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# Texas Sheriff Perceptions of the Militia Movement

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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John F. Fisher

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Walden University  
2016

Abstract

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by

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MA, Sul Ross State University, 2007

MS, Sul Ross State University, 2005

BS, Angelo State University, 2001

Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services Specializing in Criminal Justice

Walden University

August 2016

## Abstract

With the election of President Barack Obama, the United States has seen a steady increase in the number of right-wing militia groups. The Southern Poverty Law Center and the Department of Homeland Security have claimed that the various militia groups are a dangerous domestic terrorism threat. Law enforcement perceptions of the threat that these militia groups pose served as the focus of inquiry in this multiple case study. These perceptions were explored through the theoretical frameworks of groupthink, Credulous Bayesianism, and nudge theory. A purposeful sample of 12 local sheriffs in Texas were interviewed in an attempt to identify common themes regarding their perceptions of militia groups. Two common themes emerged from the interviews, which showed that sheriffs' firsthand knowledge and experience with members of the militia were instrumental in their approach to militias. If sheriffs had direct contact with the militia, then they did not believe that it posed a threat to society. However, if sheriffs did not have firsthand experience with the militia and depended on the media for their opinions, then they followed the narrative that the militia groups are dangerous. This research project showed that sheriffs' direct interaction with the militia can decrease law enforcement's fear of militia groups, allowing sheriffs to detect, investigate, and prosecute any actual threats from militia groups to make their communities safer while protecting the rights of all citizens.

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## **Dedication**

This project is dedicated to the local law enforcement officers who spend 24 hours a day seven days a week protecting this country from all threats foreign and domestic.

## **Acknowledgments**

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

“FEAR” is a word that you do not necessarily associate with anti-government militia groups, but it been taken up as the name of left-wing anarchist militia group composed of disillusioned active duty military and veterans stationed at Fort Stewart, Georgia (Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium, 2013). For this group, FEAR is an acronym for “forever enduring, always ready.” In 2011, the members of FEAR had planned to take over Fort Stewart and to assassinate President Obama (Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium, 2013). The leader and founder of this militia group was Pvt. Isaac Aguigui, who, along with his chief lieutenants Pvt. Christopher Salmon and Sgt. Anthony Peden, murdered a fourth member of the group Michael Roark and his girlfriend Tiffany York (Terry, 2013). In interviews with police, Aguigui stated that he killed Roark because he knew too much about the plans of FEAR (Terry, 2013). Reports regarding the size of FEAR are contradictory, ranging from just these four men all the way up to 200 people (Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium, 2013; Terry, 2013). The perception suggested by the media is that the anti-government militia is a dangerous threat seeking to overthrow the government and to bring anarchy to the nation.

The opposite of FEAR are the right-wing militia groups who are also showed to be a significant threat to domestic security. The thought of a group of armed civilians, such as those who were involved in the Passover Standoff of 2014 at the Cliven Bundy Ranch in Bunkerville, Nevada, April 14 and 15, 2014, causes trepidation for the government, the citizenry, and those watchdog organizations that track hate groups and militia groups (Wyler, 2014). The U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) claims that Cliven Bundy owes the federal government over \$1 million in grazing fees because his cows grazed on public land in Nevada (Caldwell,

2014). The BLM threatened to take the cattle that had grazed on this federally owned land and euthanize them, effectively euthanizing Bundy's livelihood as well (Wyler, 2014). Bundy brought his frustrations to Sean Hannity and Fox News, where it became apparent that the emotions of the militia had increased to the point there was a willingness to use violence against the government to protect the livelihood of the Bundy family (Redden, 2014).

The militia, led by the Oath Keepers (a nation-wide militia group consisting of former law enforcement officers and military veterans who have sworn to uphold the oath they took to defend the Constitution from all enemies foreign and domestic [Oath Keepers, 2012]), mobilized to show support for the Bundy family against the actions of the federal government (Finn, 2014). The militia chose this event, perceived as an assault on liberty and freedom, to stand up and fight against what the militia perceived as tyranny (Fields, 2014). The Oath Keepers demonstrated that they were ready to use violence against the government to protect the Constitution as they interpreted it (Caldwell, 2014). Because of the actions of the militia in defending the Bundy family ranching business, Senator Harry Reid of Nevada called the militia "domestic terrorists" and stated that the confrontation was not over and that a large number of people would be going to jail (CNN Political Unit, 2014). Whereas the militia led by the Oath Keepers were protesting a perceived injustice, Senator Reid labeled them in the media as domestic terrorists.

The United States has always fought perceived threats to the nation. As early as 1798, the United States enacted laws and policies, such as the Alien and Sedition Acts, that were intended to protect its people from the threat of attack from within the country. For those who hold power in the United States, the greatest perceived threat to the nation, even from its founding, has been political dissidents. In 1798, the Federalists, a political party led by Alexander Hamilton in opposition to Thomas Jefferson and the Democratic-Republicans, passed a series of laws known

as the Alien and Sedition Acts to protect the nation from attack, specifically from France (Kenneday, Bailey, & Piehl, 1993). However, these laws appeared to be nothing more than a diversion, enacted to protect the established Federalists from the political dissent of the Jeffersonian Republicans (Ghatak, 2011; Kenneday, Bailey, & Piehl, 1993). This practice of policing against perceived danger continued through the passage of laws ostensibly for the purpose of defending the nation against labor unions, communism, fascism, and even “the feebleminded” who supposedly posed a threat to the purity of the race against the peace and safety of the greater community (Ghatak, 2011; Grant, 1916; Lombardo, 2008). Many of these attacks against political dissidents were oppressive and violated the Constitution of the United States in an attempt to prevent or discourage citizens from standing against the government.

In 2016, right-wing militia groups are posing a challenge, and in some instances, a threat, to the federal government of the United States. In this study, I attempted to gain a greater understanding of the perceptions local law enforcement officials in Texas had of the domestic terrorism threat posed by the various militia groups. It is important to understand the perceptions held by law enforcement regarding the threat of the militia groups because this understanding can lead to a proactive community-oriented approach by law enforcement to detect, investigate, and prosecute these groups’ illegal activities, if any, without inflicting abuse or violating civil liberties--something that had occurred in this country in the past when the government confronted political dissidence.

In this chapter, I introduce the research project including the background of militia groups, in general, and their epidemic growth in the country. Militia groups first became popular in the United States during the Clinton Administration (1992-2000), but their number greatly diminished (149 identified groups) during the George W. Bush presidency (2000-2008). Since



the election of President Obama in 2008, militias have expanded by 819% to record numbers (Potok, 2014). Organizations such as the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) track these militia groups and their activities throughout the country. In this study, I analyzed the perceptions of militia groups held by county sheriffs in Texas, and of the influence these non-governmental organizations have on those perceptions.

Perception has been studied by a variety of researchers who are interested in understanding how people form their personal worldview. Understanding the perceptions of local county sheriffs in Texas regarding the threat posed by militia groups will make it possible to create a program to address any threats posed by these groups. Thaler and Sunstein (2008) and John, Smith, and Stoker (2009) suggested that perception can be altered through a process they have named “nudging.” Nudging suggests that individuals can change the opinions and perceptions of a group through the power of suggestion. Some people may be more susceptible to nudging because of Credulous Bayesianism. Credulous Bayesians consider all information unbiased and do not take into account the origins of the information (Glaeser & Sunstein, 2008). Credulous Bayesians target their enemies and people who are not part of the “in-group” with dehumanizing assaults (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). Nudging consists of the “in-group” creating a narrative that demonized the “out-group” (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008).

Law enforcement’s perception of militia groups and the threat they pose to society can dictate the content of future legislation and action taken against political dissenters. Also, the steps taken against militia groups and other political dissenters could evoke a violent response from these groups, such as was seen at the Bundy Ranch. If a greater understanding of the perceptions that sheriffs hold of militias can help to create a program that will prevent the types

of events witnessed at Ruby Ridge and Waco while attempting to address those perceived threats throughout the history of the country (Ghatak, 2011).

### **Background**

When conducting an academic literature review of sources published between 1993 and 2014, I found that most if not all of the literature during this period on the militia groups that formed during the Clinton presidency was written, in the wake of the disastrous events on Ruby Ridge in 1992 and the Waco Siege in 1993 (Bjelopera, 2012; Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2010). The reports on the anti-government militia groups focused on racial hate groups and not necessarily on the militia (Guilmartin, 2003). They focused on groups such as the Neo-Nazis, Aryan Nation (Lobb, 2001), the Ku Klux Klan, and the National Association for the Advancement of White People (Akins, 1998). The link between hate groups and Timothy McVeigh because he was reported to be a member of the Michigan Militia, although he denied the affiliation (Worthington, 1995). McVeigh had a copy of *The Turner Diaries* (1978) in his possession when he was arrested, and the Michigan Militia acknowledged that McVeigh and Terry Nichols had attended a few meetings, but they were denied membership because of their anti-American rhetoric (Guilmartin, 2003). *The Turner Diaries*, reported to have influenced McVeigh, is a story about the start of a new civil war in the United States based strictly on race (Guilmartin, 2003). The biggest problem found with these early research projects is that their conclusions could be wrong (Freilich & Pridemore, 2006). In their research, Freilich and Pridemore (2006) found that there was no link between a gun culture, hospitable political climate, female empowerment, minority empowerment, religious fundamentalism, and general economic deprivation to the number of militia groups as previously understood. They recommended that new hypotheses be investigated. Initiating a new exploration into militias is

important to determine what law enforcement knows about them and the extent of the domestic terrorism threat they pose to society.

Militia groups have had a long history in the United States. When someone talks about the militia, thoughts turn to the Minutemen who fought for independence in 1776. Thoughts also turn to the Second Amendment and the right to maintain a militia to keep and bear arms. Since Timothy McVeigh committed a terrorist act blowing up the Morrow Federal Building in Oklahoma City and killing 169 people, the term “militia” has taken on a whole new meaning (Potok, 2009). Militia groups today, as they were in 1776, are made up of private citizens who are at odds with their government, protesting and fighting against the policies of that government (Potok, 2013). In 1776, the militia fought against what it saw as a tyrannical king (Kennedy, Bailey, & Piehl, 1993). Today, the militia groups fight against what they view as a tyrannical president (SPLC, 2012). Media reports indicate that militia groups are comprised of hate and anger and are not based on any specific Race, class, or religion, but on ideology (EU Times, 2013). The country is dividing by political ideology, and the divisions are becoming more extreme with every national event (Book, 2012).

In times of national crisis, Americans usually come together to defend against the threat until it has subsided, and this rally effect is seen in the actions of Americans regardless of racial or political ideology. When the country is in crisis, people come together to face the threat (Stapley, 2012). However, the threat of militia groups is different from other threats in that they are not outside threats posed against the United States like those of the terror attacks in New York and Washington D.C. on September 11, 2001. Militia groups are comprised of Americans who pose the threat of domestic terrorism in the United States.

Militia groups believe this perceived crisis is an internal crisis, fearing the collapse of the United States, caused by the government (Davison, 2006; EU Times, 2013). In this crisis, the perceived threats of government intrusion and social collapse have found some Americans split into two factions. The pro-government faction is rallying around the President and his policies, while the anti-government faction, within the United States, is rallying around the Constitution, in hopes of recruiting members to their struggle against the government and their interpretation that the Constitution is being shredded (Stapley, 2012).

Glaeser and Sunstein (2008) investigated the influence Credulous Bayesianism had on extremism and group polarization and suggested that Credulous Bayesianism, in which people give greater authority to information received from trusted sources than the information deserves, increases polarization. There are four possibilities to explain this polarization caused by Credulous Bayesianism. First, sources of information come from a single source such as MSNBC, CNN, or Fox News. Second, occasionally group members are not a random sample, skewing the results. Third, group members frame views to avoid group sanctions. Lastly, people have incentives to mislead their followers (Glaeser & Sunstein, 2008, p. 50).

With perfect Bayesianism, an individual will realize that the information that he or she possesses is not the whole picture and will move to the center politically to gain a better understanding (Glaeser & Sunstein, 2008). Credulous Bayesian influence also increases group polarization, but rather than moving toward the political center, Credulous Bayesianism pushes individuals further to the extremes. Credulous Bayesianism fails to correct the errors in information obtained by those influenced by group members (Glaeser & Sunstein, 2008). Glaeser and Sunstein (2008) concluded that radicalism and extremism increase through the lack of diversity within groups. Glaeser and Sunstein have found that extremist groups take advantage of

the fact that when there is no external input to ideas, thoughts, and beliefs, people will only listen to that one source of information. Therefore silencing outgroup voices and information, causing extremism and radicalism to increase (Glaeser & Sunstein, 2008).

The militia groups are rallying around the Constitution in response to what they deem as an encroachment upon the rights and liberties established therein (SPLC, 2012). The rally effect arises in this country during times of national crisis. For example, December 7, September 11, and the Oklahoma City bombing all saw the country come together during a period of crisis to face the threat and overcome the disaster (Stapley, 2012). During the Clinton presidency, the militia movement emerged and threatened violence to achieve its goals and objectives (Davison, 2006). In the 1990s, the militia movement increased membership because of the federal government's actions in Waco and Ruby Ridge (Davison, 2006). Timothy McVeigh and the Michigan Militia became famous because of their relationship before McVeigh's terror attack on the Morrow Building (Davison, 2006). This single act of domestic terrorism caused the nation to fear everything about the militia groups (Davison, 2006; Parenti, 2009; Stapley, 2012). With the election of George W. Bush in 2000, the anti-government constitutional militia movement became nearly non-existent and in turn, the nation witnessed an eight-year trend in the formation of a record-breaking number of hate groups starting (Potok, 2013). With the election of President Obama in 2008, the trend has changed again. The number of hate groups has stabilized, and there has been no real growth in hate groups since, whereas the number of the anti-government militia groups has increased by 819%, eclipsing the numbers seen while Bill Clinton was president (Potok, 2013).

In April 2014, hundreds of militia members gathered in Southwestern Nevada to support a rancher named Cliven Bundy in his fight against the Bureau of Land Management (Caldwell,

2014). Militia members stated that they were ready to use deadly force against the government in protecting Bundy's rights to graze his cattle on public lands (Wylter, 2014). Senator Harry Reid responded by claiming and then defending his comments that maybe not so much Bundy, but the militia members who rallied from all over the country were domestic terrorists because they used the threat of violence to attempt to change government policy (CNN Political Unit, 2014; Desjardins, 2014). Gaining a greater understanding of this perceived threat will be crucial to preventing an escalation of violence into a new civil war involving individual rights.

Anti-government groups argue that their civil liberties have been infringed and that the Constitution has been destroyed by the Obama administration (Guilmartin, 2003). Militia groups primarily focus on gun control, immigration, universal healthcare, increased taxation, out-of-control spending, and the National Security Agency spying on American citizens. These groups also cite what they regard as a long list of administration scandals including the Department of Justice's involvement in the Fast and Furious arms sales scandal and the dropping of the New Black Panther Party voter intimidation case (Berger, 2012; Beirich, 2012). There is also a fear among members of the militia movement that President Obama is attempting to overthrow the current government and create a dictatorship (Book, 2012; EU Times, 2013). Failure of the government to address this issue carefully could result in armed conflict between the representatives of the government and these anti-government militias.

### **Problem Statement**

Militia groups grew to record numbers during the Clinton presidency in response to the incidents at Waco and Ruby Ridge and drastically decreased in numbers during the Bush presidency. Militia groups found resurgence and achieved record numbers after the 2008 election and subsequent 2012 election of President Obama. The number of militia groups has grown to

1,360, an increase of 819% (Potok, 2013). Interestingly, the number of racial hate groups has remained stagnant at just over 1,000 during the Obama Presidency (Potok, 2013). Mark Potok (2013) and the SPLC have stated that the rise in militia groups is because of racial hatred toward President Obama. If this were true, then logic would suggest an increase in the number of white supremacy hate groups, not a militia. My study of law enforcement perceptions could give academia and law enforcement agencies a better understanding of the militia groups to develop plans and programs to detect, investigate, and prosecute militia groups when necessary, allowing for the development of a national plan to fight threats of domestic terrorism.

Increases in anti-government militia and patriot groups have manifested in the mainstream community. Before 2012, the mainstream political parties and analysts perceived anti-government groups as being on the extreme fringes of the political spectrum, left and right (Zaitchik, 2010). The Obama presidency has witnessed the militia movement evolve from the extremist fringes into the mainstream, middle-class America, including several law enforcement agencies (Lenz, 2013). It is important to understand this phenomenon and the threat militia groups pose to the nation. If militia groups are as dangerous as suggested by the SPLC and the ADL, we could experience a second civil war (Hamm, 2004; Homeland Security Office of Intelligence and Analysis, 2009). America's law enforcement agencies need to understand the threat posed by these groups. Freilich (2006) suggested that the assessments made of militias in the 1990s are wrong, and a new evaluation needs to be completed. The first place to start this evaluation is to understand the perceptions held by those who are charged with keeping society safe. Thus, I focused on the perceptions of local sheriffs.

### **Purpose of Study**

Extreme right-wing militia movements are rallying around the Constitution with claims that they are going to revive America to its earlier glory (Stapley, 2012). The symbol chosen by the militia groups is the very item that they perceive the Obama Presidency is attempting to destroy, the Constitution of the United States of America (SPLC, 2012). According to the militia groups, the Constitution as a symbol is pure and worthy of rallying around, helping people identify with militia groups (Beirich, 2012, Stapley, 2012). Understanding law enforcement perceptions of the militia groups will help agencies create a database to detect, investigate, and prosecute militia groups and identify the threats posed by militia groups. Rader-Brown (2008) suggested that a national database should be created to compile the facts about various street gangs. Rader-Brown (2009) suggested that a national database of criminal street gangs would help law enforcement combat the rise of street crime. Creating a similar database addressing the various militia groups around the country would assist local law enforcement in detecting, tracking, investigating, and prosecuting militia group threats to society. This database could also aid in prosecuting the militia for organized criminal activities as necessary.

Some critics view a national database as an unconstitutional attack on privacy, and on the Constitution itself (Davison, 2006). Americans have the freedom of speech, even if that speech is in opposition to the federal government. Thus some groups view any tracking of expression, regardless of political religious or racial background, as a violation of the Constitution (Ghatak, 2011). However, a database of active militia groups, their mission statements, beliefs, and ways to identify those groups, does not violate the First Amendment, and still allows people the right to dissent (Beirich, 2012). Mark Potok, in his fall 2014 editorial in the *Intelligence Report* titled



“After the Climbdown,” calls for a national team to assist law enforcement with analyzing the non-Islamic domestic terrorism threat posed by militia groups.

I developed this study as a case study to investigate the perceptions several Texas sheriffs hold of militia groups. Robert Yin (2009) stated that a precise definition of the phenomenon under study is paramount. My specific focus was on perceptions of Texas sheriffs regarding militia groups and the domestic terrorism threat level the groups pose. Using this framework, I developed an interview for the sheriffs of each county in Texas who had volunteered to participate in the study. The SPLC reported more than 1,000 anti-government militia groups were active in the United States (Potok, 2014). There are 3,085 sheriffs across the country, and militia groups are found in all 50 states. Militia groups are not active in every county, and it would seem that with just over 1,000 militia groups, a quantitative study of all these sheriffs would have revealed that the militia was not a real threat to the United States. It was important to interview sheriffs who had firsthand contact with militia groups and reported active groups within their jurisdictions to understand law enforcement perceptions.

The SPLC rejected my request to provide information about specific counties with the most militia activity. The SPLC reported in the fall of 2014 that there had been armed confrontations and 17 shooting incidents between the BLM and militias in Texas, New Mexico, Utah, and Idaho since 2009 (Potok, 2014). The greatest number of interactions between the militia groups and law enforcement has been reported in Texas (ADL, 1999; Potok, 2014).

### **Research Questions**

The research questions best answered by case studies are “how and why” questions (Yin, 2009). I developed the following research questions to gain an understanding of law enforcement perceptions of anti-government militia groups.

1. How does law enforcement perceive the anti-government “patriot” groups?
2. How have law enforcement perceptions been formed regarding militia groups?

These questions were needed because current understandings and perceived threats of the militia groups may be incorrect or otherwise insufficient (Freilich & Pridemore, 2006).

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The primary foundation of this project was perception theory. There is no single origin of the theory of perception, but several researchers have attempted to study how individuals develop their worldview (Bothamley, 2002). In their work on perception, Thaler, and Sunstein (2008) suggested that “soft paternalism” could be used to nudge individuals’ opinions and beliefs one way or another. By soft paternalism, they mean to place information in front the audience to nudge their voluntary support. As opposed to the libertarian belief that people should be left free to do what they choose, choice architects seek actively to influence the perceptions of the greater society in order to mold desired behavior (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). For example, if choice architects use soft paternalism to suggest that militia groups are dangerous and a threat to society, then their policy suggestions would follow that agenda by putting forward those media reports that showed the militia as dangerous threats to society. The SPLC, a watchdog organization, tracks the activities of the nation’s hate groups, including the activities of the militia groups (Potok, 2014). The SPLC is considered an institutional expert on militia groups under the leadership of Mark Potok, even though it is in their best interest to show the extremism in the country (Wilcox, 1999). The SPLC operates as a non-profit organization, and as a result it goes against the financial interests of the group to say that the racial schism is healing (Wilcox, 1999). The primary publication of the SPLC is the *Intelligence Report*, published quarterly and provided free to all law enforcement agencies upon a subscription request. The articles in the

*Intelligence Report* focus solely on the extremism found in hate and militia groups. By eliminating all sources of information other than, that which supports the proposed narrative, members of the in-group labeled as choice architects, nudge in-group members and policy makers in the intended direction.

Once choice architects identify the activities of militia groups as extreme and dangerous, then the Credulous Bayesianism of individuals can be used by choice architects to guide and control attitudes of in-group members (Glaeser & Sunstein, 2008). The theory of Credulous Bayesianism extends the theory of groupthink and creates a polarization between “in-groups” and “out-groups.” In-groups are rewarded and encouraged to speak their mind, while out-groups are targeted and silenced for their dissent (Goette, Huffman, & Meier, 2006; Janis, 1973). Once all outside voices are silenced, any deviation from the core message is severely punished. Silencing outside dissenting voices increases the level of polarization and hatred towards the “out-group” members (Goette, Huffman, & Meier, 2006).

### **Nature of Study**

The growth of militias has caused an enormous amount of fear for many Americans throughout the country. The numbers of militia groups and their members are growing at record rates, unseen before in the history of this nation (Potok, 2014). Academic experts who have researched the growth of militias use the SPLC, the most recognized expert in the field, which tracks hate and militia groups and their activities. Every research project uses this single group for their expertise (Wilcox, 1999).

In this research project, I used materials from the SPLC as the basis for the current understanding of knowledge about militia groups and then interviewed several county sheriffs throughout Texas. Creswell (2013) states that when conducting interviews, it is important to

interview individuals with different perceptions and worldviews regarding the phenomenon to obtain a greater understanding. Thus, it was important that I interviewed sheriffs that did not have any interaction or contact with the militia groups. Interviewing sheriffs that had no dealings with the militia groups allowed me to investigate the links between their perceptions of militia groups and those individuals responsible for pushing the chosen narrative.

I compiled data retrieved from sheriff interviews was compiled into a qualitative software program called NVivo10 to find common themes within law enforcement perceptions of the militia groups. Common themes and ideas from Texas Sheriffs were used to recommend policy procedures for future interactions with militia groups.

### **Definitions**

According to George Michael (2006) much of the literature, use terms like right-wing extremists, hate groups, and militia interchangeably. Problems arise for the reader when watchdogs groups interchange these terms because readers begin to think all right-wing groups are the same, and that all are racist extremists. This opinion is simply untrue. It is thus important at this stage to define the terms in this research project to clarify the differences between hate groups, the tea party, the 9/12 Project, militias, the extreme right, and domestic terrorism.

### **Local Law Enforcement**

This term refers to County Sheriff's Offices. The sheriff is the chief police officer in each county and is accountable for all law enforcement activities within his or her jurisdiction (Myers, Myers, & Samaha, 2010). Local law enforcement agencies are independent and constitutionally chartered by the state governments, not the federal government. This difference between local and federal law enforcement is significant because militia groups recognize the authority of the local sheriff.

## **Perception**

The worldview, beliefs, and ideals of the individual. Perceptions are formed through life experiences and external influences that mold who we are as individuals and as groups (Quattrociochi, Conte, & Lodi, 2011). With the advent of technology, mass media, the internet, and social networking, these influences over time can and do shape our development of perceptions, sometimes eliminating opposing viewpoints and influences from our hearing, causing our perceptions to become polarized (Comer, Furr, Beidas, Babyar, & Kendall, 2008, Glaeser & Sunstein, 2008).

## **Extremism**

A result of polarized perceptions. Extremism has several definitions, and because the term is regularly interchanged with domestic terrorism, the two are often confused. Extremism is found on both sides of the political and religious spectrum, left and right. For instance, the Tea Party and the Anarchists have cited the same articles when showing the government is not leading the country in the right direction (Berger, 2012). The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) defines and separates extremists based upon the ideology that each group espouses. The common factor among all extremists, according to the FBI, is that extremism persuades conformity to a particular ideology and promotes committing criminal acts to advance that particular ideology (FBI, 2010). George Michael (2006) has explained that extremism is defined by the public and elite opinions at any given time and that the definition is fluid based upon current perceptions. The ADL defines extremism as those individuals who promote worldviews so radical that most people would not agree (ADL, 2005). For this research project, I defined extremism as a bifurcated system that first refers to adhering to a political, religious, or racial ideology that is outside the values of society. The second part of extremism is the use of tactics

legal and illegal that ignores the rights of others to achieve their ideological goals (Neumann, 2010).

### **Right-Wing Extremism**

Another term that has a broad range of definitions. The use of the term can be inclusive of groups that may or may not be outside of the “moderate” political thought. Those ideas, values and beliefs that are considered within the scope of liberal democracy are considered moderate, while all those outside of what is accepted by the public are not (Bjelopera, 2012). George Michael (2006) states that he has found five characteristics that capture the essence of--though they do not define--the extreme right wing. The first of these features is particularism, which is an ideology concerned with a more parochial outlook on politics. Right-wing extremism is not looking for new recruits and is not interested in exporting their ideas to the rest of the world. Unlike liberal democracy, communism, or even socialism, the extreme right wishes to maintain their message within the nation, republic, race, or ethnic group (Michael, 2006). The second characteristic described by Michael (2006) is that the extreme right has a low regard for democracy. Michael (2006) claims that right-wing extremism plays by the rules of democracy, but appears to be less thrilled about it than what is promoted in the mainstream political process. Third is anti-statism. The extreme right is very cautious about the federal government; they believe that the federal government is too big and is attempting to strip Americans of their constitutional rights. The extreme right believes in individualism and does not think the federal government should interfere with individual rights and liberties (Bjelopera, 2012). Michael (2006) does note that within the racist right, specifically the National Socialist Movement, there are some that desire a large, strong central government to promote socialist programs based on race. The racist right believes that the government is under the control of the Zionist

Occupational Government (ZOG) keeping Americans oppressed. The fourth is an obsession with conspiracy theories. The extreme right believes that the history of and the future of the United States is not actually of, by, and for the people, but a shadow government under the surface that subverts the constitution and the direction of the country (Michael, 2006). Lastly, are the racial or ethnic components of the extreme right including racism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia, which are found extensively in the ranks of right-wing extremism (Michael, 2006).

### **Domestic terrorism**

The “unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof in furtherance political or social objectives” (Homeland Security Office of Intelligence and Analysis, 2009). Domestic terrorism is the independent actions of individual or groups of Americans against American society, without any international influence hoping to influence policy decisions of the federal government (Bjelopera, 2012).

### **Militia**

A group of individuals who encourage paramilitary training and rituals and utilize informal social networks, charismatic leaders, and simple pamphlets and brochures to raise awareness about their perceptions of the government (Freilich & Pridemore, 2006). Most militia groups are opposed to a centralization of federal power through the expansion of bureaucracy, and the encroachment of individual liberties through land use regulations, taxes, global institutions, and treaties that they believe shred the nation’s sovereignty (Freilich & Pridemore, 2006).

## **Hate Groups**

Loosely identified as part of the extreme right wing primarily because of their open hatred towards minority populations who typically trend towards the left of the political spectrum. Hate groups focus their anger and spite towards a specific racial, ethnic, religious, gender, or sexual orientation group (Potok, 2014). Contrary to militias, many of these groups want a strong federal government but believe that the federal government is under the control of outside international forces, specifically ZOG, that tries to oppress the majority white population of the nation (The Knights Party, 2011). Hate groups fight against this perceived oppression using attacks against minorities and the threat of violent civil war as described in the book *The Turner Diaries* (McDonald, 1978).

## **Sovereign Citizens**

The Sovereign Citizen Movement is opposed to any government encroachment into the lives of the nation's citizens (Beirich, 2012). Sovereign Citizens do not recognize the authority of government at any level, local, state or federal. They combat the actions of the government through a form of terrorism called paper terrorism (ADL, 1999). Paper terrorism is the action of filing vast numbers of senseless petitions, motions, and lawsuits to break the court system (Beirich, 2012a). The sovereign citizens also harass law enforcement in the operation of their daily performance of their duties enforcing the law by refusing to cooperate in the hope of recording police exceeding their authority (Bjelopera, 2012).

## **Assumptions**

In this study, I assumed that the sheriff participants would speak freely and express their honest feelings. Following the nudge theory, supported by the theory of Credulous Bayesianism, I assumed that sheriffs would be likely to echo the sentiment that militia groups are a dangerous



threat to public security. Nudge theory suggests that perceptions and behavior can be influenced, and modified using choice architects. Media saturation used by choice architects can influence the perceptions of any “out-group” (John, Smith, & Stoker, 2009). Having the media focus on the extreme events like the FEAR plan and the Passover Standoff on the Bundy Ranch, the “in-group” can ostracize militia groups as militant hate-filled revolutionaries deserving arrest and control. Glaeser and Sunstein (2008), and Goette, Hoffmann, and Meier (2006) have suggested that once behavior and perception modification has been affected, the fear of punishment from the “in-group” will maintain the perception narrative and prevent the members from deviating from the prescribed direction. It would be hoped that local law enforcement creates their perceptions based on the actual events and experiences had with the militia groups. Attempting to identify the presence of nudge theory influence, I interviewed sheriffs from Texas counties with and without militia group activity. To ensure that the sample was random and free from bias, I sent an email to every county sheriff in Texas asking for their voluntary participation in the project.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

In this research project, I explored the perceptions local sheriffs hold of militia groups. Interviewing law enforcement officers provided me a greater understanding of militia groups. Using the information garnered from interviewing local sheriffs, I developed policy recommendations to help law enforcement across the country detect, investigate, and prosecute militia groups.

The population of this study was restricted to Texas county sheriffs who volunteered to participate. I chose this population because the SPLC indicated that Texas is one of four states that have encountered the greatest amount of armed interactions between law enforcement and

militia groups (Potok, 2014). Interviewing these sheriffs helped me understand the influences of perceptions and how the individual sheriffs perceive the militia. Future research should expand to include additional sheriffs from other states, and other law enforcement officials such as municipal and state police.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this project are that it included a small sample of local sheriffs. The sheriff was chosen for this case, because the sheriff is the chief law-enforcement officer of the county, and has a great impact on the direction of policing within the county. Another limitation is that this project relied solely on interviews. Creswell (2013) suggests that case studies gather data from several different sources to increase reliability. To overcome that limitation, I included interviews utilizing open-ended questions to gain a greater understanding of the perceptions held by participants (Yin, 2009).

The last limitation in this project is that the SPLC did not help select the sample pool. There are 3,085 sheriffs in the country, and less than 1000 militia groups. I had hoped that the SPLC could direct me to those specific counties with active militia groups. To overcome this limitation I sent an email invitation to every Texas county sheriff requesting participation in this research project. In the qualifications of the study, I asked if the sheriff had an active militia group in their jurisdiction. I wanted a sample size between 10 and 15, with at least nine that have an active militia presence.

### **Significance**

This research project is significant because of epidemic increases in the number of militia groups and members across the nation. Since the election of President Obama, the number of militia groups has skyrocketed from nearly nonexistent (less than 200 groups) to over 1000

groups (Potok, 2014). Watchdog organizations would have individuals believe that this increase is because of racial hatred against America's first elected African-American president (Michael, 2006; Potok, 2014). Michael and Mulloy (2008) even suggest that there will be massive riots and a civil war in this country based on race. If this were true, then it could be expected to see an increase in hate groups within the country, but there is no evidence of that increase (Potok, 2014). As mentioned earlier, it is important to understand the perception of militia groups, as seen by law enforcement.

If the SPLC (2014) is correct, then the nation will see a continued increase in the number of militia groups in the United States. If the Democratic Party increases its number of seats in Congress, there could be an increase in the calls for revolution and civil war (Bjelopera, 2012; Book, 2012; Redden, 2014). The result of this research project showed common perceptions between sheriffs interviewed, and I used them to recommend policies to direct detection, investigation, and prosecution of militia groups.

Creating a policy for detecting, investigation, and prosecution of militia groups is important to ensure that constitutional rights and liberties are not oppressed. In the past, the government has resorted to less than legal methods of control when combatting political dissent (Ghatak, 2011). Creating a policy based in Community-Oriented Policing that stays within the bill of rights will help increase trust between militia groups and the federal government. Community-Oriented Policing will bring about positive social change because it will prevent future bloodshed and decrease tension between militia groups and the federal government.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I have introduced the interests, ideas, and goals of this research project. During the Obama presidency, the number of militia groups has grown astronomically (Potok,

2014). The SPLC has suggested that the growth of militia groups is because of hatred towards America's first Black president, and a hatred of Hispanic immigrants that are coming to the country and shifting the demographics away from a white majority (McCaul, 2006; Potok, 2014). Some academics (e.g. George Michael, 2006) interchange terms like the extreme right, militia groups, and hate groups, confusing the reader to believe that all three of these groups are the same, and stand for the same ideals, values, and behaviors, starting with a hatred of racial and ethnic minorities. This trend could, in fact, be very wrong, and a new analysis of militia groups must be conducted (Freilich & Pridemore, 2006). This research project started with the perceptions held by law enforcement of militia groups.

In Chapter 2, I will delve deeper into the theories of perception, nudge, Credulous Bayesianism, self-fulfilling prophecies, "in-group/out-group" dynamics, and the history of extremism. To understand law enforcement perceptions and how they develop, it is important to realize what the media, academia, and watchdog organizations have to say about extremism, hate, and the militia.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Perceptions of the Right Wing Militia by Law Enforcement**

Militia group activity came to the forefront of the nation's attention in 1995 following the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building on April 19. Militia groups were portrayed as very dangerous domestic terrorists by the press, including CNN and MSNBC. Militia groups were reported to have had links to Timothy McVeigh and other racist, hate-filled groups like Posse Comitatus. Posse Comitatus is, in fact, a neo-Nazi group formed by Lamont Beach, not an anti-government patriot militia group (Bjelopera, 2012). It was reported that Timothy McVeigh had several copies of the William Pierce book *The Turner Diaries* (1978), written under the pseudonym Andrew McDonald, in his possession (Kroft, Bradley, Wallace, & Stahl, 1999). In a *60 Minutes* special President Clinton was asked:

However, Mr. President, there are tens, maybe more --- tens of thousands of men and women dressing up on weekends in military garb going off for training because they are upset about Waco. Despite what you say, we are talking about thousands and thousands of people in this country who are furious at the Federal Government for what you say is irrational, but they believe it. (Kroft, Bradley, Wallace, & Stahl, 1999, p. 170)

This quote is just one of many from the national media during that time, which attempted to show that many Americans were extremely dissatisfied with the activities of the Justice Department in Waco and Ruby Ridge. Representatives of the Michigan Militia testified before the United States Senate where they attempted to distance themselves from racist hate groups and anarchists. Michigan Militia member Norman Olsen, for instance, told senators:

I believe that you are trying to lay at the feet of the Militia some culpability, responsibility. You are trying to make us out to be something we are not, much as the

press has tried to do over this last year. We are people who are opposed to racism and hatred. We are people who love our government and love the Constitution. We are proud of the United States, but the thing we stand against is corruption. We stand against tyranny and oppression in government and us, many of us, are concluding that you best represent that corruption and tyranny. (Specter et al., 1999, pp. 189-190)

These historical perceptions about the risks posed by the militia still exist today, found at all levels of society, while the claims and comments of militia groups are ignored or dismissed as self-serving (Potok, 2012).

### **Literature Search Strategy**

For the literature review, I searched the following databases: Academic Search Complete/Premier, Walden University Criminal Justice Periodicals, ProQuest, Google Scholar, Thoreau, PsycINFO, Sage Premier, SocINDEX, Political Science Periodicals, EBSCO, Ebsco eBooks, and Walden University Dissertations. The search terms I used in each of the databases listed above included *militia*, *militia groups*, *domestic terrorism*, *right-wing extremism*, *Texas Militia*, *perceptions*, *threat perceptions*, *law enforcement perceptions*, and *policing threats*. There were 1,000's of articles that focused on the rise of the militia in the 1990's and their links to hate and racism. Freilich and Pridemore (2006) have suggested that the premises of much of this research in error and are an oversight on the part of these researchers. If impressions and our understanding of militia groups are incorrect, it is important to start over and learn about the militia starting with the perceptions of local law enforcement, the individuals who have to detect, investigate, and prosecute militia groups.

Many in academia and the media rely on watchdog organizations like the SPLC and the ADL for information about militia and hate groups. Even this project relies heavily on quotable

material provided by these and other watchdog organizations. This reliance upon watchdog organizations skews the information society has regarding the groups being watched. The SPLC, after the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building, provided to the FBI a list of 1000s of people they claimed to be members of militias and hate groups for further investigation (Wilcox, 1999). Many of the people on that list had nothing to do with the militia. The watchdog organizations have a symbiotic-like relationship with the militia and hate groups and if the militia and hate groups ceased to exist, the watchdog organizations would have no purpose and would cease to exist (Wilcox, 1999). It becomes necessary for the watchdog organizations to portray targets of their investigations as extreme haters and a domestic terrorist danger to society (Wilcox, 1999). By presenting this information using the worst-case scenario, these organizations look to increase readership and generate donations.

The SPLC publishes a quarterly journal called *The Intelligence Report*, tracking the nation's hate groups and anti-government militia groups. Every spring the SPLC publishes an article called "The Year in Hate." The authors at the SPLC mark distinct differences between hate groups and militia groups based on the group motivations; the difference between these entities is the target of their hate (Potok, 2013).

## **Theoretical Foundation**

### **Perception Shaped by the Media**

In the 2013 movie *White House Down*, a group of disgruntled veterans teamed together to take the president hostage and fire nuclear weapons at the United States of America (Carolin, 2013). While in the situation room, the perpetrators of the assault on the White House are described as extreme right-wing militia group members who were out to destroy the country because they hate the president, who is black (Carolin, 2013). This assault on the White House

gives a perception that the nation's veterans create anti-government militias and are a very dangerous threat to the country and the nation's first Black president.

Perception is a driving force in America, and if individuals can be convinced that a group or organization is dangerous, then individuals will believe that they are just that--dangerous (Glaeser & Sunstein, 2008; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008; John, Smith, & Stoker, 2009). Perception is created individually by those sources used to disseminate information. Information is spread to citizens through the media, Hollywood, and academia. The militia has been painted with the same brush by several entities within these sources, as extreme right-wing hate groups (Guilmartin, 2003).

### **Nudging**

Individual worldviews are created through the nudging of people into a specific belief, changing the social and civic behavior of individuals (John, Smith, & Stoker, 2009; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). As individuals, we have formed our worldview based upon the perceptions developed by sources of information as they have been presented (Comer, Furr, Beidas, Babyar, & Kendall, 2008). Deviance is defined by actions and behaviors that are outside societal norms (Merton, 1996). Hate is defined as deviance because it is outside of acceptable social norms, and being labeled a racist is feared by most in society (Potok, 2012). Thus, according to nudge theory if an "out-group" behavior is focused on enough, society categorizes that the behavior, action, or belief as deviant (John, Smith, & Stoker, 2009). Nudges encourage the "in-group" to ostracize outsiders and turn the entire society against that "out-group" (Glaeser & Sunstein, 2008; John, Smith, & Stoker, 2009).

By identifying and labeling members of the "out-group" as racists and haters, it encourages those people who do not want to be called racists and haters to leave the "out-group"



and gain access into the “in-group” (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). Society becomes scared of those things, which it is taught to be afraid. Children are born fearless and are willing to experiment or try anything without apprehension of getting hurt until they learn danger, either through experience or teaching (Comer, Furr, Beidas, Babyar, & Kendall, 2008). The same sources that teach children threats and dangers teach adults to evaluate the risk of entities and groups within the world around us (Comer, Furr, Beidas, Babyar, & Kendall, 2008).

In the following example, the public is the “in-group” and the militia is the “out-group.” Glaeser and Sunstein (2008) found in their research on Credulous Bayesianism that as diversity declines, groups become extreme. As groups are alienated and isolated from the mainstream, their influences become singular in origination and voice the more polarized and extreme the message becomes (Glaeser & Sunstein, 2008). Once the moderate voices have left the militia, it leaves the most radical voices to control the groups. The militia would then punish those members of their groups for violating the “in-group” rules (Goette, Huffman, & Meier, 2006). Goette, Huffman, and Meier (2006) found that “in-group” members punish their own more than they punish people outside of their group. Once the moderate voices have been removed, the group as a whole will become more extreme as a result of Credulous Bayesianism.

In an attempt to prevent radicalization of militia groups the ADL wrote a model of statutes intended for the states to make paramilitary training by nonmilitary and police personnel illegal (ADL, 1999). The ADL also created a model for the “common law courts” which would make it illegal for any individual to be a sovereign citizen and pose as a public official that is not duly appointed by the government (ADL, 1999).

## **Credulous Bayesianism**

The theory of Credulous Bayesianism contends that social learning brings polarization and extremism within societal groups (Glaeser & Sunstein, 2008). As people assemble with other like-minded individuals, outside voices are limited and even excluded. Credulous Bayesianism is a social learning process that takes private beliefs and seeks those voices that support that theory in a way that increases polarization (Acemoglu, Dahleh, Lobel, & Ozdaglar, 2011). As people increase their personal convictions, they seek others to support that belief, and polarization expands to a point that it becomes acceptable to attack those members of the ostracized “out-group” (Schafer & Navarro, 2003).

As extremism and polarization increases within Credulous Bayesianism, group members find that punishment for rule violations becomes more severe to those who do not conform to the group message (Goette, Huffman, & Meier, 2006). Because of the threat to “in-groups,” members fear punishment and being labeled as part of the “out-group,” and herding is the logical result (Acemoglu, Dahleh, Lobel, & Ozdaglar, 2011). This dynamic is also known as “informational cascades,” situations in which there is minimal new information and the same thoughts and beliefs are repeated (Acemoglu, Dahleh, Lobel, & Ozdaglar, 2011).

Credulous Bayesianism is a form of increasing polarization but has its origins in groupthink theory. In the early 1970s, Irving Janis introduced a new theory on groupthink, which he developed while reading about the Bay of Pigs incident during the Kennedy Presidency (Janis, 1973). Janis (1973) identified eight characteristics common to groupthink, which include:

1. Invulnerability is creating excessive optimism and risk taking.
2. Rationalizing, the group explains away errors and flaws in their worldview.

3. Unquestioned loyalty, members believe in the inherent morality and ignore the negative consequences of their decisions.
4. Stereotyping of rivals and enemies, dehumanizing and minimalizing perceived enemies.
5. Direct pressure on “in-group” members who express arguments against the collective.
6. Self-censorship, in that people, minimizes themselves and their ideas for the advancement of the whole group.
7. A shared illusion of unanimity, because of self-censorship the majority view of the group has conformed. Silence is viewed as consent.
8. Mindguards, protect the group from outside, adverse information about the group ideals (Janis 1973, p 21-22).

It is through the uses of characteristics 4, 5, and 8 are those features that promote Credulous Bayesianism.

### **Self-fulfilling Prophecy**

Perception is a collection of ideas and beliefs about an issue, subject or individual (Comer, Furr, Beidas, Babyar, & Kendall, 2008). As children, we are taught what to and not to fear (Comer, Furr, Beidas, Babyar, & Kendall, 2008). Children are not afraid of people, they are not racists, and they are very trusting of the world around them because they believe that their parents will protect them from risks and harm. Children are taught to be all of these things (Comer, Furr, Beidas, Babyar, & Kendall, 2008; Goette, Huffman, & Meier, 2006; Merton, 1996). Ideas and beliefs are formed through individual interaction with the family, friends, school, and the media (John, Smith, & Stoker, 2009). Any society can change their attitudes, modifying their perceptions of enemy “out-groups.”

Robert Merton (1996) developed the theory called a self-fulfilling prophecy. A self-fulfilling prophecy occurs when the negative thoughts and beliefs about an “out-group” come true (Merton, 1996). In the 1990’s in response to the Federal sieges in Waco and Ruby Ridge, 1000’s of Americans joined in groups that called themselves the militia in fear of governmental tyranny (Wilcox, 1999). Then one morning in April 1995, Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols blew up the Federal Murrah building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, and the nation knew fear. McVeigh and Nichols were linked to a militia in the State of Michigan, and America had someone to blame for the death of over 160 people and scores of others injured and maimed. Watchdog organizations like the SPLC, ADL, and the Montana Human Rights Network started telling America how dangerous the Militia was, and their threat to destroy America (Montana Human Rights Network, 1999; Wilcox, 1999). Early investigations and thoughts of blame pointed at an international agent, such as Al Qaeda, because of the similarities with the terror attack on the World Trade Center in 1993. When the responsibility finally dropped on an American, Timothy McVeigh, Americans became nervous and afraid of the growth of the anti-government militias springing up across America (Montana Human Rights Network, 1999).

Merton (1996) defined the self-fulfilling prophecy as, “In the beginning, a false definition of the situation evoking behavior that makes the original false conception come true” (p. 185). Everyone is familiar with the individual or private self-fulfilling prophesy where the student keeps telling himself, he is going to fail the test, fail the class or the job applicant says he will not get the job, and then becomes so worried about failing, he or she does just that and fails. This individual self-fulfilling prophesy can go one step further toward resentment and hate when the individual says to themselves, “I will not get this job because of affirmative action,” or conversely, “I will not get this job because I am a minority.” This pessimism regardless of the

actual qualifications of the individual or the person who gets the job will become the reason they did not obtain the desired position. According to Merton, the individual/private self-fulfilling prophecy is not as important as the social or public forms of the self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton, 1996). Merton focuses on the social or public forms of a self-fulfilling prophecy as a possible explanation for racial and ethnic prejudice (Merton, 1996). The social/public forms of self-fulfilling prophecy cannot be possible without the individual beliefs from the start. What Merton (1996) suggests is that if a segment of society is labeled as violent and dangerous long enough society will respond in such a way to ostracize the out-group, and that out group will become violent and hazardous. The SPLC and other media outlets have told us that the militia is violent and dangerous and that they should not be trusted, in the fact, that the militia is domestic terrorists determined to destroy the United States (Wilcox, 1999).

### **Conceptual Framework**

For 20 years, watchdog organizations have been telling society that the militia was evil and could not be trusted. Watchdog organizations suggest that the militia fills their ranks with white supremacists and people who hate the government for a variety of reasons (Anti-Defamation League, 2005; Homeland Security Office of Intelligence and Analysis, 2009; Wilcox, 1999). Merton (1996) suggested that relationships between “in-groups” and “out-groups” help ensure self-fulfilling prophecies come to pass. Because of the social stigma of becoming part of the “out-group”, people try to avoid being associated with the perceived “out-group” (Merton, 1996). Punishments instituted by those in the social “in-group” and “out-group” have a way of changing the behaviors of the general population (Glaeser & Sunstein, 2008). Continued exposure to the fears of the “in-group” about the “out-group” can even nudge the “in-group” into changing policy and even the law itself (John, Smith, & Stoker, 2009). Eventually,

the result is that the worst fears of the “in-group” become real in the “out-group” (Merton, 1996). In the case of the militia groups, which according to several militia groups, is against racism and hatred (Specter et al., 1999), has become filled with hate and anger, because of nothing other than the President is Black (Potok, 2013). The symbiotic relationship between the watchdog organizations and militia groups have created a self-fulfilling prophecy that has resulted in militia groups that have become hate filled. This attitude has also found its way in the descriptions of the Republican-led Tea Party, which is being described as part of the extreme right-wing fringe (Victor Brown, Personal Communication, 04/02/2014). As more and more people link the Tea Party with the racist, hate-filled fringe, the more the Tea Party will become delegitimized and discarded as just another hate group.

### **Literature Review to Key Variables and Concepts**

#### **Domestic terrorism**

Domestic terrorism is a threat that law enforcement at all levels of government need to track and combat using all modern technology available. The federal government does not have an official domestic terror group listing, because of the first amendment ramifications. However, the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Justice have identified behaviors and activities to be watchful (Bjelopera, 2012; Homeland Security Office of Intelligence and Analysis, 2009). The FBI maintains the Worldwide Incidents Tracking Systems (WITS) tracking terrorist incidents, around the world, and inside the United States (Bjelopera, 2012). Due to a lack of definition, many terrorist assaults within the United States, are not counted or tracked within WITS. Crimes committed by extremists could rise to the level of terrorism; however, American suspects are prosecuted under state laws of illegal weapons, and explosives

charges (Bjelopera, 2012). Bjelopera (2012) identified 100 crimes committed by extremists in 2011 that the WITS did not list as terrorism because of a lack of definition.

In reports presented to Congress the most active and violent groups are aligned with the Animal and Earth Rights Groups and are traditionally identified as being on the left of the political scale (Bjelopera, 2012; Homeland Security Office of Intelligence and Analysis, 2009). The extreme right garners the largest share of media attention, even though reports suggest that the left-wing commit more violence. In 2013, SPLC reported on the activities of a group identified as a militia group called FEAR (Terry, 2013). FEAR was recognized as a militia group by the SPLC bent on killing the President and taking over the drug trade in Washington State (Terry, 2013; Terrorism Research and Analysis Consortium, 2013). Whether or not the militia group is aligned with the left or the right wing politically, watchdog groups will identify them as right-wing extremists (Michael, 2006). The militia groups left or right has been linked with violence and criminality (Bjelopera, 2012).

There is a continuing domestic terrorist threat against the United States, and it will continue to exist as long as this nation polarizes politically, religiously, racially, and individually. Homeland Security view right-wing militia groups as being under the leadership of disgruntled Vietnam and Desert Storm Veterans who believe that the government has turned its back on them (Homeland Security Office of Intelligence and Analysis, 2009; Guilmartin, 2003). The primary threat comes in the form of racial civil disobedience and riots (Michael & Mulloy, 2008).

The radical racial right talks of, desires for, and threatens a race war within the United States (The Knights Party, 2011). The SPLC has tracked over 75 Plots, Conspiracies, and racist rampages between the Oklahoma City Bombing and 2009 (Roy, 2009). Watchdog organizations

track many of the crimes and terrorist attacks committed by American extremists because the State and Federal Governments only recognize them as crimes and not terrorism (Wilcox, 1999). These very same watchdog organizations call on the government to create a domestic terrorist list containing the names of the groups that they deem a threat to America. These groups include; Christian Identity, Constitutionals, Racialist Right, Religious Right, Tax Protesters, County Movement, and Second Amendment Groups (Montana Human Rights Network, 1999).

It is 75 attacks between 1995 and 2009 and the 100 attacks since 2009 that have the analysts nervous and concerned with the future of Domestic terrorism in the United States (Roy, 2009; Guilmartin, 2003; Homeland Security Office of Intelligence and Analysis, 2009; Michael & Mulloy, 2008). Following the Seven-Stage Hate Model, the next logical step in the evolution of the militia is domestic terrorism and violence (Schafer & Navarro, 2003).

As a hate group, any extremist group evolves through each stage of the seven stages of hate; the group becomes more radicalized and more polarized. Between stages, four and five the rhetoric stops and the violence will begin (Schafer & Navarro, 2003). At stage seven, the desire of the hate group is the complete destruction of the target of their hate (Schafer & Navarro, 2003). Thus with every new racial incident or every perceived attack on the liberty of the right there comes the fear that the right will attack the left and the racial minorities starting a race riot that could lead to a civil war (Michael & Mulloy, 2008). The country has polarized to such a degree that researchers, the media, and the watchdog organizations expect a violent armed conflict started by the militia (Lenz, *Battle Lines*, 2013; Mann & Ornstein, 2012; Marrs, 2008). These analysts expect a civil war following the fictional story as told by William Peirce, under the pseudonym Andrew McDonald in his book *The Turner Diaries* (1978) (Lenz, *Battle Lines*, 2013). Reported by the media and repeated by everyone that *The Turner Diaries* inspired the



attack on the Federal Murrah Building (Guilmartin, 2003). Predictions like these do nothing but increase fear, and polarization within the country, causing people to align with one side or the other of the conflict based on their desire to be part of the “in-group” or “out-group” (Homeland Security Office of Intelligence and Analysis, 2009; Michael & Mulloy, 2008).

### **Extremism**

The current trends found in the polarization of the government did not start with the election of President Obama, as some would have people believe. This trend began in the 1950s with “patriots” standing against a rise in the threat of communism in the United States (Mann & Ornstein, 2012; Homeland Security Office of Intelligence and Analysis, 2009). To fight against the rising threat of socialism and communism, groups like the John Birch Society and Posse Comitatus formed to protect what they called the very fabric of American society (Bjelopera, 2012). From these founding groups, extremism has evolved to the modern day Christian Identity, Constitutionlists, Racialist Right, Religious Right, Tax Protesters, County Movement, Second Amendment Protection Groups, the Tea Party and Patriot movements of 2012 (Bjelopera, 2012; Montana Human Rights Network, 1999).

The days of government bipartisanship started to show serious trouble within mainstream politics during the Clinton Presidency when Newt Gingrich was willing to shut down the government in the name of spending cuts (Mann & Ornstein, 2012). The “Contract with America” that was spearheaded by Newt Gingrich and the Republican Party, has been credited with starting the polarization process within Congress observed in action today from both parties refusing to vote for any measure put forward by the opposition (Mann & Ornstein, 2012). The people of this nation translates the polarization found in the national government of the United States into extremism to the streets in the form of militia, patriot, sovereign, hate, anarchy and

occupy groups (Bjelopera, 2012). These groups pose their individual level of threats to the communities in which they live. Bjelopera (2012) submitted a report to the United States Congress detailing the history and development of the various groups, and the threat he perceives that these groups pose to the United States at a State and National level.

Extremism in the United States comes in many forms anti-government, sovereign citizens, anarchist black block, animal rights, hate groups, separatists groups, and anti-abortion and anti-gay groups (Bjelopera, 2012). Extremism is a natural phenomenon within the United States, because of the protections found in the Bill of Rights. The First Amendment to the United States Constitution guarantees the freedom of speech. Americans hold the right to express their thoughts and beliefs regardless of how offensive those comments are as long as they do not step over into inciting people to violence and terrorism. The differences between these groups stem from political ideology, and their political targets vary widely (Bjelopera, 2012). The actual level of threat posed by each group is articulated by the media, both news, and entertainment. Since the election of President Obama in 2008, the focus has been on the right-wing extremists more commonly known as the militia (Homeland Security Office of Intelligence and Analysis, 2009). Additionally, watchdog organizations like the SPLC and the ADL have tracked increases in the numbers of Militia (Anti-Defamation League, 2005; Bjelopera, 2012; Potok, 2013). Although, this year, the SPLC has admitted that there has been a decrease in listed Hate Groups because, they claim, the Republican Party is becoming more radicalized and is adopting many of the issues that the radical, racial right support (Potok, 2014). The decrease is marked with some active hate groups in 2012 of 1007 to only 939 in 2013, yet there are still 1096 “Patriot Militia Groups” (Potok, 2014). Even though Potok (2014) identifies a decrease in Hate Groups, and the Patriot Groups, he states that they are still at historical record numbers.

Extremism is a belief in, and support of, ideas that are outside of the mainstream and far from what the average person would consider normal and correct (Merriam-Webster, 2014). On the fringes of the political spectrum, the militia forms (Grimes, 1983). Mark Potok (2014) identified an increase in the political polarization between the two parties and had identified it as extremism and hate. The government operates best from the political center in an attempt to please the most people to get the business of government accomplished. When a government is unable to find consensus, it becomes stagnated and in effect shuts down (Mann & Ornstein, 2012). This gridlock, caused by the polarization of extremists on both sides of the political aisle, unwilling to compromise and bend to the opposition (Mann & Ornstein, 2012).

Currently, in the world of the media, perception of the right exists in different sections or levels of extremism. These include the conservative religious right, which is marked by Sean Hannity, the Tea Party and Zionism; the radical right, identified by strict constitutionalists like Glen Beck and David Barton and the militia; and then finally, the racial-religious right, identified with the hate, racism and bigotry of the Christian Identity Church, the Skinheads and the Klan (Michael, 2006). The term extreme right applies to all the different, factions of society that are political, religiously, radically, and racially to the right of the political spectrum, and used interchangeably (Michael, 2006). Because all of these various factions called the extreme right, it has led to confusion in the general population. In a conversation with Linda Joy, she claimed that she could not vote Republican, because she is not a racist, bigot, mean or selfish (Personal Communication, February 26, 2014). When asked why she believed that this was true, she said she had been told that the extreme right is all about these positions and that she could never condone racism, or selfishness (Linda Joy, Personal Communication, February 26, 2014). Even through the SPLC claims that they are talking about the radical and racial right when they are

discussing the hatred that they identify, the lines are blurred and people start to believe that all of the right believe the same way (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008).

George Michael (2006) goes into great depth identifying and explaining the differences between the political, religious, radical, and racial segments of the extreme right. Michael (2006) along with the rest of the media commonly encompasses all the factions with the same term, extreme right. This tactic increases polarization and radicalization between the political factions.

### **Constitutionalists**

Strict Constitutionalists are people who believe that there is no room for misinterpretation of the Constitution, and its adherence is strict (Montana Human Rights Network, 1999).

Members of the Constitutionalist Groups believe the judicial system has misinterpreted the Constitution and creates laws as it sees fit (Bjelopera, 2012). Also, Constitutionalists believe that the Constitution applies to White Anglo-Saxon Christians only and that people of other races and religions fall under a different set of rights and protections (Montana Human Rights Network, 1999).

Arguably, the largest and most recognizable groups of Constitutionalists are the Oath Keepers (Lenz, 2012). The Oath Keepers formed in 2009 in response to the election of President Obama, and the fear that the government was going to strip Americans of their Fundamental rights and liberties (Anti-Defamation League, 2009). Stewart Rhodes, who founded the Oath Keepers, boasts that they have over 2000 members, all current and former military and law enforcement Personnel (Anti-Defamation League, 2009). The Oath Keepers swear to uphold and honor the oaths they took when they joined public service. They claim to be the last line of defense for the Tea Party and have started making the first steps towards creating a militant militia to combat a tyrannical government (Lenz, 2012). The Oath Keepers share their

conspiracies using the internet and having booths at the various Tea Party and 9-12 Movement rallies across the nation (Lenz, 2012). Groups like the Oath Keepers attach themselves to the Tea Party in hopes of mainstreaming and legitimizing their claims and anti-government position (Anti-Defamation League, 2009).

The Tea Party, even though it is embraced by the mainstream political Republican Party, also falls under the auspices of the Constitutionlists in that many believe that the Liberal Progressives in the government are wanting to destroy the Constitution and take away the liberties and rights of the American people (Zaitchik, 2010). The Tea Party was formed as a response to the Democrat Party raising taxes and allowing the Bush tax cuts to expire, but have moved on to fight other issues like same-sex marriage, and “Obamacare” (Anti-Defamation League, 2013). Although many in the Tea Party deny having extremist beliefs, many do live on the fringes of the political movement believing every conspiracy promoted by Glenn Beck and Alex Jones, as the population control policies of Agenda 21 (Zaitchik, 2010). Because many in the Tea Party mistrust the Democrats, in political power, these conspiracies take on a life of their own and hard-core anti-government groups can make inroads into the groups and direct the Tea Party further to the right (Anti-Defamation League, 1999).

### **Religious Right**

The religious right is under the leadership of Evangelical Christians like Pat Robertson with the Christian Coalition (Montana Human Rights Network, 1999), and David Burton, with Wall Builders (Potok, 2012). The Evangelical Conservative Christian movement is not overtly racist or anti-Semitic, but appears to be extremely homophobic (Montana Human Rights Network, 1999).

The Religious Right attempts to show the nation the doctrinal foundations of Christianity that are the bedrock of this country (Potok, 2012). Many members of the Religious Right hope to return the country to a nation based on a greater reliance upon the observance of Christian beliefs and dogma (Montana Human Rights Network, 1999). The Religious Right is concerned with restricting the moral behavior of the country; some of the targets of the Religious Right are homosexuality, abortion, and the theory of evolution (Potok, 2012). Fundamentalist Christians believe that God has judged and convicted this nation for their rebellion against God (Homeland Security Office of Intelligence and Analysis, 2009). The Religious Right is an intolerant group of people that continue to claim that God is going to judge the nation because of abortion, same-sex marriage, homosexuality, sexual promiscuity and the fact that the greater community accepts these behaviors as normal (Akins, 1998; Bjelopera, 2012). Hatred of sinful behavior and the unwillingness to compromise shows the intolerance of the religious right (Marrs, 2008).

#### Christian Identity Church

The Christian Identity Church is a racist, homophobic faith-based organization that has thirty-seven identified groups throughout the country (Potok, 2014). The Christian Identity Church believes in the story of Lilith as the first woman, who rebelled against God and was cast out of the Garden of Eden. Lilith then had a sexual relationship with Satan and the offspring of that unholy union was the Jewish People (Hamm, 2004). The Christian Identity Church goes further and teaches that all races, besides that of the white race, were created on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of creation; these racially inferior humans were intended to be slaves and servants to the truly chosen of God (Weatherby & Scoggins, 2005). According to the Christian Identity Church, as the chosen people of God, the White race has a favored place among the rest of God's creation (Montana Human Rights Network, 1999; Barkun, 2014). The Christian Identity Church

originated in England in the 1980s as British Israelism, and the belief that the peoples of Europe were the descendants of the 10 ½ lost tribes of the house of Israel (Barkun, 2014). This belief has evolved to become the idea that Western European people are the only true chosen of God and those that call themselves Jews are the Synagogue of Satan having usurped the title of God's Chosen (Barkun, 2014).

The Westboro Baptist Church (WBC) is arguably the most venomous of the racist religious groups. Fred Phelps founded the WBC in the 1950s, and his first followers are nine of his thirteen children and their families (Intelligence Files, 2014). These groups of people are anti-everything. They have a picket protest ministry that spews hate and claims that “God hates fags,” “God hates Jews” and that “God hates the United States Military” because of the sin found in the United States and its support of sodomites and Jews (Intelligence Files, 2014). The WBC are also vehement Holocaust deniers who believe that the Jews concocted the Holocaust Story to steal the Holy Land from its rightful heirs, the real chosen of God, the Northern European White population (Anti-Defamation League, 2013).

#### Sovereign Citizens and Tax Protesters

The Sovereign Citizen Movement comes in many forms, but the most common are the Tax Protester (Montana Human Rights Network, 1999). Another group that falls within the auspices of the Sovereign Citizens is the Courts of Common Law, who do not recognize the authority of the central government and believe that they are unconstitutionally established, therefore should not be followed (Bjelopera, 2012). Many of these Sovereign Citizens believe that they are not accountable to the government because the Constitution and the activities of the government are illegal from the onset (Anti-Defamation League, 1999).

The greatest threat that comes from the Sovereigns is paper terrorism (Beirich, Two North Carolina Detectives Build Program for Dealing with 'Sovereign Citizens', 2012). What the Sovereigns do is file hundreds of court cases and backlog the Courts System ensuring that the government cannot get their daily business done (Bjelopera, 2012). Members of these types of groups also refuse to register their vehicles or get State issued driver's licenses. When pulled over by local law enforcement, sovereigns flood officers with documents showing they are actually from a foreign country and immune from Federal, State and Local prosecution (Beirich, 2012).

### Racial Hate Groups

The hate groups believe that there is a difference between the races, which make the White race superior to all others (Montana Human Rights Network, 1999). This belief and idea does not have scientific merit and lacks the backing of science itself. Madison Grant (1916) wrote a book called *The Passing of the Great Race*, which promotes the idea that the White Northern European is of superior breeding and racial stock. This specific book read by many of the nation's leaders throughout the history of the country suggests that the White Race should not mix with any other race because it diminishes the superiority of the race (Grant, 1916). Using the theories of Charles Darwin and the Survival of the Fittest, Madison Grant (1916) suggests that all people in the United States who are not White should become victims of the Eugenics program so that the United States could create a master race of individuals that could not be conquered (Spiro, 2009). However, even within the white race eugenics suggested that those people who do not measure up to be part of the master race should be sterilized, so they no longer contribute to the racial gene pool (Lombardo, 2008).



Potok (2013) stated that with basic information, and “scientific evidence” supporting their ideology the White Supremacy movement in the United States has done nothing but grow throughout the years, most specifically in recent years, with the election of George W. Bush in 2000. Even though 2013 has seen a slight drop in the number of hate groups active in the United States, there are still record numbers of hate groups (Potok, 2014). Hate Groups deny the rights of those that they target for their hate and believe that the White Race are the sole inheritors of the United States (Cha-Jua, 2010).

Hate groups have a reputation and perception by the public of politically being part of the right wing, which would suggest that they are individualistic and expect people to pick themselves up by their bootstraps without any help from the government. In a review of the website for the Ku Klux Klan, the Klan is for social welfare programs as long as they are for Whites only (The Knights Party, 2011). In the Constitution of the Aryan Circle, a White Supremacist prison gang, it requires members to give to other members in need without question and without belittling the individual (Unknown, 1985). The entire White Supremacy movement is a socialist collective culture that puts their individual race above all others (The Knights Party, 2011).

From the foundation of this nation, discrimination, racism, and hatred have been at the forefront of race relations. From the 3/5 clause of the Constitution to the present day incarceration rate and pay differential, White America has had an advantage in this country (Gaff, 2011). This white privilege, in turn, creates a socio-environmental climate that increases the level of social problems within minority communities, because of discrimination in hiring practices, and the unequal pay at the same jobs (Danzer, 2012). When a status of entitlement is found within the white community, and they believe that minority successes and quotas for

employment threaten their status in the community, people are likely to unite against the perceived threat (Bonger, 1916). Bonger (1916) theorized that when a culture perceives that it is threatened, that culture will create hostility and defend itself from those threats. When threatened people seek to join, others who believe the same way as they do, this is stage one of the hate group model. This new “in-group” will attempt to keep “out-group” members from influencing their membership; they will in fact silence all opposition (Glaeser & Sunstein, 2008). As a group becomes more singular in their attitudes and beliefs, those groups become more extreme and radicalized in their thoughts and attitudes (Glaeser & Sunstein, 2008).

Stage two of the hate model is that once like-minded people have grouped together, it becomes time to establish and create the symbols, methodologies, rituals, and music of the group, designed to promote the group while degrading the target of their hate. Within the White Supremacy culture, that music is Punk Rock music (Childress, 2004; Smith, 2011; Wade, 2077). Each year hate-rock groups create 100s of 1000s hate-filled albums and spread them throughout the country (Wade, 2077). The medium of hate music used to recruit new members and to pass along the message of hate, is the message to be proud of one’s culture, race, and heritage at the cost of other groups or populations within society (Wade, 2077). The children of hate group members pass their hatred down from one generation to the next as a way to promote race as the most important thing to protect (Williams, 2007). Increased rhetoric given to the youth about racial pride without any opposing viewpoints makes the children more radicalized and hateful towards those people who are different and not in the “in-group” (Glaeser & Sunstein, 2008; Smith, 2011; Williams, 2007).

Once radicalized the hate group will move to stage three of the hate model; using revisionist history to disparage their specific targets. Once the culture gets to this state they do

not really care whom they target, Smith (2011) reported that hate group members specifically members of the Straight-Edge Society have no difference that exists between outsiders whether they are Hippies, Blacks, or Jews, the only concern is that they were different and not in the group.

Many of the racial hate groups believe that the only way to maintain cultural and ethnic survival is through violence and eventually through civil war (DeMarche, 2012; McCaul, 2006; McDonald, 1978; The Knights Party, 2011; X, 1964). The Ku Klux Klan is the oldest Hate Group in the United States and even in recent years have attempted to align themselves with the mainstream political system; they use the Skinheads for their violence and racial attacks (Guilmartin, 2003). The Neo-Nazi Skinheads are the storm troopers for most of the racial radical racial right (Michael, 2006). The largest of the Hate Groups is the Aryan Nations, founded by William Peirce. Peirce, who wrote *The Turner Diaries* (1978), believed that the only way to protect the race was to go to war against all non-whites and non-Christians.

White Supremacist hate groups lean heavily on freedom of speech to be able to spread their hate on the internet, in print and through music (Cowan, Resendez, Marshall, & Quist, 2002). The first Amendment protections permit hate groups to spend time recruiting people throughout the country without restriction (Cowan, Resendez, Marshall, & Quist, 2002). The hate groups use these Constitutional protections to teach their children and to silence their opposition as well. Silencing “out-group” opinions is a major aspect of increasing the extremism found within the hate group itself (Comer, Furr, Beidas, Babyar, & Kendall, 2008; Gaff, 2011). Professors teach the White Supremacy ideology in the halls and classrooms of academia where professors are promoting racism and hatred (Lobb, 2001). Many of the leaders and founders of the extreme right have first been professors, instructors at the nation's Community Colleges

(Lobb, 2001). With this pedestal from which to preach their hate, the extreme right can find new recruits to fill their ranks (Mann & Ornstein, 2012)

## Militia

The militia movement has exploded since the election of America's first Black President (Potok, 2013). The SPLC project promotes the idea that the record numbers of militia groups are caused by the race of the President (Potok, 2013), but history shows otherwise (Bjelopera, 2012). The Militia increases in number during the time of right-wing resurgence (Pitcavage, 2013). In a 2013 interview with the SPLC, Mark Pitcavage, a researcher with the ADL, suggested that many of the anti-government groups formed in response to the election of the United States' first Black President (Pitcavage, 2013; Potok, 2013). However, later in the same interview Pitcavage (2013) stated that the country had witnessed an increase in the number of militia groups every time there is fear of societal collapse. There have been several times in the history of the country marked by an increase in number and intensity of militia groups. In the 1980s, because of a fear of the USSR and the takeover of the United States after World War 3, there was an increase in the John Birch Society and Pose Comitatus (Pitcavage, 2013). During the Clinton Presidency, there were two major increases in the number of militia groups, first the reaction to Federal Law Enforcement assault at Ruby Ridge, and the second increase in anti-government groups was against a religious cult in Waco (Homeland Security Office of Intelligence and Analysis, 2009). The perception of the radical right is that the government is in the process of taking away the civil liberties of the American People (Pitcavage, 2013; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2012). Y2K was a scare, of the collapse of civilization, as the world entered the year 2000, because of fears that the world's computer systems would collapse causing society to plunge into the dark ages leaving individuals to fend for themselves (Pitcavage, 2013).

The militia movement, defined as a paramilitary group against the government, believes in several conspiracies that the national government is attempting to strip the citizens of their constitutional rights (Potok, 2013). The primary concern of the militia movement in the United States is the Second Amendment, the right to keep and bear arms (Anti-Defamation League, 2005). These fears are supported through decades of attempts by the political left to restrict access to firearms (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2012). Because these groups are right-wing extremists, they are often associated with white supremacy and hate groups (Anti-Defamation League, 2005). If it is true that the militia increases because of fear that government will take freedoms, and if the survey poll from the Pew Research Center is accurate, we can only expect the numbers of militia groups to increase (Pew Research Center, 2013). In 1995 during the height of the militia movement in the United States, the majority of Americans believed that the primary concern of the Government was to protect the rights and liberties of the populous (Marrs, 2008).

Posse Comitatus, recognized as the first paramilitary militia in the modern era, has a history of white supremacy (Guilmartin, 2003). Posse Comitatus believe that the citizenry of the United States has a Constitutional responsibility to be a part of an unorganized militia to take the government back from the entities that have taken it over and return it to the people, of the people, and by the people (Anti-Defamation League, 2005). Organized by William Potter Gail, a pastor for the White Supremacy Church, known as Christian Identity, links white supremacy to the militia movement (Anti-Defamation League, 2005). Because of Gail's association with the Christian Identity Church, he taught that the Zionist Occupational Government (ZOG) controlled the decision-making process of the Federal government. Posse claims the responsibility for reclaiming the nation and the government for the people of the United States (Guilmartin, 2003).

It is because of people like Gail that the militia is lumped together with other hate groups in the country (Anti-Defamation League, 2005). A militantly violent group came out of Posse Comitatus called The Order, who were responsible for the killing of radio show host Alan Berg (Anti-Defamation League, 2005). Posse Comitatus is credited with being the model of the Militia groups that formed in the 1990's and since the election of President Obama in 2008 (Homeland Security Office of Intelligence and Analysis, 2009).

Of the 1096 Patriot Groups that were active in the United States, 240 of them are militias; the remainder is comprised of common law courts, publishers, ministries, and citizens' groups (Potok, 2014). Mark Potok (2014) admits that not all militias or patriot groups are violent or even threaten violence. The groups find themselves on the SPLC lists next to those who commit a crime, and violence against the United States. In general, the Militia believes that it is their mission to fight against the "New World Order." The militia believes that the New World Order will strip all Americans of their liberties starting with the second amendment (Freilich & Pridemore, 2006). The greatest fear found among the militia is the stripping of the second Amendment. Many members of the militia believe that the United States Government will sign the small arms treaty created by the United Nations banning the private ownership of all firearms (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2012).

Even though the militia is its own entity within the extreme right wing of the political spectrum, anytime a radical right group forms a paramilitary organization it is labeled a militia (Freilich & Pridemore, 2006). Montana Human Rights Network (1999) reports that there are seven recurring themes found within the extreme right including the militia. This include:

1. Seek to limit or proscribe the rights of specific groups to participate in society.

2. Seek to separate groups along racial, ethnic or religious lines and assign relative values to different groups.
3. Seek to impose their values on the public at the expense of the basic freedoms.
4. Believe their way is the absolute and only truth.
5. Promote Conspiracies.
6. Have disdain for and abuse the democratic processes.
7. Seek to silence opposition (Montana Human Rights Network, 1999, pp. 135-137).

The Montana Human Rights Network (1999) suggest that the militia is used as a stepping-stone to the recruitment of unsuspecting individuals who think that the Tea Party, 9-12 Group or the Militia will help them with their problems. The several watchdog organizations all agree that the militia is a severe threat to the nation and seek legislation making these groups illegal because of the threat they pose. Researching local law enforcement perceptions will explore the influences of those perceptions.

### **Texas Militia**

The militia in Texas has a long history. The first militias formed in the State of Texas during the Reconstruction era in violation of Federal law. In March 1867, the federal government passed a series of legislation collectively known as the Reconstruction Acts, abolishing the militia in the southern states, in an attempt to keep the Southern Democrats from raising up arms again (Singletary, 1956). This law was a radical plan to make the South politically aligned with the Republican Party and to do so the Republicans created a militia to enforce martial law whenever a Republican Governor felt the need to mobilize a force. Most of the volunteers for the Republican militia were newly freed slaves who enforced the law, and the will of the Governor (Singletary, 1956).

Governor Edmond J. Davis established the “Negro Militia” in Texas and commissioned into duty to subjugate any Democrat opposition (Singletary, 1956). Davis was a radical governor of Texas between 1870 and 1874. When Richard Coke won the election for Texas Governor in December 1873, a fight for control of the government and the militia ensued. The Travis Rifles, a state militia called up by Governor Davis, ended up fighting for Coke, while the “Negro Militia” fought for Davis. By the end of January 1874, Texas had a full-fledged race war brewing. There was no support from President Grant, which forced Davis to step down, this left the militia’s role in Texas greatly curtailed (Singletary, 1956).

The Texas State Militia is still active and still in existence today claiming to be a legal, lawful citizen group that provides training, preparedness information, and disaster relief outside the jurisdiction of the government (AquaOrb Consulting, 2014). The Texas State Militia claims they reject all radicals and racists into their organization, and that they do not wish for revolution (AquaOrb Consulting, 2014). The perception the SPLC gives is that the militia is dangerous and a threat to domestic terrorism. The Texas State Militia is attempting to counter that perception with one that they narrate.

In late 1995, a sovereign citizens’ militia called the Republic of Texas formed in response to the illegal annexation, in their opinion, of Texas. The Republic of Texas was just one of five militia groups set up in the wake of the Federal Government’s attacks at Waco and Ruby Ridge (Goldman & Smith, 1996). Its founder, Rick McLaren, was an insurance salesperson from Missouri, who believed that the treaty with the United States annexing Texas was illegal declaring the independence of Texas (Patoski, 1997). McLaren committed what a form of terrorism called paper terrorism in Ft. Davis, Texas. He filled the courts with liens and cases. He filed a lawsuit against the United States Government claiming \$93 Trillion in Civil War



Reparations, along with dozens of other liens against property in Jeff Davis County, Texas (Patoski, 1997). In 1997, there was a seven-day standoff between the Texas Department of Public Safety and the armed security team of Rick McLaren. The siege ended without a shot fired, and several Republic of Texas members, supporters and sympathizers found themselves in jail (Patoski, 1997).

In 2012 the spring edition of the *Intelligence Report*, Mark Potok reported that seventy-six different anti-government militia groups were running throughout Texas with an additional thirteen nativist groups (Potok, 2012). In the same report in 2014, the number of “Patriot” militia groups dropped to 65 (Potok, 2014). Even though there has been a decrease in militia groups identified in Texas by the SPLC, Texas is one of the four states that are at greatest risk of an armed conflict between the militia and the government (Potok, 2014).

An unknown number of militia and sovereign citizens have converged on the Texas border in hopes of fighting against what they see as a surge in illegal immigration to the United States. In August 2014, there was a shooting incident between the Militia and the Border Patrol where the Border Patrol fired on an armed militia member (Sherman, 2014). On occasion, the militia had shown up on the scene and assisted the Border Patrol with arrests before they realized that the militia was not actual law enforcement (Sherman, 2014). The Sherman (2014) article quoted the Sheriff of Cameron County saying the militia “is not needed nor wanted on the border; their help was not necessary” (pp. 6).

### **Left-Wing Extremism**

Left-Wing extremists are not heard much in the media; all extremists are labeled the same, right-wing extremists (Michael, 2006). While conducting a topic search in Google Scholar and Academic Search Complete and Walden University’s Thoreau database for left-wing

extremism in the United States few articles were found that addresses American left-wing extremism. Left-wing extremism includes two philosophies, authoritarian and special needs ideologies (Bjelopera, 2012).

### **Left-wing authoritarian.**

The left-wing authoritarian extremists are considered even more dangerous to democracy than the right-wing extremists (Pohl, 2013). Their agreement with communism measures left-wing extremists as opposed to the links between the right-wing and fascism (Pohl, 2013). In American studies of the left-wing extremism, Brady, McDonald, Nyhan, and Transue (2005) found that the left were uncomfortable with obedience especially with what they termed “great leaders.” In the conclusion to their research, they contradicted the work of Pohl in Eastern Europe and found that the American Left was not a threat to society (Brady, McDonald, Nyhan, & Transue, 2005). The American left does not support ends-justify-the-means rationale, in that the left does not support violence to achieve their goals (Brady, McDonald, Nyhan, & Transue, 2005).

### **Event-driven extremism**

Earth Liberation Front (ELF), Animal Liberation Front (ALF) and the Anarchist Black Block are examples of special needs or event driven extremist (Bjelopera, 2012). ALF and ELF are considered ecological terrorists in that they target corporations and governments with violence to protest policies and practices of those companies and governments (Berger, 2012). These two groups believe that humanity is abusing animals and the earth. They have dedicated themselves to the protection of the animal kingdom and the planet (Berger, 2012).

The Anarchist movement is also found on the left of the political isle. They oppose government and corporate unity (Bjelopera, 2012). The anarchist movement is also an event-

driven organization that gathers in protest at world events like World Trade Organization and globalization organizations such as the G-20 (Bjelopera, 2012). Inside the Anarchist movement is a violent contingency, which calls themselves the Black Bloc (Dupuis-Déri, 2010). The Black Bloc will go into a protest with their peaceful counterparts. When the Black Bloc members believe that the time is right, they will turn to criminal activity to gain attention to their demands (Dupuis-Déri, 2010).

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the reader was introduced to the various theories that influence perception. Individuals have their opinions, beliefs, and ideals, supported by the information sought after by each (Glaeser & Sunstein, 2008). Perceptions are the unbounded and sometimes the unsubstantiated beliefs and ideas held by the individual. Although there exist no single researcher credited with the theory of how perceptions develop, this chapter explored two specific theories on how perceptions are formed; Bayesianism and Nudge. Individual influence develops through access to the Media, which includes print, television, radio news, Hollywood, and academic journal articles. As individuals become more confident in their beliefs, they start to silence those voices that disagree with their worldview (Glaeser & Sunstein, 2008). As the “in-group” silences dissenting voices from the hearing of like-minded group members, the group becomes more polarized, extreme in their beliefs. Bayesian social learning suggests that people shape their perceptions based on the information provided by “in-group” members who bring to knowledge no new information and no new insights (Haynie, 2002). Credulous Bayesianism creates a unique idea and belief that prohibits any external, contradictory information (Lauderdale, 2008).

Another aspect that influences our perceptions is the Theory of nudge. Choice Architects are responsible for “nudging” social opinion into the direction that the “in-group” wants that public behavior to go (John, Smith, & Stoker, 2009). Nudge theory is deployed to influence individual choices (Evans, 2012). In addition to attempting to influence the public opinion and philosophy, that is being nudged; the choice architects suggest that people who do not conform to the selected belief structure are deviant and somehow evil (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008; Wilcox, 1999).

Studies conducted by Goette, Huffman, & Meier (2006) show that “in-group” members are more likely to punish other “in-group” members more severely for violating the group norms and beliefs. This punishment comes from listening to or giving credit to those outside and dissenting voices (Goette, Huffman, & Meier, 2006). Those information sources that are viewed as inadequate are attacked as the lamestreet news and Foux News as ways to attack the message that they give to the public. Depending on which group people talk to, the news media is biased and controlled by either the Koch Brothers or by George Soros. Members of the “out-group” are insulted and ridiculed (Berger, 2012). As people are praised for their stance on a subject, that stance became more extreme and polarized against the “out-group” (Goette, Huffman, & Meier, 2006).

The danger we face is Robert Merton’s (1996) self-fulfilling prophecy. A labeling theory that suggests that if people repeat a label enough, that label, will become truth. Groups like the SPLC and the ADL spend much time every year tracking hate groups and the militia telling their audience that the Militia is nothing more than hate groups bent on the destruction of the United States (Wilcox, 1999). When these groups are considered the country’s experts on the subject of hate, their word becomes gospel regardless of that; they will only exist if they can maintain the

fear in the groups that they watch (Wilcox, 1999). It is important to determine how the perception of the militia by law enforcement, and explore how those perceptions were formed.

In the next chapter, the methodology of the project will be explained and defined. In this project, I have decided to conduct a case study. A case study is recommended when there is a new phenomenon in a society that needs to be explored (Corcoran, Walker, & Wals, 2004). The case study will be introduced and explained in detail.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Introduction

In an attempt to gain a greater understanding of the militia, the perceptions held by law enforcement, and the threat the militia poses for domestic terrorism, I conducted a collective case study (Creswell, 2013). In this project, I explored how several law enforcement agencies addressed the issue of the anti-government militias. I collected interview data from each agency. The sample included both individual sheriffs that have had dealings with militias and those who have not had dealings with militias since the election of President Obama in 2008. I selected this sample better to understand the participants' perceptions of the prevalence and threat of the anti-government militia groups within their jurisdictions. Conducting a case study allowed me to explore the real-life, contemporary experiences of the participants in the study (Creswell, 2013). Case studies attempt to explore “why” and “how” research questions (Yin, 2009). In this project, I explored not only the perceptions local law enforcement has of the militia, but also how those perceptions were formed. Case studies are best conducted by obtaining data from more than one source to gain a better understanding of the information provided (Yin, 2009).

Senator Harry Reid has led the charge against the various militias, pegging them as domestic terrorists (Desjardins, 2014). He has stated that “any group that protests the actions of the government are anti-American and when they threaten to use deadly force on tactical officers for the BLM they are terrorists” (Desjardins, 2014). This belief resonates with the news media, including CNN and MSNBC, they have sought experts to further the case that the militia is nothing more domestic terrorists (Neiwert, 2014). Although in an interview with MSNBC, SPLC Director, Mark Potok, said that the anti-government militia is not quite domestic terrorists yet, but they are not far from bloodshed and becoming terrorists (Neiwert, 2014).

## Research Design and Rationale

Over the past five years, the number of militia groups has increased from 284 groups in 2010 to over 1100 in 2014 (Potok, 2014). Militias believe the constitutional right to keep and bear arms should not be altered, and they are preparing for an armed conflict against the United States Government. Freilich and Pridemore (2006) suggested that public perceptions of the militia could be incorrect and that there needs to be a reevaluation of the threat posed by militias. I started this project of reevaluation at the law enforcement level by conducting a multiple case study to explore law enforcement perceptions of militias. According to the SPLC, the anti-government militia has been on a violent, racist rampage throughout the country for the last five years (Potok, 2014). The multiple case study design allowed me to examine a single phenomenon from several different vantage points to explore common traits found in each instance. My project included a purposeful sample of 12 sheriffs from across the State of Texas whom I interviewed to explore the following research questions:

1. How does law enforcement perceive the anti-government “patriot” groups?
2. How have law enforcement perceptions been formed regarding militia groups?

These questions need examining because current understanding and perceived threats of militias could very well be incorrect (Freilich & Pridemore, 2006).

Creswell (2013) has stated that when conducting a case study, the number of samples should be limited to manage the sample in question properly. The number of sheriffs in my study comes from a cross-section of state jurisdictions that have experienced militia activity and those that have had no militia contact what so ever. Again, participating sheriffs were recruited based on their individual consent through a purposeful sample collection method. I used this purposeful sampling method in an attempt to limit the scope of the research project. I selected county

sheriffs for this project because they are the chief law enforcement officers in each county. The sheriff holds constitutional power to direct all law enforcement activities within their individual jurisdictions, and thus was the ideal candidate to interview to learn about the perceptions held by law enforcement (Dempsey & Forst, 2013). I contacted all 254 sheriffs in Texas through email, requesting their participation.

I chose the case study model for this project because case studies help to explain further a noted phenomenon (Yin, 2009). I determined that this method is needed to increase the understanding of law enforcement perceptions and ascertain the extent of the threat of domestic terrorism that exists among the various militia groups (Corcoran, Walker, & Wals, 2004; Yin, 2009). Limited existing knowledge of a subject is another reason to use the case study method (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). It has been suggested that the knowledge that exists concerning militias could be flawed (Freilich & Pridemore, 2006), biased (Wilcox, 1999), or just plain fabricated to advance a political agenda (Ghatak, 2011). It is important to start the research of the militia over to determine if militias, as a whole, are a threat to domestic terrorism. While considering different methods to complete this, I determined that completing a quantitative research project investigating the threat perception of the militia by Texas sheriffs would be ineffective because only 76 “patriot” militia groups exist in 254 counties. These numbers indicate that less than one-third of the counties in Texas have any militia activity, which would make any real threat quantitatively insignificant (Maxwell, 2013). A narrative study was likewise not suitable because it would have focused all attention on just those counties that have active militia groups, potentially creating a bias against militia groups and focusing on a threat that might not even exist. The case study allowed me to interview several sheriffs from around the



State of Texas and explore their individual perceptions of the threat posed by the 76 militia groups in the state.

### **Role of Researcher**

I took the role of observer, interviewer, and analyzer of collected data in this project. Although I know several sheriffs throughout the State of Texas, I do not have any personal relationships with any Texas sheriffs. My criminal justice background is in federal corrections, state probation, and higher education.

A case study is a proper method to conduct research on a topic that is intrinsically interesting (Merriam, 2009). The militia group phenomenon is fascinating to me, and I believe that an entirely new understanding of the threat posed by the militia is obtainable. Understanding how this polarization is developed and how it has evolved is important to be able to create an educated and well-informed approach to deal with the threat posed by the militia. To control for bias, I have provided participating sheriffs access to all transcripts of interviews and researcher conclusions (Gibson & Brown, 2009). I returned all interview transcripts to the participating sheriffs for verification and accuracy, and I shared my interpretations and conclusion with the sheriffs to ensure accuracy and reliability.

Nudging, as I discuss in the chapter, two pushes the perceptions of the “in-group” and opposes those who dissent (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). Choice architects promoting the narrative that the militia is a threat punish those who are outside the group narrative by labeling them as racists and haters make it easier to force compliance with the accepted narrative (John, Smith, & Stoker, 2009). Being part of the “out-group” could cause a bias because I could look for those Sheriffs who promote and support my point of view. It would be easy to do, because of the type of sampling I pursued in this project. My greatest fear in undertaking this project was sounding

like an apologist for militia groups, which is far from my intention. To combat personal bias in the collection and interpretation of data, I kept a journal to note all my concerns and observations. In addition to the journal, I established a strict interview protocol for each interview.

### **Methodology**

In this case study, I explored the perceptions that Texas sheriffs have regarding the various anti-government patriot militia groups throughout Texas. This project consisted of a series of interviews of Texas sheriffs to gain an understanding of their perceptions of militias and the threat they pose for domestic terrorism. I conducted this case study to develop a new understanding of the perceived threat posed by the anti-government militia and to acquire an understanding of how this perception was developed. I chose to interview sheriffs because they are the constitutionally elected chief law enforcement officers in each county in Texas and thus have the final word on all policing policy made within the county.

I randomly sent email invitations to each sheriff in the State of Texas inviting them to participate in the interview process. I did this by randomly selecting sheriffs in groups of 20, and inviting them to participate in five-day intervals, with a two-week “respond by” date until all 254 sheriffs were sent invitations. The first 12 sheriffs that accepted participation took part in this research project. This sample produced common themes and ideas that helped me develop an understanding of the perceptions found among Texas sheriffs. Walden University IRB approved this project; approval # is 12-28-15-0087524.

### **Instrumentation**

I developed an interview protocol (Appendix A) based on the example given by John Creswell (2013) and followed it during each of the interviews. Follow-up and clarifying questions were sent to the participating sheriffs as needed, based on their responses to the interview questions. Each participant was given a Notice of Confidentiality and Consent Form (Appendix B) via email, advising them of how they were identified and defining the research project and how their data was used.

I recorded each interview using a digital recorder and then downloaded the interviews into the qualitative software product NVivo10. I transcribed each interview into NVivo10 for analysis. After verification of each transcript, I sent each participant a copy for additional verification of accuracy. Using NVivo10, I conducted an analysis of common themes, seeking a greater understanding of the increase in the number of militia groups, and the perceptions held by law enforcement (Maxwell, 2013). These themes resulted in the creation of naturalist generalizations (Creswell, 2013).

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

Sampling in qualitative research is important to ensure that the entire population is represented (Marshall, 1996). Although there are 3085 sheriffs in the United States, interviewing all of them would find a quantitative conclusion that the militia is no significant threat to society, even in Texas, where there are 254 counties and only 65 active militia groups. In sum, quantitatively the militia is insignificant and should be of no importance. I hoped to select individuals from law enforcement agencies from the State of Texas to portray a variety of different perspectives (Creswell, 2013). The SPLC has stated that there have been armed conflicts between militias and law enforcement in Texas, New Mexico, Utah, and Idaho (Potok,

2014). Because the Texas militia groups appear to be the most active, I focused this project on Texas. Creswell (2013) suggests that no more than four or five cases be reviewed; however, selecting two cases from each sub-group helped the generalizability of this study. These face-to-face interviews were intended to capture verbal and nonverbal cues offered by the various law enforcement officials (Creswell, 2013).

### **Data Analysis Plan**

One of the greatest advents to qualitative research has been computer software evolution over the last ten years (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research software programs such as NVivo 10 have advanced to a point that these programs help the researcher identify commonalities between the comments of participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

I transcribed all interviews into text documents, which I uploaded into NVivo10 for codifying these interviews and seeking common trends. I also uploaded the actual audio and/or video files into NVivo10, and the program will help maintain the data in a single password protected file that ensures security and prohibits anyone without the login information from gaining access to the data (Creswell, 2013).

There are three theories that should drive the coding in this project; Nudge, Credulous Bayesianism, and Groupthink. All three of these theories influence perception, beliefs, and attitude. Perception, beliefs, and attitude influence policy and policy decisions. The level one codes are indicators of each of these theories. The level two codes are words and phrases expected to be referred to during the interview. The last column signifies which of the five interview questions intended to garner the information needed to gain a better understanding of the perceptions as held by the several sheriffs interviewed. Following this guideline will help in

the recognition of emerging and more detailed codes and themes in understanding the perception of the militia (Huberman, Saldaña, 2014).

| Theory                | Level 1 codes                           | Level 2 codes   | Interview questions   |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|
| Nudge                 | 1. Choice Architecture                  | 2. Dangerous<br>3. Disgruntled Veterans<br>4. Violent<br>5. Terrorists                              | 1 How do you perceive the anti-government “Patriot” Groups?<br>3, What, if any, domestic terrorism threats do these militia groups pose to society, and specifically to your County?<br>5 By what means have you developed your perceptions of the Militia?   |
| Credulous Bayesianism | 1. Groupthink<br>2. Outgroup Punishment | 1. Increased polarization<br>2. Desire to punish militia members<br>3. Isolation of militia members | 1 How do you perceive the anti-government “Patriot” Groups?<br>3 What, if any, domestic terrorism threats do these militia groups pose to society, and specifically to your County?<br>4 What gaps exist in the preparations by law enforcement agencies to address potential threats posed by the militia groups?<br>5 By what means have you developed your perceptions of the Militia? |

|            |  |  |   |
|------------|--|--|---|
| Groupthink | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Shared illusion of invulnerability</li> <li>2. Manifestation of direct pressure on people who disagree</li> <li>3. Fear of disapproval from “in-group” leaders</li> <li>4. Shared illusion of unanimity</li> <li>5. Enemy is evil, weak, and/or stupid</li> <li>6. Unquestioned belief in the morality of the “in-group”.</li> <li>7. Mind-guards to protect group from conflicting information</li> <li>8. Rationalization of warnings and negative feedback</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Common attitudes</li> <li>2. Repeating talking points from SPLC and ADL nearly verbatim</li> <li>3. Verbal attacks on “out-group.”</li> <li>4. Mutual mistrust/dislike for members of the militia</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 How do you perceive the anti-government “Patriot” Groups?</li> <li>2 What militias, if any, exist in your County?</li> <li>3 What, if any, domestic terrorism threats do these militia groups pose to society, and specifically to your County?</li> <li>4 What gaps exist in the preparations by law enforcement agencies to address potential threats posed by the militia groups?</li> <li>5 By what means have you developed your perceptions of the Militia?</li> </ol> |
|------------|--|--|---|

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Interviewing is one of the major ways of obtaining data for qualitative research (Patton, 2002). In fact, interviewing is one of the most used ways to obtain data for qualitative research. The open-ended interview allows the researcher to delve into any issue a little deeper. It allows the interviewee to explain their actions, activities, and their beliefs. Interviewing participants enable the researcher to seek and find a greater understanding of the phenomena they are studying. Because of this strength, interviewing is better than survey research in that survey the researcher provides the four or five answers they think are correct and allows the participant to select from those choices without an opportunity to explain (Creswell, 2013). Within the interview process, the researcher looks for common trends between the participants hoping to gain a greater understanding of the phenomena.

Because the researcher is the data collector and the tool used to evaluate collected data, they become the greatest weakness. Researchers, while interviewing, and analyzing the data

collected, face the risk of losing objectivity (Creswell, 2013). If the researcher goes into a project attempting to prove a point or with too much bias, their research is going to be flawed and will become nothing more than a position paper on the editorial pages, and will not increase the knowledge base of social science. Because we are discussing the human element of research and a human research tool, a risk of misunderstanding exists (Creswell, 2013). One of the things taught in criminal investigations classes is that the investigator must not seek the evidence to prove a theory, but allows the evidence to explain what has happened (Hess Orthmann & Matison Hess, 2013).

A transcript of the interviews and conclusions once completed was sent back to the participating Sheriffs to ensure the accuracy of the message that they gave during the interview. Completing a review will increase the validity and reliability of the results (Patton, 2002). Having the Sheriffs review, the transcripts, and my conclusions will also protect me from promoting my personal bias and subjective conclusions (Patton, 2002).

### **Ethical Procedures**

The subject sample of this project is not a protected population and is not at risk for abuse. However, there informed consent was given to each participant on two levels. First, the email invitation (Appendix C) to participate in the project allowing prospective members to accept or reject participation, second, is the Notice of Confidentiality and Consent, (Appendix B).subsequently these two levels of consent and privacy will alleviate ethical concerns. Participants were also advised in person before the interview began that their participation was voluntary and confidential. They were given the opportunity to opt out of the interview at any time.

## Summary

In Chapter 3, I described the methodology of this project. This case study will use a purposeful sample to interview fifteen Texas Sheriffs in an attempt to understand the perceived threat posed by the anti-government militia in the State. A case study is conducted to determine if a phenomenon is real and something to needing further investigation (Yin, 2009). This study explores the perceptions of local law enforcement in hopes to determine if the threat described to us by groups like the SPLC and the ADL are real or imagined. If real, how much of a threat they are to the nation.

Current knowledge about the militia could be flawed, and a reassessment is required to find out the real threat to domestic terrorism posed by the Militia (Freilich & Pridemore, 2006). In the following chapters I will discuss the findings of this research project and recommend policy changes to local law enforcement in identifying, investigating, and prosecuting if necessary, the militia statewide. Walden University IRB approved this project; approval # is 12-28-15-0087524.



## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

I created this research project to explore perceptions of Texas sheriffs toward the anti-government patriot militia and the threat of domestic terrorism. Watchdog organizations (the SPLC, and the ADL) along with federal government agencies (Homeland Security, and the Department of Justice) have suggested that the militia is dangerous and a serious threat to national security and domestic terrorism. Nudge theory suggests that people's perceptions can be shaped by how information has been disseminated throughout the public (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). Thaler and Sunstein (2008) suggest that using choice architecture, people's perceptions can be formed and molded into believing a certain narrative. Several reports released from watchdog organizations and the federal government, and further supported by the entertainment industry, have represented militia groups as a serious threat (John, Smith, & Stoker, 2009).

Credulous Bayesianism and groupthink enforce "in-group" narratives and compliance to that narrative through the use of labeling (Glaeser & Sunstein, 2008). The practice of Credulous Bayesianism is to eliminate any outside voice that contradicts the confirmed narrative of the "in-group" (Lauderdale, 2008). Those individuals who dare to speak out against the "in-group" narrative are punished and attacked (Goette, Huffman, & Meier, 2006). These attacks are conducted to keep those in the "in-group" inline, and to make irrelevant the "out-group" opposition (Glaeser & Sunstein, 2008). This attitude is found in the narratives of militia groups across the country (Potok, 2012a). When people like Glenn Beck, David Barton, Chuck Baldwin and others attempt to refute the narrative that the militia is dangerous and a threat to national security, they are placed on a list published in the summer edition of the SPLC's *Intelligence Report* titled "30 to Watch"(Potok, 2012a). John Freilich (2006) stated that watchdogs'

narratives about militias could be wrong and that a reevaluation was needed. In this project, I attempted to explore current understandings of the militia, starting with local law enforcement. The purpose of the project was to gain a better understanding of the militia as perceived by the constitutionally appointed and duly elected top law enforcement officer in each county of Texas, the sheriff. I selected sheriffs for this project to be able to answer the research questions:

1. How are the anti-government “patriot” groups perceived by law enforcement?
2. How have law enforcement perceptions been formed regarding militia groups?

Understanding these perceptions will help develop a bridge for law enforcement to communicate and manage the actions of the militia. A proper and well-organized plan for identifying, managing, and investigating the militia, will go a long way in preventing further violence and death in interactions between the militia and the government.

In this chapter, I review the methodology of my project as described in Chapter 3. The sample will be defined and further explained, and I will explain how the data was collected and analyzed. I explain common themes that emerged, and then discuss the results. This project came to a surprising end and a conclusion that does not follow the literature. John Freilich (2008) was correct in his assessment that we should reevaluate popular understandings of the militia.

### **Setting**

I conducted individual interviews with sheriffs that consented to participate in this project. Their position influences these sheriffs. Article 5, Section 23 of the Texas Constitution (1876) constitutionally appoints sheriffs as the top law enforcement officer of each county. The sheriff of each county is responsible for all law enforcement activities within their jurisdiction. Thus, the sheriff has final say over interactions with militias in each county. Regardless of the attitudes or beliefs of the chiefs of police, the sheriff is the constitutionally appointed law

enforcement officer. However, sheriffs are elected by qualified voters in the county and are thus influenced by the attitudes and opinions of the people that live in the county where they reside.

### **Demographics**

I sent email invitations to each of the 254 sheriffs in the State of Texas. Sheriffs were randomly selected 20 at a time and given two weeks to respond to the interview. I gave those sheriffs who responded a phone call to set up an appointment for an interview. Twelve sheriffs agreed to participate in this study. At least one sheriff represented each region of Texas: the Panhandle, East Texas, South Texas, Central Texas, West Texas, and the Big Bend. The interviews occurred in the office of each sheriff as chosen by the sheriff. The longest interview was an hour and twenty minutes long. The shortest interview was seven and a half minutes long.

### **Data Collection**

#### **The Interview Process**

I conducted all interviews during the months of January, February, and March of 2016, as the sheriffs agreed to participate in the project. Each interview was conducted in the individual sheriff's office. I traveled to each county and spent between 20 and 50 minutes with each participating sheriff. Informed consent was also recorded in each interview. At the conclusion of each interview, I asked the sheriff to refer other sheriffs they believed would be interested in participating in this project. Most sheriffs admitted that their invitations were sent to the spam folder, and they had to look specifically for it after being notified of the existence of the project so they could give consent.

#### **Security of Interviews**

Interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder, then transferred to a password protected dedicated thumb drive and saved under a code known only to myself. My computer

uses facial recognition, and I am the only one who can access my laptop. Failure to access data correctly ten times results in all data being deleted. These security measures have ensured the safety of the research project.

### **Variations in Data Collection**

I collected data for this project as described in Chapter 3, except for the emergency management plans. In Chapter 3, I discussed the possibility collecting the written management plans for the various sheriff's offices to find common practices among the sheriffs in dealing with the militia. None of the participating sheriffs have an emergency management plan prepared in case of a militia group uprising. Each sheriff stated that they would have to depend on upon the plan made by state and federal governments.

During the interview with one of the sheriffs, I discovered that the recorder was not recording, and the interview had to be restarted. There was a loss of some valuable data that was not repeated by the sheriff during the second interview.

### **Data Analysis**

I explored three theories of individual perceptions in this project including nudge, Credulous Bayesianism, and groupthink. These theories provide frames for understanding the use of different activities to influence perception within the accepted narrative. Nudge theory focuses on choice architecture, the strategic placing the information that is most important to spread the desired narrative (John, Smith, & Stoker, 2009). In addition to proper placement, linkage of terms is used to reinforce the narrative further. For example after the "Passover Standoff" between the BLM and the Oath Keepers on the Bundy Ranch, Nevada in 2014, Senator Harry Reid called militias dangerous terrorist groups and the greatest threat to domestic terrorism and

national security (Neiwert, 2014). If nudge theory were a factor in forming perceptions, then those who promote this narrative would use these same phrases.

If there were evidence of Credulous Bayesianism within the perceptions of the various sheriffs, I would hear them say that the SPLC, the ADL, federal government reports, and the media were the only places sheriffs get their information. Any other sources of information could not be trusted. The sheriff would discredit any attempts to show information that did not fit the accepted narrative. The theory of groupthink would show codes from both of these other theories. During the interviews and the data analysis, I expected to find comments stating that the militias were dangerous terrorists and a threat to national security.

### **Coding and Themes**

After conducting each interview, I transcribed the interview, made a brief summary of the key points made by the sheriff, and emailed it back to the sheriff for verification. I asked the sheriff to confirm that the transcribed interview was accurate and that I properly understood what they meant. I gave instructions that if there were no changes required that they would not have to respond again. I gave each sheriff two weeks to respond, and only one responded with a clarification of my interpretation. After allowing time for the sheriffs to make corrections, I loaded the audio interviews along with the transcripts into NVivo10 to look for common themes and ideas. I was looking for evidence that the sheriff's perceptions of militia groups had been influenced and reinforced through the theories of Credulous Bayesianism, nudge, and groupthink. I was expecting to hear that militia groups were a threat to domestic security and an active terrorist threat.

Four distinct themes developed in the interviews of the sheriffs. Theme 1: those who had no experience with militia based perceptions on media sources. Theme 2: those who had experience

or who sought a more dynamic understanding of militia, used more than just media. Theme 3: it is important to differentiate between groups that are all encompassed under the term militia: Constitutional Militia, Sovereign Citizens, and Hate Groups. Theme 4: the constitutional militia is not a threat. The first were two sheriffs that had no firsthand contact with the militia. Second, the remaining ten sheriffs had firsthand interactions with militia groups. The themes that evolved from their interviews were based upon their firsthand interactions with the militia. The two sheriffs that had no contact with the militia had received all information about the militia from the SPLC, the ADL, and the media. One sheriff described the militia as “rabid dogs that need to be put down whenever they are found.” Both of these sheriffs have received all their information about militia groups from these groups, and they have used those expected terms as reinforced by the choice architects looking to advance the narrative that the militia is a threat and a danger to society and national security.

The second and larger group of sheriffs had firsthand experience with militias either through militias operating within their county or in an adjacent county. These sheriffs have read all of the same information as the other two, however, because of their dealings with the militia, the common theme that came from these sheriffs is that the identification of several groups as militias has clouded who and what the militias really are, and how much of a threat they are to national security. Although each sheriff admits that there are dangerous groups, they agree that “as a group, there is not an evil, horrible threat to us right now.” A second subtheme I found among the sheriffs that do not see a considerable threat from militia groups is that the constitutionalist militia and the sovereign citizen's movement are not the same. Sheriffs have marked a distinct difference between militia groups that respect local law enforcement and the sovereign citizens lack respect toward all government. One participant noted, “We have had the

Republic of Texas, we have had the Constitutionals and there is another group that I cannot think of, but do you think they are all in the same confines and beliefs. They are not.” Another commented, “I am sorry that the word militia has become adversarial because I think what’s the difference between a militia, or a posse when it comes to a mounted unit reserves, the only thing is that are commissioned officers or a community group.” In short, these sheriffs made a point to differentiate between militia groups and sovereign citizens.

### **Discrepant Cases**

The discrepant cases were predicted behaviors by the literature for this project. The two Sheriffs that believe that militia groups are a threat to domestic terrorism. Before the interviews of these two Sheriffs, there was no evidence of nudge, Credulous Bayesianism, and groupthink among the sheriffs interviewed. One of these two Sheriffs stated that he gains all of his information from the SPLC and the media. He said that militia groups were a significant threat. However, this Sheriff had read an article about a group of people that he knew “personally and recognized that the article was slanted in a way to make this group look dangerous” (Participant 6, personal communication, March 14, 2016). He stated that the SPLC was his source that helped form his perception of the Militia, while at the same time as saying that the SPLC cannot be trusted. This attitude is evidence of Credulous Bayesianism, in that the hearer disregards any information that discredits the source of the accepted narrative (Acemoglu, Dahleh, Lobel, & Ozdaglar, 2011). These discrepant cases have been classified as a second theme within the project, the theme that was expected, but not seen beyond these two Sheriffs.

## **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

### **Credibility**

In any qualitative research, the greatest threat to the research is the bias (Creswell, 2013). In interviews, the data collection instrument is the researcher. I hoped to obtain sheriffs from each geographical area of Texas. The plan was to interview between 10 and 15 sheriffs from around Texas. These sheriffs were invited through a random selection of 20 sheriffs at a time sent every five days until every sheriff in the State was asked to participate. Once a sheriff was interviewed, he was asked if there was another sheriff, he could refer. The final sample consisted of twelve sheriffs representing North, South, East, West, the Big Bend, the Panhandle, and the Gulf Coast of Texas.

### **Transferability**

This project can be transferred and repeated to any state in the country. The sample in this project only included twelve sheriffs from the State of Texas. This research project should be expanded to include more sheriffs from Texas and to other States. The interview for this project included six Questions:

1. How do you perceive the anti-government "Patriot" Groups?
2. What militias, if any, exist in your County?
3. What, if any, domestic terrorism threats do these militia groups pose to society, and specifically to your County?
4. How has the new open carry law in Texas affected that threat?
5. What gaps exist in the preparations by law enforcement agencies to address potential threats posed by the militia groups?
6. What has influenced your perceptions of the militia?



These questions can be repeated with every sheriff in the country to repeat the project in the future. Conducting a quantitative study on the perceived threat of the militia would yield that there was no current threat because there are three times as many Sheriffs in the country than there are militia groups. To find out about the real and perceived threat the militia poses and how those perceptions have been formed, it is important to ask the Sheriffs themselves.

### **Dependability**

When conducting qualitative research, it is important to obtain data from several sources so that the credibility and dependability of the project. Maxwell (2013) recommends that the researcher uses triangulation as a tool act as a check on one another. In this project, it was intended to review the emergency management plans of each participating sheriff. Along with the interview from several areas of Texas, it was hoped that a generalized conclusion could be understood. Although the interviews garnered a significant amount of data; not a single sheriff had an emergency management plan prepared in case of a militia group uprising. This lack of planning was explained in that not a single sheriff that participated had the resources to deal with such a situation, and there is no threat to concern with a response plan. They would have to call in and depend on upon the resources of the State and/or FBI. This research project ended with just the interviews from 12 sheriffs from the different parts of Texas.

### **Confirmability**

My greatest fear in this project is becoming an apologist for militia groups, which is the farthest thing from the truth. Patton (2002) stated that objectivity is one of the hardest things to maintain in qualitative research because the researcher is the tool used to collect, analyze and interpret data. To combat personal bias in the collection and interpretation of data, I have kept a journal to note all my concerns and observations. In addition to the journal, a strict interview

protocol for each interview was established. The last question of the interview protocol was asking each sheriff if there was anything else that they wanted to discuss militia groups that had not been covered in the remainder of the interview. This question allowed the sheriff the ability to share their thoughts without my unintentional influence.

### **Results**

In exploring the perceived threats, the militia poses to national security, I interviewed twelve Sheriffs from around the State of Texas. This research project hoped to answer the following research questions:

1. How does law enforcement perceive the anti-government “Patriot” groups?
2. How have law enforcement perceptions been formed regarding militia groups?

At least one sheriff represented the different regions of Texas, North, South, East, West, the Panhandle, and the Big Bend. Two main themes developed among the 12 sheriffs who participated in this research project with a sub-theme in the majority consensus theme. One of the interesting commonalities among every sheriff in the group is that they believed they were the only sheriff that believed the way he did. One sheriff stated that although every sheriff in the state should agree with his beliefs on militia groups, he is afraid that he stands alone. As it turned out, nine of the remaining 11 sheriffs agreed with him. The SPLC has suggested in its quarterly review that the patriot militia groups are a dangerous threat to domestic terrorism. They have identified dozens of militia group incidents to support this claim. They have further identified Texas as one of the four states that have the most active number of militia groups. Freilich and Pridemore (2006) have suggested that the current analysis of militia groups could be wrong. To gain a greater understanding of the perception of militia groups held by Texas Sheriffs an interview protocol including six questions was developed. These questions are included in

Appendix A. The result is that the current analysis of constitutional militia groups is at the very least partially wrong. The data shows that constitutional militia groups are not a threat to the nation. That being said the sheriffs interviewed identify a differentiation between the constitutional militia and sovereign citizens groups.

### **How does law enforcement perceive the anti-government “patriot” groups**

To answer this research question five of the six questions that were asked attempted to gain a greater understanding of the perceptions of participating sheriffs. The consensus was that the various militia groups found in the State and specifically their jurisdictions the militia are not a general threat to society but consist of Americans dedicated to protecting the nation and fulfilling the obligations of their oaths.

There is a difference between a group of people which are in many cases are ex-military, and they are patriots in the fact that they want to support the government. Moreover, they do not want to see illegal immigration continue, and we have a lot of that in the southern region. (Participant 11, personal communication, March 16, 2016)

The Sheriffs agreed that militia groups are patriots that are interested in defending the Constitution and the local governments in which they live. However, participants did want me to understand that there were two distinct and different groups called militia and wanted to mark the difference between constitutional militia groups and other groups that have been labeled as militia groups by watchdog organizations.

Then there are the opposite groups like the Republic of Texas, and they are just totally anti-law. You know, ‘We do not recognize your authority.’ So, you have to weed out which one is that one that says, "we do not recognize any government authority" and the

threat that poses to society versus those people who are trying to assist law enforcement in a different venue. (Participant 2, personal communication, March 16, 2016)

Those sheriffs that have an active militia in their respective counties each stated that the constitutional militia was being demonized and was not a threat.

Sheriffs have also identified a differentiation in the level of government that militia groups have an issue. Participants identified that militia groups have problems with the expansion of the federal government. Militia groups support State and local government and in turn give respect to the sheriff of each county.

It is a federal government issue. The federal government resentment of what, not just this group of folks but there are plenty of folks here in Texas; especially that think that the federal government exercises overreach in a lot of areas. That resentment leads to a coalition of like-minded folks who resent the fact of what they perceive as government overreach. That lends itself to this coalition that calls themselves patriots to fight the encroachment or loss of freedom that they feel the federal government brings to the table. It's quite a number that has felt this particular administration, that is in office now, has done more federal overreach than even past administrations. I am not sure of the numbers but through conversations with quite a few folks across the state, there is quite a bit of resentment about the federal government's practices in different things that this administration has done. (Participant 7, personal communication, January 21, 2016)

The domestic terrorism threat that the militia poses, if at all, is towards the federal government. Many of the Sheriffs stated that the constitutionalist militia is not any threat at all because they support local government and specifically the office of sheriff. Several of the Sheriffs talked about how the militia meets with them

They will come in and ask me. You know Sheriff we are here for you if you need us, and I respectfully, and even some of them have brought ammunition to us, I said thank you very much, I respect it very much. However, you do not know, if they are qualified and we need it we might, you have to vet them all and ensure that there is credibility there and respectability there. All I tell them in a humorous way keep practicing. You know. Hone in on your skills but when they cross the line, and that is the definition. Who crosses the line it does not have to be a militia, it can be an individual, it can be an organizational group, and that is where we have to be the objective aspect of law and order. (Participant 11, personal communication March 16, 2016)

Another Sheriff that had firsthand experience with the militia when asked about the development of his perception he stated

Well, I empathize with their cause. I believe in what they say. I believe that we live under an oppressive federal government that has seized way more power than it is entitled too. Particularly the EPA and the Bureau of Land Management. I do think that they are taking property from people that hurt their ability to make a living. If not property perhaps the irrigation systems that go to it. They have tried to stop ranchers from cattle grazing on federal lands which have gone on for well over 100 years, and I certainly at least empathize with their cause Participant 7, personal communication, January 21, 2016).

This Sheriff found himself not wanting to listen to anything that the media or the government had to say about the militia, and would add later in the interview that the Federal Government is the greatest threat to national security.

**Discrepant cases.** The literature in this research project is what became the discrepant cases. Of the 12 sheriffs, that participated there were two that followed the example set by the literature. One of these sheriffs described militia groups as:

From a Law Enforcement standpoint, they are definitely a threat. Now, we do not have that in this area per se. I do know that you do run into them, because they do move around, and because of their general thought process, they are a threat because they do not believe we have the right to enforce government laws on them. So yeah, they are a threat. Definitely, to the street officer, not so much the public, per se but more the government wise, as far as law enforcement, and established government like courthouses. Things of this nature. If they ever decided that, they wanted to do domestic terrorism those are going to be your primary targets: courthouses, City Halls, Police Stations, Sheriff's Departments, and things of that nature. That is the primary targets they are going to go after (Participant 8, personal communication, March 18, 2016).

It is evident that this Sheriff is discussing those groups of people the consensus has defined as sovereign citizens that the watchdog organizations have put together with the constitutional militia groups. The second Sheriff stated

As far as law enforcement goes I can see how they are a dangerous situation, that put us in a really hard place the way it did the Sheriff up there having to decide, you are on national land; that is all the people's land at the same time. Do you have the right to run cattle on that place, or do you have the right to say what you are going to do it, or what you can do or can't do? If everyone else can't do the same thing or wants to do the same thing, then we are going to get into a bind. So I think it is that part up there was more of a federal thing that they needed to have more regulations to keep that from taking place and

before like what happened, and someone got killed. It was up to law enforcements to make a decision. I do not think it was really law enforcement decision to have to make, but they had to make it. They were put in that position, and they made it (Participant 12, personal communication, March 14, 2016).

These two Sheriffs repeated the very words describing the militia as found in the literature and fulfilled the predictions found in chapter three.

### **How have law enforcement perceptions been formed regarding Militia groups?**

The second research question in this research project was to explore how sheriffs develop their perceptions of militia groups. The consensus on this issue was that people had to encompass all available information, but most importantly actual contact with local militia groups is necessary.

When asked about how perceptions were created one Sheriff responded with

Most of it from around here is by having a conversation with them, and things that their ideals and what they feel like they should be. Pretty much, they feel like they should be a branch of this department. I try to keep that very separate. I do not want to tie into that. I do not know that their perception of what the Constitution and laws are not the same as ours. Because I listen to some of what their thoughts and ideas and they are different than what ours are. It is a difference in philosophy, and we have a lot of governing to the courts and things, and they are basing straight off of the constitution that was written over 200 years ago and the Texas Constitution written 150 years ago. There has been a lot of interpretations of that, and I do not think that they look at those interpretations the same way we do (Participant 9, personal communication, January 15, 2016).

Sheriffs that have sat down with militia groups in their jurisdictions have an entirely different perception of militia groups than those sheriffs that have not had that firsthand contact.

There was a middle ground in this question. Those Sheriffs who have experience with the militia from adjacent counties. They hold a mix of sources.

There is a difference too in what you are asking here and when we are looking at these.

We are not just looking at the news media. That can be an eschewed thing. What we are looking it is after the fact. We take that information, and we analyze it we look at what the police are reporting from the information that we have available to us. Now if it is an ongoing investigation, there is a limit to how much information they will release.

Normally we look at that; we evaluate the overall information that they have gathered in that time and how the incident unfolded according to what their reports indicate, you see certain parts of the hype on the news media you do not see all the detail. So, we have to look at the underlying cause, which we do, and it gives us a perspective of preparation that proactive preparation to say, that sort of thing can happen here. So based on how they dealt with this and that is how training of law enforcement is, you are aware of that you go back and look at traffic stops that went array you go back and look at situations, and you look at the entire layout, not just the news media report. So, during that time that is where your perception starts coming in (Participant 4, personal communication, March 17, 2016).

This Sheriff made a point to understand that he cannot just rely upon the media or the militia for their perceptions to be formed. Gathering information from all different sources is important.

Several of the Sheriffs agree that it is necessary to collect information from several sources, not just the media or the militia.

News Media, and I had a meeting. I belong to the Western States Sheriffs Association, and I go to their conference or try to every year. This year, I went to the conference, and



there were a lot of Sheriffs from Oregon that got up and gave a talk about the incident that occurred in Oregon. These were guys that came into their area from outside the state, outside the territory and were just there to stir things up. They were not there to protect the two guys that were going to be arrested, a matter of fact those two guys that had warrants out for them, gave themselves up voluntarily and went into [sic] prison. I think they got the shaft big time by the government, and I believe that the Bureau Land Management and the Park Service are way outside their bounds on most of the things that they do. They are so far wrong and in violation of the Constitution and violation of the law but they are following the guidelines and policy and not following the constitution, and I do not agree with how they do things. However, the people that were there protesting were way out of bounds on what they were doing. Once the Sheriffs from Oregon gave us the talk, you understand the situation. I think these guys got what they deserve they needed to go to jail. The one guy made the threat he was going to die, he made a furtive move and acted like he was going for a weapon and was shot (Participant 5, personal communication, April 1, 2016).

I think one Sheriff put it best when he stated, “as Sheriff I am not supposed to be influenced, I am expected to maintain objectivity and shame on me if I do, because I know constitutionally the militia and the intent of writing the militia in there are for the betterment of the people” (Participant 1, personal communication, January 12, 2016). Sheriffs need to make sure that they are not unduly influenced by any of the specific sources.

**Discrepant Cases.** As seen earlier, two sheriffs who did not have any firsthand knowledge of the Militia depended solely on what they see on the news and reports received from watchdog organizations and the Department of Homeland Security.

The only thing that I see of the militia is what we see on TV. Like that thing in Oregon and the Bundys or whatever their name is. That is really the only ones that I see that really bring your attention to anything. He is just not. He can say that he is a rancher, and he can say that he is this and that. However, to me, he is nothing but a troublemaker. That is just the way I feel about it. My family has been in the ranching business all my life. We sure wouldn't carry guns around because we wanted to run a cow on national land or whatever. Of course, we do not deal with national land. Like people up north do and in California and other States where they have so much federal land and where so much of it is open. People do not have any land, so they use that kind of land (Participant 12, personal communication, March 14, 2016).

One Sheriff who has not had any firsthand contact with the militia had an interesting addition to how his perception was developed. He had stated, as quoted above, that the militia was a threat he added in regards to his perception

The Intelligence Report, Southern Poverty. The different publications and magazines we get that are geared for Law Enforcement and government for information. Southern Poverty is one of the bigger resources but by the same token, I have read several things in Southern Poverty that makes me a little cynical about the things they do print because they do lean extremely one way. I have seen some articles and some groups that have been mentioned that I know of, and the way they talk about them is way far off from where they are actually at. I know they do lean one direction. I take it with a grain of salt with them (Participant 6, personal communication, March 14, 2016).

This Sheriff is willing to admit that the information provided was skewed, but relies upon the SPLC to form his perception of the threat of the militia, knowing that other reports given by the SPLC are skewed.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, we explored the common themes to each of the research questions. First, how does Texas Sheriffs perceive the anti-government patriot militia? Second, how are those perceptions developed? Quotes from several Sheriffs that represented the common statements were presented to show the attitudes and perceptions of the participating Sheriffs. Nudge theory, combined with Credulous Bayesianism and Groupthink influencing perception occurs when the Sheriff does not have firsthand contact. Without firsthand contact with the militia, it is evidenced that perception is formed by the information that is provided by various media sources. When the Sheriffs have had firsthand contact with the militia, all of them believe that the militia is not a threat to domestic terrorism or national security.

In chapter five, I will discuss the interpretations of the project and the implications of these results. There are some limitations to this study, which will be reviewed and recommendations made.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Introduction

10 U.S.C. §311 states that all able-bodied men and women between the ages of 17 and 45 are citizens or intend to be citizens are in the militia. There are two classes of militia listed in 10 U.S.C. § 311 and the second class of militia is “the unorganized militia, which consists of the members of the militia who are not members of the National Guard or the Naval Militia.” This class of militia includes all able-bodied men and women who are not part of the active or reserve U.S. Military. During the last seven years, the number of militia groups has increased to over 1300 different militias across the country, accounting for an 813% increase in the number of patriot militias (Potok, 2014a). Academia, watchdog organizations, the media, and the Federal Government has declared that these militia groups are violent extremists and a threat to national security. The media such as CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News have presented militia activity like those found in Nevada during the Passover Standoff on the Bundy Ranch (Caldwell, 2014), and again in Oregon where the Bundy’s got involved as armed revolt (Oregon Public Radio, 2016). The media and academia use these events to show the public that militias are dangerous, threat national security, and place the public at risk (ADL, 1999). The Federal Government also has released reports warning of the danger of extremist groups, and the right-wing militia is on that list although not listed as among the greatest risks to the safety of the American people (Bjelopera, 2012).

Freilich and Pridemore (2006) suggested that the perception of the anti-government patriot militia needs to be re-evaluated. He stated that the current perception of the militia could be wrong and that the militia may not be a threat (Freilich & Pridemore, 2006). I designed this project to start that re-evaluation. The SPLC identified Texas, New Mexico, Utah, and Idaho as

states with active militia activity against the government (Potok, 2014b). Of the four states, Texas was reported to have the most active militia groups (Potok, 2014c). Thus, I chose Texas for the project. Specifically, I selected Texas sheriffs to interview for this project to explore if nudge theory, Credulous Bayesianism, and groupthink have affected their perceptions of militias.

### **Summary of Key Findings**

The results of this research project show that the current analysis of constitutional militia groups is, at the very least, partially wrong. The data indicates that constitutional militia groups are not a threat to the nation. That being said, the participants in this research study identified a differentiation between the constitutional militia groups and sovereign citizens groups.

The majority of sheriffs interviewed for this project stated that the constitutional militia is not a threat to society. Several of the sheriffs indicated that there was a threat to the federal government since there are “people who are dissatisfied with the federal government at this time, and have been dissatisfied with the federal government for some time.” The militias “don't necessary recognize the authority of a federal agency in some instances.” However, militias do acknowledge the authority of the local sheriff, and in many cases has volunteered services to the sheriffs of their respective counties. For instance, one participant noted:

They will come in and ask me. You know Sheriff we are here for you if you need us, and I respectfully, and even some of them have brought ammunition to us, I said thank you very much, I respect it very much. However, you do not know, if they are qualified and we need it we might, you have to vet them all and ensure that there is credibility there and respectability there. (Participant 10, personal communication, April 4, 2016)

The constitutional militia in Texas is not a threat to national security and does not pose a threat of domestic terrorism. Its members are upset about the perceived encroachments of the Federal Government.

I have no concern to speak of about the militia being a security threat, a national security threat. I have more concern of the federal government being a threat to national security than the militia. I said this earlier, and I want to say it again. I am not talking about the FBI I am not talking about the DEA I am not talking about the ICE I am not talking about the Border Patrol I am not talking about the law enforcement portion of the federal government. They are very hard working men and women who are here to prevent and solve criminal activity, Period. I am talking about regulatory bureaucracies of the federal government. Like the Bureau of Land Management and EPA are the two biggest.

(Participant 3, personal communication, March 17, 2016)

The sheriffs that have had first-hand contact with the constitutional anti-government militia agreed that there is no domestic terrorism threat to the local government from the militia. However, those sheriffs who have not had the same experience and relied upon the media agree with the narrative in that the militia is a grave threat to the nation.

### **Interpretation of Project Findings**

The most important thing I learned about this project is that there needs to be a clarification of what the militia is. Sheriffs that participated in this project made a point to identify a difference between the militia and the sovereign citizen movement. One participant stated:

Again as Sheriff, I am not supposed to be influenced. I am supposed to maintain objectivity, and shame on me if I do because I know constitutionally the militia and the

intent of writing the militia in there are for the betterment of the people. In an orderly manner, but the evolution of a perception of what a militia is you have broad spectrums you got people that believe it and know the constitutionality of it, and you got people that are rogue people that got their guns and their ammo and they are going to march down the streets of this town. As sheriff, I have to maintain objectivity to say really who is it you just said there might be a misperception of what a militia really is. That is probably somewhat true, but I reserve the right to make that determination on a case by case basis. (Participant 11, personal communication, March 16, 2016)

The militia is a constitutionally and legally protected group within the United States. The sovereign citizen does not reserve this same right because they have no respect for the Federal Government, or for any government entity that claims control over their lives.

They are ultra-right wing groups, “We The People,” and they are somewhat a threat, not to national security so much as they are somewhat of a threat because they believe that they are sovereign citizens and that no government has any control over them whatsoever--even local government. (Participant 7, personal communication, January 21, 2016)

There is a major difference between the two groups of right-wing extremists and these differences need to be recognized throughout the reporting agencies that track these groups. There needs to be a differentiation made between these groups because they are significantly different, as indicated by the sheriff quotes above.

### **Nudge Theory**

Nudging has shown to be effective in influencing the perceptions of those sheriffs who have not had firsthand contact with the militia. Both of these sheriffs relied upon the media and

the SPLC to build their opinions and perceptions of the threat posed by the militia (John, Smith, & Stoker, 2009). Nudge theory suggests that through the proper placement of information, social change is accomplished through changing the perceptions of the target population (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). These perceptions are sometimes pushed in the wrong direction and influence people incorrectly, as was evident in this project with those sheriffs who only had the media to consult about the threat of the militia (Evans, 2012). The research shows two specific results. The key lesson learned here is that firsthand knowledge will affect individual perceptions of the militia. If the sheriffs had firsthand knowledge of the militia, then they did not believe that it is a threat. If there had been no first-hand contact with the militia, the sheriffs relied upon the media reports and those from SPLC, and their perception of the militia was a reflection of that information.

### **Credulous Bayesianism Theory**

The theory of Credulous Bayesianism suggests that once a narrative has been adopted, all other voices are rejected (Lauderdale, 2008). Eliminating outside voices contributes to polarization (Acemoglu, Dahleh, Lobel, & Ozdaglar, 2011). Based on all of the sheriff's comments, I found that none of them were attempting to eliminate outside voices.

We are not just looking at the news media. That can be an eschewed thing. What we are looking it is after the fact. We take that information, and we analyze it we look at what the police are reporting from the information that we have available to us. Mainly the intel information that we look at comes from the federal government sources, Homeland Security, other law enforcement entities that were involved, State and Local authorities that dealt with it. You have got to take all of that information together to review it.

(Participant 4, personal communication, March 17, 2016)



The sheriffs who participated were not interested in shutting down information about the militia, and many felt that this was important research to be done. All of the sheriffs stated that they were interested in following my research and were interested in its results. This study shows that Credulous Bayesianism is not a factor among the sheriffs interviewed.

### **Groupthink**

There are eight characteristics that Janis (1973) that describe group think the most predominant are those activities that protect the “in-group,” punish the “out-group” and most importantly to apply pressure on the “in-group” members to maintain the narrative (Goette, Huffman, & Meier, 2006). In this study, we also did not find any evidence of groupthink. Ten of the twelve Sheriffs interviewed stated that the militia was not a threat, but that is not proof of groupthink. Each Sheriff showed an interest in learning more about the activities of the militia and suggested that each case should be taken individually.

I have a lot more opened mind to the situation, obviously, because there’s more so a multiple positions, there’s multiple positions than a signalized position. I just don’t believe that you can document and say this militia is exactly like this militia, and they are not. They might have common purposes; they might have common causes, but they are not the same (Participant 11, personal communication, March 16, 2016).

Sheriffs are not interested in breaking down the paths of communication, and that is another significant finding in this project. Groupthink is not evident among the Sheriffs because they must maintain objectivity and not let any single source influence their impressions.

As sheriff, I have to maintain objectivity to say really who is it you just said there may be a misperception of what a militia really is. That is probably somewhat true, but I reserve

the right to make that determination on a case-by-case basis (Participant 9, personal communication, January 15, 2016).

### **Project Limitations**

The limitations of the study are that there are so few participants. This project needs to be expanded significantly. There are 254 Sheriffs in the State of Texas, and while this project made a start in the understanding of the militia, there are 242 more Sheriffs left to interview. This project was built for it to be replicated across the country using a case study (Yin, 2009). A qualitative case study is required because there are 65 active militia groups in a State with 254 counties. If a quantitative study were to be conducted, the results would be insignificant. Thus, this project was selected. The sample is small and needs to be expanded. Speaking with one Sheriff, he stated that his Office receives two to three project requests a week, and many are tired of responding unless it peaks their interest in the subject title. I believe that building interest in this project will cause more Sheriffs willing to participate.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This project can be repeated as designed in as many States as desired (Creswell, 2013). The SPLC have identified Texas, New Mexico, Utah, and Idaho as the States with the greatest amount of militia activity and the most prone to physical violence. I recommend that this project be repeated with each the Sheriffs of each of these States to continue the understanding of the militia.

Additional research should include speaking with the militia and learning what they have in mind and what their intentions include. Academia, the media, and even law enforcement can predict the intentions and threat of the militia, but we will never really know until we sit down with the leadership of the militia itself and learn what they desire. Thus, I recommend a

nationwide project exploring the ideology, beliefs, and intentions of the militia. Through talking with the militia and learning their belief structure as it pertains to the United States and any possible threats they might pose to the nation.

### **Project Implications**

It needs to be remembered that the unorganized militia is not only legal and constitutional, but many Americans believe that they are what ensures the government is by and for the people. It is the position of the militia to help protect the county they live in from all enemies foreign and domestic (Specter et al., 1999). On a national level, it is important to separate the constitutional patriot militia who respect local government and the sovereign citizens who respect no authority at all.

I am sorry that the word militia has become adversarial because I think what's the difference between a militia or a posse when it comes to a mounted unit reserves, the only thing is that are commissioned officers or a community group. We are limited in government here at the Sheriff's office. I need more personnel; there is an advocacy maybe you call it a militia, but there is advocacy [sic]. I know Doctors and Lawyers, I know professionals that go out and sporting wise train, and they are pretty good at it. Would I consider them to assist? You know it would have to be a very serious threatening circumstance because ultimately as sheriff I am going to do what it takes to protect, to serve and protect the people, lawfully. The fact that they necessitate a posse, which i.e. might be a so-called aspect of someone defining it as a militia, well ok so be it (Participant 11, March 16, 2016).

Sheriffs in Texas recognize the militia as a legitimate entity and if a situation got bad enough would be willing to call the militia to help restore order.

Another implication learned about this product is that it is important for the federal government to coordinate with the local sheriff when facing an encounter with the militia. Waco, Texas is remembered for the confrontation between the ATF and David Koresh on Mt. Carmel. It is because of events like the assault on the Branch Davidian compound the militia found a foothold in America to combat the encroachment of the federal government upon the people of America (Specter et al., 1999).

I think the local Sheriff has more knowledge about these people than the federal government. These people have no respect for the federal government nor the policies that they put out and rightfully so. The deal that occurred in Waco with Koresh, the Sheriff up there, I knew him well, he is gone now; Jack knew Koresh, knew the people, knew the area and volunteered and would have gone in and got Koresh out and arrested him without a problem. Koresh would have given up to him. Jack had talked to him, before all of this stuff went on he had, had conversations with him. So, there was no conversation from the feds, they just went in and tried to force their way in, and those people stood up against them. Those people do not like the federal government, and the feds do not understand that. They cannot understand why people fear the government, and it is a real fear. When you have the BLM, the Park service is doing the things they are doing and usurping their rights on their property, and taking up their land and taking it away from them, they have every right to fear the government. The local Sheriff can control that (Participant 5, personal communication, April 1, 2016).

When the federal government has issues with anti-government groups whether the militia or sovereign citizens instead of an armed conflict with the group as we have seen at Ruby Ridge, Mt. Carmel, and now in Harney County, Oregon at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge ending

in the death of citizens the federal government needs to coordinate with the local Sheriff. The Sheriff is the most likely candidate to de-escalate a tense situation.

I can negotiate with a guy out in the middle of the country, you going to negotiate with a guy out in the middle as easy? Are you going to negotiate with someone in a building with a gun? Hell no you cannot see him (Participant 9, personal communication, January 15, 2016).

When the federal government is not trusted, and agents from the federal government enter a county and push their way past the Sheriff to take control of a situation, it increases the distrust. It is important to involve the Sheriff from the outset of any confrontation.

Moments before his death, Robert “LaVoy” Finicum, screamed out of his window that he was going to have a meeting with the Sheriff in Grant County (Peacher, 2016). Peacher (2016) reports that the Sheriff is now under investigation by the Department of Justice because of an inappropriate relationship with the leaders of the armed occupation group because he had met with them. This is an example of groupthink on the part of the Department of Justice because they are enforcing the narrative that the anti-government group in Oregon was a threat to domestic terrorism, and any individual who goes against the narrative is targeted for punishment. Allowing the Sheriff in Grant County to participate in deescalating the situation. Instead, the federal government is responsible for another death of an American that could have been avoided.

### **Conclusion**

The Constitutional Militia is not a threat. The anti-government patriot militia is not a group of sovereign citizens who defy all authority of the government and lack respect for all law enforcement. The U.S. Code and the Texas Constitution legally authorize the militia to operate

within the United States and in the State of Texas. These militia groups have shown that they give respect to local law enforcement, and that respect needs to be utilized when there becomes an issue with the militia. It is important that the militia and sovereign citizens not be used in the same terms. They are not the same type of group. It is important to utilize the power, authority, and respect that is held by the Sheriff in his county to prevent more Americans from dying at the hands of the federal government.

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## Appendix A

### **Interview Protocol Project: Perceptions of Law Enforcement on the Domestic Terrorism**

#### **Threat of the Militia.**

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of the Interviewee:

This project is to explore the perceptions of Local Law Enforcement of the Militia and the threat they pose to Domestic Terror. It is believed that if commonalities can be found in the various agencies that deal with the Militia, a common best practices policy can be created to deal with detection. Investigation and prosecution of the Militia as needed.

Questions:

7. How do you perceive the anti-government "Patriot" Groups?
8. What militias, if any, exist in your County?
9. What, if any, domestic terrorism threats do these militia groups pose to society, and specifically to your County?
10. What gaps exist in the preparations by law enforcement agencies to address potential threats posed by the militia groups?
11. What has influenced your perceptions of the militia?

Thank the Sheriff for their time. Assure them that their confidentiality will be maintained unless otherwise so instructed.

Advise the interviewee that a copy of the transcript will be provided for their review and approval.

## Appendix B

### CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study of law enforcement perceptions of the right wing militia and their threat to domestic terrorism. The researcher is inviting Texas County Sheriffs with an understanding of the right wing militia to be in the study. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named John Fisher, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions law enforcement has in regards to the right-wing militia.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in a 45 to 60-minute face to face interview covering your experiences with the militia
- Review a transcript of the interview to verify accuracy.
- Discuss or provide any current policy in identifying, investigating and arresting militia group members.

#### **Here are some sample questions:**

1. How do you perceive the anti-government “Patriot” Groups?
2. What militias, if any, exist in your County?
3. What, if any, domestic terrorism threats do these militia groups pose to society, and specifically to your County?
4. What gaps exist in the preparations by law enforcement agencies to address potential threats posed by the militia groups?
5. By what means have you developed your perceptions of the Militia?

#### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at Walden University will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as stress or becoming upset. Being in this study would not pose a risk to your safety or well-being.

Being a part of this study will help start a new understanding of the militia and help create a best practices policy for identifying, managing, investigating and arresting militia group members if needed.

**Privacy:**

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by being saved to a project specific data stick and kept in a personal safe. Data will be kept for at least five years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Alternatively, if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via cell phone (432)466-9809 or email at john.fisher1@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210 Walden University's approval number for this study is **IRB will enter approval number here** and it expires on **IRB will enter an expiration date.**

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep. (For face-to-face research)

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information, and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By replying to this email with the words, "I consent," I understand that I agree to the terms described above. A paper copy will be provided to you at the time of the interview and signatures will be taken at that time.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Signature

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Researcher's Signature

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## Appendix C

### Email to prospective Sheriffs

Sheriff

My name is John Fisher, and I am a Ph.D. student at Walden University. I am conducting my dissertation research and would like to ask you to participate. I am investigating the perceptions held of County Sheriffs in regards to the anti-government Militia that operate in the State of Texas. My intent is to explore the threat these groups pose to national security and domestic violence as perceived by Texas Sheriffs. I would like to interview you at your convenience during the months of May and June 2015. The interview should not take more than an hour of your time.

Data will be collected from you and several other Sheriffs relating to your experience with the Militia. You may be contacted for additional follow-up questions after the initial interview. You will receive a copy of interview transcripts via email for review and clarification comments.

Your name and involvement in this project will remain anonymous and will be identified as Sheriff of Texas.

Thank you

John Fisher, Ph.D. Student Walden University

## Appendix D

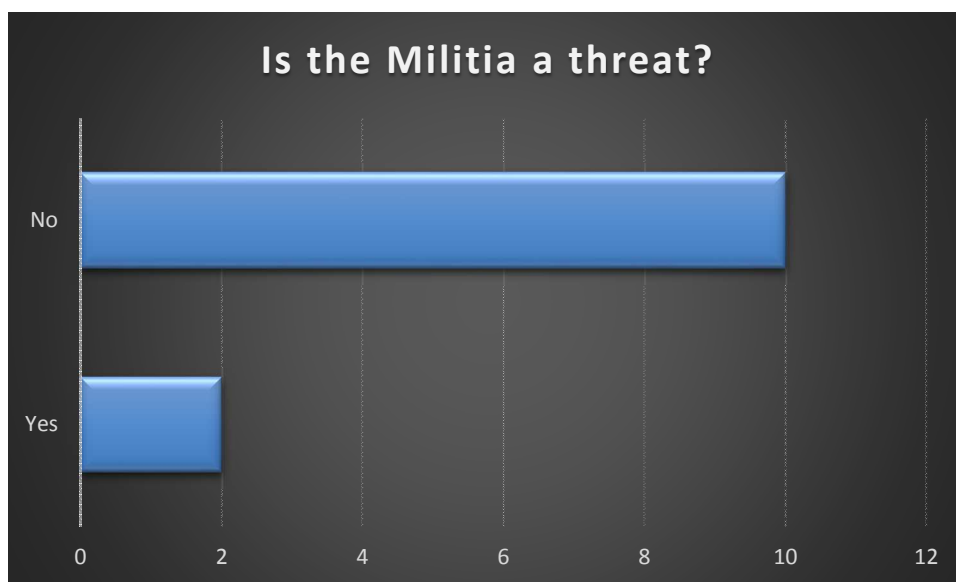
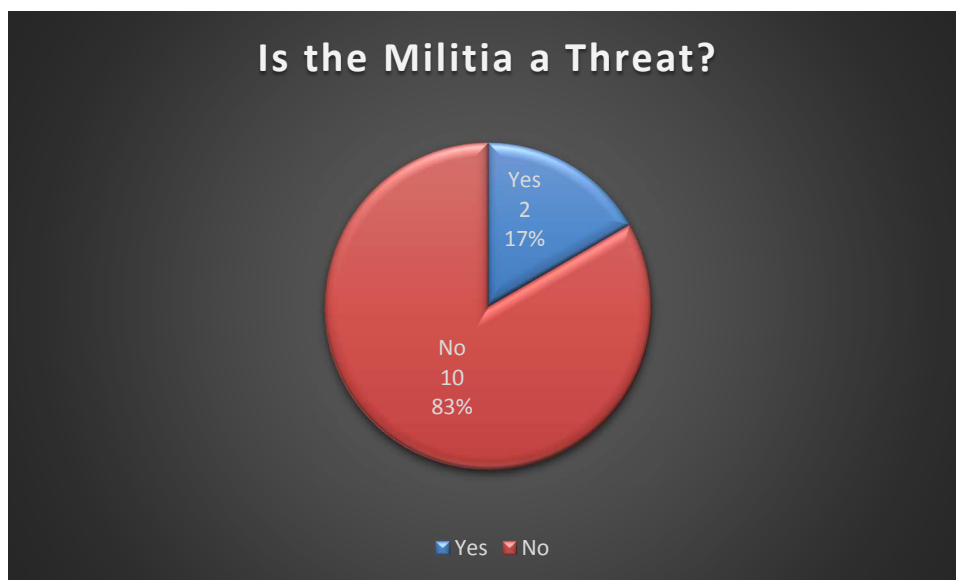
### Data and Frequency Charts

#### Data Charts

| Participants | Is the Militia a threat | How did develop you perception |                        |   |
|--------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|---|
| 1            | 2                       | 3                              | Militia is a Threat    |   |
| 2            | 2                       | 3                              | Yes                    | 1 |
| 3            | 2                       | 3                              | No                     | 2 |
| 4            | 2                       | 3                              |                        |   |
| 5            | 2                       | 3                              | Perception development |   |
| 6            | 1                       | 1                              | Media Only             | 1 |
| 7            | 2                       | 2                              | First hand Experience  | 2 |
| 8            | 2                       | 3                              | Combination of both    | 3 |
| 9            | 2                       | 3                              |                        |   |
| 10           | 2                       | 2                              |                        |   |
| 11           | 2                       | 3                              |                        |   |
| 12           | 1                       | 1                              |                        |   |

#### How does law enforcement perceive the anti-government “Patriot” Groups?

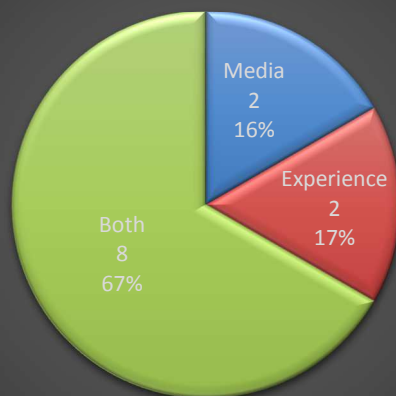
| Militia a threat | Frequency | Rel. FRQ | %        |
|------------------|-----------|----------|----------|
| Yes              | 2         | 0.166667 | 16.66667 |
| No               | 10        | 0.833333 | 83.33333 |
| Total            | 12        | 1        | 100      |



**How have law enforcement perceptions been formed regarding militia groups?**

| Perception Development | Frequency | Rel Frq  | %        |
|------------------------|-----------|----------|----------|
| Media                  | 2         | 0.166667 | 16.66667 |
| Experience             | 2         | 0.166667 | 16.66667 |
| Both                   | 8         | 0.666667 | 66.66667 |
| Total                  | 12        | 1        | 100      |

## Development of Perception



Media Experience Both

## Frequency

