

IDEAS

# What Gang-Backed Government Could Do to America

January 6 was a warning: When public authority and private muscle join forces, democracy is in danger.


By Rachel Kleinfeld



Getty; The Atlantic

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IN THE YEAR since a mob invaded the Capitol, the trend lines for political violence in the United States have worsened. According to a new poll from *The Washington Post* and the University of Maryland, about one in three Americans believes that violence against the government is sometimes justified. But even more disturbing than the hardening of attitudes is the governing pattern coalescing—like an array of magnets pulling one another near—in pockets of the country. In some localities, conservative politicians and law-enforcement officials are melding with armed vigilantes who have similar politics. In Grand Traverse County, Michigan, last January, a citizen asked local officials at a virtual public meeting to denounce the Proud Boys, a right-wing gang that took part in the Capitol riot and had previously introduced a local gun-rights resolution. Instead of disavowing the group, the county commission's vice chair stepped off-screen and returned brandishing his rifle. Closer to Michigan's capital, Barry County Sheriff Dar Leaf made news in August by speaking approvingly of militias and claiming the power to recruit posses to “suppress rioting.”

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These officials' beliefs might be shared by their constituents. Or not—the prospect of

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Rachel Kleinfeld is a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the author of *A Savage Order: How the World's Deadliest Countries Can Forge a Path to Security*.

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