

THE RISKS TO SOCIETY GENERATED BY "SOVEREIGN CITIZENS" BASED ON THE ATTITUDE INFLUENCED BY RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

Abstract:	<p><i>The Sovereign Citizen Movement is one formed by people who interpret the political, legal, and social reality through the prism of their own religious beliefs. The man was created freely by God, meaning "sovereign".</i></p> <p><i>Consequently, individuals are free from the legal norms imposed by other people. This is a movement without an organizational structure, which is replaced by its system of beliefs and values held by leaders and clearly defined organizations. Gordon Kahl's manifesto undoubtedly highlights the religious side of the sovereign citizen movement.</i></p> <p><i>The individual said in 1983 that the Kingdom of Christ was under siege by the forces of Satan who control the governments of the states, which is why people should no longer submit to them. Followers of the Sovereign Citizen Movement believe that their actions and attitudes are approved by God.</i></p> <p><i>They issued their own IDs, passports, and vehicle registration numbers, some with the phrase "Kingdom of God" emblazoned on them. Some of the "sovereign citizens" took their beliefs to extremes and became violent, killing those who opposed them. For this reason, the Federal Bureau of Investigation labeled the most extreme among them as terrorists.</i></p>
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Introduction

About 50 years ago there arose a movement known as the Sovereign Citizens Movement, which is leaderless and consists of people who reject government authority that they consider to be occult and illegitimate. Keiran Hardy, a researcher at the Griffith Criminology Institute in Australia who has published numerous articles on violent extremism and radicalization, states that sovereign citizens that they have as a predominant characteristic the fact that "rejects the legitimate authority of the government they live under, including the police and other authorities of state", being frequently involved in violent armed attacks¹⁹¹. They "are labeled a domestic terror threat by the FBI" in the United States of America, an example of this being the fact that "one of the conspirators behind the 1995 Oklahoma City bombings was a sovereign citizen"¹⁹².

According to The Southern Poverty Law Center, a non-governmental organization in the United States of America that monitors extremism and warns the public about its evolution, in 2022 the number of sovereign citizens increased, and "the QAnon conspiracy theory that initially brought new people into the movement has remained a gateway into sovereign citizenship"¹⁹³. These individuals finding various ways to dissociate from

¹⁹¹ Keiran Hardy, *Sovereign Citizens: Eccentrics or Extremists?*, 5 April 2023, <https://enlighten.griffith.edu.au/sovereign-citizens-eccentrics-or-extremists/> (06.09.2023)

¹⁹² *Idem*

¹⁹³ The Southern Poverty Law Center, *Sovereign citizens movement*, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/sovereign-citizens-movement> (05.09.2023)

societal structures, according to Stephen Dametto¹⁹⁴, establishing their states, refusing to pay taxes or obtain driving licenses from the authorities¹⁹⁵. Brian S. Slater says that the Sovereign Citizen Movement is part of the growing category of far-right anti-government movements and "whose followers have turned to violence and activity aimed at terrorizing a population, have earned the domestic terrorist moniker"¹⁹⁶.

Life Force Network, a new far-right movement, has an ideology that "is a fusion of Q-centric conspiracy theories, science fiction, and fake alternative governments and courts called sovereign citizen assemblies"¹⁹⁷. The members of the movement, like any follower of far-right ideologies, have the conviction that there is an occult organization that acts on a global level. Sovereign Citizens believe that "the organization's main villain is The Order, which they describe as an international group that has dominion over the governments and is made up of regular antigovernment bogeymen such as the Rockefellers, the Rothschilds and seemingly fictional characters such as the Annunake, and Dragon Families"¹⁹⁸. So, the Sovereign Citizens Movement is a far-right movement classified as terrorist by the FBI due to the violent actions of some of its followers.

Ideology of the Sovereign Citizens Movement

Every movement has an ideology, and the Sovereign Citizens Movement is no exception, as it is the hard core of individual beliefs that move the hearts and minds of any follower or participant in a political or religious action or movement. The Sovereign Citizen Movement has six characteristics, according to Spencer Dew and Jamie Wright, "all related to the religiosity which permeates and defines much of the sovereign citizen movement"¹⁹⁹.

The first feature is that "for most sovereigns, beliefs about the law are explicitly religious beliefs" and the belief system is a syncretic one since "they link their beliefs to points across a broad constellation of existing religious traditions"²⁰⁰. The religious beliefs of sovereign citizens sweep "from the exclusivist Christian Identity and fundamentalist strains of Mormonism to the more generic and inclusive bible-based Christian Patriotism"²⁰¹.

The second feature of sovereign citizens is that they "reject certain laws" because they believe in an "idealization of law". "For them, the law is divinely ordained and underwritten; it has a transcendent and transformative power"²⁰².

The third feature of sovereign citizens is that they have adopted laws that cancel the laws of the states, exemplary in this sense being the case of creating new registration plates for motor vehicles because "they believe laws regarding vehicle registration and licensing to be corrupt interpretations of the true law, seen not only as directly related to the deity"²⁰³.

The fourth characteristic of sovereign citizens is that they believe they have a fundamental duty to recruit others into their movement by propagating the idea that the law given by the current political system is corrupt but "is available to all as a tool for liberation"²⁰⁴. There have been cases where sovereign citizens have

¹⁹⁴ Acting Assistant Commissioner, *Counter Terrorism & Special Investigations - Australian Federal Police*, <https://au.linkedin.com/in/stephen-dametto-b4028537> (20.11.2023)

¹⁹⁵ Stephen Dametto, *The Sovereign Citizen Movement in Australia*, Australian Federal Police, p. 9, <https://www.afp.gov.au/sites/default/files/PDF/Disclosure-Log/123-2023.pdf>, (15.09.2023).

¹⁹⁶ Brian S. Slater, *Sovereign Citizen Movement: An Empirical Study On The Rise In Activity, Explanations of Growth, and Policy Prescriptions*, "Homeland Security Digital Library", September 2016, p. 3, <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=796640> (15.09.2023)

¹⁹⁷ The Southern Poverty Law Center, *Op. cit.*, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/sovereign-citizens-movement> (05.09.2023)

¹⁹⁸ *Idem*

¹⁹⁹ Dew Spencer, Jamie Wright, *God's Law: Universal Truth According to Religious Sovereign Citizens*, in "The University of Chicago – Divinity School", October 15, 2015, <https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sightings/articles/gods-law-universal-truth-according-religious-sovereign-citizens> (10.09.2023)

²⁰⁰ *Idem*

²⁰¹ *Idem*

²⁰² *Idem*

²⁰³ *Idem*

²⁰⁴ *Idem*

been stopped by the police for checks and asked to present a driver's license, a request they refused because they are "passengers" and not "drivers", which is why they do not need such documents²⁰⁵. Exemplary in this sense is the case of Dustin Bryce Rosondich and Xylie Eshleman who, at such a request from the police in the state of Tennessee - USA, stated that they are "law-lovers on a religious pilgrimage to learn more about the law and improve their abilities as lawyers"²⁰⁶. The fifth trait of sovereign citizens is that they project a society governed by uncorrupted laws as looked at in the pre-Lapsarian period. They "train themselves to become experts in law, legal discourse, and legal history by using sovereign citizen instructional manuals, often doubling as religious scriptures"²⁰⁷.

The sixth feature of sovereign citizens is the truncated interpretation of history, exemplified in this sense being the case of the same Bryce Rosondich and Xylie Eshleman who in their defense invoked the fact that they no longer hold US citizenship. They relied on the Expatriation Act of 1868 which they interpreted in the opposite sense, that is, they reasoned that they had renounced American citizenship even though that law allowed immigrants to renounce the citizenship of their home state to receive the of the USA²⁰⁸.

Although the movement is made up of people from different socio-professional categories or different social strata, they share certain ideas or beliefs²⁰⁹. Daryl Johnson²¹⁰ says that the movement's founder Gordon Kahl described herself as "a Christian Patriot"²¹¹. In a 16-page letter, which he wrote after the violent incidents in which he was involved on February 13, 1983, against the police, Kahl described his religious beliefs and refusal of state authority: "We are engaged in a struggle to the death between the people of the Kingdom of God, and the Kingdom of Satan. It started long ago and is now best described as a struggle between Jacob & Esau"²¹².

In the Old Testament, the Book of Genesis describes the struggle between two twin brothers, Esau, and Jacob for the birthright, which consisted of the blessing of their father, the Old Testament patriarch Isaac, and which he sees as a "calling and confirms it by his adhesion in-a choice"²¹³. Esau sold his birthright for a bowl of food, representing human ephemerality and weakness: "Now Jacob cooked a stew, and Esau came in from the field, and he was weary". And Esau said to Jacob, "Please feed me with that same red stew, for I am weary". Therefore, his name was called Edom. But Jacob said, "Sell me your birthright as of this day." And Esau said, "Look, I am about to die; so, what is this birthright to me?" Then Jacob said, "Swear to me as of this day. So, he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and stew of lentils; then he ate and drank, arose, and went his way. Thus, Esau despised his birthright"²¹⁴.

After mentioning the biblical episode, Gordon Kahl moves on to the atheist communist political ideology and the necessity of fighting against it as it is a satanic one: "If you've been paying tithes to the Synagogue of Satan, under the 2nd plank of the Communist Manifesto to finance your destruction, stop right now, and tell Satan's tithing collectors, as I did many years ago, 'Never again will I give aid and comfort to the enemies of Christ.' Mystery Babylon with all its greatness will be destroyed"²¹⁵.

The Sovereign Citizens Movement has racist and anti-Semitic beliefs at the core of its ideology. The seeds of such an ideology have their roots in 1971 when William Potter Gale founded the "Posse Comitatus"

²⁰⁵ *Idem*

²⁰⁶ Dew Spencer, Jamie Wright, *Op. cit.*, <https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sightings/articles/gods-law-universal-truth-according-religious-sovereign-citizens> (10.09.2023)

²⁰⁷ *Idem*

²⁰⁸ *Idem*

²⁰⁹ UNC School of Government, *A quick guide to sovereign citizens, revised November 2013*, p. 1, <https://www.sog.unc.edu/sites/www.sog.unc.edu/files/Sov%20citizens%20quick%20guide%20Nov%2013.pdf> (11.09.2023)

²¹⁰ *Consultant on domestic terrorism*, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/daryljohnson1> (20.11.2023)

²¹¹ Daryl Johnson, *The religious concepts of the Sovereign Citizens Movement*, 18 September, 2017, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/religious-concepts-sovereign-citizens-movement-daryl-johnson>, (11.09.2023)

²¹² *Idem*

²¹³ Benedict Bistrițeanul, *Patriarhul Iacov, "combatantul lui Dumnezeu"*, December, 4, 2021, <https://www.mitropolia-clujului.ro/patriarhul-iacov-combatantul-lui-dumnezeu/>, (12.09.2023)

²¹⁴ *** *Bible*, New King James Version (NKJV), *Genesis, chapter 25, verses 29 – 34*, URL: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%2025&version=NKJV>, (12.09.2023)

²¹⁵ Daryl Johnson, *The religious concepts of the Sovereign Citizens Movement*, Hate In God's Name | Southern Poverty Law Center (splcenter.org) (21.11.2023)

organization. The initial group of followers "believed that non-white people were not human and that Jews possessed a satanic plot to take over the world"²¹⁶. They considered the highest authority to be the sheriff of the county, according to the Sheriffs Act of 1887 which provided for the concept of "Posse Comitatus". "Potter's posse believed they served under common law (laws based on their interpretation of the Bible), rather than civil law (legitimate laws formed by the American legal system)"²¹⁷. D. Loren Washburn²¹⁸ believes that "it becomes almost as much a religious or philosophical stand as anything having to do with money"²¹⁹.

Sovereign citizens have a "religious sovereign worldview", amalgamating religious concepts with legal ones and giving value as universal truth to their interpretations of laws, just as they interpret biblical precepts and religious dogmas, from their perspective²²⁰. The movement of sovereign citizens does not have a leadership in the established sense, but there is "a rotating group of nationwide figures and local leaders with individualized views on sovereign citizen ideology and techniques". Among the forms of manifesting, one's beliefs are: "tax evasion, adverse possession (squatting on a property that does not belong to them) or ignoring laws regarding driver's licenses, vehicle registration or license plate possession"²²¹. "As part of their belief system, sovereigns assert they are traveling, not driving, since they are not transporting commercial goods or paying passengers", Sovereign citizens consider themselves to be people free from the constraints of such laws that provide for such documents²²². Sovereign citizens "believe all people are born free with rights - but that these natural rights are being constrained by corporations (and they see governments as artificial corporations)", in the present people being "in an oppressive contract with the government"²²³. By declaring them to be „living people” or „natural people”, „they can break this oppressive contract and avoid restrictions such as certain rates, taxes, and fines - or particular government rules on mandatory mask-wearing”²²⁴.

“A sovereign citizen might be a violent right-wing extremist, but it can also be „an anti-vaxxer and an incel” or it can be "pro-vax, pro-equality and concerned mainly with getting out of a speeding fine"²²⁵. "Sovereign citizen actions are oftentimes based on religious beliefs", says Daryl Johnson, being an amalgam of concepts taken from the Bible, Magna Carta, common law, and old constitutional laws. At the center of this system of beliefs and values is the fact that the "Supreme Being having embodied every person with certain inalienable rights as stated in the U.S. Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and the Bible"²²⁶. "Sovereign citizens and their beliefs are too diverse to describe the threat with singular certainty”, says Professor Keiran Hardy because „some individuals will pose a greater threat and require ongoing attention from ASIO²²⁷ and the police"²²⁸. The violence and attitude-fueled by the system of beliefs and values adopted by sovereign citizens make possible "a future terror attack" from them²²⁹.

²¹⁶ The Southern Poverty Law Center, *Op. cit.*, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/sovereign-citizens-movement> (05.09.2023)

²¹⁷ *Idem*

²¹⁸ Assistant United States Attorney, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/lorenwashburn>, (20.11.2023)

²¹⁹ Lorelei Laird, *Sovereign citizens' plaster courts with bogus legal filings – and some turn to violence*, "ABA Journal", May 1, 2014, https://web.archive.org/web/20141102010820/http://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/sovereign_citizens_plaster_courts_with_bogus_legal_filings/ (07.09.2023)

²²⁰ Dew Spencer, Jamie Wright, *Op. cit.*, <https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sightings/articles/gods-law-universal-truth-according-religious-sovereign-citizens> (10.09.2023)

²²¹ The Southern Poverty Law Center, *Op. cit.*, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/sovereign-citizens-movement> (05.09.2023)

²²² *Idem*

²²³ Kaz Ross, *Why do 'living people' believe they have immunity from the law?*, University of Tasmania, July 28, 2020, <https://www.utas.edu.au/about/news-and-stories/articles/2020/1038-why-do-living-people-believe-they-have-immunity-from-the-law>, (06.09.2023)

²²⁴ *Idem*

²²⁵ Keiran Hardy, *Sovereign Citizens: Eccentrics or Extremists?*, "Enlighten - Ideas for a brighter future for all", 5 April 2023, <https://enlighten.griffith.edu.au/sovereign-citizens-eccentrics-or-extremists/> (06.09.2023)

²²⁶ Daryl Johnson, *The religious concepts of the Sovereign Citizens Movement*, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/religious-concepts-sovereign-citizens-movement-daryl-johnson> (11.09.2023)

²²⁷ Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, <https://www.asio.gov.au>, (20.11.2023)

²²⁸ Keiran Hardy, *Op. cit.*, <https://enlighten.griffith.edu.au/sovereign-citizens-eccentrics-or-extremists/> (06.09.2023)

²²⁹ *Idem*

"God created man to be sovereign - "free of man-made laws and government regulation", sovereign citizens believe, according to Daryl Johnson, who still has the conviction that "their doctrine is inspired, sanctioned and sustained by God"²³⁰. This doctrine contains "universal divine truths concealed to humanity by the world's most powerful leaders and business elites"²³¹. There was a group of sovereign citizens from the state of Oregon - USA who produced license plates, driving licenses, and passports in the name of a non-existent country: "Kingdom of Heaven" and those who obtained them became "members of God's Kingdom"²³².

The creeds of sovereign citizens are best highlighted following their interaction with law enforcement or authorities. An example of this is the case of Howard Berton Adams, a sovereign citizen prosecuted for active participation in the assault on the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, being arrested because he refused to appear before the court twice, but writing to the judge a letter in which he recorded the fact that: "The Highest God created I, Howard Berton Adams, Jr., a sovereign man, living as the flesh and blood testify, I am not a dead entity, I am not a ward of the state. I am not a pauper"²³³. In the book "Pied Pipers of Babylon", "considered sovereign citizen propaganda", Verl K. Speer "summarizes his view of our society in religious terms"²³⁴. According to the solution provided to him, "It is time that we realized that we are engaged in a spiritual war against powers and principalities, contracting parties in high places who have entangled us in their web of deceit via a multitude of non-disclosed adhesion contracts"²³⁵.

The FBI considers Sovereign Citizens to be "a domestic terrorist movement" since some followers of the movement have been involved in terrorist acts, such as Terry Nichols, one of the individuals who orchestrated the Oklahoma City terrorist attack in, the US²³⁶. Also, according to the FBI, this is a domestic terrorist movement because "followers" are "anti-government extremists who believe that even though they physically reside in this country, they are separate or 'sovereign' from the United States"²³⁷. So, the ideology of the sovereign citizen movement combines religious doctrines and beliefs with conspiracy theories about the existence of a world occult that influences world governments and does not act in the interest of the people, which is why the authority of the state must be rejected.

Violence and Acts of Terrorism by Some Sovereign Citizens

Sovereign citizens believe that people have a natural and divine duty to reject some laws and state authority because the government acts contrary to God's laws. "Given the particular beliefs" of sovereign citizens, their interaction with state authorities, especially law enforcement "have the potential to escalate if not handled effectively"²³⁸. Josh Roose, Associate Professor from Deakin University, said that "there have been many cases of violence from sovereign citizens in the US including shootings of police" and "about 15 percent of domestic terrorism load, according to the FBI, in the US over the last five years was sovereign citizens"²³⁹.

²³⁰ Daryl Johnson, *The religious concepts of the Sovereign Citizens Movement*, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/religious-concepts-sovereign-citizens-movement-daryl-johnson> (11.09.2023)

²³¹ *Idem*

²³² Daryl Johnson, *The religious concepts of the Sovereign Citizens Movement*, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/religious-concepts-sovereign-citizens-movement-daryl-johnson>, (11.09.2023)

²³³ The Southern Poverty Law Center, *Op. cit.*, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/sovereign-citizens-movement> (05.09.2023)

²³⁴ Daryl Johnson, *Hate in God's name*, "Southern Poverty Law Center", September 25, 2017, <https://www.splcenter.org/20170925/hate-god%E2%80%99s-name> (12.09.2023)

²³⁵ Verl K. Speer, *Pied Pipers of Babylon*, 1985, p. 265

²³⁶ The FBI's Counterterrorism Analysis Section, *Sovereign Citizens - A Growing Domestic Threat to Law Enforcement*, September 1, 2011, <https://leb.fbi.gov/articles/featured-articles/sovereign-citizens-a-growing-domestic-threat-to-law-enforcement> (14.09.2023)

²³⁷ Max Matza, *What is the 'sovereign citizen' movement?*, 5 August 2020, "BBC News", <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-53654318> (14.09.2023)

²³⁸ Keiran Hardy, *Op. cit.*, <https://enlighten.griffith.edu.au/sovereign-citizens-eccentrics-or-extremists/> (06.09.2023)

²³⁹ Daniel Jeffrey, *What is the 'sovereign citizen' movement?*, "Nine News", Feb 16, 2023, <https://www.9news.com.au/national/what-is-a-sovereign-citizen-movement-beliefs-explainer/968ac369-a7bd-4a6d-9465-7bc2a1d13bdf>, (14.09.2023)

Some sovereign citizens committed "acts of paper terrorism and, in the most extreme cases, acts of deadly violence – usually directed against government officials"²⁴⁰. Exemplary in this sense is the case of a father-son tandem, both sovereign citizens, who in 2010 "were filmed killing two police officers with an assault rifle when they were pulled over on the interstate while traveling through West Memphis, Arkansas"²⁴¹. Brian S. Slater says that some sovereign citizens don't just stop paying taxes or registering their vehicles or getting a driver's license, but "are willing to commit acts of revenge against officials whom the Sovereign believes has infringed on their god given rights"²⁴². The attitude of sovereign citizens is prone to violence because they distort the true relationship they should have with divinity. "My God has commanded me to get out of Babylon", says Verl K. Speer who invokes in this sense a verse from the eighteenth chapter of Revelation²⁴³ entitled "The Fall of Babylon the Great": "Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues"²⁴⁴.

Sovereign citizens believe that they must obey only laws that challenge common law norms because they were handed down by divinity. Verl K. Speer says in this regard: "The Common Law originated in the Laws of God and Nature. It is rooted in antiquity, a beautiful history of men becoming free. The words were coined from observations made within the Catholic Church of Old England. These people had among them a canon notion of an unwritten law expressed as conduct. They had rules enforced by a responsibility borne by each person to know what was right or wrong and to apply that knowledge in their dealings with one another - a canon law"²⁴⁵. According to sovereign citizens, they only obey "Common Law" as it is derived from the Bible²⁴⁶.

Some sovereign citizens end up being extremely violent, says J. J. MacNab²⁴⁷ pointing to the case of the group of sovereign citizens in the state of Alaska - USA led by Schaeffer Cox who put together a plan called "241 meaning two for one - plan - saying he would kidnap or kill two government officials for every one of his associates detained or killed by the government"²⁴⁸. Cox was convicted in 2012 along with other members of the group for "conspiracy to murder federal officials, solicitation of murder and multiple weapons charges"²⁴⁹. Gordon Kahl, the initiator of the movement, was killed in a confrontation with law enforcement on June 4, 1983, in Smithville, Arkansas, USA, being "looked upon as a modern-day patriot martyr by many sovereign citizens"²⁵⁰. "Some may find videos of their arrests entertaining, but the beliefs can be far more dangerous than they might seem" because "extremists within the movement have carried out violent crimes"²⁵¹.

Daryl Johnson says that among sovereign citizens there are individuals who "particularly those who are younger, reject organized religion - its institutions, doctrine and scriptures"²⁵². Conform Global Sovereigns

²⁴⁰ The Southern Poverty Law Center, *Op. cit.*, <https://www.splcenter.org/20170925/hate-god%E2%80%99s-name> (12.09.2023)

²⁴¹ *Idem*

²⁴² Brian S. Slater, *Op. cit.*, p. 8

²⁴³ Verl K. Speer, *Op. cit.*, p. 269

²⁴⁴ *** Bible, New King James Version (NKJV), *Revelation, chapter 18, verse 4*, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation%2018&version=NKJV> (12.09.2023)

²⁴⁵ Verl K. Speer, *Op. cit.*, pp. 8-9

²⁴⁶ J.M. Berger, *Without Prejudice: What Sovereign Citizens Believe*, "The George Washington University – Program on Extremism", June 2016, p. 8, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs5746/files/downloads/JMB%20Sovereign%20Citizens.pdf> (14.09.2023)

²⁴⁷ Researcher at Center for Cyber&Homeland Security, *Program on Extremism*, George Washington University, United States of America, <https://extremism.gwu.edu/jj-macnab>, (20.11.2023)

²⁴⁸ Lorelei Laird, *Op. cit.*, https://web.archive.org/web/20141102010820/http://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/sovereign_citizens_plaster_courts_with_bogus_legal_filings/ (07.09.2023)

²⁴⁹ *Idem*

²⁵⁰ Daryl Johnson, *The religious concepts of the Sovereign Citizens Movement*, <https://www.splcenter.org/20170925/hate-god%E2%80%99s-name> (12.09.2023)

²⁵¹ Daniel Jeffrey, *Op. cit.*, <https://www.9news.com.au/national/what-is-a-sovereign-citizen-movement-beliefs-explainer/968ac369-a7bd-4a6d-9465-7bc2a1d13bdf> (14.09.2023)

²⁵² Daryl Johnson, *Hate in God's name*, "Southern Poverty Law Center", September 25, 2017, <https://www.splcenter.org/20170925/hate-god%E2%80%99s-name> (12.09.2023)

Handbook, "religion is the greatest form of mind control through manipulation of fear, guilt, and shame. Spirituality is the opposite of religion"²⁵³. Hence the firm rejection of any form of state authority because they have no standard to refer to or that could influence them. Rejecting organized religion does not mean that they are not religious, just that they reject any type of authority, whether secular or religious.

Verl K. Speer also indicates the attitude that people must adopt by defending their judgment²⁵⁴. "As a Defendant"²⁵⁵, says Verl K. Speer, people must reject authority when it does not correspond to their religious vision: "A defendant who truly believes, and lives accordingly, can offer proof that his spiritual training and belief in his Supreme Being forbid his voluntary participation in Babylon; for he is commanded by his Supreme Being to get out of Babylon and, therefore, has no choice in the matter; that his spiritual training and belief forbids his voluntary participation in Wager Policies which, by definition, are violative of God's law - being hurtful and destructive by Society in general, the defendant, and defendant's neighbors whom he is commanded to "love as thyself" with all his heart and soul"²⁵⁶. Sovereign citizens believe that today's society is the new Babylon, being ruled by Satan, "using their interpretation of the Bible, some sovereign citizens surmise that Babylonian law is controlled by merchants (i.e. corporations)"²⁵⁷. Therefore, sovereign citizens believe that they are subject to no state authority and no law given by an illegal government²⁵⁸.

Thomas Hobbes²⁵⁹ spoke about sovereignty in the work "De Cive or The Citizen", but affirming the fact that people must respect the laws and the authority of the state: "Seeing that from the virtue of the covenant whereby each subject is tied to the other to perform absolute and universal obedience (such as is defined above, chap. vi. art. 13) to the city to the sovereign power, whether that be one man or council, there is an obligation derived to observe each one of the civil laws so that that covenant contains in itself all the laws at once; it is manifest that the subject who shall renounce the general covenant of obedience, doth at once renounce all the laws"²⁶⁰.

The fact that sovereign citizens misinterpret such ideas is evidenced by the fact that Thomas Hobbes states that people who no longer submit to state authority are traitors and commit a sin, contrary to what they do: "Which trespass is so much worse than any other one sin, by how much to sin always, is worse than to sin once. This is that sin which is called treason, and it is a word or deed whereby the citizen or subject declares that he will no longer obey that man or court to whom the supreme power of the city is entrusted. And the subject declares this same will of his by deed when he either doth or endeavors to do violence to the sovereign's person, or to them who execute his commands. Of which sort are traitors, regicides, and such as take up arms against the city, or during a war fly to the enemy's side. And they show the same will in word, who flatly deny that themselves or other subjects are tied to any such kind of obedience, either in the whole, as he who should say that we must not obey him (keeping the obedience which we owe to God entire) simply, absolutely, and universally"²⁶¹.

Although it differs from other right-wing extremist groups, according to Stephen Dametto, the sovereign citizen's movement has "the potential for violence, fixation, and harassment", which is why it is under the attention of the Australian Federal Police, especially in situations "where violence is being advocated"²⁶². So, some of the sovereign citizens end up being violent, committing terrorist attacks and killing

²⁵² Verl K. Speer, *Pied Pipers of Babylon*, 1985, p. 265

²⁵³ Johnny Liberty, *The Global Sovereign's Handbook*, Institute for Communications Resources, Inc., 2004, p. 28, <https://www.calameo.com/read/000396078b61311af2d36> (14.09.2023)

²⁵⁴ Verl K. Speer, *Op. cit.*, p. 269

²⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 270

²⁵⁶ Verl K. Speer, *Op. cit.*, p. 272

²⁵⁷ Daryl Johnson, *Hate in God's name*, "Southern Poverty Law Center", September 25, 2017, <https://www.splcenter.org/20170925/hate-god%E2%80%99s-name> (12.09.2023)

²⁵⁸ Daniel Jeffrey, *Op. cit.*, <https://www.9news.com.au/national/what-is-a-sovereign-citizen-movement-beliefs-explainer/968ac369-a7bd-4a6d-9465-7bc2a1d13bdf> (14.09.2023)

²⁵⁹ Born on 15 April 1588 – dead on 14 December 1679, was a British philosopher, who wrote *Leviathan*, published in 1651, a work in which he describes the concept of the social contract, being considered one of the founders of modern political philosophy.

²⁶⁰ Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive or The Citizen*, Sterling P. Lamprecht, Appleton-Century-Crofts Incorporated, New York, 1949, p. 169

²⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 169

²⁶² Stephen Dametto, *Op. cit.*, p. 8

people, especially state representatives, in the name of strong beliefs formed by the amalgamation of conspiracy theories and political ideologies with religious beliefs and common law norms.

The Upward Trend of the Sovereign Citizen Movement Phenomenon

Although currently, the movement of sovereign citizens is heterogeneous, "is plagued with rivalries, infighting, and conspiracies that often lead to the disbanding and recreation of groups, unprecedented growth in this movement is expected to continue"²⁶³. "The pandemic has led increasing numbers of people to seek out conspiracy theories and extremist beliefs online due to "the collective trauma"²⁶⁴. If sovereign citizens believe that governments are illegitimate because they have limited people's God-given freedom, the risks posed to those who do not share their beliefs will continue to manifest. In this regard, Verl K. Speer says: "This was the grand and noble experiment, an entirely new concept in the annals of government. The National Constitution and the National government which it created, were limited in their powers over natural-born persons (individuals) to those expressly granted (i.e., beyond the extent of powers granted the natural-born inhabitant was to be governed by the Laws of God and Nature, the Law of Conscience)"²⁶⁵.

The main tool for propagating the ideology of sovereign citizens is the virtual environment as their creeds have reached all communities, and all people, regardless of social status²⁶⁶. This movement "will continue to increase without significant intervention by law enforcement, government policies that prevent sovereign activities and societal recognition of the threat from the groups and individuals involved"²⁶⁷. Sovereign Citizen "believed that 'common law' (based on interpretations of the Bible), as opposed to federal law, provided the only true legislative code for U.S. citizens"²⁶⁸. Among the elements that indicate the presence of a sovereign person are references to the Bible, The Constitution of the United States, U.S. Supreme Court decisions, or treaties with foreign governments"²⁶⁹. Of course, in the case of sovereign citizens of other countries, their constitutions and laws are invoked, not the US.

Since 2020, some practices of sovereign citizens such as "developing assemblies and common law courts"²⁷⁰. The laws of states do not apply to them, sovereign citizens believe²⁷¹. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has labeled sovereign citizens as "paper terrorists" because of their actions: "filing false liens, false tax documents or spurious lawsuits" which financially affects the victims²⁷². In any legal matter, sovereign citizens refer to "the Uniform Commercial Code, maritime law, and the Bible"²⁷³. The FBI categorized some of the sovereign citizens as "domestic terrorists" because "they occasionally get into armed confrontations with law enforcement"²⁷⁴.

²⁶³ The Southern Poverty Law Center, *Op. cit.*, <https://www.splcenter.org/20170925/hate-god%E2%80%99s-name> (12.09.2023)

²⁶⁴ Keiran Hardy, *Op. cit.*, <https://enlighten.griffith.edu.au/sovereign-citizens-eccentrics-or-extremists/> (06.09.2023)

²⁶⁵ Verl K. Speer, *Op. cit.*, p. xiii

²⁶⁶ The Southern Poverty Law Center, *Op. cit.*, <https://www.splcenter.org/20170925/hate-god%E2%80%99s-name> (12.09.2023)

²⁶⁷ *Idem*

²⁶⁸ Institute for Strategic Dialogue, *Sovereign Citizens*, <https://www.isdglobal.org/explainers/sovereign-citizens/> (14.09.2023)

²⁶⁹ The FBI's Counterterrorism Analysis Section, *Sovereign Citizens - A Growing Domestic Threat to Law Enforcement*, September 1, 2011, <https://leb.fbi.gov/articles/featured-articles/sovereign-citizens-a-growing-domestic-threat-to-law-enforcement>, (14.09.2023)

²⁷⁰ The Southern Poverty Law Center, *Op. cit.*, <https://www.splcenter.org/20170925/hate-god%E2%80%99s-name> (12.09.2023)

²⁷¹ Daniel Jeffrey, *Op. cit.*, <https://www.9news.com.au/national/what-is-a-sovereign-citizen-movement-beliefs-explainer/968ac369-a7bd-4a6d-9465-7bc2a1d13bdf> (14.09.2023)

²⁷² Lorelei Laird, *Op. cit.*,

https://web.archive.org/web/20141102010820/http://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/sovereign_citizens_plaster_courts_with_bogus_legal_filings/ (07.09.2023)

²⁷³ *Idem*

²⁷⁴ *Idem*

Among the traits of the movement's followers is "recruiting & evangelizing", according to Stephen Dametto²⁷⁵, which is why the movement has grown in recent years. The sovereign citizen movement is not organized and does not have "a leader or a unified ideology" according to Mark Potok, researcher of extremist organizations for the Southern Poverty Law Center. In 2011 there were approximately 300,000 sovereign citizens in the US alone, of which "about a third, or 100,000, were hard-core believers", in the opinion of Mark Potok, who believes that in three years, from 2011 to 2014 when he conducted the study, "the percentage of hard-core believers has since increased"²⁷⁶.

Mark Potok based his conclusion on the fact that "a fair amount of anecdotal evidence suggests it is spreading" because "it is the single most widespread idea from the radical right"²⁷⁷. Due to the restrictions imposed by all states in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, including vaccination, the number of followers of this ideology has increased "significantly"²⁷⁸. Sovereign citizens believe that "they are subject only to God's law or common law" and thus have the right to form their nation and their government as the current US government is illegitimate²⁷⁹. They "believe their legal system is the only legitimate one - and because they frequently resent authorities, they feel are not legitimate - they have trouble cooperating with even the most basic of requirements" and these beliefs go to the extreme, seeing themselves as martyrs rather than submit to government authority²⁸⁰.

Sovereign citizens believe that "they are morally and legally correct" according to Stephen Dametto²⁸¹. "In the 21st century, adherents are diverse and not necessarily racist"²⁸², but ASIO (Australian Security Intelligence Organisation) director Mike Burgess says their beliefs are dangerous²⁸³. The violence of sovereign citizens will intensify in the future, says J. J. MacNab, as they realize that they will achieve their goals. "Most of the retaliation is in the form of lines - sometimes in the form of threats, and very rare cases they act on the threats", MacNab says "I think they're moving in that direction, unfortunately. And if enough people threaten, some people will start acting on it", according to the same MacNab²⁸⁴. So, the trend of developing the Sovereign Citizens Movement by attracting members can offer people alternatives to the current social order with which such adherents do not agree.

Conclusions

The Sovereign Citizen Movement is a movement formed by followers of an ideology formed from subjective concepts and whose meaning is intentionally distorted, these being taken from common law, the Bible, English, or American history, but which compete to support their point of view according to which he must not submit to the authority of the state.

Sovereign citizens, by their creeds, refuse to obey laws, rejecting the legal provisions relating in particular to the payment of fees and taxes owed to the state, to obtaining and holding identity documents with personal numerical codes or with the first and last name written in capital letters, registering vehicles with the legal authorities or obtaining a driver's license from the legally authorized institutions citing the fact that they are traveling, are not drivers and do not need such a document. Sovereign citizens are not followers of a

²⁷⁵ Stephen Dametto, *Op. cit.*, p. 3

²⁷⁶ Lorelei Laird, *Op. cit.*, p. 67

²⁷⁷ *Idem*

²⁷⁸ Daniel Jeffrey, *Op. cit.*, <https://www.9news.com.au/national/what-is-a-sovereign-citizen-movement-beliefs-explainer/968ac369-a7bd-4a6d-9465-7bc2a1d13bdf> (14.09.2023)

²⁷⁹ Lorelei Laird, *Op. cit.*, https://web.archive.org/web/20141102010820/http://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/sovereign_citizens_plaster_courts_with_bogus_legal_filings/ (07.09.2023)

²⁸⁰ *Idem*

²⁸¹ Stephen Dametto, *Op. cit.*, p. 4

²⁸² Lorelei Laird, *Op. cit.*, p. 68, https://web.archive.org/web/20141102010820/http://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/sovereign_citizens_plaster_courts_with_bogus_legal_filings/ (07.09.2023)

²⁸³ Daniel Jeffrey, *Op. cit.*, <https://www.9news.com.au/national/what-is-a-sovereign-citizen-movement-beliefs-explainer/968ac369-a7bd-4a6d-9465-7bc2a1d13bdf> (14.09.2023)

²⁸⁴ Lorelei Laird, *Op. cit.*, https://web.archive.org/web/20141102010820/http://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/sovereign_citizens_plaster_courts_with_bogus_legal_filings/ (07.09.2023)

religious denomination but are syncretizes, amalgamating several religious doctrines that support them in their visions of life and the functioning of society.

They generally retain the religion and religious beliefs they had before becoming sovereign citizens but distort their established meaning to support their claims and goals. According to them, society is run by a world occult organization and the governments of countries are illegitimate because they are influenced by this occult because it has turned countries into organizations that function like giant corporations. Sovereign citizens accuse authorities, especially governments, of no longer respecting people's right to be free. Thus, governments violate people's natural, God-given right to be free. By abrogating this divine right, governments are influenced by Satan, and sovereign citizens are obligated to refuse the Devil's authority.

Some sovereign citizens generate risks for society because they refuse any type of authority, secular or clerical, considering that they have a natural right to be part of another society that is guided by other norms as they interpret them. For sovereign citizens, today's society and governments are corrupt because they have imposed laws that no longer stem from natural and common law, and laws issued by states can only be used to fight the authorities' measures in the courts.

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