

Ex-Central Florida cops' Capitol riot arrests underscore extremists' inroads among police, experts say

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Experts say **the arrests of two former Central Florida police officers** accused of storming the U.S. Capitol during January's riot **alongside members of the Proud Boys** underscore the alarming ties emerging between law enforcement and far-right extremist groups.

At least four local agencies now have ties to Capitol rioters, after the indictment of Kevin Tuck, a Windermere Police Department officer until he resigned on the day of his arrest, and his son Nathaniel Tuck, a former Apopka Police Department officer who is married to an active officer for the Longwood Police Department.

Both **were indicted as co-defendants of two Proud Boys**, including **Arthur Jackman**, vice president of the far-right nationalist group's Orlando chapter **and husband of an Orange County deputy sheriff**.

The indictment does not indicate if either Tuck is a Proud Boys member, but prosecutors say Jackman infiltrated the Capitol alongside Joseph Biggs, an Ormond Beach organizer of the extremist group. Biggs is accused of **helping to plan the Jan. 6 attack**, during which a mob supporting then-President Donald Trump's false election fraud claims overran the Capitol in an attempt to stop Congress from certifying the election of President Joe Biden.

Court filings show both Tucks are being represented by John Pierce, a California attorney known **for having represented Kenosha shooter Kyle Rittenhouse** and whose **current clients include other Proud Boys members** accused of participating in the Capitol riot.

Pierce did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The FBI warned in a 2006 report that white supremacist and anti-government groups were **"infiltrating"** law enforcement and the military, but experts say it can be nearly impossible to fire police officers who express extremist views but have not acted on them. They say departments across the county also have done little to improve screening practices.

Nationwide, **dozens** of current and former police officers, other first-responders and military veterans have been among those arrested in the Capitol riot. But Central Florida law enforcement leaders provided few details when asked how they combat potential extremism within their ranks.

Jim Pasco, executive director of the National Fraternal Order of Police, said the arrests are “disgraceful,” but there’s “no significant evidence” of a large number of law enforcement officers holding white supremacist or extremist views.

“That’s generally true of all professions, whether it’s reporting or teaching or being elected to Congress,” he said.

Vida Johnson, a Georgetown University law professor who studies white supremacists in police departments, said extremism among law enforcement now represents a “threat to our national security.”

“If you have people who hold a lot of power and have access to information — and who hold these beliefs — there’s a lot they can get away with,” she said. “I think we can see from Jan. 6 ... there really is no bigger threat to our democracy than something like that.”

Expert: Extremism in police ranks has ‘destructive impact’

Members of the Proud Boys attended the deadly, white supremacist-led Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville in 2017, and recently, a leader of the group **pleaded guilty to burning a Black Lives Matter banner** stolen from a historically Black church in Washington D.C. The group is also known for openly courting violence at its rallies, according to Cassie Miller, a senior research analyst with the Southern Poverty Law Center’s Intelligence Report.

“We’ve seen the law enforcement agencies in those places fail to take the threat seriously because they seem to have some sympathies with these groups,” she said.

Miller said links between law enforcement and far-right extremists can have a “destructive impact” on the relationship between police and communities of color.

“These are communities that are already discriminated against and over-policed,” she said. “When the institutions that are supposed to be protecting them are tolerating people who have ties to racist and extremist organizations in their ranks, that creates a really frightening situation for people.”

The Orlando Sentinel requested interviews with the heads of the four local agencies linked to the Tucks and Jackman — Windermere PD, Apopka PD, Longwood PD and the Orange County Sheriff’s Office — to find out what efforts those agencies are undertaking to combat extremism in their ranks. None were made available to speak.

Windermere Police Chief David Ogden did not respond to a request for comment, though he previously said the agency was “disheartened” by the arrest of Kevin Tuck. The department contacted the FBI about Kevin Tuck’s alleged involvement in the Capitol riot after another officer raised concerns, the police chief said in a statement.

Apopka PD’s chief declined to comment.

“The FBI continues to investigate the events of [Jan. 6],” said agency spokesperson Kim Walsh. “As a result, Chief [Michael] McKinley is not going to make any comments regarding this matter.”

In Longwood, where both Kevin and Nathaniel Tuck were once officers, Police Chief David Dowda was not available to comment on the topic, according to spokesperson Lt. Adam Bryant.

Bryant said Longwood officers go through extensive background investigations during hiring, including a psychological profile, drug test, criminal history check and interviews with family, friends, former employers and neighbors. The agency never saw any indication the Tucks were or had been extremists, nor did it receive any complaints indicating they were, he said.

At the Orange County Sheriff’s Office, agency spokeswoman Michelle Guido said there’s “no evidence” that any deputies have extremist views or belong to extremist organizations.

“[Sheriff John Mina] is currently researching best practices and does plan to put measures in place to help identify any troubling patterns of behavior among any [OCSO] employees,” Guido said.

OCSO **investigated Deputy Sarah Jackman** after her husband’s arrest and cleared her of wrongdoing, though the probe revealed she knew about her husband’s role in the local Proud Boys chapter and thought the extremist group was “pro American, pro-family, and very patriotic.”

It’s difficult for agencies to discipline officers who express favorable views of an extremist group but haven’t joined the organization or committed a crime, said Michael Jensen, senior researcher at the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism at the University of Maryland.

“That sheriff’s department is in a very difficult situation,” Jensen said. “On the one hand, how do you ensure public trust in the sheriff’s department when you have an officer out there with these affiliations as police in the street? But then at the same time, are you prepared to fight that legal battle in court, which you’re probably going to lose in many of these cases?”

That active officers like Kevin Tuck felt comfortable participating in an anti-government riot — during which many in the mob, including Nathaniel Tuck, are accused of striking on-duty Capitol police — shows “how insulated police officers are from any consequences at their job,” Johnson said.

“It illustrates how some police officers feel that they can get away with anything,” she added. “That’s chilling.”

Nathaniel Tuck, who worked at LPD from 2012 to 2018, resigned in good standing, Bryant said. His wife, Gabriela Tuck, still works at the department and is not currently under investigation for violating any laws or **department policies**, which require all Longwood police employees to “report all criminal activity or suspected activity.”

During a hearing last week, a federal prosecutor alleged both Tucks sent messages to family members as they stormed the Capitol.

“If actual misconduct comes to light on her part, we will then investigate,” Bryant said.

Combat training appeals to far-right groups

Far-right extremist groups seek to recruit law enforcement officers and military professionals primarily because they have weapons and tactical training, which they can teach to other recruits in preparation for “a coming conflict” that many extremist groups believe is on the horizon, Jensen said.

“It’s something that you really can’t get on your own without access to somebody who’s been through that professional military [or] professional law enforcement training,” he said.

Firefighters and other first responders are targeted by groups to some extent but are not as well represented, he said.

The oath that police and military members take to protect the public and uphold the Constitution can be perverted to justify extremist beliefs and behaviors, Jensen said. Extremist leaders claim traditional means for protecting the nation’s ideals have failed and “it’s up to the citizens now to stand up,” he said.

“They sell the [extremist] group as an extension of that oath,” Jensen said.

In the late ‘80s, far-right extremist leaders began pushing potential followers away from joining organized groups after the failed 1988 presidential run of David Duke, a former Ku Klux Klan grand wizard, said Paul Becker, a University of Dayton sociology professor who researches extremism.

“You started to see extremist leaders [say] ... that David Duke could have been president if there weren’t pictures of him in Klan robes,” Becker said. “Instead, join the military, join the police, because then you’ll be in a position to help the movement when the race war comes about that they were predicting.”

Few police departments go after officers who express white supremacist or extremist views because of powerful police unions, which fight firings or suspensions for such behavior on free speech grounds, Becker said.

Pasco said unions are legally required to defend members and ensure they get due process rights.

“We do not seek to keep individuals who have broken any law or are unfit to be police officers on the force,” he said. “ ... Police officers have the same First Amendment rights as any other human being in the United States of America.”

He added the FOP has been vocal about the shortcomings of agencies in screening potential officers, a process in which the union has “no role.”

Police departments haven't significantly changed their screening practices since the FBI's 2006 report, Becker said.

"We need to look at that screening process and listen to the advice that we've been getting for years on these connections between extremist groups and law enforcement and setting up a way where we can identify them," he said. "... A lot of the research is saying that these are the groups that we have to be the most concerned with when it comes to domestic terrorism."

Experts suggested several changes police departments could make to combat extremism, including focusing on training to identify the recruitment tactics of extremist groups, creating a database of fired police officers with extremist ties, increasing protections for whistleblowers who report their colleagues and monitoring officers' emails, social media and body-worn camera footage.

"We already have problems with significant parts of our country not having trust in our police departments," said Johnson, the Georgetown professor who studies white supremacists. "If I was a police chief, this would be my top concern."

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