

Montana's Good Old Boy Club

How One Man Was Bullied Out of Democracy — and How the Playbook Looks a Lot Like Saul Alinsky's

WRITTEN BY
Nathan White

In Montana, small-town politics are supposed to be about neighbors looking out for neighbors. But for Nathan White of Choteau, running for mayor meant stepping into a hornet's nest — a "good old boy" club determined to protect itself at any cost.

What followed wasn't politics as usual. It was intimidation, retaliation, and, in White's words, "a conspiracy to violate civil rights." And disturbingly, the tactics used against him mirror several of the strategies laid out in Saul Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals* — a manual originally meant to help the powerless challenge entrenched authority, now seemingly flipped and used by those in power to protect their own positions.

Ballot Cleansing: Democracy Made to Disappear

After earning 6% of the vote in a 2019 special election with minimal campaigning, White planned a full-fledged run in 2021. Support poured in from judges and council members alike — but just as the filing deadline approached, he was arrested on spurious charges and whisked 99 miles away to a Fort Benton detention center. He missed the deadline — and his campaign was erased.

This wasn't an accident. It was a calculated act of ballot cleansing, where law enforcement and elected officials conspired to remove a challenger from the race entirely.

Alinsky Parallel — Rule 12: "Go after people and not institutions; people hurt faster than institutions." By targeting White personally — rather than debating his ideas — they eliminated the threat without ever having to face him at the ballot box.

"Get Out of Our Town"

White remembers the moment things turned ugly.

"There was a gal in a white Toyota pickup," he says. "She told me the best thing I could do was to get my stuff and get out of our town. A gentleman in a red Dodge echoed her words — he said me leaving town would be best for all."

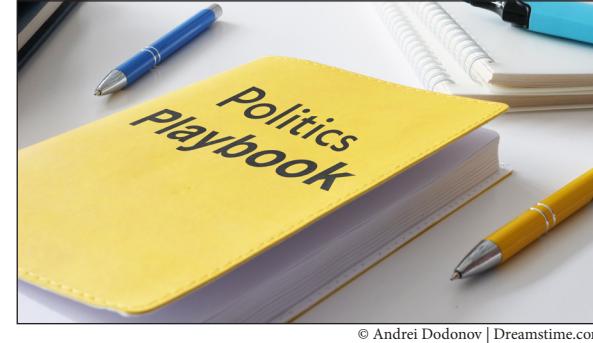
That hostility wasn't random — it followed his criticism of the Teton County Sheriff's Office at a 2019 mayoral forum, where he pointed to multiple instances of misconduct by officers. The response was swift: City Attorney Jennifer Stutz — whose husband faced accusations of abusing teenage girls — "went hysterical," White says. She threatened him with disorderly conduct charges to silence his voice.

Alinsky Parallel — Rule 5: "Ridicule is man's most potent weapon." The public shaming and threats weren't just about silencing him in that moment — they were meant to make him a cautionary tale for anyone else thinking of speaking up.

Erasing a Citizen

The attacks escalated into attempts to scrub White from civic life.

"On multiple occasions, Mayor Hindoien falsely reported to law enforcement officers that I had no reason to be in the Choteau City office because I didn't live in Choteau," White says. "The mayor knew my home was



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in Choteau. Trying to unlawfully ban me from a government building, open to the public, was an attempt to cancel and erase me by an unlawful suspension of civil rights."

Bodycam footage confirms the conspiracy. It captured a Teton County officer joking that the sheriff's department only followed the law "when necessary," and mocking White with the mayor for being "all about the Constitution." It didn't stop there. "The footage shows them openly plotting to entrap me by deliberate provocation," White recalls. "And the mayor was caught belittling my religious practices."

Alinsky Parallel — Rule 13: "Pick the target, freeze it, personalize it, and polarize it."

White became the target — frozen in the public mind as a "problem" — making it easier to justify extraordinary measures against him.

The Election Administrator Incident — Alinsky in Action

On October 30, 2020, White visited the Teton County Courthouse during early voting to personally speak with a county official about discrimination against residents with medical exemptions from mask mandates. That's when the Election Administrator stormed over, yelling and demanding White leave, claiming he was "disrupting the voting process."

Alinsky Parallel — Rule 5 (Ridicule) and Rule 13 (Freeze and Polarize):

- Freeze:** The Administrator's loud, public confrontation froze White in the role of "disruptor" in front of witnesses.
- Polarize:** The scene forced bystanders to choose sides instantly — either with the official or with the man now framed as a troublemaker.
- Ridicule:** The yelling itself created a spectacle, making White appear combative even though the loudest voice in the room was not his.

On October 31, 2020, White was arrested at home while brushing his teeth. The charge? "Disrupting a lawful assembly or public meeting."

But there was no assembly. No meeting.

The so-called "assembly" was his visit to the Teton County Courthouse while early voting was occurring. Residents were registering to vote or casting absentee ballots — a private act, not a public gathering.

"I wasn't disrupting anyone," he says. "I was exercising my rights and addressing how people with medical conditions were being treated unfairly under the mask mandate."

A voter even told an officer that Nathan hadn't distracted her at all. She voted and left without issue. Still, prosecutors bent the law until it broke.

"There are no Montana cases calling voting a 'lawful assembly,'" White points out. "The term doesn't even appear in the election statutes. They just made it up."

To him, it was straight out of *Alice in Wonderland*. "Humpty Dumpty tells Alice, 'When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean.' That's exactly what they did to me."

This wasn't just a personal attack — it was a

chilling example of how far the good old boy club would go to silence dissent.

Alinsky Parallel — Rule 4: "Make the enemy live up to their own book of rules." Here, the "rules" of public order were selectively enforced — but only against White. The same conduct (raising one's voice) was ignored when done by the official.

Weaponizing a Vague Law

White's arrest relied on Montana's disorderly conduct statute, which criminalizes "loud or unusual noises" without defining them. This vagueness allows selective enforcement — a hallmark of political suppression.

Alinsky Parallel — Rule 10: "The major premise for tactics is the development of operations that will maintain a constant pressure upon the opposition." By keeping White under constant legal pressure, they drained his time, resources, and energy — making it harder for him to mount any political challenge.

Denying the People Their Rights

What happened to White fits a larger pattern: Teton County and Choteau officials have a history of shutting citizens out of government.

The Montana Supreme Court has already ruled that City Attorney Stutz illegally closed public interviews. Even Sheriff Keith Van Setten acknowledged possible open meeting violations. And Mayor Stewart Merja admitted officials intentionally made citizens feel threatened.

Alinsky Parallel — Rule 8: "Keep the pressure on. Never let up." From closed meetings to public intimidation, the pressure never stopped — ensuring dissenters stayed on the defensive.

Mocked for Faith and Health

Once arrested, White says he was humiliated and denied medical attention. "When I begged for care, they tied me into a chair. One officer pulled my hair, another screamed in my face." Bodycam footage caught officials mocking his faith and constitutional beliefs — turning civic engagement into a gauntlet of personal attacks.

The Fall of Mayor Hindoien

In February 2025, after more than four years in office, Mayor Chris Hindoien announced during a city council meeting that he would resign effective March 4 rather than face a recall election. The recall petition — driven largely by frustration over his handling of the city's law enforcement agreement with the Teton County Sheriff's Office — had already been validated. Hindoien had been a vocal advocate for Choteau to have its own police department, a stance that divided the community. He admitted the fight over the issue was "a hill I chose to live and die on" — and ultimately, it ended his tenure.

After his resignation, Council President Stewart Merja became interim mayor, and Hindoien and his wife relocated to Helena to run their insurance business.

Why It Matters

Nathan White has stepped away from public meetings. "I will not be part of Choteau's displays of corruption and hatred," he says. "I look forward to mediation."

But his story is a warning: when government officials adopt the tactics of radical disruption to silence those who challenge them, democracy itself is at risk. And when vague statutes are used to criminalize civic engagement, constitutional rights become collateral damage.

It's not just about one man—it's about ensuring that public service serves the people—and that speaking truth to power doesn't become a crime. ☮