

Oath Keepers



Key Points:

- The Oath Keepers are a large but loosely organized collection of right-wing anti-government extremists who are part of the [militia movement](#), which believes that the federal government has been coopted by a shadowy conspiracy that is trying to strip American citizens of their rights.
- Though the Oath Keepers will accept anyone as members, what differentiates them from other anti-government extremist groups is their explicit focus on recruiting current and former military, law enforcement and first responder personnel.
- While there is a formal national leadership, on the local level many Oath Keepers are essentially self-organized, and form official, semi-official or

informal groupings of Oath Keepers.

- The Oath Keepers were particularly active in 2020, participating in various anti-lockdown protests, providing vigilante-style “security” for local communities and businesses during the Black Lives Matter protests that spread in the wake of the killing of George Floyd, and warning about a potential takeover by the “Marxist left” during the 2020 election.
- The group gained notoriety for their armed participation in disputes between ranchers or miners and federal agencies, particularly in 2014 and 2015. However, their decision to retreat from the [Bundy Ranch standoff in 2014](#) out of a fear of possible drone strikes tarnished the group’s reputation among other anti-government extremists.
- Members of the Oath Keepers have been arrested in connection with a wide range of criminal activities, including various firearms violations, conspiracy to impede federal workers, possession of explosives, and threatening public officials.
- At least nine people associated with the Oath Keepers have been [charged](#) with conspiracy in connection with the [January 6, 2021](#) attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Origins and membership

Founded in 2009 by Stewart Rhodes, the Oath Keepers is a large right-wing anti-government extremist group. The group has attracted considerable media attention in 2020 for providing vigilante-style “security” for local communities and businesses during Black Lives Matter protests, for their aggressive rhetoric in the lead up to the 2020 election (including asserting that the “Marxist left” is trying to seize control of the United States which led Twitter to de-platform the group) and for participating in various anti-lockdown protests.

The Oath Keepers are a large but loosely organized collection of anti-government extremists; membership data is closely guarded. ADL estimates there are between

1,000 and 3,000 Oath Keepers, though the group's influence extends well beyond that number.

The Oath Keepers are part of the [militia movement](#), a subsection of the broader anti-government "[Patriot](#)" movement – which consists of sovereign citizens and tax protesters, among others – that believes the federal government has been coopted by a shadowy conspiracy that is trying to strip Americans of their rights. What differentiates the Oath Keepers from other anti-government extremist groups is that the Oath Keepers explicitly focus on recruiting current and former military members, police officers and first responders (although they accept anyone as members).

The ideology of the Oath Keepers most closely resembles that of the militia movement, whose adherents believe that the United States is collaborating with a one-world tyrannical conspiracy called the [New World Order](#) to strip Americans of their rights—starting with their right to keep and bear arms. Once Americans are rendered defenseless, they will be enslaved by the New World Order. While this terminology reflects some of the language used by explicitly antisemitic groups, antisemitism is not a foundational issue for the Oath Keepers.

Founder Stewart Rhodes is a former Montana attorney and Army veteran who acts as the group's main spokesperson. Under his leadership, the Oath Keepers are essentially an updated and more successful version of a similar 1990s group, Police Against the New World Order, started by retired police officer Jack McLamb, who died in 2014. McLamb warned of post-Cold War chaos perpetrated by an elitist-controlled New World Order, while Rhodes warns of an insidious global oligarchy bent on destroying America's constitutional republic.

The Oath Keepers aim much of their propaganda at members of military and police, reminding them that they swore an oath to defend the Constitution "from all enemies, foreign and domestic," and asking them to pledge to disobey theoretical unconstitutional orders they might get from superiors—orders that

explicitly or implicitly [reference militia-related conspiracy theories](#), such as mass gun confiscation or rounding up Americans to put them in [concentration camps](#). Each theory goes back to the idea that the U.S. government has fallen under global governance and will at some point use police and military members to enforce the New World Order's plans. The Oath Keepers urge military and law enforcement personnel to step up to stop the conspirators.

The number of active duty police and military personnel who have publicly admitted to being Oath Keepers is very small; the number of closeted members may be larger. The Oath Keepers have had more success in recruiting former military personnel, which is a much larger pool to draw from; many Oath Keepers speak of past military service. The group has also recruited from among people already involved in the anti-government extremist movement. Membership has never actually required current or former ties with military, police, or first responders. The popularity of Oath Keepers social media accounts illustrates clearly that many more people support the Oath Keepers without ever officially joining (which requires paying dues).

Based on its monitoring of the Oath Keepers, ADL estimates that the group has up to several thousand members, though the Oath Keepers have claimed far more.

This estimated size would still make the Oath Keepers larger than any single traditional militia group. Though there is a formal national leadership, on the local level many Oath Keepers are essentially self-organized, forming official, semi-official or informal groupings of Oath Keepers in specific, sometimes even overlapping, geographic areas.



Rhetoric and ideology

Oath Keepers have several theories they repeatedly peddle as proof that their “constitutional republic” is being taken over and destroyed by evil forces. These beliefs, which encapsulate the one-world government conspiracy theories that underpin the anti-government movement, stoke paranoia, fan anti-government sentiment and give them purpose. These include:

Impending Takeover of the U.S. by the Marxist Left: On September 10, 2020, Twitter announced that it had banned the accounts belonging to the Oath Keepers for violating the platform’s policies on violent extremist groups as part of the platform’s wider effort to limit the presence of militias on its platform. Though Twitter has not stated which specific posts they determined violated their policy, in the weeks leading up to their ban, the Oath Keepers Twitter account declared in the wake of the murder of Patriot Prayer member Aaron Danielson that there is a “Marxist rebellion against the United States, with the oft stated intent to overthrow its government under the Constitution.” The account urged President Trump to declare that there is an ongoing Marxist insurrection led by antifa and

Black Lives Matter and to respond by calling the militia into federal service to suppress the “rebellion.”

This stance is not a new one for the Oath Keepers. Since the election of President Trump, the Oath Keepers have routinely stoked fears regarding the Democratic Party, stating that the party is in fact a Marxist-Islamist organization, where an unholy alliance of communists and jihadists aim to defeat their common enemy – Western Civilization. The Oath Keepers’ leader, Stewart Rhodes, has posted various livestreams on the group’s website claiming that undocumented immigrants are part of a larger plan to flood the United States with Democratic voters to shatter the American social system. Oath Keepers also claims that the reason Democratic leaders support gun-control legislation is to allow for easy gun confiscation and make the American people both dependent and vulnerable to a takeover. Oath Keepers have made continuous, [baseless claims](#) that antifa is an arm of the Democratic Party and that they are working together with the goal of a socialist takeover.

As the election neared, Rhodes ratcheted up his rhetoric. On October 27, he appeared on far-right conspiracy theorist [Alex Jones’](#) program The Alex Jones Show and said that members of the Oath Keepers will be at polling stations to “protect” Trump voters from the left. He warned about a possible “Benghazi-style attack” targeting President Trump and said that the Oath Keepers will be stationing its “best men” outside of Washington, D.C. around the election because they are anticipating the government to enable a coup against Trump. He also discussed the possibility of a second civil war and said that his “battle-hardened” supporters were prepared to fight the “street soldiers” of the “radical left.”

Impending Martial Law: One of the most prominent Oath Keeper theories is that a large scale pandemic, natural disaster or terrorist attack will give the government an excuse to impose martial law resulting in (but not limited to) door to door gun confiscation, the ban of interstate travel and detainment of citizens in concentration camps. To prove the imminent threat of martial law, Rhodes often

points to the World War II internment of Japanese Americans and to the gun confiscation by police and military members in the chaotic aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 (a federal court subsequently ordered New Orleans officials to return all confiscated firearms). Some Oath Keepers have [claimed](#) that the government may even stage a terrorist attack or other incident as an excuse to declare martial law. The group's response to the 2020 outbreak of the coronavirus is discussed in more detail below; however, it is worth noting that the national organization initially shared material on its website and Twitter account calling for increased state government involvement in stemming the virus's spread before shifting its messaging and labelling the virus as a weapon used by leftists to attack President Trump and by the government to strip away Americans' rights.

The Second Amendment Under Assault: Oath Keepers call for the nullification of all gun laws and view any gun control measures as schemes designed to dismantle the Second Amendment. Rhodes insists the government wants to track gun owners like it does sex offenders and uses mass shooting incidents as an excuse to violate Second Amendment rights. Rhodes has said that the purpose of the Second Amendment is to “preserve the ability of the people, who are the militia, to provide for their own security” and “to preserve the military capacity of the American people to resist tyranny and violations of their rights by oath breakers within government.” Another Oath Keeper theory claims the Veterans Administration is busily deeming veterans mentally unfit in order to legally disarm Americans trained to fight, thereby paving the way for a foreign (New World Order) takeover.

Anti-United Nations Sentiments: Oath Keepers [view the United Nations](#) (UN) as a tool of the “New World Order” trying to undermine American sovereignty by imposing a globalist agenda. Some looming UN transgressions anticipated by Oath Keepers include the implementation of global taxation and a global currency that would end the use of the dollar. Overreaching laws or regulations are also expected. For example, the Oath Keepers believe that a UN Small Arms Treaty will be implemented to bypass the second Amendment and prohibit firearms. The

group has also long warned that voluntary UN sustainable development plans like Agenda 21 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – which was implemented in 2015 – will be used to take away private property and civil liberties in the name of sustainability.

Oath Keepers' Pledge

The Oath Keepers' belief that the allegedly tyrannical American government will use law enforcement and military personnel against its people leads to their avowed purpose of opposing such conspiracies. This sentiment is encapsulated in the so-called Oath Keeper's Pledge, which they ask all members and supporters to take. The pledge, which refers to the honorable vow of service given by those in uniform, reminds Oath Keepers that they swore an oath to defend the Constitution "from all enemies, foreign and domestic." By taking this pledge, Oath Keepers vow that they will refuse to cooperate with the "tyrannical government" by making a declaration that there are certain "orders" from superiors that they will refuse to obey.

The list of "orders" the Oath Keepers vow to refuse reveals their extreme conspiratorial mindset, because the "orders" are not instructions likely to ever be actually handed down by officials; instead, they are reflective of the anti-government conspiracy theories embraced by the extreme right. The first "order," for example, that they refuse to follow is any order "to disarm the American people." They also pledge to disobey any order to impose martial law or to support foreign troops on American soil. The other "orders" they refuse to follow are of a similar sort.

Orders Oath Keepers "refuse":

1. We will NOT obey orders to disarm the American people.
2. We will NOT obey orders to conduct warrantless searches of the American people.

3. We will NOT obey orders to detain American citizens as “unlawful enemy combatants” or to subject them to military tribunal.
4. We will NOT obey orders to impose martial law or a “state of emergency” on a state.
5. We will NOT obey orders to invade and subjugate any state that asserts its sovereignty.
6. We will NOT obey any order to blockade American cities, thus turning them into giant concentration camps.
7. We will NOT obey any order to force American citizens into any form of detention camps under any pretext.
8. We will NOT obey orders to assist or support the use of any foreign troops on U.S. soil against the American people to “keep the peace” or to “maintain control.”
9. We will NOT obey any orders to confiscate the property of the American people, including food and other essential supplies.
10. We will NOT obey any orders which infringe on the right of the people to free speech, to peaceably assemble, and to petition their government for a redress of grievances.



Tactics

In addition to peddling conspiracy theories and paranoia, the Oath Keepers use a number of strategies to stay in the forefront of the anti-government extremist movement in the United States. Most relate to their recruitment and promotional efforts.

Community Preparedness Teams (CPT) and Post-Disaster Response: In October 2013, the Oath Keepers announced the formation of “civilization preservation cells” (since renamed Community Preparedness Teams), which Rhodes claims are necessitated by the country’s impending (and possibly government-created) economic collapse. Since 2015, various Oath Keepers CPTs have held militia-like training sessions on topics such as weapons use, patrolling techniques, first aid, and emergency communications. Recently, these activities have increasingly taken the shape of natural disaster management. The Oath Keepers regularly denounce FEMA and their response to natural disasters, highlighting notable failures during Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Harvey. Rather than rely on the government, Oath Keepers have assisted following natural disasters across the United States and Puerto Rico since 2017, using these efforts to garner positive press coverage. This aid includes providing bottled water and food, clearing roads and helping with rescue missions. According to their Facebook, Oath Keepers has provided disaster relief in five hurricanes and have also issued calls for action following various other floods, tornadoes and wildfires.

COVID-19 Advice: The militia movement has long been preoccupied with the idea that a pandemic (possibly one that was manufactured) could be used as a pretense to infringe on American liberties, and the Oath Keepers are no different in this regard. In 2014, the Oath Keepers highlighted the outbreak of Ebola in West Africa on their web site, questioning the Obama administration’s response and raising concerns that it could be used to justify medical martial law in the U.S.

As early as January 2020, Oath Keepers began posting about the seriousness of COVID-19, which was spreading at the time within China, and in the first two months of the pandemic's spread in the U.S., they provided advice and information regarding COVID-19 to their followers. At the beginning of the pandemic, Oath Keepers used COVID-19 to spread fear to their followers, warning that the virus was worse than government officials were saying and pushing people to do whatever they needed to do to remain safe themselves since the government would be unable to help them. As Rhodes tweeted in early March 2020, "It's critical that towns and counties do all they can with their own resources now to prepare. Do NOT count on the state or federal gov [sic] to give you all you need."

However, as the pandemic progressed, Oath Keepers changed their narrative, shifting from concern about the government failing to contain the virus to fearing government involvement altogether. At the beginning of the global pandemic, Oath Keepers called on President Trump to immediately shut down all commercial airline traffic as well as schools and public places in order to slow the spread of the virus, but by April the [organization adopted anti-lockdown rhetoric](#). This change brought them in line with other militia groups that were taking a hardline approach in opposing public health efforts to curb the pandemic. The organization has publicly labeled lockdown measures Orwellian violations of liberty and urges their members to defy these measures.

Since shifting their approach, the Oath Keepers have provided security to businesses that have refused to follow state lockdown orders while maintaining a presence at anti-lockdown rallies across the nation. Stewart Rhodes has spoken at anti-lockdown protests in Texas, New York and California. Oath Keepers have advertised various anti-lockdown events and calls to action, for example protesting outside of a Dallas-based judge's home to demand the immediate release of a business owner who had defied lockdown orders. In addition, Oath Keepers routinely pushed conspiratorial rhetoric within their communities, including promoting the ostensible effectiveness of hydroxychloroquine, claiming

the virus is a Chinese bioweapon, and casting the virus within a deep state globalist narrative.

Stoking fears of Black Lives Matter as part of Marxist NWO program: Oath Keepers have framed the civil rights movement that emerged following the death of George Floyd as part of a Marxist agenda that they allege is being used to destroy the United States. While the Oath Keepers' official statement regarding the death of George Floyd was to condemn the actions of the officers involved, they have stated that they oppose looting and arson and have expressed a general distrust for the Black Lives Matter protests. On June 21, 2020, Stewart Rhodes wrote in a now-deleted tweet that Black Lives Matter is a communist front organization with the central goal of the destruction of the United States and repeatedly refers to the movement as a communist insurrection.

Stoking Fears about Antifa: Oath Keepers use the specter of antifa as a substitute for their former foe, the federal government. Antifa is a loose collection of groups, networks and individuals who believe in active, sometimes aggressive opposition to far right-wing movements. Their overt opposition to President Trump made them a target for anti-government extremists, and Oath Keepers were quick to label antifa the modern day "Brown Shirts." They have repeatedly called on President Trump to put an end to the "terrorist insurrection" of antifa, particularly in response to their alleged involvement in the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, and they have offered protection to various individuals who have been doxed by supposed antifa supporters, including ICE officials and their families. The Oath Keepers have also amplified conspiracies regarding antifa, for example an August 2019 post on their website details allegations that antifa attempted to purchase weapons from Mexican cartels to advance an uprising within the U.S. and that antifa was planning to target Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) agents in El Paso, Texas.

Amplifying Fears of the "Deep State:" Though the Oath Keepers espouse an anti-government ideology, the Oath Keepers largely support President Trump and his

administration. In the days leading up to the 2016 election, the organization issued a call to action seeking volunteers to position themselves at polling stations to ensure that the left did not steal the election from then-candidate Donald Trump, and since his election they have expressed support for the president, largely redirecting their ire away from the federal government and towards the broader left.

As part of their support for President Trump, the Oath Keepers have decried the “deep state”, an alleged network of institutions and bureaucracies within the federal government that a range of right-wing actors and groups believe is trying to undermine and even destroy the Trump administration. The “deep state” conspiracy helps create space for the Oath Keepers to address the dissonance created by their opposition to the federal government and their support for President Trump by reframing events as a struggle between President Trump, who is trying to help the people, and a deep state that is seeking to thwart his efforts.

Before 2019, the Oath Keepers Twitter platform used the term “deep state” only once, but since then the term has been used at least 79 times on the platform, which suggests that the organization finds this rhetoric to be a useful tactic to appeal to the large pool of right-wing actors who believe in the conspiracy.

Activity

Oath Keepers across the country have engaged in a wide array of activities, some of which have gotten considerable media attention.

January 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol: At least nine people associated with the Oath Keepers have been [charged](#) with conspiracy in connection with the January 6 attack, with prosecutors alleging that the defendants coordinated to travel to Washington, D.C., breach the Capitol and disrupt the certification of the 2020 election. Seven of the defendants were visible wearing combat gear and participating in a tactical “stack” as they moved through the crowd towards the Capitol.

Despite this clear evidence of involvement, the [militia movement](#) has by and large not reckoned with the role their conspiratorial beliefs and violent rhetoric played in the leadup to the insurrection. Instead, many simply dismiss the events of January 6th as the work of antifa or a false flag operation. Meanwhile, they are doubling down on conspiratorial claims that the election was stolen and that the Biden administration is a nefarious entity seeking to destroy the American way of life. This signals the return of the militia movement's traditional animosity towards the federal government – which they largely downplayed during the Trump administration.

Armed confrontations with federal authorities during land disputes: The Oath Keepers have issued calls for action during disputes between ranchers or miners and federal agencies, such as the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service. In 2015, armed Oath Keepers along with various individuals from the broader “Patriot” movement traveled to mines in Montana and Oregon during regulation compliance disputes related to mining rights versus surface rights in the hopes that their presence would intimidate federal officials from taking action. At the White Hope mine in Lincoln, Montana, the U.S. Forest Service took issue with an unauthorized shed and surface disturbances related to the cutting of firewood. Similarly, the owners of Sugar Pine Mine in Josephine County, Oregon, were in a dispute with the Bureau of Land Management over unauthorized surface structures. The Oath Keepers also joined scores of other anti-government extremists in a show of force for Nevada cattle rancher Cliven Bundy during a 2014 grazing dispute with the Bureau of Land Management again with the intention of preventing the agency from enforcing laws and regulations. In this case, the Oath Keepers and other right-wing extremists opposed the Bureau of Land Management's efforts to impound Bundy's cattle, which had been illegally grazing on federal land. In his call for action, Rhodes asked all Oath Keepers to come to the Bundy Ranch and “stand up against a corrupt government that would subvert us all,” though a fear of drone strikes caused an Oath Keepers retreat, which tarnished the group's reputation among other anti-government extremists.

Countering Black Lives Matter: Some of the Oath Keepers' most notable mobilizations have occurred in response to the Black Lives Matter movement. As Black Lives Matter protests spread across the United States during the summer of 2020 in reaction to the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police, Oath Keepers offered protection to various restaurants and businesses from alleged looters and arsonists and in several cases, they showed up to provide armed security. The organization urged members to form security networks within their communities to block neighborhoods with vehicles and armed men, and following one protest in El Paso, the group claimed that they successfully served as a deterrent to anyone looking to inflict damage, thereby taking credit for peaceful protests. This activity mirrors the Oath Keepers' behavior in 2014 in Ferguson, Missouri, when a small group of armed local Oath Keepers, led by Sam Andrews, took to the streets during the unrest following a grand jury's decision not to charge a former police officer for the shooting death of a Black teenager, Michael Brown, Jr. The Oath Keepers stationed themselves on rooftops and conducted street patrols, asserting that they were there to protect local businesses and reporters from angry protesters.

These incidents underscore the internal tension between the Oath Keepers' anti-government ideology and their focus on military and police personnel. In response to various controversial shootings by and of police since 2014, most Oath Keepers have sided with law enforcement against activist groups like Black Lives Matter. However, a minority of Oath Keepers are so anti-authoritarian that they have been less willing to express support for law enforcement. At the same time, Oath Keepers have also organized or participated in armed confrontations with law enforcement in different parts of the country, such as the Bundy Ranch standoff in Nevada in 2014. The Oath Keepers seem to be trying to resolve this tension by focusing their confrontational tactics primarily on various federal law enforcement agencies, while often siding with local law enforcement officers in other controversies. Though the Oath Keepers have generally been less hostile towards law enforcement during the Trump administration, it is likely that their vitriol would return under a Democratic administration.

Providing Security: The Oath Keepers frequently solicit volunteers to provide security in a variety of different contexts. For example, following a July 2015 attack on two separate Tennessee military facilities by Mohammad Abdulazeez, the Oath Keepers launched “Operation Protect the Protectors.” During this short-lived call for action, members of the Oath Keepers (as well as some others) armed themselves and stood guard outside various military recruitment centers around the nation under the pretense of guarding unarmed military recruiters.

More recently, the Oath Keepers have offered armed security to individuals attending Trump Rallies, “Free Speech” rallies and other pro-Trump events. The Oath Keepers claim it is their mission to protect Trump Rally attendees and provide them escorts to and from their vehicles. They also routinely offer protection to individuals, including to Ann Coulter at a UC Berkeley Free Speech event in 2017. Throughout 2020, the group has also posted several calls to action in places like Washington D.C., New Orleans and Texas, looking for volunteers to protect monuments across the United States, arguing that these measures were needed to protect the monuments from Marxist domestic enemies who were seeking to destroy American history. Usually these calls for security go unanswered, and merely serve as displays of support for various causes and a means of garnering attention.

Virginia Lobby Day: On January 20, 2020, the [Virginia Civilians Defense League](#) (VCDL), hosted a gun rights “Lobby Day” on the steps of the state capitol in Richmond, Virginia, where a reported 22,000 people demonstrated, including various militia groups and other right-wing extremists. On Dec. 31, 2019, the Oath Keepers issued a call to action for the Lobby Day, stating that they were sending a team to Virginia to “assist in organizing resistance to unconstitutional acts and to organize and train armed posses and militia.” The Facebook event, “The Militias March on the Capital,” listed more than 550 attendees. Various Oath Keeper adherents attended the protest, carrying signs and publicly showcasing their dislike for Governor Northam’s attempts at gun legislation, calling him a coward and a tyrant while also violating the state’s ban on firearms. Such behavior was in

line with the Oath Keepers' efforts to focus on opposing state governments rather than the Trump administration.

Criminal Activity

Oath Keepers members have not limited their activities to spouting extreme anti-government conspiracy theories as a number of people associated with the Oath Keepers have been involved in criminal incidents since its founding in 2009.

Some of these incidents include:

Washington, D.C., January 2021: At least nine people associated with the Oath Keepers have been **charged** with conspiracy in connection with the January 6 attack, with prosecutors alleging that the defendants coordinated to travel to Washington, D.C., breach the Capitol and disrupt the certification of the 2020 election.

Bay County, Florida, October 2018: A group identifying themselves as Oath Keepers were **arrested** after violating curfew and for openly carrying a firearm. The five members were driving around Mexico Beach "patrolling" the aftermath of Hurricane Michael in a Ford automobile that was decorated to look like a patrol cruiser; every member wore military-style clothing, including one vest that read "tactical officer."

Peoria, Arizona, January 2016: Jon Ritzheimer, a former member of the Oath Keepers, voluntarily surrendered to local authorities. He subsequently pleaded guilty in August 2016 to a felony charge of federal conspiracy to impede federal workers for his prominent role in the 2016 armed occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon. In November 2017, Ritzheimer was **sentenced** to spend a year and a day in federal prison.

Springdale, Washington, December 2015: Schuyler Barbeau, who was filmed in at least one video while wearing Oath Keeper attire and shared several posts in favor

of Oath Keeper Charles Dyer (see below), was arrested after he tried to sell a short-barreled rifle he had converted into an illegal machine gun to an individual secretly working with law enforcement. Barbeau [pleaded guilty](#) to possessing a machine gun and was sentenced to 27 months in prison in September 2017.

Las Vegas, Nevada, April 2015: Nevada Oath Keeper (and Bundy standoff participant) Richard Lee Cook was arrested and [indicted](#) on charges of being a felon in possession of a firearm. Cook had previous convictions for possessing stolen property, grand larceny and attempted possession of a controlled substance.

Greenwood, Delaware, February 2015: [Oath Keeper](#) Matthew Opaliski was charged with three counts of dealing firearms without a license and two counts of unlawful transfer of firearms after he allegedly sold, traded or gave firearms to a person who was not a Delaware resident. Opaliski subsequently pleaded guilty to one count of dealing firearms without a license and was [sentenced](#) in July 2016 to one year and one day in prison.

Brentwood, New Hampshire, February 2013: Federal authorities charged open carry activist and Oath Keeper Johnathon Irish with five felonies stemming from an investigation into the alleged sales of homemade assault rifles to undercover agents. As part of a December 2014 plea agreement, Irish admitted to lying to authorities. He also admitted to persuading his girlfriend to purchase assault rifle parts for him in order to avoid a background check. In return, prosecutors agreed not to re-impose the other three charges, which had been recently dropped, against Irish. In February 2015, Irish was [sentenced](#) to 18 months in prison.

Herndon, Virginia, July 2013: Gun rights activist and Oath Keeper Adam Kokesh was [arrested](#) in Washington, D.C., on weapon charges after a search warrant on his Virginia home turned up firearms and illegal drugs. In a separate incident, the U.S. Park Police arrested Kokesh for bearing arms at the Freedom Plaza in violation of Washington D.C. law by loading a shotgun. A District of Columbia judge sentenced

Kokesh to two years' probation on the shotgun charge in November 2013. In September 2014, following an Alford plea by Kokesh, a Fairfax County, Virginia, judge ordered a suspended sentence for the warrant-related felony drug and gun charges. In cases of an Alford plea, a defendant does not admit guilt, but acknowledges that prosecutors have enough evidence for a conviction. Prior to his arrest, Kokesh claimed to be an Oath Keeper and promoted the Oath Keepers through his radio talk show, "Adam vs. the Man."

Westfield, Massachusetts, March 2011: Oath Keeper David M. Phillips was **arrested** in Massachusetts on charges of possession of ammunition without the required Firearms Identification Card and four counts of possession of a large capacity firearm feeding device. The charges followed a March 2011 vehicle stop by the Worcester Police Department due to an invalid license plate and driving with excessive speed. When questioned, Phillips allegedly told the officer that he was exempt from having to register or insure his vehicle. The officer towed the vehicle after a check revealed that the vehicle registration and insurance had been cancelled. During an inventory search of the vehicle's trunk, police found nine large-capacity ammunition magazines along with 2,156 rounds of ammunition. Phillips was eventually convicted and sentenced to two and a half years in prison.

Dallas, Georgia, and Madisonville, Tennessee, April 2010: Darren Huff, a Georgia militia member and Oath Keeper, traveled to Tennessee with an AK-47 and a .45 caliber Colt handgun in order to make "citizens arrests" of government officials who had refused demands to indict President Obama. He was charged with carrying a firearm in interstate commerce with intent to use it for civil disorder, as well as a second count of using a firearm in relation to another felony. He eventually reached a plea deal on local charges against him, pleading no contest to one charge in exchange for the state dropping other charges. A federal jury **convicted** him on the carrying a firearm charge but acquitted him of using a firearm in relation to another felony. In May 2012, a federal judge in Knoxville sentenced Huff to four years in prison.

Cleveland, Ohio, April 2010: Matthew Fairfield, president of the local Oath Keepers chapter, was **arrested** on a large number of explosives (and other) charges, including child pornography allegations. When executing a search warrant, law enforcement officers discovered a live napalm bomb and dozens of other explosives in a storage locker; he eventually was indicted on 97 different charges, including 18 counts of unlawful possession of dangerous ordnance, 23 counts of receiving stolen property, 23 counts of possession of criminal tools, 10 counts of failure to secure dangerous ordnance, one count of perjury, and 21 counts of pandering obscenity involving child pornography. Following a 2011 no contest plea, Fairfield received a 16-year sentence. In January 2019, Fairfield had an additional four years **added** to his sentence after officials determined that he interfered with another investigation.

Duncan, Oklahoma, January 2010: Charles Dyer, an Oklahoma Oath Keeper, was **arrested** by local law enforcement on charges of raping a young child; during his arrest, authorities also discovered an unregistered grenade launcher in his residence that had been stolen from a military base in California. Dyer failed to show up in court for his trial, becoming a fugitive. He was **tracked down** and arrested the following week in Houston, Texas, extradited back to Oklahoma, where (after several abortive attempts) he finally stood trial, was convicted and sentenced to 30 years in prison. Prior to his arrest, Dyer had posted a YouTube video in which Dyer, a former Marine, said, "Join the military? Depends on what you want to do with it. Me? I'm going to use my training and become one of those domestic terrorists that you're so afraid of from the DHS reports." He still has many supporters within the "Patriot" movement.

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, April 2009: Daniel Knight Hayden, an Oath Keeper supporter, was arrested by the FBI after **posting** a series of Twitter messages threatening to attack Oklahoma officials (including police officers) on April 15 (Tax Day). He was subsequently convicted of knowingly transmitting a threatening communication and received an eight-month sentence.