

Three Percenters

AT A GLANCE

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HOW TO CITE

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SUMMARY

Formed: 2008

Disbanded: Group is Active.

First Attack: April 2014: Members of the Three Percenters, including Eric Parker, the leader of the Idaho III%ers, joined far-right groups from across the nation in Bunkerville, Nevada, to participate in an armed standoff between the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and Cliven Bundy, a rancher who refused to pay federal grazing fees. They successfully prevented the confiscation of rancher Cliven Bundy’s cattle. This operation – one of the organization’s first – helped the Three Percenters gain national attention.¹ (0 killed, 0 wounded)

Last Attack: January 6, 2021: The Three Percenters participated in the storming of the U.S. Capitol alongside other far-right groups, including the Oath Keepers, Proud Boys, and QAnon supporters, in an attempt to halt the certification of Joe Biden’s election. One police officer who engaged with protesters during the insurrection, Brian Sicknick, died of natural causes the day after the attack.² Four protesters died at various points throughout the event: one (Ashli Babbitt) was shot by Capitol Police, two died of natural causes and another of drug intoxication.³ Approximately one hundred forty police officers were injured. The number of injured rioters remains unknown. Four police officers who responded to the attack died by suicide within seven months.⁴ (5 killed, about 140 wounded)⁵

OVERVIEW

The Three Percenters (also known as 3%ers, III%ers, and Threepers) is a far-right, anti-government extremist group founded in 2008 following the election of President Barack Obama. Considered to be one of the largest umbrella groups in the militia movement, the Three Percenters gain its name from the historically incorrect notion that only 3% of the population fought against the British in the American Revolution. The Three Percenters believe that small groups of armed citizens have a patriotic duty to defend the public from governmental tyranny. Three Percenter chapters often form traditional militia groups, though some chapters are not armed or only maintain an online presence. The concept for the Three Percenters group was created by Mike Vanderboegh, an Alabama-based right-wing extremist who also organized a group called the Sons of Liberty. Since the III%ers group structure remains largely decentralized, the organization is particularly prone to splinters and internal upheaval. The Three Percenters label now alludes to numerous militia chapters, including the III% Security Force, the III% United Patriots, the American Patriots III%, the III% Originals, and more. The Three Percenters are ardent supporters of the Second Amendment and actively oppose gun control policies. Some members have developed anti-Muslim attitudes and led armed protests against mosques. Others express anti-immigration attitudes, participating in patrols of the U.S.-Mexico border. The group regularly conducts armed protests and offers protection to political leaders aligned with III% ideology. The Three Percenters have also engaged in multiple armed standoffs with the federal government. On January 6, 2021, the group played an active role in storming the U.S. Capitol to disrupt the certification of Joe Biden's victory in the 2020 presidential election.

NARRATIVE SUMMARY

The Three Percenters (also known as 3%ers, III%ers, and Threepers) was founded by Michael (Mike) Vanderboegh in 2008.⁶ It is composed of a loose coalition of local chapters with no centralized organization or authority.⁷ The group nominally has six tiers of leadership (National, Regional, State, Zone, District, County), though in reality there is no clear hierarchy of power within the Three Percenters. This profile uses the Three Percenters name to discuss broad trends in the evolution and activities of the group's constituent autonomous chapters. When possible, this profile refers to these chapters by name, which include the III% Security Force, the American Constitutional Elite III%, the III% United Patriots, the American Patriots the III%, the We the People III%, the III% Nation (III%N), the American Patriots the III%, the III% Republic (III%R), the III% Originals (III%O), and more.⁸

2008-2014: Early Beginnings

Before creating the Three Percenters, Vanderboegh was a longtime leader of the 1990s militia movement, during which he served as an organizer for the Sons of Liberty and allegedly headed an Alabama militia group called the First Alabama Cavalry Regiment.⁹ In the mid-1990s, Vanderboegh became popular for his online newspaper, the Joe Doe Times, where he promoted anti-government conspiracy theories. In 2008, inspired by the ideology of the militia movement—namely the “New World Order” (NWO) conspiracy,

which posits the secret emergence of a tyrannical world government— Vanderboegh created the Three Percenters.¹⁰

The group centers around the debunked claim that only 3% of American colonists fought against the British during the fight for American independence. Three Percenters view themselves as modern day counterparts of those revolutionaries, fighting not against the British but rather the alleged tyranny of the U.S. federal government.¹¹ According to Vanderboegh, “The Three Percent idea, the movement, the ideal, was designed to be a simple, powerful concept that could not be infiltrated or subjected to agents provocateurs like many organizations that I observed in the constitutional militia movement of the 90s.”¹²

Along with other right-wing, anti-government groups, the Three Percenters experienced a significant growth in membership following the election of U.S. President Barack Obama in 2008. The rise of social media allowed the group to spread its ideas online, particularly to young audiences. According to the Anti-Defamation League, individual Three Percenters “created Facebook pages or Facebook groups; by the mid-2010s, some of the latter had thousands and even tens of thousands of members.”¹³ Unlike other right-wing groups, membership into the Three Percenters does not require law enforcement experience or paramilitary involvement.¹⁴ Consequently, the group gained many members who self-identified as Three Percenters, and rapidly established itself as one of the largest anti-government, right-wing umbrella groups in the United States.¹⁵

From 2008 to 2014, the group remained relatively under the radar with most of its activity occurring online. There were several incidents, however, that called attention to Vanderboegh and the Three Percenters. For example, in 2011, four militia members from Georgia were arrested for plotting to attack four cities in the United States using explosives and the biological agent ricin.¹⁶ According to federal prosecutors, the men were inspired by Vanderboegh’s self-published online novel *Absolved*, which Vanderboegh described as a “a cautionary tale for the out-of-control gun cops of the ATF” and “a combination field manual, technical manual and call to arms for my beloved gunnies of the armed citizenry.”¹⁷ Vanderboegh denied having any connection to the plot.¹⁸ Additionally, in April 2013, a group of police officers in the Jersey City Police Department’s Emergency Services Unit were disciplined for wearing Three Percenters patches.¹⁹

2014-2017: A Rise to Prominence by Controversial Activities

The Three Percenters began conducting large-scale operations in 2014. The group made national headlines for participating in a 2014 armed standoff with federal agents in Nevada.²⁰ Alongside the Oath Keepers, the Three Percenters sought to defy the confiscation of rancher Cliven Bundy’s cattle land by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management.²¹ In 2015, one Three Percenter member, Eric Parker, traveled to Oregon and Montana to participate in additional armed standoffs with officers from the U.S. Forest Service.²²

In 2016, the Three Percenters, particularly the III% Security Force (SF), faced criticism for an attempted attack against Muslims in Kansas. Specifically, three militia members affiliated with the Three Percenters planned to bomb an apartment complex in Garden City, Kansas, where a number of immigrants from Somalia lived. Their militia group, known as the “Kansas Crusaders,” grew out of the Kansas Security Force, a III% Security Force affiliate. The men were arrested before they could carry out their plans and were convicted with sentences of 25 to 30 years in prison. Following the arrests, both the Kansas Security Force and the leader of the III% Security Force, Chris Hill, attempted to distance themselves from the Kansas Crusaders (KC).²³ Even so, III% SF members continued to engage in anti-Muslim activity. For example, in late 2016, III% SF members made headlines for their protests against the construction of a mosque in a small town in Georgia, which they claimed would be a training ground for the Islamic State. Many of the protestors showed up in overtly Islamophobic attire.²⁴

In 2017, the Three Percenters faced additional criticism after Jerry Varnell, a 23-year-old from Oklahoma, attempted to bomb a bank in Oklahoma City and testified in court that he ascribed to III%er ideology.²⁵ Less than a year later, in 2018, one of the men arrested in the 2017 bombing of the Dar Al-Farooq Islamic Center in Minnesota was also identified as a Three Percenters affiliate.²⁶

2017-2020: Ideological Pivots and Splintering

In 2015, the Three Percenters began to strongly back Donald Trump’s candidacy in the U.S. presidential election. As with other militia groups, the Three Percenters supported his pro-gun stance as well as his anti-Islamic and anti-immigrant rhetoric.²⁷ President Trump’s victory in 2016 drove a shift in Three Percenter activity. With Trump at the head of the federal government, the group began to abandon its anti-government rhetoric and instead focus on opposing left-wing activists and protesters.²⁸

The group’s new focus on right-wing and left-wing politics was evidenced by the presence of Three Percenters at several political events. In August 2017, the Three Percenters were present at two left-leaning events in Kansas City, Missouri, to “monitor” proceedings as armed “observers.”²⁹ Also in 2017, the Three Percenters appeared at several white supremacist events, including the “Unite the Right” rally in 2017 in Charlottesville, from which they later attempted to distance themselves.³⁰ Starting in 2019, the Three Percenters were present as “security” at pro-Trump rallies and offered to “protect” Republican representatives who oppose climate change legislation and gun control policies.³¹ At the end of 2019, the Three Percenters showed up as counter-protesters at a rally where left-wing protestors demanded that Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell support the impeachment of Trump.³²

The Three Percenters also targeted immigrants and Muslims. Group members mobilized against the presence of mosques and Muslim communities in Georgia.³³ Several chapters in the Three Percenter umbrella also participated in “vigilante border patrols” at the U.S.-Mexico border and have reportedly held immigrants at gunpoint.³⁴

As the Three Percenters adopted a more political focus, schisms emerged within the group. Disagreements developed among constituent Three Percenters chapters, and group members criticized and defected to other chapters within the broader movement. In 2018, a Three Percenter chapter called the III% Originals issued a forceful statement against the III% Security Force. The III% Originals condemned Chris Hill (the leader of the III% SF) for creating an anti-government and Islamophobic environment within the III% SF and reaffirmed their commitment to “protect the rights of all citizens regardless of their skin color, creed, or religious affiliation.” The statement also asserted that any member of the III% Originals found to be associating with the III% SF would be “immediately removed from our group permanently.”³⁵ Then, in late 2019, several III% SF members publicly denounced Hill for a string of abuses and aggressive behavior. After audio leaked from an exchange in which Hill discussed killing and raping a member of the militia movement, the Security Force began to disintegrate.³⁶ After further disagreements with Hill, more than six out of the nine Security Force chapters defected from Hill and aligned with Skylar Steward, the leader of the III%SF Ohio. Steward and the six new chapters subsequently formed the American Constitutional Elites III% (A.C.E. III%).³⁷

After the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Three Percenters both organized and participated in protests against state lockdown requirements.³⁸ In May 2020, for example, Three Percenter members breached the grounds of Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear’s mansion, where they heckled the occupants about the state’s COVID-19 policies and hung an effigy of the governor on a tree.³⁹ The Three Percenters also carried out several activities in response to Black Lives Matter demonstrations following the death of George Floyd on May 25, 2020. Three Percenters chapters organized several armed marches and counter-protest rallies to BLM and anti-fascist (antifa) demonstrations.⁴⁰

Following the election of U.S. President Joe Biden on November 7, 2020, Three Percenters members participated in protests to pressure officials to overturn the allegedly fraudulent results of the election. In Georgia, members of the III% Security Force, including leader Chris Hill, appeared at a Stop the Steal rally at the Georgia State Capitol on November 7, 2020.⁴¹ Later that month, Hill posted a video about the election to social media, in which he fired an assault rifle and declared, “These next 45 days are going to be packed with violence.”⁴²

While the Three Percenters continued to be highly active throughout 2017-2020, the group’s membership declined during that period. According to the *Anti-Defamation League*, “the number of organized Three Percenter groups—both online and in the real world—has decreased.” This reduction in membership is likely a result of both the splintering of Three Percenter chapters and the broader movement’s ideological inconsistencies, including its simultaneous antipathy toward the federal government and support of the Trump administration.⁴³

2021-2022: The 2020 Election, the Storming of the U.S. Capitol, and Federal Investigations

On January 6, 2021, the Three Percenters participated in the storming of the U.S. Capitol, seeking to prevent the certification of Joe Biden as the victor of the 2020 presidential election. The Three Percenters was present at the Capitol alongside a large group of Donald Trump supporters and right-wing militia groups, including the Oath Keepers, the Proud Boys, and adherents of the QAnon conspiracy theory.⁴⁴ A journalist present during the Capitol Riot reported that some people wore "Three Percenter badges."⁴⁵ As Congress convened to determine electoral vote counts, an estimated 800 rioters stormed and entered the Capitol building.⁴⁶ Representatives were forced to postpone the electoral count for several hours. 138 police officers were injured during the Capitol riot and one, Officer Brian Sicknick, died the following day of natural causes.⁴⁷ Four protestors died during the event: one (Ashli Babbitt) was shot by Capitol Police, two died of natural causes and another of drug intoxication.⁴⁸ The number of protestors injured remains unknown.⁴⁹

In March 2021, prosecutors in Washington, D.C., released court documents indicating that the Three Percenters coordinated with leaders of the Oath Keepers and Proud Boys. The documents reveal that the three right-wing militia groups were "in close contact" prior to the event and "formed an alliance" to conspire against the certification of Biden's victory.⁵⁰ The Three Percenters, Oath Keepers, and Proud Boys also became the focus of an FBI investigation of the January 6 violence.⁵¹

Several Three Percenters have faced charges in relation to the Capitol riot. Guy Wesley Reffitt, a self-described Three Percenter from Texas, was arrested on January 18, 2021 on charges of trespassing on restricted grounds at the U.S. Capitol and obstruction of justice.⁵² On March 8, 2022, a federal jury convicted Reffitt on five counts.⁵³ Reffitt will be sentenced on June 8, 2022. He could face up to 60 years in prison.⁵⁴ In addition, Robert Gieswein of Colorado, another member of the Three Percenters, was charged in late January 2021 with assaulting a federal officer with an aerosol irritant spray and baseball bat, obstructing an official proceeding, destroying government property, and trespassing.⁵⁵ Gieswein's trial was originally scheduled for February 1, 2022, although it had to be postponed due to an outbreak of COVID-19 at the jail where he is being held. The jury selection for his trial is set to begin on April 28.⁵⁶ On June 10, 2021, federal prosecutors filed a conspiracy indictment against six men affiliated with the Three Percenters. The prosecutors reported that the six accused men communicated via text, Facebook, and the chatting app, Telegram, to attend the January 6 protests and be "ready and willing to fight."⁵⁷

The insurrection divided the Three Percenter organization, and several chapters sought to distance themselves from the violence. The Three Percenter's "National Council," which allegedly "oversaw the group," was dissolved in February 2021, writing in a statement that "the DC riots and Capitol breach has hurt the patriot movement drastically and as a result brought an end to our organization."⁵⁸ The Three Percenters still maintain a national presence, though the fallout of the Capitol riot may cause additional fracturing within the movement.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

A. LEADERSHIP

The Three Percenters are a national organization that claims to have six tiers of leadership (National, Regional, State, Zone, District, County). According to their bylaws, each state has a Leader, Assistant Leader, Communications Officer, Training Officer, Vetting Officer, Secretary, and Public Relations Officer.⁵⁹ In actuality, there is no clear hierarchy of power within the Three Percenter group. The organization is a collection of loosely tied groups with no centralized organization or authority.⁶⁰ Although there is a “Three Percenters National Council,” it is unclear what role it plays within the overall movement.⁶¹ The leaders of the state-wide groups grant themselves self-selected names and ranks rather than organizing in the specified tiers. Generally, leaders name themselves with military titles.⁶² The main leader of the group is given the designation of “General,” though lower ranks do not seem to represent an official chain of command. The groups also refer to one another with “callsigns,” or codenames, to disguise their identity online or over radio-comms. For example, Chris Hill, the leader of the III% Security Force, one of the splinter groups of the Three Percenters, refers to himself as “General Bloodagent.”⁶³

The Three Percenter label refers to a broad collection of splintered chapters, which include the III% Security Force, the American Constitutional Elite III%, the III% United Patriots, the American Patriots the III%, the We the People III%, the III% Nation (III%N), the American Patriots the III%, the III% Republic (III%R), the III% Originals (III%O), and more.⁶⁴ The organization is particularly prone to internal upheaval, and there are continual changes in leadership. The following section outlines the most important founders and leaders within the movement.

Michael Vanderboegh (2008-2016): The Three Percenters were founded by Michael (Mike) Vanderboegh in 2008 following the rise of the Tea Party nationalism movement in the United States and the election of President Barack Obama.⁶⁵ Vanderboegh was previously a member of the 1990s Patriot militia movement and of the Sons of Liberty militia in Alabama before leading the Alabama Cavalry Regiment Constitutional Militia. In the 2000s, Vanderboegh also affiliated with an anti-immigrant group known as the Alabama Minuteman Support Team.⁶⁶ In 2008, he started a blog called the “Sipsey Street Irregulars” to publicize his upcoming novel and mobilize far-right militia groups. On the blog, Vanderboegh announced the formation of the “Three Percenters,” whose purpose was to reactivate former 1990s militia groups and create an anti-gun control/pro-Second Amendment movement.⁶⁷ He claimed that the Three Percenters stood for an alleged three percent of gun owners who “will not disarm, will not compromise and will no longer back up at the passage of the next gun control act.” Vanderboegh declared that the “Three Percenters were committed to the ‘restoration of the Founders’ Republic” and were willing to fight and to kill “in the defense of ourselves and the Constitution.”⁶⁸ His book, *Absolved*, inspired ricin attacks in Georgia in 2011, and his blog encouraged criminal violence against Democratic offices during the passing of a health care reform bill in 2010.⁶⁹

Vanderboegh primarily served as the ideological founder of the Three Percenters and never held any formal leadership position or membership within the organization. In 2016, Mike Vanderboegh died after a five-year-long battle with cancer.⁷⁰

Vanderboegh's ideology and posts from the Sipsey Street Irregulars blog continue to permeate the Three Percenter organization.

Chris Hill (2011-present): Chris Hill, also known as “General Bloodagent,” is the leader of the III% Security Force (III%SF), the largest faction of the loose-knit Three Percenter movement.⁷¹ The III% Security Force is headquartered in Georgia, from which base Chris Hill coordinates with other Three Percenter chapters nationally. As of 2011, reports indicated that Hill was the chief moderator of the Three Percenter website and the leader of national recruitment efforts. Hill has also livestreamed many Three Percenter rallies and training sessions. To publicize the ideology and goals of the Three Percenter movement, Hill has posted videos online announcing Three Percenter policy priorities and events. Hill has encouraged open discussions about the Three Percenters with media sources and even starred in a *Vice* documentary film in 2017.⁷² However, since 2016, there has been internal pushback against Hill's influence in the organization. In 2018, another branch of the Three Percenter movement, the III% Originals, released a statement in which they condemned Chris Hill as Islamophobic and an “anti-government extremist.”⁷³ In 2019, III%SF members publicly denounced Hill for abuses and aggressive behavior. After a leaked audio exchange in which Hill discussed killing and raping a member of the militia movement, the Security Force began to disintegrate.⁷⁴ Six out of the nine chapters that Hill led ultimately defected from him and aligned with Skylar Steward, the leader of the III%SF Ohio. Steward and the six new chapters subsequently formed the American Constitutional Elites III% (A.C.E. III%).⁷⁵

Skylar Steward: (Unknown-present): Skylar Steward, also known as “Skydog,” has led the Ohio III%SF for several years.⁷⁶ Following the internal III%er schism in September 2019, Steward inherited more than six of the nine III% Security Force chapters and formed the American Constitutional Elites (A.C.E.) III%.⁷⁷ Steward also mended ties with Chris Hill's adversary, James Stachowiak, also known as “Johnny Infidel.”⁷⁸ Steward left his leadership position in the A.C.E. III% to continue developing his new organization, the Ohio Patriots III%.⁷⁹ Steward has insisted that he is not Islamophobic or racist, despite having equated antifa and Black Lives Matter with white supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan.⁸⁰ Steward was also actively involved in III%er anti-abortion activism after 2019 and armed rallies against Black Lives Matter protests after 2020.⁸¹

Other Prominent Leaders: (Unknown-present): One of the larger collections of Three Percenter chapters outside of the Security Force III% is the III% United Patriots, headquartered in Colorado. Ex-Marine **Tim Delpiero** is a prominent leader of the III% United Patriots. As of 2016, Delpiero led a III% United Force quick-response force known as the “Ghost of our Forefathers.”⁸² The American Patriots III% has considerable overlap with the III% United Patriots and was founded by **Scott Seddon**.⁸³ The III% Originals, known for its criticism of Chris Hill, is partially

led by **Kaleb Hill**, an infantry combat veteran.⁸⁴ Other prominent leaders include **Eric Parker**, who founded the Real 3% of Idaho, and **Matt Marshall**, the founder and leader of the Washington Three Percent.⁸⁵

B. NAME CHANGES

There are no recorded name changes for this group.

C. SIZE ESTIMATES

- 2017: 10,000 members (Anti-Defamation League/Vice)⁸⁶
- 2021: National membership in the “low thousands” (Devin Burghart, vice-president of the Institute for Research and Education on Human Rights)⁸⁷

Size estimates of the Three Percenters have a vast range. This is in part because there are no requirements to become a Three Percenter beyond considering yourself a Three Percenter. Some Three Percenter members may choose to participate in traditional Three Percenters militia activities, while others may engage in non-paramilitary coordination activities or in the online realm. A *Vice* documentary in 2017 estimated that there are a total of 10,000 Three Percenter members.⁸⁸ However, due to recent splinters in the organization, the number is likely much lower. An investigation of leaked Three Percenter membership lists conducted by *The Guardian* in 2021 estimates that there are several thousand members in the III% United Patriots Division, which is one of the largest collections of III%er chapters outside of the III% Security Force and the American Constitutional Elites III%.⁸⁹

Although the number of active Three Percenter members cannot be estimated with any precision, the group is considered one of the largest umbrella groups in the militia movement.⁹⁰ A 2021 report by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) defined the Three Percenter militia as a “mainstream militia” with a “large” estimated size and a “nationwide” presence.⁹¹

D. RESOURCES

Training Exercises and Military Experience:

Though the Three Percenters do not require a military or law enforcement background to be a member of the organization, most of the group’s leaders are military veterans or retired law enforcement officers. One-third of the Three Percenter members charged in the 2021 Capitol riots had a background in law enforcement and infantry training.⁹² Three Percenter members draw upon the military expertise of their fellow affiliates by participating in monthly military field training exercises organized by chapter leaders.⁹³ The Three Percenters also encourage members to purchase and carry semi-automatic rifles, side arms, and long-range rifles, among other weapons.⁹⁴

Fundraising:

Many Three Percenter chapters raise funds by selling ammunition and other supplies for military exercises. The American Patriots III%ers raffled off survival kits and sold merchandise online. The American Patriots III% also created a website tab for “Conservative Business,” which provided a list of businesses and communities the chapters can support.⁹⁵ The Delaware Three Percenters participated in AmazonSmile, which allowed Amazon customers to donate approximately 0.5 percent of all purchases to the Three Percenter organization.⁹⁶ In January 2021, Amazon banned Three Percenter groups from qualifying as a “charity” on AmazonSmile and subsequently barred the Delaware chapter from receiving funds from Amazon purchases.⁹⁷ A report released in October 2020 by the Strategic Dialogue Institute and Global Disinformation Index outlined funding resources for anti-government militia and hate organizations. The report concluded that groups like the Three Percenters largely obtain funding through PayPal, Facebook Fundraisers, Stripe, eBay for Charity, and GoFundMe.⁹⁸

E. GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS

Disclaimer: This is a partial list of where the organization has bases or operates. This does not include information on where the group conducts major attacks or has external influences.

The Three Percenters claim to maintain a presence in all 50 states and in Canada.⁹⁹ According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, the Three Percenters had established chapters in 49 states as of 2020, though not all chapters appeared to be active. Many Facebook accounts of these chapters are inactive or have little to no followers. Leaders of a Three Percenters chapter in one city often oversee the social media accounts of several states, suggesting limited leadership and activity across the U.S.¹⁰⁰ According to a 2021 report by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, Three Percenters groups were active in at least nineteen states since the summer of 2020.¹⁰¹ Additionally, according to Mark Pitcavage, an expert on extremist and far-right groups, at least 330 Three Percenter groups were active between 2016 and 2019.¹⁰² The following section describes the states with the highest concentration and chapter presence of Three Percenter members and participants.

*Asterisk denotes militias

Colorado:

- Chapters: III% Security Force (Statewide), III% United Patriots* (Statewide), American Patriots Three Percent* (Statewide), The Three Percenters-III%ers (Statewide)¹⁰³

Colorado is the headquarters for the III% United Patriots, the second-largest collection of Three Percenter chapters outside of the III% Security Force. As a result, the Three Percenters maintain a consistent and comparatively large presence in the state. There was a significant increase in Three Percenter activity in 2019-2020. Civilians wearing Three Percenter patches appeared at many Black Lives Matter protests in Denver and provided

“security” for a January 6 rally at the Colorado Capitol in support of President Donald Trump.¹⁰⁴

Georgia:

- Chapters: III% Security Force* (Statewide), III% United Patriots (in 11 counties), American Patriots Three Percent (Statewide), The Three Percenters-III%ers (Wilkinson County), Georgia III% Martyrs¹⁰⁵

Georgia is the primary state of operation for Three Percenter events and membership and is the headquarters for the III% Security Force. The Three Percenters have a long history of conducting training exercises in the state and attending protests armed. Until recently, most of these armed appearances were at anti-Muslim, anti-immigration, and pro-gun control events. Starting in 2019-2020, Three Percenters in the state increasingly attended Black Lives Matter demonstrations as counter-protesters. The Three Percenters also protested against state lockdowns and government responses to the coronavirus pandemic.¹⁰⁶

Kentucky:

- Chapters III% Security Force* (Statewide), III % United Patriots* (Statewide), American Patriots Three Percent (Statewide), The Three Percenters-III%ers (Bullitt County, Louisville)¹⁰⁷

Kentucky has been a hub for Three Percenter marches and rallies against the Black Lives Matter movement since early 2020. Though turnout for these rallies has been limited, online coordination between Three Percenter chapters in the state has been on the rise, and prominent leaders such as Chris Hill have promoted the state for gatherings and events with other right-wing groups.¹⁰⁸

Oregon:

- Chapters: III% Security Force (Statewide), American Patriots Three Percent (Statewide), Oregon III% (Statewide)¹⁰⁹

Oregon experienced continuous and highly organized Three Percenter and right-wing militia gatherings in 2020, many of which turned violent. Though none of the Three Percenters in the region identify as militias, III%ers in the state attended Black Lives Matter (BLM) demonstrations with other militia groups such as the Proud Boys, Patriot Prayer, Boogaloo Boys, and the Sons of Liberty and engaged as armed groups against BLM protesters. Confrontations often turned violent. Law enforcement has deployed in more than a quarter of all demonstrations in the state and used force in approximately half of these cases.¹¹⁰

Pennsylvania:

- Chapters: III% United Patriots* (Statewide), American Patriots Three Percent* (Statewide), The Three Percenters-III%ers* (Northumberland County), Three Percent Liberty Defenders* (Statewide), Three Percent Liberty Defenders Auxiliary (Statewide)¹¹¹

Outside of Georgia, Pennsylvania hosts the most Three Percenter militia and non-paramilitary chapters in the United States. However, the Three Percenter groups in the state appear to host significantly fewer events and exercises. Nevertheless, reports indicate that the region has a high potential for violence, and there was a significant increase in armed protests leading up to the November 2020 election.¹¹²

Washington:

- Chapters: III% United Patriots (Statewide), American Patriots Three Percent (Statewide), Liberty For All Three Percent (Yakima), The Three Percenters-III%ers (Statewide), Three Percent of Washington* (Statewide)¹¹³

Washington state has the greatest presence of non-paramilitary Three Percenter groups. Notably, the Washington Three Percenters, led by Matt Marshall, have sought to distance themselves from extremist labels by registering the chapter as a nonprofit organization, “vetting” its several hundred members, and running for local office. However, many Three Percenter groups in Washington, including the Three Percent of Washington, are occasionally linked to armed standoffs and extreme, right-wing ideology.¹¹⁴

Canada:

The Canadian III% began as a Facebook group after the election of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau in 2015. By 2017, the Canadian Three Percenters had established chapters in several Canadian provinces, the largest in Alberta and British Columbia. The group made its public debut at a rally hosted by the World Coalition Against Islam in Calgary on June 3, 2017, where they purportedly provided “security” for the anti-Islam activist Sandra Solomon. Members of the Canadian III% have since posed as “security” at similar rallies in cities throughout Canada, including Toronto, London, and Hamilton. The group was originally led by Robert “Beau” Welling, who also served as the president of the Alberta chapter. On November 28, 2018, leadership of the group was taken over by Kazimir “Kazz” Nowlin, who has sought to increase the group’s paramilitary training. In 2018, Maxime Fiset, a former Neo-Nazi who now works on efforts to counter violent extremism and radicalization, called the Three Percenters the “most dangerous” extremist group in Canada.¹¹⁵

STRATEGY

A. IDEOLOGY AND GOALS

The Three Percenters coalesce around the incorrect belief that only 3% of Americans defended the public from British forces during the American war for independence.¹¹⁶ Historical estimates place participation closer to 15-25%, a substantial portion of the colonists at the time.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, the Three Percenters interpret the idea of the 3% as a “success case” of defense against the alleged tyranny of the federal government. Three Percenters view themselves as modern day counterparts to those American revolutionaries, fighting not against the British but the U.S. federal government.¹¹⁸

On their website, Three Percenters claim that they are “not a militia” and “not antigovernment.” They group’s goal is “to reign [*sic*] in an overreaching government and push back against tyranny.”¹¹⁹ The Three Percenters are also committed to protecting gun rights and opposing gun control laws.¹²⁰ Despite their rejection of the antigovernment label, much of Three Percenter ideology draws on the anti-government ideas of the 1990s militia movement. This movement was driven by a belief in the conspiracy of the “New World Order” (NWO), which holds that the government is secretly a socialist coalition of leaders attempting to strip Americans of their rights and make them slaves to a tyrannical government. The Three Percenter concept can be understood as a simplification of the NWO theory, which is harder to sell to a mainstream audience than a tale of patriotism about a small minority of Americans.¹²¹ The *Anti-Defamation League* has described the concept as “the most powerful marketing tool for the militia movement in its history.”¹²²

The Three Percenters do not officially adhere to racist ideologies. Three Percenters’ founder Michael Vanderboegh declared that he “fought white supremacists and neo-Nazis all [his] life.”¹²³ Nonetheless, the group has exhibited significant hostility towards Muslims and immigrants. Facebook forums and posts created by group members are often blatantly Islamophobic, and many Three Percenter leaders have been recorded making anti-Muslim statements.¹²⁴ For example, Chris Hill, the leader of the III% Security Force, claimed in a video posted to Facebook in 2019 that Muslims “want to fucking destroy us and our way of life.”¹²⁵ Other Three Percenters have focused on immigrants, joining anti-immigrant extremists in vigilante border patrols along the U.S.-Mexico border.¹²⁶

B. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

Elections, Representatives, and Law Enforcement

Starting in 2015, Three Percenter chapters appeared at Trump and pro-Trump rallies across the United States. In many cases, chapter members arrived armed and provided self-designated “security” against counter-protestors.¹²⁷ The Three Percenters have also offered “protection” to right-wing individuals and representatives that support Three Percenter legislative priorities. In 2018, Idaho III%ers provided security for Janice McGeachin, who was running for lieutenant governor.¹²⁸ In 2019, Three Percenter members offered armed “protection” for Republican senators who had fled the Capitol to prevent the passing of a climate-change proposal.¹²⁹ Following the 2015 Chattanooga shootings at a mall in Tennessee, Three Percenters organized armed gatherings outside of army recruiting centers in a similar attempt to “protect” service members.¹³⁰

Several state representatives have been linked to the Three Percenter organization, which encourages its members to run for local or state offices. Most predominantly, Representative Lauren Boebert from Colorado has reportedly been tied to the group, in addition to Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene, who has promoted QAnon conspiracies and attended events that hosted Three Percenters.¹³¹ The Three Percenters

also seek to support local enforcement officers. As with other right-wing militias, law enforcement officers and military veterans have been linked to Three Percenter groups.¹³²

Activism and Mobilization

Three Percenter leaders are staunch promoters of member participation in marches, protests, and rallies. Members are often, but not always, armed. In 2020, the Three Perceners participated in counterprotests to Black Lives Matter demonstrations and rallied against lockdown restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic. The Three Perceners also encourage activism that is often overtly Islamophobic, anti-immigrant, or anti-abortion. For example, the III% Security Force in Georgia engaged in a slew of armed rallies around local mosques and conducted armed protests outside of the Georgia State Capitol in Atlanta to show their support for anti-abortion legislation that had been passed in the state.¹³³ Members of the III% United Patriots similarly encouraged armed border patrols along the U.S.-Mexico border.¹³⁴

Involvement in Local and National Politics

In recent years, Three Perceners have become involved in local and state politics throughout the United States. In the small Washington town of Black Diamond, for example, two people on the city council are members of the Washington (WA) Three Percent. Moreover, Matt Marshall, the founder of the WA III% and a former army medic who served in Afghanistan, was elected to the school board in Eatonville, Washington.¹³⁵ In 2020, he ran for a seat in the Washington state legislature, although he lost in the general election. In Idaho, Eric Parker, the founder of the Real 3% of Idaho who was charged in the 2014 armed standoff at Bundy ranch, ran unsuccessfully for election to the Idaho State Senate as a Republican.¹³⁶

C. TARGETS AND TACTICS

The Three Perceners primarily target symbols of government power, minority communities, anti-racist organizations, and the anti-fascist (antifa) movement. Most attacks conducted by the Three Perceners occur without casualties. The group's chapters have participated in armed standoffs with the federal government to target federal regulators and agents, such as the 2014 and 2015 standoffs with the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service in Nevada, Oregon, and Montana. In 2021, efforts to target government power and prevent Joe Biden's victory turned violent, marking a deviation in tactics. The Three Perceners have also targeted minority groups by protesting the presence of mosques, counterprotesting Black Lives Matter demonstrations, and conducting vigilante border patrols.

MAJOR ATTACKS

Disclaimer: This list includes instances in which the militant group engaged in or threatened violence. It is not a comprehensive listing but captures some of the most notable examples of participation in violent events.

April 2014: Members of the Three Percenters, including Eric Parker, the leader of the Idaho III%ers, joined far-right groups from across the nation in Bunkerville, Nevada, to participate in an armed standoff between the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and Cliven Bundy, a rancher who refused to pay federal grazing fees. They successfully prevented the confiscation of rancher Cliven Bundy's cattle. This operation – one of the organization's first – helped the Three Percenters gain national attention.¹³⁷ (0 killed, 0 wounded)

April 2015: In April 2015, Eric Parker and other Three Percenter members were involved in an armed standoff between miners and the Bureau of Land Management in Grants Pass Oregon.¹³⁸ (0 killed, 0 wounded)

August 2015: Eric Parker and other Three Percenter members took part in a protest in Lincoln, Montana, where they again supported miners banned from working on federal land. Parker allegedly set up an armed checkpoint on public lands to prevent U.S. Forest Service agents from taking any regulatory action against the White Hope mine.¹³⁹ (0 killed, 0 wounded)

October 14, 2016: Three members of the Kansas Crusaders, an affiliate chapter of the III% Security Force, were arrested for plotting to bomb a mosque and an apartment building housing Somali and Muslim residents. In 2019, the three men were convicted and received sentences ranging from 25 to 30 years in prison.¹⁴⁰ (0 killed, 0 wounded)

August 5, 2017: Three members of the small militia III%er chapter, the White Rabbit Three Percent Illinois Patriot Freedom Fighters Militia, bombed a mosque, the Dar Al-Farooq Islamic Center, in Bloomington, Minnesota. Three months later, they attacked an abortion clinic in Champaign, Illinois. The three men were arrested in March 2018 and were convicted on multiple charges. As of mid-2021, they had yet to be sentenced but each faced mandatory minimum sentences of 35 years in prison.¹⁴¹ (0 killed, 0 wounded)

August 14, 2017: Jerry Drake Varnell, a 23-year-old self-identified affiliate of the Three Percenters, was arrested for attempting to bomb a bank in Oklahoma City. The attempted attack was modeled after the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, which killed over one hundred people. Fortunately, unbeknownst to Varnell, the bombs were fake, supplied by an undercover FBI agent. Varnell was convicted on multiple charges and in March 2020 sentenced to 25 years in prison.¹⁴² (0 killed, 0 wounded)

January 6, 2021: The Three Percenters participated in the storming of the U.S. Capitol alongside other far-right groups, including the Oath Keepers, Proud Boys, and QAnon supporters, in an attempt to halt the certification of Joe Biden's election. One police officer who engaged with protesters during the insurrection, Brian Sicknick, died of natural causes the day after the attack.¹⁴³ Four protesters died at various points throughout the event: one (Ashli Babbitt) was shot by Capitol Police, two died of natural causes and another of drug intoxication.¹⁴⁴ Approximately one hundred forty

police officers were injured. The number of injured rioters remains unknown. Four police officers who responded to the attack died by suicide within seven months. (5 killed, about 140 wounded)¹⁴⁶

INTERACTIONS

A. DESIGNATED/LISTED

- Canada designated the Three Percenters as a terrorist entity on June 25, 2021, saying the group posed a “significant threat” to Canadian domestic security.¹⁴⁷

B. COMMUNITY RELATIONS

The Three Percenters draws its membership from a broad range of individuals and communities across the United States. Members include men and women, ranging in age from their 20s to their 70s. While Three Percenters represent a variety of professions, the group draws a considerable number of its members from law enforcement and from the oil and gas industry.¹⁴⁸

In addition, several chapters actively engage in community outreach and charity work. The Washington (WA) III%, located in Washington state, has sought to portray itself as a civil society organization with a positive community impact. In fact, the group’s founder, Matt Marshall, registered the group as a nonprofit, claiming its primary goal is to support local communities.¹⁴⁹ The WA III% rejects labels like “militia,” “paramilitary,” and “antigovernment,” even though its bylaws explicitly reference the Minutemen of the American Revolution and encourage members to carry weapons “every day and everywhere you legally can.”¹⁵⁰ Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the WA III% has supported food banks, coordinated food drives, and organized protests calling for the reopening of the economy. These efforts have sometimes been combined with political objectives. In May, for example, as reported by *High Country News*, the group “posted on Facebook asking for volunteers to help with the next food drive, while also collecting signatures for a ballot initiative to repeal Washington’s comprehensive sex education law.”¹⁵¹

The Real 3% of Idaho has also participated in community service efforts. According to the group’s founder, Eric Parker, such efforts are an integral component of the group’s mission. During the pandemic, members have aided in potato drives and delivered sanitizer and masks to volunteer firefighters in western Idaho. Moreover, in the past few years, the group has joined adopt-a-highway programs.¹⁵² While Parker insisted that their charitable acts have no agenda beyond helping the community, terrorism experts have criticized them as “publicity stunts” intended to mainstream the group and attract new members.¹⁵³

C. RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER GROUPS

The Three Percenters have been in contact with various other far-right groups since its founding in 2008, including the Proud Boys, the Oath Keepers, and Patriot Prayer. Most connections between the Three Percenters and other groups consist of participation in the same events and operations, so the extent of these relationships is unclear. Even so, it appears that the Three Percenter's most significant relationship is with the Oath Keepers, as described below.

Oath Keepers

The Oath Keepers (OK) are an ideological ally of the Three Percenters. A far-right militant organization founded in 2009, OK seeks to protect Americans from what it perceives as violations of U.S. citizens' natural rights by the U.S. federal government. The group's name refers to the oath to "defend the Constitution against all enemies, foreign and domestic," that is sworn by members of the military and police.¹⁵⁴ Unlike the Three Percenters, OK has a hierarchical structure.¹⁵⁵ The Three Percenters share aspects of OK's worldview, such as favorable self-comparison with the American Revolution and fear of a tyrannical federal government.¹⁵⁶ There is considerable membership overlap between the two groups.¹⁵⁷

OK has been linked to the Three Percenters since OK was founded in 2009 by U.S. Army veteran and Yale Law School graduate Stewart Rhodes.¹⁵⁸ Three Percenters founder Mike Vanderboegh attended OK's founding ceremony in Lexington, Massachusetts, on April 19, 2009.¹⁵⁹ Rhodes has spoken publicly in support of the Three Percenters, and as early as September 2009, OK members were seen carrying a Three Percenters flag at an Oath Keepers demonstration in Washington, D.C.¹⁶⁰ Over the years, OK and the Three Percenters have participated alongside each other in several major operations. In April 2014, both groups came to the aid of rancher Cliven Bundy in his armed confrontation with the federal government.¹⁶¹ The next year, the Idaho III%ers joined OK in its standoff at the Sugar Pine Mine in southwestern Oregon, where they sought to defend gold miners Rick Barclay and George Backes against federal authorities.¹⁶² OK and the Three Percenters also banded together to organize armed patrols outside military recruiting centers around the United States after a shooting at one such center in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in July 2015.¹⁶³

In January 2017, OK coordinated with the Three Percenters and a group called Bikers for Trump in organizing an operation to provide security for President Donald Trump's inauguration in anticipation of threats from antifa and the Islamic State.¹⁶⁴ This collaborative relationship continued during the Trump presidency. For example, in June 2017, OK and the Three Percenters both participated in efforts to provide security for anti-Muslim rallies organized by ACT for America and participated in a right-wing free speech rally in the face of a heavy antifa presence in Portland.¹⁶⁵ Along with the Three Percenters, OK played a major role in the storming of the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021.¹⁶⁶ According to federal prosecutors, the leader of the Florida Oath Keepers, Kelly Meggs, coordinated with members of the Three Percenters prior to the attack on the Capitol.¹⁶⁷

D. STATE SPONSORS AND EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

There is no observable evidence that this group receives external support from foreign governments or third parties.

MAPS

- Global Right-Wing Extremism

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