



Crowdfunding Conspiracists: Grassroots Giving to January 6 Participants

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International Centre for
Counter-Terrorism

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Abstract

This policy brief explores the online ecosystem of crowdfunding for those charged with crimes related to the storming of the US Capitol on 6 January 2021. It sketches this ongoing phenomenon, highlighting key nodes, patterns, and narratives. Specifically, this policy brief confirms that the platform GiveSendGo is central to the crowdfunding of participation in such extremist-led mass protest events, being the host of 95.7 percent of the 255 distinct fundraising pages collected. This article also confirms that January 6-participants continue to raise millions in donations from grassroots supporters. Since 2021, those charged with January 6-related crimes have collected over 5.3 million US dollars from over eighty thousand donors. Making a case study out of the Proud Boy figures convicted for their ringleading roles, this policy brief further highlights key narratives within the fundraising ecosystem. Core elements of the fundraising appeals encountered in this research are continued revisionism as to the events of 6 January, continued loyalty to the 'Make America Great Again' (MAGA) movement and its leader, claims of legal persecution, and invitations to donors to identify with their struggles. Finally, this piece makes policy recommendations on strengthening the governance around crowdfunding while respecting important legal protections and avoiding a chilling effect on legitimate crowdfunding.

Keywords: crowdfunding, extremism, United States, extreme right, Proud Boys, GiveSendGo, Capitol Hill

Introduction

The storming of the US Capitol on 6 January 2021 by a violent crowd, including far-right militias, constitutes a major event in recent US history. It caused the injury of over 140 police officers, over USD 2.8 billion in damage, and, interrupting the election certification, shook the very foundations of American democracy.¹ Criminal charges for 1,400 individuals and sentences for at least 944 have resulted.²

The qualification of this event as “terrorism”³ or even as “the culmination of an attempted coup”,⁴ and the criminal consequences for hundreds do not seem to have abated support for the original conspiracy or the participants. Charged individuals have drawn millions of US dollars in online donations from a public seeking to express continued support for them.

This policy brief explores the online ecosystem of crowdfunding for January 6 extremists. While there is a wide literature on online extremist and terrorism financing, insufficient attention has been given to crowdfunding as a tool to mobilise support for an extremist cause.

First, this policy brief assesses fundraising campaigns for defendants involved in January 6. Doing so allows for the exploration of the scope and characteristics of this phenomenon. Second, it makes qualitative and quantitative analysis of the GiveSendGo campaigns on behalf of five Proud Boys (an American extreme right organisation which participated in the events of 6 January) leaders charged with seditious conspiracy post-event. Exploring crowdfunding for these men, all of whom had terrorism enhancements on their sentences,⁵ serves as a case study for understanding how extreme right wing actors are financially supported.

Overall, this policy brief makes clear that January 6 participants mobilise significant material grassroots support and, in doing so, are component to perpetuating anti-government conspiracies. In light of the findings, this piece explores policy implications. Stronger awareness of these crowdfunding ecosystems could provide insight into behavioural radicalisation and the traction of conspiracy theories. This article makes policy recommendations on how to develop oversight so while respecting important legal protections. It further makes policy recommendations on engaging crowdfunding platforms and payment processors on topics of extremism and terrorism.

¹ On 6 January 2021, the US Congress was convened to certify the election of Joe Biden as the President of the United States. Answering calls to protest and “fight like hell” by President Trump, tens of thousands gathered in Washington DC. Several thousand proceeded to the US Capitol building, with front rows battling the police. Crowds led by far-right extremists, eventually broke through defensive lines and into the Capitol itself, forcing lawmakers to interrupt proceedings and seek safety. A police officer was killed, over 140 were injured, some very seriously. Approximately USD 2,881,360.20 in monetary losses were suffered, with this amount including the damage to the Capitol building and grounds and certain resulting US Capitol Police costs. The information on damages can be found on the US Justice Department’s 43 month update on prosecutions post-attack here: “43 Months Since the Jan. 6 Attack on the Capitol.” 6 August 2024. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/43-months-jan-6-attack-capitol>. See: Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol, *Final Report of the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Publishing Office, 2023), <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GPO-J6-REPORT/pdf/GPO-J6-REPORT.pdf>

² US Justice Department. “43 Months for Jan. 6 Attack on Capitol.”

³ Eric Tucker and Mary Clare Jalonick, “WATCH: FBI chief Chris Wray calls Jan. 6 ‘domestic terrorism,’ defends intel. *PBS News*, 2 March 2021. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/watch-live-fbi-chief-chris-wray-to-face-questions-about-extremism-capitol-riot>

⁴ said by Jan 6 Committee Chair Bennie Thompson, as evident in: Lisa Miscaro, Mary Clare Jalonick, and Farnoush Amiri, “WATCH: Capitol riot was ‘culmination of an attempted coup,’ Jan. 6 Committee chair Thompson says”, *PBS News*, 9 June 2022, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/watch-jan-6-committee-chair-rep-bennie-thompson-calls-capitol-riot-the-culmination-of-an-attempted-coup>.

⁵ Daniel Barnes, and Ryan J Reilly, “Former Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrío gets 22 years, longest Jan. 6 sentence yet”, 5 September 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/justice-department/enrique-tarrío-proud-boys-sentenced-jan-6-sedition-case-rcna103280>; Office of Public Affairs – U.S. Department of Justice. 5 September 2023. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/proud-boys-leader-sentenced-22-years-prison-seditious-conspiracy-and-other-charges-related>.

Context

The extreme right across Europe and the United States frequently operates without proscription, meaning that they have legal avenues for collecting the funding that enables their extremist activities.⁶

Emergent literature has noted the use of legal donation-based crowdfunding by the extreme right. The issue has been raised by policymaking bodies including the Financial Action Task Force (FATF),⁷ Europol,⁸ and the Canadian House of Commons.⁹ Research by the Global Disinformation Index (GDI) and Institute for Strategy Dialogue (ISD) has traced fundraising strategies by US-based hate groups¹⁰ and German entities suspected of right-wing extremism.¹¹ The Anti-Defamation League's (ADL) publication on far-right fundraising 2016-2022 provided further evidence, tracking calls by groups such as the Proud Boys, the self-professed fraternity of "Western chauvinists" that has US and international chapters.¹² It details crowdfunding around events like the Freedom Convoys, the Unite the Right rally,¹³ and the storming of the US Capitol.¹⁴ Proud Boy leader Ethan Nordean, for instance, raised USD 18,951 for "protective gear and communications" to "operate safely at events" in the lead-up to 6 January.¹⁵ This fundraising, the purchase of paramilitary gear and supplies, and their use were noted by prosecutors as part of the conspiracy to stop election certification.¹⁶ With the Unite the Right resulting in the death and injury of counter-protesters, and the storming of the Capitol in the assault of 140 police officers,¹⁷ this fundraising is a clear vehicle of online-offline linkage, wherein online activities (fundraising) are component to offline extremist action and violence.

Existing research has not, however, traced the mechanics of crowdfunding efforts in the aftermath of violent engagements at anti-government and extreme right protests in sufficient detail. Scattered newspaper investigations of individual funds have provided some knowledge.¹⁸

6 Financial Action Task Force. *Ethnically or Racially Motivated Terrorism Financing*, June 2021. <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/content/dam/fatf-gafi/reports/Ethnically-or-rationally-motivated-terrorism-financing.pdf.coredownload.inline.pdf>, p. 3.

7 Ibid., p. 9; Financial Action Task Force. *Crowdfunding Terrorism Financing*, October 2023. <https://www.fatf-gafi.org/content/dam/fatf-gafi/reports/Crowdfunding-Terrorism-Financing.pdf.coredownload.inline.pdf>, p. 24.

8 Europol. *TE-SAT 2022: European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report*, June 2023. https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/Tesat_Report_2022_0.pdf, p. 55.

9 Jim Carr, *The Rise of Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremism in Canada: Report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security*. Ottawa: Government of Canada. June 2022. https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2022/parl/xc76-1/XC76-1-1-441-6-eng.pdf, pp. 22-24.

10 Institute for Strategic Dialogue. *Bankrolling Bigotry*. London: 2020. <https://www.isdglobal.org/isd-publications/bankrolling-bigotry/>, pp. 5, 17.

11 Global Disinformation Index (GDI) and Institute for Strategic Dialogue. *The Business of Hate*. September 2021. <https://www.isdglobal.org/isd-publications/the-business-of-hate/>.

12 Anti-Defamation League (ADL), "Proud Boys." Updated 12 November 2023. <https://www.adl.org/resources/background/proud-boys-0>; Sam Kutner, Bjorn Ihler and C.L. Murray "Function Over Appearance: Examining the Role of the Proud Boys in American Politics Before and After January 6th", *The Khalifa Ihler Institute*, 2022. <https://www.justsecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Samantha-Kutner-et-al.-Expert-Statement.pdf> pp. 8-12, 32.

13 The Unite the Right rally, which took place on 11-12 August 2017 saw white supremacist and alt-right individuals chant racist and antisemitic slogans, parade burning torches, and saw a white supremacist deliberately drive into counter-protesters, killing Heather Heyer and injuring dozens. See: ADL, *ADL Crowdfunding Report: How Bigots and Extremists Collect and Use Millions in Online Donations*, January 2023. <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/adl-crowdfunding-report-how-bigots-and-extremists-collect-and-use-millions-online>

14 ADL, *ADL Crowdfunding Report*, pp. 28 – 33, pp. 14-18.

15 Ibid.

16 Justice Department, "Case 1:21-cr-00175-TJK Document 305", 7 March 2022. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/case-multi-defendant/file/1480996/dl> p. 11, p. 13.

17 Justice Department, "24 Months Since the January 6 Attack on the Capitol", Updated 4 Jan 2023. <https://www.justice.gov/usao-dc/24-months-january-6-attack-capitol>.

18 Vera Bergengruen, "Extremism and Crowdfunding: What the Data Shows." *Time*. 31 January 2023, <https://time.com/6251612/extremism-crowdfunding-report/>; Teddy Wilson, "GiveSendGo: Jan. 6 Defendants Have Raised More Than \$3.5 Million Through Christian Crowdfunding Website." *Rolling Stone*, 11 April 2022, <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/give-send-riot-jan-6-defendants-have-raised-more-than-3-5-million-through-christian-crowdfunding-website-1332787/>; Jason Wilson, "Proud Boys: Far-Right Group Uses Christian Fundraising Site GiveSendGo." *The Guardian*, 10 April 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/10/proud-boys-far-right-givesendgo-christian-fundraising-site>.

Existing academic research on crowdfunding in relation to (often violent) mass protest events by the post-January 6 context draws only on topline statistics from these campaigns¹⁹ or makes descriptive reference to their existence.²⁰ However, the factors that prompt support, the makeup of donors, and the strategic implications of this tactic remain poorly understood.

¹⁹ See, for example: ADL, *ADL Crowdfunding Report*. This insightful paper highlights that there are crowdfunding campaigns for legal defence or medical expenses resulting from ideologically motivated activities, including assaults on antifascist protesters and crimes committed during the storming of the US Capitol on January 6. It notes that these are frequently narrated in terms of the injustice of prosecution, or in defence of their original actions.

²⁰ See, for example: Kutner, et al., “Function Over Appearance” p. 10.

Methodology

The guiding question for this policy brief is ‘what are the mechanics and implications of donation-based crowdfunding in the aftermath of violent, extremist mass protest events?’

To address this question holistically, the policy briefs delves into the mechanics and the key narratives of the crowdfunding ecosystem surrounding the storming of the US Capitol on 6 January 2021. It investigates online crowdfunding by individuals charged with crimes related to this event. Such participants are not all classified as far-right or anti-institutional ideologues, at least by the myriad think tank trackers following the prosecutions.²¹ Still, the storming of the US Capitol was led by violent extremist actors and was done with the intention to interrupt the democratic process.²² Those involved participated in extreme, anti-institutional, and significantly violent action. In doing so, and by fundraising in relation to their participation in the aftermath, they are components to the phenomenon of crowdfunding violent, extremist post-mass protest events.

Data was collected in two ways. Firstly, the directories of two prominent organisations which support the January 6 defendants were scraped. These provide information on the case statuses of those charged with crimes related to January 6, where they are imprisoned (if they are), and how to support them. The crowdfunding pages linked here were collected. The publicly available information on these pages was then recorded. Secondly, the fundraising for five individuals who planned the storming of the US Capitol was selected to qualitatively illustrate key narratives driving crowdfunding.

The first step of data collection, coding the crowdfunding pages on the directories of “J6ers”²³ on Patriot Mail Project (PMP) and Patriot Freedom Project (PFP), provided a suitable snapshot of the fundraising ecosystem around January 6. PMP, which focuses on supporting January 6 prisoners,²⁴ has the largest directory of defendants of like sites, such as American Gulag, which facilitates support for those charged with crimes related to January 6. PFP, likewise, is a charity endorsed by Donald Trump²⁵ that aims to “provide support to those being politically persecuted along with their families”.²⁶ Using these two prominent organisations’ directories of donation pages, therefore, provides a relevant, efficient, non-prejudicial, and repeatable sample. Using internal searches of various crowdfunding sites would not have accounted for fundraising done via independent websites. Using browser searches would leave data collection dependent on the searcher’s (geographically and search-history affected) algorithm.

Data was collected by scraping the Patriot Mail Project and Patriot Freedom Project January 6 defendant donation directories from 18 to 21 August 2024. Information was collected by page and collated into a master dataset, organised into the defendant’s name, crowdfunding page context, and the crowdfunding record. The page context logged was the directory on which the page was discovered, the link, the host platform, and the status as active or unpublished. Repeats

21 As can be discerned from limited numbers in “affiliations” with extremist groups/ movements in trackers such as those by The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, or The Associated Press: Linda Gorman, Michael Kunzelman, Seth Rasmussen, and Kevin Vineys. The Associated Press. 2024. <https://interactives.ap.org/jan-6-prosecutions/>; Michael Jensen, “Extremist Group/Movement Affiliations of the January 6 Capitol Rioters.” *College Park, MD: START*, 2022. <https://www.start.umd.edu/publication/extremist-groupmovement-affiliations-january-6-capitol-rioters>.

22 Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol, *Final Report of the Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol*, 22 December 2022. <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/GPO-J6-REPORT>. p. 5, pp. 56-60, and pp. 501-531.

23 A term often by those sympathetic those prosecuted in the aftermath of the storming of the US Capitol, meaning those charged with or convicted of offences in relation to the events of 6 January 2021.

24 Which was originally founded to support those involved in the anti-government Bundy stand-off with federal agents but has since refocused on 6 January.

25 The organisation’s website highlight videos of Trump stating “I love what you are doing” to help “those that are held hostage” as well as on 20 June 2024 that “we are with you” on its Homepage and Endorsement page.

26 Patriot Freedom Project. “Endorsements”.

where the same page was linked by more than one directory, were marked and excluded from calculations. The crowdfunding record, then, included the top-line public details from the page. These were the campaign creator, recipient, amount raised, number of donors, and number of shares.

Finally, to draw out a relevant case study, this piece explores crowdfunding by Proud Boys who led the storming of the US Capitol.²⁷ This suitably focuses on potentially concerning implications of this fundraising phenomenon, namely in relation to outright extremists. The Proud Boys certainly meet this standard. Founded by Gavin McInnes, an influential proponent of the Great Replacement theory with ties to various white supremacist and MAGA figures, the Proud Boys are a self-professed fraternity of “Western chauvinists who refuse to apologize for creating the modern world”.²⁸ They define themselves by their capacity for violence, by dressing in tactical gear and fighting on behalf of the Proud Boys previously required to reach the highest degree of membership.²⁹ A particular hallmark is initiating clashes at mass protest events, either with counter-protesters or by, for example, massing at Black Lives Matter (BLM) events to provoke fights with attendees.³⁰ In this, they appear to meet the popular working definition of extremism of “the belief that an in-group’s success or survival can never be separated from the need for hostile action against an out-group”; their aggressive activity puts such a belief into practice.³¹ The Proud Boys can at least be considered an extremist organisation with a particular propensity toward violence, and are indeed designated as a terrorist organisation by Canada and New Zealand.³²

This piece delves into the crowdfunding on behalf of five Proud Boy leaders charged with seditious conspiracy for their leading roles in January 6.³³ Tried together, their campaigns allow for comparison and consistency in data collection. Four of these five – Enrique Tarrio, Ethan Nordean, Joseph Biggs, and Zach Rehl – were found guilty of seditious conspiracy in May 2023, while Dominic Pezzola was convicted of other serious felonies.³⁴ Jail terms ranging from ten to 22 years were handed down, with the presiding judge applying a terrorism sentencing enhancement to all five.³⁵ Crowdfunding on their behalf is portrayed as for lifestyle and legal expenses; the latter especially has important constitutional protections, and donors may be motivated to ensure a robust legal defence. Nonetheless, with their Proud Boy leadership roles and with these verdicts, the donations to the campaigns in the name of these men do constitute financial support for prominent extremists. Exploring crowdfunding on their behalf provides insight into a legal means by which some extreme right-wing actors obtain financing. This policy brief, therefore, offers a qualitative analysis of the six GiveSendGo campaigns in the names

27 Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol, *Final Report*, p. 5, pp. 56-60, pp. 501-531.

28 Andy B. Campbell, *We Are Proud Boys: How a Right-Wing Street Gang Ushered in a New Era of American Extremism* (Hachette Books, 2022); Samantha Kutner, “Swiping Right : The Allure of Hyper Masculinity and Cryptofascism for Men Who Join the Proud Boys,” *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Studies*, (2020), <https://doi.org/10.19165/2020.1.03>, p. 5, p. 3.

29 ADL. “Proud Boys – Backgrounder”, ADL, last modified December 11, 2023. <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/proud-boys-0>.

30 Mapping Militant Organizations. “Proud Boys.” Last modified September 28, 2023. <https://mappingmilitants.org/node/490/>.

31 JM Berger, “The Berger Definition of Extremism,” n.d., <https://www.jmberger.com/extremism/definition>.

32 Public Safety Canada, “Government of Canada Lists 13 New Groups as Terrorist Entities and Completes Review of Seven Others.” Canada. Ca, 2021. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/news/2021/02/government-of-canada-lists-13-new-groups-as-terrorist-entities-and-completes-review-of-seven-others.html>; Ayana Archie, “New Zealand’s Government Classifies the Proud Boys as a Terrorist Organization,” *NPR*, 30 June 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/06/30/1108841462/new-zealands-government-classifies-the-proud-boys-as-a-terrorist-organization>.

33 Adam Fleur and Zara Montague. “Proud Boys Leaders Convicted of Seditious Conspiracy in Jan. 6 Case.” *The New York Times*, 4 May 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/04/us/politics/jan-6-proud-boys-sedition.html>; Daniel Barnes and Rebecca Reilly, “Enrique Tarrio, Proud Boys Leaders Sentenced in Jan. 6 Sedition Case.” *NBC News*, 5 September 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/justice-department/enrique-tarrio-proud-boys-sentenced-jan-6-sedition-case-rcna103280>; U.S. Department of Justice, “Proud Boys Leader Sentenced to 22 Years in Prison for Seditious Conspiracy and Other Charges Related to January 6th.” 5 September 2023. <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/proud-boys-leader-sentenced-22-years-prison-seditious-conspiracy-and-other-charges-related>.

34 Fleur and Montague. “Proud Boys Leaders”.

35 Barnes and Reilly. “Enrique Tarrio”; US Department of Justice. “Proud Boys Leader Sentenced to 22 Years”.

of Dominic Pezzola, Ethan “Rufio Panman” Nordean, Henry “Enrique” Tarrío, Joe Biggs, and Zach Rehl. As the first stage of data collection demonstrates and existing literature affirms,³⁶ GiveSendGo is the dominant space such fundraising, making it a suitable site to focus on.

The information for the case study of the narratives presented on the pages of five Proud Boy leaders, including descriptions provided and updates made, was collected on 19 August 2024, with the quantitative information surveyed on 23 September 2024.

Data collected for both the snapshot survey of crowdfunding pages and the Proud Boys sub-case study, done manually, was collected in accordance with the Terms of Service.³⁷ The data was treated with ethical considerations in mind: in particular, user privacy and the risk of reproducing extremist material were accounted for. An open-access online crowdfunding page is inherently a public appeal, but the platform design of the hosting sites also gave options for both the campaign creator and donors to obscure their information.³⁸ Mindful that online users may not be aware they will be studied, though, this report further does not reveal donor usernames or campaign recipient names where it is not the charged individual or a corporation. It also obscures the faces of those pictured on the campaign pages. This was done in accordance with the Code of Ethics for Research in the Social and Behavioural Sciences involving Human Participants.³⁹ Secondly, this policy brief accounts for the risk of providing access to extremist material and spaces by displaying links to them either in-text or in footnotes. Such links were included only when the author judged the societal and academic benefits outweighed these risks. Full references are available on request to the author.

36 Tim Dickinson, “A Christian Crowdfunding Site Has a White-Power Problem,” *Rolling Stone*. 22 August 2023. <https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/christian-crowdfunding-givesendgo-white-power-problem-1234809799/>; Vera Bergengruen and Chris Wilson, “Free Crowdfunding Site Linked to Right-Wing Causes Generates a Windfall for Itself,” *Time*. 2 March 2022. <https://time.com/6150317/givesendgo-trucker-convoy-canada-profits/>; Jim Carr, *The Rise of Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremism in Canada: Report of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security*. Ottawa: Government of Canada. June 2022. https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2022/parl/x76-1/XC76-1-1-441-6-eng.pdf; Anti-Defamation League. *ADL Crowdfunding Report*: p. 9.

37 GiveSendGo “Terms of Use”, 7 April 2022, <https://www.givesendgo.com/terms-of-use>.

38 The pages collected were hosted almost entirely on GiveSendGo, with a small number of self-designed websites, and an even smaller number of non-profit or donation sites such as RightDefense.org. In self-designed or non-profit websites, information on donors or total amounts raised was largely hidden. On GiveSendGo, each crowdfunding page has user settings that allow the campaign owner to obscure the amount raised, unpublish their campaign at will to make it invisible and unsearchable within the site, and write a campaign description of their choice. Donors can also choose to contribute anonymously. These protections are clear at: GiveSendGo. n.d. “How to Hide Donation Amounts on Your Campaign Page.” <https://help.givesendgo.com/support/solutions/articles/70000659965-how-to-hide-donation-amounts-on-your-campaign-page>; GiveSendGo. n.d. “Publishing and Unpublishing Your Campaign.” <https://help.givesendgo.com/support/solutions/articles/70000646472-publishing-and-unpublishing-your-campaign>; GiveSendGo. n.d. “Donating Anonymously: Protecting Your Privacy on GiveSendGo.” <https://help.givesendgo.com/support/solutions/articles/70000646410-donating-anonymously-protecting-your-privacy-on-givesendgo>.

39 Adopted on 23 May 2018 in the Social Sciences Discipline Consultation.

Crowdfunding post-January 6: the Mechanics

Crowdfunding is inherently public. The recipient appeals beyond their social circle and to a wider public for financial support. Online platforms connect the recipient to the potential donors, with social media often playing an important role in spreading the appeal.⁴⁰ This functionality is sometimes directly offered by social media companies.⁴¹ Primarily, though, crowdfunding platforms, designed around convenient creation of and donation to fundraisers, are used; they provide a stable space to which to refer donors, and usually have associated payment processors that allow online donation transactions to go through.⁴²

Extremists have been able to use relatively mainstream platforms to collect funds. Data collected from the donation pages contained in the directories of the Patriot Mail Project (PMP) and Patriot Freedom Project (PFP) makes clear GiveSendGo's place in fundraising by January 6 defendants/convicts. PMP linked 24,643 crowdfunding pages and PFP 48 pages, on various platforms or self-designed websites.⁴⁴ Together, these two organisations collected 255 distinct fundraisers for the January 6 defendants (there were some overlaps). Of these, 95.7 percent of pages are hosted on GiveSendGo.

Moreover, organisations with missions to support J6 defendants solicit donations via GiveSendGo. The Patriot Freedom Project, the site of data collection for its directory of defendants' fundraisers, even more prominently calls for website users to donate to the organisation itself. The options presented are donations via the payment processor "give.cornerstone", or its own GiveSendGo, which recorded USD 595,683 as of 18 August 2024.⁴⁵ This aligns with evidence from similar sites: for instance, American Gulag, a purported non-profit aimed at advocating for January 6 "political prisoners",⁴⁶ provides a directory of crowdfunding pages,⁴⁷ but also prominently directs users to a GiveSendGo supporting "our investigations" and "families of Jan 6 participants" that has raised over USD 230,000 for recipient (and disinformation site The Gateway Pundit's own) Jim Hoft.⁴⁸ This pattern is repeated by the organisation "Condemned USA", itself run by a January 6 convict, which raises money through nine GiveSendGos for defendants/convicts. Until 17 August 2024, Condemned USA's website linked its own GiveSendGo page,⁴⁹ raising USD 97,581 for its own operation via this fundraiser by this date.⁵⁰

This platform, being the overarching home of appeals by those who partook in—and organisations which continue to support the contest the certification of the election/events of—January 6, confirms the centrality of this crowdfunding platform to this ecosystem. GiveSendGo provides ongoing, convenient, and consistent financing to the perpetrators of such conspiracies. This confirms the conclusions of investigations such as ADL's, which tracked 324 extremist fundraising campaigns and found that 86.5 percent of those—including individuals associated with groups like Proud Boys and Oath Keepers—were on GiveSendGo.⁵¹

40 Financial Action Task Force (FATF), "Crowdfunding for Terrorism Financing," 2023 <http://www.fatf-gafi.org/publications/Methodsandtrends/crowdfunding-terrorism-financing.html>, p. 9.

41 Facebook, "Donations and fundraises". n.d. https://www.facebook.com/help/1409509059114623/?helpref=popular_articles

42 FATF, "Crowdfunding Terrorism Financing", p. 4; Stephen Reimer and Matthew Redhead. "Following the Crowd: Clarifying Terrorism Financing Risks in European Crowdfunding." *Research Briefing No.7*. (2021), p. 2. <https://www.projectcraaft.eu/research-briefings/following-the-crowd>

43 Patriot Mail Project, "Donate", n.d.

44 Patriot Freedom Project. 'Connect with'.

45 Patriot Freedom Project. 'Donate'; GiveSendGo, Page created by The Patriot Freedom Project.

46 AmericanGulag.org, 'About Us' n.d.

47 American Gulag. 'Individuals'.

48 AmericanGulag.org. n.d. 'About Us'.

49 This website was active during the research period but, as of 18 August 2024 displayed a message from website host Hostinger stating "You Are All Set to Go!" and asking the viewer to "upload your website files" or a 404 error message stating "Oops, looks like the page is lost". This implies the website domain has gone down, but the founder Treniss Evans' Instagram and X profile (@condemnedusa) remain active accounts, as does the CondemnedUSA GiveSendGo page as of 18 August 2024. Whether the website will resume operation remains to be seen.

50 GiveSendGo. 'Page created by Treniss Evans', n.d.

51 Anti-Defamation League, *ADL Crowdfunding Report*, Calling GiveSendGo "a singularly important part of the extremist fundraising ecosystem" p. 9.

The topline data analysis from these campaigns, conducted between 19 and 21 August 2024, is further indicative. Not all of these campaigns are active, with 127 (49.8 percent) being unpublished or displaying broken website links. This demonstrates that not all those charged continue to use their January 6 participation to draw financial support. Of those active, a small minority also had privacy settings that hid the total amount raised (23 campaigns, or 17.9 percent). The observable 105 campaigns, nonetheless, have raised a total of USD 5,338,484 from 82,911 donors. The amounts raised by each campaign ranged from 101 to USD 558,030. The majority, 59 percent, took in over USD 10,000, and a sizeable 21.9 percent of campaigns over USD 50,000. The average donation from these over 80,000 donors is USD 64.39 exceeding the average amount given on the much larger platform GoFundMe.⁵² Taken together, this demonstrates significant grassroots enthusiasm, and a sizeable receptive audience for sympathetic portrayal of those who stormed the US Capitol.

That this public is willing to make above-average financial contributions shows commitment to the cause far greater than mere supportive social media comments would. Given contributions makes the donor a material supporter of the individual January 6 defendant/convict, and given making a donation prompts you to subscribe to future updates, this act likely reinforces the donor's own identification with such January 6-related grievances.

Indeed, the campaigns with visible totals were shared 206,833 times, demonstrating the grassroots perpetuation of such narratives. It should be noted that 194,564 of these shares were on the page for "Antime Gionet", otherwise known as the extreme right media figure "Baked Alaska".⁵³ Part of this social media spread is some exceptional pages gaining massive traction. Excluding his total as an anomaly, the pages were still shared an average of 116.8 times. These shares may be into hard-right social media spaces; GiveSendGo conspicuously highlights far-right-aligned platforms, including Truth Social and Gab, as spaces to share these pages alongside mainstream channels like email, Facebook or WhatsApp.⁵⁴ In doing so, GiveSendGo elevates platforms aligned with the extreme right. Moreover, such crowdfunding and the public response to it may be component to the alternative ecosystem of anti-government or far-right-friendly online spaces.

Overall, the significant amounts raised from grassroots donors, the substantial numbers of open pages, and the network of organisations that encourage this fundraising make this phenomenon notable. Crowdfunding by January 6 participants is actively drawing in a wider public: this crowdfunding is a live online ecosystem perpetuating and reinforcing January 6-related grievances that are centred on GiveSendGo and publicised by organisations peddling related conspiracies.

⁵² GoFundMe (UK), "What Are the Advantages of Crowdfunding?," 13 September 2024, <https://www.gofundme.com/en-gb/c/blog/what-are-the-advantages-of-crowdfunding>.

⁵³ Social media personality "Baked Alaska", who also marched in the neo-Nazi "Unite the Right" rally and was known for his internet trolling and far-right takes on topics, had more than 120,000 Twitter followers at the time of its suspension shortly after the storming of the US Capitol. He livestreamed his breaching of the Capitol to these followers and was sentenced to sixty days in prison for his actions. His X (Twitter) account has since been reinstated. See: Mike Wendling, "Far-right influencer Baked Alaska sentenced for his role in the Capitol riot." *BBC*. 10 Jan 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-64218535>.

⁵⁴ As evident if "Share" is selected on any GiveSendGo page.

Crowdfunding post-January 6: a Case Study

Delving into the self-presentation and patterns on several pages provides further insight into the mechanics of the fundraising that takes place across this ecosystem. As such, this piece will explore the GiveSendGo crowdfunding campaigns of five Proud Boys tried together for seditious conspiracy: Dominic Pezzola, Ethan Nordean, Henry Tarrío, Joe Biggs, and Zach Rehl. Each had campaigns actively raising funds for legal expenses and/or family support, with Pezzola having two. Each of these pages is still actively collecting funds at the time of writing.⁵⁵

Figure 1: Screen captures of GiveSendGo campaigns on behalf of Biggs, Nordean, Pezzola, Rehl and Tarrío taken 19 August 2024

The figure displays six screenshots of GiveSendGo crowdfunding campaigns. Each campaign includes a header with the goal and amount raised, a central image or video, and buttons for 'Give', 'Share', and 'Pray'. Below each campaign is a 'Recent Donations' section showing individual contributions.

- Support Ethan Nordean:** Goal: USD \$50,000, Raised: USD \$23,770. Recent donation: Anonymous Giver - \$ 5.00 USD (18 days ago).
- Save Joe Biggs:** Goal: USD \$250,000, Raised: USD \$88,462. Recent donation: Anonymous Giver - \$ 5.00 USD (18 hours ago).
- TARRIO FAMILY FUND:** Goal: USD \$275,000, Raised: USD \$218,758. Recent donation: Anonymous Giver - \$ 5.00 USD (18 hours ago).
- Support Zach Rehl:** Goal: USD \$200,000, Raised: USD \$136,998. Recent donation: Anonymous Giver - \$ 5.00 USD (18 hours ago).

Help Dom

Domestic Pezzola is a loving husband father and a veteran. He grew up in a diverse community raised by 1st and 2nd generation immigrants. He has a wife and 2 daughters he hasn't been able to see in 2 years. They miss him dearly, their family is not complete without him.

Domestic's image has been deceitfully used in a smear campaign alleging he threw a pole through a window and destroying it at the capital on Jan 6th. A carefully edited video of this incident was produced by the government to make him appear guilty. Once the government, who used this video as the basis to keep him jailed for TWO years were forced to allow the full unedited version of the video that was used to besmirch his name it was proven he DID NOT break the window, yet he is still sitting in solitary confinement.

He has suffered medical neglect during his time being shipped around the country from jail to jail and they are attempting to have his attorney removed from his case to prevent him having a necessary and adequate defense.

Any amount you are able to give is greatly appreciated and will help him begin the process of restoring his freedom. If you are unable to give, please share his story.

Goal: USD \$100,000 Raised: USD \$26,843

Campaign created by **Condemned USA**

Campaign funds will be received by [redacted]

Give 385
Share 42
Pray 300

Pezzola Dominic Political Prisoner

As most of you know, Dominic Pezzola has been held as a political prisoner since he turned himself into authorities on Jan 13th for his participation in the rally that took place in Washington DC. Dominic has been accused of several serious crimes that hold no bearing and are completely false. He has been blasted by not only the media but named over 22 times at Trump's last failed impeachment hearing. He has absolutely no chance at a fair trial and we are doing our best to fight back against this tyranny. First and foremost, Dominic is a true patriot who raised himself to stand up to our overreaching tyrannical government. He is an honorably discharged Marine Corps Veteran. He stands true to the oath he took to defend our constitution against all enemies foreign and domestic, although he is no longer in the military he vowed to abide by that oath for the entirety of his life. At this time Dominic has been held in solitary confinement for over 6 months. In this time, he has undergone inhumane treatment in the deplorable DC jail. He has been refused basic human rights, medical care, and access to his attorney by the super liberal authorities in charge. Dominic has been the victim of retaliation several times by being put in the "hole" anytime I or his attorney have spoken out about the abuses taking place inside of the jail. He was left there for two weeks without even having a disciplinary hearing, because the guard who put him in there for absolutely no reason quit her job immediately after putting him there and never even filed a complaint for him being there. He sat for 2 weeks being completely forgotten about by the authorities that be. Dominic and I have 2 beautiful girls (10) and (17) to say the least these children have been put through the ringer. Our oldest had to withdraw from college last semester as her father was the sole provider for our family as I am

Goal: USD \$175,000 Raised: USD \$90,843

Give 1,514
Share 151
Pray 1,229

Recent Donations

Show: Most Recent

[redacted] \$ 5.00 USD
1 month ago

[redacted] \$ 10.00 USD
1 month ago

I give what I can 30 a month I wish it was a lot more. I wish this country had some people with money that would give all that's needed for our patriots! I support info warrior! Dom is one!

[redacted] \$ 5.00 USD
1 month ago

Happy birthday [redacted]

[redacted] \$ 100.00 USD
1 month ago

Where the events of 6 January are addressed, these men deny any violence and highlight their blamelessness. Rehl's page claims "he is nonviolent"; he testified to the same effect, bringing on himself accusations of perjury after video evidence at trial showed him spraying chemical irritants on police officers.⁵⁶ Pezzola's pages claim the footage of him throwing a pole through the Capitol window was "[a] carefully edited video...produced by the government to make him appear guilty". Likewise, update number four on Biggs' page describes the evidence as "a collection of hyperbolic commentary, unrelated telegram chats, and videos of other individuals – NOT, Joe Biggs – doing some silly things" apparently presented to a "hostile jury...of majority BLM activists". In doing so, these Proud Boys attempt to recast January 6 and their actions within it. They feed a narrative of these events being overstated or manipulated by the federal government in politically motivated prosecution.

Moreover, all frame themselves as political prisoners and long-suffering martyrs for the cause – a shared struggle in which they still participate. Tarrío frames his appeal against his sentence as "also the appeal for all Americans that believe in our rights", and Nordean's page states "together we will defeat the unjust." Biggs' page likewise includes updates on overcrowding in prison and limited food before asking his audience "Will you wait until you are in box cuffs and sleeping on a concrete floor." These appeals combine narratives of political prosecution and victimhood, while the direct address and references to "our rights" invite the viewer to identify with their struggle.

Pezzola's pages particularly highlight his continued belief in Trump. The description from his page emphasises a message "From Dominic", namely, "Trump is the warrior President fighting for [the] US and I stand with him". The *Condemned USA* campaign for Pezzola's 5th update tells viewers that after sentencing he "stuck his first in the air and told the court 'Trump Won! And you all know it!' before being marched back to his cell by US Marshalls" before stating "His wife and Daughters need you." Both imply that Pezzola's family should be rewarded for his loyalty to Trump and the election-denying conspiracy; that his ideological stance combined with his prisoner status means he deserves (financial) support.

Rehl notably links the January 6 struggle to current developments. His page made updates in response to the Supreme Court ruling on Trump's presidential immunity – calling this a "stepping stone closer to bringing him home"—and after the shooting of Trump, wherein the page stated: "If you ever doubted that J6 was a political setup to stop President Trump, that they won't do anything

⁵⁶ Alexander Mallin, "Former Proud Boys Leaders Joseph Biggs, Zachary Rehl Sentenced for Jan. 6 Sedition." *ABC News*. 31 August 2023. <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/proud-boy-leaders-joe-biggs-zachary-rehl-sentenced/story?id=102832655>.

to hold on to power, the assassination attempt today on President Trump should put that to rest. God Bless our hostages and God Bless President Trump.” The linking of January 6 cases to such developments, which energised the right-wing base more broadly, demonstrates a co-opting of more recent political developments to keep relevant and fresh grievances related to January 6 – including the prosecution of those involved.

Collectively, these pages demonstrate a diversion from discussion of violence, emphasis on outrages by the government to validate claims of political persecution, and the showing of continued loyalty/engagement with the Trump faithful. These crowdfunding appeals recast January 6 and linked developments to resonate with deeper ideological grievances against the establishment.

These campaigns have continued to draw donations, although they do not seem to draw consistent revenue. Fundraising from 23 August – 23 September 2024, totalled only USD 1,448 from forty donors, whereas the total across all six campaigns by 23 September was USD 586,500 from 8548 donors.⁵⁷ Preliminary quantitative analysis shows clear variation over time in donations. This includes periods of non-activity, but also significant spikes in donation. For instance, Zach Rehl had no donations on 31 May 2022. On 1 June 2022, he received USD 30,280 from 533 donors, then USD 9,332 from 159 individuals the following day, and USD 671 from fifteen individuals on 3 June, before receiving only twenty US dollars on 5 June. Such occurrences could be explained by mobilisation factors such as emergent discourses, news stories, or developments in their cases; associated comments made during these spikes often reference similar narratives or far-right media personalities directing them to the page. The triggers for such spikes are due for further investigation. More directly, that donations continue to flow confirms the continued potency of January 6-related grievances, and that crowdfunding post-mass protest events is a context where networks of supporters continue to develop.

⁵⁷ Donations across the six campaigns as per 23 September 2024.

Policy Implications

Several measures could enhance governance and oversight of extremist crowdfunding, but there are some policy hurdles. Anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing (AML/CTF) regulations largely do not apply as these frequently hinge on the designation of terrorist groups. Violent right-wing extremist organisations are designated inconsistently; for instance, the Proud Boys are listed in Canada and New Zealand but not in the US, creating enforcement gaps.⁵⁸ Additionally, the de-risking, chilling effect of early AML/CTF regulations on the non-profit sector shows that any new steps must be carefully balanced and respect legal protections for crowdfunding.

In the context of prosecution of extremists, such as for crimes related to activities within radical mass protest events, there are particular implications for the right to a fair trial that must be avoided. Crowdfunding in the cases explored in this piece was portrayed as raising funds for legal defence. There are also frequent references to supporting family finances that prosecution or imprisonment have put under pressure. Even if run on behalf of prominent extremists, these are legitimate activities, with constitutional and international law protecting the right to adequate legal assistance.

Hence, the recommendations below are focused on strengthening the governance infrastructure around crowdfunding to prevent abuses, and *measured* use of information on crowdfunding for threat assessment. Overreaction should be avoided, but insight into the phenomenon should be improved. Possible actions include closer observation to better understand radicalisation, along with stronger reporting requirements and exchange with crowdfunding platforms and payment processors.

Consider extremist and terrorist crowdfunding when collecting intelligence on extremist networks.

The millions raised and the anti-government narratives on these pages, as investigated above, reveal two key conclusions. First, these narratives are promoted and have traction through successful crowdfunding campaigns post-protest events. This means that, second, crowdfunding platforms can serve as hubs for mobilisation and behavioural radicalisation, where contributors offer material support to those identified with this extremist cause, including those with terrorism enhancements on their sentences.

As this piece has emphasised, crowdfunding may not be proscribed but can be viewed as a component part of an ecosystem of disinformation and revenue generation. As the case studies demonstrate, these pages can be spaces to perpetuate conspiracies which recast the storming of the US Capitol and which hold “the government is weaponised” Trump supporters. As Nordean’s pre-January 6 fundraiser for tactical equipment also demonstrates, crowdfunding may also further be a component of extremist action.

Crowdfunding linked to violent extremist mass protests or by violent extremist actors can, therefore, provide valuable intelligence. Observing the total amounts raised could speak to the resources at the disposal of violent extremist actors. This could inform risk assessment of planned activities which threaten violence. These campaigns, more broadly, can reveal the popularity of a cause or individual, offer insights into supportive networks, and are a material element that may

⁵⁸ Public Safety Canada, “Government of Canada Lists 13 New Groups as Terrorist Entities and Completes Review of Seven Others.” Canada: CA, 2021. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-safety-canada/news/2021/02/government-of-canada-lists-13-new-groups-as-terrorist-entities-and-completes-review-of-seven-others.html>; Nick Perry, “New Zealand Designates Proud Boys a Terrorist Organization” *AP News*. 1 July 2022. <https://apnews.com/article/canada-religion-new-zealand-race-and-ethnicity-racial-injustice-aaf63aaa32f9e9cccd2d46e8ff5d417f3>.

link individuals to a group or ideology. Where legally permissible, monitoring of these crowdfunding ecosystems by intelligence or law enforcement agencies could generate insight into emerging risks and threats, behavioural radicalisation, and the traction of extremist or anti-government narratives.

That being said, in campaigns referencing legal costs, donors may seek to support a robust defence in a legal case; they are not necessarily synonymous with extremists. This must be reflected when using financial intelligence to expand understanding of extremist networks. Donations to such causes should not be treated as radical behaviour, per se, but put in dialogue with indicators from other sources. Focus on the extremists raising money and on fundraising for activities which promise violence, is crucial to avoid overreach.

It must also be emphasised that policymakers and agencies may have limited legal authority to observe crowdfunding or may be unaware of emerging platforms. This is especially true in the US, where surveillance of First Amendment-protected activities requires a lawful investigation.⁵⁹ Regular dialogues with experts who monitor extremist crowdfunding could help agencies stay updated on these threats, while respecting important protections for citizens.

Follow the Financial Action Task Force-highlighted practice of including extremist and terrorist crowdfunding in National Risk Assessments, and include this phenomenon in domestic threat assessments.

National Risk Assessments are reports on money laundering and terrorist financing threats, produced every four to five years by members of the Financial Action Task Force, the global watchdog for these issues.⁶⁰ FATF highlighted the potential exploitation of crowdfunding by extremists or terrorists in these assessments as an emerging best practice.⁶¹ While countries like Canada, Australia, and the Netherlands already do so, many others do not.

Additionally, if evidence of crowdfunding exploitation exists within a country, it should be included in periodic or annual domestic threat assessments, like the Dutch National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security's "Terrorist Threat Assessment" (DTN).⁶² Since FATF National Risk Assessments are published infrequently, annual reporting would provide a more current picture of potentially rapidly evolving risks.

These steps would help policymakers understand how far crowdfunding is exploited for unlawful purposes, or whether activities remain lawful, if potentially distasteful. From this, policymakers could assess whether further regulatory action would be needed. Such further action could include making crowdfunding platforms and payment processors subject to AML/CFT obligations, as Canada did in April 2022, in the aftermath of the Freedom Convoy movement.⁶³ However, such reporting obligations are complex and would burden both on industry and on the Financial Intelligence Units that provide oversight. This step should be taken cautiously to avoid obscuring the intelligence picture with needless data or, most importantly, creating chilling effects on legitimate crowdfunding.

⁵⁹ Federal Bureau of Investigation – Department of Homeland Security. Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism. Submitted to the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, the Committee on Homeland Security, and the Committee of the Judiciary of the United States House of Representatives, and the Select Committee on Intelligence, the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, and the Committee of the Judiciary of the United States Senate. FBI. June 2023. <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/fbi-dhs-domestic-terrorism-strategic-report-2023.pdf/view> pp. 21.

⁶⁰ FATF sets policy standards on these issues, and (mutually) evaluates its 40 Member States on meeting these standards. These members include more than half of the EU, much of the Americas, and significant numbers of Middle Eastern, African and Asian states.

⁶¹ FATF, "Crowdfunding Terrorism Financing". p. 38.

⁶² NCTV, "Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland Juni 2024", 11 June 2024. <https://www.nctv.nl/onderwerpen/dtn/documenten/publicaties/2024/06/11/dreigingsbeeld-terrorisme-nederland-juni-2024>.

⁶³ Department of Finance Canada. *Canada's Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorist Financing Regime Strategy 2023-2026*. Cat. No.: F2-292/2023E-PDF ; ISBN: 978-0-660-44020-0. N.d. <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/fin/programs-programmes/fsp-psf/rs-sr/rs-sr-eng.pdf> p. 18.

Encourage detailed crowdfunding platforms and payment processors to have strong anti-extremism and anti-hate policies and procedures.

Policymakers could encourage platforms to generate more detailed anti-hate and anti-extremism reporting procedures and policies by fostering cross-sector discussions on best practices. Such procedures should allow reporting where harmful content arises in the social features of crowdfunding pages, such as in the updates or comments sections; in one or two notable examples in the cases observed, antisemitic statements were made with donations.

Stronger procedures could be developed through collaboration in new forums or existing initiatives like the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT). Offering the prospect of sandboxing regulations or self-regulation may incentivise platforms to adopt more comprehensive policies. This approach would respect crowdfunding's legal protections while promoting good practices among platforms.

Alongside this, policymakers should conduct outreach to payment providers. Policymakers should encourage collaboration between payment processors and crowdfunding platforms to harmonise policies and improve information-sharing. This would improve consistency and enforcement of anti-hate and anti-extremism rules. Strong payment provider policies, given they process the transactions, would also provide some redress where crowdfunding platforms such as GiveSendGo may display significantly different interpretations of problematic content.⁶⁴ Policymakers should also encourage payment processors and crowdfunding sites to engage extremism experts. Crowdfunding platforms may vet recipients but may lack awareness of violent or hateful comments, since monitoring discourse is not a core function. Consulting with extremism experts can improve their understanding of how certain narratives foster hate and contribute to stronger internal monitoring.

⁶⁴ The organisation GiveSendGo, for instance, seems to pride itself on lack of judgement on the purposes of campaigns, calling itself the "Leader in Freedom Fundraising." Its founders told a committee of the Canadian Parliament that it would allow the KKK to fundraise on their site provided it was legal, with co-founder Jacob Wells further saying in an interview to *The Nation* "I would consider it an honor to have them use the platform". This quote can be found in: Anti-Defamation League, *ADL Crowdfunding Report*, p. 10.

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