed. Our analysis reveals that 26.3% (See Appendix 1) of the retrieved data explicitly focuses on the intentions of preserving traditional masculinity. This category captures Gavin McInnes's portraying the Proud Boys as the last soldiers standing before the fall of Western society to the perceived threat of feminism and progressive ideologies.

Gavin McInnes's assertion, "We are constantly under attack. Doesn't mean we'll lose; we'll win," encapsulates the Proud Boys' combative stance and their unwavering commitment to defending a traditional masculine identity. This statement is emblematic of the group's narrative that frames them as the saviors of not just masculinity, but also of Western civilization and its values. The Proud Boys position themselves as the vanguard against what they perceive as a cultural assault on traditional gender roles and male identity.

The rhetoric of the “White Knighthood” is closely tied to the concept of "red-pilling," a term borrowed from popular culture that signifies awakening to a purportedly hidden truth. For the Proud Boys, this process involves educating men about

the perceived threats to their masculinity posed by feminism, progressive gender norms, and multiculturalism. By "red-pilling" others, they aim to recruit more men to their cause, fostering a collective resistance against threats, such as feminism and Islam.

The rhetoric of the Proud Boy has mythologized the principles of masculinity that are considered at stake repeatedly. By emphasizing traditional gender norms, masculinity, and a sentimental interpretation of the American origins, they interpreted American principles through the prism of chauvinist white nationalism. They mention a nostalgic vision of a previous period where the gender roles were clearly defines, where the Western civilization was at its ultimate power. The nostalgia, evoking simpler times, is a powerful tool in the ideological toolbox of the Proud Boys. McInnes plays on the notion of “minority”, by stating that White Western men are a now a minority (McInnes, 2017), thus emphasizing that their feeling of victimhood and need for them to stand up for their ideas.

In summary, the Proud Boys' discourse on the “White Knighthood” consists of defending themselves against supposed attacks, a masculine awakening with the red pill, and a nostalgia for a simpler traditional time. By rallying people to the cause of defending Western masculinity and its ideals, they are able to attract new members and strengthen their worldview. Their combative resistance is reflected in their violent behaviour and rhetoric, portraying them as warriors defending masculinity against the dangers of modern social change. They create a sense of urgency and encourage their supporters to get involved by showing masculinity as under attack. Their movement succeeds in inspiring and attracting new members by presenting itself as a strong and emotional story that defends Western ideals and true masculinity. Understanding this language is important for understanding the dynamics of the organisation and the wider social consequences of their ideology.

4.2 Naming the enemy - Feminism

When looking at the data we accumulated, our analysis distinguishes one clear phenomenon considered as an existential threat to the Proud Boys, and even men at large according to the group: feminism. Most of the men’s sufferings in the modern world have

for source the feminist ideals and reforms to disturb the existing and working set of norms that form society.

As explained in our theoretical framework, in order for an issue to be securitized some different steps and boxes need to be ticked. As a reminder, in order to be securitized, an issue needs to be called by the securitizing actor as a threat, then the issue at hand needs to be backed up with evidence to legitimize the need for acting measures, and finally, those measures need to affect the relation between all the parties, namely the functional actor, the securitizing actor and the referent object. When all of those conditions and actors are reunited, an issue is successfully securitized.

In this case, the securitizing actors and the referent objects are one and the same: men. According to the rhetoric of the Proud Boys, men are the only ones powerful enough to stop their extinction from the existential threat posed by contemporary societal changes. The group advocates for a return to traditional ways, envisioning a society where conservative politicians are brought into power to restore an idealized Western world. In this vision, men go out to work while women remain housewives, adhering to rigid, traditional gender roles.

When examining the data we have accumulated, our analysis identifies a clear and consistent phenomenon: the Proud Boys consider feminism to be the primary existential threat to their existence and, more broadly, to men as a whole. This perception is deeply ingrained in their discourse, where feminism is portrayed as a disruptive force that seeks to overturn traditional gender roles and, by extension, the societal structures that the Proud Boys believe are essential for a stable and functioning society.

The Proud Boys argue that the rise of feminist ideologies challenges what they perceive as the natural order of gender relations, disrupting the traditional balance that has historically placed men in positions of power and authority. They assert that the empowerment of women and the push for gender equality diminish men's roles and influence, leading to a crisis of masculinity. In their view, feminism contributes to the erosion of traditional family structures, weakens social cohesion, and undermines the very foundations of Western civilization. All of our identified strategic narratives have some

link with feminism being at the core of the problem. Whether it is victimhood, where men are being emasculated by feminists and are losing all of their privileges leading them to suicide, or their hatred for any other men who do not conform to their ideology of the perfect American man, it is because of feminist movement brainwashing them with “woke” ideology, with making men too feminine, derailing them from their real masculine potential, or transitioning to be a man for trans people. All of this is linked to this “war on masculinity” that is at the core of their ideology, that feminism is leading.

The Proud Boys have been created to counter this perceived threat, against feminism, explicitly seeking to reverse the achievements of various feminist movements. . They emphasize the need to reassert traditional masculine virtues and restore a societal framework where male dominance is unquestioned. This involves advocating for policies that reinforce gender distinctions and opposing initiatives that promote gender equality. By framing feminism as an existential threat, they justify their actions and rhetoric as necessary measures to preserve their vision of society. They believe feminism has not only shamed and guilted them but also disrupted traditional gender hierarchies, roles, and biological distinctions. According to the Proud Boys, the principles of feminism directly oppose their interpretation of masculinity, challenging them not just through the shame feminism imposes but also through the structural changes it has brought to traditional hierarchies.

The group's stance on feminism serves multiple strategic purposes. It not only provides a clear and common adversary, rallying their members around a unified cause but also appeals to potential recruits who may feel alienated or threatened by contemporary gender dynamics. This framing of feminism as a threat helps to foster a sense of unity and purpose among the Proud Boys, positioning them as defenders of masculinity.

In addition, by identifying feminism as an existential threat through their discourse, the Proud Boys ideology for the maintenance, or the return of a traditional patriarchy with clear gender roles and structures is resurfacing. Their discourse rhetoric and actions are intertwined with the desire to preserve the patriarchal order of things, by seeing feminism and its advancements in society as a risk for their existence as white men. This perspective

is significant to both of their political and social agenda, but its also displays their commitment to as a reactionary groups of society.

In summary, this identification of feminism as the biggest threat against the Proud Boys displays their main ideology of keeping traditional gender roles and societal norms. They want to preserve men's dominance in Western societies, and a world where men are in power and women are housewives, thus seeing feminism as a threat to their end goal.

4.2.1 Proud Girls

Despite the Proud Boys openly stating that it is a man-only group, a female counterpart group emerged. The Proud Girls was primarily formed to provide a space for women who align with similar ideologies, embracing nationalist and traditionalist values. Despite sharing the same foundational beliefs, the Proud Girls emphasize a role that supports and complements the predominantly male Proud Boys, advocating for what they view as traditional gender roles and family structures, but also encouraging other female members to take part in rallies and fight for the cause. Multiple "Proud Girls" Telegram channels were created in 2021 in different states of the country to show support for the cause.

However, the original Proud Boys did not receive this new growing community with open arms. In one Telegram Channel addressing the nationwide members, one Proud Boys stated:

"Dear "Proud Girls"... Stop ... Hijacking our fraternity because you can't stand men having their own club. This is exactly why we created this club in the first place. You aren't supporting us. You're hurting us. You're ruining what we hold dear. Want to know how to ACTUALLY support us? Get married, have children, and cultivate wonderful communities in which we can live in. To save the west we need WOMEN BEING WOMEN. Not women trying to be men ... We beg of you, with sincere love from the bottom of our hearts, get pregnant and get the fuck back in the kitchen." (Proud Boys Telegram Channel, 2021)

As this example shows, the Proud Boys The Proud Boys ideology calls it “venerating the housewife”. They venerate the traditionalism of having women in the kitchen and tending to home chores and children, with the nostalgia of 1950s households when there were clear gender roles. By “venerating the housewife”, the Proud Boys seek to reassert a nostalgic vision of a past where gender roles were unambiguous and family structures were allegedly more stable. The domestic role of women is highly romanticized by the group as the role of women, as a caregiver, homemaker, and they argue that this third wave of feminism is dragging women away from their natural role of mothers. Motherhood is considered as the ultimate fulfillment, and is the primary role of women as we can observe in the text above, where women are objectified.

However, the active involvement of women in a parallel organization undermines the Proud Boys’ narrative, contradicts their claim that women's ultimate fulfillment and primary role are within the home by having women’s group considering themselves as the female equivalent of the Proud Boys. These women are engaging in public and organizational activities, challenging the very notion that their primary worth and satisfaction come from domestic duties. This contradiction exposes a fundamental inconsistency in the Proud Boys' ideology, suggesting that their rigid gender roles are not universally applicable, even among their supporters.

5. Discussion

The link between masculinity and violence remains clear in McInnes's discourse, particularly through the vocabulary of war that he frequently uses to name this ‘War on men and masculinity’. The use of such language serves as a justification for carrying out violent actions in the name of this war. They believe in themselves as being the defenders of traditional masculinity. Traits associated with militarized masculinities, such as aggression and dominance, are often valorized in civilian contexts. This can contribute to a culture that tolerates or even celebrates aggressive behavior in men.

However, no recorded violence has been in the name of this fight against the demonizing of masculinity. Violent outbursts at rallies and planned violent attacks tend to be more politically charged, and target antifa groups rather than being in the name of

masculinity. It is important to note that despite feminism being clearly named as the enemy of the Proud Boys, and of the Western world at large according to them, no violence was directly perpetrated against feminist groups, although this research does not take into account possible domestic violence perpetrated by members of the group.

Far-right activists are well known for how they use Web 2.0, with the digitization and deplatforming of their groups online. They are some of the most active users out there, constantly sharing content and spreading their ideologies. But, since social media is now a big part of everyday life, it's really hard to figure out how single elements affect things when hate on the internet becomes violence in real life. The vast amount of information and the speed at which it spreads make it difficult to pinpoint what exactly triggers someone to go from posting hateful comments online to committing acts of violence on the streets. The constant interaction and reinforcement of ideas within these online communities further complicate the ability to measure the impact of each individual element.

Nevertheless, it is important to not disregard this research that linking masculinity with violence, and securitizing it the way the Proud Boys do, by associating it with the threat of feminism, will more likely lead to violent behavior by members. A sense of collective victimhood creates intragroup solidarity whilst increasing hostility to those who are seen to be carrying out the victimization (Noor et al. 2017 p.125), and this collective victimhood is important because it's often used as a justification to use violence. Through his use of language and clear framing, Gavin McInnes encourages the Proud Boys to unite, and openly names their enemies and enemies of the modern world: feminism and Islam. He urges members to band together and defend their values, even if it means using force. This speech creates a group cohesion, in-group important for the ideology because it strengthens the links between members, creating a powerful echo-chamber in the community.

The Proud Boys often misrepresent feminist goals of achieving gender equality, claiming that feminism seeks to establish female supremacy rather than gender equality. They argue that feminism is about diminishing men and traditional family values, and it transcribes in the creator's discourse.

When Gavin McInnes withdrew from the Proud Boys, he was succeeded by Enrique Tarrío, who continued to perpetuate McInnes's rhetoric of securing masculinity. Tarrío's leadership maintained the group's aggressive stance, encapsulated in phrases like "We are men, and we will defend ourselves and our beliefs. If that means getting into a fight, so be it." This statement shows the Proud Boys' belief, where masculinity is closely tied to physical fights and defending their ideas. Also, Tarrío being a leader of Afro-Cuban descent adds a complicated layer to the group's dynamics. Basically, Tarrío's leadership kept the Proud Boys' focus on masculinity, continuing a cycle of perceived threats and justified violence.

6. Potential limitations

As Van Djick (1993) argues, "Unlike other discourse analysts, Critical Discourse analysts (should) take an explicit sociopolitical stance; they spell out their point of view, perspective, principles, and aims, both within their discipline and within society at large. Their work is undoubtedly political." (Van Djick, 1993, p.252). This assertion highlights the inherently political nature of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which is particularly relevant to this research. By employing the CDA method, this study inevitably grapples with the problem of objectivity. Unlike traditional discourse analysis, which often strives for a neutral examination of language, CDA explicitly acknowledges its engagement with power dynamics, ideologies, and sociopolitical contexts. This means that the researcher's perspective and biases are not just acknowledged but are integral to the analysis.

However, this approach also means that the research is inherently subjective, shaped by the researcher's own sociopolitical stance. This subjectivity is not a flaw but a fundamental aspect of the CDA method, which recognizes that all discourse is influenced by power and ideology. The challenge is to critically reflect on how the different influences can shape the analysis.

Another limitation of this research is regarding the quantity and scope of data that is used for this analysis. Mainstream social media platforms and the META/ GAFAM

groups have taken significant actions against the Proud Boys, by putting down most of the accounts and restricting access to members since 2017 and the Charlottesville incident, forcing them to migrate to other alternative, fringe websites and platforms, creating their own safe ecosystem to share their ideas freely. Consequently, the available data that this research relies on is constrained to official statements made by Gavin McInnes, and those available for public use on mainstream social media, namely on Youtube from the channel Rebel News for this specific research.

Relying solely on data from a single social media platform can significantly limit the scope of the research. This research and approach only captures what remains accessible after the deplatforming of the far-right community, probably omitting crucial details and context from banned content, affecting how deep and accurate the research could be. Future studies should try to find ways to get and look at data from alternative and encrypted platforms to get a better overall view of what extremist groups are doing and how they act, and how the deplatforming affected their speech.

However it is important to highlight the fact the YouTube is one of the biggest social media platforms since its creation in 2005, thus making the accessibility to not only members of the Proud Boys but to a broader public, including a younger and more fragile and vulnerable audience. This broader access and visibility that the platforms gives to Gavin McInnes and his ideology is highly dangerous, especially regarding the concerning risks of the numbers of potential future radicalized people that these videos could bring in for the Proud Boys movement, and thus represents a threat for the American society with the upcoming political events.

Conclusion

This research aimed to contribute to the existing literature concerning gender and security when it comes to masculinity and securitization. Our main argument was that the Gavin McInnes was securitizing masculinity in his discourse by linking it with violence and victimhood in order to justify his stance and the ideology behind the far-right group which is renown for its violence during political and social events.

Our findings have led us to the following result: Gavin McInnes' discourse on masculinity and security can be divided into five categories: victimhood, feminism portrayed as evil, hatred of other men, link with warfare, and the "white knight" saving masculinity. Masculinity and the proud boy's ideology are closely intertwined, and it is reflected in the creator's discourse, from which there appears a clear pattern and process of securitization. This securitization is made through the link of warfare and masculinity, debating that real men are going extinct and that there is a war on men that is orchestrated by their external threat, feminism, and feminists.

In this securitization process, the Proud Boys portray violence as the only viable means to combat the existential threats they perceive. This stance is legitimized through the use of strong military language, framing their actions as part of a broader battle or war. Leaders and members frequently employ terms like "defense," "combat," and "battle" to describe their activities, creating an environment where aggressive actions are seen as not only necessary but noble and heroic.

The narrative of victimhood plays a crucial role in this dynamic. By positioning themselves as victims of systemic oppression and societal marginalization, the Proud Boys create a powerful tie between members, fostering a shared sense of vulnerability and urgency. This perceived victimization serves as a unifying force, strengthening group cohesion and justifying extreme measures as a form of self-defense. Members are encouraged to view themselves as protectors of traditional values and defenders of their community, reinforcing their commitment to the cause and to each other.

The combination of militaristic rhetoric and a victimhood narrative creates an ideological framework where violence is not merely condoned but is viewed as a moral imperative. This framework allows the Proud Boys to rationalize their violent actions as necessary responses to the threats they believe are posed by political correctness, immigration, and other societal changes. It fosters an "us versus them" mentality, where any opposition is seen as a direct attack on their identity and way of life, further entrenching the group's justification for violent behavior.

Ultimately, this securitization process changes how the Proud Boys see themselves and their mission when completed. Violence and anti-feminism become key parts of their identity, justified by a story they've built around being under threat and victimized by feminism. This not only keeps their cycle of aggression going but also cements their place as a radical and dangerous group in the social and political scene. The Proud Boys also adapted their hierarchy and adopted a strategy in order to be less vulnerable than they were before January 6th. This shows that the group has resilience and adapts itself quickly to changes to not get caught by the government. The group is now organized with self-governing chapters in 40 different states, without as much structure and directive coming from the hierarchal leaders (Reuters, 2024).

This research raises the question of other far-right groups, both in America and globally. The rise of such groups is not confined to the United States; Europe, in particular, is witnessing a rise in far-right groupuscules. These groups are gaining power and influence, with far-right political figures increasingly growing closer to governmental power. In America, the Proud Boys exemplify a brand of masculinity rooted in traditional Western ideals, often coupled with overt displays of patriotism and anti-feminist rhetoric. Their activities are opted towards reinstating what they perceive as a threatened societal traditional order, where men are the primary breadwinners, and women are relegated to domestic roles.

Overall, this analysis supports the notion that the Proud Boys movement is a misogynist, with its roots primarily in the demonization of feminism and the declaration of male superiority. Feminist ideas are routinely attacked by the group in their rhetoric, which sees them as the main danger to their social agenda. Their opposition to feminism

highlights their wish to uphold conventional gender norms in which men—especially white men—occupy positions of control. The narrative of The Proud Boys frequently highlights a sense of victimization, asserting that modern societal developments are oppressing or marginalizing men. This position is, however, at odds with the fact that men—and white men in particular—remain overwhelmingly prevalent in a number of spheres, including politics, business, and the media.

The securitization process involves framing feminism as an existential threat to white men by Proud Boys as it is done by Gavin McInnes, feminism and its followers that derails the traditional gender values, that changes the societal order. The referent object, at it is explained by McInnes are white men, and the securitizing actors are the Proud Boys. They consider that the members of the group are the “White Knights” that will save men from their demise caused by feminism in order to find their lost glory. This analysis highlights how the Proud Boys' securitization process constructs a narrative of white male victimhood and heroism. By framing themselves as soldiers and protectors against an existential feminist threat, they reinforce their ideology and legitimize their actions.

Finally, this research is more than currently relevant with the upcoming elections of November 2024, with former president Donald Trump coming back as a candidate. The comeback of Trump on the political scene could mean a new rise in political violence by far-right groups such as the Proud Boys: “If we don’t win, you know, it depends,” he said when asked by Time magazine in April 2024 if he expected violence after the election. “I’m not sure the public would stand for it, a certain point, there’s a breaking point.” (Fox News, Reuters, 2024) Thus, this research is highly topical for the future of American politics and society, and the future of women and feminists.

Summary

This research has studied the discourse of Proud Boys creator and former leader Gavin McInnes regarding masculinity. The main argument and result of the analysis is that the creator is using his platform for securitizing masculinity by linking masculinity with violence and warfare, and feminism as a threat to their existence.

Tento výzkum studoval diskurz tvůrce a bývalého vůdce Proud Boys Gavina McInnese týkající se maskulinity. Hlavním argumentem a výsledkem analýzy je, že tvůrce využívá svou platformu k sekuritizaci maskulinity tím, že spojuje maskulinitu s násilím a válkou a feminismus jako hrozbu pro jejich existenci.

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List of Appendices

Appendix no. 1: Gavin McInnes discourse on masculinity (graph)

