

How Long Does It Take a Narrative to Change?

A White Paper on U.S. Capitol Attack Media & Narrative Analysis through Quantifiable Communications Strategy by NUNA Consulting Group, LLC

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Overview & Methodology

On Wednesday, January 6, 2021, the country watched citizens swarm the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. in one of the most shocking broadcasts on U.S. news channels in history. Between January 5 and January 13, 2021, there were more than 17 million online mentions of the Capitol Attack, coming from more than three million unique authors. Mentions on the day of the attack surpassed 4.5 million mentions, with each subsequent day seeing at least one million mentions.

NUNA has compiled this media listening report using our minute-by-minute timeline, compiled in real time through reports on Twitter and news broadcasts, as well as the Brandwatch social media analytics tools. Using this data as a starting point, we have created the following analysis of how the discussion around the Capitol Attack evolved as events unfolded, as well as how they have impacted the news cycle over the past week.

Situational Awareness

During a joint session of Congress, convened to formally certify the results of the Electoral College, thousands of people surrounded, stormed, and occupied the United States Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. in support of President Donald Trump, who lost his bid for reelection in November of 2020.

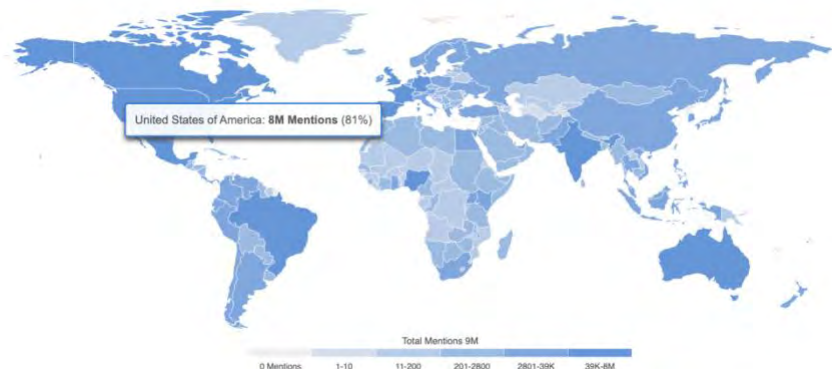
Countless people around the world – the NUNA team included – watched as live video was broadcast on every major news network, as we tracked and monitored social media as reporters inside the Capitol shared what was happening, and we saw the narrative evolve from discussing protesters to rioters to insurrection and an attempted coup.

The below report provides an in-depth, hour-by-hour analysis of the online discussion surrounding the attack, how the narrative shifted in real-time, and how that discussion continued over the next seven days by tracking key narrative indicator terms: **Protesters, Rioters, Insurrection, and Coup & Sedition**.

Topline Insights

- The data in this report was pulled from January 5 through January 13.
 - On the day of the attack there were **4,507,982 mentions alone** out of **17,218,042 total overall mentions**
- On January 6, **total online mentions** around the **Capitol Attack peaked at 3 P.M. EST** at 954,480 – **more than two hours after the incident began**
- The swell in online discourse grew from 29,937 mentions at 1 P.M. EST and 517,465 mentions at 2 P.M. EST, eventually leading to a shift in narrative and both online and traditional media coverage
- **It took two hours on the day to eventually establish the narrative of “rioters” engaging in “insurrection”**
 - The media cycle transitioned their language from “protesters” to “rioters” to “insurrection” at around 3:06 P.M. EST via broadcast with the moniker “pro-Trump mob” starting to trend starting around 8:00 P.M. EST online
 - At 3:20 P.M. EST “Nazi” started to trend on political Twitter
- Over the following week, **the “protesters” narrative consistently diminished in its overall voice share, declining from 12% on January 6 to just 1% on January 13**, while “rioters” maintained a consistent voice share around 10%
- **The largest jump in voice share was for references to “insurrection” in the week following the Capitol Attack.** At just 6% on January 6, it surged to 22% on January 13 when the House of Representatives voted on an article of impeachment charging President Trump with “incitement of insurrection”
- **Television broadcasts lagged behind around 15-25 minutes** as the stories developed online the day of the attack
- In the first two days after the attack, **there were 5,398,048 mentions by 3 million unique authors** meaning there were **3 million people leading the entire online conversation around the globe**
- From **January 7– 13**, there was a **steady decline in overall mentions by 53%**
- In the **total online mentions** of the U.S. Capitol Building Attack, **the U.S. accounted for only 81%** while the global community engaged in the conversation led by the following countries:

- Canada
- United Kingdom
- Mexico
- Brazil
- Nigeria
- Germany
- France
- Spain
- India
- Australia



Media Coverage & Narrative Timeline Snapshot | January 6, 2021

- **11:58 A.M. EST:** Trump begins speaking, **1:28 P.M. EST** Trump concludes speech
- **1:30 P.M. EST:** Crowd begins marching from Trump's speech to the Capitol Complex
- **1:56 P.M. EST:** Rioters ("Protesters") getting rowdy, bomb threat at the Capitol Hill Club results in Congressional Offices evacuated
- **2:16 P.M. EST:** Huffington Post reporter Igor Bobic [tweets](#) that "protesters have breached the Capitol," along with photos
- **2:44 P.M. EST:** Huffington Post reporter Matt Fuller [tweets](#) a photo of Secret Service Agents with guns drawn, pointed at the barricaded door of the Senate Chamber
- **2:47 P.M. EST:** Huffington Post reporter Igor Bobic [tweets](#) a photo of rioters in the House Chamber
- **2:55 P.M. EST:** Washington Post reporter Aaron C. Davis [tweets](#) that the DoD denied request by DC officials to deploy the National Guard
- **3:01 P.M. EST:** Fox Local D.C. reporter Lindsay Watts [tweets](#) that a DC paramedic source tells her one person was shot in the Capitol, and that CPR is in progress
- **3:04 P.M. EST:** Huffington Post reporter Matt Fuller tweets "they are clearing the Capitol"
- **3:06 P.M. EST:** Verbage of news broadcasts changes from "protesters" to "rioters," to "insurrection"
- **3:20 P.M. EST:** Political Twitter starts trending with "Nazi"
- **3:37 P.M. EST:** National Association of Manufacturers [urges](#) VP Pence to "seriously consider working with the Cabinet to invoke the 25th Amendment to preserve democracy."
- **3:42 P.M. EST:** Timothy Burke [tweets](#) a video from a rioter's live stream that shows Capitol Police taking a selfie with the rioters
- **3:51 P.M. EST:** Huffington Post reporter Matt Fuller [tweets](#) that the Sergeant at Arms says they expect it to take "half an hour or an hour" to clear the Capitol
- **3:52 P.M. EST:** Washington Post reporter Aaron C. Davis [tweets](#) that the DdD "reversed course" and the National Guard "will be deployed to the Capitol"
- **4:05 P.M. EST:** President-elect Joe Biden [gives a live speech](#) calling on President Trump to "go on national television now to fulfill his oath and defend the Constitution by demanding an end to this siege."
- **4:17 P.M. EST:** President Trump posts a video to Twitter from the Rose Garden telling the rioters "you have to go home now, we have to have peace," while insisting "we had an election that was stolen from us"
- **4:38 P.M. EST:** Representative Ilhan Omar [announces on Twitter](#) that she is drawing up Articles of Impeachment against President Trump
- **5:34 P.M. EST:** Sergeant at Arms says [the Capitol is secure](#)
- **7:02 P.M. EST:** Twitter requires the removal of three of President Trump's tweets from the day, including his video from the Rose Garden, and [locks his personal account for 12 hours](#)

Note: A significant aspect of the conversation was about the difference in treatment between the primarily Caucasian/white crowd that attacked the Capitol, and the more diverse crowds at Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests over the summer. In all instances below referring to the voice-share of "protesters", mentions that reference BLM protesters have been removed from the data in order to maintain clarity on how the narrative surrounding the Capitol Attack evolved.

Deep Dive Narrative Change Analysis

The following is the deep dive narrative change analysis starting on January 6, 2021 in the hour-by-hour reporting and narrative shifting that expands into the following seven days of online and broadcast media coverage.

LEADING KEY INSIGHT: *The narrative around “protesters” and the U.S. Capitol Attack was established within two hours, it took seven days for the narrative to be shifted to “rioters” and the U.S. Capitol Attack.*

Voice Share on January 6, 2021

As the Capitol Attack began on January 6, dueling narratives emerged on how the events of the day would be discussed. Early on, more than a quarter of all online mentions referred to those storming the Capitol as “protesters,” while only a small portion referred to them as “rioters.”

The arc of the discussion online throughout the day consistently shifted towards “rioters,” with “protesters” steadily declining in total voice share. While mentions including “protesters” accounted for more than twice those including “rioters” on the day as a whole, by 9 P.M. EST that evening “rioters” was the more used term hour by hour – a trend that would continue over the next seven days, until the narrative was fully shifted to “rioters,” and “protesters” made up just 1% of the total voice share.

Key Indicator Terms on January 6

- Protesters: 12% of mentions
- Rioters: 6% of mentions
- Insurrection: 6% of mentions
- Coup & Sedition: 5% of mentions

January 6, 2021: The Capitol Building Attack

1:00 P.M. EST – 2:00 P.M. EST: The President's Speech & The Riot's Start

After President Trump finished speaking at the “Save America” rally, thousands of people made their way to the Capitol Building complex.

Almost immediately, those at the Capitol [broke through the metal barriers](#) set outside the Capitol Building, and by the end of the hour two buildings in the Capitol complex had been evacuated as “protesters” [attempted to breach security lines](#), and the first wave of people [stormed the Capitol](#).

In the days leading up to Congress certifying the Electoral College results, it was well known that there would be pro-Trump supporters there protesting the results – and the language used in reporting on those individuals reflected that same language of “protests.”

Online mentions during this hour surpassed 30,000 total, the first of more than 4.5 million on the day. Out of those 30,000 mentions, 3% used the word “rioters” to describe those storming the Capitol, whereas 27% used the word “protesters.”

2:00 P.M. EST – 3:00 P.M. EST: The Capitol is Locked Down

At 2:16 P.M. EST, Huffington Post reporter Igor Bobic [tweeted out a picture](#) of the “protesters” inside the Capitol Building, confronting Capitol Police with Confederate Flags just outside of the Chamber where Senators were meeting to certify the Electoral College vote.

During this hour, online mentions soared to more than 520,000 total, with individual legislators and reporters inside the building posting about what was happening. News outlets from across the country and around the world began reporting on the events using verbiage “protesters.”

Of the 520,000 total mentions of the Capitol Attack, 2% used the word “rioters” to describe those storming the Capitol, whereas 22% used the word “protesters.”

This initial spike in mentions follows the progress of the “protesters” as they made their way into and through the Capitol Building. Television broadcasts continued to show footage from outside the Capitol, while reporting that “protesters” had overpowered Capitol Police and were making their way through the building.

Meanwhile, on Twitter reporters like Bobic and the Huffington Post’s Matt Fuller were posting photos from inside the [House](#) and [Senate](#) chambers, and at 2:53 P.M. EST New York Times Reporter Jonathan Martin [tweeted](#) that Senator Mitt Romney told him “this is what the president has caused today, this insurrection.”

3:00 P.M. EST – 4:00 P.M. EST: The Narrative Tipping Point

At 3:01 P.M. EST, Fox Local D.C. reporter Lindsay Watts [tweeted](#) that one person was shot in the Capitol. We would later learn the person was Ashli Babbitt, who would be pronounced dead later that evening. Just five minutes later, CNN changed the headline on their live broadcast to read “Insurrection In Washington Following Trump Encouragement.”

The three o’clock hour saw the highest mention volume of the entire day, with more than 960,000 total mentions. Of those, 4% used the word “rioters” to describe those storming the Capitol, whereas just 15% used the word “protesters.” Meanwhile, this is when we see our first significant number of mentions of either “sedition” or “coup,” with more than 4% of all mentions including one of those terms.

The shifting narrative used by the major news networks on television mark the start of a significant tonal shift across online and traditional media that we see over the remainder of January 6th, as well as the following week.

Also of note – at 3:37 P.M. EST the National Association of Manufacturers [issued a press release](#) calling on Vice President Mike Pence to invoke the 25th Amendment and remove President Trump from office, adding to the narrative change momentum and sparking a conversation about the 25th that would culminate in the House of Representatives [officially calling on the Vice President](#) to invoke it.

4:00 P.M. EST – 5:00 P.M. EST: The President and President-elect Address the Nation

While President Trump had tweeted a handful of times calling for peace and asking the “protesters” to leave the Capitol and return home, it wasn’t until 4:17 P.M. EST that he directly addressed the nation on the issue, posting a video to Twitter telling the “protesters” that they “have to go home now,” and “we have to have peace.”

The President's video came after President-elect Joe Biden gave a live speech, calling on "President Trump to go on national television now, to fulfill his oath and defend the constitution and demand an end to this siege." President-elect Biden said that the events at the Capitol weren't "dissent," but "disorder" and "chaos," bordering on "sedition."

The dueling addresses given by the President and President-elect contributed significantly to more than 680,000 online mentions during this hour – the second most of the day. The online narrative continued to shift away from "protesters" – making up just 12% of total mentions – towards "rioters" – making up 9% of total mentions for this hour. "Coups" and "sedition" continued to tick up this hour as well, totaling 5% of all mentions following President-elect Biden's speech.

5:00 P.M. EST – 8:00 P.M. EST: The Capitol is Cleared, the Conversation Continues

At 5:34 P.M. EST, Huffington Post reporter Matt Fuller [tweeted](#) that the Sergeant at Arms had announced the Capitol building was secure – putting an end to the attack on the building after more than four hours of conflict.

The hours that followed saw a steady decline in online conversation around the event, though hour-by-hour mentions would not fall below a quarter of a million until 10 P.M. EST that evening.

Between 5:00 P.M. EST and when Congress reconvened at 8:00 P.M. EST, the narrative of the conversation online remained consistent, with only minor variation in how the events of the day were being discussed. More commentary continued to use "protesters," but the margin was much thinner when compared to "rioters."

The mention rates by hour were as follows:

5:00 P.M. – 6:00 P.M.:

Total: 548,094, "Protesters": 10%, "Rioters": 9%, "Coups" and "Sedition": 6%

6:00 P.M. – 7:00 P.M.:

Total: 442,229, "Protesters": 10%, "Rioters": 6%, "Coups" and "Sedition": 5%

7:00 P.M. – 8:00 P.M.:

Total: 323,946, "Protesters": 10%, "Rioters": 8%, "Coups" and "Sedition": 7%

While many news outlets across the country and around the world continued to report on "protesters" who had stormed the U.S. Capitol, a growing number of individual reporters, politicians, and others online continued the discourse around the "rioters" who had attempted a "coup."

Finally, at 7:02 P.M. EST Twitter announced that they would require the removal of three of President Trump's tweets from the day, including his video from the Rose Garden, and [locked his personal account for 12 hours](#).

Two days later, Friday, January 8, Twitter would [announce a permanent ban](#) of President Trump's personal Twitter account.

8:00 P.M. EST – 9:00 P.M. EST: Congress Reconvenes

At 8:00 P.M. EST on January 6, less than seven hours after their business was interrupted by the “protesters” that stormed the Capitol, Vice President Mike Pence gavelled the joint session of Congress back into session. Early the next morning, they would officially certify the results of the Electoral College.

During this hour there was a small bump in total mentions compared to the previous hour – a result of members of Congress addressing the events of the day and adding fuel to the online discourse.

There were just over 330,000 mentions during this hour, many of them quoting or referencing statements made by members of Congress or continuing the discussion around the events of the day. Notably, it was between 8 and 9 o'clock that use of “rioters” surpassed the use of “protesters” – 8% compared to 6%.

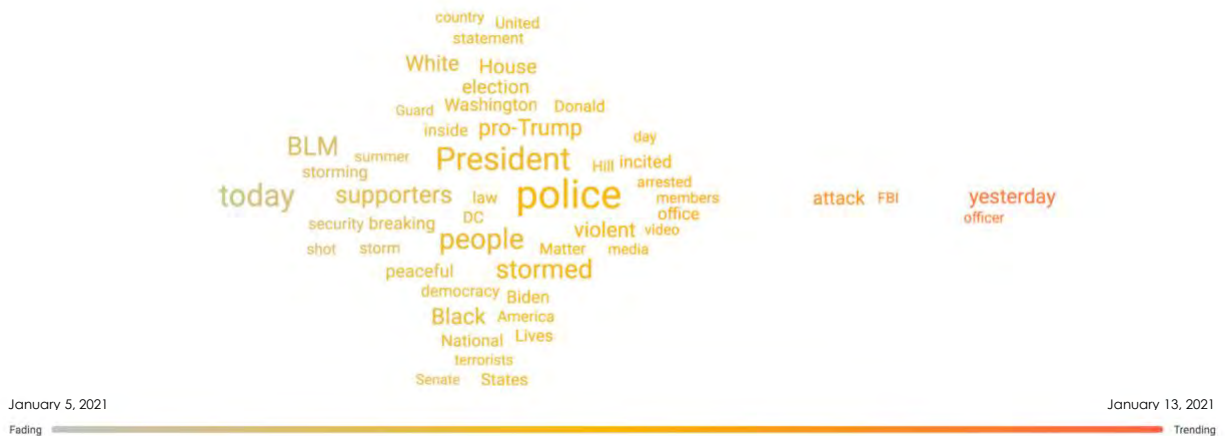
As the evening continued on, Facebook banned President Trump from posting for 24 hours (and would eventually ban him for the [remainder of his Presidency](#)), a growing segment of the conversation focused in on [how the race of the “protesters” played a factor](#), and foreign countries announced they would be [reviewing the safety](#) of their own legislative branches.

The Aftermath | January 7 – January 13, 2021

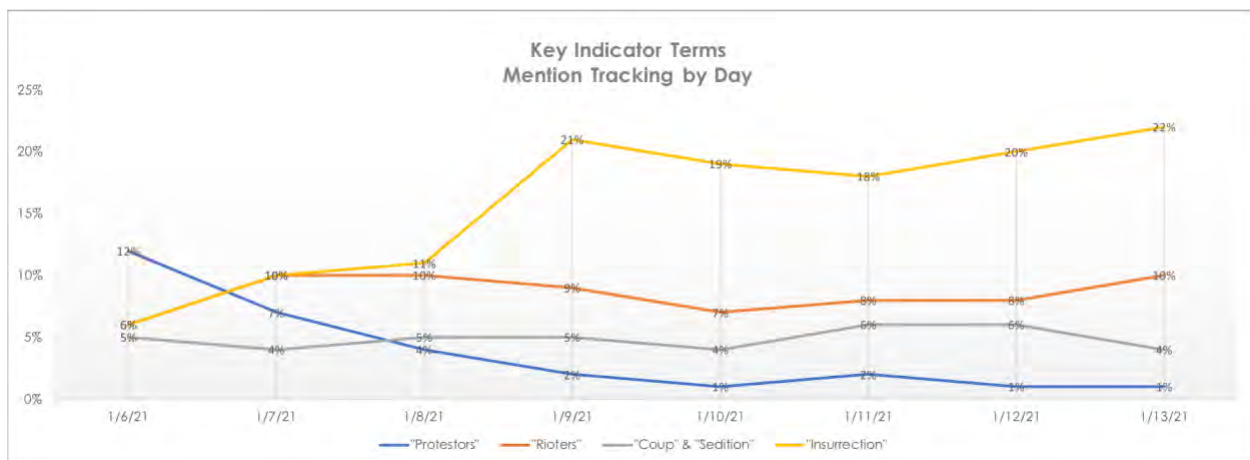
In the days that followed the attack on the Capitol, conversation remained consistent, if less abundant. The news cycle followed the expected pattern of rolling hills of mentions, growing each day as more information became available and Congress moved forward with action against the President.

Online Trending Coverage

The following graphic represents the most commonly used words and trends around the Capitol Attack in online media from January 5 – January 13, 2021.



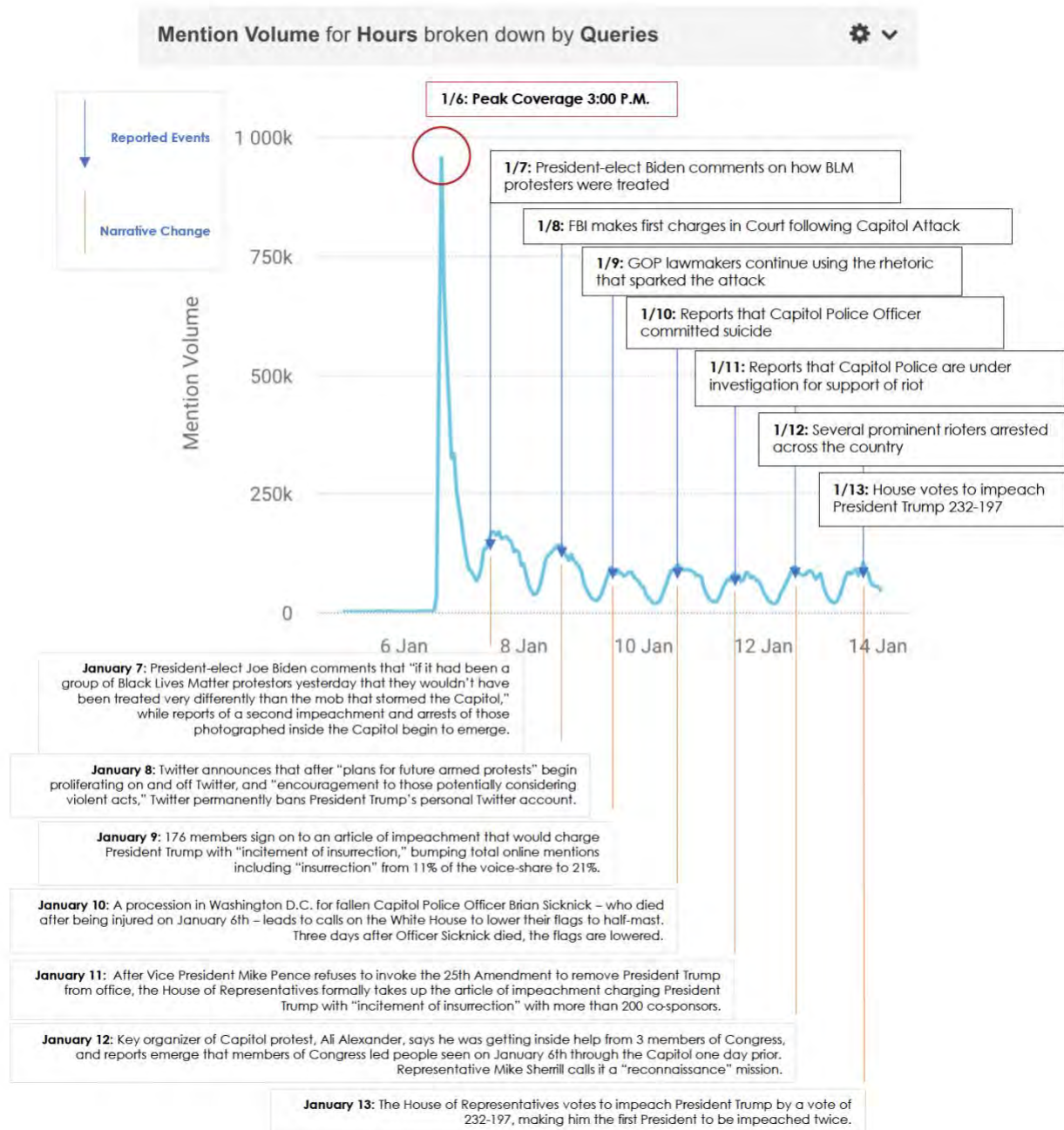
Between January 7 and January 13, online mentions totaled at least 1.4 million each day, with a high of 3 million mentions on January 7. The trend away from “protesters” and towards “rioters” that we saw throughout the day on January 6 continued, with use of “rioters” staying at around 10% of mentions every day, while “protesters” fell to just over 1%.



“Coup” and “Sedition” maintained a voice-share of around 5% throughout the week, while “insurrection” saw the largest jump of any key indicator terms. Between January 8 and 9, after it was announced that an article of impeachment would be introduced to charge President Trump with “inciting an insurrection,” use of “insurrection” jumped by 10% to make up 21% of the overall voice-share online. After the House voted to impeach the President on January 13, usage peaked at 22% of the overall voice-share.

Below is a graph showing the trend in overall mentions over the week following the Capitol Attack – a large spike on the day of the attack, and bumps in mentions each of the subsequent days. These bumps coincided with additional news breaking, either about the attack itself or about action that Congress planned to take in response.

See visual analysis below for the full coverage data from January 6 through January 13, 2021 and coinciding key narrative tracking changes made after additional online media coverage surfaced after the attack.



Conclusion

The preceding analysis captures a moment in time on a micro level that has a lasting impact in the way that we view, digest, and interact with the media landscape and individual contributions that each citizen of the world makes as they engage and consume in online and broadcast media.

LEADING KEY INSIGHT: *The narrative around “protesters” and the U.S. Capitol Attack was established within two hours, it took seven days for the narrative to be shifted to “rioters” and the U.S. Capitol Attack.*

Voices of the News Makers

Due to a lack of available data on demographics, we were unable to fully identify audiences but can draw assumptions on the vast differences in reporting by broadcasters and those individuals commenting and interacting via social media and online outlets with ethnically diverse audiences.

The major news networks set the tone within two hours of the breaking news broadcast reaching the mass mainstream audience with the primary terminology being used to identify people as “protesters” while online media quickly shifted within minutes from “protesters” to “rioters” and “mob”.

It took a total of seven days for the narrative trend in broadcast and subsequent residual reporting to “rioters” which is now the commonplace indicator term now widely used in the reporting cycle.

Macro Application

In the coming weeks the narrative will continue to change as the Biden-Harris Administration takes office and the Senate moves forward with impeachment trials while the coverage around the U.S. Capitol Attack continues to fade overtime per historical evidence of the natural progression of the media cycle.

It is an imperative moment that we take the findings from this analysis and apply the data to current policy and public affairs issue areas as a benchmark for the timelines in which narratives are created, amended, and changed.

Over the next year, NUNA is moving to conduct comparative analyses on recent historical events to track and study human behavior within the media cycle.

For more information about NUNA Consulting Group, LLC, Quantifiable Communications Strategy, and access the U.S. Capitol Attack Narrative Change dashboard visit www.nunaconsultgroup.com.