

To: **The Civic Listening Corps**

From: John Schmidt and Kaitlyn Dowling

Subject: June Volunteer Report

Date: June 30th, 2022



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 during the month of June 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 leverage civic engagement to combat online misinformation, they can access all of our materials by signing up here: ati.io/signup**

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Your Impact By the Numbers

We received over **1,200 reports** in the month of June from our CLC volunteer team! Here is how they broke down by our major misinformation topics (as of June 28th, 2022):

1. 666 issues related to **January 6th**
 2. 311 issues related to **elections or democracy issues**
 3. 96 issues related to **gun violence**
 4. 88 issues related to **medical misinformation including COVID-19, monkeypox, and baby formula shortages**
 5. 78 issues related to **LGBTQ+ Issues**
 6. 57 issues related to **abortion**
 7. 50 issues related to the **Supreme Court**
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Major Narratives of the Month

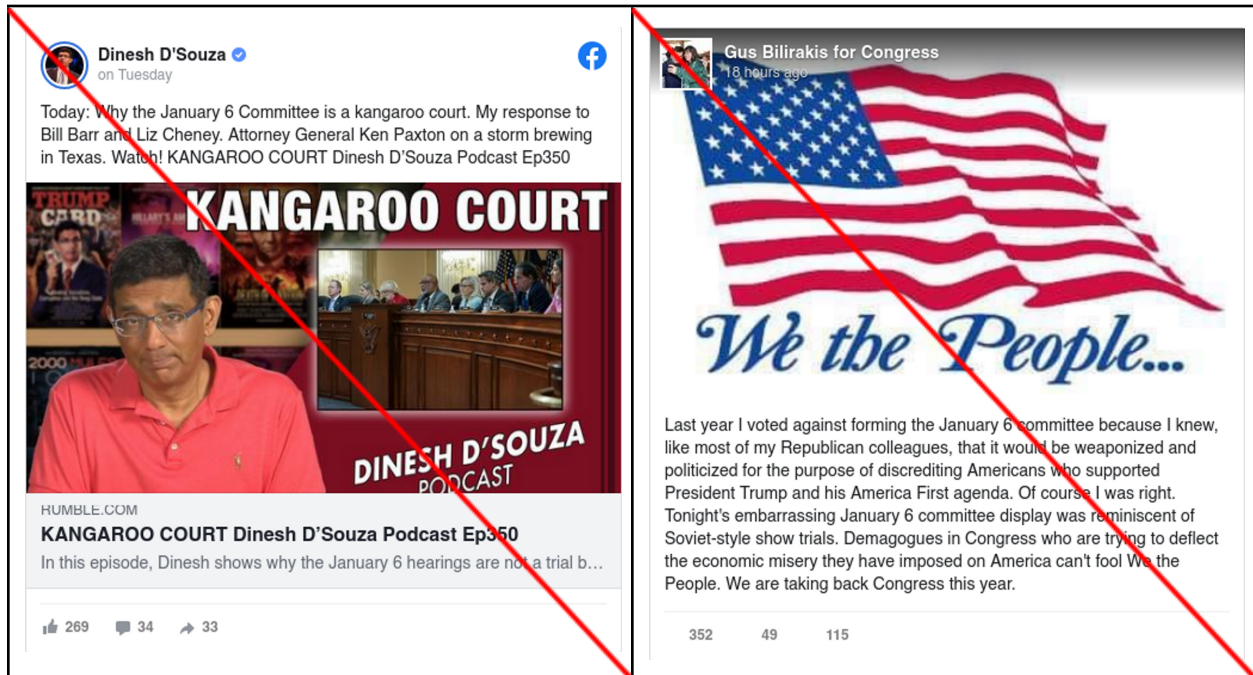
I. January 6th Committee Investigations

Starting on June 9th, 2022, the US House Select Committee on the January 6 Attack has hosted a series of hearings designed 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, create recommendations to prevent future exploitation, and hold responsible parties accountable. In response to the publicity surrounding the hearings, several problematic narratives emerged:

A. Claim: The January 6th Committee is a "Kangaroo Court" Designed to Silence Political Opponents

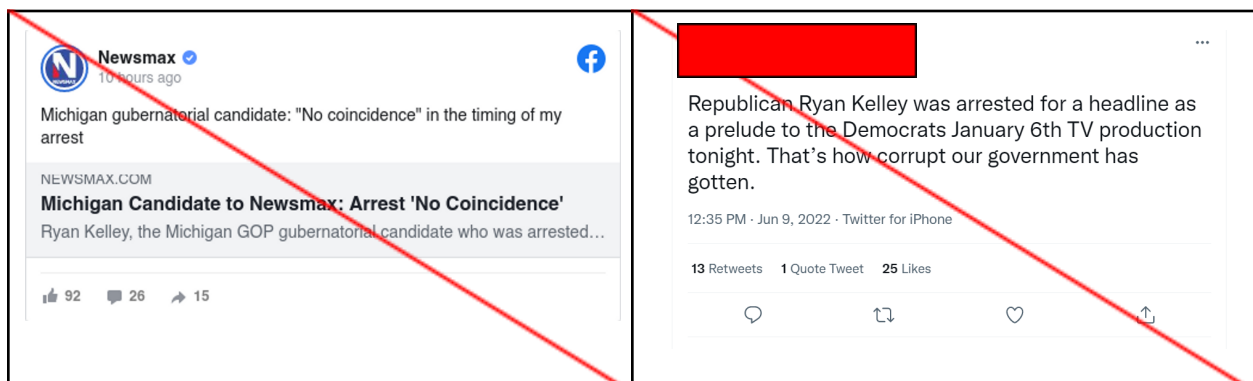
According to volunteer reports, there are frequently shared claims that the investigation is a scheme to silence political opponents regardless of their level of involvement in inciting the Capitol Attack. This seems partially inspired by this New York Times [editorial](#) quoting a Congressional Democrat who argues the committee would demonstrate "...how irresponsibly complicit Republicans were in attempting to toss out their vote and just how far Republicans will go to gain power for themselves.", but is otherwise part of a broader attempt to discredit any investigations into January 6th.

These online discussions frequently use fear-mongering language labeling the hearings a “kangaroo court” or “Soviet-style show trials” to evoke authoritarianism.



Pictured: (left) right-wing documentarian Dinesh D'Souza using the Kangaroo Court terminology as part of his podcast (right) U.S. House Representative Gus Bilirakis (R-FL-12), call the hearings a “Soviet style show trial” to claim that the committee is out to discredit Trump supporters. Screenshot courtesy of Junkipedia.org

This theme was advanced when [Michigan GOP gubernatorial candidate Ryan Kelley was arrested and charged](#) with alleged involvement in the insurrection, leading Kelly to suggest he was a “political prisoner”. Kelley denies entering the Capitol building during the insurrection.

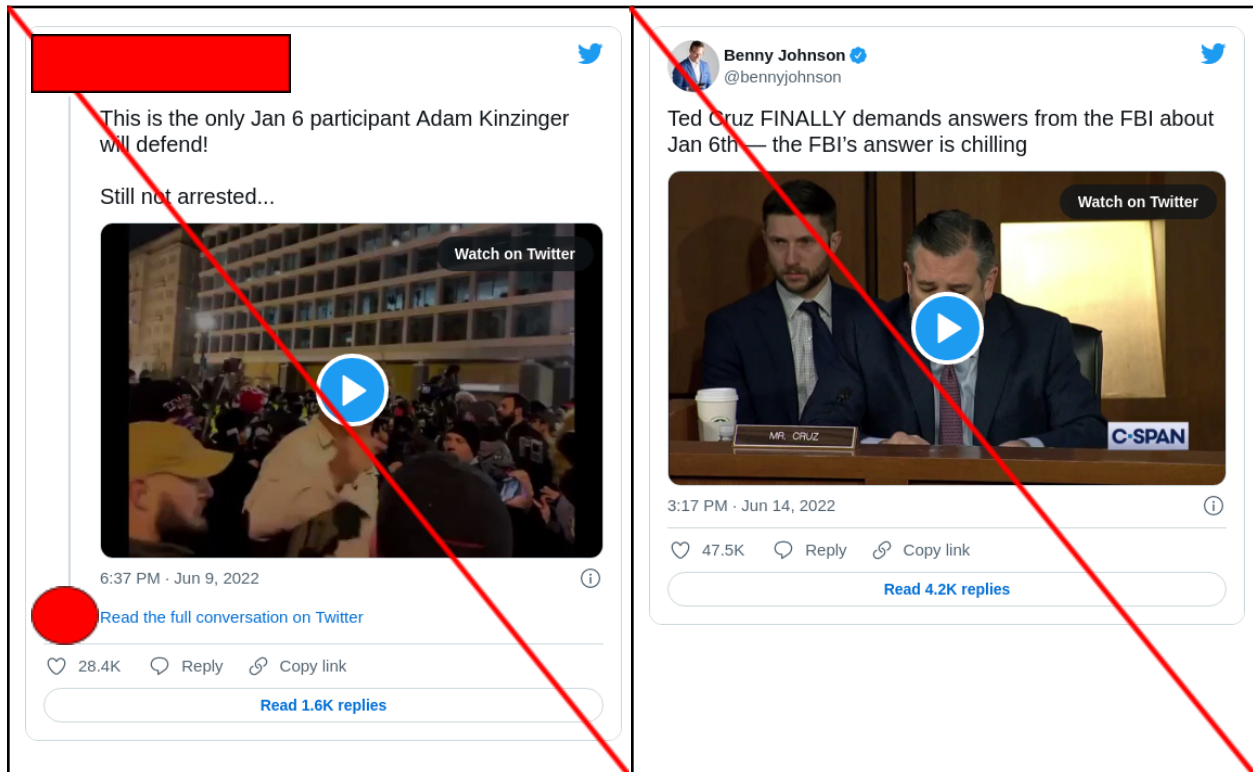


Pictured: (left) Newsmax gives candidate Kelly a platform via online interview and article to repeat his claim that he is a political prisoner as a result of his election beliefs. (right) Individual on Twitter claims that Kelley was arrested as a prelude to the hearings. Screenshots courtesy of Junkipedia.org

B. Claim: January 6th Was Fabricated/An Inside Job

Another fringe conspiracy alleges that the insurrection was fabricated or incited by the government in an effort to further discredit the attempts to overturn the 2020 presidential election. According to this theory, FBI informants within the groups protesting on January 6th were encouraging the protestors to riot.

Texas Senator Ted Cruz amplified the conspiracy during a Senate hearing with a representative from the FBI, using the most common claim that Arizona participant Ray Epps was an FBI informant and the primary instigator of the riot. [The theory has been undermined by new evidence.](#)



Pictured (left): individual on Twitter shares video of alleged FBI informant inciting violence on January 6th. (right): online commentator Benny Johnson amplified Cruz's accusations with a video of Cruz's questions. Screenshots courtesy of Junkipedia.org

C. Other Narratives

The Civic Listening Corps volunteers also documented narratives:

- Creating a false comparison between the attempted insurrection on January 6th and the Black Lives Matter movement, [with the inaccurate claim that no one participating in BLM protests was arrested.](#)
- Creating a false comparison between [the detainment of staff members of *The Late Show With Stephen Colbert*](#) to the January 6th Insurrection

II. Targeting Pride Month Celebrations

CONTENT WARNING: transphobia, homophobia

Around the world, June is celebrated as Pride Month by the LGBTQ+ community. This year, Pride took place as politicians, commentators, and online influencers rallied around anti-LGBTQ+ causes. Civic Listening Corps members have reported increasing amounts of this content over the last two months. From Florida's "[Don't Say Gay](#)" bill to attacks on [transgender children](#) and their families in places like Texas, we knew June would be a month to pay attention to civic discourse online around gay and transgender rights. Unfortunately as we predicted, Pride [celebrations](#) in several cities and towns attracted counter-protesters, some of whom antagonized attendees, accused them of being "groomers" and "pedophiles," and threatened violence.

A. Claim: Drag shows billed as "family-friendly" attempt to groom children

In particular, drag shows – especially events aimed at children and families – have attracted hostility. According to local reporting by the *Dallas Observer*, prominent right-wing commentators showed up to a drag brunch (billed by event organizers as a family-friendly) to [protest](#), accusing attendees of child abuse, genital mutilation, supporting pedophilia, and being "bigots" for not allowing protesters inside the venue. Video of the protesters spread over social media in the following days.

The event contributed to a larger conversation online about drag shows and whether or not drag performers should be allowed at events with children. [Drag queen story hours](#) – events put on by local libraries during which drag performers read books to children – have also been the [target](#) of such protests, with some states moving to [outlaw](#) the events.

These threats have not been without consequence. The Texas Tribune [reported](#) that some organizers have opted to move their events online. The [Washington Post](#) and [NBC News](#) have also reported on increasing threats and violence at Pride events and more broadly in the community.

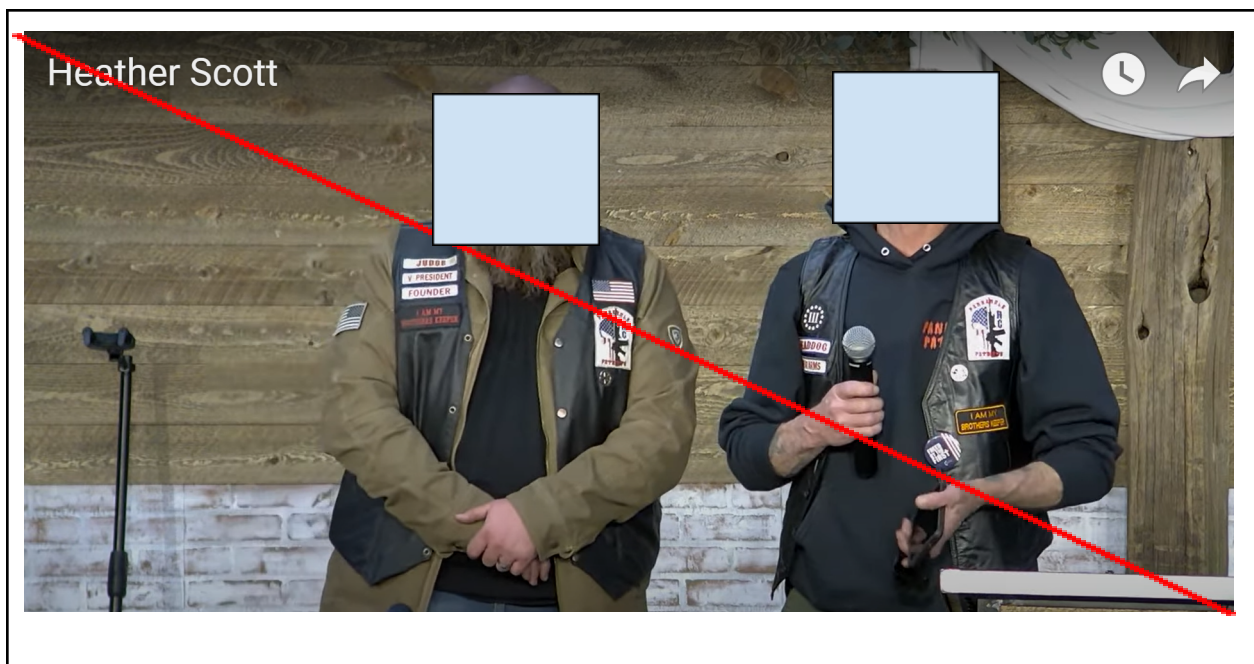
III. Volunteer Spotlight

Part of our mandate is to empower our volunteer team to monitor the disinformation that impacts THEM and their communities. As part of this effort we have invited Idaho Civic Listening Corps volunteer Kristen to provide a report about what she saw online when a pride event near her was targeted for harassment. Kristen has been a volunteer social media monitor for multiple groups since the 2020 election, and has in that time become an expert on disinformation in her state.

CONTENT WARNING: homophobia, transphobia, harassment

Calls to target a pride event in Coeur d’Alene began in early May, when Idaho Representative Heather Scott (R-ID-1A) held an event at a local church to [organize](#) around book banning and the perception of “an organized attack on [kids] minds and souls”. At the end of that hour-long event, she invited two members of a group called the Panhandle Patriots Riding Club up to the microphone.

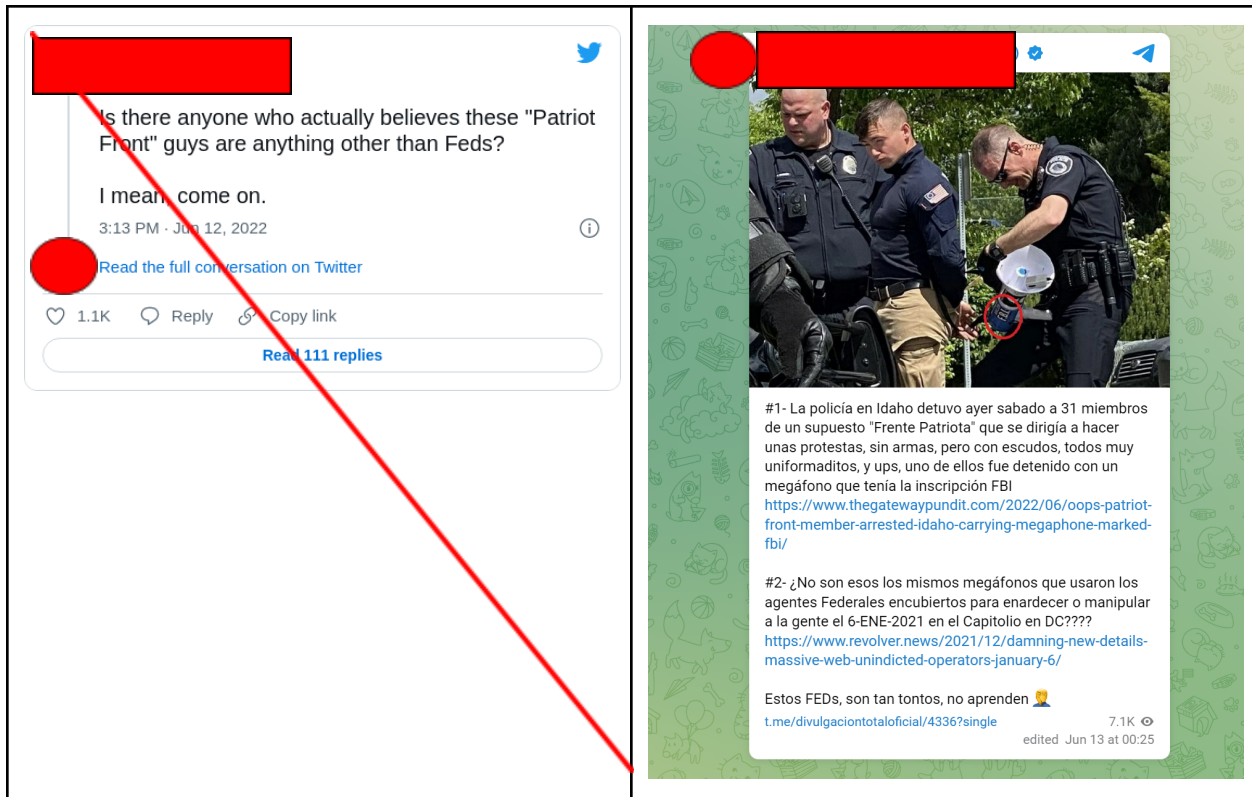
The two men talked about an upcoming “Pride in the Park” event and put out a call to get “head-to-head” with the people at the event. This was posted to YouTube. A III% hate group patch is clearly visible. While the original engagement of this video was just over 300, it seemed to predict what would happen the day of the event



Pictured: Original YouTube video, where these two individuals were invited to speak by the State Representative

On June 11th, Police in Coeur d’Alene [arrested](#) 31 men in a U-Haul in uniform and riot gear. They were later charged with conspiracy to riot before the upcoming “Pride in the Park” event. While there is no evidence that Patriot Front was affiliated with the group in the initial video (or the State Representative), they had a similar plan and motive.

Within hours, online disinformation spread that the men in the van were Federal Agents. The story was picked up by [Gateway Pundit](#) and spread to Telegram, in Spanish, which included innuendo based on half truths and possibly manipulated media. That post received 6,000 engagements



Pictured (Left) Individual claims on Twitter that the Patriot Front was infiltrated by Feds.

(Right) Spanish language claims on Telegram. Translation: “#1- Police in Idaho arrested 31 members of a so-called "Patriot Front" on their way to a protest yesterday Saturday, unarmed, but with shields, all in uniform, and oops, one of them was arrested with a megaphone bearing the words FBI... #2- Aren't those the same megaphones that were used by undercover Federal agents to inflame or manipulate people on 6-JAN-2021 at the Capitol in DC????”

Screenshots courtesy of Junkipedia.org

What's Next?

We would love to invite you to our **Volunteer Huddle on Wednesday, July 13th, at 7 pm ET !** We will be sharing more information about some of the narratives you have gathered (both ones shared in here and some additional updates), share our plan for the rest of the summer, **and provide an opportunity for you all to meet the rest of our staff and the fellow members of your volunteer team!**

[You can follow this link to register- hope to see you all there!](#)

While the narratives in July are still to be determined, we are going to prioritize investigations into:

- **Misinformation around abortion and reproductive rights** in the wake of *Dobbs v Jackson*
- **Misinformation around gun violence** as bipartisan legislation to curb such violence continues to advance in Congress
- **Any new developments in the narratives you elevated for us this month**

We hope you can join us as we move into this next phase of our program! [You can sign up for a shift here.](#)