A memorandum

To: Sarah Cohen  
From: Tyler Dedrick  
Date: 4/24/22  
Subject: Story pitch: Yavapai County Preparedness Team activity

In the months following the January 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, a local chapter of the Oath Keepers has grown quickly, inspiring the creation of new chapters and apparently ramping up its recruiting events.

The Yavapai County Preparedness Team (YCPT) claims to be the largest Oath Keepers chapter in the country, with over 800 participants as of February.

The Oath Keepers, a national group of loosely organized right-wing extremists, made national headlines last year after some of its members were charged in connection to the January 6th insurrection. In the weeks following the insurrection, the YCPT split from the national Oath Keepers organization.

Since then, the YCPT has had 28 recruitment events since April 2021 — the most tracked recruiting events of any organization during that period. These events compose the vast majority of the more than 30 recruitment events in Arizona since last April.

That’s according to data from the [Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project](https://acleddata.com/curated-data-files/) (ACLED), which tracks political and violent incidents around the globe. [Since 2020](https://acleddata.com/special-projects/us-crisis-monitor/), ACLED has tracked political demonstrations and activity in the United States. The project pulls from the reporting of local news media or community groups.

**What is the Yavapai County Preparedness Team**

The Yavapai County Preparedness Team describes itself on its website as a nonpartisan educational organization. The YCPT is led by Jim Arroyo, the vice president of the Arizona state Oath Keepers and a U.S. Army veteran. Arroyo has repeated during meetings that YCPT is not a militia.

“We’re here to train and teach our politicians and our law enforcement about upholding and defending the Constitution and not violating their oath of office,” Arroyo told his audience during a February 2022 general meeting. “We are not a militia. Never have been, never will be.”

According to its [website](https://ycpt.org/ycpt/about-us/), the YCPT’s mission is to prepare its members for natural and man-made disasters, including fires, food shortages, economic collapse — and civil war.

“We are headed for civil war, no two ways about it,” Arroyo said during a February meeting. “It’s already underway.”

Despite claiming to be an “apolitical, nonpartisan organization,” meetings have been attended by Republican politicians and candidates like Noel Campbell, a former state representative and State Senate candidate, and state Rep. Quang Nguyen.

Arroyo has also invited the Lions of Liberty to speak during meetings, a political action group which recently endorsed conservative State Senate candidate Steve Zipperman and that subscribe to “The Great Reset,” a conspiracy theorizing an international effort of the world’s elite “to create an international governance system and recreate the world in the image of Carl Marx.”

The YCPT itself seems to embrace conspiracy theories. The front page of YCPT website features a presentation titled “COVID-19, the Plandemic and Mass Psychosis,” and Arroyo [claimed](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNiJfR0mIjo&t=58s) that “we are facing is a full onslaught and a communist takeover of the United States of America.”

A group of people sitting in chairs

Description automatically generated with low confidence

[MiltiaWatch](https://militia.watch/about/), a blog that covers militia activity in the United States, noted in a [recent report](https://militia.watch/read/ycpt-az-ok/) on YCPT that “Civil war seems to be a constant feature of these meetings.”

**Splitting off from the Oath Keepers**

Despite the group’s apparent extremist and conspiratorial bent, an analysis of ACLED data showed that the group’s only tracked activity was recruitment events.

The YCPT split from the Oath Keepers in April of 2021, during the weeks following the insurrection on January 6. [According to the Anti-Defamation League](https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/oath-keepers), at least 25 Oath Keepers have been charged in connection to the insurrection.

During an interview for [60 Minutes](https://www.cbsnews.com/news/60-minutes-capitol-riots-oath-keepers-2021-06-20/), Arroyo called Oath Keepers who participated in the riot at the U.S. Capitol winners of the “ultimate dumbass contest” and said it “goes against everything we ever taught, everything we believe in.”

**Tracking the spread of extremism**

The YCPT has held recruitment events in Chino Valley, Cottonwood and Surprise, but the internet has allowed the group’s content and message to spread far beyond central Arizona.

Many of the meetings are posted online, which allows ACLED and MilitiaWatch to track them.

According to Arroyo, chapters of the U.S. County Preparedness Team from around the country watch the videos YCPT post online. The U.S. CPT has chapters in 12 states according to its [website](https://uscpt.org/).

Extremist and militia groups often recruit on the internet, using social media and websites to develop networks and spread materials, [according to the Anti-Defamation League](https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/the-militia-movement-2020).

**Further Reporting:**

* The “Tracking the spread of extremism” section needs to be further reported
  + One of the limitations of “recruitment” data is that there is a lot of recruitment that happens online, rather than at recruitment events like those tracked in the ACLED data. I would like to speak to experts on online extremism, such as:
    - Academic experts like [Cynthia Miller-Idriss](https://www.american.edu/spa/faculty/cynthia.cfm), Professor at American University
    - [Heather J. Williams](https://www.rand.org/about/people/w/williams_heather_j.html) or [Alexandra T. Evans](https://www.rand.org/about/people/e/evans_alexandra_t.html) at RAND, authors of [“The Online Extremist Ecosystem”](https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA1458-1.html)
* I would like to attend YCPT meetings and speak to members. I am interested in their perspectives on the group, politics and the state of the union.
  + I am particularly interested to find individuals who have participated in activities tracked by ACLED. There may be instances where, while YCPT as a group was not represented at protests, riots or demonstrations, a number of its members may have been present, which would speak to the difficulty of tracking these semi-formal, unofficial extremist groups
* A lot of reporting still needs to be done on the U.S. County Preparedness Teams. Who leads those, what is the structure? How autonomous or centralized are they?
* I would like to speak to Jim Arroyo and his wife Janet Arroyo. In the videos available online, Jim Arroyo repeatedly says the media mischaracterizes the group.