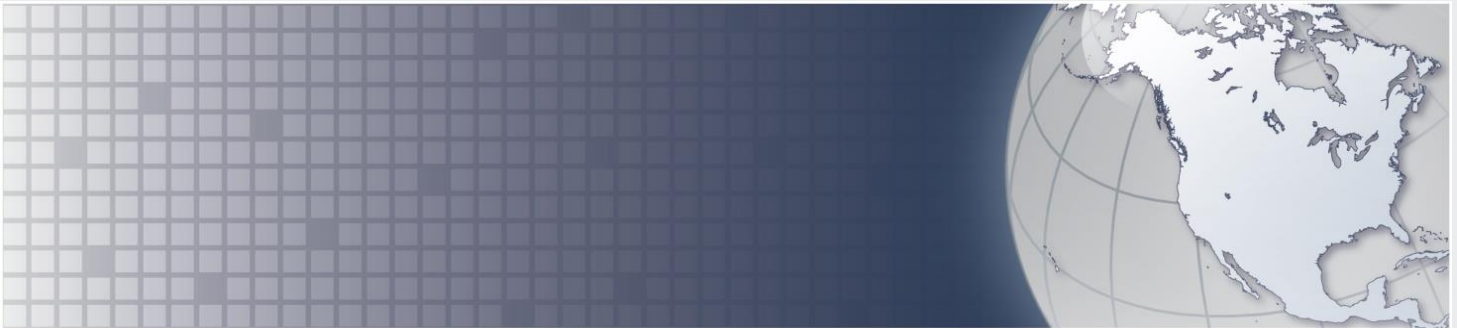




Homeland  
Security

# INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENT



## (U//FOUO) Sovereign Citizen Extremist Ideology Will Drive Violence at Home, During Travel, and at Government Facilities

5 February 2015

Office of Intelligence and Analysis

IA-0105-15

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## (U//FOUO) Sovereign Citizen Extremist Ideology Will Drive Violence at Home, During Travel, and at Government Facilities

(U//FOUO) Prepared by the Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A). Coordinated with FBI.

### (U) Scope

(U//FOUO) This Assessment is based on an I&A review of 24 law enforcement investigations into acts and threats of sovereign citizen extremist (SCE) violence since 2010, detailing locations, targets of violence, and their statements about the violence, when available.\* It is intended to inform law enforcement at the federal, state, and local levels about the nature and circumstances of SCE violence to help officers prepare for, anticipate, and ultimately avoid violent incidents. Most sovereign citizens are non-violent, and this assessment applies only to those that use violence to advance their goals. This Assessment stems from law enforcement feedback on a 2013 analysis of the geographic distribution of SCE violence (see “(U//FOUO) Limited Reporting Suggests Sovereign Citizen Extremist Violence Most Common in Southern and Western United States,” dated 27 February 2014).

(U//FOUO) For this review, I&A counted only violence perpetrated by identified SCEs for ideological reasons that involved shootings, assaults, plots to commit violence, and credible violent threats against law enforcement, government personnel, and public officials. All incidents were reviewed by multiple I&A analysts to validate ideological motives. This data set may not be comprehensive of all SCE violence and threats of violence, and is limited by the difficulty in discerning the ideological motivations behind some crimes, which could increase the number of violent incidents by SCEs that were not recognized or reported as stemming from ideological reasons. Additional information from state and local partners could assist efforts to better understand the nature and breadth of these activities.

\* (U//FOUO) DHS defines SCEs as groups or individuals who facilitate or engage in acts of violence directed at public officials, financial institutions, and government facilities in support of their belief that the legitimacy of US citizenship should be rejected; that almost all forms of established government, authority, and institutions are illegitimate; and that they are immune from federal, state, and local laws.

### (U) Key Judgments

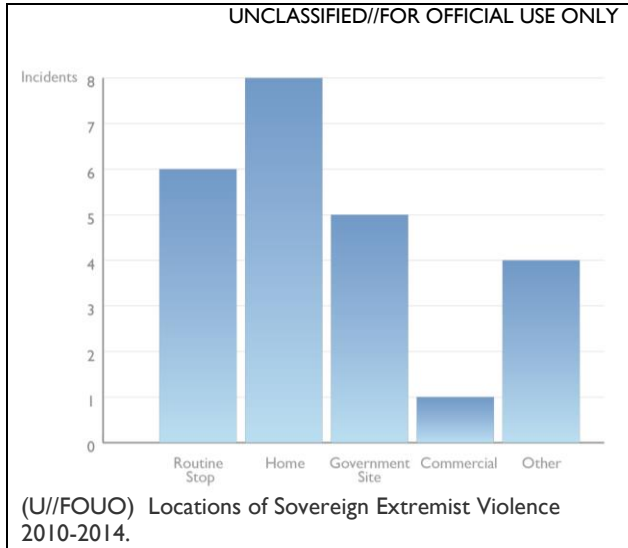
(U//FOUO) I&A assesses that SCE violence during 2015 will occur most frequently during routine law enforcement stops at a suspect’s home, during enforcement stops and at government offices. †

(U//FOUO) I&A assesses that SCE violence over the next year will remain at the same sporadic level, consisting primarily of unplanned, reactive violence targeting law enforcement officers during active enforcement efforts.

### (U//FOUO) SCE Ideology Will Prompt Violence in Specific Circumstances and Locations

(U//FOUO) I&A assesses that most SCE violence will continue to occur most frequently at SCE homes, during routine traffic stops, or at government offices due to their perception that their individual rights are being violated. SCE violence took place in these three circumstances in 19 of the 24 instances of SCE violence since 2010. SCEs perceive that law enforcement efforts and judicial actions infringe upon key personal rights and individual sovereignty—such as the right to travel—most strongly during these circumstances. SCEs believe they personally can ignore laws and act according to their own sovereign citizen ideology. Consequently, when SCEs perceive government representatives directly infringing on their rights and freedoms in an irrevocable way—such as police serving a warrant or a judge ruling against legal filings intended to tie up court proceedings—SCEs resort to violence.

† (U) For the purposes of this product, “routine stops” includes primarily traffic stops, but also Terry stops—where a police officer briefly detains a person based on a reasonable suspicion of involvement in criminal activity—and other routine enforcement actions.



- » (U) Victor White<sup>USPER</sup>, an Odessa, Texas SCE, engaged in a 22-hour armed standoff and gun battle with police in 2010 and was convicted of shooting two officers and a utility worker. White initiated the violence because the police officer was escorting the utility worker onto White's property. White claimed he was "defending and protecting my dignity and the sovereignty of my domain" in a jailhouse interview with media.
- » (U) A SCE father and son claimed police had no authority over them and refused to produce identification when stopped for a traffic violation in Louisiana in 2012. The son then allegedly shot and wounded the police officer who stopped them with an AK-47 assault rifle before fleeing the scene. Later that day, police officers located the suspects at a residence in a mobile home park. The son emerged from the home and allegedly started shooting, killing two police officers and wounding two others, according to media reports.
- » (U) A Denver-based SCE threatened a state employee who handled his unresolved tax dispute with a hoax terrorism letter in 2012. He was convicted after sending an envelope containing white powder specifically to the employee, resulting in the evacuation of a Colorado Department of Revenue building, according to media reports.

### (U) Sovereign Citizen Extremist Ideology

(U//FOUO) SCEs—like their non-violent sovereign citizen counterparts—believe they are immune from federal, state, and local laws and that many Constitutional amendments are false. They reject the authority of the government, law enforcement, and the courts because they think these entities are actually commercial entities that cannot compel participation in a commercial contract (although many sovereign citizens recognize the law enforcement authority of the elected sheriff). Many believe that US born citizens can use their birth certificates to access secret US Treasury bank accounts to pay debts and fines. SCEs believe they have unfettered authority to travel "on the land" and avoid paying taxes and fees. Sometimes they create their own parallel government institutions, such as courts and grand juries—which have no legal authority—to support their claims.

### (U//FOUO) SCE Violence Is Personal, Not Symbolic

(U//FOUO) I&A assesses that SCE tactics differ from most violent extremists in that their attacks are reactive and personal, rather than symbolic. Other domestic terrorists typically attack symbolic targets to oppose laws and policies they disagree with rather than certain individuals.\* By contrast, even when SCEs plot their violence over time or threaten attacks, it is often in direct response to an on-going personal grievance, such as an arrest or court order. In almost all of the 24 incidents we reviewed, the targets were the specific individuals who the SCE perceive violated their rights, rather than public symbols or anonymous representatives of the government. While other domestic terrorists may be motivated by personal grievances as well as ideology, rarely do they target a specific individual.

- » (U) A Washington-based SCE was convicted in December 2011 for threatening to arrest and kidnap specific law enforcement and government officials involved in giving him a traffic citation, according to the Department of Justice.
- » (U) Francis Shaeffer Cox<sup>USPER</sup>, an Alaska-based SCE, conspired to kill a US district court judge and an

\* (U//FOUO) DHS defines domestic terrorism as any act of violence that is dangerous to human life or potentially destructive of critical infrastructure or key resources committed by a group or individual based and operating entirely within the United States or its territories without direction or inspiration from a foreign terrorist group. The act is a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any state or other subdivision of the United States and appears to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population, to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion, or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping. A domestic terrorist differs from a homegrown violent extremist in that the former is not inspired by, and does not take direction from, a foreign terrorist group or other foreign actor.

Internal Revenue Service officer in March 2011. He targeted them in retaliation for their involvement in law enforcement and judicial actions against him, according to media reports of his trial and conviction.

- » (U//FOUO) Other recent domestic terrorism attacks committed by individuals motivated by anti-government ideologies but who are not SCEs targeted random law enforcement and government employees due to their symbolic value as targets rather than a personal grievance against those individuals, according to case documents. These cases include the shooting attack on three TSA agents at Los Angeles International Airport in November 2013 (killing one); the murder of two Las Vegas policemen and a civilian in May 2014 by Jerad and Amanda Miller (who were killed during the attack); and Eric Michael Frein<sup>USPER</sup>, who allegedly shot and killed a policeman and injured another in September 2014.

### **(U//FOUO) SCEs Will Continue to Attack Police Officers Because of Their Enforcement Role**

(U//FOUO) I&A assesses law enforcement officers will remain the primary target of SCE violence over the next year due to their role in physically enforcing laws and regulations. While judges and other government officials often earn SCE ire, SCEs typically—though not always—respond to judicial decrees and regulatory actions by disputing them on paper through extensive legal claims before engaging in violent plots, and rarely attack symbolic targets. By contrast, law enforcement actions often involve direct personal (and physical) confrontations that SCEs perceive as provoking an immediate physical response for “self-defense.”

- » (U//FOUO) Law enforcement officers were targeted in 83 percent (20 of 24) of violent sovereign citizen incidents between 2010 and 2014, according to a review of DHS, law enforcement, and open source data.
- » (U) An alleged SCE shot two federal and state law enforcement officers in California in June 2014. He justified his actions in a local media interview by claiming that the law enforcement officers were there “to provoke me” and “murder me if possible.”
- » (U) Earl Cranston Harris, an Oregon SCE, was shot and killed after threatening to shoot deputies who came to his home to enforce an eviction order stemming from a long-running, but previously peaceful, property dispute in June 2014, according to media accounts.

- » (U//FOUO) An alleged SCE made a series of verbal and written threats to CBP and other law enforcement officials at a port of entry between 2010-2013, including mailing threatening statements and manifestos, simply for processing him at the international border. He threatened to retaliate against law enforcement if they continued to stop and question him during border crossings, according to DHS reporting.

### **(U) Outlook**

(U//FOUO) Barring any significant change in SCE ideology, a major event, or a charismatic leader that advocates for more assertive violence in support of SCEs’ perceived rights, I&A assesses the sporadic pattern and level of violence at homes, traffic stops, and government sites will continue through 2015. However, each individual is unique and may have different interpretations of SCE ideology, especially since there is no agreed-upon dogma or national leader. Some domestic terrorists may combine elements of SCE ideologies with other, more aggressive violent anti-government perspectives—such as militia extremism.\* Consequently, such individuals likely pose a greater threat of proactive violence than other SCEs.

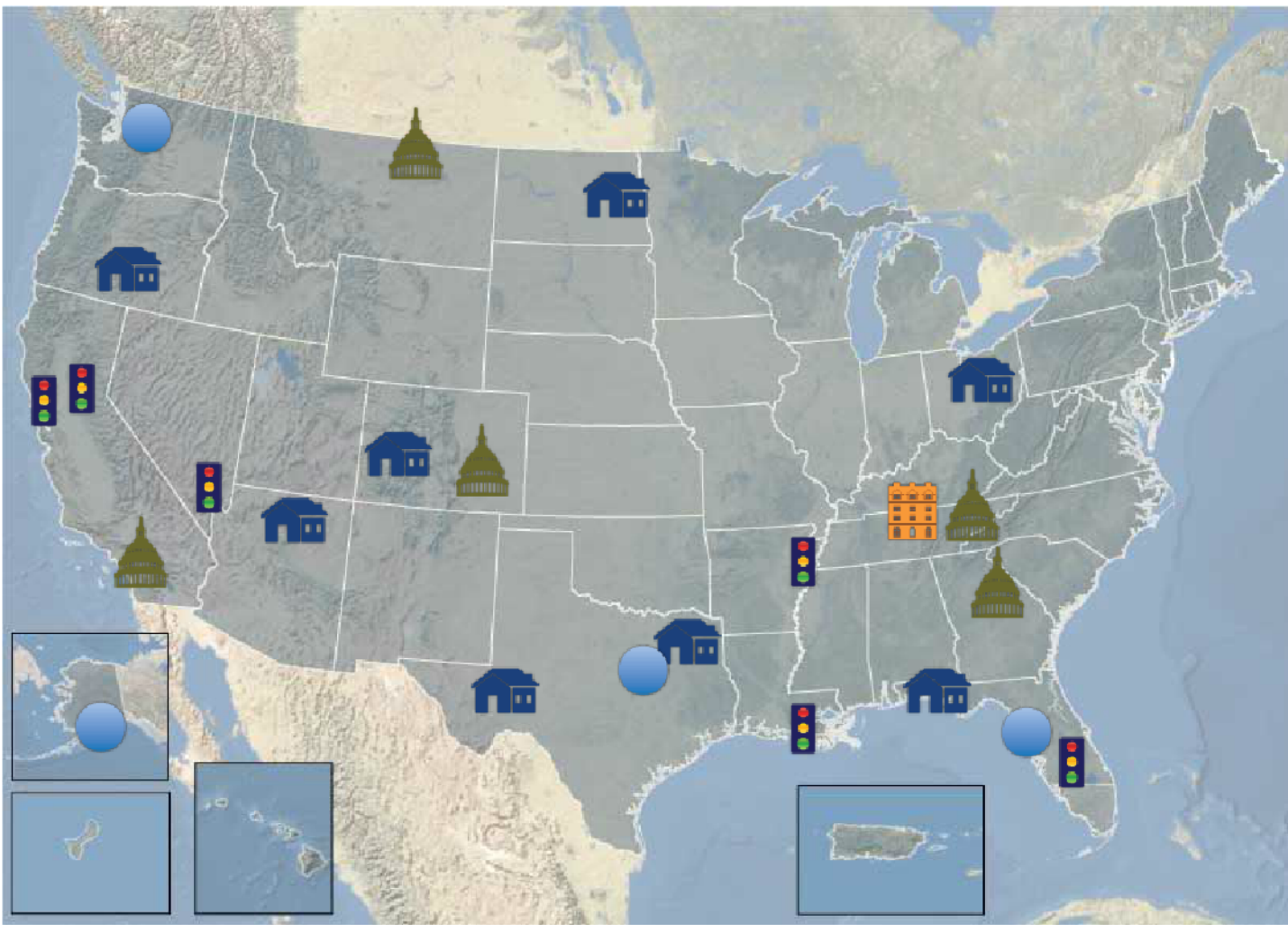
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\* (U//FOUO) DHS defines militia extremists as groups or individuals who facilitate or engage in acts of violence directed at federal, state, or local government officials or infrastructure in response to their belief that the government deliberately is stripping Americans of their freedoms and is attempting to establish a totalitarian regime. These individuals consequently oppose many federal and state authorities’ laws and regulations (particularly those related to firearms ownership), and often belong to armed paramilitary groups. They often conduct paramilitary training designed to violently resist perceived government oppression or to violently overthrow the US Government.

Reset

### (U) Locations and Targets of Sovereign Citizen Extremist Violence 2010-2014

(U) This is an interactive graphic. Click on any incident — or use the navigation buttons for any year or target type below — to see more details.

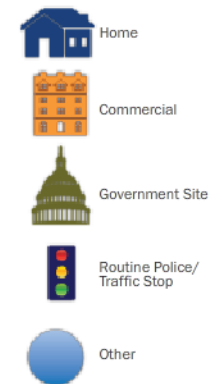


2010 2011 2012 2013 2014

#### Target



#### Location



**(U) Source Summary Statement**

*(U//FOUO) This Assessment is based on a large body of law enforcement and open source reporting from DHS, state and local law enforcement, the FBI, court documents and the media. The law enforcement reports and court documents typically have high credibility and rely on witness testimony and facts established through law enforcement investigation. The media reports range in reliability from moderate to high, but all incidents have also been reviewed by either FBI or local fusion center analysts, giving us **high confidence** in the factual reporting of these cases. We have **high confidence** in our judgment that SCE violence during 2015 will continue to occur most frequently during routine law enforcement stops and encounters at a suspect's home, followed by government offices, because it is based on our review of these incidents and the consistency of basic sovereign citizen ideology that has been established over many years. We also have **high confidence** in our assessment that most SCE violence over the next year will remain at the same sporadic level and will consist primarily of unplanned, reactive violence targeting law enforcement officers during active enforcement efforts. We have seen no changes in basic SCE ideology and the trends displayed since 2010 stem from this ideology. Additional FBI reporting on plotting by SCE groups could alter our assessment, but existing reporting supports our assessments above.*

**(U) Report Suspicious Activity**

**(U) To report suspicious activity, law enforcement, Fire-EMS, private security personnel, and emergency managers should follow established protocols; all other personnel should call 911 or contact local law enforcement.** Suspicious activity reports (SARs) will be forwarded to the appropriate fusion center and FBI Joint Terrorism Task Force for further action. For more information on the Nationwide SAR Initiative, visit <http://nsi.ncirc.gov/resources.aspx>.

**(U) Tracked by:** HSEC-8.2, HSEC-8.5, HSEC-8.6, HSEC-8.8, HSEC-8.10