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The Contemporary Ku Klux Klan as an Insurgency

Introduction

The following article addresses the contemporary Ku Klux Klan in the United States. Its existence is challenged by theoretical concepts of insurgencies employed in order to either prove or reject Klan's historical legacy tightly connected to terrorist activities perpetrated during the post-Civil War era. Two goals accompany our research. Firstly, a prevailing narrative of the Ku Klux Klan is debated. Secondly, an empirical overview is provided, which can serve as an educational instrument, in connection with a wide-spread exaggerated perception of the Ku Klux Klan.

When debates about racism are brought up in the United States, the Ku Klux Klan instantly appears "on the stage". Recent events highly reflect this phenomenon. Although its size has drastically shrunk, it continuously persists in everyday conversations. Older than a century, but strong enough to survive in the minds of many. Having said that, every racial controversy somehow resonates with the Klan. Atrocious events committed during the Reconstruction era¹ and 1920s still survive. Nevertheless, a closer look at the far-right family indicates its inability to remain competitive among other actors, such as paramilitary militias or QAnon.²

Employed research design is framed by one primary research question: *To what degree is the contemporary Ku Klux Klan accordant to a concept of insurgencies?*; and two secondary research questions: *What are the main narratives the contemporary Ku Klux Klan employs?*, and *Can we perceive the contemporary Ku Klux Klan as the fourth generation of the Klan?* In order to answer them, following roadmap guides the analysis. Firstly, five academic approaches debating insurgencies are discussed in order to formulate conditions that are later used as evaluation parameters. Secondly, comprehensive elements of its activities are analyzed in a range from

¹ A historical term referring to the period of 1865-1877 that followed the American Civil War. The Reconstruction era is mainly connected with restoration of the Union after reunification with the 11 states that had seceded and subsequently founded the Confederacy. Primarily, the legacy of slavery rooted in fundamental elements of its political, social and economic existence was addressed (Foner 2020).

² QAnon is a heterogeneous conspiratorial movement predominantly existing in the United States, nevertheless, its activities are traceable to other countries like Germany or France. Simply said, QAnon perceives President Trump as a protagonist of fight against "the New World Order" represented by politicians, celebrities, mainstream media and global companies striving for global control, and simultaneously perpetrates child trafficking. However, the last American presidential election significantly undermined promoted narratives, the coronavirus disease has successfully filled the cleavage and retrieved the leading role in its ideology (Forrest 2021).

historical development to interviews with contemporary leaders. Thirdly, gained data are assessed and interpreted.

Theoretical Part

Following part debates theoretical concepts of insurgencies. Proposed conceptualization reflects five selected approaches: Jones (2017), Javed (2010), Metz (2012), Nesser (2012), and Mareš (2020). Simultaneously, it serves as our theoretical framework whose presence guarantees unbiased selection of parameters that are operationalized.

Theoretical framework of insurgencies

Jones presents three fundamental causes that precondition insurgencies: local grievances, weak governance, and greed. The article merely focuses on the first one.¹ Exploitation of grievances is one of the fundamental elements, unmotivated rebels without resentment would never form an insurgency. Furthermore, a charismatic leader, who can through well-targeted rhetoric mobilize individuals to organize a rebellion, is perceived as a joint element of successful insurgencies. However, a list of possible grievances is long, Jones emphasizes following three. Firstly, *Low per capita income* indicates positive conjuncture with rebellions. Naturally, in countries with low per capita income earners, narratives resonating with weak governance are more likely to be successful. Rebels either join insurgencies due to financial benefits or ideological reasons.² Besides, poor states do not collect enough revenue that could allow strengthening of their security forces. Secondly, *ethnic polarization* is a sufficient insurgency-building tool. Jones argues that insurgencies more likely start in countries where a large, well-organized ethnic minority faces a majority. Thirdly, *religious polarization* is perceived identically as ethnic polarization. Jones states that countries face a higher risk of insurgency formation if one religious group dominates while the others are left behind and benefit neither from economic opportunities nor political participation (Jones 2017: 19-24).

Javed perceives insurgencies as outcomes of deep dissatisfaction rooted in political and social environment. These entities oppose established status quo³ if the current system is unable to successfully address existing problems. Insurgencies are seen as armed resistance against a governing body formed in order to oppose the imposition of legal constraints or to overthrow/weaken the government. Besides, Javed proposes a variety of insurgencies.⁴ *National insurgency* appears in countries with heterogeneous society comprised of ethnical, language, religious, or racial differences. Such insurgency begins in smaller regions that are interconnected and mutually dependent. Initial cooperation leads to a foundation of unions that subsequently usurp political/economic interests. Secondly, *preservationist insurgency* corresponds with the historical legacy of the Ku Klux Klan's violent atrocities. These insurgents fight for

¹ To clarify this decision, the United States is a well-developed country that neither suffers from a weak governance nor is economically poor.

² Weinstein defines them as *activist* and *opportunistic* rebellions (Weinstein 2007: 9).

³ Javed provides following examples: a ruling party, social order, religious majority, or state system.

⁴ Although Javed proposes a variety of them, for our purposes only two are relevant.

preservation of the existing political/socioeconomic system that guarantees their superior position and survival (Javed 2010: 172-178).

Metz proposes a different approach, in two concepts explains insurgencies. The first one *the orthodox conceptualization* dominates in the academic literature with respect to the Western perception defined as: 1) Groups that strive for a statehood/split of a nation with subsequent creation of a new state within the territory of its predecessor; 2) enemies willing to subvert the existing political system in order to achieve political goals through organized violence if necessary; 3) entities seeking public support that later serves as an instrument of legitimacy. Metz argues that this deterministic narrative based on the Western perception is insufficient. On the contrary, *the counter-orthodox conceptualization* proposes that a *type of strategy* is the decisive variable, not the state-centric viewpoint. This phenomenon is explained by the difference between insurgencies and terrorist groups. While insurgencies desire to control a given area through hierarchical governance, terrorists employ intentional violence against non-combatants to merely gain political/ideological goals. When insurgents use terrorism, they seek public attention that could attract new supporters (Metz 2012: 32-38).

Insurgencies employ a variety of strategies from organized guerillas to lone wolf terrorism. Nesser argues that lone wolf terrorism is a strategy that is being employed by terrorist groups under existential pressure. Horizontal hierarchy of small cells, or individuals respectively, is the key element that minimizes interactions with organizational entities, especially a central command¹. Its modern form is mainly associated with Abu Musab al-Suri² who called upon all dispersed jihadist movements, that do not control any territory, to engage in individual terrorism until a successful renewal of territorial control. The strategy emphasizes the role of “cell builders” that represent organized movements and prepare subordinate units as well as individuals for violent missions. Nevertheless, these “coordinators” disappear before planned attacks are perpetrated (Nesser 2012: 61-64).

Mareš proposes two structural frameworks of insurgencies, *The traditional hierarchical model with a commander and subordinated units* and *Modern “netwar” model consisting of a free non-hierarchical network of involved units*. The hierarchical model compounds more commando-levels, its leadership controls and coordinates inferior cells that are not connected. On the contrary, the modern “netwar” model whose network includes numerous cells that are either interconnected³ or diffused that neither cooperate nor share mutual activities.⁴ Nevertheless, the usage of one organizational structure does not eliminate the presence of elements belonging to the other. As Mareš proposes, especially in the diffused model, groups that gain significant power throughout their existence can initiate a transformation leading to a birth of new organizations (Mareš 2020: 42-45).

¹ Simply said, lone wolf terrorism is perpetrated by individuals who operate independently, organized groups provide zero assistance.

² Nesser portrays Abu Musab al-Suri as one of Al-Qaeda’s strategic thinkers.

³ Through direct cooperation, communication, and shared mutual activities

⁴ Linked solely by a mutual goal/ideology.

Conceptualization of insurgencies

Five different theoretical approaches were discussed within the literature review. Although definitions of insurgencies differ, they can be conceptualized as:

- Organizations deliberately exploiting cultural, economic, ethnic/racial, or religious grievances that produce cleavages in societies;
- opposing existing status quo represented by a ruling party, social order, or religious majority;
- pursuing a statehood with a desire to govern over the claimed territory;
- willing to engage in violent clashes predominantly with governments;
- with an organizational structure that is either hierarchical or leaderless with shared goal/ideology.

Other theoretical approaches might have been employed, however, for purposes of this article debated concepts were sufficient. It examines the contemporary Ku Klux Klan, therefore, no deep correlation can be expected like in cases of Boko Haram or Taliban. Moreover, all five defining elements of insurgencies are later used as assessment parameters that indicate commonalities between them and the contemporary Ku Klux Klan.

Methodology

Chosen research method is a qualitative approach that employs a descriptive case study. To clarify this selection, we follow three approaches that reflect the existing literature. As Lijphart argues, descriptive case studies do have great utility regarding data-gathering operations. Although they do not directly generate any theoretical value, gained information indirectly contributes to theory-building as a rigorously described collection of empirical phenomena (Lijphart 1971: 691). The key objective of this article is a systematic observation of the contemporary Ku Klux Klan, therefore, a descriptive case study is the right method how to carry out such goal. Simply said, the article contributes to empirical understanding (Peters 1998: 138). Nevertheless, a descriptive case study is not a theory-free approach. As Zainal proposes, a theory is essential in order to sufficiently create a research design that accompanies the description and produces all necessary variables. Without it, an important factor might be disregarded (Zainal 2017: 3).

To successfully deliver valid results an empirical analysis is used. Firstly, five parameters that indicate whether organizations are insurgencies were formulated upon a literature review. Secondly, an empirical analysis of the Ku Klux Klan succeeds. Employed article's roadmap is following. Description begins with its historical development. Subsequently, a position of the Ku Klux Klan among other American far-right entities is framed. Followed by a section that observes an organizational structure indicating how the Ku Klux Klan operates. Lastly, promotional and violent activities are being discussed.

Throughout the research one data set is employed. Our inability to collect primary data refers us solely to secondary data: academic books and articles, publicly available

interviews with Klansmen, and reports published by Southern Poverty Law Center¹ and Anti-Defamation League.² Although these documents can contain biased information, the article acknowledges this reality and tries to fact-check presented statements. Governmental reports would have been incorporated as well but no document explicitly mentioning the Ku Klux Klan was discovered.³

Analytical Part

Following part provides an empirical analysis of the contemporary Ku Klux Klan. Firstly, fundamental elements of its existence are debated. Secondly, interviews with selected Klansmen are analyzed in order to strengthen conceptualization of the Ku Klux Klan's ideology. Then, the parameters of insurgencies are employed. Lastly, the results of the analysis are presented.

Historical development of the Ku Klux Klan

Three generations of the Ku Klux Klan have existed in the United States. The first generation was founded right after the Civil War by six former officers of the Confederate Army in 1865. Preservation of social order reflecting the pre-Civil War form was the primary goal, i.e., newly freed slaves should have stayed in an inferior position to the white population. Terror and violent campaigns had been employed in order to intimidate newly formed free Southern society. Prior the 1868 presidential election, thousands of African Americans had been killed as well as many others who were victims of lynching, tar-and-featherings, rapes and other violent crimes. The first Ku Klux Klan had existed for a short period of time, Nathan Bedford Forrest⁴ disbanded it in 1869 (Schaefer 1971: 144-145).

The rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan is dated to 1915 when William J. Simmons had organized a cross lighting in Stone Mountain, Georgia that had served as the first event of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Ideologically, the second Klan followed its predecessor. Besides hostility toward African Americans, xenophobia, religious prejudice, and conservative moralism were exploited. By 1925 it had gained around 4 million members, in some states the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan even held considerable political power. Until today, there is no agreement what brought the second Klan down. Rothman argues that the hostile Klan's perception of American enemies, that had never come into being, was the initial reason. American economy decimated by the relentless World War I eased by the middle of the 1920s when it

¹ Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) is an American 501(c)(3) nonprofit legal advocacy organization specializing in civil rights and public interest litigation. It is known for its legal cases against white supremacist groups, classification of hate groups and other extremist organizations as well as education programs.

² Anti-Defamation League (ADL), founded in 1913, is an international Jewish non-governmental organization focused on combating antisemitism and extremism.

³ Analyzed documents were the *Country Reports on Terrorism* from 2016 to 2019 (U.S. Department of State) and the FBI's *Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism* on Domestic Terrorism 2020 (U.S. Department of Justice 2021).

⁴ Nathan Bedford Forrest served as a general of the Confederate States Army. Although he had volunteered as a private, at the end of the Civil War Forrest was promoted to Lieutenant General. In the post-Civil War era became famous as one of the Ku Klux Klan founders, he was the first Grand Wizard until its dissolution in 1869 (American Battlefield 2021).

boomed again. Communism was unsuccessful among American proletariat, and restrictions imposed on immigration in 1924 significantly downsized number of people arriving from Eastern Europe (Rothman 2016). Furthermore, Spence links its dissolution with social consequences connected to a murder of Madge Oberholtzer perpetrated by David C. Stephenson, a Grand Dragon of the Indiana Klan. Moreover, in Stephenson's trials he had revealed some of the Klan's secrets that subsequently destroyed its reputation and initiated its disappearance (Spence 2020).

The third generation arose during the 1960s as a response to the Civil Rights Movement. Spence describes it as a collection of secret societies without unity and organization. The Klan experienced a wave of supporters in the 1980s and 1990s thanks to new leaders, such as David Duke.¹ Until today, the Klan has merged with other far-right organizations, such as Skinheads and neo-Nazis. However, the third generation is still active, it has drastically altered in comparison with its predecessors. No nationwide organization exists, the Ku Klux Klan is represented by ununified network of dispersed groups (Spence 2020).

Therefore, the article refers to the Ku Klux Klan as *KKK groups* in the following parts.

KKK groups in the American far-right environment

However, far-right movements usually share mutual goals, their activities significantly differ. While KKK groups are involved in acts of vandalism, Skinheads and neo-Nazis more likely engage in violent activities (Perliger 2012: 3-4). Furthermore, the FBI's recognition of the KKK groups provides confusing conceptualization. As Becker et al. argue, KKK groups fall into the same category as other diverse political extremists, even mixed with street gangs (Becker et al. 2020: 1).

KKK groups have experienced fast appearances and disappearances in recent years. Although contemporary KKK groups reflect the traditional ideology of their predecessors, simultaneously have absorbed beliefs belonging predominantly to neo-Nazism. Kentucky-based organization Elders Blood-N-Blood Out Knights (EBBOK), formed in 2015, openly admits affiliation with neo-Nazism and Skinheads. Recently formed KKK groups have proven this trend of a symbiotic Klan/neo-Nazim coexistence that might be perceived in two views. Firstly, such conjuncture fuels support among the far-right community. These organizations would not survive without one another, i.e., a competition with other white supremacists is simply too high. Secondly, the Klan's traditional ideology has transformed into a version that indeed resonates with white supremacy and neo-Nazism. These Klan groups are Black & Silver Solution or Right-Wing Resistance. Furthermore, the merger between KKK groups and neo-

¹ David Duke, American white supremacist and anti-Semite, one of the leading figures in the Klan's contemporary history. Considered as a pioneer among the far-right community thanks to camouflaging racist ideas behind hot-button topics like immigration. Recently, Duke has been recognized as an international figure who has promoted anti-Semitic rhetoric in Europe, especially in Russia and Ukraine. From 1974 to 1980 Duke held a position of the Grand Wizard, i.e., Imperial Wizard, of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Today, Duke continues in public activities, writes articles, attends conferences and delivers public speeches hostile toward Jews and other minorities (ADL 2021a) The audience in the Czech Republic might be familiar with Duke's book "Moje probuzení" published in 2009.

Nazism is visible regarding the Confederate flag.¹ Historically, the Ku Klux Klan has always identified with the Southern heritage. However, recent controversies have shown that the preservation of this symbol is not only important to KKK groups, but neo-Nazis as well. In July 2015, the Loyal White Knights (LWK) had organized a rally that opposed South Carolina's decision to remove the Confederate flag from the Statehouse grounds in response to the mass shooting in Charleston perpetrated by Dylann Roof.² Approximately 125 white supremacists participated in the rally, including neo-Nazis belonging to National Socialist Movement (NSM), the Nordic Order Knights, the Fraternal Order of the Cross, and the Trinity White Knights (ADL 2016: 1-3).

Fig. 1 – KKK's cross lighting, SS Bolts and the Totenkopf in the foreground (VICE 2013)



Ideology of KKK groups

To analyze KKK groups' ideology, four interviews with Klansmen are observed. Ideological grounds are proposed based on shared ideas, values, or beliefs. Two individual interviews are summarized, i.e., the most relevant answers are cited. The Klan's rally is captured through direct citations. When a direct citation is interpreted, it remains unchanged unless an offensive expression or informal language were used. Then, these parts are either rewritten into a non-offensive form or formal language.

¹ Debating the Confederate flag, one important differentiation must be addressed. This symbol, which causes many controversies nowadays, had never been recognized as the official flag of the Confederacy. When individuals discuss the Confederate flag, they unconsciously refer to the battle flag. Nevertheless, association of the battle flag with racism is not as clear as it is believed. Firstly, the battle flag had served as a Civil War remembrance, especially in the post-Civil War era. A twist followed in mid-1950s as a byproduct of Southern resistance to the Civil Rights Movement, advocates of segregation and white supremacy had adopted the battle flag regardless its primordial meaning. Therefore, its precarious symbolism, whether it represents the Southern heritage or racism, is being questioned so often (Blakemore 2021).

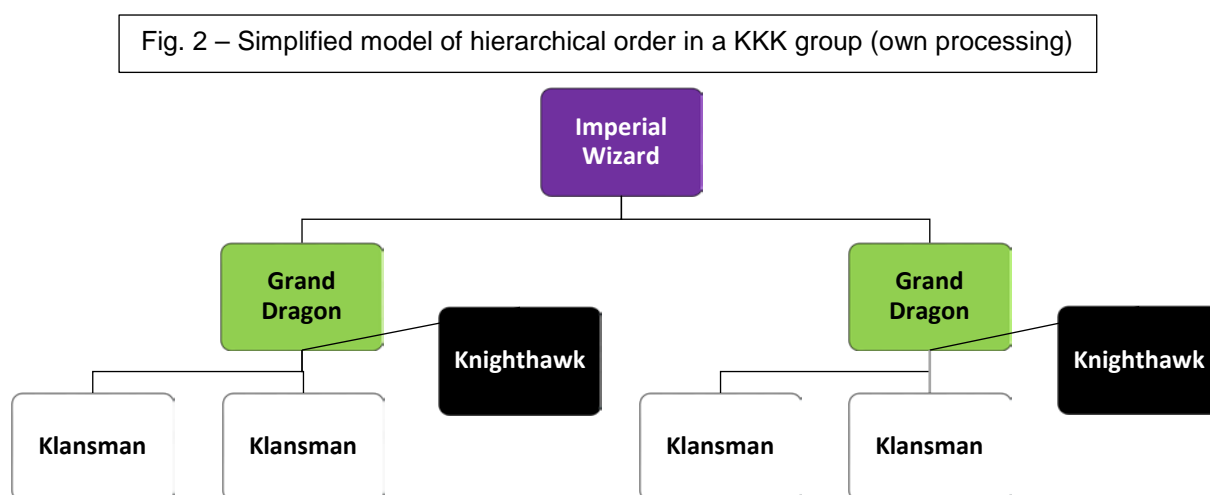
² Dylann Roof massacred nine African Americans during a church mass in South Carolina. Before the attack, he had posted a photo portraying himself with a handgun and the Confederate battle flag (Robles 2015).

Employed ranks in KKK groups

To fully understand statements of interviewees below, knowledge of ranks and roles associated with Klansmen is necessary. The Klansman's Manual (1924) contains the most accurate specification that provides readers with detailed descriptions of almost every position reflecting the second Klan's large membership, for our purposes the most common ranks are enough.

Although white robes are perceived as the traditional Klan's symbol, they hadn't played such role at the beginning. Members of the first Klan wore miscellaneous masks and hoods. The second generation is responsible for implementation of those traditional uniforms. Nevertheless, mutually accepted unanimity of meanings associated with robes had evaporated as well as some ranks¹ after its dissolution. The subsequent existence of independent Klan groups created an environment in which tighter cooperation was impossible (ADL 2021b).

Contemporary KKK groups have adopted white robes with some modifications. With most KKK groups, the general membership wears white robes as well as Klan officers, but with colored stripes indicating their ranks. Other groups have implemented robes of other colors that can differ (black, green, purple, etc.) regarding Klansman's rank. To correctly associate ranks with the color of robes, the ADL's database provides following conjunctures. As stated above, white robes are worn by general members. Green robes predominantly indicate state leaders, Grand Dragons, while black robes prone to identify Knighthawks who occupy security positions within KKK groups. The leaders, Imperial Wizards², can choose different colors that distinguish their role. Moreover, KKK groups also employ a variety of additional accessories, such as stripes, sashes, and emblems (ADL 2021b).



¹ The Klansman's Manual (1924) offers a detailed description of every rank, including those that had been abandoned.

² Also identified as Grand Wizards. Although both titles are interchangeable depending on each KKK group (Mareš 2001), the Imperial Wizard should be favored according to our analysis. Theoretically, merely one should be recognized. On the contrary, the empirical reality suggests the existence of more Imperial Wizards across the United States.

2.3.2 Imperial Wizard Chris, The North Carolina Ku Klux Klan

Four main narratives interconnect the interview: race mixing, homophobia, antisemitism, and Christian Identity. Firstly, race mixing plays a vital role in the Klan's ideology. According to Chris, KKK groups should be understood as organizations for white people that are based on charitable purposes, i.e., they are presented as community organizations. Their legitimacy is connected to hostile societal attacks that label Klansmen as racists and terrorists. He opposes these nicknames and argues that racism is an artificially developed term by Trotsky. Besides, they cannot be terrorists because, as he declares, no Klansman has ever been seen publicly lynching any African American. To quote his words, this is a myth. He numerously emphasizes racial segregation, in his view African Americans, Mexicans, and Asians are not civilized. Furthermore, Chris points out that the Klan must rise again and fight for the white race, or it will die out in the US. Moreover, he openly calls for a race war: *We want a race war, full out race war*. Secondly, when asked about homosexuals, Chris said: *The gay community is an abomination, gay people supposed to be put to death upon sight, and that is in Romans 11 and also in Leviticus 20:13: homosexuals are supposed to be put to death upon sight*. His anti-Semitic views are instantly present. Although Chris considers himself as a Trump supporter, immediately heavily criticizes Trump's cooperation with Israel. Moreover, he argues that the Holocaust was a lie and claims that *our soldiers did the killing of the Jews*. Chris adds a statement arguing that the Jewish community controls the media and banks that are deliberately used against the white race. Fourthly, after a question whether the Ku Klux Klan is a Christian organization, he directly answered: *Yes, the Klan is a Christian organization. We read the same Bible, but we read the whole Bible, we do not skip parts like these Judea Christian preachers do today*. When Chris presents any controversial statement, a Biblical reference is used as supportive evidence (Soft White Underbelly 2020).

Imperial Wizard Steven, The Mississippi White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan

Three key outcomes underline the interview. Firstly, Steven immediately stresses out a role of KKK groups regarding preservation of the white race. Its existence guarantees survival of the white race that has been strongly jeopardized by homosexuals, African Americans, and Communists. When asked about the Klan's goal, he said: *My belief and my goal for the Ku Klux Klan is to protect this country from all invasions. The goal of the KKK is to advance the white race. I am a white separatist, not a white supremacist*. Simultaneously, Steven claims that nothing like race superiority exists, he adds that all races have the same rights. Although Steven strongly opposes race mixing, he neutrally perceives interracial relationships if they do not lead to race mixing¹. Secondly, the Ku Klux Klan is a Christian organization in his view, he said: *Yes, we are Christian. We are like Taliban or Al-Qaeda, we are fighting a Holy War for Christianity, for our race, and for our people*. Subsequently, he added: *I have never been to a prison but if I had to do something for my race and go to a prison, I would do it*. Hard to judge what was meant behind the statement, whether a serious threat or just "muscle stretching". Thirdly, racial segregation is presented as the ultimate goal. According to Steven, races should live separately in order to preserve their heritage and prosperous well-being. A follow up question brought up slavery.

¹ At the same time confesses that he needed a long period of time to realize it.

Steven instantly answered: *African Americans were bettered in America* and proposes that if they want to go back to Africa, he will gladly fund the relocation. He presented KKK groups as “community organizations” that help people either financially or materially (Soft White Underbelly 2020).

Grand Dragon Steven, The Mississippi White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan

Very likely the same Klansman whose thoughts were analyzed in the previous section. However, the second interview states his rank as a Grand Dragon, he could have been promoted over time. Therefore, it is analyzed separately, but the article admits that both interviewees are probably identical. Summary of the second interview is provided through direct quotations of expressed thoughts due to a fact that it was not merely focused on Steven’s views, other content was presented as well.

Firstly, a view of coexistence between races was described, Steven said: *Black people and white people are nowhere related in my opinion. I think black people evolved from animals, I believe that we need to be separated, white then blacks need to separate. I do not agree with race mixing, let them set up their own state where they belong and give them their own homeland.* A follow up question extrapolated the first one, a reporter asked what he would do if his daughter married a black boy. Steven said: *I dishonor, would have nothing else to do with her for the rest of my life. If you love somebody, you love somebody beyond the race. God decreed that, Jesus decreed that. Jesus said love your neighbor.* Secondly, when asked about President Obama’s reelection, he instantly answered: *War... he is going to start it, I feel it, it is coming on. And it is not just me, it is going to be another war in this United States of America if he gets elected back to the office. If he gets four more years, Barrack Obama will ruin this country and white people will be in the concentration camps. If you do not believe white people cannot be in concentration camps, people are sadly mistaken.* Thirdly, a reporter wanted to clarify the Klan’s goal regarding racial segregation. She suggested that the only way how to reach it in the United States is through violence because people would not willingly leave their homes. Steven interrupted her and said: *If they peacefully go, then yeah, but if they will not peacefully go, then that is the only way through violence – making them go, that is it* (ABC News 2012).

Traditionalist American Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Missouri

Frank Ancona, the Imperial Wizard, argued: *There is a reason that God made separate races and the white race is a superior race.* On the contrary, in following answer declared that KKK groups are not hate organizations, *we do not hate people of other races* Ancona said. They are presented as fraternal organizations whose members are interconnected by mutual beliefs rooted in the white race and Southern heritage. Furthermore, he stressed a non-violent nature of his KKK group. Secondly, Klansman John, a Knighthawk, explained why he had joined the group: *I have been on the housing list for 6 years. I got three white children, myself, and my wife, I worked every single day for 6 years to be assisted a little bit from the government... nothing. Our country just does not care about us Americans who built this country. It is all about to hand out to illegal immigrants.* Klansman Rick showed a medal his grandfather had received in 1920s. A reporter asked whether he is fine with a possibility that his grandfather might have been involved in violent crimes perpetrated by the second

Ku Klux Klan. Rick said: *I like it because it is part of my heritage. I did not do it. I do not think he lynched anybody* (Reel Truth Documentaries 2018).

Unknown KKK group's rally

Lastly, a video capturing an anonymous KKK group rally held in 2014 is analyzed. It serves as a comparative element challenging previous ones regarding seriousness of presented thoughts. Hypothetically, Klansmen are more likely to fully disclose their real beliefs in their natural environment created thanks to the presence of fellow members. The video contains five speeches, speakers remain anonymous. Therefore, they are nicknamed as Klansman# to distinguish each person. The article altered informal lingo into a formal language as well as racially offensive statements that were substituted by more acceptable wording. The article includes even uncompleted sentences that were not finished.

Klansman1 delivered a speech debating the differences between homogeneous and cosmopolitan cities: *You see this state is a majority white state and a civilized Christian state. Unlike California, where they let the zoo animals walk free. Anybody who does not believe me, look at Michigan. The whole state is bankrupt. It is a majority black state. With three murders happening every day. Just goes to show you what happens when you take the black man (originally the "n" word was used) out of the jungle, but you cannot take the jungle out of the black man (originally the "n" word was said)* (Truly 2014).

Klansman2 presented his views of homosexuals: *If I were to push the envelope the just a little bit more, and I said that I hate gays, because homosexuality is forbidden by God's law.* Klansman3 added: *Praise God for AIDS* (Truly 2014).

Klansman1's second delivered speech addressed the role of the Jewish population in American/global society. Moreover, a plan, suggesting how to strengthen KKK groups in the military-based tactics and armed resistance, was presented: *And these Jewish puppets, who want to sell our ideals just for ratings on some TV show. They will be the first ones to hang for their sins and then, their sins against God and sins against humanity. We are going to do something a little bit different, for the next, probably the next couple of years to try to get our men and women ready for the upcoming battle that we are about to take upon us and this is something that no Klan has ever done and we are going to start it, all our boys are coming back home from the military which is good and we are getting a lot more military members joining, as we are going to start doing military training, now that we got out marines and army back. They are going to start showing us how to skin and how to survive off the land. We are going to try to move into another direction with the little white knights and that is starting to arm, train, hand to hand combat, and stuff like that just for the upcoming battle* (Truly 2014). The term *battle* was not subsequently described in the speech.

Klansman4 proposed his personal opinion regarding the existing political system and institutions: *The ultimate goal for myself, is to have our membership, get to the point where we can effect political change through the political system. Right now, our numbers are not quite good enough* (Truly 2014).

Klansman James provided his view of the federal government and the Klan's role in future: *Black people, white people, we are all getting tired of the government, and pretty soon you will see the government collapse. And when the government keeps on*

sending their money over to Israel and it finally collapses, you are going to see the Klan take it back and we are going to make this nation the way it needs to be (Truly 2014).

Conceptualization of KKK groups' ideology

Two fundamental elements must be considered before any conceptualization is proposed. Firstly, no statewide organization called the Ku Klux Klan exists. This historical narrative is connected to the first and the second Klan. Although a network of approximately 25 groups exists, none can be labeled as a superior Ku Klux Klan. Each group operates independently, with exceptions of a ceremonial collaboration. Secondly, evolution in recent years has heavily influenced promoted ideology. KKK groups should be perceived as merely far-right organizations, not successors of the first Klan whose legacy is being simply exploited.

No general ideology that would universally apply to all KKK groups exists, however, an ideological framework representing their beliefs/values/views can be conceptualized. Based on the analysis of selected interviews in conjunction with its recognition among other far-right entities, KKK groups employ ideology rooted in:

- White supremacy and racial segregation arguing that races must be separated either peacefully or violently if non-white population does not comply;
- the existence of inevitable Race War that will return power back to the white race;
- Christian Identity that provides justification for almost all activities (hostility against homosexuals, antisemitism, racism), subsequently escalating into the Holy War¹ that should preserve a position of Christianity and the white race;
- social grievances striving for a restoration of social order favoring the white race, and economic grievances promoting that the current system unequally favors non-white races.

Violent activities linked to KKK groups

Several violent crimes were perpetrated by individuals directly linked or affiliated with KKK groups in the last decade. Three of them are presented in the following section.

Frazier Glenn Cross was sentenced to death for murdering three people at the Jewish Community Center located in Overland Park, KS in 2014. According to the available information, he had founded the Carolina Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in North Carolina and later the White Patriot Party.² Moreover, Cross ran on a white-power platform during campaigns for the U.S. House 2006 and the U.S. Senate in 2010 in Missouri (Brown 2021).

Glendon Scott Crawford was sentenced to 30 years in a federal prison for plotting an attack on Muslim communities perpetrated by a mobile radiation-spewing device hidden in a truck. Unveiled FBI surveillance video shows Crawford to excitedly talk

¹ Note that Imperial Wizard Steven compared the Ku Klux Klan to Taliban and Al-Qaeda.

² The White Patriot Party (WPP) was an American anti-Semitic, anti-Zionist, homophobic, white supremacist paramilitary political party affiliated with Christian Identity and the Ku Klux Klan led by Frazier Glenn Miller Jr., known as Frazier Glenn Cross.

about attacking the Executive Mansion in Albany, the White House and local Muslim institutions, such as the Masjid As Salaam mosque, Masjid e-Nabvi Islamic Center as well as the Islamic Center of the Capitol District. The footage presents Crawford's racist lingo calling Muslims "medical waste" and proposing necessary actions in order to "sterilize" them. Unveiled documents indicate Crawford's membership in an unspecified KKK group (Gavin 2016).

Harry H. Rogers was found guilty of six misdemeanor charges after driving his vehicle into a group of protesters in Richmond, VA in 2020. However, the first verdict was appealed, the initial punishment was lowered to three years and eight months in prison. According to trial information, Rogers was a self-identified leader of a KKK group in Virginia (Davies 2021).

Waning membership in KKK groups

KKK groups are ambiguous entities that operate on regional, state, and local levels. Their members are interconnected based on state-centric values and objectives rather than on national ones. Although shared beliefs prerequisite their existence, significant differences are traceable especially between Northern and Southern groups (Madison 2020: 3).

The reduction of KKK groups has been a continuous phenomenon triggered in the last decade. Historically, the third Klan had been comprised of 150 groups consistently existing across the United States, only 25 active groups were estimated in 2020. However, the number of individuals sympathizing with their ideology probably remains unchanged, such low affiliation with KKK groups probably resonates with extreme consequences. If an individual is a Klan member, then is very likely to be fired from a job. Such hostile reaction produces, to some degree, a self-regulation, i.e., sympathizers rather seek different more socially acceptable organizations. The SPLC's annual report highlights a role of Proud Boys¹ whose supporters are usually taken over from other far-right groups (SPLC 2021a: 2-4).

The most prominent KKK groups

According to Southern Poverty Law Center, among the most prominent contemporary KKK groups in the United States belong: Loyal White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in North Carolina, Church of the National Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, Imperial Klans of America from Kentucky, and Knights of the Ku Klux Klan based in Arkansas (SPLC 2021b).

Promotional activities of KKK groups

KKK groups promote their activities in two ways. Traditional spreading of fliers that are directly delivered to doorsteps or driveways is still an effective promotional tool. Such activities were spotted in 86 separate incidents when KKK groups intentionally distributed anti-Semitic, homophobic, and Islamophobic fliers in 2015

¹ Proud Boys describe themselves as a men's organization for "Western chauvinists" opposing left-wing activists. The group's ideological standpoints are associated with anti-homosexual, anti-Muslim, anti-immigration, and in some cases anti-Semitic rhetoric (Levy and Ailworth 2021).

across the US (ADL 2016: 5). Furthermore, many other neighborhoods have experienced the same activity, e.g., Leesburg, VA (Klein 2018), Carlisle, PA (Sauro 2019), or Newport Beach, CA (De Nova 2021).

More importantly, social media plays a vital role in communication among dispersed KKK groups. It provides a cheap instrument allowing wider recruitment of new members and sympathizes not only in the United States. When the Western-based social media companies had started banning accounts of alleged hate groups, their successor immediately emerged. The Russian-based VKontakte¹ has become a stronghold for far-right entities including KKK groups. Although VK claims that 7.9 million posts were removed from January to November 2018 (Farivar 2019), weak terms of service allow sharing hate-filled memes, praising Adolf Hitler, anti-immigration and anti-Semitic content without any possible consequential legal repercussions. These alarming pro-Ku Klux Klan posts are easily accessible.²

KKK groups as insurgencies

Following part provides evaluation of KKK groups based on debated concepts of insurgencies. Each parameter is independently assessed. The results follow in a subsequent section.

The first parameter

Positive evaluation. KKK groups intentionally exploit social, economic, and religious grievances through historical narratives emphasizing the role of the first Klan. Racial segregation is promoted in order to reestablish functional white society reflecting the Confederate States of America. Economic grievances are tied to immigration that allow blaming the federal government for biased wealth distribution. Therefore, KKK groups perceive themselves as community organizations securing the well-being of the white race. Religious grievances are not fully employed, prevalence of Christianity is dominant in the United States, nevertheless, preservation of the status quo is the primary goal. Besides that, every ideological claim was supported by a Biblical reference. Furthermore, Klansmen repeatedly pointed out the Holy War that should preserve the white race and Christianity.

The second parameter

Negative assessment. Discovered evidence does not suggest direct hostility against the federal or state governments that would potentially lead to a secession. Narratives connecting contemporary status quo with conspiracies are acknowledged, nevertheless, they are insufficient to demonstrate intentions to undermine/overthrow the existing system. Minor correlation is visible in social order, Klansmen unanimously support racial segregation. Steven admits violent coercion if non-white population does not comply. Nevertheless, hostility toward the whole system is the key variable, violent

¹ VKontakte is a Russian-based social media platform, i.e., Russian version of Facebook. Recent statistics suggest that by December 2020 VK had around 66.6 million monthly mobile active users (Statista 2021).

² Accessibility of those posts is so high that even an unregistered user can within a couple of minutes find pro-KKK groups flooded by outrageous content. This experience was provided by the author.

activities perpetrated against any group would be unquestionably suppressed by the American law enforcement.

The third parameter

Negative evaluation. KKK groups argue that the United States belongs to the white race, therefore, other races should be relocated. Moreover, do not aspire to gain control over the country. They consider themselves as “tools” of restoration, not governance.

The fourth parameter

Neutral assessment. There is no empirical evidence linking KKK groups with direct involvement in any violent activity. When terrorist attacks are perpetrated, individuals act alone. Nevertheless, Nesser’s approach toward *lone wolf terrorism* can reflect these actions. Klansmen act independently, fueled by the existing ideology that presents the contemporary American environment as inevitably hostile against the white race. Steven’s statement admitting violent actions against non-white population should be considered by the law enforcement. Therefore, neutral evaluation is proposed, no empirical evidence supports such narrative.

The fifth parameter

Positive evaluation. KKK groups are semi-leaderless organizations, each group operates individually under a supervision of Grand Dragons (state leaders) and Imperial Wizards (national/regional leaders). All groups are connected through shared ideological beliefs, which might vary in some cases. Besides, KKK groups have successfully shifted internal and external communication to social media, especially the Russian-based VKontakte allowing them to connect all groups as well as their sympathizers in the United States and elsewhere.

Table 1 – Graphically presented results of operationalized parameters (own processing)

Parameter	Evaluation
<i>Exploitation of grievances (cultural, economic, ethnic/racial, or religious)</i>	+
<i>Opposition to the status quo</i>	-
<i>Pursuing a statehood</i>	-
<i>Engagement in violent activities</i>	neutral
<i>Hierarchical or leaderless organizational structure</i>	+*

*Proposed semi-leaderless organizational structure better reflects the reality due to the existence of more Imperial Wizards.

Results

No organization like the unitary Ku Klux Klan exists, this narrative remains connected to the first and second Klan. Such perception ought to be replaced by individual observation of each group. A term *KKK groups* has been operationalized. Nevertheless, the Ku Klux Klan label is acceptable when it comes to non-academic literature. Academic debates must avoid using the prevalent term Ku Klux Klan.

Two formulated parameters were positively, two negatively and one neutrally evaluated. Based on the factual evidence, KKK groups are not insurgencies, two contradictory factors provide the explanation. Firstly, a statehood is not being sought. They consider the United States as a territory belonging to the white race that is simultaneously usurped by other races. Besides that, no support for a rebellion was found. Although full compliance with the federal government is missing, KKK groups do not subvert the status quo. They perceive themselves as “tools” whose presence should trigger restoration of social order in the country, do not strive for power. Willingness to engage in violent activities in order to ultimately shift racial relations in the American society is worrying but does not necessarily separate KKK groups from other far-right entities. Therefore, KKK groups should be perceived similarly like neo-Nazis or paramilitary militias. Secondly, insurgencies use directly targeted violence or terrorist attacks. Although violent activities have been unarguably perpetrated by Klansmen, or sympathizers affiliated with KKK groups, there is no direct conjuncture between them and any existing group. On the other hand, KKK groups positively correlate with insurgencies thanks to exploitation of social/economic/racial grievances as well as hierarchical structure that reflects, to some degree, the model of leaderless organization.

KKK groups employ narratives that are based on white supremacy, racial segregation, homophobia, antisemitism, Christian Identity, and neo-Nazism. They can be conceptualized as far-right entities that promote racial segregation with a radical view of Christianity exploited to either dehumanize minority groups like homosexuals, ethnic/racial minorities or to legitimize their beliefs through Biblical references.

Although the third generation had undergone significant changes in the 1980s and 1990s, contemporary KKK groups are incomparably different. Traditional political parties transform during their existence as well, however, the article claims that KKK groups have been fundamentally altered in recent years and the definition of the third Klan simply does not apply. Therefore, the article proposes the existence of the fourth generation whose primary activities have been shifted to the online environment that connects all groups and recruits new sympathizers nationally and internationally. Moreover, its ideological standpoints have changed as well. Newly founded KKK groups have adopted neo-Nazism that compounds with the traditional Klan's ideology. Although the fourth generation shares numerous similarities with its predecessors, empirical activities differ.

Conclusion

Legacy of the Ku Klux Klan will survive forever in the hearts and minds of many Americans. No other organization disposes such influence without having a wide network of supporters. Every movement should be perceived by its current position, historical narratives are just exploited and used in recruitment.

In the article KKK groups were analyzed and challenged by the theoretical concept of insurgencies. Although gained findings did not prove any connection of KKK groups with insurgencies, their historical development, position within the far-right family, empirical activities, and ideological standpoints were debated.

Based on the empirical analysis the existence of the fourth Klan was proposed. The article admits that deeper qualitative research done throughout a collection of

primary data, i.e., direct interviews with Klansmen, would have served as stronger factual evidence strengthening this claim. However, presented findings can serve as the groundwork for future research as well as the first attempt that precedes further observation of the Ku Klux Klan's fourth generation.

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Fig. 1 – KKK's cross lighting, SS Bolts and the Totenkopf in the foreground VICE. (2013, June 6). *The KKK vs. the Crips vs. Memphis City Council (Full Length)* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUnobHHAKxo>

SUMMARY

The article debates the contemporary Ku Klux Klan regarding its historical legacy influencing the American society. It is examined through employment of theoretical approaches focused on insurgencies. Five parameters are operationalized based on the literature review and frame the article's research design. The empirical development of the Ku Klux Klan in the last decade serves as the main data source. Moreover, five different interviews with Klansmen are observed. In the conclusion the existence of the Klan's fourth generation is proposed as well as a conceptualization of employed ideology. Moreover, it provides an empirical overview of its existence.

Key words: The Ku Klux Klan, KKK groups, far-right, racial segregation, ideology, insurgency.

RESUMÉ

ZILVAR, Martin: SOUČASNÝ KU KLUX KLAN JAKO POVSTALECKÁ ORGANIZACE

Článek se zaměřuje na současný Ku Klux Klan a jeho historický odkaz dodnes ovlivňující americkou společnost. Samotná analýza je postavena na teoretických přístupech debatujících povstalecké organizace. Na základě práce s existující literaturou operacionalizuje pět parametrů měření. Empirický vývoj Ku Klux Klanu v poslední dekádě slouží jako primární zdroj dat článku, zároveň pracuje s pěti dostupnými rozhovory se členy Ku Klux Klanu. V závěru navrhuje existenci čtvrté generace Ku Klux Klanu spolu s konceptualizací využívané ideologie. Současně poskytuje empirický přehled aktivit spojených s existencí Ku Klux Klanu.

Klíčová slova: Ku Klux Klan, KKK skupiny, krajní pravice, rasová segregace, ideologie, povstaectví.