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A Cultural Topography of the Sovereign Citizens Movement: Are They a Terrorist Threat?

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A CULTURAL TOPOGRAPHY OF THE SOVEREIGN CITIZENS MOVEMENT:

ARE THEY A TERRORIST THREAT?

by

Piper Blotter Biery

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
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ABSTRACT

A Cultural Topography of the Sovereign Citizens Movement:

Are They a Terrorist Threat?

by

Piper Blotter Biery, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2014

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Department: Political Science

The United States government has assessed that the Sovereign Citizens

Movement, a collection of individuals claiming that federal, state, and local governments

operate illegally, is a terrorist organization. As a result, law enforcement agencies have

developed particular strategies, and their officers have received specialized training for

dealing with Sovereigns. Despite this, Sovereign Citizens claim to be a non-violent

organization. This thesis uses the Cultural Mapping research framework to analyze the

identity, norms, values, and perceptual lens of the group in order to determine the extent

of the threat they pose, and assess the effectiveness of the government's response to their

activities.

(86 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

A Cultural Topography of the Sovereign Citizens Movement:

Are They a Terrorist Threat?

Piper Blotter Biery

This thesis analyzes the Sovereign Citizens Movement—considered a domestic terrorist organization by the FBI— to determine if the label "terrorist organization" is appropriately applied, and then to assess the effectiveness of government protocols. The Sovereign Citizens Movement is a loose organization of individuals who adhere to an anti-government ideology. In most cases their actions are limited to fraudulent activity; however there have been individuals who resorted to violence in their engagements with government officials. This thesis concludes that the label "terrorist organization" does not describe the movement well, but that it is more likely that some individuals extrapolate the ideology and choose violence on their own, making them lone-wolf terrorists. Another conclusion of this thesis is that there needs to be a regular set of protocols established for all government agencies for interacting with Sovereigns. The method created by Rob Finch and Kory Flowers, which incorporates both law enforcement officials and legal professionals, provides the most effective way to interact with Sovereigns.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

On May 20, 2010 two police officers in West Memphis, Arkansas stopped what they perceived to be a suspicious white minivan. Jerry Kane, the driver, argued with the officers for several minutes, before his son, Joe, stepped out with an AK-47 and gunned down both officers.   The Kanes then fled the scene. Within a couple of hours they were found in a Walmart parking lot changing the plates on their white minivan. A Wildlife Officer rammed his vehicle into the van so the Kanes would be unable to flee, and a shootout ensued. Two more officers were wounded, and both of the Kanes were killed.[1]

The Kanes' response to a routine stop is shocking. After further investigation it was discovered that the Kanes belonged to the Sovereign Citizens Movement. Individuals claiming sovereign citizenship believe federal, state, and local governments operate illegally.[2] Including this incident, Sovereign Citizens[3] are tied to the killings of at least four other officers since 2000, the Oklahoma City bombing, through one of the planners, Terry Nichols, and the plane driven into the Austin, Texas IRS building by Joe Stack.[4] Because of these events the FBI "considers sovereign-citizen extremism a domestic terrorist movement."[5]

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[1] J.J. MacNab, "'Sovereign' Citizen Kane," *The Intelligence Report*, no. 139 (Fall 2010), http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2010/fall/sovereign-citizen-kane (accessed October 16, 2013).

[2] FBI's Counterterrorism Analysis Section, "Sovereign Citizens: A Growing Domestic Threat to Law Enforcement," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin,* September 2011, http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/law-enforcement-bulletin/september-2011/sovereign-citizens (accessed September 2013).

[3] Throughout this thesis the terms "Sovereign Citizen" and "Sovereigns" will be capitalized, indicating that they are a part of the Sovereign Citizens Movement, and differentiating them from other individuals who legally forfeit their U.S. citizenship. Most authors writing about this movement choose not to capitalize these terms, thus in all quotations the authors' original spelling will be retained.

[4] FBI, "Sovereign Citizens," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, Sept. 2011.

[5] FBI, "Sovereign Citizens," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, Sept. 2011.

However, the Sovereign Citizens themselves claim to be non-violent.[6] Indeed, most crimes committed by these extremists fall under the white-collar category, and most encounters with Sovereign Citizens are annoyances rather than violent exchanges. For example, James Sanders, a self-proclaimed Sovereign Citizen, paid a fine of $702 to a Florida courthouse in pennies, showing up ten minutes before the end of the work day.[7] Still federal and local law enforcement agencies have dedicated significant time developing strategies to respond to the extremists.[8] Also, in some situations, such as calling in a SWAT team in response to a bad license plate, there appears to be an exaggerated response by law enforcement when engaging them.[9]

When institutions or individuals apply a label to another organization or person there is meaning attached to that label. Some labels carry significantly more weight than

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[6] *Sovereign Citizenship,* http://www.sovereign-citizenship.net/home/home.html (accessed September 12, 2013).

[7] "'Sovereign Citizen' Pays Fines with 70,000 Pennies," *Channel 10 News*, (Florida), September 16, 2013, http://www.wtsp.com/news/article/335451/58/Sovereign-citizen-pays-fines-with-70000-pennies (accessed September 18, 2013).

[8] Heidi Beirich, "Two North Carolina Detectives Build Program for Dealing with 'Sovereign Citizens'," *Intelligence Report*, no. 147 (Fall 2012), http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2012/fall/dealing-with-sovereigns (accessed October 17, 2013).
See Also: Morgan A. Linn, "Sovereign Citizen Encounters: What Officers Should Know," *Mike DeWine, Ohio Attorney General: Law Enforcement Bulletin,* April 15, 2013, https://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/Media/Newsletters/Law-Enforcement-Bulletin/April-2013/Sovereign-citizen-encounters-What-officers-should (accessed October 17, 2013).
David Zucchino, "Police Teach Tactics for Handling 'Sovereign Citizens,'" *Los Angeles Times,* April 5, 2013, http://articles.latimes.com/2013/apr/05/nation/la-na-sovereigns-20130406 (accessed October 17, 2013).
UNC School of Government's "A Quick Guide to Sovereign Citizens" was created based on the assessments of Finch and Flowers.

[9] Rob Finch and Kory Flowers, "Sovereign Citizens: A Clear and Present Danger," *Police Patrol: The Law Enforcement Magazine*, (September 21, 2012), http://www.policemag.com/channel/patrol/articles/2012/09/sovereign-citizens-a-clear-and-present-danger.aspx (accessed October 17, 2013).

others, and have power to change the way that group is perceived. "Terrorist" is one of

those labels. Philip Herbst describes this well:

> *Terrorist* became the mantra of our time, carrying similar negative charge
> as *communist* once did. Like that word, it tends to divide the world
> simplistically into those who are assigned the stigma and those who
> believe themselves above it. Conveying criminality, illegitimacy, and even
> madness, the application of *terrorist* shuts the door to discussion *about* the
> stigmatized group or *with* them, while reinforcing the righteousness of the
> labelers, justifying their agendas and mobilizing their responses.[10]

The Sovereign Citizen Movement has been understudied. Defining them as a terrorist

organization is potentially dangerous, and may actually encourage them to become what

the label states they are, if they are not already. Before we "shut the door to discussion"

about, or with, Sovereign Citizens it is useful to ensure the organization fits the

parameters of the label "terrorist organization"—especially as more people become

involved in the group. This thesis answers the question*: Is the Sovereign Citizens*

Movement a terrorist organization? and then briefly assesses the policy question: *Are the*

protocols being applied to the Sovereign Citizens likely to be effective in diminishing the

threats posed by this group?

There are at least three potential answers to the definitional question. First, the

research may indicate that the Sovereign Citizens Movement is an organization

specifically designed to encourage radical violent behavior from its adherents in order to

harm the United States government, and thus, is appropriately labeled a terrorist

organization. Second, it may indicate that the movement is like a gnat—annoying, ever

present, but ultimately causing minimal damage. While they are a nuisance to the

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[10] Philip Herbst, *Talking Terrorism: A Dictionary of the Loaded Language of Political Violence,*
(Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2003), 164, emphasis original.

government they may not warrant the label "terrorist organization." Finally, it may be the case that the Sovereign Citizens Movement does not encourage violent extremism, but that at times a lone individual will extrapolate the ideology of the group and engage in terrorist activity of his/her own accord. Thus the label "terrorist organization" may not be usefully applied to the movement or organization as a whole, but law enforcement would be well advised to keep a keen eye on the group as a breeding ground for leaderless resistance outbursts. This scenario is especially delicate as government protocols may in fact inspire and increase lone-wolf activity.

The first question posed by this thesis: *Is the Sovereign Citizens Movement a terrorist organization?* will be addressed through an assessment of academic and institutional definitions and their fit with the modes of organization and operation inherent to the Sovereign Citizens Movement. It will also employ the Cultural Mapping method[11]—a research framework drawn from strategic culture and interpretive traditions within political science—in order to assess the intentions of the organization. Understanding the intentions of an organization is a critical part of classifying it.

Insights into the second question: *Are the protocols being applied to the Sovereign Citizens likely to be effective in diminishing the threats posed by this group?* will stem from the Cultural Mapping method which uses four perspectives: identity, norms, values, and perceptual lens to locate critical factors that influence a group. This method will help not only to understand the Sovereign Citizens Movement's structure, but its internal codes, patterns of behavior, and intentions.

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[11] Jeannie L. Johnson and Matthew T. Berrett, "Cultural Topography: A New Research Tool for Intelligence Analysts," Unclassified articles from *Studies in Intelligence* 55, no. 2 (June 2011).

In a time when the term terrorism has a significant impact, not only on the perception of the populace, but also on the management of limited government resources, it is essential to understand what the response to a specific organization—terrorist or not—should be. Understanding the effectiveness of government protocols will enable a tailored approach to responding to Sovereign Citizens as well as maximizing the utility of government resources.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will examine a range of academic and institutional interpretations of terrorism in order to appropriately place the Sovereign Citizens Movement within that definitional structure. It will do so by exploring the conceptual context of terrorism in both academic and organizational frameworks.[12] Second, this thesis will frame inquiry into the intentions of Sovereign Citizens, and the policy question concerning the nature of response to policing protocols within the research design of Cultural Mapping.

Conceptual Context

An essential part of assessing whether or not the Sovereign Citizens Movement is a terrorist organization is defining the term. This section of the thesis will explore the conceptual context of terrorism. First, it will attempt to define terrorism generally, narrowing it down to domestic terrorism by exploring both academic and organizational perspectives. Second, it will provide a typology of terrorist groups based on their structure.

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[12] For the purposes of this thesis the term "organizational" refers to a U.S. government subculture that influences policy making. Examples include a specific branch of the military, intelligence community, or other bureaucracy. In this thesis the organization is the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Jeffrey Legro defines organizational culture as "the pattern of assumptions, ideas, and beliefs that prescribes how a group should adapt to its external environment and manage its internal affairs influences calculations and actions."
Jeffrey W. Legro, "Which Norms Matter? Revisiting the 'Failure' of Internationalism," *International Organization* 51, no. 1 (1997): 35.

Definitions

One of the most essential, and difficult, tasks for a conversation about terrorism, and particularly domestic terrorism, is defining it. Despite the fact that terrorism is a serious security concern for most states and an influential part of many political organizations, there is no consensus about what the term terrorism means. Academics have struggled for decades to create a satisfying definition, but still disagree about even the most fundamental elements. Major institutions which are devoted to eradicating it, such as the United Nations, the United States' Department of State, or Federal Bureau of Investigation, disagree about critical elements. The Department of Homeland Security, an U.S. institution created with the specific purpose of combating terrorism post-9/11, does not have a formal definition of the very thing it stands in opposition to. However, having a concrete definition is critical for the purposes of this thesis. There are two definitions that are particularly pertinent. One is provided by academia, the other from a government institution—the United States' Federal Bureau of Investigation.

<u>Academic</u>

In *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research,* Alex P. Schmid attempts to create a comprehensive definition of terrorism. He surveyed fifty academics to glean their criticisms and expectations, and then produced a definition that was a conglomeration of these professionals' opinions. The result is something he terms "the revised academic

consensus definition of terrorism".[13] The ultimate definition comprises two pages of text, and will be included in the appendix. However, the primary definition is:

> Terrorism refers on the one hand to a **doctrine** about the presumed effectiveness of a special form or tactic of fear-generating, coercive political violence and, on the other hand, to a conspiratorial **practice** of calculated, demonstrative, direct violent action without legal or moral restraints, targeting mainly civilians and noncombatants, performed for its propagandistic and psychological effects on various audiences and conflict parties.[14]

This definition, especially in its entirety, outlines some of the critical elements required to define terrorism, such as the motivation of the activity (political change), the type of political activity (violent), the targets of terrorism (civilians and noncombatants), and purpose (propagandistic and psychological effects).

Yet, even within this definition there are contested terms. For example, what is a noncombatant? This is one of the most divisive terms within the definition. The term noncombatants has had an important role in preventing the official adoption of a singular definition of terrorism within the United Nations and is hotly contested in the War on Terror. The U.S. Department of State demonstrates how problematic this term can be. In 2003 the State Department determined that a noncombatant was, "in addition to civilians, military personnel who at the time of the incident are unarmed and/or not on duty."[15] Then in its 2005 report it expanded the definition, claiming that noncombatants are "in

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[13] Alex P. Schmid, "The Definition of Terrorism," in *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research,* ed. Alex P. Schmid (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 86.

[14] Schmid, "The Definition of Terrorism," 86. Emphasis original.

[15] Ambassador Cofer Black, "Introduction," in *Patterns Global Terrorism 2003* (United States Department of State: April 2004), xii, http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/31932.pdf (accessed October 2013).

addition to civilians, military personnel (whether or not armed or on duty) who are not

deployed in a warzone or a war-like setting."[16]

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)

The FBI's definition of terrorism is critical for the purposes of this thesis, as it is

the FBI that classified the Sovereign Citizens Movement as terrorist, and it is part of the

U.S. anti-terrorism apparatus that constructs and responds to terrorist activity. The FBI's

official website adopts the definition from U.S. Code, and divides it into two distinct

categories, "international terrorism" and "domestic terrorism." For the purposes of this

thesis, and based on the FBI's distinction of the Sovereign Citizens Movement as a

domestic terrorist organization, the FBI's "domestic terrorism" definition is the most

relevant:

> "Domestic terrorism" means activities with the following three
> characteristics:
> - Involve acts dangerous to human life that violate federal or state law;
> - Appear intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to
>   influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii)
>   to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination or
>   kidnapping; and
> - Occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the U.S.[17]

The FBI amends this definition, based on U.S. code, to include that:

> [The] federal crime of terrorism [is] an offense that:
> - Is calculated to influence or affect the conduct of government by
>   intimidation or coercion, or to retaliate against government conduct; and
> - Is a violation of one of several listed statutes, including § 930(c) (relating
>   to killing or attempted killing during an attack on a federal facility with a

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[16] Schmid, "The Definition of Terrorism," 46.

[17] "Definitions of Terrorism in the U.S. Code," *The Federal Bureau of Investigation: Terrorism*,
http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/investigate/terrorism/terrorism-definition (accessed December 30, 2013).

dangerous weapon); and § 1114 (relating to killing or attempted killing of officers and employees of the U.S.).[18]

According to the FBI, acts of domestic terrorism must endanger peoples' lives, attempt to change government behavior, and must occur within the United States. They avoid the term noncombatant, insisting instead that the victims can be civilians or "officers and employees of the U.S."

Typology of Terrorism

Terrorists can be categorized by several different typologies based on their motivations, tactics, geographical location, and structure of the terrorist organization.[19] One of the most basic ways to organize terrorist groups is by structure. This includes both organizational and "lone wolf" terrorists.

Organizational Terrorism

Terrorist groups are organized and have structure. This makes their activities more efficient, and protects the leadership from being eliminated. Individuals receive instruction and training on how to operate effectively and what tactics to employ. Within an organization an individual—who is often already radicalized—becomes indoctrinated with the narrative and culture of which they have become a part. There are two typical structures for terrorist organizations: hierarchical and networked. [20]

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[18] "Definitions of Terrorism in the U.S. Code," *The Federal Bureau of Investigation: Terrorism.*
[19] This is not a comprehensive list of terrorist typologies, just a few selected for their applicability to this research topic. For a more exhaustive discussion of the types and typologies of terrorism see Sarah V. Marsden and Alex P. Schmid, "Typologies of Terrorism and Political Violence," in *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research,* ed. Alex P. Schmid (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 158-193.
[20] United States Government, US Army, "Terrorist Organizational Models," *A Military Guide to Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century* (US: Createspace Independent Publishing Platform, 2007), 3.

Hierarchical organizations have a fairly strict vertical flow. Information and resources flow up and down the chain of command, but not often horizontally. Typically in this structure only cell leaders have knowledge of other cells, and only those at the top have the full view of the organization. This type of structure is favored by organizations with strong political, social, or economic objectives, such as separatist-nationalist groups, or leftist groups. [21]

The basic feature of terrorist networked structures is that cells and individuals need only be loosely connected. They have the same goal, often a narrow issue compared to the full scale change of a separatist group. There is little coordination between cells, and they are encouraged to use initiative. However, the lack of coordination means that sometimes a cell may engage in an activity that harms the movement as a whole, because there is no overseer watching out for the entire group.[22] If the structure of a group is either hierarchical or networked, with the organization encouraging, teaching, coordinating, and placing overt value on violent terrorist action, then it is a terrorist organization.

Lone-Wolf Terrorism

The "lone wolf" strategy of terrorism, sometimes called "leaderless resistance," was popularized by Louis Beam. Beam was a racist, a former member of the Ku Klux Klan and the Aryan Nations, and advocated for this strategy as it makes it more difficult

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[21] US Army, "Terrorist Organizational Models," 3-6.
[22] US Army, "Terrorist Organizational Models," 3-7.

for law enforcement agencies to respond to and stop terrorist activity.[23] There is discord

among scholars over the nature of leaderless resistance. The definition provided here

comes from a Dutch council on crisis management. It was selected because the council

synthesized the work of many scholars on lone-wolf terror, and created a concise yet

thorough definition.

Lone-wolf terror, is terror that is:

Committed by persons:
    (a) who operate individually;
    (b) who do not belong to an organized terrorist group or network;
    (c) who act without the direct influence of a leader or hierarchy;
    (d) whose tactics and methods are conceived and directed by the
        individual without any direct outside command or direction.[24]

The council chose to define lone-wolf terrorism narrowly, excluding acts that

include two or more people, while other terrorist experts, such as Christopher Hewitt

believe that lone-wolf terrorism can consist of no more than four individuals.[25] Bruce

Hoffman, takes this one more step indicating that there is no such thing as the lone

terrorist. He believes that "to qualify as terrorism, violence must be perpetrated by some

organizational entity with at least some conspiratorial structure and identifiable chain of

command beyond a single individual acting on his or her own."[26] Despite Hoffman's

opinion, the existence of lone-wolf terrorism has been validated by academia. The Dutch

institute identified seventy-two international incidents of leaderless resistance between

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[23] Lone-Wolf Terrorism, *Instituut voor Veiligheids-en Crisismanagement*, (Rotterdam, Netherlands: 2007), 13, http://www.transnationalterrorism.eu/tekst/publications/Lone-Wolf%20Terrorism.pdf (accessed November 6, 2013).
[24] Lone-Wolf Terrorism, *Instituut voor Veiligheids,* 6.
[25] Lone-Wolf Terrorism, *Instituut voor Veiligheids,* 14.
[26] Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 42-43.

1968 and 2007,[27] and Hewitt found twenty-seven U.S. cases between 1955 and 2001.[28]

The FBI "believe[s] most domestic attacks are carried out by lone offenders to promote

their own grievances and agendas."[29] They further explain that lone wolves are

> driven to hateful attacks based on a particular set of beliefs without a
> larger group's knowledge or support. In some cases these lone offenders
> may have tried to join a group but were kicked out for being too radical or
> simply left the group because they felt it wasn't extreme or violent
> enough.[30]

McCauley and Moskalenko believe that unlike most individuals who join terrorist

groups, lone-wolf terrorists are more likely to fit a particular mold. Their research

indicates that lone terrorists, after reaching a level of radical political thought only acted

out after "something of great emotional significance occurred…what move[s] [them]

is…an unusual capacity to care about others."[31] This moment of great emotional

significance was not perpetrated against the lone-wolf, but instead occurred to some other

group. An example of this is Timothy McVeigh, who admitted that his bombing of the

Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City was motivated by the Waco Siege.

It was not done just for retaliation, but also to draw attention to his political agenda.

McVeigh believed the government intended to disarm the U.S. population, violating his

second amendment rights.[32]

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[27] Lone-Wolf Terrorism, *Instituut voor Veiligheids,* 16.

[28] Clark McCauley and Sophia Moskalenko, "Toward a Profile of Lone Wolf Terrorists: What Moves an Individual From Radical Opinion to Radical Action," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 26 (2014): 81.

[29] "Domestic Terrorism: In the Post-9/11 Era," *The Federal Bureau of Investigation: Terrorism,* http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2009/september/domterror_090709 (accessed January 17, 2014).

[30] "Domestic Terrorism," *The Federal Bureau of Investigation.*

[31] McCauley and Moskalenko, "Toward a Profile of Lone Wolf Terrorists," 76.

[32] Stuart A. Wright, *Patriots, Politics, and the Oklahoma City Bombing*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 4-5.

Methodological Context

There are many different ways to approach questions linked to terrorism. Many

scholars depend on the databases that have been developed—most of which emphasize

quantitative methods of study. Schmid introduces thirty three databases, and only two of

them are primarily qualitative.[33] However, the most frequently mentioned research

method employed by terrorism scholars is "study of documents originating from

terrorists/sympathizers," followed by, "study of scholarly books and articles on

terrorism," and "study of newspapers and other media outputs on terrorism."[34] These

methods have produced answers to many questions about terrorism, and have introduced

new ones. However, they emphasize generalizability, and often make claims that prove

faulty in specific circumstances.

Strategic Culture

I will be using a novel method called "Cultural Mapping" developed by Matthew

Berrett and Jeannie Johnson.[35] Cultural Mapping is located in the paradigm of strategic

culture. While strategic culture itself has been defined by various scholars, one of the

most comprehensive definitions is attributed to the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction

Agency. It reads:

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[33] Alex P. Schmid, introduction to *The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research*, ed. Alex P. Schmid (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 9-10.
[34] Schmid, introduction, 11.
[35] Johnson and Berrett, "Cultural Topography."

> Strategic culture is that set of shared beliefs, assumptions, and modes of behavior, derived from common experiences and accepted narratives (both oral and written), that shape collective identity and relationships to other groups, and which determine appropriate ends and means for achieving security objectives.[36]

Strategic culture's contribution is that it recognizes the effects of culture on the creation of a state's decision making process, specifically security policy.[37] "[It] can also allow us to more accurately evaluate and interpret our intelligence and threat assessments of dangers emanating from within other cultures."[38] Implemented well, strategic culture provides more nuance to systems level paradigms, creating a more accurate picture and better policy.

Traditionally strategic culture has been used to assess security policy at the state level of analysis.[39] However there have been a few cases where it has been applied to sub-state actors.[40] Jerry Mark Long has also used this paradigm to assess al Qaeda and its

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[36] Jeannie L. Johnson, Kerry M. Kartchner, and Jeffrey A. Larsen, introduction to *Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction: Culturally Based Insights into Comparative National Security Policymaking,* ed. Jeannie L. Johnson, Kerry M. Kartchner, and Jeffrey A. Larsen (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 9.

[37] Colin Gray, "Strategic Culture as Context: The First Generation of Theory Strikes Back," *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 1 (1999): 49-69; see also Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review* 51, no. 2 (1986): 273-286; Jack Snyder, "The Concept of Strategic Culture: Caveat Emptor," in *Strategic Power: The United States of America and the USSR,* ed. Carl G. Jacobsen (London: MacMillan Press, 1990); Ken Booth, "The Concept of Strategic Culture Affirmed," in *Strategic Power: The United States of America and the USSR,* ed. Carl G. Jacobsen (London: MacMillan Press, 1990).

[38] Johnson, Kartchner, and Larsen, introduction, 7.

[39] *Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction: Culturally Based Insights into Comparative National Security Policymaking,* ed. Jeannie L. Johnson, Kerry M. Kartchner, and Jeffrey A. Larsen (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009); see also Jack Snyder, "The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Nuclear Operations," (project report, United State Air Force, 1977); Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); several case studies exist in *Neorealism Versus Strategic Culture*, ed. John Glenn, Darryl Howlett, and Stuart Poore (Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004); also Lawrence Sondhaus, *Strategic Culture and Ways of War,* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006); *Culture and Foreign Policy*, ed. Valerie M. Hudson, (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1997).

[40] Legro, "Which Norms Matter?" 31-63.

potential use of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).[41] He argues that its application is

appropriate because al Qaeda has developed a "meta-narrative, the overarching story that

situates individuals in a distinct community, provides a cognitive roadmap by which they

are to live, and that motivates members to protect the community against its enemies,

even in the face of death."[42] Through an analysis of this narrative Long assesses that if al

Qaeda were able to obtain a WMD it is probable that they would use it on non-Muslim

countries, but would be less likely to use it on Muslim countries.[43]

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[41] Jerry Mark Long, "Does Al Qaeda have a Strategic Culture?" *Strategic Culture and Weapons of Mass Destruction: Culturally Based Insights into Comparative National Security Policymaking,* ed. Jeannie L. Johnson, Kerry M. Kartchner, and Jeffrey A. Larsen (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 201-218.
[42] Long, "Does Al Qaeda have a Strategic Culture?" 204.
[43] Long, "Does Al Qaeda have a Strategic Culture?" 214.

RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to appropriately assess the Sovereign Citizens Movement this thesis will

employ the Cultural Mapping method within the Cultural Topography research

framework. Social scientists use particular methods in order to ensure that their results

can be tested, offering others a chance to replicate and possibly disprove their

conclusions. This separates their work from amateurs who research for their own

enjoyment. The Cultural Mapping method was developed by Jeannie Johnson and

Matthew Berrett to help intelligence analysts look beyond the paradigms of their

institutions to find cultural elements that influence decision-making within the groups

they study.[44] This method is appropriate not just for security analysts, but also for those

in academia because both types of researchers are bounded by similar limitations such as:

biases of gatekeepers, inability to live within the culture being studied, and the

information available within a research facility.[45] It has been formally adopted as an

analytic method by the intelligence community, and is articulated as a method in the

Strategic Culture literature. It has also been the framework employed in a number of

successful intelligence pieces, and a comprehensive assessment of an organization within

the U.S. security community.[46] The Cultural Mapping method is employed in this thesis

because its unique design allows for a calculated, replicable approach to understanding

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[44] Johnson and Berrett, "Cultural Topography," 3.
[45] Johnson and Berrett, "Cultural Topography," 3-4.
[46] Jeannie L. Johnson, "Assessing the Strategic Impact of Service Culture on Counterinsurgency
Operations: Case: United States Marine Corps" (PhD diss., University of Reading, 2013).

the intentions of the Sovereign Citizens Movement, and assessing the type of threat the group may pose.

The Cultural Mapping exercise draws from the strategic culture tradition in offering a very specific research approach for analysis of national or subnational culture groupings. As a process it narrows down the cultural analysis of strategic culture to four basic elements: identity, values, norms, and perceptual lens—each of which plays a role in the decision making process of the group. The identity of a group influences the specific roles they pursue in their environments, and the character traits they embrace. Their norms are the "accepted and expected modes of behavior," and can help determine which actions might be considered an "appropriate" or validated response to government protocols by this organization. Their values indicate not only what they deem important, but also what attributes or material goods confer honor. The group's perceptual lens reveals how they perceive the environment they live in, as well as the other groups with whom they interact.[47] In concert these perspectives enable us to "identify both those issues or policy moves which may cause a group to coalesce and fortify core identity, as well as those that may cause a group to fracture and engage in disparate action."[48]

The Cultural Mapping exercise is also an interpretive or hermeneutic approach. Interpretivism stands in opposition to the positivist, or naturalist, approach to political science. Positivists believe that social science can be conducted using the same basic methods that are used in the natural sciences. Interpretivists believe that the social world is distinctly different than the natural world. The difference is that human action is

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[47] Johnson and Berrett, "Cultural Topography," 3-7.
[48] Johnson, "Assessing the Strategic Impact of Service Culture on Counterinsurgency Operations," 33.

intentional, "they express the purposes and ideas of social actors" while natural activities are not.[49] Kubálková paraphrasing Pettman explains,

> There is a difference between knowing the natural world and knowing the human one. Human beings are creative in a way rocks are not. The possibility of knowing rocks in a singular, eternal, and absolute way is a real one….human creativity is seemingly endless and well nigh boundless, and this means that no single Truth can ever obtain [sic] about humankind.[50]

Interpretivists believe that it is possible to explain the intentions of human activity, but in order to do this we have to understand the meanings behind individual behavior, symbolic gestures, and even the nuances of particular words in a given context.[51] Cultural Mapping facilitates this by putting the scientist *into* the context, helping him/her determine what is valuable and motivates behavior, although it is true that the scientist may still be bounded by their own biases.

One of the consequences of an interpretivist approach, such as Cultural Mapping, is that it does not lend itself to generalizations, or theories. It responds to a particular situation and provides tailored policy initiatives. It illuminates the intentions of the group.

Cultural Mapping

The Cultural Mapping exercise involves seven steps. First, the researcher selects an issue of strategic interest. Second, he/she selects an actor for focused study. Third, he/she amasses a range of cultural influences likely to influence an actor's decision

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[49] Donald Moon, "The Logic of Political Inquiry: A Synthesis of Opposed Perspectives," *Political Science: Scope and Theory, Handbook of Political Science Vol. 1*, ed. Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson W. Polsby (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1975), 155.
[50] Vendulka Kubálková, "A Constructivist Primer," *Foreign Policy in a Constructed World* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 2001), 60.
[51] Moon, "The Logic of Political Inquiry," 170.

making. Fourth, the researcher employs the four research perspectives: identity, norms, values, and perceptual lens to begin to identify and assess relevant cultural factors. Fifth, he/she hones in on those most relevant for the policy issue at hand--critical cultural factors. Sixth, he/she maps those factors across the cultural influences identified in step three in order to assess the source and scope of the most critical cultural factors. Seventh, he/she assesses the results of the research.[52]

Step One: Identify an Issue of Strategic Interest

Step one requires the researcher to select a specific problem or policy question at the outset of the research. This is because a "cultural [profile] built without the framing of a particular security question [is] of limited utility to operational planners."[53] It is not essential that this question remain the basis of the research--a more important issue may emerge from better understanding the cultural context as research progresses. This process adopts the essence of grounded theory, "a method of extracting theory from data by allowing immersion in the data to unearth patterns and trends worthy of study."[54] Once the initial definitional question of this thesis is answered by an examination of the academic and policy literature on terrorism, the Cultural Mapping exercise will provide insight into the intentions of the group as well as respond to the policy question: are the protocols set in motion by use of the "terrorist organization" label usefully applied against the Sovereign Citizens Movement?

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[52] Johnson, "Assessing the Strategic Impact of Service Culture on Counterinsurgency Operations," 35.
[53] Johnson, "Assessing the Strategic Impact of Service Culture on Counterinsurgency Operations," 35.
[54] Johnson, "Assessing the Strategic Impact of Service Culture on Counterinsurgency Operations," 36.

Step Two: Select an Actor for Focused Study

In step two the researcher selects a particular actor for study. Nearly every time a security issue exists there are multiple actors involved. In this case the relevant actors include Sovereign Citizens, law enforcement agencies and agents, and victims of Sovereign actions—who are not always law enforcement. The process of narrowing down to a particular actor comes from the needs of the security issue. Johnson explains, "the strategist," meaning individual employing the Cultural Mapping method, "may assess that the selected organization or grouping is a 'wild card' in need of scrutiny, or an organization that has long been understood in one vein and is being asked to switch to another."[55] The Sovereign Citizens Movement was chosen as the primary focus of research because it is a growing organization of which little is known. Because it has been understudied the label "terrorist organization" may or may not have been appropriately applied.

Step Three: Amass a Range of Cultural Influences

Step three, amassing a range of cultural influences, involves both the basic cultural influences any individual bears: "national, ethnic, religious, socio-economic, generational, and gendered" as well as the unconventional such as those created by the organization.[56]

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[55] Johnson, "Assessing the Strategic Impact of Service Culture on Counterinsurgency Operations," 37.
[56] Johnson, "Assessing the Strategic Impact of Service Culture on Counterinsurgency Operations," 38.

Step Four: Employ Four Research Perspectives

Step four recommends the researcher organize the cultural data into the previously mentioned four perspectives: identity, norms, values and perceptual lens.[57] These lenses provide a framework for analysis. The benefit of these categories is that they are "distinctive enough from one another to inspire different sets of questions and elastic enough to capture a wide range of data."[58] They facilitate the process by enabling the researcher to step into the context of the situation and share conceptions with the group in order to explain the intentions of an action, or perhaps even to predict it. The intentions have to be learned contextually.[59] Johnson and Berrett define each perspective:

> **Identity:** The character traits the group assigns to itself, the reputation it pursues, and individual roles and statuses it designates to members.
> **Norms:** Accepted and expected modes of behavior.
> **Values:** Material or ideational goods that are honored or that confer increased status to members.
> **Perceptual Lens:** The filter through which this group determines "facts" about others.[60]

Further exploration of these perspectives follows below.

Identity

Identity emphasizes the role that the group sees for itself. The identity of a group determines its objectives and purpose. "It is a group's self-assessment—its own view of group character, strengths and weakness, and its intended strategic role, now and in the future."[61] For example, at the nation-state level, for good or for bad, the United States has

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[57] This thesis adopts the recommendation of the original authors.
[58] Johnson and Berrett, "Cultural Topography," 6.
[59] Moon, "The Logic of Political Inquiry," 170, 175.
[60] Johnson and Berrett, "Cultural Topography," 6, emphasis original.
[61] Johnson, "Assessing the Strategic Impact of Service Culture on Counterinsurgency Operations," 40.

an identity of "world police". This identity plays a role in strategic policy making of each White House Administration. Sometimes it is a determining force, such as U.S. intervention in Serbia in the nineties; other times its influence is weaker, such as determining whether or not to get involved in Syria, most recently.

Part of the objective of the Cultural Mapping method is to determine how influential a group's identity is in the decision making process. This is why it is so important to have a specific security question in mind when attempting the Cultural Mapping method, rather than attempting to create a generalizable theory. If an organization self-identifies as a force in opposition to a government, that identity may influence the actions they take, including whether those actions can be violent.

Norms

Norms are the formal and informal "rules" of behavior that the group accepts, or expects from its members. Within the context of Cultural Mapping there are two kinds of norms, those with instrumental utility and those that have intrinsic value. Instrumental norms are used because they have direct benefits for the actor; they are a "means to an end." Intrinsic norms are ones that "are internalized and will persist without supervision and despite more 'logical' recommendations."[62] Understanding whether a norm is instrumental or intrinsic provides the strategist with an avenue for implementing a change they would like to see—instrumental norms being more open to change while intrinsic norms are less open. "When a norm achieves both instrumental utility (a proven track record for achieving strategic ends) and intrinsic value (it fulfills emotional or moral

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[62] Johnson, "Assessing the Strategic Impact of Service Culture on Counterinsurgency Operations," 43.

needs created by the group) it may be regarded as particularly robust."[63] The norms of the group—both intrinsic and instrumental—will indicate whether or not violent behavior is accepted—regardless of whether or not the organization claims to be peaceful and may offer some indication of likely trend lines for the future.

Values

Every organization and institution has some mechanism for bestowing honor on itself, its members, or particular actions—these are the things it values. Cultural Mapping recognizes two forms of value: "character traits or material goods which elevate one's status in the relevant society" and "those memes in a society that are powerfully loaded with positive emotion."[64] Understanding the values of an organization is critical to understanding the role that terror might play. If members who engage in terrorism tend to be honored and respected because of their activities, then terrorism is valuable to the movement. They will be unlikely to give it up. However, if terrorism creates discord and shame within the group then it is not.[65]

Perceptual Lens

Because of the vastness of information the human brain is subject to, and its limitations, the world and our conceptions of it are filtered through a lens. We understand the world through our observations and interpretations, and this creates our perceptual lens. Johnson references Fisher, who argues that there are three elemental ways that our

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[63] Johnson, "Assessing the Strategic Impact of Service Culture on Counterinsurgency Operations," 43.
[64] Johnson, "Assessing the Strategic Impact of Service Culture on Counterinsurgency Operations," 44.
[65] Johnson, "Assessing the Strategic Impact of Service Culture on Counterinsurgency Operations," 45.

perceptual lenses influence us. The first, cognitive processes, is based on the

aforementioned conditions of reality.

> The human mind simply cannot encompass the full complexity of all the
> events and stimuli which press upon it from even its own immediate,
> everyday environment….It must therefore have a means of efficiently
> screening, sorting, coding, and storing sensory data….Mindsets, then,
> are…a means of simplifying the environment and bringing to each new
> experience or event a pre-established frame of reference for understanding
> it.[66]

Cosmology, or "mindsets about the way the world works, the forces that control

it, and what humans are meant to do about it," is the second lens. Understanding the

perceptual lens of the group may also help pinpoint areas where the organization sees

the government as legitimate—if they do at all.

The third lens is "perceptions of self." This is the way the group perceives its

own history, which may be vastly different from the "facts." Regardless of whether or

not their perceptions mirror "reality" or not, they still influence what the actor actually

does. Perceptions, in this case, are more important than objective "reality".[67]

Once the researcher has determined to employ the Cultural Mapping method

he/she must actually go out and get cultural data about the chosen actor. Political

scientists and their organizational counterparts, Johnson explains, have not developed

particular modes of doing this. Instead the Cultural Mapping method depends on modes

produced by other fields including: anthropology, sociology, psychology, and

professionals such as Foreign Service officers and journalists.[68] These modes include:

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[66] Glen Fisher, *Mindsets: The Role of Culture and Perception in International Relations, 2nd Edition* (Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press, 1997), 22-23.

[67] Johnson, "Assessing the Strategic Impact of Service Culture on Counterinsurgency Operations," 47.

[68] Johnson, "Assessing the Strategic Impact of Service Culture on Counterinsurgency Operations," 67.

tracking and analyzing institutional images and narratives about self over time; examining material culture and the meaning it has for its members; tracking the themes of key leadership speeches; assessing the values celebrated in hero legend and highlighting, where possible, when and why these have changed over time; identifying key rituals and the values they celebrate; testing knowledge of the culture against the humor produced within it; paying keen attention to those actions and habits of character rewarded with status and those derided; sifting through internal jargon: what comprises and 'insult'? compliment? How does the lexicon reflect institutional values?; and absorbing as much as one can via participant observation.[69]

However, this research has limitations. Research projects driven by content analysis are often analyzed by a team of researchers in order to ensure their validity. In this case there is only one author interpreting the work, and this may result in bias regardless of how objective the author attempts to be. In order to compensate for this bias the author has examined a wide variety of source offerings.

The data include a range of primary and secondary sources assembled and analyzed according to the four categories: identity, norms, values, and perceptual lens. Unlike many other threatening organizations, there are few academic publications that help to establish the culture, purpose, and motivations of Sovereign Citizens. One example is an academic article that assesses the psychological well-being of Sovereign Citizens in terms of their ability to stand trial for their crimes.[70] Also, the University of North Carolina has developed "A Quick Guide to Sovereign Citizens," which outlines

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[69] Johnson, "Assessing the Strategic Impact of Service Culture on Counterinsurgency Operations," 67.

[70] Jennifer Pytyck and Gary A. Chaimowitz, "The Sovereign Citizen Movement and Fitness to Stand Trial," *International Journal of Forensic Mental Health* 12 (2013): 149-153.

basic beliefs and practices of the movement.[71] This appears to be the extent of peer-reviewed, professional academic publishing on this group.

Other professionals have also published on the Sovereign Citizen Movement. Their activities have been catalogued by journalists, both in written and broadcast forms. The Southern Poverty Law Center also tracks Sovereign Citizens. Additionally, law enforcement officials have developed workshops and essays that attempt to define the group, as well as provide patterns for interacting with them. They have also published reports detailing their interactions with Sovereign Citizens. Twenty seven different news reports were reviewed for this thesis. In incidences where many different news stations reported the same event, often with nearly identical verbatim, only one source is provided, so as not to over report any particular incidence. These news reports primarily stem from the past four years. Violent encounters are more likely to be a source for the news, so these examples do not accurately represent the wide-range of activity that Sovereigns employ. Despite this, there are still more nonviolent encounters reported by the media than violent.

One Sovereign Citizen, who calls himself H.I.R.M J.M. Sovereign: Godsent™, has compiled a handbook for Sovereigns. This guide is called *Title 4 Flag Says You're SCHWAG!: The Sovereign Citizen's Handbook.* For the purposes of this thesis, version 3.1 will be used as it is available on the Sovereign Citizen Website, as well as on

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[71] UNC School of Government, "A Quick Guide to Sovereign Citizens," University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (2012).

Amazon.[72] This handbook explains what sovereign citizenship is according to H.I.R.M

J.M. Sovereign: Godsent™, including methods for adherents to avoid legal penalties,

erase their presence established by birth certificates and other licenses, and gain access to

millions of dollars they believe the United States government holds in their name. He is

not the only Sovereign to publish a guide. John David Van Hove, known by Sovereigns

as "Johnny Liberty" has published several texts to help Sovereigns find their way,

including: *Global Sovereign's Handbook, Individual Sovereignty Process,* and *Allodial

Titles and Land Patents.*

Included in analysis were the twenty seven blog posts produced by Jumpin Jack

Ca$h, a self-proclaimed Sovereign Citizen in the Seattle area who participates in the

group as part of a Copwatch team and as a journalist, by filming interactions with police

officers in order to prevent them from engaging in alleged illegal behaviors. He also

produces comics for the organization.

This research also includes a sampling of thirty YouTube videos. These videos

include those produced by Sovereign Citizens, those posted for instructional purposes by

Sovereigns, and at least two created by journalists. These videos were produced

anywhere between the early nineties (although they were uploaded more recently) and the

present day, and were selected based on the number of views and comments they

received, as well as their connections to both regular Sovereigns and those who hold

some sort of leadership position.

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[72]Version 3.1 of *Title 4 Flag Says You're SCHWAG!: The Sovereign Citizen's Handbook* is available at the Sovereign Citizen Website and can be accessed with the following URL: http://flag-book.com/title-4-flag-says-youre-schwag-the-sovereign-citizens-handbook/.

Step Five: Hone Critical Cultural Factors (CCFs)

In step five the cultural data is refined through a three part litmus test. Cultural

factors must exhibit the following traits:

1. **Relevance** for the issue selected.
2. **Robustness***:*
   - How well established?
   - How widely shared amongst members of this group?
   - To what extent is opinion or behavior that is inconsistent with this aspect of identity, norms, values, or perceptual lens rewarded or punished internally by other members of this group?
3. A likelihood that this cultural factor will provoke a **Response** (cooperative or conflictual) when the strategist engages this group on this issue.[73]

Patterns may emerge from the data. These can be tested by determining if they exist in a

variety of different sources. For this project that includes textual resources such as the

Sovereign Citizen's Handbook, and secondary sources such as news articles, scholars,

people who know or interact with them, and the organization's many online publications.

If patterns emerge in diverse geographical locations, and within several types of sources

they are considered "critical cultural factors (CCFs)," meaning they indicate the

"intentions behind examined actions."[74]

Step Six: Map CCFs Across Cultural Influences

After collecting the CCFs it is appropriate to determine from which cultural

influences they stem. This helps the researcher assess which behaviors come from the

culture that was "purposefully cultivated by that organization" and which come from

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[73] Johnson, "Assessing the Strategic Impact of Service Culture on Counterinsurgency Operations," 49, emphasis original.
[74] Johnson, "Assessing the Strategic Impact of Service Culture on Counterinsurgency Operations," 49.

external sources.[75] For the Sovereign Citizens Movement this step will be crucial to

determining whether or not the actual organization is terrorist. It will indicate if the

Sovereign Citizens Movement encourages terrorism, or if terrorist activity attributed to

individual members is motivated by other forces.

Step Seven: Assess Results

In step seven the results of the previous steps are assessed for legitimacy. This can

be done by testing them in the field, or waiting for time to pass and either prove or

disprove them through the group's activities. In this case it is this thesis that provides the

assessments of the results of the research. If the data indicates that the Sovereign Citizens

Movement is not a terrorist organization, it will still be valuable to determine if the

protocols of law enforcement are encouraging or dampening Sovereign behaviors.

For this particular group, the Sovereign Citizens Movement, the Cultural Mapping

exercise will enable insight into what motivates their actions, an assessment of whether or

not they may be a terrorist organization, and what their intentions are. The analysis will

also explore opportunities to offer practical advice about the amount of resource

investment the U.S. can/should afford in addressing the Sovereign Citizens.

This thesis proceeds with an analysis of the Sovereign Citizens Movement

through the lenses of the Cultural Mapping method because it provides a basis for

understanding the group. Then it will answer the first research question: *Is the Sovereign*

Citizens Movement a terrorist organization? by responding to the definitional and

typological parameters of terrorism. The Cultural Mapping exercise illuminates the

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[75] Johnson, "Assessing the Strategic Impact of Service Culture on Counterinsurgency Operations," 49.

intentions of the Sovereign Citizens Movement, and proceeds to help answer the second

question: *Are the protocols being applied to the Sovereign Citizens likely to be effective*

in diminishing the threats posed by this group? by providing background information

about current government protocols. The thesis concludes with recommendations for

future interactions with Sovereigns.

THE NARRATIVE: IDENTITY AND PERCEPTUAL LENS

In the case of the Sovereign Citizens Movement it is the perceptual lens of the

organization that gave birth to its identity. Without this alternative history it would be

useless for Sovereign Citizens to share their message, and encourage others to do the

same. The Sovereign Citizens Movement is best understood by examining its conceptual

foundation, perceptual lens and identity, and then moving to an assessment of behaviors

stemming from norms and values. This analysis proceeds in that order.

Perceptual Lens

Sovereign Citizens are located all across the United States, and even throughout

the globe. One radio interview, rebroadcasted on YouTube, included participants from

Arizona, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Texas; and comments and questions were

encouraged and incorporated from the station's online chat room, introducing even more

diversity.[76] In addition to diverse geographic distribution, Sovereign Citizens come from

a variety of backgrounds, some liberal and others conservative, and the movement has

existed in some form or another since the 1970s.[77] FBI research indicates that "generally,

sovereign citizens do not operate as a group or have an established leadership hierarchy.

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[76] "A Look At The Sovereignty Movement w/Attorney Margo Lane…," YouTube video, 1:57:37, posted by "AdmiralConservative," December 12, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AbhDUGo5zfI (accessed March 14, 2014).

[77] For examples of this compare: "Man on the land Executor Advocate Revocate Republic for Ariz…," YouTube video, 57:07, posted by "*republicusagold,*" May 11, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jC9mbr-c5oo&list=PL298AFB2458557680&index=3 (accessed March 12, 2014) and "Sovereign citizens, of the United States," YouTube video, 6:55, posted by "*TheAlyonaShow,*" March 8, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hjnQrZ7-Rcg (accessed March 14, 2014).

Rather they act independently or in loosely affiliated groups which come together for training, to assist with paperwork, and to socialize based on sovereign ideology."[78] The Sovereign movement exists in its most tangible form on the internet, where members regularly share information and instruction on how to obtain sovereign citizenship through YouTube videos and blog posts.

One of the consequences of this decentralized network is that there is minimal consistency in the finer details of the narrative of Sovereign Citizens.[79] However, there is still a general history that all Sovereigns depend on, and have since the seventies—this is their perceptual lens. The narrative insists that when the United States created the District of Columbia in 1871 the U.S. ceased to be a country, and instead became a corporation— this belief is based on the fact that from this time forward the words "United States of America" were written in all capital letters in the U.S. Constitution, and a reinterpretation of a section of *Black's Law Dictionary,* which states that only the names of corporations and dead people can be spelled out with all capitals.

According to the Sovereign Citizen narrative it was not until the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified that an entity called "the U.S. citizen" was created. An individual's birth certificate makes them property, a slave to the U.S. Corporation. However, it also gives them access to a treasury bond created in their name at their birth that is supposedly worth millions, and has been used as collateral by the U.S. government to secure loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Used correctly, a birth

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[78] Domestic Terrorism Operations Unit, "Sovereign Citizens: An Introduction for Law Enforcement," *Federal Bureau of Investigation*, unclassified, November 2010, http://info.publicintelligence.net/FBI-SovereignCitizens.pdf (accessed October 18, 2013).
[79] "Sovereign Citizens Movement," *Southern Poverty Law Center*.

certificate can be used to pay bills and relieve personal debt. Sovereigns also claim that when an individual becomes a U.S. citizen they lose their inalienable rights, retaining only civil ones.

Sovereign Citizens further suggest that any time they enter into a "contract" with the U.S.—including registering a company, obtaining a social security card, registering a vehicle, or obtaining a driver's or marriage license—they do it as the "straw man" representation that government has created. The straw man, Sovereigns claim, is created by the government the day one is born and issued a birth certificate. It has the same name, address, and legal information as the individual it represents, but does not really exist. According to Sovereigns, laws, debts, and legal obligations only belong to the straw man, but the government has duped us into believing that we are responsible for it.[80] Without a straw man one does not have to register anything with the government or answer to its authority. In order to get out of paying taxes, routine traffic stops, or registering their properties, all they have to do is insist that they are the "real man on the land" instead of the straw man. Asserting that one is the "real man" means that they are not subject to the U.S. government, and are sovereign unto themselves.[81]

Sovereigns see government officials as their oppressors, and employ their tactics (outlined in the norms section) in order to free themselves. Figure one illustrates the

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[80] "Meet Your Strawman!" YouTube Video, 5:01, posted by "infomaticfilms," June 14, 2010, accessed March 5, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ME7K6P7hlko.

[81] This summation of Sovereigns' perceptual lens is primarily derived from "Johnny Liberty – Reclaiming Your Sovereign Citizenship," YouTube video, 1:50:13, posted by "Duron Chavis," November 15, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9a9PYp94T8 (accessed March 10, 2014), and *Title 4 Flag Says You're Schwag!*
Additional sources providing this general information are available in the references.

influence of the groups' perceptual lens. As they take back what they see as their proper

place in the United States, Sovereigns become more powerful than officials.

Figure 1- Comic of a Sovereign reclaiming dominance
over the U.S. government (or corporation).[82]

Law enforcement officers are the most common way that Sovereigns interact with

the government, and so they take the brunt of the Sovereigns' animosity toward the

government. In internet discussion they are regularly called "pigs" and other common

derogatory terms for police officers.[83] Sovereign Citizens perceive law enforcement as

duped slaves that serve the government to bring in revenue. Because of this they can be

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[82] Godsent, *Title 4 Flag Says You're Schwag!,* 54.
[83] Examples of this can be found in nearly every comments section in YouTube videos and news reports.

manipulated to free the Sovereigns as in figure two, where the officers are offering the

Sovereign their own money and vouchers for a hotel stay and gasoline.
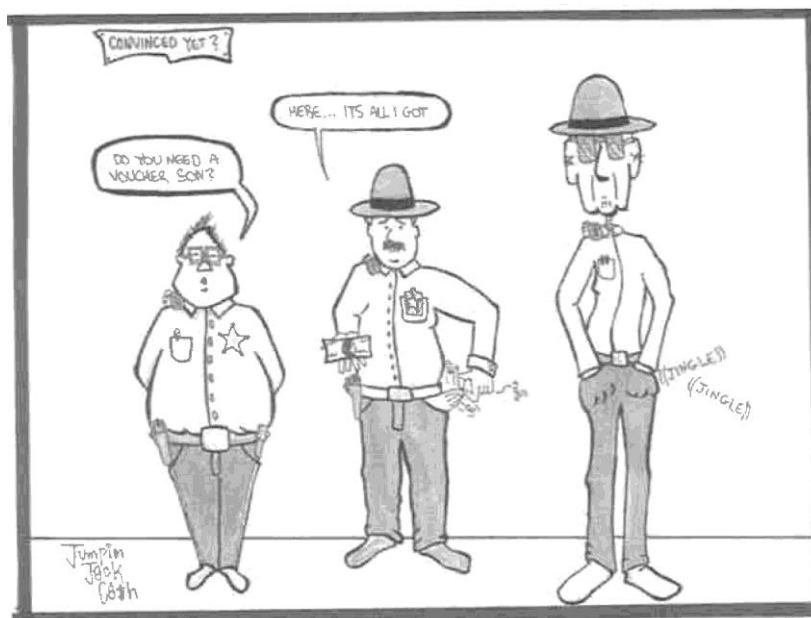
Figure 2- Comic of police officers showing deference
after finding out the alleged criminal was a Sovereign[84]

Identity

It is from this interpretation of U.S. history that the identity of the group is born.

Sovereigns believe they have knowledge that has been kept hidden from the general

population, and share this message in hopes that others will join their cause. H.I.R.M

J.M. Godsent™ goes so far as to say that he is offering the "red pill" that will take

Americans outside of the "matrix."[85] Others have posted enthusiastic videos about what

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[84] Godsent, *Title 4 Flag Says You're Schwag!,* 70.
[85] Godsent, *Title 4 Flag Says You're Schwag!,* 20-21.

they have just learned from a friend that explains some element of sovereign citizenship

that could make their lives easier, such as how to get out of a traffic citation, or how to

use their birth certificate as a check.[86] Sovereign Citizen leaders hold conferences,

produce radio shows, and entertain speaking engagements for other ideologically based

groups such as the Granada forum, a California based anti-government organization from

the nineties.[87] However, there is some question as to the actual motivation of Sovereign

leaders. Johnny Liberty was eventually convicted of tax fraud and a wire fraud scheme,

was sentenced to twenty seven months in jail, and was obligated to pay back

approximately $400,000 he had obtained from other Sovereign Citizens.[88] Some of his

followers insist that Johnny was silenced by the government, and since his incarceration

he has returned to his job of spreading the message of sovereign citizenship.[89]

     Johnny Liberty is not the only leader to be arrested for his activities. Others

include Wesley Snipes and John Lloyd Kirk who have served time for tax fraud, and

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[86] For examples of this see "What I do when dealing with court clerks," YouTube video, 8:27, posted by "Tactikalguy1," October 27, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQArbbhYKHk&list=PL95AD1C6D7DF09DA8&index=59 (accessed March 11, 2014); "YOUR BIRTH CERTIFICATE = MONEY + FREEDOM" YouTube video, 9:41, posted by "ThankYouEarthAllies," February 15, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlab_2oJPok&list=PL95AD1C6D7DF09DA8 (accessed March 11, 2014); "How to dis charge any traffic ticket," YouTube video, 3:44, posted by "atexascash3502," February 10, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ssg43-Ga-jk&list=PLCC5619ADACE14742&index=7 (accessed March 11, 2014); "The Simple Guide to Sovereignty – Section 2: Consent," YouTube video, 11:15, posted by "TITLE 4 FLAG SAYS YOU'RE SCHWAG! The Sovereign Citizen's Handbook," October 5, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ooWqzJzCGeM (accessed March 11, 2014).
[87] For examples of this see "Johnny Liberty – Reclaiming Your Sovereign Citizenship."
"Man on the land Executor Advocate Revocate Republic for Ariz…"
"A Look At The Sovereignty Movement w/Attorney Margo Lane…"
[88] U.S. Department of Justice, "Press Release," United States Attorney, District of Hawaii, (Honolulu, Hawaii, May 30, 2006), http://www.justice.gov/tax/usaopress/2006/txdv06_0605vanhove.html (accessed March 11, 2014).
[89] "Johnny Liberty's Page," *Cascadian Source Center*, cascadiansourcecenter.com/profile/JohnnyLiberty (accessed March 13, 2014).

Roger Elvick who served time for writing bogus checks (this was an attempt to access the

funds stored in his straw man account). Despite these arrests, and the many times when

Sovereigns were unable to successfully get what they felt was owed them, members of

the group continue to try, share their knowledge with others, and find a way to throw off

the government.

SOVEREIGN PRACTICE: NORMS AND VALUES

For the Sovereign Citizen Movement, norms and values are strongly knit together. Through handbooks and instructional videos the members have taught each other the correct rules, or modes of behavior, for existing in the world as Sovereign Citizens. Members who adhere to the rules and find themselves successfully maneuvering their way through the legal system are venerated, and encourage others to follow suit, solidifying a distinctive Sovereign value set.

Norms

One of the defining characteristics of the Sovereign Citizens Movement is that they have developed patterns of ways to interact with public servants. These behaviors tend to be rather consistent in any geographical region in the United States. This is probably facilitated by the fact that any individual interested in their activities can find suggested norms—methods of interaction—on the internet. This may not have been the case in the early days of the movement, as the internet was not readily available; however, it is definitely true today.

The most typical Sovereign behaviors include: refusing to register their property, businesses, and vehicles; refusing to obtain licenses for their marriages and businesses; refusing to have their homes inspected; and refusing to pay fines for traffic violations, taxes, or court fees. Sovereigns have been known to file deeds claiming abandoned homes as their own property, and to refuse eviction when they fail to pay mortgages for homes they have legally purchased. They also file false documents claiming their

sovereignty, often these are signed with a fingerprint in red ink to signify that it is the "real man" signing the documents.

Sovereigns have produced several documents that help them negotiate their interactions with government officials without having to defer to them. These include: "Claim for the Life," which is expected to operate as an international passport and provide "international documentation" for the individual who creates it. This document is supposed to prove to all governments that the individual has complete sovereignty.[90] Other documents include "Power of Attorney…Salvage of the Vessel…Habeas Corpus…Copyright of the Fiction Name," all of which are supposed to help an incarcerated individual not only leave the jailhouse, but provide him/her with the evidence for suing the court and its officers. There are many YouTube videos that demonstrate these documents in action, or how to create them.[91] The "Power of Attorney" document is supposed to ensure that an attorney cannot be assigned to the Sovereign, so they are responsible for their own defense in court. This prevents the attorney from making a deal or a contract with the government that the Sovereign does not want.[92] "Salvage of the Vessel" is a document that allows the individual to sue a police officer in order to get out of jail. This document stems from maritime law codes that Sovereigns have reinterpreted for their purposes.[93] The document called "Copyright of a Fiction Name" is suggested to provide proof that the straw man's name, written in all caps, has been copyrighted, and that any legal action can only be brought against the

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[90] Godsent, *Title 4 Flag Says You're Schwag!,* 104-106.
[91] See the references at the end of this thesis.
[92] Godsent, *Title 4 Flag Says You're Schwag*!, 153.
[93] Godsent, *Title 4 Flag Says You're Schwag*!, 153.

straw man, not the real person. It also is seen to enable the individual to sue the court for use of the name in any legal documents as a violation of copyright laws.[94] Perhaps the most important document for Sovereigns, is the "Point of Contract Card," which is to be given to law enforcement officers when an individual is pulled over for any traffic incident, instead of identification.[95] The "Point of Contract Card" serves as a sort of identification card, explaining the individual is sovereign, and then listing services available from the Sovereign. For example, one service they offer is "answering questions" with an associated fee. If a law enforcement official questions the Sovereign after receiving a "Point of Contract Card" they can be charged up to $10,000 for the answers provided by the Sovereign, depending on the stipulations of the card creator.[96] These documents are all available for purchase online from a variety of different Sovereigns, such as Johnny Liberty and H.I.R.M. J. M. Sovereign: Godsent™, each one with different specialties or guarantees that their set of documents is the most effective.

One of the most common patterns that exist in these instructions is to always treat public officials well. Godsent urges those who read his book to act with peace and explains that, "if a person does a bad thing to intimidate a population, he is not a sovereign."[97] Jumpin Jack Ca$h advises to never "be confrontational," [98] his twitter feed encourages, "you really don't have to take up arms to fight the good fight,"[99] and the

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[94] Godsent, *Title 4 Flag Says You're Schwag*!, 153

[95] Godsent, *Title 4 Flag Says You're Schwag*!, 153. The titles of these documents may be slightly different depending on the geographic location of the individual, but the purposes are the same.

[96] Godsent, *Title 4 Flag Says You're Schwag*!, 149.

[97] Godsent, *Title 4 Flag Says You're Schwag!,* 47.

[98] Jumpin Jack Ca$h, "Tip #3: Know How To Interact With Public Servants," *Jumpin Jack Cash: Sovereignty Press Graphic Journalist*, https://jumpinjackcash.sfn.im/ten-tips-on-how-to-protect-yourself-from-public-exploitation-tip-3/ (accessed March 10, 2014).

[99] Jumpin Jack Ca$h, Twitter post, March 3, 2014, 9:32 a.m., https://twitter.com/JumpinJackCash.

transition page to his website admonishes that "you must be a peaceful soul to view this site."[100] Tactikalguy1 explains to his YouTube audience that you "have to be humble and kind" when dealing with court clerks.[101] During a speech at a Granada forum, Johnny Liberty told the audience, "I am not an advocate for violence, and not an advocate for war, as a first resort. I'm an advocate of using all the other tools available…we might win this thing without firing a single shot."[102] Bill, from the Republic for Arizona told his audience that he stopped carrying a gun because he did not want to be involved in an accident with law enforcement.[103] This sample of statements comes from individuals living all across the United States. Some of them come from people who seek sovereign citizenship because they believe in a more liberal version of freedom such as H.I.R.M. J.M. Sovereign: Godsent and Jumpin Jack Ca$h, others adhere to a conservative version of freedom, emphasizing federalism, such as Johnny Liberty and Bill. Despite their sometimes radical differences, none advocates violence.

Despite these calls for a pacifist approach, there does seem to be an escalation in levels of violence among Sovereigns. A recent video posted by the author of *The Title 4 Flag Says Your Schwag* teaches how to engage in a successful revolution. The narrator indicates several times that this should be a peaceful revolution, but the images included

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[100] Jumpin Jack Ca$h, "Transition Page," accessed March 10, 2014, https://jumpinjackcash.sfn.im.
[101] "What I do when dealing with court clerks."
[102] "Johnny Liberty – Reclaiming Your Sovereign Citizenship."
[103] "Man on the land Executor Advocate Revocate Republic for Ariz…"
Bill was later killed by a police officer who responded to a domestic dispute call at Bill's place of employment. Local news agencies reported that Bill was shot when he attempted to reach for the officer's Taser, but many members of the Republic for Arizona believe he was being silenced. Additional information is available in the appendix.

are filled with destruction, flames, and scenes of war.[104] Johnny Liberty, mentioned

above, indicated that there "might" be a time when violence would be a part of the

solution. There have also been several recent violent incidents, including: a Las Vegas

couple who plotted to kidnap and try police officers in an abandoned building with the

intent to execute them; a Florida man who waved a gun around, threatening people at a

local car dealership and lawn care provider; and the shooting between the Kanes and

police officers recounted in the introduction to this thesis.[105] Additionally, there have

been several blog posts and YouTube videos created by Sovereigns insisting that the

footage from the Kane attacks, as well as the 911 calls were tampered with. They argue

that the Kanes were innocent victims of police brutality and that justice should be had.[106]

While these calls for justice do not explicitly call for violence—instead they ask viewers

to "send letters, make phone calls, etc. to mainstream and alternative news outlets, as well

as to public officials"—they also do not condemn the violent actions of the Kanes.[107]

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[104] "Blueprint for Revolution," YouTube video, 16:26, posted by "*TITLE 4 FLAG SAYS YOU'RE SCHWAG! The Sovereign Citizen's Handbook,"* December 8, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zA0-zhaXRu0 (accessed March 11, 2014).

[105] "Vegas arrests cast light on anti-government 'sovereign citizens' movement," NBCNews, August 23, 2013, http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/vegas-arrests-cast-light-anti-government-sovereign-citizens-movement-v20151351 (accessed September 12, 2013); see also: "Judge revokes bond for 'sovereign citizen'," *My Fox: Tampa Bay*, November 22, 2013, http://www.myfoxtampabay.com/story/24041316/2013/11/22/judge-revokes-bond-for-sovereign-citizen (accessed March 8, 2014); MacNab, "'Sovereign' Citizen Kane," *The Intelligence Report;* Bill Morlin, "Slain California Cop-Killer Held 'Sovereign Citizen' Beliefs," *Southern Poverty Law Center*, March 28, 2013, http://www.splcenter.org/blog/2013/03/28/slain-california-cop-killer-held-sovereign-citizen-beliefs/ (accessed September 12, 2013).

[106] Mark Jungwirth, "Patriot Murder Cover-Up in West Memphis: The Jerry and Joe Kane Story," *We Are Change Chicago*, August 24, 2010, http://www.wearechangechicago.com/patriot-murder-cover-up-in-west-memphis-the-jerry-and-joe-kane-story.html (accessed March 3, 2013); see also: *The Brutal Homicides and & Cover Up of Jerry and Joe Kane By WMPD*, http://www.justiceforjerryandjoekane.com/ (accessed March 3, 2014); "Joe and Jerry Kane Innocent May 20, 2010," YouTube Video, 3:04, posted by "TheGreatTurtleIsland," September 5, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8UWmJ3J8dhk (accessed March 3, 2014).

[107] Jungwirth, "Patriot Murder Cover-Up in West Memphis," *We Are Change Chicago.*

The most common Sovereign norm is jamming the legal system with false

paperwork that insists they are not liable for anything. This behavior is something that

can be expected from nearly every one of the 300,000 adherents.[108] For some Sovereigns

this has become an intrinsic norm, something they will continue to do regardless of

success or failure, or proof of its false nature. For many more this is an instrumental tool,

used to avoid legal and financial challenges. The incidents when Sovereigns engage in

violent behavior are an aberration from typical Sovereign beliefs and practices in the past

decades. In the last thirty years there have been only about a dozen violent encounters,

however many of these have occurred in the last few years. This may be an indication

that while not explicitly endorsed by the Sovereign Citizens Movement, the group is

currently undergoing a transition period as they determine whether or not they accept

violence from their members.

<div align="center">Values</div>

Key elements of the Sovereign Citizens' narrative, such as the creation of the U.S.

corporation and the nature of a birth certificate, are based largely on conspiracy theory

and unusual interpretations of the U.S. Constitution and *Black's Law Dictionary*.

Sovereigns, therefore, are often questioned by members of the public about the validity of

their claims. This creates an environment where Sovereign Citizens are often on the

defensive, looking to prove that they are right. The result is that the supposed successes

of any Sovereign Citizen over the legal system are heralded, and they become important

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[108] "Sovereign Citizens Movement," Southern Poverty Law Center.

figures to this community. The court cases the "hero" wins set precedence for the other members of group, encouraging them to continue their behavior.

For example, Ernie Wayne Tertelgte successfully won at least nine court cases, which he claimed set a precedence that would get him out of a tenth violation as of November 2013.[109] In a YouTube video, a record of the court interaction for the tenth violation, Tertelgte vocally insists repeatedly that he is a Sovereign. The video was filmed in the courtroom where the judge attempted to explain the charges against Tertelgte despite repeated interruptions from him. Tertelgte vocally refused any classification the judge attempted to place on him, such as his charges, a plea, and regularly corrects the judge's wording to fit Sovereign jargon. For example, when the judge brings up the previous nine charges, such as trespassing, Tertelgte insists that he charged the officers "right back by stating the overthrow of the Constitution of 1789, overthrow of the Bill of Rights, and overthrow of my rights to forage for food as a natural living person who was in hunger."[110] The judge's frustration is evident in the film, and she eventually leaves the courtroom. Tertelgte takes that as an indication that the trial is over, and he and his family leave, all while the judge stands in the hallway and lets them walk out. This was considered a win. In comments posted to the YouTube video documenting Tertelgte's success, PistolPackingPatriot writes, "Love this man! We need 200 million more like him." Jetsetjoey agrees, "This guy is a TRUE Patriot…," and the *Title 4 Flag* authors echo the refrain, "Montana Mountain Living- Man Arrested for

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[109] "Raw footage of Ernie Wayne Tertelgte in Three Forks Justice C…" YouTube video, 6:53, posted by "*Liberty Crier,*" November 23, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8vnSZSnMz0 (accessed March 11, 2014).
[110] "Raw footage of Ernie Wayne Tertelgte in Three Forks Justice C…"

Trying to Feed Himself, refuses jurisdiction of the court, dismisses case, Leaves Judge

Speechless…This stuff reaally [sic] works!!!"[111]

Mr. Tertelgte is not alone. Tactickalguy1's video "What I do when dealing with

court clerks" has been well received by the Sovereign community. He explains that when

he attempts to file Sovereign documents he always asks for a supervisor. If they refuse to

file his documents he tells them, "I believe you are restricting my access to the courts,"

and explains that he is going to file a claim for damages against the clerk for refusing to

file his documents. This, he claims, ensures that the documents will get filed.

Deepwatertree thanks him for helping him beat his/her own case, and Younitehumanity

also got his/her own case dismissed. Nearly half of the comments left on the video are

from other individuals who ask him for legal advice, how to file their own documents—

or where to find them, and offer other tips for avoiding paying for violations of the

law.[112]

Figure three depicts the reaction of a judge to a Sovereign using jargon. The

Sovereign says, "Your honor if I may…on the record, is a fine to be paid in silver or in

insurance script?" and the case is dismissed. The comic is used to encourage Sovereigns

to use key words that will frustrate and confuse government officials, and also

demonstrates that doing so will help them overcome the law.

[111] "Raw footage of Ernie Wayne Tertelgte in Three Forks Justice C…"
[112] "What I do when dealing with court clerks."

Figure 3- Comic evidence that Sovereigns are successful in court.[113]

The reputation of a Sovereign Citizen can be harmed if they feign success. One man in North Carolina posted a video with the title, "State Citizen Challenges Jurisdiction. Case Dismissed!" Over the course of the five and a half minutes video Jerry Plemmons, a self-described North Carolina State Citizen, explains how he challenged his traffic ticket by questioning the jurisdiction of the police officer who ticketed him. In this case it was necessary for the officer to appear at court in order to be a witness, but the officer failed to appear and the case was dismissed.[114] The comments section demonstrates that people were not impressed. Brad Schlangen responded, "I'm giving this video a thumb's down for a misleading title." Paulina Paulino agreed, "Why is this

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[113] Godsent, *Title 4 Flag Says You're Schwag*!, 60.

[114] "State Citizen Challenges Jurisdiction. Case Dismissed!" YouTube video, 5:29, posted by "*NCrpublic*," February 1, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUSoH5ISco8&list=PLCC5619ADACE14742&index=5 (accessed March 11, 2013).

video called 'State Citizen Challenges Jurisdiction. Case Dismissed!'? The reason your

case was dismissed has nothing to do with 'Jurisdiction". It had to do with the cop not

showing up." Forensource continues, "Now this guy didn't win for lack of jurisdiction, he

won because the cop did not show up. So show us any case law where the reconstructed

states were some how not real or could not issue laws, codes, etc." There were a few

people who argued that the precedence of Mr. Plemmons case would cause so much harm

to the U.S. government that there is no way that they would ever let him win, and others

who indicated that there were different tactics he should try to win again, such as

appealing to a higher court because a lower court could not hear these types of cases, or

arguing in common law courts rather than the government's courts—although this piece

of advice did not come with a suggestion of where one could find a common law court.[115]

This research found at least thirty three incidents where Sovereign Citizens feel

they beat the government, either through getting the case dismissed, getting away from a

traffic encounter without a ticket, or actually getting a not-guilty verdict—although

getting the case dismissed is the most common win. It is likely that this number does not

reflect the actual number of cases that Sovereigns have "won". It includes moments when

law enforcement officers were unfamiliar with the organization—they had never

encountered a Sovereign before, and did not know how to respond to their slew of

documents; judges who gave up out of frustration; and clerks who did not know what else

to do. In each situation the Sovereign feels that he/she has just one more proof that their

perceptual lens is factual—the government is a corporation, and claiming sovereignty

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[115] "State Citizen Challenges Jurisdiction. Case Dismissed!"

makes one immune to the laws. Joseph Tsidulko, a journalist, observes that, "Many

Sovereigns see such a result as validation of their belief that properly invoking ritualistic

behavior and specific keywords in court can undermine the government's jurisdiction."[116]

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[116] Joseph Tsidulko, "The Sovereign Citizen Scam," *Skeptic Magazine* 18, no. 3 (2013), 15.

ARE THEY TERRORISTS?

Many Sovereign Citizens engage in criminal activity such as tax evasion and fraud, and have even targeted government buildings and personnel violently. What needs to be determined is if these activities constitute organized terrorism. This section will analyze the organization to answer the research question: *is the Sovereign Citizens Movement a terrorist organization?* There are three parts to this answer. First, the typological question—do they fit the structure of a terrorist organization? Second, the definitional question—do their actions classify them as terrorist? Interwoven within these sections is the third part—what are the intentions of Sovereign Citizens? This question is answered based on the insights obtained through the Cultural Mapping exercise.

Typology

Included in the literature review of this thesis was a summary of both organizational and lone-wolf terrorism. Organizational terrorism includes both hierarchical, a top down structure, and networked terrorism, which is comprised of individual cells without an overarching leader. Within a terrorist organization members are trained on how to operate effectively and what tactics to employ. Of the two organizational types, the Sovereign Citizens Movement is most like a network. There is no real overarching leader, the members are free to act on their own, and yet each member has a similar goal in mind. The Southern Poverty Law Center agrees:

> There is no central leadership and no organized group that members can join. Instead there are a variety of local leaders with individualized views on sovereign citizen ideology and technique. Those who are attracted to this subculture typically attend a seminar or two, or visit one of the

thousands of websites and online videos on the subject and then simply choose how to act on what they've learned.[117]

However, unlike other terrorist organizations, the Sovereign Citizens Movement does not teach violent terrorist tactics to its individual members, nor does it encourage terrorist activity. Even its online community does not act like the typical virtual terrorist cell. One of the key features of an internet terrorist group is that it depends on anonymity, "because of the separation from real life social consequences, anonymity is what allows Internet users to participate in narcissistic and taboo behavior…it is also what makes it an incubator for radical and violent ideologies."[118] In contrast, Sovereign Citizens do not always depend on anonymity to protect themselves, in fact, they often purposefully publish their full names, addresses, and other identifying information.[119] They want others to know that they are involved in the movement, and how to get more information from them.

Instead, it is much more likely that what exists is a lone wolf phenomenon. As the FBI describes, "[lone wolves] are driven to hateful attacks based on a particular set of beliefs without a larger group's knowledge or support."[120] This describes Sovereign

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[117] Sovereign Citizens Movement," Southern Poverty Law Center.

[118] Mike Burnham, "Anonymity Catalyzes Radicalization Among Internet Community," (internship publication, Cultural Intelligence Institute, 2011), 2.

[119] For examples see: Jumpin Jack Ca$h, "INCIDENT REPORT: Police Caught Trespassing on Sacred Family Temple," *Jumpin Jack Ca$h*, January 27, 2012, https://jumpinjackcash.sfn.im/incident-report-police-caught-tresspassing-on-sacred-family-temple/ (accessed March 13, 2014).
"State Citizen Challenges Jurisdiction. Case Dismissed!"
"Johnny Liberty – Reclaiming Your Sovereign Citizenship,"
"Raw footage of Ernie Wayne Tertelgte in Three Forks Justice C…"
"A Look At The Sovereignty Movement w/Attorney Margo Lane…"

[120] "Domestic Terrorism," *The Federal Bureau of Investigation*.

Citizen related violence much better than claiming that the organization itself is

"terrorist." Interpretation by the FBI supports this assessment,

> Sovereign citizens do not represent an anarchist group, nor are they a
> militia, although they sometimes use or buy illegal weapons. Rather, they
> operate as individuals without established leadership and only come
> together in loosely affiliated groups to train, help each other with
> paperwork, or socialize and talk about their ideology.[121]

There are several examples that indicate the trend is toward lone-wolf terror,

rather than organizational. An ABC Nightline clip specifically draws attention to several

of the most violent incidents tied to Sovereigns: Terry Nichols is one of these—he helped

build the bomb Timothy McVeigh used in the Oklahoma City bombing and initially

intended to deliver the truck to the building; and Joe Stack, who flew his private plane

into an IRS building.[122] All of these people acted without instruction from a higher up,

but on their own, and their circumstances reflect the definition of lone-wolf terror:

> Committed by persons:
>   (a) who operate individually;
>   (b) who do not belong to an organized terrorist group or network;
>   (c) who act without the direct influence of a leader or hierarchy;
>   (d) whose tactics and methods are conceived and directed by the
>   individual without any direct outside command or direction.[123]

Additionally, while these incidents are frequently attributed to the Sovereign

Citizens Movement, closer inspection indicates that these correlations are weakly drawn.

Terry Nichols was not solely involved with Sovereigns. He had strong ties to survivalist

movements, and other extreme right ideologies, including Posse Comitatus.[124] Many of

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[121] FBI, "Sovereign Citizens," FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, Sept. 2011.
[122] "Sovereign Citizens on nightline on abc news,"
[123] Lone-Wolf Terrorism, *Instituut voor Veiligheids-en Crisismanagement*, 6.
[124] The origins of the Sovereign Citizens movement are closely tied to Posse Comitatus, although the latter was also defined by rigid racism and militia ideology that is not attributed to the Sovereign Citizens today.

his problems with government seemed to be driven by financial failure and he, like

McVeigh, was influenced by the siege at Waco, believing the government was going to

disarm the entire population.[125] Nichols and McVeigh "acted without the direct influence

of a leader" and their tactics were "conceived and directed by the individual without any

direct outside command or direction."[126] Similarly, Joe Stack's suicide letter has no

Sovereign Citizen jargon, such as "free man on the land," "natural common law rights,"

or even general claims of sovereignty. Instead he writes of instances when he has felt

betrayed by the IRS and the U.S. government, who he feels like often set him on the path

of financial ruin. His complaints emphasize financial struggles he blames on the

government, rather than an extreme ideology.[127] In his letter Stack hopes

> …that by striking a nerve that stimulates the inevitable double standard,
> knee-jerk government reaction that results in more stupid draconian
> restrictions people wake up and begin to see the pompous political thugs
> and their mindless minions for what they are.[128]

Stack's attack on the IRS building fits all the parameters of the definition of lone-wolf

terror.

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[125] Sara Rimer, "The Second Suspect—A special report; With Extremism and Explosives, A Drifting Life Found a Purpose," *The New York Times* (New York), May 28, 1995.
[126] "Lone-Wolf Terrorism," *Instituut voor Veiligheids-en Crisismanagement*, 6.
[127] "Austin plane crash: Full text of Joe Stack online suicide note posted on website embeddedart.com," *NY Daily News*, (New York), February 18, 2010, http://www.n conceived and directed by the individual without any direct outside command or direction. ydailynews.com/news/national/austin-plane-crash-full-text-joe-stack-online-suicide-note-posted-website-embeddedart-article-1.195510 (accessed March 21, 2014).
[128] "Austin plane crash," *NY Daily News.*

Definition

Most activities that Sovereign Citizens engage in are nonviolent. Most often their crimes consist of regular traffic violations, tax fraud, filing false documents such as liens against law enforcement officials, clerks, prosecutors, and judges; and acting belligerently in the court.[129] Based on both the academic consensus definition and the FBI's these are not acts of terrorism because they are not "direct violent action"[130] nor do they "involve acts dangerous to human life."[131]

However, there are times when Sovereigns engage in violence. In these instances it can be difficult to determine if their acts are terrorist in nature. For example, recall the Kanes, whose story is recounted at the beginning of this thesis. Both the academic and FBI definitions insists that terrorist action must be calculated, and it is unclear if the Kanes' was. While the father, Jerry Kane, had previously explained, "I don't want to kill anybody, but if they keep messin' with me that's what it's going to have to come out," it is not clear that this traffic stop was purposefully orchestrated so that he, and his son, could assault law enforcement officers.[132] There is little evidence indicating either that these attacks were or were not politically motivated, and the Kane's did not leave behind a note to clarify the details for us.

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[129] UNC School of Government, "A Quick Guide to Sovereign Citizens," University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (2012), 1-3; see also: FBI, "Sovereign Citizens," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin*, Sept. 2011; "Sovereign Citizens Movement," Southern Poverty Law Center.

[130] Schmid, "The Definition of Terrorism," 86.

[131] "Definitions of Terrorism in the U.S. Code," *The Federal Bureau of Investigation: Terrorism.*

[132] "Sovereign Citizens on nightline on abc news," YouTube video, 7:17, posted by "twn5858," March 9, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkNEeDB2ijE (accessed March 14, 2014).

Another critical factor is that the attack occurred against uniformed, on duty, police officers. The State Department's diverse stances on the nature of "combatants" further complicates this case. According to the 2003 definition, with a little interpretation, the law enforcement officers killed or injured by the Kanes were not victims of a terrorist attack because they were both armed and on duty. However, the 2005 definition suggests that the officers were not just murdered, but were also victims of a domestic terrorist attack, despite the fact that the basic elements of the situation remain the same.[133] The Las Vegas couple who plotted to kidnap and kill police officers, after trying them in a mock-court, are another such example. Their actions were premeditated, involving months of planning, but once again, their intended victims were police officers.[134]

Then there is the case of Eric Holtgard, a Florida resident, who "terrorized a car dealership and a local lawn maintenance man over a two day period."[135] The news story indicates that Mr. Holtgard pulled a gun on customers and employees at the car dealership, which may or may not have been a calculated decision—his intentions were unreported—and the targets of his threats were not law enforcement officials. Yet, if Mr. Holtgard had not had any association with the Sovereign Citizens Movement, would his actions have been considered terrorist, or just criminal?

On the basis of the material considered above this thesis concludes that the label "terrorist organization" is not *presently* an accurate characterization of the Sovereign

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[133] Both of these definitions are included in the appendix.

[134] "Vegas arrests cast light on anti-government 'sovereign citizens' movement," NBCNews.

[135] "Judge revokes bond for 'sovereign citizen'," *My Fox: Tampa Bay*.

Citizens Movement. The Cultural Mapping method indicates that as a whole the organization does not have violent or terroristic intentions, and that their norms emphasize white collar criminal activity, such a fraud. Indeed, Sovereign "heroes," individuals that have received honor through exemplifying organizational values, are not made through violence, but through "wins" in the legal system through obstruction and nuisance behavior. The Sovereign Citizens Movement does not, at this juncture, merit the label "terrorist organization" based on the definitions of terrorism which state that it must be "calculated, demonstrative, direct violent action without legal or moral restraints, targeting mainly civilians and noncombatants, performed for its propagandistic and psychological effects on various audiences and conflict parties."[136] Sovereign activity while calculated, is not regularly violent. With estimated membership ranging from 100,000-300,000 individuals[137] the very limited number of violent incidents that occur indicate that the organization does not explicitly endorse terrorism. Additionally, those who have engaged in violence, besides being outside the norm, have operated individually or in groups of two or three, they do not take direction from a leader, nor do they learn their violent tactics from the organization, which by definition classifies their actions as lone-wolf terrorism.

It is important to note, however, that while Sovereigns do not overtly promote violent acts against the government, neither do they condemn those that do occur. Individual members do not seem to feel compelled to defend Sovereign "identity" by

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[136] Schmid, "The Definition of Terrorism," 86.
[137] The Southern Poverty Law Center believes there are approximately 100,000 hardcore members and 200,000 experimenters.

publicly disavowing members who engage in violent activity despite the opportunity in multiple public forums to do so. Rather than condemn the Kanes' actions some Sovereigns chose instead to create an alternate history of the event which enabled them to place blame for the violence on the government.[138] Others, like Johnny Liberty, have indicated that there "might" be a time when shots would have to be fired in order for the change Sovereigns want to see to occur.[139] This may indicate identity and norms flux within the organization—a potentially formative stage for the organization.

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[138] Jungwirth, "Patriot Murder Cover-Up in West Memphis," *We Are Change Chicago.*
[139] "Johnny Liberty – Reclaiming Your Sovereign Citizenship."

ASSESSMENT OF PROTOCOLS

In order to answer the second question, *Are the protocols being applied to the Sovereign Citizens likely to be effective in diminishing the threats posed by this group?* this section will first describe the protocols that are currently in place, and then analyze them through the Cultural Mapping lenses to determine their effectiveness.

What Are the Protocols?

There is no overarching government strategy for responding to Sovereign Citizens. However, specific agencies and organizations have created methods within their own jurisdictions. This section will provide a synopsis of these protocols at the local, state, and federal levels.

Local/State Level

At the city, county, and state levels of government there is no singular way that government agencies respond to Sovereign Citizens. Some police departments and other state agencies have developed patterns recognizing Sovereigns easily, such as watching for particular license plates or paperwork.[140] Others are completely unaware of Sovereign

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[140] Thom Jackson, "Sovereign Citizens on Traffic Stops," *The Police Chief* 80 (February 2013): 14-15; see also: Finch and Flowers, "Sovereign Citizens: A Clear and Present Danger," *Police Patrol: The Law Enforcement Magazine*; Linn, "Sovereign Citizen Encounters," *Ohio Attorney General: Law Enforcement Bulletin;* Ryan Kellus Turner, "Sovereign Citizens: Threats to Our Courts?" *Texas Municipal Court Education Center*, http://www.tmcec.com/public/files/File/Course%20Materials/FY13/Clerks/Houston/Turner%20-%20Sovereign%20Citizens%20-%20BINDER.pdf (accessed October 12, 2013); Moe Greenberg, "10 tips and tactics for investigating Sovereign Citizens," *PoliceOne.com*, March 28, 2013, 2013, http://www.policeone.com/investigations/articles/6176998-10-tips-and-tactics-for-investigating-Sovereign-Citizens/ (accessed October 12).

Citizens and the problems that could arise in an encounter with them.[141] The Southern

Poverty Law Center has encouraged each police department to construct their own

strategy for responding to Sovereigns that includes training units, tactical units, and

commanders; and creating specific procedures for Sovereign Citizens.[142]

Thom Jackson, a police chief from Nevada, published ways that chiefs and

officers can create safe environments when dealing with Sovereign Citizens. He advises

that officers recognize the signs of a Sovereign including: bumper stickers, unofficial

license plates, and code words. He insists that an officer must call for backup

immediately in such encounters, and always act professionally. Police chiefs should be

sure to share their information, so that other officials can be aware of the security

concern, and ensure the agencies legal council is prepared to handle the expected

onslaught of paperwork.[143]

Moe Greenberg, a detective from Baltimore, emphasized that officers should be

cautious, remain professional, gather as much information as possible, and share it with

other agencies. He encourages conducting surveillance in areas Sovereign Citizens

frequent, and emphasizes the safety of the officers.[144]

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[141] "Sovereign Copwatch Training: Presenting Credentials," YouTube video, 6:13, posted by "*sovereigncopwatch*," April 20, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AHUZXMRb_g (accessed March 11, 2014).

[142] Robert Steinback, "With 'Sovereign Citizen' Movement Growing, New SPLC Video Promotes Law Enforcement Safety," *Southern Poverty Law Center: Hatewatch*, November 1, 2010, http://www.splcenter.org/blog/2010/11/01/sovereign-citizen-movement-growing-new-splc-video-promotes-law-enforcement-safety/ (accessed March 9, 2014).

[143] Jackson, "Sovereign Citizens on Traffic Stops," *The Police Chief*.

[144] Greenberg, "10 tips and tactics for investigating Sovereign Citizens," *PoliceOne.com*.

The office of Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine released a bulletin encouraging law enforcement to be cautious when engaging them, and outlining ways to recognize Sovereigns:

> If you determine that you are dealing with a sovereign citizen, the most important thing to do is approach the interaction the same as you would with any other person. If, during the traffic stop, the citizen doesn't produce a proper license, registration, or proof of insurance, proceed as you would with any other stop.[145]

The bulletin encourages officers to retain control of the situation, and if necessary to call for backup. Like the Southern Poverty Law Center, it suggests law enforcement agencies develop strategies for these encounters.[146]

Ryan Kellus Turner produced a seminar to train legal clerks, attorneys, and other members of the judicial system. After describing the Sovereign Citizen Movement Turner outlines specific things that must be in done when dealing with Sovereigns. He emphasizes, "The smoother the system runs, the less likely it is that some difficult or sovereign defendant can successfully exploit the system to his advantage."[147] He encourages prosecutors to read all the motions a Sovereign puts forth to avoid letting the Sovereign get away with one of their tactics. This helps the prosecutor to determine if Sovereign documents and legal claims are actually recognized by the court. However, Turner is not encouraging the members of the judicial system to completely ignore or dismiss Sovereign claims. There are some instances that are easier to comply with than fight, and do no harm to the legal process.[148] For example, all legal officials are required

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[145] Linn, "Sovereign Citizen Encounters," *Ohio Attorney General: Law Enforcement Bulletin.*
[146] Linn, "Sovereign Citizen Encounters," *Ohio Attorney General: Law Enforcement Bulletin.*
[147] Turner, "Sovereign Citizens: Threats to Our Courts?" *Texas Municipal Court Education Center*, 7.
[148] Turner, "Sovereign Citizens: Threats to Our Courts?" *Texas Municipal Court Education Center*, 8-9.

to swear an oath of allegiance to the United States. This oath is important to Sovereigns, because it is a basis for the legitimacy of the official. They will request proof that the law enforcement officer, prosecutor or judge has taken the oath. Turner encourages legal professionals to take the oath again because it is a simple process, to appease Sovereigns, rather than fight a battle over legitimacy.

The most comprehensive strategy was created by Rob Finch and Kory Flowers, both detectives from North Carolina. They have studied the Sovereign Citizens Movement for several years, including interviewing members in their own homes, and tracking their activities in the region.[149] Finch and Flowers' program incorporates not only caution during traffic stops, but also encourages officers to reject Sovereigns' paperwork, in order to "send a clear message that these sovereign tactics are ineffective in your particular jurisdiction."[150] They also believe it is critical to include the criminal justice system in the process, training professionals at all levels of the judicial system, and even fire inspectors, "Don't just keep the training in-house. Don't just train law enforcement. You have to train everybody from the courthouse personnel, all the way down to your parking enforcement folks."[151] This prevents Sovereigns from punishing law enforcement and other officers

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[149] Beirich, "Two North Carolina Detectives Build Program for Dealing with 'Sovereign Citizens'," Intelligence Report, 2.

[150] Finch and Flowers, "Sovereign Citizens: A Clear and Present Danger," *Police Patrol: The Law Enforcement Magazine*.

[151] Beirich, "Two North Carolina Detectives Build Program for Dealing with 'Sovereign Citizens'," Intelligence Report, 5.

by filing liens. Sovereigns do not recognize the authority of government officials, and will use their false claims of sovereignty to prevent fire inspectors from inspecting their homes and businesses, or to get out of paying for their parking violations.

Federal Level

In November of 2010, the FBI produced a primer about the Sovereign Citizens Movement. This primer serves as an introduction to the organization, its beliefs, and its actions. However, it does not provide particular instructions to law enforcement officials on how to engage Sovereigns.[152] This is probably because their interactions with these individuals do not consist of initial encounters, like state troopers and local police officers do, but instead are called in when a situation has escalated either through intensely violent situation or interstate white collar criminal activity. Additionally, this research turned up no particular protocols that federal agents are to follow when responding to a group or individual classified as terrorist.

<div align="center">Policy and Practical Recommendations</div>

Sovereigns "win" or have their cases dismissed because of the lack of uniformity of protocols and communication between law enforcement and the criminal court system. Mitigating the influence of Sovereign Citizens, and the damage their methods create, will require cooperation from both levels of government. Another critical step is for the government to establish a uniform pattern for interactions with Sovereign Citizens that is executed in every region of the United States. This will ensure that both law enforcement

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[152] Domestic Terrorism Operations Unit, "Sovereign Citizens," *Federal Bureau of Investigation*.

and legal teams are prepared to handle the diverse range of Sovereign behaviors. Finch

and Flowers claim to have been very successful in North Carolina, "Word is getting out

among the sovereign circles in the Southeast that this not the place to be. It's our hope to

just move them. And if everybody else would just work to insulate their counties and

states, then they will eventually run out of places to be."[153]

The Cultural Mapping method highlighted that one of the strongest values of the

Sovereign Citizen Movement comes from the successes of Sovereigns over the legal

system. In order to reduce their effectiveness—both as criminals and in spreading their

belief system—the government must render Sovereign efforts futile.

With Law Enforcement

One of the most important things law enforcement officers must be able to do is

recognize a Sovereign Citizen. They should never be taken off guard, distracted, or

flustered by the documents and exclamations of a Sovereign because this gives the

Sovereign power over the official that they use to get out of paying for tickets or

following the laws. This will enable them to treat Sovereigns as they would any other

citizen, expecting them to follow all the laws. It will also prevent Sovereigns from

claiming they successfully got out of a ticket or a fine by employing any one of their

tactics.

In order to protect law enforcement officers from liens and harassment from

Sovereigns they must collect and share information they obtain about Sovereigns—even

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[153] Beirich, "Two North Carolina Detectives Build Program for Dealing with 'Sovereign Citizens'," Intelligence Report, 4.

between agencies and borders. This includes what documents Sovereigns have created or used. Sovereign Citizens who react violently have typically had altercations with the government more than once, and having access to those records might prepare officers for their encounters.

Officers should also remain professional through the entire engagement. This may help prevent the encounter from escalating. The many instances and observations of this thesis indicate that often law enforcement officers become overwhelmed or frustrated by Sovereigns. Remaining professional includes not arguing about the ideology or paperwork provided by the Sovereign, but instead insisting on those things required in any other encounter, such as identification and registration. When they fail to provide these legal documents they should be treated as any other citizen might. This will ensure there is no breach of lawful behavior on the behalf of the officer that might get a case dismissed in court.

In the Judicial System

Prosecutors and judges should not give up during proceedings because Sovereigns are belligerent or frustrate them. While adhering to the law in its entirety, they must fight the battle against the slew of paperwork Sovereigns use to jam the system. Doing so will protect both themselves and law enforcement officials from the stress and difficulty created by Sovereigns who file liens against them. Finch and Flowers method appears to be the most effective, as it addresses both the norms and values of the Sovereign Citizens Movement. Finch explains:

> We are to the point now where if sovereigns decide they want to file a fraudulent lien against an officer, or anybody in law enforcement or the criminal justice system or city government, or file a lawsuit, that information is brought to us immediately. In Guilford County, if a sovereign comes in the registrar of deeds' office to file any type of sovereign paperwork, whether it's a lien, lawsuit, or an affidavit renouncing their citizenship, we will get that information typically within 20 or 25 minutes of that sovereign leaving the office. And that allows us to be preemptive with the liens and the lawsuits that they are trying to file against judicial officials, our patrol guys, or anybody in the criminal justice system, because then we can take that information to the district attorney's office [where it's decided] whether to prosecute, and we can bring it to the city attorneys and make sure they can [seek] summary judgments dismissing those lawsuits. So it's made the process quicker and it's allowed us to be proactive instead of being reactive to it.[154]

While it is unlikely that the Sovereign Citizens Movement can be stopped as a whole, employing these responses may prevent other individuals from adopting Sovereign ideology, and will help the movement to lose legitimacy within its ranks. However, frustration at their failures may lead to an escalation of lone-wolf violent reactions for a while before the movement really weakens. Individuals might come to believe, like Stack, "that nothing changes unless there is a body count" and only by "adding my body to the count" will anything change.[155]

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[154] Beirich, "Two North Carolina Detectives Build Program for Dealing with 'Sovereign Citizens'," *Intelligence Report*, 2.

[155] "Austin plane crash," *NY Daily News.*

CONCLUSION

The Cultural Mapping method provides important insight into the Sovereign Citizens Movement. The identity of the group, or the role it sees for itself, is that of champion for truth. The norms include the many tactics and documents that Sovereigns employ to establish their sovereignty and overcome the perceived enslavement by the U.S. government. One of the most important values of the Sovereign Citizens is the success of their tactics, or norms, in the legal system, and this bestows honor on its members. The perceptual lens, or the way they see the world, is strongly driven by a reinterpretation of the historical narrative of the United States.

This thesis has determined that based on the intentions of the Sovereign Citizens Movement, ascertained by the Cultural Mapping method, and also the particular definitions employed by this thesis, that the activities and structure of this group do not match those required of a "terrorist organization." However, there are individuals who ascribe to Sovereign ideology who have extrapolated those beliefs, and then employed terrorist tactics, making them lone-wolf terrorists. Despite the misapplication of the label "terrorist organization" it seems that when protocols are employed by law enforcement officials they have provided some security due to familiarity. Those methods advocated by Rob Finch and Kory Flowers appear to be the most successful, as they incorporate the entire gamut of Sovereign behaviors. However, as the movement evolves and as time passes these conclusions may no longer hold true, as the culture of the Sovereign Citizens adapts.

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APPENDIX

Definitions of Terrorism

Revised Academic Consensus Definition:

1. *Terrorism refers, on the one hand, to a **doctrine** about the presumed effectiveness of a special form or tactic of fear-generating, coercive political violence and, on the other hand, to a conspiratorial **practice** of calculated, demonstrative, direct violent action without legal or moral restraints, targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants, performed for its propagandistic and psychological effects on various audiences and conflict parties;*
2. Terrorism as a tactic is employed in *three main contexts*: (i) illegal state repression, (ii) propagandistic agitation by non-state actors in times of peace or outside zones of conflict and(iii) as an illicit tactic of irregular warfare employed by state- and non-state actors;
3. The physical *violence* or threat thereof employed by terrorist actors involves single-phase acts of lethal violence (such as bombings and armed assaults), dual- phased life-threatening incidents (like kidnapping, hijacking and other forms of hostage-taking for coercive bargaining) as well as multi-phased sequences of actions (such as in 'disappearances' involving kidnapping, secret detention, torture and murder).
4. The public (-ized) terrorist victimization initiates *threat-based communication processes* whereby, on the one hand, conditional demands are made to individuals, groups, governments, societies or sections thereof, and, on the other hand, the support of specific constituencies (based on ties of ethnicity, religion, political affiliation and the like) is sought by the terrorist perpetrators;
5. At the origin of terrorism stands *terror* – instilled fear, dread, panic or mere anxiety - spread among those identifying, or sharing similarities, with the direct victims, generated by some of the modalities of the terrorist act – its shocking brutality, lack of discrimination, dramatic or symbolic quality and disregard of the rules of warfare and the rules of punishment;
6. The main direct *victims* of terrorist attacks are in general not any armed forces but are *usually civilians, non-combatants or other innocent and defenceless persons* who bear no direct responsibility for the conflict that gave rise to acts of terrorism;
7. The *direct victims are not the ultimate target* (as in a classical assassination where victim and target coincide) but serve as message generators, more or less unwittingly helped by the news values of the mass media, to reach various audiences and conflict parties that identify either with the victims' plight or the terrorists' professed cause;
8. Sources of terrorist violence can be individual *perpetrators*, small groups, diffuse transnational networks as well as state actors or state-sponsored clandestine agents (such as death squads and hit teams);
9. While showing similarities with methods employed by organized crime as well as those found in war crimes, terrorist violence is *predominantly political* – usually in its motivation but nearly always in its societal repercussions;
10. The immediate *intent* of acts of terrorism is to terrorize, intimidate, antagonize, disorientate, destabilize, coerce, compel, demoralize or provoke a target population or conflict party in the hope of achieving from the resulting insecurity a favourable power

outcome, e.g. obtaining publicity, extorting ransom money, submission to terrorist demands and/or mobilizing or immobilizing sectors of the public;

11. The *motivations* to engage in terrorism cover a broad range, including redress for alleged grievances, personal or vicarious revenge, collective punishment, revolution, national liberation and the promotion of diverse ideological, political, social, national or religious causes and objectives;

12: Acts of terrorism rarely stand alone but form part of a *campaign* of violence which alone can, due to the serial character of acts of violence and threats of more to come, create a pervasive climate of fear that enables the terrorists to manipulate the political process.[156]

FBI's Definitions of Terrorism in the U.S. Code:

18 U.S.C. § 2331 defines "international terrorism" and "domestic terrorism" for purposes of Chapter 113B of the Code, entitled "Terrorism":

"International terrorism" means activities with the following three characteristics:
- Involve violent acts or acts dangerous to human life that violate federal or state law;
- Appear to be intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and
- Occur primarily outside the territorial jurisdiction of the U.S., or transcend national boundaries in terms of the means by which they are accomplished, the persons they appear intended to intimidate or coerce, or the locale in which their perpetrators operate or seek asylum.*

"Domestic terrorism" means activities with the following three characteristics:
- Involve acts dangerous to human life that violate federal or state law;
- Appear intended (i) to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; (ii) to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or (iii) to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination. or kidnapping; and
- Occur primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the U.S.

18 U.S.C. § 2332b defines the term "federal crime of terrorism" as an offense that:
- Is calculated to influence or affect the conduct of government by intimidation or coercion, or to retaliate against government conduct; and
- Is a violation of one of several listed statutes, including § 930(c) (relating to killing or attempted killing during an attack on a federal facility with a dangerous weapon); and § 1114 (relating to killing or attempted killing of officers and employees of the U.S.).[157]

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[156] Schmid, "The Definition of Terrorism," 86, emphasis original.
[157] "Definitions of Terrorism in the U.S. Code," *The Federal Bureau of Investigation: Terrorism.*

U.S. Department of State:

For the purpose of [Executive Order 13224], 'terrorism' is defined to be an activity that (1) involves a violent act or an act dangerous to human life, property, or infrastructure; <u>and</u> (2) appears to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, kidnapping, or hostage-taking.[158]

   Also: "The term terrorism means premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience." A footnote for this definition clarifies that "the term noncombatant is interpreted to include, in addition to civilians, military personnel who at the time of the incident are unarmed and/or not on duty."[159]

Congressional Research Service:

People who commit crimes within the homeland and draw inspiration from U.S.-based extremist ideologies and movements.[160]

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[158] Office of the Coordinator for Counterterrorism, "Executive Order 13224," *U.S. Department of State*, Sept. 23, 2001, http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/122570.htm (accessed October 9, 2013).
[159] Black, "Introduction," xii.
[160] Jerome P. Bjelopera, *The Domestic Terrorist Threat: Background and Issues for Congress,* (Congressional Research Service: May 2012), i.