



## **Michigan Militia Groups Organize Openly on Social Media**

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As part of its Election Protection Project, Alethea Group investigated 25 militia groups in Michigan to understand what, if any, impact they may have on the 2020 elections. Even before the F.B.I. arrests surrounding plans to kidnap Governor Gretchen Whitmer, it was clear that militia members have activated ahead of Election Day. In our investigation, we focused on how these groups use the internet and social media to organize, particularly amid ongoing crackdowns on their activities across mainstream social media platforms. This investigation was conducted using open source information, and focused specifically on how actors used Facebook to organize, as well as how militias organize using Twitter and off of major social media platforms, where applicable.

Alethea Group found evidence on Facebook that some of the 25 militia groups we identified in Michigan are operating a well organized bureaucracy, with local chapters that also plan and promote social community events. Alethea Group observed that these militias use inclusive rhetoric, similar in tone and nature to political or activist entities. Most of the militias are highly organized with hierarchical systems of representation within the organization. In addition to militia activities, some groups are including fitness and training activities for members.

Facebook's algorithm is still suggesting militia groups and pages to users, thereby increasing the militia's reach. Alethea Group saw evidence that 13 Facebook groups were shown algorithmically to users through functions such as related pages. Among these groups was the Michigan Militia Corps, Wolverines (MMCW), which, until it was taken down by Facebook, was using similar rhetoric to the "Wolverine Watchmen" group that authorities identified as being behind the plot to kidnap Governor Whitmer.

Militias are also organizing off of Facebook. Following Facebook's ban on some militia activity, several groups are using social networking site and app Mewe as an alternative for militia communication.