



LOWY
INSTITUTE

The global sovereign citizen movement

POLICY BRIEF

LYDIA KHALIL
KEIRAN HARDY

February 2026

LOWY INSTITUTE



The Lowy Institute is an independent, nonpartisan international policy think tank. The Institute provides high-quality research and distinctive perspectives on the issues and trends shaping Australia's role in the world.

Cover image: A protester from the "Freedom Convoy" in Ottawa (Steve Russell/Toronto Star via Getty Images)

Lowy Institute Policy Briefs are designed to address a particular, current policy issue and to suggest solutions. They are deliberately prescriptive, specifically addressing two questions: What is the problem? What should be done?

Responsibility for the views, information, or advice expressed in this report is that of the authors. The contents of this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Lowy Institute or the Australian government.

Published 9 February 2026

31 Bligh Street
Sydney NSW 2000

lowyinstitute.org
+61 2 8238 9000

Version 2026-02-08.5E17B0B

Contents

Key findings	4
What is the problem?	5
What should be done?	6
The landscape	7
The sovereign citizen movement goes global	7
Understanding the national security risks and harms	10
Radicalisation to violence	10
Terrorism, civil unrest, and plotting	12
Delegitimation of the state	13
Policy recommendations	15
Multilateral law enforcement and intelligence coordination	15
Online interventions	15
Globally informed threat assessment and training	16
Acknowledgements	18
Notes	18

Key findings

- The sovereign citizen movement has spread from the United States to more than 26 countries globally. Covid restrictions and digital networks accelerated its growth and created dangerous intersections with other conspiracy movements.
- The sovereign citizen movement has grown beyond a nuisance, escalating into a national security challenge for many countries around the world.
- The transnational threat of the movement requires multilateral intelligence coordination, online interventions to counter influencers, narratives, and networks, and globally informed threat assessment.

What is the problem?

Sovereign citizens are often dismissed as a collection of conspiratorial eccentrics operating on the fringes of society. However, at the core of the movement — which does not exist as a single, unified entity but rather a loose alignment of groups and individuals — is a collective rejection of the legitimacy of government authority and the democratic rule of law. Sovereign citizens do not believe they are subject to the same laws as everyone else and have formulated a fantastical conspiracy and pseudo-legal framework to justify this belief.

The sovereign citizen movement has grown beyond a nuisance and into an escalating national security challenge for many countries around the world. Sovereign citizens have promoted delegitimising narratives against democracies, created alternative structures of authority, committed acts of political violence, fomented civil unrest, engaged in violent confrontations with law enforcement, and threatened elected officials and high office holders.

Digital communications and the internet have facilitated the spread of sovereign citizen ideas and expanded the global reach of sovereign citizen influencers. The Covid pandemic triggered a surge in sovereign citizen beliefs as citizens chafing at government restrictions and emergency measures found relief in a movement that rejects government authority. The current expansion of the sovereign citizen movement, as in other phases of the movement's growth history, is occurring during a period of growing inequality and global democratic decline.

What should be done?

Authorities have tended to address sovereign citizens as a strictly domestic problem, with the transnational nature of the movement often underappreciated. Yet its origins, manifestations, reach, and networks are global. To comprehensively address this challenge, we need to understand the transnational element of its networks, influencers, and tactics.

This Policy Brief outlines three recommendations to address the transnational dimensions of the problem:

- Multilateral law enforcement and intelligence coordination on the sovereign citizen movement.
- Online interventions to counter sovereign citizen influencers, narratives, and networks.
- Globally informed threat assessments.

The landscape

The sovereign citizen movement goes global

The origins of the sovereign citizen movement can be traced back to the United States and the emergence of the *Posse Comitatus* (Power of the Country) movement in the late 1960s. This movement rejected government authority and intersected with antisemitic, White supremacist, and extreme Christian nationalism. The *Posse Comitatus* movement eventually fizzled out, but its remnants merged with other anti-government extremist and US militia movements to develop into the sovereign citizen movement.¹

The sovereign citizen belief system is underpinned by the conviction that the US government is illegitimate and, therefore, has no authority or jurisdiction. This belief is based on a conspiracy theory that the original, legitimate US government was replaced with an illegitimate version via the 14th constitutional amendment ratified in 1868 (which grants citizenship to all US-born individuals) and a series of fraudulent contracts that caused US citizens to unknowingly surrender their rights. Many sovereign citizens also believe that the government is a corporation that controls its citizens through birth certificates and other identity documents. Those documents create a bogus legal persona known as your “strawman”, which does not represent your true identify as a “flesh and blood” or “living being”. Individuals, therefore, have the right to oppose the state, any of its laws, regulations, and courts, and can take steps to “divorce” themselves from the state’s authority and jurisdiction by declaring themselves as “sovereign”.

For many years, these beliefs were confined to the United States. They then gradually began to spread to other English-speaking common law countries; first Canada, then the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Australia.² It was not until the late 2000s, coinciding with the global financial crisis, that sovereign citizen ideas spread and evolved significantly in other countries. Estimates show that the sovereign citizen movement now has a presence in more than 26 countries, including in Europe, Russia, South Africa, and the Caribbean.³

While the broader movement is called the sovereign citizen movement, and many within it use the label to describe themselves, not all “sovereigns” do. Some reject the term “sovereign citizen” as an oxymoron, claiming that they sit outside a country’s laws and its requirements of citizenship; one cannot be both “sovereign” and a “citizen”.

Others use different terms depending on their beliefs and geographical location.⁴ For the purpose of this Policy Brief, we use the term “sovereign citizen movement” to encompass other related sovereigntist anti-government movements such as the Canadian-originated “freeman on the land” movement, convergent nationally specific movements like the *Reichsbürger* (Citizens of the Reich) movement, and various self-proclaimed micronations. We justify their inclusion under the broader sovereign citizen umbrella as they are all anti-government movements based on conspiracy beliefs about the nature of state authority and legitimacy. As recent studies confirm, “The core principles of sovereign citizen pseudo-law remain largely similar across these jurisdictions.”⁵

In some contexts outside the United States, sovereigns repeat American sovereign citizen tropes and even cite American legal frameworks.⁶ But others have come up with their own local anti-government movements and conspiracies. Some, such as the *Reichsbürger* movement in Germany — a distinct but related movement established in the 1980s — have reached similar ideological beliefs. The *Reichsbürger* and *Selbstverwalter* (self-administrator) movements not only reject the legitimacy of the German state, but its very existence. *Reichsbürgers* believe that because no formal peace treaty was ever signed after the Second World War, the current German state remains an administrative entity of the Allied Forces and is therefore an occupied zone or a “corporation”.⁷

In Australia, New Zealand, and Canada — some of the first countries where the movement spread outside the United States — sovereign citizens have further developed the movement’s existing pseudo-legal arguments and even co-opted the language of Indigenous sovereignty movements. In some cases, they have sought credibility by association with Indigenous sovereignty claims.⁸

In Italy, adherents have combined sovereign citizen legalese with new age spirituality and apocalyptic messaging, resulting in groups such as the Sovereign Citizens of Gaia and the One People I Am movements that claim they have no obligation to obey laws or pay taxes.⁹

While the US movement’s origins intersected with White supremacy, the wider movement has since attracted followers from many different ethnic and racial backgrounds. Uniquely Black manifestations began to emerge in the early 1990s. In the United States, the Moorish sovereign citizen movement believes that Black Americans are an elite class; they self-identify as “Moors” and claim that a 1787 treaty between the United States and Morocco grants them immunity from US law.¹⁰ Sovereign citizen groups and narratives have also spread to Jamaica,¹¹ Trinidad and Tobago, and other Caribbean nations.

The Covid pandemic triggered a sharp uptick in sovereign citizen beliefs. For the first time in their lives, many people were subject to orders that affected their daily choices and movements. Public health restrictions, combined with social isolation and increased time online, created the ideal conditions for

disinformation and conspiracy theories about government control to thrive. During that time, the sovereign citizen movement also overlapped and cross-pollinated with anti-vaxxers, MAGA nationalists, and far-right conspiracy movements such as QAnon who aligned in their common rejection of collective public health measures and government control, and advocacy of individual freedom. These overlaps during the pandemic contributed to the exponential exposure to and adoption of sovereign citizen ideas globally and the international coordination of protests that led to civil unrest.

A clear illustration of the influence of sovereign citizen ideology and its intersection with other anti-government movements was the Freedom Convoy in Ottawa, Canada, in which truck drivers blocked a border crossing in protest over Canada's pandemic restrictions. The Freedom Convoy was one of the largest anti-authority protests in Canadian history. Many of the arguments against Canada's pandemic public health mandates were taken from sovereign citizen rationales,¹² and a cluster of the Freedom Convoy even deputised themselves as alternative law enforcement agents and claimed they had powers to arrest and detain. One of the founders of the Canadian sovereign citizen movement held these "swearing-in" ceremonies during the convoy protests.¹³

The cross-pollination of pandemic protest, conspiracy theories, and sovereign citizen ideology was of course not confined to Canada. The Canadian Freedom Convoy inspired similar anti-lockdown protests around the world, including in Australia, France, Sweden, and New Zealand.¹⁴ These so-called "freedom protests" mimicked the Canadian actions, but elements were also coordinated and astroturfed — a tactic where a group creates the illusion of widespread public support or "fake grassroots". The German-based *Freie Bürger Kassel* (Free Citizens of Kassel) organised a wave of 129 simultaneous events and protests around the world on 20 March 2021, united under the banner of "World Wide Rally for Freedom".¹⁵

The public health restrictions have long since abated, but the resentment they generated remains. The sovereign citizen movement is one among many grievance-based, anti-government ideologies that is gaining traction post-pandemic and in an era of democratic decline.

The movement has grown through online networks and influencers that facilitate the spread of sovereign citizen pseudo-legal arguments and conspiracies. Online networks have allowed sovereign citizens to broadcast their activities, share information and tactics, and offer mutual support, providing a broader global platform for so-called sovereign citizen "gurus" or leaders.

It has also grown by intersecting with QAnon and other online conspiracy movements.¹⁶ The dynamic is embodied in the case of Romana Didulo, the self-styled "Queen of Canada" — a QAnon believer and anti-vaxxer who embraced sovereign citizen ideas and tactics. Didulo has set up her own "sovereign"

village in Saskatchewan and amassed a large global online following. She has threatened politicians and issued orders to her followers to attack or kill anyone administering Covid vaccines. Her followers have attempted to arrest police for genocide and treason.¹⁷

Understanding the national security risks and harms

Sovereign citizens are often dismissed as eccentrics, perhaps agitators, and except in rare circumstances, not fundamentally dangerous. The sovereign citizen movement is not a proscribed movement in most countries, although the German Ministry of the Interior has banned two associations related to the *Reichsbürger* movement.¹⁸ It is not considered illegal to identify as a sovereign citizen or believe in the movement's ideology and conspiracies. However, many sovereign citizens have been arrested and convicted of a variety of increasingly serious and violent offences.

Yet most individuals who claim to be sovereign citizens are not violent and join the movement to avoid paying taxes, or otherwise escape legal obligations. Most of the movement's influencers are scammers who seek to exploit vulnerable people by conducting fee-paying seminars on how to evade debts and taxes. These influencers often sell fictitious financial instruments such as fake certificates of deposit, counterfeit Treasury cheques and money orders, and fraudulent diplomatic identification cards they claim can be used to pay off mortgages and other debts or exempt them from paying taxes.¹⁹

However, the view that sovereign citizens are mostly a nuisance is becoming increasingly outdated. Some of the movement's scams have resulted in significant financial criminal activity.²⁰ Particularly in the United States, the movement has also been associated with violence, presenting a serious threat to law enforcement. That violence is now spreading to other countries and jurisdictions, creating national security risks.

The sovereign citizen movement presents three broad and escalating national security threats: radicalisation to violence; terrorism, civil unrest, and plotting to overthrow government; and delegitimation of the state.

Radicalisation to violence

The core claims made by sovereign citizens — that they are immune from law and that governments are not legitimate sources of authority — can and have motivated serious acts of violence. A recent survey of Australians found that people who espouse anti-government conspiratorial beliefs, such as sovereign citizen beliefs, were more likely to support violence and have engaged in violence in the past.²¹

Most acts of violence perpetrated by sovereign citizens have been spontaneous or reactive. These acts have tended to occur during encounters with police or other public-facing government employees, particularly in relation to traffic stops, welfare checks, or the enforcement of ordinances or collection of fines.²² Sovereign citizens view police as agents of illegitimate governments. When they defy police orders, sovereign citizens believe “they are legitimately resisting the tyranny of state control, and defending their inherent rights and freedoms”.²³

The shooting of two Australian police officers in regional Victoria in August 2025 and many more attacks against police in the United States illustrate how encounters between sovereign citizens and law enforcement can turn deadly. Dutch sovereign citizens belonging to the Common Law Netherlands Earth group, who advocate “fighting back” against the government and law enforcement, have been convicted of threatening police and tried for illegal weapons possession.²⁴ In Germany in 2016, members of the *Reichsbürger* movement launched attacks from their own property in two separate incidents, killing law enforcement officials. In 2022, there were other *Reichsbürger* attacks on police, one during an attempted weapons seizure and another at a police checkpoint.²⁵

The judiciary is another frequent target of sovereign citizens. In addition to tying up significant court resources, judges and court officers are often the target of intimidation and threats of violence. In Victoria, threats against the judiciary nearly quadrupled between 2023 and 2025, and almost a quarter of judges in New South Wales have received death threats, many from sovereign citizens.²⁶ Desmond Filby, also known as Dezi Freeman, the Australian sovereign citizen responsible for the recent fatal shootings of two police officers in Victoria, previously tried to arrest a magistrate during a court hearing.²⁷

Sovereign citizens also present a threat to local councils and councillors. Local councils are the most accessible form of government, one with which citizens have the most interaction, yet these institutions do not receive the same level of resourcing or protection as state or national agencies and officials. In Australia and the United States, local councils have had to call police or deploy security for meetings, with councillors reporting feeling increasingly threatened.²⁸ In a New Zealand incident in 2022, a sovereign citizen “sheriff” entered a local council building and assaulted a staff member after having previously threatened others.²⁹

Terrorism, civil unrest, and plotting

While sovereign citizens have generally not engaged in premeditated mass casualty attacks in furtherance of their ideology, there have been incidents of sovereign citizens instigating civil unrest and engaging in terrorist attacks, plots, and acts of violence directed towards government officials. The majority of sovereign citizen violence has been perpetrated in the United States, with the deadliest homegrown terrorist attack ever committed in America being the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing by Timothy McVeigh, an anti-government extremist whose co-conspirator Terry Nichols identified with sovereign citizen ideology.³⁰ Joseph Stack, who flew his plane into an Internal Revenue Service (IRS) building in Texas in a 2010 suicide attack, was an anti-tax protester and is also considered to be associated with the sovereign citizen movement.³¹ Based on these previous acts of violence, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has deemed sovereign citizen extremists as domestic terrorists (though at the time, Stack's attack was controversially not labelled as a terrorist incident by the government.)

A more recent example of the threat to national security posed by sovereign citizen and convergent movements sits outside the United States. The largest counter-terrorism operation in German history took place in 2022, targeting adherents of the *Reichsbürger* movement for an alleged plot to overthrow the German government by raiding the Bundestag and taking elected officials hostage. The raid spanned numerous properties across Germany and Austria; 25 people were arrested including a former member of the Bundestag, a judge, former members of the armed forces, and a police inspector. Since then, there have been other arrests of German sovereign citizens for attempting to create a terrorist organisation, plotting and committing further attacks, and the killing of a police officer by a suspected sovereign citizen.³² In 2024, sovereign citizens in the Netherlands were accused of plotting a terrorist attack on the mayor of Deventer and had already purchased firearms to support their citizen arrests and tribunals.

Globally, sovereign citizens were also active in many instances of civil unrest in response to pandemic restrictions and public health measures, including the attack on the US Capitol on 6 January 2021 after the US elections.³³ Sovereign citizens participated in violent protests and storming of legislatures around the world, including in Germany, New Zealand, and Australia. In the United Kingdom, sovereign citizens used pseudo-legal arguments to challenge vaccine mandates, accusing the government of “vaccine genocide”. They attempted to arrest public health officials as “common law constables” and mobilised supporters by offering training for direct action.³⁴

Sovereign citizen ideology promotes a radical reframing of the relationship between citizen and state, portraying the citizen as enslaved to the state, and the state as tyrannical and illegitimate.³⁵ These ideas are based on pseudo-legal and pseudo-historical beliefs that not only fundamentally reject government authority but claim it is a threat. When authority is framed in such terms, justifying violence against it or plotting to overthrow it is not an illogical next step.

Delegitimation of the state

Sovereign citizens not only reject government authority and legitimacy; they create alternative systems and fictitious entities of authority. The creation of “micronations”, where citizens claim swaths of land and property as “sovereign”, is one such example. Here, they form communes, forge their own identity documents and sometimes currency, set regulations, and charge fees to those living there. Their leaders often fashion themselves as royalty. German sovereign citizen Peter Fitzek, like Romana Didulo in Canada, has crowned himself king of Germany, his realm a cluster of properties in Wittenburg. Here, he has held his own coronation, prints his own passports, and mints his own coins. Hundreds of people have paid to live and work there, learning how to separate themselves from the state.³⁶ Sovereign citizens have also set up similar enclaves in other countries. For example, Germans associated with the *Reichsbürger* movement have bought land in Paraguay to establish settlements.³⁷

Micronations have cropped up around the world, but nowhere more so than Australia. Authorities have tended to tolerate the Australian variants as odd expressions of Australian larrikinism or as creative attempts at protest or to resist bureaucracy.³⁸ Well known examples include the Principality of Hutt River, which was born out of a dispute between its creator and the Western Australian government over wheat production quotas.³⁹ These Australian micronations have not generally presented a national security threat, but they do represent the delegitimation of government authority.

The national security threat escalates, however, when sovereign citizens create so-called “fictitious entities” to support these micronations or attempt to use claims of sovereignty to plot against the government, as the *Reichsbürger* movement has done in Germany. Fictitious entities are bogus government agencies, law enforcement, consulates, and courts created by sovereign citizens.⁴⁰ Representatives from these entities often attempt to arrest and try in court legitimate government officials and police. For example, in Ontario, Canada, sovereign citizen “sheriffs” associated with Didulo attempted to arrest police officers and try them for “crimes against humanity”.⁴¹

There have been a number of similar incidents in Australia and Europe. In 2021, a disparate group of Australians with sovereign citizen links was arrested after

they gathered online, claiming to be commissioners of a new Australian federal police force and promising to carry out arrest warrants against government officials.⁴² Earlier that year, members of a Western Australian sovereign group broke into and took residence in a courthouse, attempting to establish themselves as the “proper governing body of law”.⁴³ Another sovereign citizen group in Western Australia has sworn themselves in as sheriffs and established courts. In 2022, they conducted their own jury trial and “convicted” former prime minister Scott Morrison and every state premier for their involvement in the Covid response, sentencing them to 30 years’ imprisonment.⁴⁴ Throughout the pandemic, and after, there were scores of people, motivated by sovereign citizen beliefs and other conspiracies, arrested for attempting to kidnap or kill elected officials and high office holders around the world.⁴⁵

Policy recommendations

Multilateral law enforcement and intelligence coordination

It is time for more structured multilateral law enforcement and intelligence coordination on the sovereign citizen movement. Intelligence sharing among Five Eyes nations is already robust, but greater coordination with European partners that sit outside the Five Eyes, particularly Germany, is needed. We recommend establishing a dedicated taskforce or the development of a dedicated intelligence sharing stream specifically on sovereign citizens that also includes partner countries with a significant sovereign citizen presence. This coordinated international intelligence stream could create a central global database, accessible to partner countries' law enforcement agencies, that is updated regularly on sovereign citizen incidents to help inform procedures and policies. Many sovereign citizen interactions occur at the local council level, therefore coordination across national agencies and jurisdictions will be needed to inform the global database and general intelligence gathering. The database could also be used to track publicly available information on global sovereign citizen influencers or gurus, many of whom are online and have significant numbers of followers and influence outside their immediate locations. Many of the mechanisms and forums used by partner governments to address other global extremist movements can be used to exchange information, intelligence, and lessons learned about sovereign citizens.

Online interventions

Most sovereign citizens first become exposed to sovereign citizen ideology via the internet. Sovereign citizen ideas, arguments, narratives, and tactics spread globally on social media platforms, websites, online forums, and encrypted messaging channels. Digital platforms have become central to fostering sovereign citizen connections, disposing of the need for traditional groups or leadership structures.⁴⁶ Meaningful action is needed to reduce this global spread of harmful online content.

Countering online extremism often involves content moderation and enforcement of terms of service of mainstream platforms. These efforts have been most effective against proscribed terrorist and criminal organisations. Because the sovereign citizen movement is not a designated terrorist entity, its influencers, narratives, and communities often evade the moderation efforts of the online platforms that facilitate their growth, with content falling into a 'borderline' category. It can also be difficult for content moderators to identify

certain sovereign citizen individuals and communities online. This has been exacerbated by social media companies scaling back safety and content moderation efforts in recent years.⁴⁷ While sovereign citizens still operate on mainstream platforms, increasingly they are using alternative platforms with lax or non-existent moderation policies to organise and spread.⁴⁸

We recommend that governments concerned about escalating sovereign citizen threats in their jurisdictions coordinate their approaches to digital platforms, including by working closely with global coordination bodies — such as the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) — to have member tech platforms list sovereigntist groups as designated entities. This would better enable digital platforms to then include sovereign citizen content in their hash-sharing database (which identifies known illegal content), deplatform accounts, and identify and report trends regarding sovereign citizen online content on their platforms. Governments should coordinate their efforts to compel platforms to more robustly enforce their existing community guidelines and terms of service regarding violations such as online harassment, threats of violence, harmful and deceptive content, and illegal activities. Doing so would help track broad trends and assist in establishing online interventions such as inoculation techniques against disinformation and extremist narratives or directing those engaging with sovereign citizen content online towards social support services. While sovereign citizens are increasingly using alternative online platforms with little to no content moderation, this would reduce their presence and influence on mainstream platforms.

Globally informed threat assessment and training

Law enforcement and frontline workers encountering sovereign citizens face uncertain and possibly volatile situations. To reduce these risks, globally informed training resources and materials should be developed for law enforcement, frontline agencies, electoral offices, and the courts, that outline sovereign citizen vocabulary, behaviours, and the visible signs and symbols of their beliefs. Because sovereign citizens often operate similarly across country contexts,⁴⁹ multilateral coordination and intelligence can also assist in developing resource material and security protocols. These protocols could be used for engaging with or arresting sovereign citizens when necessary, identifying and addressing transnational influencers, and better understanding the intersection of sovereign citizens with other violent extremist movements and dynamics. For example, the danger to law enforcement from sovereign citizens was long present in the United States before it manifested in Australia.⁵⁰ A global picture would allow countries to anticipate threats and developments that might emerge in their own countries.

There are few empirically based research studies into sovereign citizens and radicalisation,⁵¹ and there is not enough known about why some sovereign

citizens radicalise to violence while others do not. However, the current evidence highlights that, contrary to other motivating ideologies and extremist movements, sovereign citizens have a higher average age, mostly in the second half of life, than others who are radicalised to extremism.⁵² Sovereign citizens are also likely to share other key characteristics, including a conspiratorial mindset, a history of negative interactions with government institutions, and for some, financial hardship.⁵³

One study showed that two different threat assessment tools can be used to distinguish violent sovereign citizens from other extremists, suggesting there are some identifiable patterns.⁵⁴ However, much more research is needed to understand if threat assessment tools developed for other types of violent extremist offenders can also successfully assess sovereign citizens, or if developing alternative threat assessment tools is necessary. Incorporating case studies from various countries can inform the development of these threat assessment tools and our broader understanding of sovereign citizen radicalisation trajectories.

Acknowledgements

This report is part of the Lowy Institute’s Changing Violent Extremism Threat Landscape Project, funded by the Australian Federal Police (AFP). The authors wish to acknowledge James Paterson for his research assistance, Clare Caldwell, Sam Roggeveen, and Mihai Sora for their editorial support, and the anonymous reviewers for their constructive peer review.

Notes

- 1 Anti-Defamation League, “The Sovereign Citizen Movement in the United States”, 21 December 2023, <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/sovereign-citizen-movement-united-states>.
- 2 Donald Netolitzky, “A Pathogen Astride the Minds of Men: The Epidemiological History of Pseudolaw”, Conference Paper, CEFIR Symposium: Sovereign Citizens in Canada, 3 May 2018, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3177472.
- 3 Christine M. Sarteschi, “Growing Threat of Sovereign Citizen Extremism Spans Borders and Ideologies”, *Homeland Security Today*, 19 April 2022, <https://www.hstoday.us/featured/perspective-growing-threat-of-sovereign-citizen-extremism-spans-borders-and-ideologies/>.
- 4 In addition to the examples already noted, there are other national terms and variations. For example, some sovereign citizens in America who are also part of the QAnon movement call themselves American State Nationals. In Italy, some sovereign citizens call themselves People of Mother Earth, and in France, the associated movement is called One Nation.
- 5 Emma B. van der Tak and Jaron Harambam, “Caught in Construction: Why Dutch Sovereign Citizens Challenge the Bureaucratic State”, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Volume 54, Issue 6, 3 October 2025, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/08912416251376522>.
- 6 Anti-Defamation League, “The Sovereign Citizen Movement in the United States”, 21 December 2023, <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/sovereign-citizen-movement-united-states>.

- 7 Eric Campbell, “How Germany’s ‘Reichsbürger’ Sovereign Citizens Movement Became a Threat to the State”, ABC News, 31 August 2023, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-08-31/germany-citizens-of-the-reich-foreign-correspondent/102789818>.
- 8 Stephen Young and Harry Hobbs, “The Concerning Intersections of Sovereign Citizen and Indigenous Sovereignty Claims”, UNSW Law Research No. 25-3, 30 November 2024, <https://www4.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/UNSWLawJl/2025/26.html>.
- 9 Glen Cash, “A Beast with Many Heads”, Paper delivered to the Europe Asia Conference, Portofino, 24 June 2025, <https://archive.sclqld.org.au/judgepub/2025/cash20250624.pdf>.
- 10 Southern Poverty Law Centre, “Moorish Sovereign Citizens”, <https://www.splcenter.org/resources/extremist-files/moorish-sovereign-citizens/>.
- 11 Mark Pitcavage, Twitter post, 30 January 2022, <https://x.com/egavactip/status/1487643253382037506>.
- 12 Adrian Donskov, “Operational Intelligence Report: Freedom Convoy 2022/Operation BearHug 2.0”, Ontario Provincial Police, Provisional Operations Intelligence Bureau, 11 February 2022, <https://publicorderemergencycommission.ca/files/exhibits/OPP00002179.pdf?t=1666644930>.
- 13 Michele St-Amant, David Jones, Michael King, and John McCoy, “Ideologically-Motivated Violent Extremism: Hate, Extremism, and Terrorism in Alberta, Canada, & Beyond”, Organization for the Prevention of Violence, August 2022, <https://preventviolence.ca/publication/hate-extremism-terrorism-alberta-ii/>.
- 14 Saba Aziz, “‘Snowball Effect’: Canada’s Trucker Convoy Sparks Anti-Mandate Protests Globally”, Global News, 9 February 2022, <https://globalnews.ca/news/8608477/freedom-convoy-worldwide-covid-protests/>.
- 15 See Christopher Knaus and Michael McGowan, “Who’s Behind Australia’s Anti-Lockdown Protests? The German Conspiracy Group Driving Marches”, *The Guardian*, 27 July 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/jul/27/who-behind-australia-anti-covid-lockdown-protest-march-rallies-sydney-melbourne-far-right-and-german-conspiracy-groups-driving-protests>.
- 16 Satrio Yudhoatmojo, Utkucan Balci, and Jeremy Blackburn, “A Data-Driven Analysis of the Sovereign Citizens Movement on Telegram”, Arxiv, 29 October 2024, <https://arxiv.org/html/2410.22142v1#S4> and Lydia Khalil, “Alternative Platforms and Alternative Recommendation Systems: A Case of the Australian Sovereign Citizen Movement on Telegram”, GNET Insights, 30 March 2021, <https://gnet-research.org/2021/03/30/alternative-platforms-and-alternative-recommendation-systems-a-case-of-the-australian-sovereign-citizen-movement-on-telegram/>.
- 17 Mack Lamoureux, “Inside the QAnon Queen’s Cult: ‘The Abuse Was Non-Stop,’” *VICE*, 23 August 2022, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/qanon-queen-romana-didulo-cult-convoy-canada/>.
- 18 Merlina Herbach, “Banning, Designating, Disarming? Legal Implications of Countering the Reichsbürger Movement”, ICCT Analysis, 7 June 2023, <https://icct.nl/publication/banning-designating-disarming-legal-implications-countering-reichsburger-movement>.

- 19 Federal Bureau of Investigation Domestic Terrorism Operations Unit II, “Sovereign Citizens: An Introduction for Law Enforcement”, Unclassified/ LE Sensitive Memo, November 2010, <https://info.publicintelligence.net/FBI-SovereignCitizens.pdf>.
- 20 Anti-Defamation League, “The Sovereign Citizen Movement in the United States”, Backgrounder, 21 December 2023, <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/sovereign-citizen-movement-united-states>.
- 21 Kristina Murphy, et al, “Linking Conspiracy Beliefs and Violent Anti-Government Extremism: Mitigating the Threat with Procedurally Just Governance”, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Volume 1, Issue 24, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2025.2536333>.
- 22 Christina M. Sarteschi, “Sovereign Citizens: A Narrative Review with Implications of Violence towards Law Enforcement”, *Journal of Aggression and Violent Behavior*, Volume 60, 2021, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1359178920302135>.
- 23 Emma Shakespeare, Keiran Hardy, and Kristina Murphy, “Why are Police a Target for Sovereign Citizen Violence?”, *The Conversation*, 27 August 2025, <https://theconversation.com/why-are-police-a-target-for-sovereign-citizen-violence-264016>.
- 24 Menso Hartgers, “Sovereign Citizen Groups in the Netherlands are Arming Themselves: Cause for Concern?”, ICCT Analysis, 16 July 2024, <https://icct.nl/publication/sovereign-citizen-groups-netherlands-are-arming-themselves-cause-concern>; Emma B. van der Tak and Jaron Harambam, “Caught in Construction: Why Dutch Sovereign Citizens Challenge the Bureaucratic State”, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, Volume 54, Issue 6, 3 October 2025, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/08912416251376522>.
- 25 Kolja Schwartz, “Increasingly Prone to Violence”, *Tagesschau*,* 7 December 2022, <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/innenpolitik/reichsbuerger-chronik-101.html>.
- 26 Chris Vedelago, “Death Threats against Judges among Soaring Safety Incidents Linked to Sovereign Citizens”, *The Age*, 29 September 2025, <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/death-threats-against-judges-among-soaring-safety-incidents-linked-to-sovereign-citizens-20250923-p5mx64.html>.
- 27 Eleanor Steafel, “The ‘Sovereign Citizens’ Who Reject the State — and Turn to Violence”, *The Telegraph*, 29 August 2025, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2025/08/29/dezi-freeman-australia-sovereign-citizens-extremists/>.
- 28 Rachael Dexter and Benjamin Preiss, “Victorian Councils Targeted by Conspiracy Theorists’ Campaign of Disruption and Influence”, *The Age*, 22 April 2023, <https://www.theage.com.au/politics/victoria/victorian-councils-targeted-by-conspiracy-theorists-campaign-of-disruption-and-influence-20230404-p5cxzj.html>.
- 29 Charlie Mitchell, “The Barefoot, Small-Town ‘Sheriff’ Who Allegedly Attacked a Council Boss”, *Stuff NZ*, 15 May 2023, <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/300872706/the-barefoot-smalltown-sheriff-who-allegedly-attacked-a-council-boss>.
- 30 FBI Counterterrorism Analysis Section, “Sovereign Citizens: A Growing Domestic Threat to Law Enforcement”, *Law Enforcement Bulletin*, 1 September 2011, <https://leb.fbi.gov/articles/featured-articles/sovereign-citizens-a-growing-domestic-threat-to-law-enforcement>.

- 31 “Sovereign Citizens: Radicals Exercising ‘God Given Rights’ or Fueling Domestic Terrorism?”, ABC News, 9 March 2012, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/sovereign-citizens-radicals-exercising-god-rights-fueling-domestic/story?id=15876417>.
- 32 Alexander Ritzmann, “The December 2022 German Reichsbürger Plot to Overthrow the German Government”, Combating Terrorism Center, *CTC Sentinel*, Volume 16, Issues 3, March 2023, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-december-2022-german-reichsburger-plot-to-overthrow-the-german-government/>.
- 33 Mack Lamoureux, “Jan. 6 Couple Tried to Use Sovereign Citizen Defense. It Did Not Go Well”, *Vice*, 12 January 2023, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/jan-6-sovereign-citizen/>; Julia Reinstein, “Jan. 6 Rioter Who Led Crowd in Attacking Police Sentenced to Over 7 Years in Prison”, ABC News, 4 April 2024, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/taylor-johnatakis-jan-6-rioter-led-crowd-attacking/story?id=108799674>.
- 34 Alistair Coleman and Shayan Sardarizadeh, “Anti-Vax Protests: ‘Sovereign Citizens’ Fight UK Covid Vaccine Rollout”, BBC, 18 January 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/59870550>.
- 35 Donald J. Netolitzky, “The History of the Organized Pseudolegal Commercial Argument Phenomenon in Canada”, *Alberta Law Review*, Volume 53, Issue 3, 2016, <https://canlii.ca/t/6s9>.
- 36 Eric Campbell, “How Germany’s ‘Reichsbürger’ Sovereign Citizens Movement became a Threat to the State”, ABC News, 31 August 2023, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-08-31/germany-citizens-of-the-reich-foreign-correspondent/102789818>.
- 37 Nathaniel Janowitz, “German Anti-Vaxxers are Fleeing to Paraguay just like Nazis did 70 Years Ago”, *Vice*, 11 May 2022, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/german-anti-vaxxers-are-fleeing-to-paraguay-just-like-nazis-did-70-years-ago/>.
- 38 Matt Siegel, “The Royal Me”, *The Atlantic*, April 2012, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/04/the-royal-me/308912/>.
- 39 Bridget Judd, “Australia has One of the Largest Number of Micronations in the World”, ABC News, 6 August 2020, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-08-06/hutt-river-commonwealth-micronations-in-australia/12521668>.
- 40 Anti-Defamation League, “The Sovereign Citizen Movement in the United States”, Backgrounder, 21 December 2023, <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounder/sovereign-citizen-movement-united-states>.
- 41 Ali Abbas Ahmadi, “Canada’s QAnon ‘Queen’ Arrested in Saskatchewan Compound”, BBC, 4 September 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c8exrp72e20o>.
- 42 Cam Wilson, “The Inside Story: How Homegrown ‘True Patriots’ Sharing Conspiracies on a Zoom Call Sparked Police Raids across Three States”, *Crikey*, 6 August 2021, <https://www.crikey.com.au/2021/08/06/true-patriots-police-raid/>.
- 43 Kate Hedley, “Bizarre Scenes in Tiny WA Town as ‘Sovereign Nation’ Attempts to Overthrow Government”, *The Age*, 5 June 2020, <https://www.theage.com.au/national/bizarre-scenes-in-tiny-wa-town-as-sovereign-nation-attempts-to-overthrow-government-20200605-p54zxx.html>.

- 44 Mahmood Fazal, Amy Donaldson, and Dylan Welch, “Inside the Fringe Groups Fighting a ‘Quasi Civil War’ with Self-Styled Sheriffs and their Own Court”, ABC News, 18 August 2025, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-08-18/sovereign-citizen-movement-law-court-four-corners/105655100>.
- 45 Stephen Rice, “Australian Police Cracking Down on Protesters Who Try to Incite Violence”, *The Australian*, 20 February 2022, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/australian-police-cracking-down-on-protesters-who-try-to-incite-violence/news-story/Of3daeacbc b9917ade7aadfadc63acb0>.
- 46 Leonie Heims, et al, “Sovereignism and Anti-Authority Extremism in Germany and Canada. A Comparative Analysis for a Deeper Understanding of the Fluid Movement”, Modus – Zentrum für angewandte Deradikalisierungsforschung & Organization for the Prevention of Violence, 4 June 2025, https://modus-zad.de/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Sovereignism-and-Anti-Authority-Extremism_Research-Report-EN.pdf.
- 47 Nora Benavidez, “Big Tech Backslide: How Social-Media Rollbacks Endanger Democracy Ahead of the 2024 Elections”, Free Press, December, 2023, <https://www.freepress.net/big-tech-backslide-how-social-media-rollbacks-endanger-democracy-ahead-2024-elections>.
- 48 Lydia Khalil, “Alternative Platforms and Alternative Recommendation Systems: A Case of the Australian Sovereign Citizen Movement on Telegram”, GNET Insights, 30 March 2021, <https://gnet-research.org/2021/03/30/alternative-platforms-and-alternative-recommendation-systems-a-case-of-the-australian-sovereign-citizen-movement-on-telegram/>.
- 49 Verena Fiebig and Daniel Koehler, “Uncharted Territory: Towards an Evidence-Based Criminology of Sovereign Citizens Through a Systematic Literature Review”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Volume 16, Issue 6, https://pt.icct.nl/sites/default/files/2023-04/Article%204_1.pdf.
- 50 Christina M. Sarteschi, “Sovereign Citizens: A Narrative Review with Implications of Violence towards Law Enforcement”, *Journal of Aggression and Violent Behavior*, Volume 60, 2021, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1359178920302135>.
- 51 Verena Fiebig and Daniel Koehler, “Uncharted Territory: Towards an Evidence-Based Criminology of Sovereign Citizens Through a Systematic Literature Review”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Volume 16, Issue 6, https://pt.icct.nl/sites/default/files/2023-04/Article%204_1.pdf.
- 52 Verena Fiebig and Daniel Koehler, “Uncharted Territory: Towards an Evidence-Based Criminology of Sovereign Citizens Through a Systematic Literature Review”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Volume 16, Issue 6, https://pt.icct.nl/sites/default/files/2023-04/Article%204_1.pdf.
- 53 Leonie Heims, et al, “Sovereignism and Anti-Authority Extremism in Germany and Canada. A Comparative Analysis for a Deeper Understanding of the Fluid Movement”, Modus – Zentrum für angewandte Deradikalisierungsforschung & Organization for the Prevention of Violence, 4 June 2025, https://modus-zad.de/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Sovereignism-and-Anti-Authority-Extremism_Research-Report-EN.pdf.
- 54 Darin J. Challacombe and Paul A. Lucas, “Postdicting Violence with Sovereign Citizen Actors: An Exploratory Test of the Trap-18”, *Journal of Threat Assessment and*

Management, Volume6, Issue 1, p.51–59, <https://psycnet.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2Ftam0000105>.

About the authors



Lydia Khalil is Program Director of the Transnational Challenges Program at the Lowy Institute. She is also a Senior Research Fellow at Deakin University's Alfred Deakin Institute. She serves as an editorial board member of the academic journal *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* and is former convener of the Addressing Violent Extremism and Radicalisation to Terrorism (AVERT) Research Network.

She has previously served as a senior policy adviser with various US government agencies such as the US Department of Defense, Boston Police Department, and New York Police Department. Her research interests include new forms of violent extremism, counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism, the intersection of technology and social harms, threats to democracy, and democratic resilience.

Lydia is a frequent media commentator and has published widely in both popular and academic publications on her areas of expertise. She is the author of *Rise of the Extreme Right: The New Global Extremism and the Threat to Democracy* (Penguin, 2022).



Dr Keiran Hardy is an associate professor in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Griffith University. He is a member of the Griffith Criminology Institute and an executive member of the AVERT (Addressing Violent Extremism and Radicalisation to Terrorism) Research Network. He has published extensively on counter-terrorism law and policy. His research interests include counter-terrorism law, countering violent extremism, radicalisation, intelligence whistleblowing and cyber terrorism and he is currently undertaking an Australian Research Council (ARC) research project on conspiracy-fuelled extremism. He is the author of *Law in Australian Society: An Introduction to Principles and Processes* (Routledge, 2024).

LOWY INSTITUTE