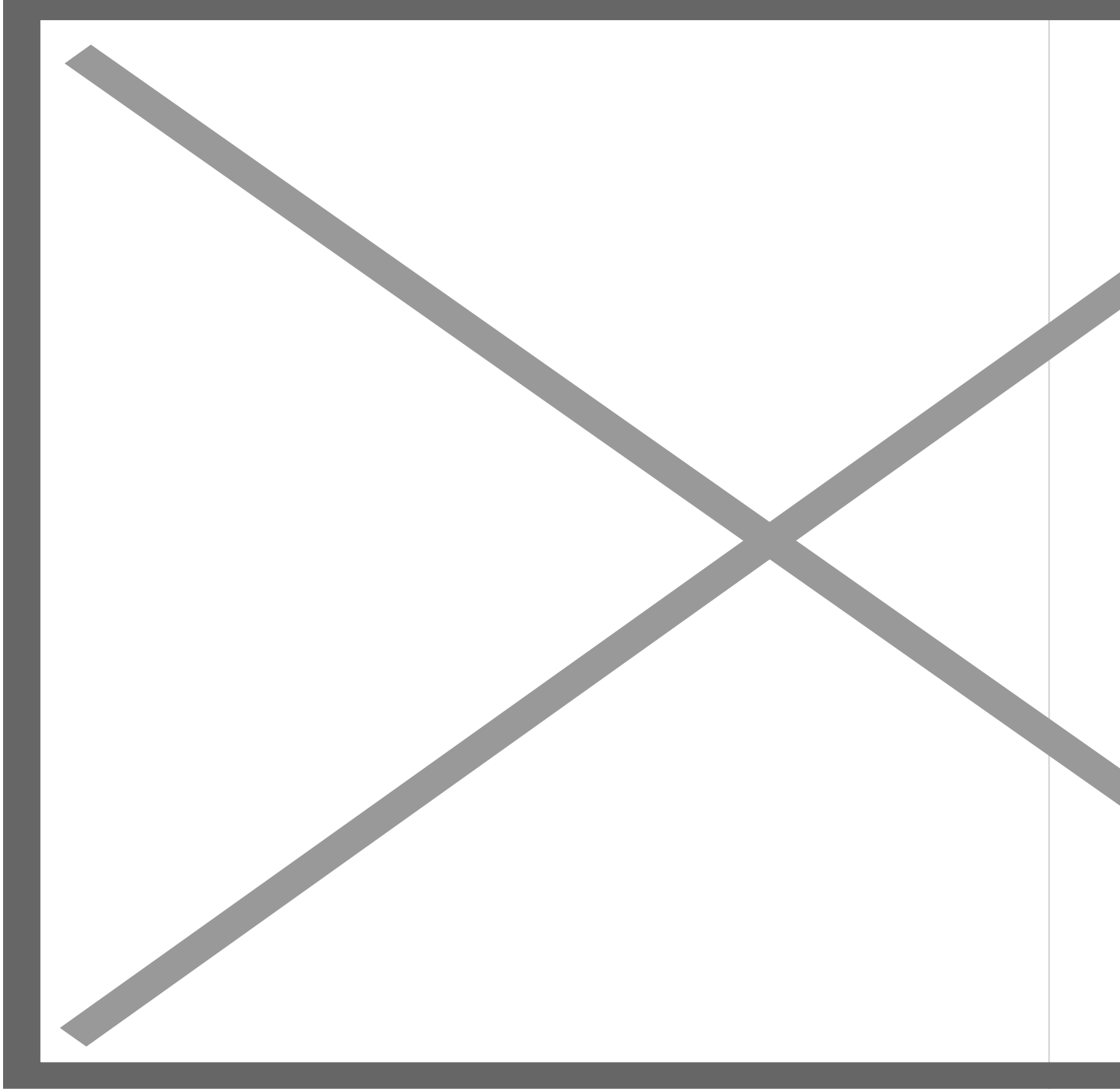


*Trump's Proud Boys standing by
to go to prison*

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Proud Boy Enrique Tarrio in front of the Versailles Restaurant in Miami, Florida. PEDRO PORTAL / MIAMI HERALD / TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE VIA GETTY IMAGES

Washington, May 7 (RHC)-- Former U.S. President Donald Trump famously refused to condemn white supremacists and told members of the neo-fascist Proud Boys to “stand back and stand by” during a 2020 presidential debate. When Trump tweeted that the January 6 “Stop the Steal” rally would be “wild,” the

Proud Boys believed it was their cue to organize a group of “real men” to be in Washington, D.C. on that fateful day.

Now, top members of the Proud Boys have been convicted of multiple felonies for their role in the January 6 riot that broke out at the Capitol as Trump and his supporters attempted to prevent Congress from certifying Joe Biden’s election victory.

Trump did not specifically mention the conviction on Truth Social, his far right social media platform, but Friday morning, the former president went on a lengthy diatribe about federal law enforcement targeting him and his movement. Trump was recently indicted in New York on paperwork fraud charges, and he faces multiple criminal investigations and a civil lawsuit by a woman who alleges he attacked and raped her in 1996.

Four members of the Proud Boys, including former leader Henry “Enrique” Tarrío, were convicted of seditious conspiracy on May 4 for plotting to lead the mob that attacked police and stormed the Capitol in a last-ditch effort to keep Trump in power. Dominic Pezzola, a fifth Proud Boy who was captured on video using a police officer’s riot shield to break a window and allow the first wave of rioters to enter the Capitol building, was convicted of obstructing Congress and other felonies.

Prosecutors successfully convinced a jury that Tarrío and three other Proud Boys coordinated before the rally and riot to leverage their followers, who see themselves “Western chauvinist” streetfighters, and the sheer size of the crowd to disrupt the certification of the election.

Seditious conspiracy, a rare charge originally meant to target white supremacist rebels in the turbulent after the Civil War, requires prosecutors to prove that two or more people plotted to overthrow the government or oppose its authority by force. That Proud Boys violently broke through police lines and into the Capitol is clear — it’s on video — but a pre-planned conspiracy to use force is difficult to prove in court.

Tarrío was not present at the January 6 riot but was still convicted for coordinating the Proud Boys and cheering the violence from afar. Pezzola, who was on the front lines, was convicted for engaging in violence and conspiracy to disrupt Congress, but was the only defendant to escape the sedition charge after a jury deadlocked over the evidence.

Rulings by Judge Timothy Kelly allowed prosecutors to present a broad range of evidence ranging from videos to private online chats, allowing the jury to zoom out and consider the racist, misogynist inner workings of the Proud Boys organization, rather than focus solely on the actions of individuals and leaders like Tarrío. The jury also saw videos taken on January 6, when Proud Boys were among the first rioters to break through police barricades and storm the capitol. According to The New York Times:

Judge Kelly’s rulings allowed prosecutors to introduce damning evidence about the violent behavior and aggressive language of members of the Proud Boys who had only limited connections to the five defendants. The rulings also permitted jurors to convict on conspiracy even if they found there was no plan to disrupt the certification of the election, but merely an unspoken agreement to do so.

The Proud Boys have a long history of ideologically motivated crimes and violence, and the group has used videos of street fights with anti-fascists and other perceived “enemies” to create propaganda online and recruit more members.

At least 54 people facing charges for January 6 are identified as Proud Boys. Attorneys for Tarrío and his co-defendants dismiss the accusation that leaders conspired to use Proud Boy members and other protesters as tools for disrupting the certification, arguing Proud Boys are only loosely affiliated and their guilt should not be decided by association.

However, in internal messages, Tarrío made cryptic references to 1776, a date associated with the American Revolution that became a rallying cry for pro-Trump reactionaries who wrongly believe the election was stolen and the nation must be saved from tyranny by any means necessary. In one video taken before heavy rioting began, one Proud Boy speaking into a megaphone is seen reprimanding another who suggested they “take the Capitol” while standing in front of a rolling camera, which could suggest that leadership expected violence and did not want evidence collected against them.

Four members of the Oath Keepers, a far right group associated with the militia movement that also planned for violence and brawled at the Capitol, were convicted of seditious conspiracy and other crimes in January. Former President Trump, his lies about a stolen election and his effort to egg on supporters on January 6 loomed large over trials of Oath Keepers, Proud Boys, and other defendants.

Jose Padilla, a member of The Donald web forum where violence was discussed before and after the mob attack, was convicted of 10 felonies and misdemeanors this week for rioting on January 6, including “assaulting, resisting or impeding an officer with a deadly or dangerous weapon.” Padilla was part of a mob that attempted to breach the Capitol and was seen throwing a flag pole that struck a police officer in the helmet.

A judge dismissed Padilla’s own testimony in court as “self-serving” after he insisted, under oath, that the Trump supporters attacking the Capitol only intended to “convince legislators” to “adopt constitutional amendments” that would keep their preferred president in power.

When asked about his online posts detailing clashes with police along with rhetoric about “war” and “revolution,” Padilla said he was part of a “gaming subculture” that was trying to score “internet cool points” with shocking posts, according to NBC News.

Trump and his family are the central figures in extremist conspiracy theories and ideology that ballooned online during his presidency before exploding as Trump refused to concede and declared the 2020 election stolen. This includes the baseless and bizarre QAnon movement, which presents Trump as a sort of savior-within-the-system who defends the righteous from a cabal of elite Democrats and Satanic pedophiles who control the “deep state.” Baseless claims of a stolen election fit neatly into this groove, and many January 6 rioters were QAnon adherents.

Trump and his sycophants normalized white nationalist narratives, and analysts saw plenty of warning signs ahead of the violence on January 6. As Truthout reported in 2021, between January 1 and January 4 of that year, posts calling for violence — including the arrest and execution of politicians — were found across Twitter, TikTok, Parler, and other platforms, according to an analysis by Right-Wing Watch. Violent posts on The Donald alone received 40,000 engagements.

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