

To: **The Civic Listening Corps**

From: John Schmidt and Kaitlyn Dowling

Subject: July Volunteer Report

Date: July 27th, 2022



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**The Civic Listening Corps was formed in January 2022 to give communities across the country the tools and training needed to identify and fight the impact misinformation has on the issues we discuss online every day.** Our goal is to use the knowledge we gather together to prevent attempts to further undermine our civic discourse. We have created this report to provide a deep dive into key narratives identified over the last two weeks and to share some of the best examples of your efforts.

All of the information presented in this report was made possible by your contributions during our weekly guided monitoring shifts. Thank you so much for all you have done! **If you would like to invite your network to join us and learn more about how to combat online misinformation, they can access all of our materials by signing up here: [ati.io/signup](https://ati.io/signup)**

**Want to read our last report?** Find it here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vle0RPbyf-TNRms-de6eU5KkCGd7ft8/view?usp=sharing>

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## Your Impact By the Numbers

Over the last two weeks we have received 619 reports from our CLC volunteer team in the last two weeks! Here is how they broke down by our major misinformation topics (as of July 26th, 2022):

1. 289 issues related to the January 6th Committee
  2. 131 issues related to abortion
  3. 59 issues related to COVID-19
  4. 50 issues related to elections
  5. 49 issues related to LGBTQ+
  6. 38 issues related to monkeypox
  7. 24 issues related to Climate
  8. 21 issues related gun violence
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## Major Narratives

### I. Monkeypox

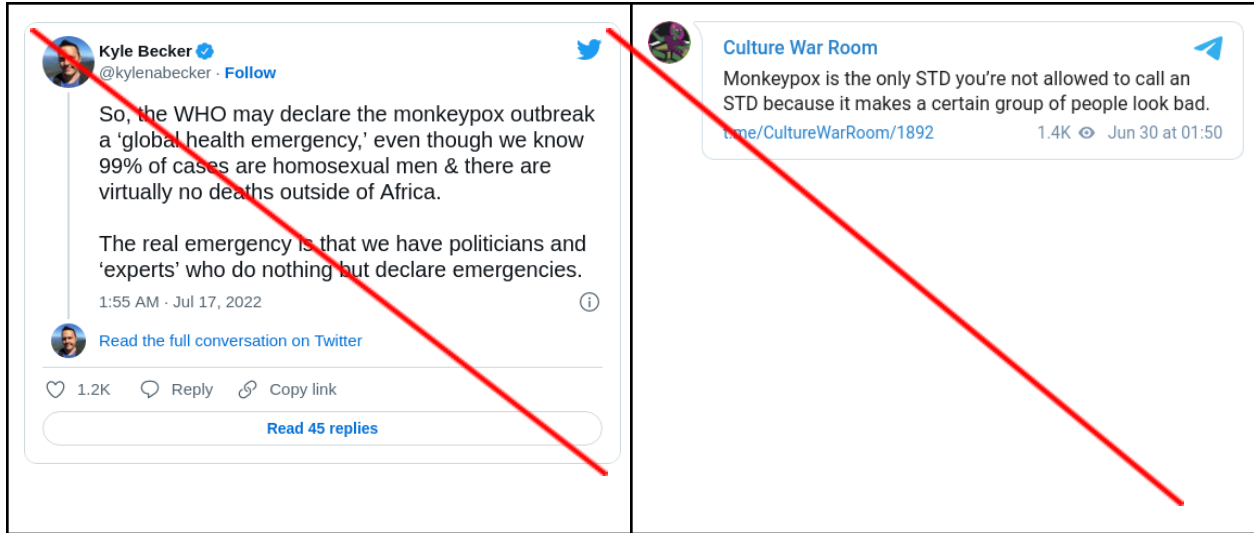
#### **CONTENT WARNING: homophobia, sexual content**

Monkeypox cases have been on the rise in the United States since late May, and has been declared a global health emergency by the World Health Organization. Misinformation spreaders are reacting to healthcare officials' statements by promoting claims that undermine potential precautions:

**Claim: Monkeypox is only spread by gay men**

A common (but inaccurate) stereotype about sexually transmitted diseases alleges only gay people (and more specifically gay men) get infected. Although monkeypox is not [considered an STD](#), this stereotype persists due to reports that monkeypox infections are [rising](#) among men who have sex with men (MSM).

As a result, ar right commentators are encouraging their audience to ignore any monkeypox guidance criticizing public health guidance as an overreaction to a disease they believe only infects a subset of the population. These messages were often accompanied by homophobic attacks:



Left: former FOX news producer Kyle Becker mocks efforts to declare monkeypox and emergency because “[...] 99% of case are homosexual men [...]”. Right: online commentator Culture War Room claiming that the only reason we do not call Monkeypox an STD is because it will make “a certain group of people look bad.” Images courtesy of Junkipedia.org

While recent data does support the claim that men who have sex with men re currently the main community impacted by the outbreak, there are some who argue that the [current case count](#) is misleading, and is not the only way monkeypox can spread. Regardless, this narrative is being used to both discourage a whole society response to the outbreak and reinforce an existing effort to attack the LGBTQ+ community. The misconception is already informing grooming attacks after an outbreak was found in children:



*Pictured: YouTube Video that claims the Child Monkeypox explosion is the result of pedophilia. The CDC screenshot has been digitally altered. Images courtesy of Junkipedia.org*

For more information on this narrative, [see our section on grooming](#)

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## II. January 6th Committee Hearings

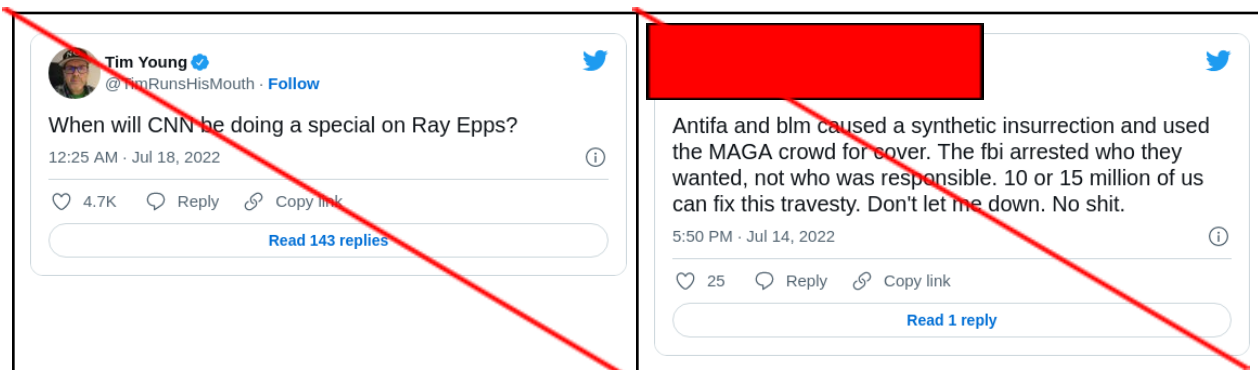
Starting on June 9th, 2022, the US House Select Committee on the January 6 Attack has hosted a series of hearings to inform the public about their investigation. The goal of this committee has been to investigate the causes and gaps that created the circumstances for the insurrection and create recommendations to prevent future exploitation.

We have been covering this narrative throughout our most recent issues (access here and here). Here are the latest updates on the claims you reported:

### A. Update: January 6th Was an Inside Job

While this was a narrative that we covered in our first issue (which you can access here), over the last two weeks we saw an increase in reports around this narrative. These reports coalesced around a singular claim: that Arizona participant Ray Epps was an FBI informant tasked with inciting a riot.

Some reports were in response to mainstream coverage, like this New York Times piece about the impact of the conspiracy theory on Epps' life, but the goal of this thoroughly debunked conspiracy theory is to shift blame for the insurrection from the pro-MAGA crowd to the federal government.

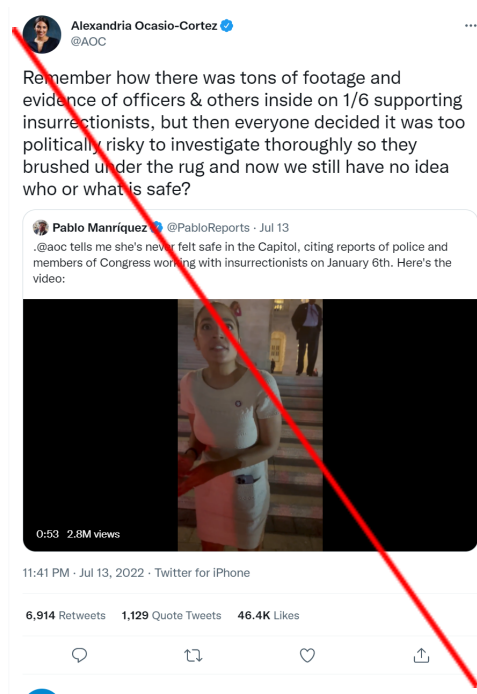


*Left: Online commentator Tim Young mocks January 6th CNN specials by suggesting there should be one on Ray Epps. Right: Individual claims that Antifa and BLM orchestrated a “synthetic insurrection” so the FBI could arrest who they want. Images courtesy of Junkipedia.org*

### A. Claim: Representative Ocasio-Cortez Claims Co-Opted by Right Wing Commentators

On Wednesday, July 13th, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY-14) shared an incident in which members of the US Capitol Police refused to assist after a right wing commentator sexually

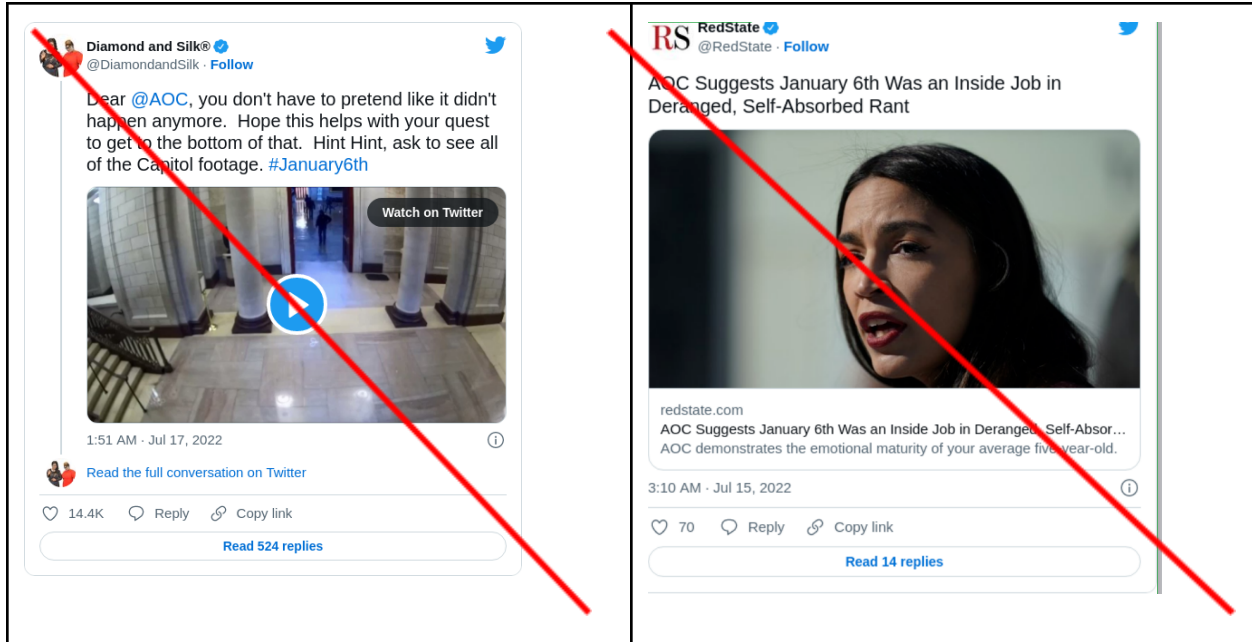
harassed her on the steps of the Capitol Building. As part of this, she included the following claim that Capitol Police supported insurrectionists during the attack:



*Above: the original tweet from Representative Ocasio-Cortez that prompted the discussion. Image courtesy of Junkipedia.org*

This claim is disputed- while video evidence shows Capitol Police allowing insurrectionists to enter the Capitol Building and in the immediate aftermath six officers were [suspended](#) with pay, there is no evidence that they actively supported the riot.

This claim was then co-opted by right wing commentators to generate the broader conclusion that the insurrection was an inside job:



*Left: Right wing commentators Diamond and Silk share edited footage that they claim demonstrates an inside job. Right: RedState editorial mocks Occasio-Cortez's claims, but reiterates their belief that the FBI staged the insurrection. Images courtesy of Junkipedia.org*

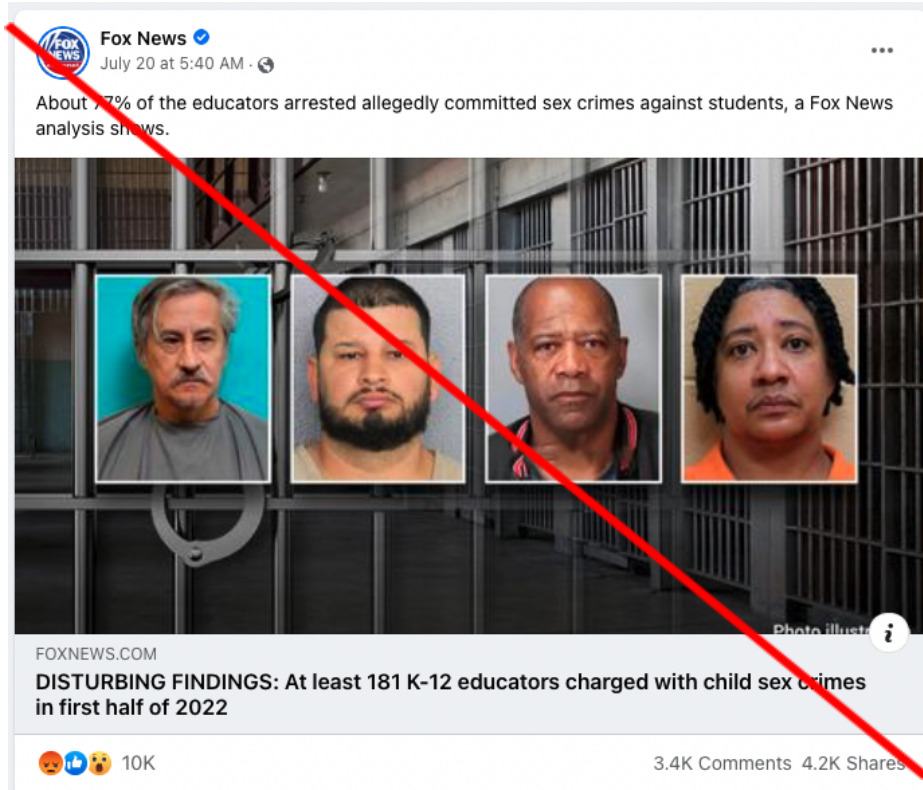
### III. "Grooming" Accusations Continue to Spread,

**CONTENT WARNING: homophobia, sexual content, allusions to pedophilia**

Claim: Public school teachers, librarians, members of the LGBTQ+ community pose a threat to children

Online commentators have continued promoting narratives that claim children are being sexually harmed by teachers, librarians, and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

This week, CLC volunteers surfaced a Fox News analysis that found 181 K-12 teachers "were arrested on child sex-related crimes in the U.S. in the first six months of 2022...[with] 77%, [involving] alleged crimes against students."



*Pictured: Semi-viral Fox News article promoting the analysis. Images courtesy of Junkipedia.org*

It is important to note that this headline omits critical context: not only are these still alleged crimes, but the US [had approximately 3.7 million teachers](#) for the 2021-2022 school year, meaning that this statistic of .005% of teachers cannot demonstrate a link between public schools and widespread abuse.

The analysis has been promoted by influential accounts. Conservative personality Mike Cernovich compared the situation to Catholic Church sexual abuse, [claiming](#) “there are far more pedophiles in public schools” than in the Church.

The analysis was also [promoted](#) by Chris Rufo, who has spearheaded his own “[investigation](#)” into Los Angeles Unified School District’s [publicly-available](#) DEI resources about LGBTQ+ students and staff. Tucker Carlson also [promoted](#) the Rufo piece, asking “Shouldn’t they [teachers] be in prison for [talking to kids about sex]?” referring to discussions of gender and sexuality. It should be noted that Rufo is also [responsible](#) for “inventing” the false idea that critical race theory is taught to children in public schools.



*Pictured: Online commentator/troll account Libs of TikTok promotes Rufos' latest interview on Tucker Carlson Tonight with the encouragement of homeschooling. Images courtesy of Junkipedia.org*

Due to the increased use of the term “groomers” against LGBTQ+ people, advocates are pushing social media to take action on the term as hate speech. Reddit [confirmed](#) to Media Matters that language comparing LGBTQ+ people to groomers or pedophiles violates its existing hate speech policies. Reporting from [Daily Dot](#) also confirmed with Reddit, TikTok, and Meta spokespeople “that baselessly calling LGBTQ people or the community ‘groomers’ or accusing them of ‘grooming’ is governed under their policies prohibiting hate speech.” [Daily Dot](#) also confirmed that Twitter “bans calling people ‘groomers’ based on their gender identity, but the rule is not effectively enforced.” Google has not yet commented.

Many have expressed [anger](#) at platforms for “censorship,” claiming that “groomer” and “pedophile” are not used as [slurs](#) against the LGBTQ+ community.





*Pictured: Citizen journalist Tim Pool criticizes Twitter's recent standards change, with the claim that the pedophilia accusations were not intended to attack the LGBTQ+ community as a whole. Images courtesy of Junkipedia.org*

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## What's Next?

**Looking ahead to August, we are going to continue to monitor these narratives for further developments- with special emphasis on:**

- **Continued monitoring of grooming accusations** after Twitter's revision of community guidelines
- **Misinformation during the August primaries**
- **Monkeypox** as the World Health Organization [declares it a global health emergency](#)

Thank you for everything you have done! If you would like to join us on a shift to collect more insights like this you can sign up here:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/10c0e4dada728a2fece9-august>

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