



FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

Domestic Terrorism Reference Guide - September 2023

Sovereign Citizen Violent Extremism

(U) THREAT OVERVIEW

(U//FOUO) Sovereign citizens are US citizens who claim to have special knowledge or heritage that renders them immune from government authority and laws. Although the ideology itself is not illegal, sovereign citizen violent extremists express their anti-government or anti-authority violent extremist beliefs through the use or threat of force or violence, while sovereign citizen criminals use these beliefs to justify non-violent activities, such as fraud and theft. Sovereign citizen violent extremists or sovereign citizen criminals may attempt to frame legal encounters with government officials as negotiable commercial transactions, or claim legal immunity based on “common law rights of man.”



(U) INDICATORS

(U//FOUO) Indicators of sovereign citizen violent extremist ideology can include constitutionally protected conduct, and no single indicator should be used as the sole basis for a determination of sovereign citizen violent extremism or criminal activity. The following indicators of sovereign citizen violent extremist ideology might constitute a basis for reporting or law enforcement action when observed in combination with suspicious criminal or potentially violent activity:

- ◆ (U) Using fraudulent license plates, credentials, driver’s licenses, identification cards, or badges from fictitious republics or indigenous groups
- ◆ (U) Making claims of sovereignty, often incorporating terms like “freeman,” “traveler,” “natural person,” “flesh and blood,” “artificial person,” “strawman,” or “right to road travel”
- ◆ (U) Using signatures that are distinguished by odd colons, dashes, brackets, or the copyright symbol ©, or are followed by “under duress,” “without prejudice,” “without recourse,” “Threat, Duress, or Coercion” (TDC), “All Rights Reserved” (ARR), or a red thumb print
- ◆ (U) Threatening to “arrest” officials or use “common law courts”; making demands for oath of office or “bond”; and making claims of “kidnapping” by officials
- ◆ (U) Filing fraudulent liens or illegal lawsuits, frequently involving the fraudulent use of government seals or forms, sometimes accompanied by a notary signature

(U) NOTABLE ATTACKS or CRIMINAL ACTS

(U//FOUO) In April 2023, a sovereign citizen violent extremist was convicted on state charges for extortion. The sovereign citizen violent extremist had threatened to place a lien on the residence of a local police officer if his previously impounded vehicle was not returned to him, and he separately made online statements expressing willingness to file liens on individuals if they attempted to foreclose on his home.

(U) For additional information, please contact the Counterterrorism Analysis Section of the FBI Counterterrorism Division via email at FBI_CTD_CTAS@fbi.gov.

(U) Disclaimer: Domestic Violent Extremists (DVEs) employ several indicators, some of which may be criminal and others which may constitute the exercise of rights guaranteed by the US Constitution. Under FBI policy and federal law, no investigative activity may be based solely on First Amendment activity. The FBI does not investigate, collect, or maintain information on US persons solely for the purpose of monitoring activities protected by the First Amendment. All personnel should exercise sound judgment and discretion in evaluating the totality of circumstances surrounding any of these indicators in order to determine whether a law enforcement or intelligence response or activity is warranted.

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(U) NOTABLE ATTACKS or CRIMINAL ACTS continued

(U) In March 2023, a sovereign citizen violent extremist pleaded guilty to five counts of transmitting threats to kidnap government officials and law enforcement. The sovereign citizen violent extremist posted purported "Writs of Execution," providing instruction on and advocating service of Writs, arrest of public officials, and the need to abolish the government. In August 2023, he was sentenced to 120 months in prison and a 3-year supervised release.

(U//FOUO) In February 2018, a sovereign citizen violent extremist in Locust Grove, Georgia, shot three law enforcement officers while they were attempting to serve an arrest warrant at the extremist's residence for failure to appear. After killing one police officer and wounding two sheriff's deputies, the extremist was shot and killed by law enforcement.

(U) KEY TERMS

Term	Description
Accepted for Value (A4V)	Some sovereign citizens annotate bills, traffic tickets, or other official documents with the phrase "Accepted for Value" or "A4V," meaning the recipient interprets the document as an offer to engage in commerce with a free person who retains his or her rights.
Adhesion Contracts	Official identifications, licenses, or certificates believed to bind individuals unwittingly to the government, in a state of virtual slavery. Individuals might refuse to carry official identity documents and, when asked to present identification, might claim to have none or present documents of their own design, such as badges, credentials, passports, or right-to-travel cards.
Affidavit of Truth	Popular example of a fraudulent sovereign citizen document used for purposes of intimidation or assertions of sovereign citizen beliefs.
Apostille	Legitimate certificate that authenticates documents for use in foreign countries. Sovereign citizen criminals might use apostilles to certify document content fraudulently.
Common Law	Sovereign citizens interpret common law as an alternative legal remedy that can bypass legitimate legal processes, convening false common law "grand juries" or "courts" that can issue fraudulent indictments, arrest warrants, threatening letters or efforts to compel officials to act on their behalf or fulfill oaths of office. All these actions lack legal standing or force of law.
Flesh-and-Blood	Term used to describe free identities whom sovereign citizen adherents believe exist beyond the jurisdiction of the US authority.
14th Amendment	Many sovereign citizens believe passage of the 14th amendment, which granted rights to former slaves following the civil war, resulted in a fictional category of servitude for US citizens, and that the government became a corporation that no longer followed the constitution.
Sheriff's Posse Comitatus	A militant anti-government, anti-tax movement active in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, from which many of today's sovereign citizen beliefs and assertions are derived.
Redemption Theory	Underlies a sovereign citizen criminal fraud scheme to access supposed secret US Treasury accounts worth millions of dollars, which adherents believe the US Government opens for every US citizen upon receipt of a birth certificate. Adherents file fraudulent paperwork with the goal of gaining control of their supposed funds to discharge debts including mortgages, loans, etc.
Sovereign Citizen	The term "sovereign citizen" is used mainly by law enforcement; adherents tend to self-identify as sovereign, freemen, flesh-and-blood persons, living beings, etc. It is not illegal to advocate sovereign citizen beliefs, absent extremist or criminal threats or activities.
Strawman	According to sovereign citizen ideology, the US Government creates a fictitious identity—a "strawman"—in the name of all born or naturalized US citizens. Adherents refer to their supposed secret US Treasury account as a "strawman account."
Traveling	During traffic stops, sovereign citizen criminals might claim to be "traveling"—versus "driving"—fraudulently claiming to engage in a private, non-commercial activity outside of the authority of officers.
Uniform Commercial Code (UCC)	A legitimate legal code governing commercial transactions. Sovereign citizen criminals use UCC fraudulently as a bridge or remedy for interacting with government agencies and officials, using legitimate UCC forms during illicit financial schemes and fraudulent filings, as part of what they perceive to be transactions with illegitimate government entities.