

4 Proud Boys, including leader Enrique Tarrio, guilty of seditious conspiracy for Jan. 6 Capitol attack

Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio and three lieutenants were found guilty Thursday of entering a seditious conspiracy against the U.S. government that culminated in the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol attack. A fifth Proud Boy was acquitted of the charge.

Prosecutors painted Tarrio as the leader of the plot, despite not physically being in Washington that day. His arrest on Jan. 4, 2021, on unrelated charges and the stabbing of several Proud Boys at a protest in December 2020 turned members of the group against District of Columbia law enforcement and served as motivators to try to stop certification of the 2020 presidential election, the government claimed.

But Tarrio's attorneys argued that the Miami Proud Boy is the government's scapegoat for the Capitol attack. The true culprit of Jan. 6, they said, was former President Donald Trump, who inflamed a mob of supporters and directed them toward the Capitol.

"It was Donald Trump's words, it was his motivation, it was his anger that caused what occurred on Jan. 6," Tarrio attorney Nayib Hassan said in his closing remarks. "They want to use Enrique Tarrio as a scapegoat for Donald Trump and those in power."

Defendants Ethan Nordean, Joseph Biggs and Zachary Rehl also were found guilty of seditious conspiracy. The jury decided later Thursday that defendant Dominic Pezzola, who is well known for using a police riot shield to break open a window of the Capitol, is not guilty of the charge.

U.S. District Judge Timothy Kelly, who is overseeing the case, instructed the jury that they could return a partial verdict on any charges at any time. Kelly declared the jury hung on whether Pezzola conspired to obstruct the certification of the 2020 election and a second count of assaulting, resisting and impeding an officer. He also declared the jury hung on two charges for defendants Nordean, Biggs, Rehl and Tarrio.

All defendants were convicted of obstructing the certification of the 2020 presidential election, and all but Pezzola were convicted of conspiring to obstruct it. The defendants also were all convicted of conspiring to prevent an officer from discharging their duties, obstructing law enforcement and at least one count of destruction of government property. Pezzola was found guilty of a second count.

Each dressed in a full suit, the Proud Boys stood shoulder-to-shoulder and were expressionless as the verdicts were read.

The Justice Department's conviction of Tarrio and three others on the rare, Civil War-era crime bolsters its account that the Capitol attack endangered American law and order. The Justice

Department also earned several high-profile seditious conspiracy convictions of members of the right-wing militia group Oath Keepers, including leader Stewart Rhodes.

Attorney General Merrick Garland Thursday lauded the work of federal prosecutors, FBI agents and analysts.

"Our work will continue," Garland said, adding that the verdicts were an example of the government's "steadfast commitment to defend the American people and American democracy."

Garland said the evidence presented at trial demonstrated the "central role" members of the extremist Proud Boys played in the effort to block the transfer of power.

In the jury trial's 15 weeks, heated legal disputes, regular bickering between attorneys and plain bad luck caused extensive delays to the proceeding that was once projected to last just six weeks. Kelly, the judge, thanked the jury for its diligence and patience before dismissing them.