

# Using OSINT in Times of Social Unrest

## Capitol Hill Riots Intelligence Report



# INTRODUCTION

In democracies, demonstrating is a legitimate way for citizens to let their officials know how they feel about important topics and try to change policies or attitudes. Peaceful demonstrations are powerful to keep the checks and balances in democracies. As we have seen over the ages (going back to Roman times), once demonstrations turn into riots, democracies are shaken to the core. During a riot, the fine line between being an activist and a criminal is often crossed.

For law enforcement, restoring and keeping order is a challenge. It involves identifying the agitators, those actors who believe that violent means justify the cause, and those who join demonstrations (often in other cities) to create trouble. Law enforcement needs to have the tools to identify and separate the bad apples from the rest to protect the fundamental democratic right to peaceably demonstrate.

This report will provide an open-source investigation perspective to cover this event **before, during, and after** the riots using the Cobwebs Tangles platform.

- The context of recent riots/civil unrest in the USA
- Pre-Event
- Situational Awareness
- Post-Event
- How OSINT assists law enforcement officers and investigators
- Why using a WEBINT solution is key for successful intervention

# BACKGROUND

On January 6, 2020, Congress convened at the U.S. Capitol to count the electoral votes of the 2020 presidential election, to declare Joe Biden the winner despite strong opposition from Trump administration and supporters. Demonstrators from all over the country traveled to Washington D.C. to protest President Trump losing the election.

The protestors claimed election fraud, government corruption, unfair democratic processes, and more. In particular, the Proud Boys group, which is known for promoting and endorsing violence, organized a call to action, instructing their members to travel to the nation's capital to protest. While the right to protest is guaranteed by the Constitution, any violent acts associated with such a demonstration are illegal.

# THE CONTEXT OF RECENT RIOTS IN THE USA

In general, there are various types of riots. Each type dictates how quickly and effectively law enforcement can plan and react. The table below lists the different types of riots and the typical response of law enforcement to each one of them.

Type of Riot	Description	Characteristics
<b>CSR</b>	Celebratory Spontaneous Riots (CSR) most often occur immediately following a major sports victory but can also occur after political or other victories that galvanize large groups.	CSR most often occur in the immediate vicinity of the event but can also occur in places like the town around a college campus or the streets of a major city.
<b>SRCE</b>	Spontaneous Riots due to a Controversial Event (SRCE) occur most frequently in heavily populated areas where masses of people can either quickly pour out of homes or quickly congregate by driving or using public transit.	The most egregious agitators and clear leaders who incite rioting must be quickly arrested. Agencies must monitor social media and arrest those who electronically incite as well.
<b>ORCSR</b>	Organized Riots in Continuation of a Spontaneous Riot (ORCSR) can occur with amazing speed, fueled by opportunistic organizers who are ready and willing to turn nearly any controversy into a prolonged event.	Law enforcement agencies and affected business entities should scour media and social media for events and be prepared to act.
<b>ROP</b>	Riots in Organized Protests (ROP) happen when large planned event protests get out of control and result in rioting.	Law enforcement agencies can prepare for such events and carefully monitor crowd size and sentiment.

(Source: Joel McNelly, Police Commander specializing in Intelligence, Investigations, Physical Security, Risk Assessment, and Leadership in [American Security Today](#))

*Figure 1 - The four types of riots*

## PRE-EVENT

In the days preceding the event, law enforcement can leverage Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) solution such as Cobwebs to analyze social media and other forums automatically and effectively. Apart from identifying persons of interest, gaining insight into groups instigating rioting, plans to turn peaceful demonstrations into riots, the pinpointing of exact locations in real-time is essential to prevent escalations. Cobwebs WEBINT platform does just that, as shown below. The table below shows the four different analysis methods that the platform uses.

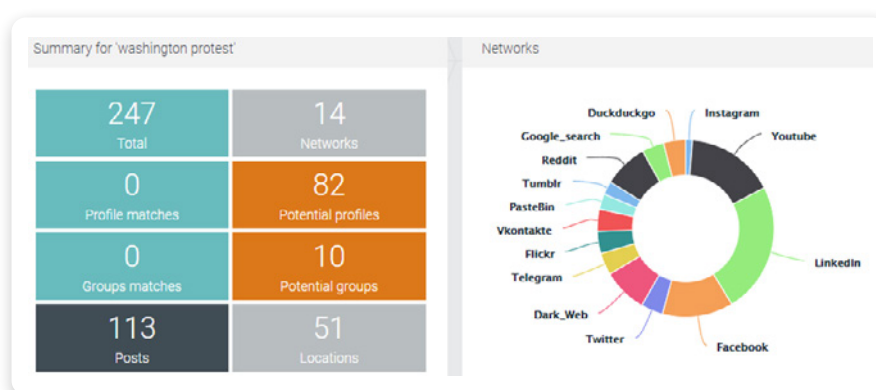
Analysis Method	Analytic Question	Value for Investigations
<b>Anomalies Detection</b>	What happened?	Find suspicious behaviors and spatial outliers
<b>Pattern Recognition</b>	Can it happen?	Probability of similar occasions and in a specific location
<b>Hot Spot Regions</b>	Where does it happen?	Highlight location data points density, frequency, and appearance
<b>Predictive Analysis</b>	What could happen?	Predict future events and trigger alerts

*Figure 2 - Analysis Methods*

To gain situational awareness and public safety alerts surrounding the planned events, initial automated and continued searches using the Tangles platform was conducted around main event rel popular hashtags, keywords, slogans, and phrases including:

- #dcprotest
- Election fraud
- #Stopthesteal
- Proud boys
- #Wildelection

The search results were displayed in the user-friendly GUI. Figure 3 shows the 247 search results for the keyword “Washington protest” broken down by social media networks, posts, and potential profiles and groups of interest.



*Figure 3 - Search results for the keyword “Washington protest”*

The instigators used social media to not only spread their ideology, but also to coordinate and organize their protest.

The platform presented a strong indication of the extent of preparedness the day before the demonstration. Activists were discussing the demonstration plans and also organized transportation (keywords “rally” and “caravan” in red) to the event (See Figure 4).



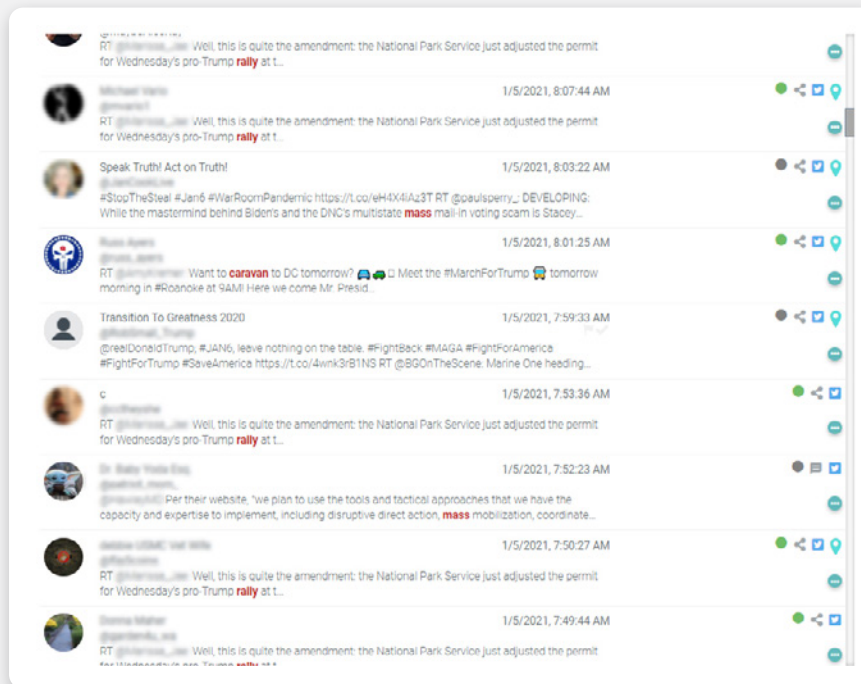


Figure 4 - Posts with used keywords

The analysis results also showed the social media posters that were “Top Influencers”. The figure below shows the number of “Liked” and “Shared” posts of these Top Influencers, indicating which ones are potentially the leaders.

Below are two examples of social media posts from a Top Influencers enticing violence, in this case, arson and coordinated violence.

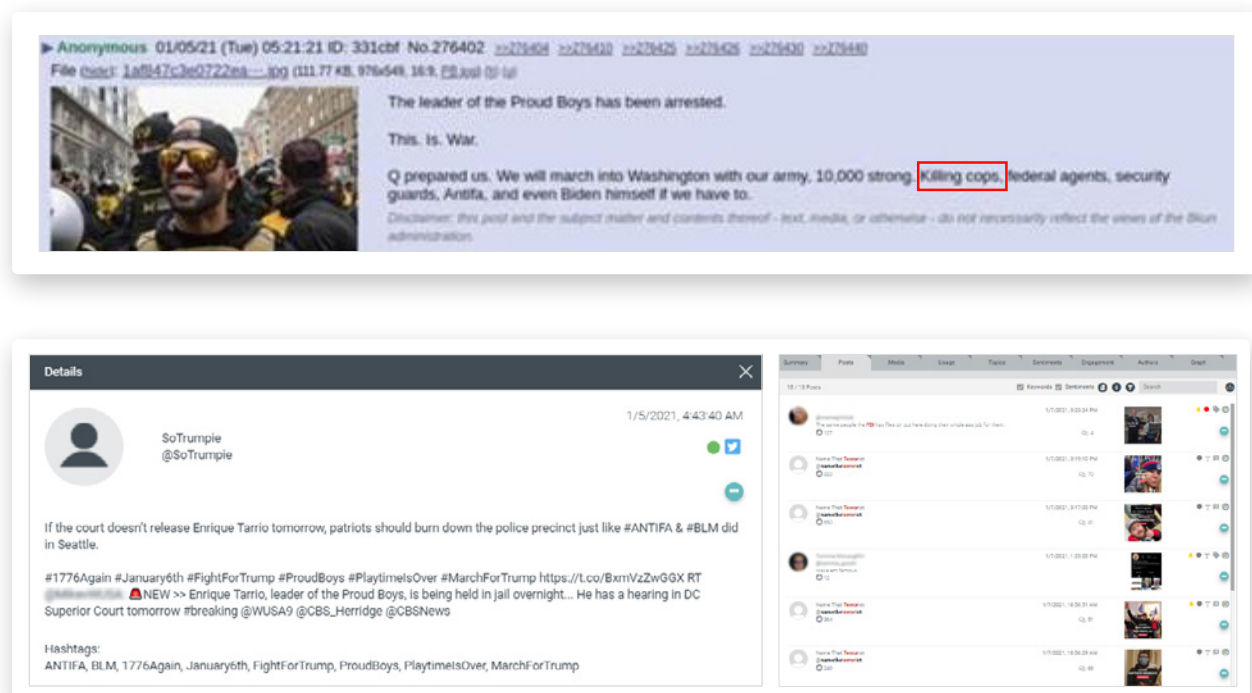


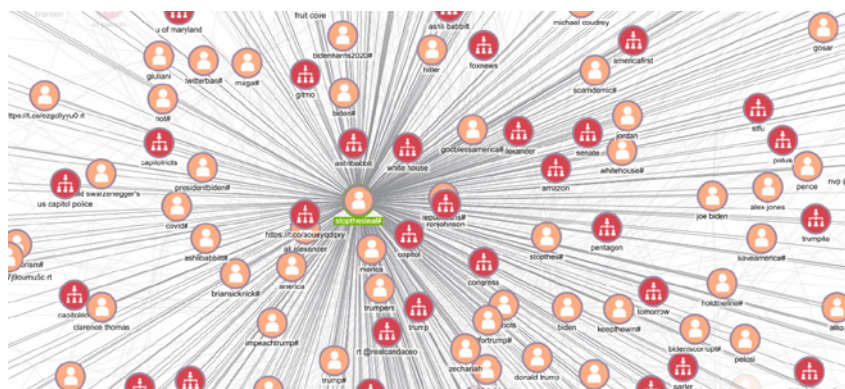
Figure 5 - Examples of posts by Top Influencers

Many posts containing certain keywords and slogans were spread by influencers and their followers, reaching white-supremacist groups, conspiracy theorists, and extremists who in turn shared these posts adding their keywords and slogans to promote their own agenda. The platform mapped all these connections and presented them in the GUI shown below.



*Figure 6 - Visual representation of the spread of a social media post*

The different keywords and slogans were used in combination with a popular keyword to gather and influence more people. Figure 7 shows how the Top Influencer in the middle and his followers use keywords (red circles) to spread the message. This helps law enforcement to understand what the issues of that interest the rioters are. Keywords used were “Capitol” and “Congress”.



*Figure 7 - Spread of posts to followers using keywords*

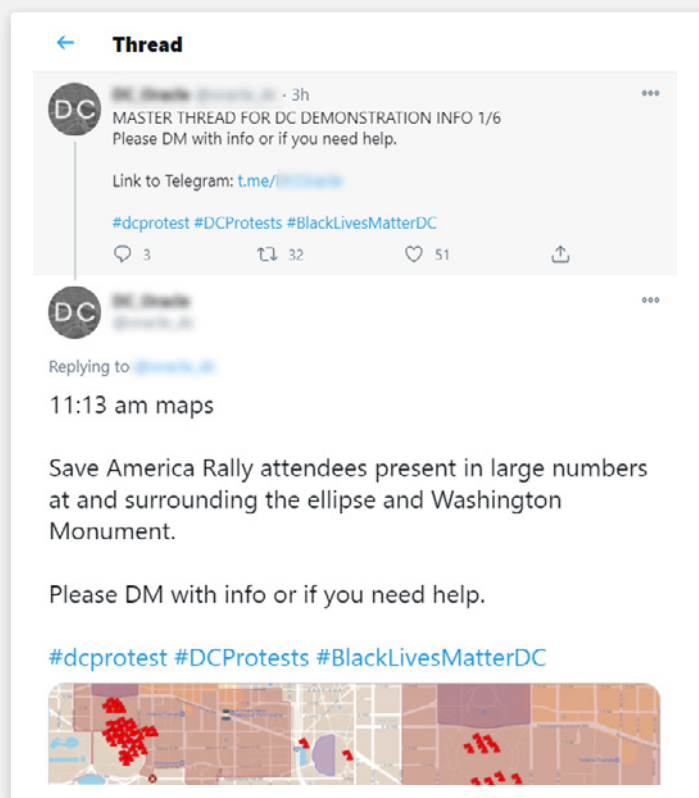
To prepare for the event, authorities can use special features of the Tangles platform such as Dictionaries and Monitoring.

The Dictionary allow users to predefine a list of key terms for the system to search and issue alerts when the platform finds one or more of these key terms. These alerts were displayed in the user-friendly GUI as pop-ups on the screen and sent as email alerts.

## DURING THE EVENT - SITUATIONAL AWARENESS

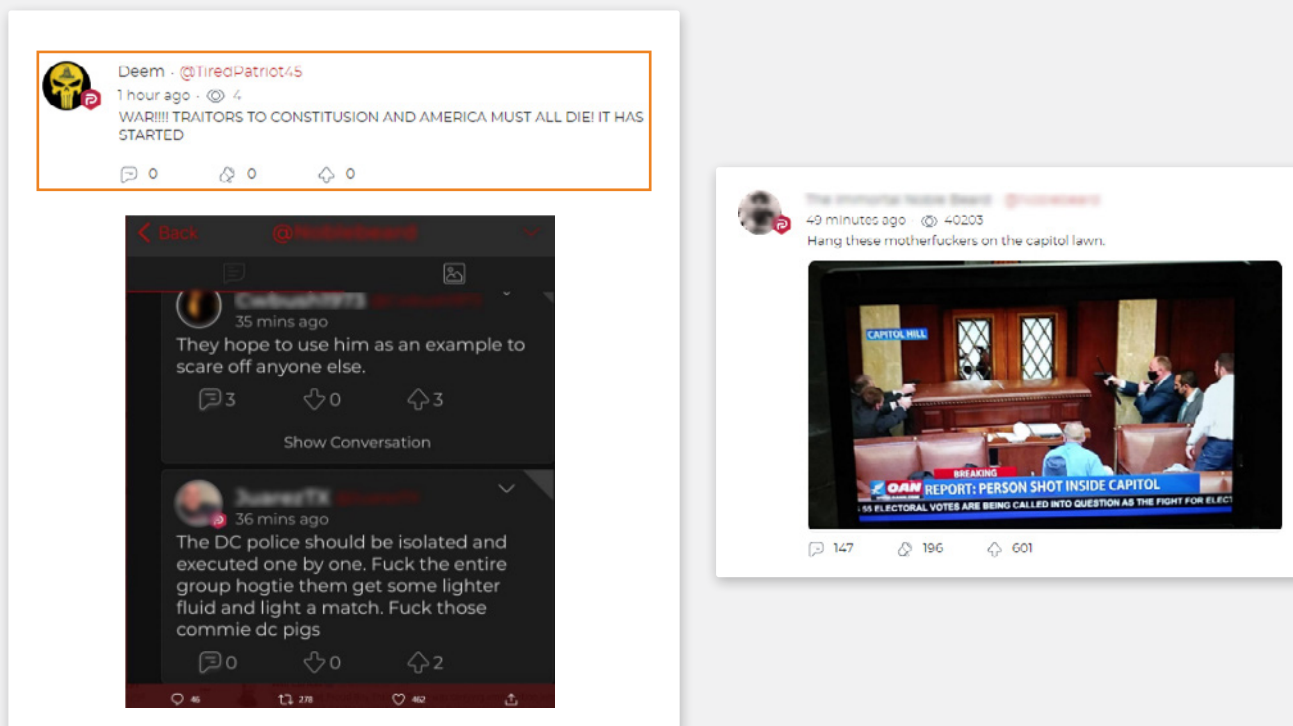
The WEBINT platform also enables geofencing, which allowed law enforcement to monitor suspicious social media activities related to Washington DC for situational awareness. Certain keywords were used to aggregate live posts in the area, which assisted in identifying posts containing critical intelligence during the event.

An example is shown in Figure 8.



*Figure 8 - Example of a situational awareness post*

Rioters put themselves all over social media, taking selfies and posting photos and videos, and boasting about their exploits (in many cases, criminal offenses) in posts and comments. Cobwebs' OSINT solution collected these from social media, and other online sources, to use as evidence in criminal procedures. Below are two examples of social media posts of persons of interest promoting violence and criminal acts.



*Figure 9 - Examples of social media posts of persons of interest*

Collection of those social media posts helped law enforcement to capture related open-source information in real-time during the event. The user-driven capturing capability of the platform allows for posts to be kept by the system, as evidence, for follow-up prior to accounts been taken down by the service providers.

## POST-EVENT

Several individuals suspected of being rioters were arrested in the days following the violent event. In an unprecedented first, the FBI posted on its [website](#):

“The FBI is seeking information that will assist in identifying individuals who are actively instigating violence in Washington, DC. The FBI is accepting tips and **digital media** depicting rioting and violence in the U.S. Capitol Building and the surrounding area in Washington, DC, on January 6, 2021.”

Law enforcement has been using social media and internet activities before to track down persons of interest. After the Portland riot in July 2020, law enforcement looked at the social media feeds and live streams of suspects to make their case. However, combing through the huge amount of data on social media is time-consuming, a luxury that law enforcement officers and agents don't have.



## Social Media Chatter Enticing Violence

"An online thread discussed specific calls for violence to include stating 'Be ready to fight. Congress needs to hear glass breaking, doors being kicked in, and blood from their BLM and Pantifa slave soldiers being spilled.'"

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FBI Norfolk | [Forbes](#)

The monitoring of social media allowed for capturing a significant amount of data relevant for law enforcement to use as evidence. Protesters posted about their own actions on social media, left comments in response to posted photos and videos, shared questionable images and videos, and even went on camera to state their cause and call for action. Some of the protesters who breached the U.S. Capitol incriminated themselves on social media or were identified and reported by family members, friends, neighbors, and associates. The platform captured and analyzed this data quickly and efficiently for actionable insights.

Based on the analysis of the recent Capitol riot, authorities are preparing themselves for the inauguration of Joe Biden, which will take place on January 20. Following the analyses that were conducted, the Department of Homeland Security is expected to "establish a security and federal force deployment plan for all federal property" in coordination with the departments of Defense and Justice, Congress, and the Supreme Court.

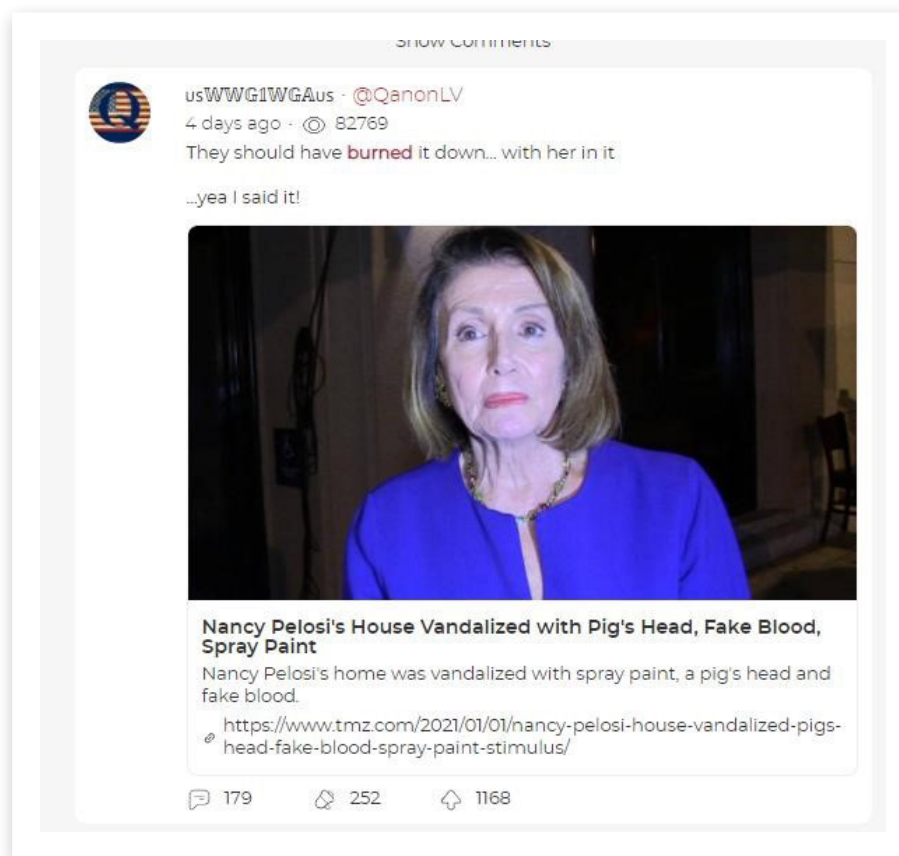
Defense officials will send as many as 20,000 National Guard troops to Washington, D.C. for the inauguration, which is twice the number of all troops stationed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Some National Guard troops are already stationed in the halls of the Capitol since January 13, 2021 to prevent escalation during the second impeachment voting.

The FBI also issued a bulletin warning of plans for armed protestors to demonstrate and "storm" government offices in all 50 states if Trump will be removed from office or on Biden's inauguration day.

# HOW LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS & INVESTIGATORS ARE ASSISTED BY OSINT

For gaining unmatched intelligence, a WEBINT solution uses open-source intelligence (OSINT) tools. A social network analysis of OSINT information allowed investigators to identify agitators who turn peaceful demonstrations into riots and persons of interest who are planning riots. By mapping and measuring the relationships between identified individuals and groups, future violence during demonstrations and riots can be prevented.

The platform also uses advanced AI and machine learning (ML) and Natural Language Processing (NLP) technologies. This enabled law enforcement and investigators to anonymously and automatically monitor and collect relevant content across social media. This helped law enforcement agencies to collect and analyze big data from social media in (near) real-time to identify rioters (Figure 9). They are also able to monitor social media within a tactical timeframe to prevent riots.



*Figure 10 - Social media post that traced back to a rioter*

The OSINT solution also assists authorities in their efforts to anticipate violence during future demonstrations by monitoring the social media presence of persons of interest and suspected agitators.

# THE REASON WHY USING A WEBINT SOLUTION IS KEY FOR SUCCESSFUL INTERVENTION

A powerful WEBINT solution handles huge amounts of data sources, conducts unconventional and jargon queries for data extraction, crawls, and extracts insights from existing and new social media that are becoming popular.

Law enforcement can monitor social media and process vast amounts of social media data to detect and analyze the results automatically and use the streamlined, automated insights for immediate action.

## The Importance Of An AI-Powered Webint Solution

“Our AI-powered WEBINT solution enables law enforcement to collect and analyze relevant data from social networks using keywords, slogans, and phrases and present for actionable results follow-up. The solutions also allow for monitoring social media to prevent riots.”

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Law Enforcement Officer | USA

# GLOSSARY

<b>CSR</b>	Celebratory Spontaneous Riots
<b>FBI</b>	Federal Bureau of Investigation
<b>ML</b>	Machine Learning
<b>NLP</b>	Natural Language Processing
<b>ORCSR</b>	Organized Riots in Continuation of a Spontaneous Riot
<b>OSINT</b>	Open-Source Intelligence
<b>ROP</b>	Riots in Organized Protests
<b>SRCE</b>	Spontaneous Riots due to a Controversial Event
<b>WEBINT</b>	Web Intelligence



# ABOUT COBWEBS TECHNOLOGIES

Cobwebs Technologies is a global leader in Web Intelligence providing innovative solutions tailored to operational needs of the public and the private sectors by identifying threats and generating insights in real-time.

The Company's advanced artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms deliver powerful threat intelligence by deciphering the intricacies of web layers and analyzing the complex details of structured and unstructured data. Its web intelligence platform monitors these vast sources of data for revealing hidden clues and generating insights for intelligence-enhanced security to keep the world safer.



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