

SOVEREIGN CITIZENS: THE CONCERN

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to two parties, the first of whom are all the law enforcement agencies and law enforcement families who have lost a colleague or loved one at the hands of a Sovereign Citizen. Second, I dedicate this thesis to Dr. Annie Gainous Thompson – my friend and my former supervisor; she was (and still is) an inspirational figure who encouraged me to continue my educational journey and never give up.

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I wish to thank entire APUS Security and Global Studies for providing the platform for me and so many other students to excel and study what we are passionate about. In particular, there are two very special professors I'd like to express my utmost gratitude and respect for: Drs. Monique Chouraeshkenazi and Cheryl Seminara.

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Although I have not had the pleasure of working with Dr. Seminara for very long, she has proven to be a kind, caring, and highly skilled professor. Writing this thesis has proven a challenge for me, as I spent several weeks on medical leave and in the hospital. I was so worried about not being able to complete my thesis, but Dr. Seminara was there to help and ensured that she would work with me and everything was going to be okay. I sincerely thank each of you for everything!

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

SOVEREIGN CITIZENS: THE CONCERN

by

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American Military University, May 5, 2019

Charles Town, WV

Dr. Cheryl Seminara, Thesis Professor

This thesis addresses a topic of increasing concern for law enforcement and government officials: The Sovereign Citizen. Sovereign Citizens are part of a movement, which is classified by the Federal Bureau of Investigation as a domestic extremist group. The research questions in this study were: To what extent do local agencies engage with Sovereign Citizens, and is there an adequate amount of awareness on the topic among those agencies? The researcher chose this topic due to his personal and professional connection to the problem, and seeing how this group abuses the justice system. The research method utilized in the study was predominately mixed-methods, and part of the study employed the symbolic interactionism theory to highlight how Sovereign Citizens view the government. The results of the study included many responses from law enforcement agencies via a survey, which assisted in determining that, 1.) agencies do engage regularly with Sovereign Citizens, and 2.) there is not an adequate amount of awareness training being provided to law enforcement.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The law enforcement agencies of the United States of America have been facing a growing concern – this concern bears the name, The Sovereign Citizen Movement; members of the movement are known as Sovereign Citizens. The Federal Bureau of Investigation – the principal law enforcement and domestic intelligence agency of the United States – classifies the Sovereign Citizen Movement as an extremist movement, which appropriately designates its members as extremists and/or domestic terrorists (FBI, 2010). By definition, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, hereinafter referred to as the FBI, asserts that Sovereign Citizens are anti-government extremists physically residing in the United States, who believe they are members of a separate nation or are themselves a nation, not bound by federal law (2010).

While there is no tracking mechanism to determine the exact number of self-proclaimed Sovereign Citizens living in the United States, the official website for The Sovereign Citizen Movement projects there are over 300,000 living in America (“Sovereign Citizenship,” n.d.). According to Masterson (2011), not all Sovereign Citizens are “true believers,” and a conservative estimate in 2011 was that there were about 100,000 genuine devotees to the cause. Van Ness (2011) states that American economic stress could potentially lead to growth in the Sovereign Citizen Movement, especially due to lost jobs, debt, and foreclosure. To further emphasize the appeal the Movement presents to some economically-stressed individuals, Tsidulko (2013) tells of a sovereign-associated tax preparation firm called Old Quest Foundation, which offered seminars explaining how impoverished workers did not owe the government anything, but the government did have an obligation to pay off the workers’ debts.

Together, the workers paid this “firm” over two-million dollars to commit tax fraud on their behalf.

It is important to examine other nations to see how they address similar problems. Canada, for instance, faces a similar dilemma, but they refer to Sovereign Citizens as “Natural Persons.” Even across the ocean, Africa contends with Sovereign Citizens. There, the majority of their Sovereign Citizens are actually Sovereign Moors. Moors are predominately African or African-American Sovereigns, who rely heavily on maritime law and the United States treaty with Morocco. In parts of Africa, there is a strong and tense division between white Africans and black Africans; as such, many of the Moorish Sovereigns align themselves with domestic terrorist cells, such as Black Identity Extremist (BIE) groups (Anonymous, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Technically, being a Sovereign Citizen is not against any law. Essentially, the Sovereign Citizen Movement is a collective of like-minded individuals – a group with similar ideologies about the government, the country, and how they fit in it. The problem lies in the actions that some Sovereign Citizens take, turning them into criminals. Because of their belief that they are not bound by federal law (and in many cases, state and local law), Sovereign Citizens often disregard the authority of government bodies, including motor vehicle departments, courts, and bodies of law enforcement not under an elected official (The Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2010). In some cases, Sovereign Citizens have been known to forgo paying federal and state taxes, use counterfeit currency and self-printed checks, and file frivolous and exaggerated lawsuits and liens against law enforcement officers and government officials as a means of harassment (2010).

Sovereign Citizens have been dubbed “paper terrorists” because they are known for using the legal system to their advantage, employing non-violent methods to perpetrate their criminal activities (including lien-filing); however, this does not preclude them from violence. In fact, they have been known to impersonate, threaten, and/or physically assault law enforcement officers and government officials, as well as commit murder and engage in a multitude of white-collar-type scams (2010). Regrettably, many rural law enforcement agencies and the general public may not be aware of the solemnity of this group. Challacombe and Lucas (2018) assert that in the last 10 years alone, people devoted to the Sovereign Citizen ideology injured or killed over a dozen public officials.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the quandary that is Sovereign Citizens and the threat(s) they pose to local law enforcement personnel and to homeland security. As the aforementioned designation of “paper terrorists” suggests, there is a stigma that surrounds the topic of Sovereign Citizens, seemingly attenuating the danger they could pose. In actuality, perhaps the “unknown” aspect of Sovereign Citizens is what contributes most to the danger they present. As Smith (2016) stated in a Master thesis for the University of Arkansas, little research has been done to examine the Sovereign Citizen Movement and how it fits into the broader domestic terrorist movement.

Research Questions

Q1. To what extent do local agencies (county/municipal) engage with Sovereign Citizens?

Q2. Is there an adequate amount of awareness on the topic of Sovereign Citizens and The Movement among local and state law enforcement agencies?

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II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will highlight existing literature on Sovereign Citizens and help to demonstrate the need for additional research by identifying gaps in what is currently available. The literature is comprised of that which examines the differences in Sovereign Citizen classifications and their beliefs, real-life knowledge for police officers and other professionals in the field, proven concerns, and whether incarceration is good or bad for deterring action on Sovereign ideologies.

Differences in Classifications and Beliefs

Sovereign Citizens are anti-government extremists physically residing in the United States, who believe they are members of a separate nation or are themselves a nation, not bound by federal law (2010). As of 2016, hardly any empirical research had been completed on the Sovereign Citizen Movement. One of the earliest studies focused mainly on the demographic composition, trial strategies and behaviors, and tried to determine whether or not the Sovereign Citizen Movement should be grouped together, holistically, with the entire far-right domestic terrorist movement (Smith, 2016). Ultimately, the study concluded with the employment of several statistical calculations involving federal court cases and defendant behavior, that the two movements/groups were significantly different in how they behave during trial and how the government prosecutes them (Smith, 2016). Finally, it was determined that the Sovereign Citizen Movement and the broader far-right domestic terrorists should be studied independently when conducting future research (Smith, 2016).

In contrast to the 2016 study above, another study from 2013 insinuated that the Sovereign Citizen Movement is a culmination of right-wing militias who have adopted a religious component, namely from the Christian Identity Movement, along with a more

militaristic approach to anti-government actions (Tsidulko, 2013). Further, the study indicated that not only do Sovereign Citizens exhibit extreme anti-government beliefs, but they also engage in “paper terrorism,” a term that equates to committing financial crimes, such as filing false liens and frivolous lawsuits (Tsidulko, 2013).

To further highlight the seriousness of Sovereign Citizens and the financial impact they can have, a study from 2011 stated that courtrooms are often overwhelmed by seemingly desperate people, many of whom arm themselves with over-the-top fraudulent paperwork, such as petitions to the court, motions, and other such documents that deny state and federal authority (e.g. paper terrorism) (Masterson, 2011). It was further asserted that Sovereign Citizens often seek out federal courts, as opposed to county or state-level courts, and in most cases, argue admiralty law and common law, in lieu of recognized local, state, and federal laws because of their self-proclaimed “sovereignty” from the United States (Masterson, 2011).

Next, a 2018 study dramatically accentuated the significance of the Sovereign Citizen Movement in the United States in saying that in the last decade alone, over 12 public officials were either seriously injured or killed by Sovereign Citizens (Challacombe & Lucas, 2018). Although the studies from 2016 and 2013 differed slightly on their exact opinions of the placement of Sovereign Citizens compared to right-wing domestic terrorists but still maintained a stance of non-inclusion, this particular study indicated that by applying the Terrorist Radicalization Assessment Protocol, or TRAP-18, they were able to postdict violent outcomes in select Sovereign Citizen actors (Challacombe & Lucas, 2018). This means that although Sovereign Citizens are divergent when compared to right-wing domestic terrorists, the same testing method of prediction and observation can still be used to assess violent and non-violent outcomes.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) differentiates Sovereign Citizens from other extremists and terrorists, just as the other authors have. The FBI asserted that the Sovereign Citizen ideology causes all sorts of issues in the United States, including failure to pay taxes, clogging of the court system with the aforementioned frivolous lawsuits and liens (often against public officials as a means of harassment), and counterfeit money and checks (The Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2010). The FBI brief was published in 2010, but they indicate by wording, that prior to that date the general public was not aware of or educated on the topic (and threat) of Sovereign Citizens.

Although this thesis centrally focuses on Sovereign Citizens and the Sovereign Citizen Movement within the United States, other countries face similar threats in their own respect. Countries in Northern Africa, for example, face domestic threats from Black Identity Extremist (BIE) groups (Anonymous, 2017) – like White Nationalist and White Purity groups here in the United States, except instead of targeting African Americans and other non-white ethnic groups, they target Caucasians. The author of this journal entry remained anonymous for unknown reasons; however, he/she stated that it was found that the BIE Group 26 had ties to the Sovereign Citizen Movement, and that one of their members declared himself an “aboriginal/indigenous free sovereign moor” and had in his possession a Moorish identification card (Anonymous, 2017). This undoubtedly highlights an even greater concern: The Sovereign Citizen Movement is clearly no longer just a localized issue – they are now connecting with other anti-government and hate groups, internationally.

Sovereign Citizens are not just posing a problem with the United States’ neighbors across the ocean – they can be seen threatening the legitimacy of the government and court systems as nearby as Canada. An article on a Canadian law firm’s website reported that although Sovereigns

in the United States and Canada are somewhat different, they are essentially the same in that they share a common characteristic of using complex arguments based on historical and/or legal documents, to rationalize how the government, laws, and the court are illegitimate (Wiffen, 2012). To detail just how ostentatious some Sovereign Citizens can be, Wiffen details the case involving Eva Sydel. Sydel vehemently opposed the Canadian Income Tax Act, to the point where she asserted that the act is void because King George VI failed to provide royal assent to the tax's legislation (2012). Sydel further stated that the act was void since it was not mentioned in the 1947 speech from the throne. She also held the view that Freemasons "run" Canada, and that the maple leaf on the Canadian flag was that of communists (2012). Holding onto that same reasoning, Sydel asserted that nearly all of her court cases involved Jewish judges and prosecutors, on purpose, so they would be prejudiced against her since she was German (2012).

On the United States' southern border, Mexico is not exempt from the effects of Sovereign Citizens. In 2007, Oleh Stowbuneko-Saitschenko of Yuma, Arizona was convicted of smuggling illegal immigrants and currency into the United States from Mexico (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2009). He used fraudulent tribal documents from the Pembina National Little Shell Band, a potential spin-off of the Little Shell Pembina Band – a spurious American Indian "tribe" (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2009). According to the article, Little Shell shares membership with several antigovernment militia groups, as well as Sovereign Citizens (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2009). When Stowbuneko-Saitschenko was apprehended, he proclaimed, in court, that his membership in the Pembina Tribe made him a Sovereign Citizen and was therefore not subject to federal law (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2009).

Real-Life Knowledge from the Field

PoliceOne is a journal-esque resource contributed to and used by law enforcement educators and professionals throughout the United States. In one article, titled *5 responses to a sovereign citizen at a traffic stop*, the author(s) provided literature on just what a potential encounter with a sovereign citizen by police officers can actually look like. Some Sovereign Citizens never become violent – they use paper as their weapons instead of guns and knives; however, there is a smaller percentage of them who have proven the willingness and ability to become violent toward police (Uniform Stories Staff, 2015). In this article, the author(s) advised any law enforcement officer who suspects they are facing a Sovereign Citizen to immediately call for backup (Uniform Stories Staff, 2015) due to their propensity for violence noted above. Even if a situation does not become violent, during a traffic stop Sovereign Citizens will almost always use some sort of fabricated, official-sounding reason for why their rights have been violated and laws do not apply to them – some of those could include:

- A distinct differentiation between “driving” and “traveling,” because Sovereign Citizens see traveling freely as an unconquerable natural right;
- A statement that since they are a “free” person, they do not recognize jurisdictional law;
- The belief that by speeding, they are not actually breaking any law because a crime requires an injured party;
- Denial of any liability to pay taxes on vehicles, registrations, or possess a valid, state-issued driver’s license or license plate; and,
- Questioning why they are being detained, not realizing or recognizing the difference between arrest and detainment (Uniform Stories Staff, 2015).

Dean C. Alexander, a professor and the director of the Homeland Security Research Program at Western Illinois University, is a recognized subject matter expert on topics involving terrorism, extremist movements, and Sovereign Citizens. In 2016, he published an article in *Security Magazine*, titled *The Sovereign Citizen Movement: Threats and Responses*, in which he discussed the Movement, their ideology, perceived benefits of membership, a profile of its structure, tactics, activities, and the extremist elements that they have in common with other unrelated cells. Despite the lack of education on the subject of Sovereign Citizens when compared to terrorist movements and dangerous criminal gangs, this article states that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) lists Sovereign Citizens among the United States' top domestic terror threats (Alexander, 2016).

There is not an abundance of sources available that actually delve into the structure of the Sovereign Citizen Movement, likely because they do not operate similar to an organized criminal gang or mafia, so the Movement is disregarded as “connected” (The Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2010). Alexander (2016) confirmed the most current estimate of Sovereign Citizen membership count, by stating that there are around 300,000 Sovereign Citizens in The Movement, but only about 100,000 of them could be described as “hard core.” Even though they are not as organized and together as a typical criminal gang, the structure can (and often does) include informal groups of followers, sometimes headed by ideologues who espouse beliefs to whomever will listen (Alexander, 2016). They often hold seminars or even use shell organizations dubbed “consulting services” to spread their message and recruit more members (Alexander, 2016). Unlike gangs, these small groups tend not to last very long because the leaders are usually apprehended for tax fraud or other financial-related crimes (Alexander, 2016).

The majority of other Sovereign Citizens tend to be members of small familial cabals who are “born” into the life (Alexander, 2016).

Although many Sovereign Citizens do not resort to violence, there are enough incidents in recent history to warrant a hard look at what is being done education-wise and legally to monitor, and if necessary, prosecute these individuals. Alexander (2016) highlighted several incidents within the past decade that illustrate the need for concern vividly. In 2014 alone, four police officers were killed by Sovereign Citizens. In 2012, two deputy sheriffs were killed, and in 2010, two additional police officers were killed by a teenage Sovereign Citizen (2016). Unlike criminal gang members, who are usually located in/around a central turf and are prosecutable with sentencing enhancements in many states, Sovereign Citizens (like the ones who killed the law enforcement officers above) are located throughout the United States and cannot be prosecuted using specialized sentencing enhancements, save one particular case.

Heather Ann Tucci-Jarraf of Washington is a former prosecutor. She became a Sovereign Citizen and assisted a man with defrauding the United States Automotive Association (USAA) Bank for millions of U.S. Dollars (Dorman, 2018). She instructed a man named Randall Keith Beane in how to “use the system,” launder money, commit wire fraud, and hide his money from authorities. Because she simply conspired with Beane in the above crimes, Tucci-Jarraf did not receive a hefty sentence; however, the judge in the case used an enhancement in the sentencing, citing that she used her legal training as an attorney to coach Beane (Dorman, 2018). That enhancement, used at the judges’ discretion, was imposed to “set an example” (Dorman, 2018). Currently, many Clerks of Court offices forward suspicious paperwork with a Sovereign-esque appearance to the county or state law enforcement body because they are not certain how to

properly process them. Law enforcement officers and court personnel alike may benefit from Sovereign criminal enhancements, such as the one utilized by the judge in the case above.

Proven Concern from Officials and the Need for More

Seven years ago (in 2012), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) shared a podcast on their website regarding Sovereign Citizen Extremism. One statement made in that podcast by a member of the FBI surmised that the Bureau was being inundated with requests from state and local law enforcement agencies requesting training on matters related to Sovereign Citizens (Carty as cited in Sovereign Citizen Extremism, 2012). In that podcast, the FBI personnel discussed what Sovereign Citizens were and what some of the indicators might look like (Sovereign Citizen Extremism, 2012), most of which were in line with the article from *PoliceOne* included above.

In fact, it was not just the requests from local and state law enforcement agencies in 2012 that brought the need for training into the light; in 2011, the FBI cited that the scattered domestic terrorist movement (Sovereign Citizens) has existed for decades and has well-known members like Terry Nichols, who helped plan the Oklahoma City bombing (FBI Counterterrorism Analysis Section, 2011). In the last decade, criminal gang members which are so heavily concentrated on have not been recorded to have coordinated with any mass-casualty event, such as the Oklahoma City bombing. Why, then, is the FBI (the principal domestic law enforcement entity) not holding Sovereign Citizens at the same level of concern as domestic gangs?

In addition to violent incidents, the FBI reaffirms what other sources have said, citing that Sovereign Citizens believe that they can “free money” from the United States Treasury Department without consequence, and that by using various statutory-based demands from the Uniform Commercial Code (U.C.C.), it will prompt the federal government to pay their debts,

including that which is accumulated on credit cards, taxes, and home mortgages (FBI Counterterrorism Analysis Section, 2011). Sovereign Citizens can be dangerous or deadly, they can and do extort money from the government, and they can cause unnecessary complications to the legal system, as described in this quote from the FBI:

At a minimum, these activities create a voluminous influx of documents that clog the courts and other government agencies. But, the idea behind the Redemption Theory also leads sovereign citizens to find criminal sources of income as they travel the country, teach fraudulent tactics to others for a fee, and participate in white collar crimes. The latter offenses include mail, bank, mortgage, and wire fraud; money laundering; tax violations; and illegal firearms sales and purchases (2011).

Again, although the Sovereign Citizen Movement is not nearly as compact, predictable, or organized as a typical criminal gang, there are blatant indicators that could easily serve as a means of identification (Uniform Stories Staff, 2015). According to the FBI, in California there was a case involving Sovereign Citizens who were selling “lifetime memberships” to a fraudulent insurance company, and eventually collected millions of dollars from customers (FBI Counterterrorism Analysis Section, 2011). Another incident in Missouri involved Sovereign Citizens who took part in a fraudulent diplomatic credential scandal, in which they charged absurd amounts ranging from a few hundred dollars to a couple thousand for a diplomatic credential card, giving the holder “sovereign status.” This status supposedly meant that holders would be exempt from paying taxes, and would be immune from stops, searches, and arrests by law enforcement personnel (Counterterrorism Analysis Section, 2011).

The Nevada Joint Terrorism Task Force, or NJTTF, apprehended four Sovereign Citizens on charges including federal money laundering, tax evasion, and weapons charges (FBI Counterterrorism Analysis Section, 2011) – this is significant, given the propensity for violence that Sovereign Citizens already exhibit sometimes, now combined with laundering weapons. Last but certainly not least on the FBI's list was a 2007 incident in New Hampshire involving the Browns. They were charged with various crimes of fraud, but failed to appear in court. The incident escalated quickly into a standoff in which the couple barricaded themselves in their home, all while issuing militant/threatening statements. To make matters worse, they had already stockpiled weapons and various explosive ordinances (2011). Luckily, they were apprehended without loss of life.

Incarceration: Is it Punishment or a New Opportunity?

This is the 21st century, and as such, the availability of technological resources is abundant. Essentially, wherever there is a smartphone or a computer, and internet access, a crime can be committed. It might be reasonable to think that once a Sovereign Citizen is arrested, convicted, then sentenced to jail or prison, his or her crimes would cease; however, that is often a far from accurate assumption. Because inmates are still United States citizens, they are afforded rights, such as visitation and access to telephones, libraries, and computers. Even when Sovereign Citizens go to prison, they often carry-out their criminal activities during incarceration (FBI Counterterrorism Analysis Section, 2011). In fact, whenever a Sovereign Citizen is incarcerated, he or she finds that the inmate population they are housed with provides a new audience to preach the ideology to and recruit to help them commit their criminal acts (2011). From within prison, they are able to create fraudulent businesses, complete fraudulent financial documents, defraud banks and credit institutions, and even defraud the U.S. Government (2011).

As the FBI has illustrated, prison is not often much of a deterrent to Sovereign Citizen activity. In fact, one specific case involved a man named Roger Elvick. Elvick was a believer and promoter of the redemption theory, which is one that exploits the concept of currency devaluation (Berger, 2016, p.11). In Elvick's case, he essentially committed fraud by claiming he could use phony financial instruments which he created to pay off legitimate debts (2016, p.11). During the 1990s, Elvick was sentenced to prison for his crimes of fraud; however, he was out soon enough and began pushing the concept of redemption theory and committing fraud, and was back in prison in the early 2000s (2016, p.11).

Similar to *PoliceOne*, *InPublicSafety* contains resources contributed by and used by law enforcement educators and professionals throughout the United States and is owned by American Public University System. In this particular article, the author is an alumnus of American Military University's Intelligence Studies program. Interestingly, Whitehead (2018) explains that he has worked many posts in the 13-years he has been with the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, and that one of the most crucial places for correctional officers to be vigilant is the law library. While most inmates access the law library to legitimately work on their legal matters (i.e. appeals, divorces, etc.), some are there to try to undermine the legal system by manipulating certain laws to their own benefit. The author explains that while all of these people are not Sovereign Citizens, some are – and “they always carry their legal work; they always challenge the internal disciplinary system of the prison; these are inmates who often believe they know the laws and policies better than officers” (Whitehead, 2018).

Although some Sovereign Citizens who are incarcerated spend their time recruiting new members and working on their scams from inside the prison, some come to “work” and learn

more about laws and how to supersede them by putting their own “twist” on them. Whitehead (2018) identified the following publications as key indicators to look for when in a prison law library: *The Sovereign Citizen’s Cut-Out Kit* (assists with removing oneself from control of the government), *The Global Sovereign’s Handbook* (describes The Movement), publications containing “Strawman” or “Redemption/Redemption Theory” in the title or description, and any books or articles published by the Sovereignty Press (essentially, The Movement’s publishing company).

In a 2008 case in Jacksonville, Texas, a police raid was carried-out on the House of Israel (an antigovernment group), when a member of the group violated his parole (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2009). The leader of the House of Israel was reported to be Robert Fox, a Canadian national who “allegedly has practiced unlicensed law and dentistry” (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2009). This particular subject is infamous for circulating books and other publications inside the prison system that instruct prisoners on using Sovereign Citizen techniques to circumvent the legal system (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2009).

In another 2008 case – this time in Baltimore, Maryland – four Sovereign Citizens known for their involvement in murder, weapons offenses, drug trafficking, and racketeering were arrested and put on criminal trial (Southern Poverty Law Center 2009). The four men continually used Sovereign Citizen tactics to disrupt hearings and other court proceedings and routinely fired their lawyers. Although official trial proceedings began in 2008, the four men were tying-up the court system as early as 2004, when their pre-trial hearings began (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2009).

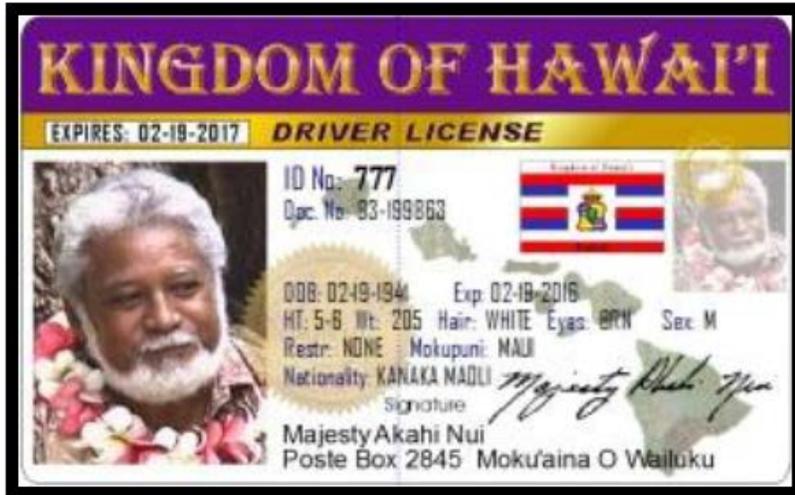
What do Sovereign Citizen documents look like?

At several points in this thesis thus far, fraudulent documents (i.e. driver licenses, license plates, court documents, etc.) routinely used by Sovereign Citizens have been mentioned. In the figures on this page and the succeeding page, readers observe a small sampling of commonly-seen documents.



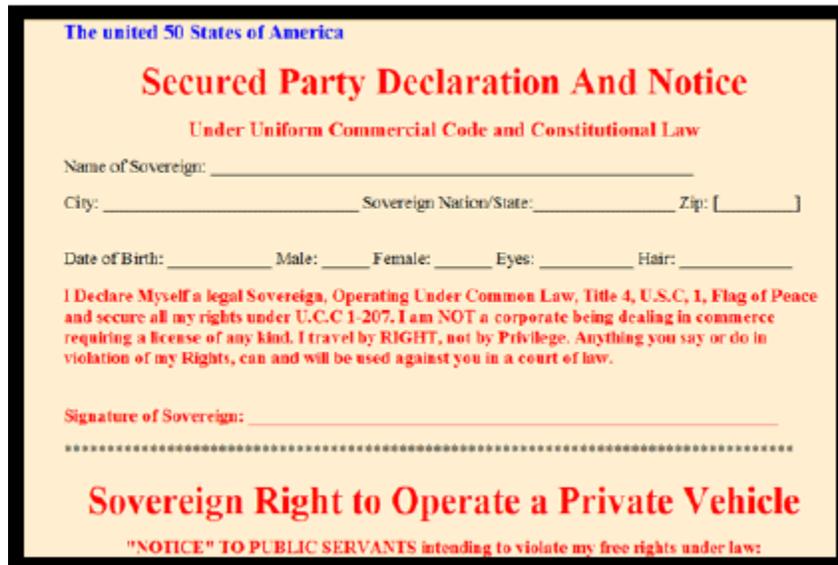
1. Sovereign Driver's License

Figure 1. Sovereign Driver's License. Reprinted from a September 03, 2016 article in the *SunHerald*. Retrieved May 20, 2019, from <https://www.sunherald.com/news/local/crime/article99801227.html>. Courtesy of Slidell Police Department.



2. Another Sovereign Driver's License

Figure 2. Sovereign Driver's License. Reprinted from a September 03, 2016 article in the *SunHerald*. Retrieved May 20, 2019, from <http://hrmakahinui.com/transportation/>



3. Sovereign Declaration

Figure 3. Sovereign Declaration. Reprinted from a (n.d.) website for Sovereign Citizen indoctrination. Retrieved May 20, 2019, from <http://hrmakahinui.com/transportation/>

III. METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Framework

The Sovereign Citizen Movement and its individual actors, the Sovereign Citizens, are obscure to many people – even to this day. There is a lack of research, and an even greater lack of legislature in place to assist law enforcement officers and court officials with arrests, convictions, and sentencing. Awareness is the key to affecting change and in gaining support for law enforcement and legal professionals in situations involving such actors. There are a couple theses that have been completed on topics involving Sovereign Citizens, but none that truly highlight the threat they pose or provide insight into the causation of choosing to become Sovereign. To illustrate the cause and provide said insight, this thesis will be utilizing the Symbolic Interaction Theory. Symbolic interactionism was first coined by Herbert Blumer, an American sociologist, in 1937 (Lal, 1995). In criminology specifically, the symbolic interactionist approach theorizes that those who have an interest in pursuing criminal endeavors or in creating “stability” or change in the world take a pragmatic or practical approach to do so (Ulmer & Spencer, 1999). In other words, this approach empowers one to create new opportunities and overcome constraints, and could be influenced by socialization or even biological traits and tendencies (Ulmer & Spencer, 1999). Essentially, symbolic interactionism is practical, in that it applies symbolic references for relativity – with Sovereign Citizens, the most common example that comes to mind is the association of the United States and the Federal Government as the “War Machine” (“Sovereign Citizenship,” n.d.). Furthermore, people tend to gravitate toward the Sovereign Citizen Movement because of a common ground in their beliefs and the purposes of The Movement.

Unfortunately, the Sovereign Citizen Movement differs by family, clan, locale, etc. ever-so-slightly; however, symbolic interactionism is useful here because it changes with each individual. The three (3) core principles are language, meaning, and thought: humans act according to the meaning they give people and things, and identify those meanings in association with symbols, then they make sense of those thoughts with individual interpretation (University of Twente, 2019). As an example, a person responsible for child support payments (which is taxed by the government), who barely makes ends meet, and who lost a job they had working for a state government agency might symbolize the government (at any level) as his or her enemy – not a network of agencies – but a singular foe. To this person, the thought of not having to pay taxes and becoming a Sovereign Citizen may even seem enticing.

The next step in the process will be to disseminate controlled surveys/questionnaires that will serve to collect information from local and state law enforcement agencies. Depending on the amount of responses received, incorporation an extensive spreadsheet which depicts differences from state-to-state and county-to-county (Florida) in how extensively law enforcement agencies in each locale interact with Sovereign Citizens (i.e. local ordinances, specialty units, arrests, convictions, etc.) may be created. In addition to law enforcement agencies, it may later be determined that the survey needs to reach state and district attorney offices to gauge the impact (or lack thereof) of convictions of Sovereign Citizens. That information will then be further synthesized in an analysis section.

It is hypothesized that local and state law enforcement bodies (primarily in Florida) interact with Sovereign Citizens on a regular basis, but rarely receive the support or have the training they need to recognize or understand them, let alone successfully arrest and convict them.

Research Design

As this thesis employs mixed-method research, the overall framework is somewhat fluid and incorporates more than one research method (quantitative and qualitative) in its design. The quantitative data includes closed-end information for statistical analysis, the result of which include numbers or percentages; some of these are presented in tables (Grand Canyon University, n.d.). The qualitative data is more subjective, which allowed for survey respondents' responses to be viewed, along with the interpretation of the observations (Grand Canyon University, n.d.). Initially, the first step was to look deeper for any other existing research on Sovereign Citizens or comparable groups from other countries and assimilate it into a more complex analysis, followed by synthesis of said information to truly highlight where current gaps in research lie and how situations are similar in different between Florida and a few other states.

Qualitative data was primarily gathered from existing literature, including but not limited to news publications, published books, scholarly articles, and prior theses. Quantitative data from Florida law enforcement agencies was used to address the primary and secondary research questions presented in this thesis – this data primarily consisted of specific events, agency information, and crime-related data in the form of numbers. For comparative purposes, data received from agencies outside of Florida was utilized. Many variables were considered, as the research questions could not be answered using a predominately-statistical approach. These variables included, but were not limited to, the state the responding agency is located in, along with applicable laws, agency policies, and training the agency's members have received. Literature on the Sovereign Citizen Movement, Sovereign Citizens, court cases, and law enforcement encounters was also gathered.

The primary means of gathering statistical data and information on individual cases/experiences from law enforcement agencies was done via electronically disseminated controlled questionnaires, which were disseminated using the distribution services of the Florida Crime & Intelligence Analyst Association (FCIAA), the International Association of Crime Analysts (IACA), the International Association of Law Enforcement Intelligence Analysts (IALEIA), and the local Tallahassee, Florida region of law enforcement intelligence contacts.

The controlled-answer surveys were developed to collect statistical and general jurisdictional information from law enforcement agencies. The questions were divided into four sections: basic information, specific agency information, criminal and indicator data, and additional jurisdictional specifics. The initial request for respondents was disseminated via the electronic mailing list services of the International Association of Crime Analysts (IACA), International Association of Law Enforcement Intelligence Analysts (IALEIA), and the Florida Crime & Intelligence Analyst Association (FCIAA). This writer is a member of all three associations above, but serves as a Board Member of FCIAA. FCIAA is currently a regional partner of the IACA. The IACA currently has over 4,000 members internationally, while FCIAA has 175 members in Florida and other parts of the United States. The IALEIA has approximately 2,500 members internationally (International Association of Law Enforcement Intelligence Analysts, 2019).

In addition to the wide-spectrum distribution method for the questionnaire, another stratagem was to target personally-known agency contacts who specialize in Sovereign Citizen activity, including contacts with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission. It is imperative to note that the questionnaire is not human subject research, as the data requested via the form was not apropos of the individuals

themselves and did not require IRB approval (IRB determination statement will be included in appendix).

Methods to be included in the design of this thesis will consist of primarily non-invasive forms of study. Content analysis will be conducted, which will include news articles and possibly contextual information gained from previous video-recorded interviews of Sovereign Citizens – this will help ensure appropriate categories are present which are representative of the research interest (Singleton & Straits, 2010). As previously mentioned, this thesis will also employ the use of electronically mailed surveys. Although the surveys included quantitative data via controlled responses, they also provided certain spaces for respondents to include their professional experiences with Sovereign Citizens, allowing them to elaborate in more detail (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005) – further information on the content of the surveys will be provided in the results section of this paper. Because there was an option for respondents to include their individual professional experiences, the responses were screened for neutrality so unnecessary biases were not introduced into the content of this thesis.

Limitations of the Study & Researcher Bias

Limitations of this study include sparse amounts of in-depth studies on Sovereign Citizens, the Sovereign Citizen Movement, and examinations into their organization. Additionally, much of the analysis and findings is dependent upon willing participants to complete and submit electronically mailed surveys to aid in performing a comparative analysis and identifying deficits in trainings, policies, etc.

Care has been taken to ensure there is no researcher bias. What is presented in the literature review has been gleaned to only include statements and information from qualified

sources, while the results and findings sections include factual statements and statistical information from certified law enforcement agencies.

IV. RESULTS

Information on the Survey

Agency analysts who wished to participate in the survey were instructed to reply in order to receive a copy of the survey form; however, despite the number of members in the professional associations listed above, only analysts who had direct experience with Sovereign Citizens were requested. The following statement was included on each form to ensure non-bias and anonymity:

The purpose of this survey is to aid in gathering empirical data to compliment research into Sovereign Citizens. This will be used to complete a thesis in partial fulfillment of the Master of Arts degree in Homeland Security from American Military University. Aside from the country and state your agency is located in, all personal information and your agency's information will be kept anonymous (Smith, 2019).

From the request for participants, 42 responses were received. Of that number, 20 respondents had direct experience with Sovereign Citizens, while the other 22 respondents simply replied to provide encouragements, such as "good luck" or "I wish you the best!" Each survey has been assigned a respondent number (i.e. R1, R2...).

The following information was requested within the survey from the qualified respondents:

- Agency's country and state
- Any laws or penalty enhancements regarding Sovereign Citizens
- Number of crime or intelligence analysts at the agency
- Number of sworn personnel at the agency

- Agency's position on collection of intelligence on Sovereign Citizens
- The number of Sovereign Citizens monitored by the agency
- Information on specific analysts or specialized units/task forces assigned to Sovereign Citizen-related investigations
- Information on agency-provided Sovereign Citizen awareness training
- Information on agency policy specific to Sovereign Citizens
- Any history of law enforcement officers assaulted by Sovereign Citizens at the agency
- Prevalent types of criminal activity engaged in by Sovereign Citizens, indicators seen, fraudulent documents received, and prosecution by State/District Attorney (per jurisdiction)

Survey Results

The table below provides a high-level overview of the agencies who responded to the survey, based on the county and state they are located in, the number of crime or intelligence analysts they employ, and the current number of their sworn personnel. Aside from providing general information on the agencies who responded, this table also serves to set the tone for the discussion on the analyst-sworn staffing level relationship in a latter section of this paper.

Basic Information				
Respondent	Country	State	# Analysts	# Sworn
R1	USA	NJ	0	19
R2	USA	KS	1	100
R3	USA	FL	50*	300*
R4	USA	FL	3	800
R5	USA	IL	1	73
R6	USA	TN	0	100
R7	USA	AL	0	80
R8	USA	UT	3	144
R9	USA	CA	1	177
R10	USA	FL	4	229
R11	USA	FL	13	1800
R12	USA	FL	3	355
R13	USA	FL	7	300
R14	USA	FL	3	208
R15	USA	FL	9	425
R16	USA	FL	2	200
R17	USA	FL	3	755
R18	USA	FL	1	300
R19	USA	FL	1	90
R20	USA	FL	2	139

1. Basic Agency Information

In Table 1, the asterisk represents a principal, state-level law enforcement agency whose overall number of analysts and sworn personnel were excluded from calculations as an anomaly. Bearing that in mind, the average of the number of analysts at all responding agencies is three, while the average number of sworn personnel is 331. Examining Florida agencies alone, while still excluding the aforementioned principal agency, the average number of analysts is four, while the average number of sworn personnel is 467. The significance of the relationship between the number of analysts and sworn personnel will be made clear in the Discussion section of this paper.

In Table 2 immediately following, additional information is presented to depict the emphasis each of the responding agencies places on Sovereign Citizens in their respective

jurisdictions. Only nine of the 20 responding agencies reported that they maintain some form of intelligence or information on Sovereign Citizens. Only eight of the responding agencies reported that they flag case reports or calls for service in their Records Management Systems (RMS) or Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) applications if a Sovereign Citizen is involved. The majority of the responding agencies reported that they either do not know how many Sovereign Citizens they are currently monitoring, or they are not actively monitoring any at all. Similarly, most of them further reported that they do not have a dedicated analyst or task force/specialized unit assigned to Sovereign Citizen cases or intelligence-gathering. More than half of the responding agencies reported that they do provide their employees with some form of Sovereign Citizen awareness training, but none of the agencies have any organizational policies in place regarding Sovereign Citizens or what to do when interacting with them.

Specific Agency Information							
Respondent	Maintain Intel/Info	Cases/ CFS Flagged	# SC's Monitored	SC Analyst	SC Task Force	SC Awareness Training	SC Policies
R1	NO	NO	0	NO	NO	YES	NO
R2	YES	YES	1	NO	NO	NO	NO
R3	YES	NO	0	NO	NO	NO	NO
R4	YES	YES	65	NO	NO	NO	NO
R5	NO	NO	UNK	NO	NO	YES	NO
R6	NO	YES	1	YES	YES	YES	NO
R7	NO	YES	3	YES	NO	YES	NO
R8	NO	NO	0	NO	NO	YES	NO
R9	NO	YES	1	NO	NO	YES	NO
R10	NO	YES	0	NO	NO	NO	NO
R11	YES	NO	0	YES	NO	YES	NO
R12	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO
R13	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO
R14	YES	NO	0	NO	NO	YES	NO
R15	NO	NO	0	NO	NO	NO	NO
R16	NO	NO	0	NO	NO	NO	NO
R17	YES	YES	UNK	NO	NO	YES	NO
R18	YES	NO	2	NO	NO	NO	NO
R19	YES	YES	UNK	NO	NO	YES	NO
R20	NO	NO	0	NO	NO	NO	NO

2. Agency Emphasis on Sovereign Citizens

The last table in this section provides an overview of agency responses to questions regarding specific criminal data and Sovereign Citizen indicator data within their jurisdictions. For reference when reading the table below, LEOKA is an acronym meaning Law Enforcement Officers Killed or Assaulted.

Criminal & Indicator Data					
Respondent	LEOKA from SC	Activity Type	Indicators	Fraud. Docs	Active Prosec.
R1	NO	Traffic Offenses	YES	YES	NO
R2	NO	Traffic Offenses	YES	YES	NO
R3	NO	Unlawful Filings	YES	YES	YES
R4	NO	Lack of Licensure	YES	NO	NO
R5	NO	Traffic Offenses	YES	NO	YES
R6	YES	Traffic Offenses/Resisting	YES	NO	NO
R7	NO	Traffic Offenses	YES	YES	YES
R8	NO	Fraud	YES	YES	YES
R9	NO	Traffic Offenses	YES	YES	NO
R10	NO	Narcotics Trafficking	NO	NO	NO
R11	NO	Traffic Offenses/Resisting	YES	YES	YES
R12	NO	Traffic Offenses/Fraud	YES	YES	NO
R13	NO	Fraud/Resisting	YES	YES	NO
R14	UNK	False Declarations of Fines	YES	YES	YES
R15	YES	Traffic Offenses/Resisting	YES	YES	YES
R16	NO	Fraud	YES	YES	NO
R17	NO	Traffic Offenses	YES	YES	NO
R18	NO	Traffic Offenses	YES	YES	NO
R19	NO	Traffic Offenses	YES	YES	NO
R20	YES	Fraud	YES	YES	NO

3. Jurisdictional Criminal & Indicator Data

In Table 3, three out of 20 responding agencies reported that a law enforcement officer in their jurisdiction was either killed or assaulted by a Sovereign Citizen at some point in time. The majority of the responding agencies reported that traffic offenses (i.e. fictitious driver's licenses, license plates, argumentative behavior during a traffic stop, etc.) were the most prevalent type of criminal activity Sovereign Citizens were involved in in their jurisdiction. Several other agencies reported other Sovereign-related criminal activities, including unlawful court document filings,

resisting law enforcement officers, fraud, narcotics trafficking, and false declarations of fines to be levied against persons. All but one agency reported that they regularly see Sovereign indicators (i.e. fake diplomatic license plates, signs, U.C.C. references, etc.) in their jurisdictions, and the majority also reported that they receive fraudulent documents from Sovereign Citizens. Finally, just seven of the 20 responding agencies reported that their agency, state attorney, or district attorney actively investigates and prosecutes cases involving fraudulent documents from Sovereign Citizens (or other crimes involving them).

Elaboration from Surveys

This section contains additional information gathered from limited, free-text fields of the survey. Respondents were asked to provide extra explanations for certain “if-then” type questions, where one question is optional and dependent on a yes or no question from the previous question.

Training

A total of 11 of the 20 responding agencies reported that they provide their agencies with some form of Sovereign Citizen awareness training. R1 reported that training is provided to them occasionally by the New Jersey State Police, Office of Homeland Security. R1 further clarified that the NJSP office keeps track of all training they receive, as well as Sovereign Citizens. R5 reported that their agency provides one annual training per year on the topic, while R6’s agency only provides the training once to employees. Some agencies, such as R7, reported that while they do provide or engage in Sovereign Citizen awareness training, the amount they partake in varies or is unknown. R8, on the other hand, disclosed that they receive somewhere between eight and 24 hours of training annually on the subject. R9 indicated that while their agency does offer Sovereign Citizen awareness training twice per year, it is not offered department-wide and

is not mandatory. R11 reported that awareness training is available, but elective. Lastly, R14 reported that only one hour of training is provided on the subject; however, that training is only provided to newly hired sworn officers.

Indicators

The following responses are based on Question 18 of the survey, which states “What indicators is your agency aware of in its jurisdiction?”:

R1: Fraudulent license plates

R2: Fraudulent, altered, or missing license plates

R3: Fraudulent license plates; however, the self-proclaimed Florida Moorish “Governor” lives in R3’s jurisdiction and places signs displaying his bogus position on and around his property

R4: Fraudulent license plates, fraudulent driver’s licenses, and “Don’t tread on me” signs

R7: Fraudulent license plates and the presence of stickers on vehicles

R8: Strange verbiage in various documents and fraudulent “legal” documents

R9: Strange verbiage in various documents, fraudulent license plates, strange symbols, red thumbprints on documents, and refusal to acknowledge law enforcement authority

R11: Peculiar correspondence received by the agency, pseudo-legal document templates, fraudulent license plates, and stickers on vehicles

The remaining agencies either did not report any Sovereign Citizen indicators in their respective jurisdictions, or simply did not answer the question.

Monitoring

While many agencies who responded to the survey reported that they did not actively monitor Sovereign Citizens or flag specific case or call activity involving them, a handful of agencies did provide monitoring techniques and safety measures. The following respondents reported flagging cases, calls-for-service, persons records, or addresses involving identified Sovereign Citizens who have committed crimes:

R2: A subject's master name file in their Records Management System (RMS) is flagged with information indicating the person is a Sovereign Citizen and any other pertinent information.

R4: "Intel" flags can be placed on a subject's master name file in their RMS.

R6: A subject's master name file in their RMS or an address is flagged for a responder safety alert.

R7: Information is kept in the dispatch center as a warning to units responding to an address with which a Sovereign Citizen is associated. When a warning does go out, responding units are asked to switch to a secure radio frequency so sensitive information can be communicated to them. This particular agency notates any known residences of the Sovereign Citizen, type of criminal activity they are known to engage in, known mental states (if any), and likelihood of altercations with officers.

R9: A subject's master name file in their RMS or an address is flagged as a hazard for heightened officer safety. When a call is received and a flag appears, it may require a three-unit response for safety reasons.

R10: Addresses associated with Sovereign Citizens are flagged as officer safety concerns by the 9-1-1 call center. When officers are dispatched, safety concerns are relayed to the officer(s) responding.

R14: Only information on Sovereign Citizens that are part of active investigations is kept on file, and is kept in compliance with the state policy on general law enforcement, correctional facility, and district medical examiner data.

Jurisdictional Specifics

The following responses are based on the optional free-text field at the end of the survey, which provides respondents with the opportunity to elaborate on any questions presented in the survey, or to provide further comments based on the agency's specific experiences with Sovereign Citizens, policies, monitoring techniques, concerns, etc. in 700 characters or less.

R5: The survey participant representing this agency reported that he/she worked 35 years for a police department in Illinois and now works as a detective with a state-level agency, dealing with financial crimes related to casinos. While working for the police department, the respondent was regularly exposed to Be On Look-Outs (BOLOs) and information reports containing information on Sovereign Citizens who came into contact with their officers. Since being at the state-level agency, the respondent reports no Sovereign Citizen awareness training has been offered.

R7: The survey participant representing this agency reported that when a Sovereign Citizen is identified in their jurisdiction, no matter what the occurrence, a patrol supervisor is notified and available officers will also respond due to their propensity for violence toward officers.

R9: This survey participant reported that in their jurisdiction, Moorish Sovereign Citizens sent bizarre letters to the Chief of Police. They were suspects in multiple burglary, house-squatting, and document forgery crimes, and have been uncooperative during traffic stops.

R11: This survey participant reported the most contextual jurisdiction data of all respondents. The respondent states that while the agency does have occasional encounters with Sovereign Citizens and receive consistent correspondence from them, they are not considered a primary concern (in part, because it is a state-level agency and not the primary investigative body for crimes involving them). Correspondence is noted for situational awareness, but are not entered into databases or criminally pursued unless specific threats are made or they are seen as a concern for officer safety. The agency reports no proactive measures to monitor Sovereign Citizens (even those who have committed crimes in the past), and rather, they only respond or initiate action when a crime is occurring or has recently occurred involving one.

V. DISCUSSION

From the Data Collected

Based on the statistical and state-specific results provided in the previous section, it is clear that awareness of Sovereign Citizens and the Sovereign Citizen Movement, and proactive measures to monitor their activities is largely lacking. In Table 1, a holistic overview of all responding agencies resulted in a sworn strength of 331 and just three crime or intelligence analysts; comparatively, Florida agencies surveyed averaged 467 sworn personnel with four analysts. This is quite disproportionate. The International Association of Crime Analysts (IACA), a non-profit professional organization that established the standard in the crime analysis field, recommends at least one analysts per 70 sworn officers when basing the crime analysis unit size on personnel (International Association of Crime Analysts, 2019). The formula recommended by the IACA would equate to five analysts, on average, for all surveyed agencies or seven, on average, for the Florida agencies surveyed. Most agencies surveyed reported that they did not have specific analysts, units, or task forces dedicated to work Sovereign Citizen cases, but many did regularly receive fraudulent documents or have encounters with Sovereign Citizens. Even with the inordinate number of sworn personnel compared to analysts, without an in-depth study of agencies' resources and personnel, in addition to Sovereign Citizen problems in each jurisdiction, a conclusion cannot be established as to whether or not this issue directly contributes to those problems.

In Table 2, just nine of the 20 responding agencies reported they maintain some form of intelligence or information on Sovereign Citizens, and just eight reported that they flag case reports or calls for service in their Records Management Systems (RMS) or Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) systems. Alarming, respondents R6, R15, and R20 all reported that a law

enforcement officer was either killed or assaulted at their agencies at some point in time; however, neither of those agencies maintain any information or intelligence on Sovereign Citizens, nor do they have any policies in place governing how they should be handled or approached when encountered by a law enforcement officer. In addition, two of those agencies still do not provide their personnel with Sovereign Citizen awareness training, even though they reported they have regular encounters during traffic stops, where the subjects are known to resist arrest or questioning.

As seen in data garnered from Table 3, only 11 of the 20 reporting agencies provide awareness training to their personnel. Of that number, several agencies only provide it once, at a couple agencies the training is not mandatory, and at another the training only occurs to newly hired sworn personnel (not analysts) and updated, refresher trainings are not offered. Many agencies reporting on the survey did not place emphasis on the importance of Sovereign Citizen awareness training because they rarely received fraudulent court filings and usually only experienced traffic-related offenses involving them.

The Dangers Associated with the Lack of Awareness and Monitoring

Even though the majority of agencies that responded to the survey reported little-to-no violent crime involving Sovereign Citizens in their areas, awareness training is still extremely important. Until May 20, 2010, the West Memphis Police Department had no idea what a Sovereign Citizen was. Training had never been provided, so when two officers encountered a white van with a fraudulent (Sovereign) license plate attached, they had no idea what they were getting themselves into when they initiated a traffic stop on the vehicle (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.). Shortly after the stop, father and son Jerry and Joseph Kane shot and killed both officers and fled. A short while later, the Kanes were found at a Wal-Mart Supercenter and were

killed by gunfire when they would not surrender to police custody (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.).

In an interview with *TimesNews*, a special agent with the Tennessee Department of Safety and Homeland Security explained that Terry Nichols and Timothy McVeigh – the infamous Oklahoma City Bomber and his accomplice – were Sovereign Citizens (Hayes, 2016). In 2014, two Alaska State Troopers were shot to death with an AR-15 by a “free, natural” Sovereign Citizen named Nathaniel Lee Kangas after they responded to follow-up on an earlier complaint (Friedman, 2014). Gavin Long, a former United States Marine, “became” a member of the Washitaw Nation of Moorish Sovereign Citizens. On his birthday in 2016, Long purposely looked for police officers to kill. When he could not find any, he loitered near a gas station in Baton Rouge, Louisiana with a shotgun until enough concerned citizens called and police responded – it resulted in three police officers being killed before Long was taken down by return gunfire (Jarvie, 2016).

While Michael Hicks did not become violent, he still posed a problem for a Washington State police officer who initiated a traffic stop after observing Hicks driving with a fraudulent license plate (Bishop, 2012). Not only did Hicks employ the use of the fraudulent license plate, but he also openly displayed several bumper stickers and decals, one of which said “no trespassing, private property.” Once stopped, he refused to exit the vehicle due to not feeling safe (Bishop, 2012). Hicks was subsequently arrested, after which he exclaimed that his rights were trampled as a Sovereign (Bishop, 2012).

In one Florida case from November 2013, a death threat was made against a customer at a Buick Dealership in Tampa Bay. Eric Holtgard was arrested for the incident but was somehow granted bail (Chambers, 2013). Not long after his release from jail, Holtgard was re-arrested after

holding a lawn care worker hostage at gunpoint, all while carrying a piece of paper that said he was a sovereign citizen and exempt from laws (Chambers, 2013). Deputies in Hillsborough County, Florida searched Holtgard's car and seized several firearms and an impressive amount of high-powered ammunition (Chambers, 2013).

Another aspect that has not been explored much is the extent to which social media influences the recruitment and actions of Sovereign Citizens. As of 2018, YouTube – the popular video-streaming service, now turned live television provider – reportedly received approximately 300 hours of video uploads every minute throughout each day of the year (Aslam, 2018). On an annual basis, that number equates to approximately 157.7 million hours of video. It was further reported that nearly 80% of users on the platform were from somewhere other than the United States (Aslam, 2018), which accurately depicts the connection and potential for influence from and to other countries. One YouTube channel in particular, dubbed the *Human Restoration Project*, had 265 subscribers and nearly 16,000 views as of April 22, 2018, but as of May 20, 2019, the number of subscribers dropped to 258. The channel has since been made private, so an accurate and current count on total views cannot be established. In one video in particular, entitled *The Sovereign Citizen vs. the Natural Person*, the page's owner asserted her support for the Sovereign Citizen Movement and acknowledged and sanctioned the use of the Uniform Commercial Code (UCC) (The Human Restoration Project, 2017). Further along in the video, the subject declares that “funds” (likely referring to the various taxes imposed on American citizens) are used to finance the “War Machine” – more commonly known as the federal government (The Human Restoration Project, 2017).

Another influencer on YouTube is a channel called *TheChris AndHollieShow*. where Chris, one of the page's owners, routinely posts out-of-the-ordinary videos. In one particular

video, entitled 2nd time I've caught a hard time about using UCC 1-308, Chris espouses Sovereign Citizen ideologies and admits to trying to utilize the Uniform Commercial Code (UCC) on multiple occasions (TheChris AndHollieShow, 2017). Keeping in fashion with common Sovereign ideology, Chris believes that by being assigned a social security number and a driver's license or identification card by a government entity, he would be a government-owned "corporation." In the video, his son was just born and the hospital staff informed him that he needed to pay \$12 to obtain a birth certificate for his child (TheChris AndHollieShow, 2017). Because birth certificates require a signature from the parents, Chris felt he should write "UCC 1-308, all rights reserved" under his name, so the government could not own him or his son (TheChris AndHollieShow, 2017). The hospital would not accept the signature with the UCC designation. The final comment made by Chris near the end of the video adduced that he had attempted to fraudulently sign documents with the UCC designation at the Department of Motor Vehicles but was not successful in obtaining a driver's license under that pretense (TheChris AndHollieShow, 2017).

As previously mentioned in several segments of this thesis, Sovereign Citizens view the government as their enemy – not just the Federal Government, but all levels. In the tragic yet true LEOKA cases listed above, the Sovereign Citizens who carried out those acts against law enforcement officers saw them as the government – the enemy. Pulling from the introduction section of this product, a large number of true Sovereigns see the government as "the war machine" and government workers as part of the "corporation." The examples from social media platforms provided above help put in perspective the far-reaching influence those mediums have on the furtherance of the Sovereign Citizen Movement. This is a perfect, vivid

example of how the theory of symbolic interactionism drives much of the ideologies that Sovereign Citizens so strongly believe and support.

Recommendations

1. From information gathered in Table 1 and suggestions cited from the IACA on the number of analysts needed at a law enforcement agency, it is recommended that further research be conducted (at a jurisdictional level) on agencies' resources and personnel configuration, as well as historical and current issues with Sovereign Citizens.
2. A more standardized approach to Sovereign Citizen awareness training needs to be implemented at all levels of public safety, including federal, state, local, and even tribal law enforcement personnel. There is a clear and present danger and concern, given the number of agencies who reported experiencing less-than-friendly encounters with them via the survey, and the cases reported in the previous section involving LEOKA.
3. Although simply being a Sovereign Citizen is not criminal (unless criminal actions are undertaken), the ideology is concern enough in itself. It is recommended that further research be conducted into the organization of the Sovereign Citizen Movement (which, again, the FBI classifies as a Domestic Terrorist Movement), to include case studies and perhaps, undercover operations in the larger cells. This is needed to establish a standard for what a Sovereign "cell," "family," or "network" might look like – this could be useful in establishing the basis for increased legislative support. In 2007, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE) conducted a statewide assessment on gangs in Florida. This assessment included the overview of the "gang associate" and "gang member" requirements in order for a subject to be flagged with either designation, after which any

crimes committed by them is eligible for enhancement under *Florida Statutes* chapter 874 (2007 Statewide Gang Survey Results, 2007)

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APPENDIX A

The document below is a screenshot of an email sent to the APUS IRB Office for human subjects research determination. When this was submitted initially, a different topic was being considered; however, the question format remained the same, with all questions related to statistics on Sovereign Citizens, with no questions directly related to the survey participant. As such, information garnered from surveys in this thesis is not human subjects research and requires no additional approval. A copy of the survey is attached in Appendix B.

Response to Human Subjects Research Determination Form



From: apus-irb@apus.edu

7/20/2018 at 8:33 AM

Dear Researcher,

The IRB has reviewed your Human Subjects Determination Form and concluded that your project is not human subjects research. No further IRB review is needed.

Principal Investigator: tommy smith8

Project Description: Since my research for my Master's thesis is on Florida's tourism and the connection to transient/migrant criminal activity, I need data from local police and sheriffs' offices. I am a state-certified criminal intelligence analyst and I am a member of a Florida network and an international network of other law enforcement analysts. I need statistical data from their respective agencies (i.e. numbers of specific crime types over a set number of years, information on known transient population, human/drug trafficking data, etc.). In a nutshell, this would NOT involve asking any questions about the person I'm collecting the data from - I am not interested in their personal opinions or anything about them. I am only interested in collecting statistical data to support my thesis. If need-be, I can list only the agency that the information comes from, and not the person I collected it from (so they'll remain anonymous).

I plan to use the statistical information garnered from the completed forms in my analysis/findings section of the thesis.

NOTE: According to the IRB documentation, approval is only required when "a human subject research project requires that the data received from the living individual is ABOUT the person" - my data is not about a person. IRB documentation also states that if the information is publicly available, it does not need approval. Under Florida Statutes Chapter 119, the Sunshine State Public Records Law, all law enforcement data that is not deemed exempt (exempt would be active intelligence, ongoing investigations, victim identities in sexual battery cases, and personal information on law enforcement officers), is available as a public records request. Further, the statute explains that although a public office is not required to create any report they currently do not have produced at the time a request is made, if the data is readily available it must be provided. What I am asking for is criminal incident data that is directly available via agencies' Records Management Systems (RMS) and Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) systems.

Thank you,

IRB Office
 American Public University System
 American Military University | American Public University
 111 W. Congress Street, Charles Town, WV 25414
apus-IRB@apus.edu | www.apus.edu

APPENDIX B

The document below and on the following page includes the survey questions disseminated to the participants in the data-gathering steps of this thesis.

The purpose of this survey is to aid in gathering empirical data to compliment my research into Sovereign Citizens. This will be used to complete a thesis in partial fulfillment of the Master of Arts degree in Homeland Security from American Military University (2019). Aside from the country and state your agency is located in, all personal information (your name, job, etc.) and your agency's information will be kept anonymous.

Basic Information

1. What country and state is your agency located in?
2. If your agency is **NOT** located in Florida, USA, are there any specific laws or penalty enhancements regarding Sovereign Citizens and crimes committed by them?
Yes No
3. If Q2 is yes, please elaborate in 1 – 2 sentences (350 characters or less).
4. How many crime or intelligence analysts does your agency employ?
5. How many sworn personnel does your agency employ?

Specific Agency Information

6. Does your agency maintain information or intelligence on known Sovereign Citizens in your jurisdiction who have committed criminal acts? Yes No
7. Does your agency flag cases, calls-for-service, or addresses that involve identified Sovereign Citizens (who have committed criminal acts) for officer safety and tracking purposes? Yes No
8. If Q7 is yes, please provide details on what is flagged and how in 1 – 2 sentences (350 characters or less).
9. If possible, please provide the number of known Sovereign Citizens your agency is currently monitoring (*if you do not have an exact number, an educated approximation based on your work is acceptable*).
10. Does your agency have a specific analyst, officer, etc. assigned to monitor Sovereign Citizens and/or assist with cases involving them? Yes No
11. Does your agency have a task force or specialized unit for Sovereign Citizens (similar to a gang task force)? Yes No

12. Does your agency provide or participate in any training for Sovereign Citizen awareness?
Yes No
13. If Q12 is yes, how many hours (exact or approximate is acceptable) of training are provided for Sovereign Citizen awareness to appropriate personnel? How often?
14. Does your agency or unit have any policies in place specifically addressing Sovereign Citizens? Yes No

Criminal & Indicator Data

15. Has any sworn law enforcement officer at your agency ever been injured by anyone espousing Sovereign Citizen ideology, or anyone your agency has identified as Sovereign Citizen?
Yes No
16. What is/are the most prevalent type(s) of criminal activity engaged in by Sovereign Citizens in your jurisdiction (350 characters or less)?
17. Is your agency aware of any Sovereign indicators (i.e. “Don’t Tread on Me” signs, Sovereign Authority signs, fake diplomatic license plates, etc.) in its jurisdiction?
Yes No
18. If Q17 is yes, what indicators is your agency aware of in its jurisdiction (1 – 2 sentences, 350 characters or less)?
19. Has your agency received fraudulent documents containing Sovereign indicators or ideology (i.e. affidavits, Declarations of Expatriation, documents containing Uniform Commercial Code language, etc.)?
Yes No
20. If Q19 is yes, what frequency (how often) are such documents received?
21. Does your agency (or your state or district attorney) actively investigate and prosecute cases involving fraudulent documents received from Sovereign Citizens, and other crimes they may commit? Yes No

Additional Jurisdictional Specifics

If you wish to elaborate on any of the questions above or provide further comments based on your agency’s specific experiences, policies, monitoring techniques, concerns, etc., please do so here in 3 – 4 sentences (700 characters or less).