

New Imaginations: An Analysis of the Sovereign Citizens Movement through the Lens of National Identity

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What do sovereign citizens – a movement known its disobedience towards laws and regulations by rejecting their legitimacy – in North America think of themselves? Current literature provides thoughtful but limited answers. This study identifies this scholarly gap and attempts to remedy it by serving as a pilot project into this largely unexplored topic from the perspective of national identities. Specifically, it studies sovereign citizens' conception of national identity and elaborates its framework using negative definitions and positive characterization. It contains two propositions, arguing that the sovereign citizen identity in North America is a porous, decentralized, civic, and non-physically discriminating alternative constructed reality defined by an explicit rejection of citizenship and characterized by a selective interpretation and compliance of State laws. This study uses qualitative methods to validate the propositions over two legal cases, *Meads v. Meads* and *United States v. Martinez*. Further, to prevent potential bias due to the nature of the legal profession, this study implements a robustness check by analyzing the history of David Straight, a well-known sovereign citizen. After the analyses, the study successfully validates the two propositions. This study ends by identifying its limitations and provides further research directions in the conclusion.

Introduction

Sovereign citizens are a movement that consider themselves to be “not under the jurisdiction of the federal government and consider themselves exempt from U.S. law” (Turner) in the American case, although a similar statement can be said about the Canadian case. Known for their pseudo-legal claims during court sessions, with some even resorting to violent means, sovereign citizens present a unique policy challenge to the criminal justice system. Unlike other fringe groups, such as White supremacists, sovereign citizens have mostly non-violent interactions with authorities, and perhaps for this reason, have largely stayed out of public sight. A further distinction about sovereign citizens is their unique worldview, which is based on alternative interpretations of the State institutions and laws. In other words, sovereign citizens' ideology involves the interaction with our actual society, unlike the often-unachievable all-white society that White supremacists posit.

While it can be amusing – or infuriating – to listen to sovereign citizen “gurus,” this study asks a serious question: what do these individuals – who are members of our society – think of themselves? Specifically, what is the conception of identity behind their arguments? If most sovereign citizen rhetoric contains little logic or normality from an outside perspective and would often get them into greater legal troubles, why do they persist in their claims?

This study provides a preliminary analysis of sovereign citizens' conceptions of identity in North America. The lack of political and sociological analysis of the sovereign citizen movement, despite that movement receiving wide and regular media coverage, provides ample justification for this research. The two main objectives are as follows:

First, this study identifies the prevalence of literature on national identities and sovereign citizens, but also notes the lack of bridging between them, of which this study attempts to achieve. to provide additional findings to the sovereign citizen-related literature that is currently dominated by policy-oriented, criminological, and psychological analyses. Rather than continuing the trend, this study presents a political and sociological analysis of the sovereign citizen movement premised on the assumption that the persistence of their behaviours – even if it often results in adverse legal consequences – has deeper sociological and political roots.

Second, this study seeks to provide a preliminary political/sociological definition of the sovereign citizen movement. Recalling the first objective, the definition of a sovereign citizen is equivocal, with different sources resorting to different terms despite all describing the same group of people. This study aims to create and establish a preliminary definition of a sovereign citizen, and to systematically categorize sovereign citizens based on common characteristics rather than geographic areas, eras, or ideological spins.

This study contains two propositions: (1) Sovereign citizenship is a porous, decentralized, civic, and non-physically discriminatory alternative national identity defined by an explicit rejection of citizenship; (2) Sovereign citizenship is positively characterized by a selective interpretation, compliance, and utilization of laws. These two propositions, this study argues, provide an overarching framework at the macro level within which an archetypical sovereign citizen can be categorized. This study uses qualitative methods to validate the propositions over two legal cases, *Meads v. Meads* and *United States v. Martinez*. This study also performs a robustness check by analyzing David Straight, a sovereign citizen, to remedy the potential bias incurred by official records. After the analyses, this study successfully validates the two propositions.

This article will be structured as follows. It begins with a literature review of previous studies on the sovereign citizen movement, and on citizenship and national identities more broadly. This study then introduces its theories and propositions by contextualizing the theory within the case of the sovereign citizen movement. This study will then introduce its methods of case selection before performing its analyses and following them with a robustness check. This study ends with a summary of its findings, a conclusion, and a brief discussion of future research directions.

Literature Review

Previous studies have provided limited – although meaningful – findings. Most existing analyses of sovereign citizens approach the analysis from the criminological and terrorism studies perspective. These perspectives have nonetheless provided valuable insights into the movement. Smith (2016), for instance, establishes the distinct nature of the sovereign citizen movement from other far-right groups and thus proposes studying the movement as a distinct object. Pitcavage (2012) observes the internal competition within the sovereign citizen

movement and the formation of various groups centred around different “gurus” that act as leaders and provide ideological guidance. Baldino and Lucas (2019) confirm Pitcavage’s (2012) findings by noting the critical distinguishing characteristics of sovereign citizens: they are anti-government and lack central ideologies and movements. Sarteschi (2020, 7) echoes the former’s findings and provides additional descriptions of the movement’s various tactics and underlying ideological basis. However, neither study identifies this movement as a potential mutation of broader societal identities; they instead see it as motivated by “self-interest and a desire to evade the law.” (Sarteschi 2020, 7).

Hodge (2019, 8) does provide a deeper sociological analysis of the sovereign citizen movement by documenting a “radical redefinition of citizenship” rooted in a confrontation against the prevailing society in the US and Canada. However, a significant number of works focus on whether sovereign citizens constitute a terrorist threat, for example, Loeser (2015, 1139) on the movement’s “terroristic tendencies.” Psychological analyses, such as Pytyck and Chaimowitz (2013, 149), have also contributed significantly to verifying the sanity of sovereign citizens, finding that most sovereign citizens are determined to be non-psychotic –in terms of their competency to stand trial.

While there is a lack of existing literature on the sovereign citizen movement from the perspective of identities, there is an extensive literature on the broader relationship between citizenship, State, and national identities. Specifically, scholars reveal how citizenship is reimagined through the machinery of State bureaucracies, which can deploy strong discursive powers to create an official image of a nation that is incongruent with the societal nation. Earlier works, such as Brubaker (1990), have already shown a distinct understanding of citizenship due to the nation’s conception. From a theoretical perspective, this is best illustrated by Shapiro (2000, 81), who provides an analysis of citizenship as both territorially and culturally relevant, that citizenship, from the State’s perspective, is not only legally relevant but is also associated with “a cultural community where it is associated with a history of shared ethnic and social characteristics.” As Shapiro (2000) argues, this creates a temporal disjuncture between citizenship and identity. Fulbrook (1996) contextualizes this by focusing on the disparities between official citizenship and nationality in both Germanies during the Cold War. The West saw the ethnicity-based conception of German citizenship becoming increasingly disjunct from societal diversity and the self-identification of the German people (Fulbrook 1996, 95). The opposite happened in the East, which sought to apply ethnicity-less citizenship against the resilient notion of the German people (Fulbrook 1996, 95). Jugé & Perez (2006) focus on the conception of French citizenship and the notion of the French identity it implies, which is fully assimilating into being “French” and relegating those who identify themselves as otherwise to second-class citizens. Like Fulbrook (1996), the authors note a conflict in contemporary France between the “French identity versus the identity of France.” (Jugé and Perez 2006, 207).

Non-Western European studies also yield similar findings. Handelman (1994) discusses the concept of *le’om* (ethnicity) and its profound effects in dismantling the egalitarian notion of Israeli citizenship by separating Jews and non-Jews and shattering the “potential unity of citizenship by reifying and implementing the legal sanction for different categorical nationalities.” (Handelman 1994, 449). Similarly, Daskalovski (2002) focuses on the Macedonian constitution and notes the State’s re-imagination of the Macedonian nation. Specifically, Daskalovski (2002) obtains findings similar to Handelman (1994), that Art.19 and 78 embrace further specification of ethnicity within the nominally equal Macedonian citizenship,

which the author argues is inimical against a liberal notion of citizenship. Barrington (2021), on the other hand, reaches the opposite conclusion by finding a solid congruence between Ukrainian identity and Ukrainian citizenship, that claiming citizenship represents a central component within one's Ukrainian identity. Mavroudi (2008) investigates the conceptions of national identities among Palestinian exiles in Greece, where Palestinian Greek citizens possess no national attachment to Greece but to Palestine. Ip et al. (1997) produce similar findings in their study of Asian migrants in Australia, where the acquisition of Australian citizenship – thus a nominal acceptance of the Australian nation – does not necessitate a realistic notion of belonging among migrants. Nanes (2008) examines the debates around Jordanian national identity and citizenship, particularly over the distinction between Palestinians and Transjordanians about what it means to be a Jordanian. Lastly, Sindic (2011, 202) examines the relationship between citizenship and national identity through the lens of “psychological citizenship,” which he defines as “the subjective sense of being a citizen.” Sindic's (2011) finding resonates with both Mavroudi (2008) and Ip et al. (2011), that while national identity remains the most critical way of imagining a societal reality, one should be cautious in assuming a natural connection between citizenship and identity.

Concerning the sovereign citizens' movement, a crucial element in analyzing it is its conception of identity, of what constitutes or does not constitute it. Previous studies have produced valuable findings about the compositions and formations of national identity. This, however, must be differentiated from how nationalism forms, as characterized by authors like Benedict Anderson, whose work this study builds on. Although Anderson (2006, 6) is now immortalized for proclaiming that nationality is imagined, more practical works must also be examined to demonstrate the ingredients of such imaginations.

Countless works show that national identities and their components are flexible and mutable. For instance, De Cillia et al. (1999) show an all-encompassing construction of Austrian national identity, which includes citizenship and culture; in other words, in the authors' findings, the constructed Austrian identity is political and cultural. Similar findings are produced by Howard & Gill (2001) in their investigation of Australian children's conceptions of Australian identity, including natural features unique to Australia and cultural features, including arts, films, etc. However, this does not suggest all imaginations of national identities are broad, as Hajjaj (2023) demonstrates in its identification of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's leadership as the pivotal factor in the imagination of an East Bengali identity during the 1960s. It is also possible, albeit less frequently seen, to identify what does not constitute one's national identity, such as by Huntington (2004), who, in his analysis of American identities, identifies the absence of attachment to land as a critical characteristic of American identity. McLean (1998, 243) provides further findings in its study of museums as sites of constructing identities, of their purposes of “fulfilling national ambitions by creating a national identity.” Historical observations by Helleiner (1998) echoes McLean (1998) in its finding that establishing national currencies in the 19th and 20th century contributed to reifying the imagination of national identities. A recent study by Winstone and Witherspoon (2016) finds greater national associations among British children with stronger national identity when presented with the British national anthem. While Winstone & Witherspoon (2016, 263) focus on the national anthems, which, in the authors' words, “are one of the most salient and evocative of national symbols,” other scholars have indicated the importance of music as a significant component within the construction of identity.

Krüger Bridge (2022) demonstrates this importance in its study of Paraguayan music and finds the musical pieces it examines to represent expressions of Paraguayan national identities.

However, these compositions can change, as McLean (1998) discusses the museums' exhibitions as the result of negotiations during the process of national imagination of what to include and portray and what not to. This mutability of national identities is also adequately expressed within other studies. Howard & Gill (2001, 102), in addition, also note the difficulties among some children in defining the Australian identity vis-à-vis the identity itself, but "best described from the outside and through comparisons with those who are different." In other words, the children identify Australian identities through what it is not instead of what it is (Howard and Gill 2001). Uberoi (2008, 413-415) finds that multiculturalism can change national identities, that the former causes the latter to be "more attractive to cultural minorities and also makes it more likely that they will want to share it." More recent studies, including Ariely (2023) and Tinsley (2022), have provided further evidence for the fluidity and flexibility of national identities. Ariely (2023) found that the population unvaccinated against COVID-19 has less national attachment than those vaccinated. Tinsley (2022) focuses on election rhetoric during the 2016 American presidential election and identifies the heavy use of patriotism – albeit through different lenses – by both the Republican and Democratic parties. Tinley (2022, 822) concludes that such rhetoric "distinguished patriotic citizens from their unpatriotic counterparts, implying that the latter did not truly belong to the nation." By identifying contemporary components, including COVID-19 vaccines and patriotism in their findings, Ariely (2023) and Tinley (2022) demonstrate the reshaping and re-imagining of national identities against contemporary backgrounds.

Theory and Propositions

This study does not cast doubt on the previous studies' findings. Instead, it seeks to contribute to the existing academic literature by focusing on a less-well-studied yet prominent fringe group that has the potential to expand. While existing studies on the sovereign citizens' movement come mainly from the perspectives of criminology, law, and psychology, this political science study examines the movement from the perspective of identities. To this end, this study situates itself atop previous studies on citizenship, nationalism, and identity. It traces its intellectual development of such studies, including De Cillia et al. (1999), Fulbrook (1996), and Anderson (2006), and applies some of their central arguments and insights.

In studying the sovereign citizens' movement, this study contributes to existing criminological, legal, and psychological studies such as Sarteschi (2020) and Pytyck and Chaimowitz (2013). It serves to analyze the conceptions of national identity held by sovereign citizens, of how they consider themselves to be, and what constitutes one's self-identified membership within the sovereign citizens' communities. This study also acknowledges the role of economic factors within the movement, as identified by Sarteschi (2020) and Baldino and Lucas (2019) but considers them limited in explanatory power and scope.

In other words, this study is not a pioneering piece, but is the first attempt by a political scientist to understand a particular deep-rooted social phenomenon. It then uses that understanding to deconstruct the notions of "citizenship" and "nation", arguing that the disconnection or asynchrony between citizenship and national identity possesses considerable

explanatory power when applied to the sovereign citizens' movement. This, however, does not suggest that specific differences in identity between the "regular" citizenry and sovereign citizens can be identified in detail. Indeed, this study does not seek to perform such a task, for it considers it extremely difficult in not impossible. Instead, it argues that the conceptions of sovereign citizens' identities can be understood in two other ways, building off observations made by Howard and Gill (2001) and later theorized by Abdelal et al. (2006), among others: negative identification and positive characterization. This study discusses both ways in some detail below.

A key concept of this study is the separation between "national identity" and "citizenship." Specifically, this study proposes a more careful approach to such semantics, for the two terms possess different theoretical meanings and conceptions. To this point, this study utilizes the term "national identity" exclusively, as this study hypothesizes the nationalistic nature within the identities of sovereign citizens. It thus distinguishes the term "national identity" from "nationalism", with the former referring to the broader national construction. Using the term "national identity," this study seeks to accentuate its focus on identities, not nations. Further, this study accepts this term in its plural form – national identities – for it considers and theorizes that multiple versions of national identity exist, though all can still be considered within the framework of nations through various diverging perspectives.

"Citizenship" is used by this study to exclusively denote the legal status given to a member of the State. Further, this study assumes that citizenship contains a duality: the access to privilege (and thus protection); and the acceptance of duty, with sovereign citizens vehemently rejecting the latter. This association between citizenship and duty, this study proposes, is explicitly present within the State through mechanisms such as conscription or taxation, and of particular interest to this study, obeying laws and regulations within the country. This last civic duty is comparably less visible than the previous two points, for law enforcement acts against all transgressors of local laws regardless of their citizenship. However, to show such duty exists, one can simply examine the oath of citizenship throughout different countries; almost all include explicit oaths dedicated to obeying the laws and regulations of the State. This explicit presence of stipulations by the State to follow laws as citizens thus suffice this study's assumptions.

The relationship between citizenship and national identity is complex and requires additional clarification. This study posits that the two do not necessarily link because they are quite different categories. As mentioned above, citizenship possesses a legal perspective from the State, with its strong and unique discursive and physical power over its subjects. In other words, citizenship is understood as the product of the State. In this case, the nation and nationalism – as coming from the State to justify its existence and legitimacy – can be said to be constructed but not necessarily imagined. In other words, citizenship is a product of a constructed reality; constructed by a State. And the nation only becomes visible as its principles are embodied by citizenship. This imagined, and elusive notion of the nation is particularly present and visible within migrant communities, as Mavroudi (2008) has already demonstrated. This conception of the nation – even if people do not necessarily imagine themselves to be a part of, as Fulbrook (1996) demonstrates – survives because of the solid discursive power the State possesses to shape and continuously reshape the nation it sees as appropriate and necessary. The nation also gives rise to an official version of national identity, one that most subjects adhere to, whether consciously or subconsciously. This is because modern States possess strong discursive powers

to shape public opinion and material powers to permeate civil societies in their attempts to maintain the images of the constructed nations, as McLean (1998) shows.

But national identity – as a standalone concept – should not be understood to be confined to the official version, as Fulbrook (1996) shows above. This study exposes how civic national identity can be flexible and diverse –to the extent that it considers it more imagined than constructed. This mainly derives from the lack of discursive power these identities possess. As a result, people can choose to subscribe to a particular national identity, different from the official version.

A reasonable objection can be raised against this theory, for the above description appears to deconstruct nation and identity altogether. Although this objection has weight, it needs to pay more attention to the societal coverage of such identities, which often extends to large parts of the civic society, but not necessarily all parts. And a group's societal and collective imagination qualifies the notion of a nation.

Although other sub-national identities can also be analyzed in the way described above, they are different from national identities, this study argues, for the exact reason that national identity is individualistic and lacks a collective and identifiable destiny, namely the willingness to establish (self-determination) or restore (see the 1911 Chinese Revolution) a State justified through the imagined nation.

Importantly, this theory does not conclude that citizenship and national identities never interact. Rather, the strong discursive power of the State guarantees interactions between the two, whether positive or negative. However, identifying such national identities on the civic level requires additional thinking and creativity. Lacking corporealization such as monuments or museums (see McLean 1998), this study argues that it is impossible to identify their exact contents, although this study can verify their existence through indirect methods.

The first method is identifying civic national identities through what they are not, as previously explored by Abdelal et al. (2006, 701), who propose the concept of “relational comparison” in identifying collective identities by viewing others. While it is hard to analytically describe national identities through what they are, this study considers it more practical to identify the opposite. Although less meaningful than identification (what is), negative identification nonetheless eliminates unnecessary ambiguities surrounding national identities by providing a reasonable range of possibilities for further analysis. The legitimacy of this approach rests in the inherent difficulty of defining national identities: one would find it challenging to define the meaning of the “American nation” or the “Canadian nation” as a national identity can often appear to be self-explanatory, thus making any attempt of elaboration seem futile. However, this study argues that it is significantly easier to define the above terminologies in terms of what they are not. For example, one can begin to distinguish the “Canadian nation” by identifying that it is not American.

The second method is positively identifying key characteristics of national identities. As argued above, it is impossible to observe the exact composition of national identities, for it constitutes a black hole of psychological interactions, group identities, and other personal factors that lack external validity. This dense web of social interaction is not a closed system but a precarious equilibrium within the external societal and sociological system-wide environment.

The contextualization of such mechanisms is reflected in daily interactions. How one interacts with another is a function of group identities, perceptions, and other unobservable factors that cannot be denied their effects. This complexity entails flexibility, and the innate flexibility of national identities is what citizenship seeks to confine, even if it cannot always succeed in so doing. All this means that, to observe national identities meaningfully, one needs to identify critical nodes and characteristics of such identities without necessarily identifying any hierarchical orders or interactions. This method avoids the complexities of personal interactions by identifying group-level features that can be generally applied to a larger in-group population.

These two methods should not be seen as mutually exclusive but complementary, as the former provides general identification directions while the latter enables micro-level descriptions and analyses.

Contextualization in the North American Case

Having clarified the theoretical framework of this study, it is now appropriate to contextualize the framework with North American sovereign citizens' movements, to which this study proposes three objectives. First, by utilizing its two methods (the positive and the negative), this study aims to provide an overarching and better political, rather than a criminal, definition of "sovereign citizens" that encapsulates the societal characteristics of this movement. This should be distinguished from group-level definitions at the system level, as the movement is mainly decentralized. Specifically, this study defines sovereign citizens through what it does not represent and through overarching features of the movement that have external validity to all North American sovereign citizens.

This study argues that North America's sovereign citizens' movement belongs to the latter type of national identity – that is, people voluntarily subscribe to such identities, which naturally translates into the burgeoning of the various forms, ideologies, and organizations loosely defined as sovereign citizens. This alternate reality is distinct from citizenship. Moreover, unlike citizenship, this alternative perception manifests in material phenomena that discursively shape the core principles of a group of sovereign citizens. The lack of centralization meant a lack of central guidelines at the system level, effectively leaving the discursive power to the group or individual level. This explains the burgeoning of both organizationally affiliated and unaffiliated sovereign citizens. This is because, without centralization, the societal construction of the sovereign citizen identity becomes fragmented both geographically and socially, meaning, theoretically, many sovereign citizens would imagine their identity out of thin air. The existence of the modern nation-state, in the Weberian definition, further ensures the decentralization of sovereign citizen ideologies, as any non-state actors – as in the case of the sovereign citizens – cannot construct effective physical system-wide enforcement mechanisms that might unify the various strands of far-right ideologies loosely defined as sovereign citizens.

This study begins by asking what can be said of sovereign citizenship through the first method, i.e., of what it does not represent? To this end, this study defines sovereign citizens as a distinct, broad, and simultaneous affirmation of national identity and a rejection of citizenship, for it portrays an alternative national identity that aberrates from the official national identity associated with citizenship. What this reflects onto reality is the outright rejection by sovereign citizens to conform to laws or any regulations that they deem illegitimate (e.g., driving without a driver's license) while simultaneously affirming an alternative national identity (e.g., arguing in courts using constitutional amendments in the case of the United States). This rejection of

“illegitimate laws,” this study argues, constitutes a rejection of citizenship, providing grounds for avoiding civic duties. Yet the interactions of sovereign citizens with the legal system – whether proactively or passively – justifies this study’s analysis of such identities as “national identities,” for they do not imagine a non-existent nation that seeks to manifest into a State but an identity that is built on an idealized imagination of a corporeal nation, such as the United States or Canada.

This identification of sovereign citizens as a collective group, however, should not lead one to equate the sovereign citizens – a distinctive far-right movement – to other far-right movements in North America, particularly in the United States, such as Q-Anon or White supremacists. To elaborate on this distinction, this study further defines and theorizes that a central and crucial difference between sovereign citizens and other far-right groups is the lack of physical discrimination and, to a lesser extent, the lack of system-level collective destiny. The former meant that sovereign citizens do not discriminate against a particular societal group based on a particular characteristic, race or origin. This significantly distinguishes the movement from other far-right groups. The lack of discrimination towards physical characteristics is exemplified by the active presence of ethnic minorities and immigrants in the sovereign citizen movement (see the “Queen of Canada” Romana Didulo, a now-famous conspiracy theory/sovereign citizen group).

As for a system-level collective density, political orientation is not necessarily related to physical appearance/characteristic – one cannot tell if someone is a Republican by one’s physical characteristics, e.g., eye colour, height, etc. Yet this study finds no evidence of a system-level collective destiny among sovereign citizens. This can be explained due to the sovereign citizen’s movement’s decentralized or even individualized ideologies that inhibit the formation of large, nationwide manifestos, such as those created by groups like Proud Boys. However, this lack of collective destiny must be distinguished from “collective objective,” as the two terms have vastly different meanings. This study defines the former as self-determination to realize a nation-state, exemplified by the manifestos of establishing a white-only America. The latter, however, represents an ongoing struggle without necessarily achieving self-determination, which characterizes many sovereign citizens. Sovereign citizens’ ideologies, therefore, rest on a defiant notion of an alternative national identity that emphasizes the relationship between individuals and the State rather than a foreseeable collective destiny one should pursue, which is present in white supremacist manifestos. In this sense, this study proposes the following:

Proposition 1: Sovereign citizenship is a porous, decentralized, civic, and non-physically discriminatory alternative national identity defined by an explicit rejection of citizenship.

However, the extent to which sovereign citizens specifically reject their political citizenship, and consequently the State, requires further analysis and elaborations due to the diversity of sovereign citizen ideologies. To perform the analyses, this study uses a second method, thus taking a cautious approach that avoids making micro-level characterizations that would decrease this study’s external validity. Subsequently, this study proposes the following,

Proposition 2: Sovereign citizenship is positively characterized by a selective interpretation, compliance, and utilization of laws.

Proposition 2 must be conditioned by Proposition 1, for the opposite would only equate to an archetypical civil dissatisfaction about a particular law. A sovereign citizen’s identity is

characterized by rejecting citizenship while interacting with citizenship. This is particularly demonstrated by the sovereign citizens' legal arguments that often rest on existing legal frameworks. This meant that certain parts of citizenship – and the State – are utilized by sovereign citizens in their constructed alternative reality. Making arguments within the legal framework demonstrates a selective picking that guarantees the protections offered through citizenship while simultaneously maintaining a rejection of the State's legitimacy.

In this way, laws that fulfill or at least are compatible with the principles of the alternative national identities are implicitly accepted. This results in a selective conception of citizenship within the identities of the sovereign citizens, of which a different type of citizenship is imagined and constructed that deems the current State to be illegitimate. This conception of identity through the selective lens of citizenship also meant that sovereign citizens would perceive laws and regulations selectively, of which only specific parts of citizenship are perceived as legitimate. It is through these selective lenses, this study argues, that a sovereign citizen's identity becomes materialized and distinct. It should also be argued that this identity is reinforced constantly through proactive or passive means, resulting in a dynamic relationship of constant interactions.

Methods

Having covered the theoretical framework this study is built on; this study will now elaborate on the methods and case selections.

In its analysis, this study will take a qualitative approach, namely the “most different case” approach. This study will feature two primary document analyses. Specifically, it will examine two legal proceedings. This possesses unique advantages. Legal proceedings – especially criminal cases – require a significant burden of proof regarding competency to stand trial. In other words, legal proceedings eliminate a potential objection to this study; that the defendants are not mentally competent enough to be analyzed. However, legal proceedings also possess their unique disadvantage, especially when analyzing the sovereign citizens movement. These proceedings are written by the very “enemy” of the sovereign citizens, the State. This can induce bias in the analysis as the State's legal system often possesses little leniency or consideration for the sovereign citizens' self-conception. The potential consequences of this bias are negative connotations associated with legal descriptions, which this study seeks to avoid or remedy through a single-case study of a prominent sovereign citizen “guru”. This study strengthens its analysis by demonstrating a broad congruence across different cases, consequently validating its theoretical framework.

The first part, the “most different case” analysis, features two legal proceedings from Canada and the United States, *Meads v. Meads* from Alberta, Canada, and *United States v. Martinez* from Nevada, United States. Both cases – especially the first – are often seen as unprecedented cases that provide a pioneering analysis of the movement combined with the merits of jurisprudence. (Netolitzky 2019, 1167) The advantage of the second case is its temporal relevancy from May 2023, only seven months before the writing of this study. The temporal difference between the two cases – twelve years apart – demonstrates the temporal resiliency and continuity of the sovereign citizens movement in terms of key characteristics. The two cases, then, are complementary to each other, where the first case – well recognized as a demonstration

of sovereign citizen's pseudo-legal arguments (ibid.) – allows this study to test its Propositions to the fullest by being a perfect embodiment of the sovereign citizen movement. The second case builds off the findings of the first case by demonstrating the continuance of the sovereign citizen identity. The difference in the type of these cases – the former being a civil case, the latter a criminal case – removes the potential concern of competency in expressing beliefs by sovereign citizens, as mentioned above. While the contextual background of these cases is essential, it is not the focus of this study. Rather, the focus is on the behavioural patterns of the defendants in both proceedings, in the form of their statements, enabling the identification of general commonalities helpful to test this study's theoretical framework.

The robustness check features the prominent sovereign citizen David Lester Straight. Specifically, it uses a variety of sources, including a lecture series he gave in April 2023. The timing of these lectures is advantageous, as they represent the latest iteration of the sovereign citizen ideology and, subsequently, the conception of national identity the movement currently imagines. By comparing the judicial case analyses to Straight's lectures, this study provides a qualitative robustness check of its initial findings. One could, of course, question the representativeness of Straight's lectures, especially as this study theorizes that the movement is decentralized and lacks any consensual central figure worthy of analysis. But the robustness check operates both ways: the representativeness of Straight's lectures being checked against the findings of two professional judges. The validation of the two Propositions from the side of the State and sovereign citizens thus provides this study with confidence in its findings, as each Proposition will be validated three times and from two perspectives.

Case Analyses

Meads v. Meads

The first case analysis of this study revolves around the Meads v. Meads case, which occurred in Alberta, Canada in 2011. For contextual background, this case involves Mr. Dennis Larry Meads (hereafter referred to as Dennis to avoid confusion) and Ms. Crystal Lynne Meads (hereafter referred to as Crystal) appearing in front of Associate Chief Justice J.D. Rooke (hereafter referred to as Rooke). This civil case involves Crystal bringing property action against Dennis after the couple divorced (p.3). While this case is not exceptional in its judicial contents, it became famous after Rooke's adjudication, which involved extensive categorization and recordings of the sovereign citizen's movement—from a judicial/legal perspective. Similarly, though Netolitzky (2019) has commented extensively on the case's shortcomings, including its limited scope in its descriptions of the broader movement, he concedes that there is value present in these descriptions. The proceeding's detailed records of Dennis, a sovereign citizen, including his motions and behaviours outside and during the proceedings, provide a rare and credible record this study can focus on in its analysis of the sovereign citizen movement.

To validate Proposition 1 in this case is not difficult, as Dennis' behaviours reflect the typical mindset of sovereign citizens. The first noticeable characteristic of Dennis comes from his self-identification.

“Mr. Meads commenced his submissions by noting that he was not Dennis Meads, the ‘corporate identity’, but was present as Dennis Larry Meads, ‘a flesh and blood man’. He said this Court is a house of law.” (p.4, [13])

The three quoted terms are worthy of more significant analysis here. The term “corporate,” in this case, although not immediately addressed by Rooke, apparently refers to the legal Canadian identity of Dennis. That is, Dennis Meads is registered as a Canadian citizen. Dennis thus rejects being a “Canadian citizen,” for he rejects his identity vis-à-vis the Canadian State but adopts an alternative identity of “a flesh and blood man.” (ibid.) This term is significant in terms of sovereign citizen semantics, for it does not refer to the State but is a direct expression of the individual-based alternative conception of national identity that exists independent of the State. The term “a house of law” (ibid.) appears unconventional but is not surprising, as it can be seen as a corporeal manifestation of the sovereign citizen identity – the refusal to be entirely subjected to Canadian law, as the term “house” does not imply legal authorities. In contrast, the term “court” would imply otherwise.

Notwithstanding the minutiae of semantical minutiae behind Dennis’ specific use of these terms, the most apparent feature of his argument is the explicit rejection of himself as a Canadian citizen, that he is not subjected to legally imposed duties. In the succeeding paragraph, Dennis explains his interpretation of “corporate identity” (ibid). This term, according to Dennis, refers to his certificate of birth (which is issued by a State authority), and that it is “bonded and registered in the Bank of Canada and the state stock exchange, and that registration had an imputed income.” (p.4 [15]) This demonstration of belief in a piece of objectively incorrect information demonstrates Dennis’ adherence to the alternative reality the sovereign citizens’ movement constructs, where it paints an alternative and parallel institutional framework, where such statements constitute the bulwark against legal consequences from the current reality, that in this case revolves around marital properties.

Having made his initial statements, Dennis then proceeds to the following statement, “I, Dennis Larry Meads, and for the record a child of the almighty God Jehovah, and not a child of the state.” (p.6[22]) This should be examined from legal and sociological perspectives, which allows this study to vindicate Proposition 1. Legally, this statement represents a rejection of legal citizenship, where an explicit rejection of Dennis’ relationship with the Canadian State has been unambiguously expressed. The sociological perspective helps this study to validate the remaining parts of Proposition 1, namely, that sovereign citizens – while defined by a rejection of citizenship – represent a decentralized, civil, and physically non-discriminatory alternative identity. To examine these three elements, this study looks for evidence of any organizational backing, specific references to a particular ethnic group, or whether any discriminatory actions are recorded. Answering “yes” to any of these three criteria would nullify the proposition. However, the case proves otherwise.

First, the proceeding does not explicitly reference the presence of a dominant sovereign citizen organization that is behind the causes of Dennis, nor does Dennis’ statements refer to or imply a more significant societal cause, as one would expect from organized litigants. The rest of Proceeding’s texts also reflect this: although beyond the scope of this essay, Rooke’s extensive writing, as Netolitzky (2019) mentions, has only covered a limited scope of the broader movement.

However, it is still necessary to show the decentralized nature of the movement through Dennis' case. This study's definition of decentralization refers to a lack of easily identifiable central figures, individuals, or organizations that can be associated with or related to the sovereign citizens' movement, and the Meads vs. Meads case does not illuminate the existence of such organizations. This is reflected in the first part of Dennis' declaration, where he is "a child of the almighty God Jehovah." (p.6[22]) This explicit expression of his religious adherence is repeated in succeeding paragraphs, where he asserts the Bible is the "Maximus of Law." (p.8[33]) This recognition, however, does not directly imply any organizational backing (secularly), nor does it suggest an ideology or any discrimination against any group. A list of documents by Dennis is also provided by Dennis within the proceedings, including a letter by Dennis addressed to Rooke that instructs Rooke "under the guidance and direction with the Almighty God Jehovah watching over us through His Son and Reigning King Jesus Christ." (p.10[41]) This archetypical reference to the religion of Dennis does not infer any organizational backing, such as a superior organization providing legal support to Dennis' motions. This study can find no evidence that Dennis hired any counsel to assist with his motions, whereas Crystal did. The repeated lack of corporeal or secular figures referenced within Dennis' notions also prompts the reasonable conclusion of a decentralized cause that Dennis adheres to, which is that of the sovereign citizen movement.

A reasonable objection against this conclusion would be that the lack of reference to organization does not imply that the movement is decentralized. Indeed, this is the suspicion of Rooke, where he notes,

"From the structure of the OPCA community and the nature of his materials, I believe one or more persons are advising Mr. Meads. I hope he will show them these Reasons, and scrutinize their response. I believe Mr. Meads has the ability to meaningfully evaluate their reply. Mr. Meads may also benefit from speaking to and indeed retaining legal counsel." (p.158[733])

However, this suspicion should not be taken as a confirmation of an organization behind Dennis' motions. The wordings of Rooke, where he suggests that "one or more persons are advising Mr. Meads" (*ibid.*), should be seen as only a reasonable speculation, considering Rooke's documenting of various "gurus" within the broader movement, which is included in the case's reasoning but beyond the scope of this study. This reflects an absence of a centralized structure within the sovereign citizens' movement, where no organization is large enough to claim a dominant position. Furthermore, the word "community" is also a particular choice, with the word suggesting a more decentralized structure consisting of members not collectively affiliated with an organization. This interpretation of the wording is also corroborated by Dennis' autonomy during the proceedings, where Rooke described him as "a sophisticated and educated person" (p.1[3]), suggesting that Dennis acts on his own behalf and has full awareness of his actions, which a potential counterfactual involving a sovereign citizen organization acting on his behalf cannot explain. Therefore, it is reasonable for this study to conclude that this case reflects the decentralized structure of the sovereign citizen movement.

This study, furthermore, does not find any reference to ethnic groups or any discriminatory actions against any groups based on physical characteristics, such as race. To contextualize, the word "black" only appeared 16 times within the case Reasoning, which runs 159 pages long. Similarly, "immigrant" or "race" are absent from the texts. However, as seen above, one interesting aspect is religion, which Dennis repeatedly referenced. Rather than

discriminatory, these assertions validate Proposition 2, where they do not imply discrimination against non-believers, such as the abovementioned letter from Dennis on p.10[41]. The expression "... Almighty God Jehovah watching over us..." (p.10[41]) demonstrates the extended applicability of the sovereign citizens' legal interpretations, as shown by the term "us" to Rooke, even though no reference to Rooke's religious affiliation has been made within the case Reasoning. Even if one assumes Rooke is affiliated with the Christian faith, it is reasonable to doubt whether Dennis would consider his affiliation acceptable. This example validates Proposition 1 that the sovereign citizen identity is not physically discriminatory, as this study has defined. Further, it is a civic national identity not premised on biological characteristics, such as ethnicity or skin colour.

The last part of Proposition 1 is the assertion that the sovereign citizen identity is a national identity, to which this study finds evidence. In this context, the term "nation" should not be premised on the physical boundaries of States, but the imagined communities exist within the context of society. In this sense, just as the proposition states, the sovereign citizen identity is an alternative national identity imagined and premised on the existing nation by explicitly rejecting the State. A reasonable objection is to doubt the national nature of the sovereign citizen identity. To refute this, throughout the proceedings, the strategy of Dennis against the court is a confrontational one. Although Rooke has commented positively on Dennis' behaviours that he was generally polite (p.158[735]), Dennis' claims over the illegitimacy of the court show not only a rejection of citizenship but also a rejection of the current reality. By rejecting the legitimacy of the institutions, Dennis' assertions portray an alternative reality that mandates the manners in which they ought to work. In other words, the alternative reality premised on the sovereign citizen identity is a national identity in that it not only rejects the legitimacy of State-wide institutions but also argues for a new functioning of them. In this sense, it is inappropriate to suggest the existence of two parallel identities in the case of Dennis and the sovereign citizens movement in general, but the existence of an alternate imagined reality in which the sovereign citizen ideologies prevail and determine the functioning of existing institutions.

This also implies additional insights about the understanding of "national identity" in the context of sovereign citizens, that the concept cannot be constrained within the bounds of territorial States. This meant the "nation," as an ultimate manifestation of an "imagined community," should be considered in an abstract and sociological sense. In this sense, one is susceptible to assume that Dennis has "helpers" preparing and assisting his court motions outside of the court. However, it would not be reasonable to conclude that Dennis is related to them ethnically – although it might be the case – or based on other physical characteristics except their shared belief in the sovereign citizen ideology. This assertion is also reflected in Dennis' lack of claim over ethnicity or other physical characteristics during his dispositions. Therefore, the "nation identity" in this case, as mentioned above, is a civil one bound by a common ideology. It exists within an invisible abstract sociological space beyond the territorial borders of nation-states. However, suggesting that this sociological space is either closed or unlimited in scope is also fallacious. Instead, as this case has demonstrated, this space is a porous one characterized by its confrontational interactions with the State. The interactions between the two are apparent, with Dennis appearing in court being one example. How the interactions are characterized is captured by Proposition 2

Proposition 2, however, presents a nuanced picture within the context of this case, where it would first pass the condition test: that its existence is conditioned on Proposition 1. It must be

argued that because Dennis rejects Canadian citizenship, he self-proclaims to be immune to “illegitimate” laws as he views it, or that he rejects such “illegitimate” laws, he rejects his Canadian citizenship. This order is vital for the two rationales to emphasize different subjects: the first emphasizes Dennis’ relationship to citizenship, and the second emphasizes Dennis’ relationship to laws. In this sense, the vindication of Proposition 1 favours the first ratiocination rather than the second, for the rejection of laws – and, subsequently, civic duties – comes from the inherent rejection of citizenship as a legal-binding identity.

Indeed, Dennis’ succeeding statements confirm the first ratiocination above upon Rooke’s explanation to Dennis that the court would apply Canadian laws. In response to Rooke’s declarations, he states,

“This is an admiral court, your jurisdiction is on water, it’s not on land; I am a freeman on the land, and for you to play down some of the statements I am making is not acceptable unless you prove it to me in law, and just saying it to me is nothing.” (p.6[24])

This illustrates that Dennis’ logic is premised on a rejection of citizenship. Dennis expresses discontent over Rooke’s dismissal of his statements because of him being “a freeman on the land” (p.6[24]). In this sense, Dennis’ protest is premised on his self-conception of identity, where he rejects his Canadian citizenship and adopts an alternative one. In other words, Dennis rejects the court’s jurisdiction because he rejects Canadian citizenship, not in the opposite direction. This then validates Proposition 1 from a legal perspective, where a rejection of citizenship defines the sovereign citizen. Contextualized to this particular case, this is illustrated by Dennis’ repeated declaration of belonging to a separate legal category that differentiates his legal status from that of a citizen.

Having completed the condition test, this study moves on to validate Proposition 2, which posits a selective interaction and interpretation of laws by sovereign citizens to their advantage, and this process characterizes the national identity of the sovereign citizens. Dennis’ following filings best capture this selective process,

“Mr. Meads said the contents of the envelope had been ‘filed internationally’: a UCC filing ... ‘UCC’ means the ‘Uniform Commercial Code’, which is U.S. commercial legislation.” (p.7[26])

And the following by Rooke,

“I refused the envelope and noted that if the envelope was abandoned, then I would put those materials in the garbage. I reassured Mr. Meads that I will apply the laws of Alberta and Canada, and that while he is in court, he will follow the court’s rules. Mr. Meads’ reply was that was ‘unacceptable’, and he claimed that the ‘UCC’ is ‘universal law’.” (p.7[27])

UCC, which concerns commercial operations in the United States, is referenced in both excerpts, with Dennis filing additional UCC documentation in subsequent developments. This study does not concern the specific symbolic importance or psychological factors prompting Dennis to make such decisions to use UCC. However, this study seeks to demonstrate a selective use of laws and regulations compatible with their alternative conception of national identity. In this case, the reference of a legal piece entirely ungermane for the case, which concerns a divorce, shows the sovereign citizens’ selective processing and interpretation of laws. Furthermore, considering that Dennis rejects Canadian laws, this use of UCC, a secular law

besides his religious preachings, shows the corporeality and solidification of the sovereign citizen identity from an ideology to a real-world identity.

This selective interpretation's nature, in this case, is undoubtedly material and biased towards Dennis. The context for the UCC filing is that "Mr. Meads stated that his birth certificate has an associated bond with large amounts of money that could easily discharge in full the claims advanced by Ms. Meads." (p.7[26]). This shows that the motive behind the UCC filing is a material one, where Dennis attempts to avoid payments by providing an alternative source that he believes to contain funds. The critical takeaway here, however, is that the selection interpretation of laws is a material and biased one. In other words, sovereign citizens interpret laws selectively to achieve their ends, as seen in this case.

However, as a reasonable objection would posit, this economic motivation behind the filing does not nullify the study's other findings, particularly concerning Proposition 1. An economic motive behind selective interpretations of laws cannot be mutually exclusive with Dennis' rejection of his citizenship, as previously shown, where the rejection – and subsequent selective interpretation – of laws comes from his rejection of citizenship. In this sense, rejection of citizenship precedes rejection of laws. The various "rituals" performed by Dennis within his filings to Rooke and Rooke's positive comments about Dennis' behaviours suggest a deeper religious-like cause behind his actions, concluding that all actions driven by pure avarice present an incomplete picture.

However, concluding that Dennis – and sovereign citizens – reject all laws not interpreted by them is also inaccurate. The nuance within Proposition 2 and the part that clouds the nature of Dennis' motives comes not from his selective interpretation and application of laws but his selective adherence to Canadian laws. Although claiming that he is not subjected to secular laws, Rooke also notes the following, augmenting an additional layer of complexity to sovereign citizens' selection process of laws,

"On March 18, 2011, Veit J. ordered interim monthly child and spousal support payments from Mr. Meads. My understanding is that to date Mr. Meads has generally honoured that obligation." (p.3[10])

"Mr. Meads explained he has yet to file his 2010 and 2011 income tax returns, and he did acknowledge that was a task he needed to address. He promised to provide that information by September 1, 2012." (p.7[29])

These excerpts from the case Reasoning, especially the second excerpt, create a nuanced picture of the selective process sovereign citizens use regarding laws, for these excerpts directly contradict many statements mentioned above about Dennis' rejection of laws. While the first excerpt on child support can be explained by Dennis' later claim that he paid "on his own accord" (p.5[17]), the motives for the second excerpt are not explained fully within Reasoning. Notwithstanding the lack of explicit, what this study can reasonably deduct from this observation is a validation of Proposition 2, that the selective process must be seen as a duality, involving not only a selective interpretation of law but also a selective compliance of laws and a selective non-confrontational interaction with the State. This is because, given Dennis' explicit Canadian laws, it is counterintuitive to some extent that he would file taxes for himself without an explicit reference to his "corporate identity." The only explanation, then, is that the selection process, as elaborated within the theory section, notwithstanding the economic motives behind Dennis' UCC

filings, cannot be understood as a purely cost-benefit analysis, where only self-beneficial laws are being filed and complied with by sovereign citizens. Dennis' compliance with the court's question over tax filings suggests the selection process can be further premised on an acknowledgement of the State, where sovereign citizens acknowledge the presence of the State, as elaborated in the theory. However, this acknowledgement should not be taken as compliance. In this case, while acknowledging the State, Dennis chooses to comply and interact with the State selectively. This selective process is characterized by Dennis' simultaneous rejection of all Canadian laws but selectively agrees to comply with a subset of them, namely filing taxes, as shown in this case. Nonetheless, the excerpts above have validated Proposition 2, although also providing a more nuanced picture beyond the theories of Proposition 2.

United States v. Martinez

The *Meads vs. Meads* case provides rich insights into the conceptions of sovereign citizens. However, a potential concern and objection may come from the civic nature of the case. Although the Case involves a detailed description of the sovereign citizen's identity, it does not involve a confrontation with the State and, perhaps more important, does not require high mental competency to participate. However, the *United States v. Martinez* further complements this study for being a criminal case. The direct enforcement of the State through force means a more significant uncovering of the substantive conceptions of the identity of sovereign citizens.

For contextual background, the case is recent, with the study finding the latest document to be from May 2023, in Nevada. The case involves Joshua Martinez appearing in front of Magistrate Judge Daniel J. Albrechts regarding a criminal proceeding, where Martinez is arrested for online threats against a Las Vegas Police Detective, Detective Mead. (p.1) The Proceeding in May 2023 concerns Martinez attempting to disapprove the warrants issued against him and suppress evidence. (Ibid.) However, a shortcoming of this case text is the lack of detailed descriptions of Martinez in court, unlike *Meads v. Meads*. Notwithstanding this shortcoming, this study nevertheless finds significant support within the case that validates the study's propositions. However, Proposition 2 is more directly supported by the case than Proposition 1, which is only indirectly supported.

Proposition 1, on the rejection of citizenship by sovereign citizens, is demonstrated by the threat Martinez has been arrested for and indicted upon, as the proceedings record one of Martinez's statements posted online prior to his indictment,

“This is Detective Kenneth Mead with the Metropolitan Police Department. He is an enemy of the constitution and has tried to make my life a living hell but has failed. To any activist here in Las Vegas please keep an eye out for him. I also have his resume just in Case you want more intel on him. Contact me for more information.” (p.2)

Martinez's threat against Detective Mead demonstrates a confrontational stance adopted against law enforcement, which, again adopting the Weberian notion of the State, meant a rejection of State institutions. This rejection of citizenship, reflected by the rejection and loathing of law enforcement, is further exemplified in the following paragraphs,

“Between December 2020 and the middle of January 2021, Martinez made numerous Facebook posts containing anti-government statements, often advocating violence against the

government and law enforcement. Some of these posts include veiled threats and obvious references to Mead.” (Ibid.)

This further exemplifies a rejection of citizenship, as Proposition 1 has theorized to define the sovereign citizen identity. This is clearly illustrated by the two paragraphs above, where the rejection of citizenship is reflected through Martinez’s enmity against law enforcement. However, this hostile stance alone cannot constitute a rejection of citizenship, nor can Martinez’s active attempt to instigate violence against the government. This active attempt to overthrow the central authority complements and validates Proposition 1 because, as shown in Proposition 1 and seen in Dennis’ case, this represents a desire to replace the current reality with an alternative reality, or at least a dissatisfaction with the current reality and a desire to destroy it.

A doubt can be raised about the “authenticity” of Martinez’s acts against the government and law enforcement. The current texts presented here – a reasonable objection would posit – do not differentiate and accentuate the distinctive features characteristic of a sovereign citizen, as Dennis has shown. It is reasonable to assume that Martinez’s hostile remarks against authorities can be easily found among the inmate population. To validate Propositions 1 and 2, this study must be able to differentiate the distinct sovereign citizen nature of Martinez’s statements.

The first part of the differentiation revolves around the ratiocination between citizenship and laws, as mentioned in the first case. To show that citizenship precedes the rejection of laws, this study notes the following descriptions of Martinez by the case proceeding,

“LVMPD knew Martinez as an anti-government/anti-law enforcement activist who hosted YouTube videos regarding ‘1 amendment audits.’...For example, Martinez documented Southern Nevada Health District officials attempting to enforce COVID restrictions and posted videos of him protesting certain trials involving individuals he supported at the Lloyd D. George Federal Courthouse.” (Ibid.)

This shows that Martinez’s motives are indiscriminate. This can be analyzed spatially and temporally. The spatial generality surrounding the rejection of citizenship means that Martinez’s attack and rejection of State institutions are expected to be indiscriminate and wide-ranging. This is shown in this case, where Martinez attacks Nevada health authorities for the conflict between the State and the alternative reality Martinez has constructed. In the case of Detective Mead, it is due to self-proclaimed unfairness by Mead in previous prosecutions against him and “prosecuting a state-court criminal case against Martinez-of persecuting activists and making his activism more difficult.” (Ibid.) This shows and validates Proposition 1 from several perspectives. First, the hostility of Martinez against Mead shows the exclusivity of Martinez’s alternative reality, where the perceived impediment of his activism contributes to his direct attack against Mead. This, like Dennis’ conception of the sovereign citizen identity, shows the exclusive nature of this alternative reality, which is, at best, substitutive and, at worst, antithetical to the actual reality. The direct hostility shown by Martinez against Mead, then, shows an ongoing struggle against the current reality, which equates to a rejection of citizenship rather than a rejection of law. In other words, Martinez’s hostility towards Mead is not due to any personal characteristics of Mead himself but the system Mead represents.

Further, the temporal generality mainly stems from Martinez’s attack against Nevada health authorities on COVID-19 regulations. The attack’s substance is not essential here, but the temporal contemporariness is worth noting. This attack on COVID-19 policies and his hostility

towards Mead demonstrates the temporal adoption of Martinez's conception, where the conception of the sovereign citizen identity evolves against the State's responses. In other words, Martinez's rejection of law originates not from the substance of a particular law but from his rejection of citizenship.

The above analysis first refutes the objection regarding the "authenticity" of Martinez's statements by demonstrating the more profound rejection of citizenship behind his actions. Also, it leads to the conclusion that sovereign citizen identity is a national identity constructed within a porous but abstract sociological space. The above analysis shows that Martinez is on a crusade against the State, and the opposition against the State is observed regardless of the situation, whether it is about impeding his movement or about COVID-19 regulations. Further, Martinez's opposition towards the "enforcement" of COVID-19 regulations, rather than the substance *per se* of Nevada's COVID-19 rules, suggests a view of illegitimacy by the State when enforcing such rules. These all show an explicit rejection of citizenship and illustrate the porous nature of a national identity that claims legitimacy to the State by maintaining its central underlining hostility against the current State that evolves along the trajectories of State institutions.

The other three elements of Proposition 1, decentralization, civil, and non-physically discriminatory, are also evident within the case proceedings. Martinez, unlike Dennis, is more active online, as shown above. As shown above, this has also garnered followers and supporters (*ibid.*) Compared to Dennis, who closely resembles a lone-wolf sovereign citizen, Martinez appears to have an active online presence, although one that fails to achieve a central role within the sovereign citizen movement. However, the scale of operation does not equate to the activeness of the organization. The court shows that while Martinez actively encourages his followers to inquire him about Mead, the court concludes it is an encouragement by Martinez for additional actions against Mead by his followers. (p.5) Additional information from the Southern Poverty Law Centre shows Martinez as the People's Right Nevada leader, a far-right group operating in Nevada. (Turner). This study, in its extensive research, fails to find additional material related to the organization or any significant online presence. This meets the decentralization proposition, as the organization fails to attract public attention even at the local level, not to mention at the state or national level. The lack of organization is further demonstrated by the lack of documentation by the court of any significant participants within Martinez's movement, as shown by the following statements,

"Facebook and YouTube users from around the country-many of whom were activists sharing Martinez's ideologies-commented on Martinez's posts and videos, supporting his allegations that Mead and Dickerson were targeting him." (*Ibid.*)

The court's referral to Martinez's supporters collectively as users shows the miniscule scale on which Martinez's conception operates. The lack of reference by the court to any substantive organizational support in the physical world outside the online community further demonstrates the overall decentralized structure of the sovereign citizens movement. Indeed, the presence of a central organization would result in explicit records by the court about organizational affiliations, and there are none.

Similarly, the case validates the other two characteristics: civil and non-physically discriminating. The words "God" and "religion" do not appear within the text of the Case, nor do non-legal interviews given by Martinez indicate specific ethnic or religious references, as indicated by the new report below,

“He [Martinez] told the Review-Journal days before his arrest, that his main effort with Bundy’s group was holding Las Vegas police accountable when they stop people on the streets... ‘We don’t believe in bowing down to police,’ he said. **‘We’re anti-corrupt government. Not just anti-government. We need government.’**” (German 2021, emphasis added by author)

Although these statements are clearly in Martinez’s defence, these statements nonetheless show that Martinez’s target is the authorities with an emphasis on law enforcement. This nullifies any suspicions of the ethnic or religious motivations behind the movement. Compared to the specific references to Christianity by Dennis, Martinez’s case further demonstrates the civic nature of the sovereign citizen identity, that it cannot be defined by ethnicity or religion. Similarly, the court and the reporting above show no indication of any discrimination against physical characteristics, especially considering the family name "Martinez" is commonly considered to have a Hispanic origin by its common occurrence in Spain and Mexico. The evidence above permits this study to validate Proposition 1.

Regarding Proposition 2, the condition test, as shown above, has already been passed, where the rejection of laws is indiscriminate and originates from the rejection of citizenship. *United States v. Martinez*, however, furthers the selection process established by *Meads v. Meads* by illustrating the selective utilization. In other words, not only does Martinez selectively accept the existence of specific laws, but he also selectively "plays along with the rules" by using current laws in his defence.

The selective rejection of laws by Martinez, similar to Dennis, is visible when Martinez declares Mead an “enemy of the constitution,” (p.2), suggesting an alternative interpretation – thus rejection – of the prevailing laws embodied by Mead. Similarly, when Martinez, a convicted felon and thus prohibited from possessing firearms, claims that “his disarmament is inconsistent with the Nation’s historical tradition of firearm regulations and is therefore unconstitutional,” (ibid.), it shows a selective process over the legitimacy of the application of laws, that in this case, the laws the court enforces is disputed because it is illegitimate. Other incidents of selective interpretation of laws are also present during later stages of the Proceeding when the court notes,

“But Martinez’s arguments misapply the probable cause standard... Martinez’s arguments are instead based on the faulty premise that an affiant must prove that a defendant committed a crime before ever obtaining a warrant to investigate them for that crime. The Court declines to decide Martinez’s motion to suppress on these grounds.” (p.5)

This again demonstrates an iconoclastic interpretation of the law by Martinez compared to that of the court. Given the abovementioned remarks, as a reasonable objection would posit, Martinez’s diverging interpretation of probable cause cannot be concluded as solely a sign of inadequate understanding of the legal framework. The previous remarks of Martinez’s question of the constitutionality of his disarmament indicate a more profound identity-level conviction, that of the sovereign citizens, that provides an alternative and selective framework for such interpretation to materialize.

However, as mentioned above, this case’s most exciting analysis point comes from the selective utilization and, consequently, acknowledgement of the State’s legal system. This is best observed in three instances, with each instance signalling an additional perspective and providing additional details into the selection mechanism of the sovereign citizens:

- the selective acknowledgement of the existing legal system
- the selective acknowledgement of the existing State
- the selective strategic utilization of existing laws

Although the first two points are present within *Meads v. Meads*, this case's criminal nature provides a more detailed analysis.

The first instance is Martinez's reference to the "Nation's historical tradition of firearm regulations." (p.3). By tradition, instead of referencing religion or non-material laws, as Dennis does, Martinez references the "Supreme Court's recent decision in *New York State Rifle & Pistol Ass'n, Inc. v. Bruen*." (Ibid.) Martinez's arguments are entirely based on previous case laws, as this case has shown. Although the court dismisses Martinez's motion, as it concludes that *Bruen* does not overrule the previous decisions (Ibid.), the reference to previous case laws shows a coherent, although selective, acknowledgement of the existing law framework similar to when Dennis agrees to file taxes. This acknowledgement stems from the explicit reliance and utilization of appropriate legal avenues by Martinez in his defence. In other words, Martinez's interactions with the State in the form of the legal system as a sovereign citizen better demonstrate the flexible mechanism between the sovereign citizen identity and the State characterized by a selective process.

The second instance comes from the bolded texts above on the previous page. This study bolded the texts to demonstrate Martinez's selective acknowledgement of the existing State. This contrasts with Dennis, who makes no reference throughout his case to the Canadian State but only implicitly does so by agreeing to file taxes (and coming to the court). Although the statement can be interpreted as a defence by Martinez about his indictments, the acknowledgement of the "Government" shows an implicit acceptance of selective interpretation of the existing State. An objection here would question the sincerity of Martinez's statement of whether such statements are given to the media to downplay his criminal actions. However, to address such objections is beyond this study's scope. Proposition 1, which outlines the defining feature of sovereign citizens, which Martinez's case has already validated, meant that regardless of the true intentions behind Martinez's statement, it would be premised on a selective acknowledgement of the State. In other words, Martinez's expression of such statements meant the existence of an implicit approval within the constructed sovereign citizen identity of such a statement.

Having addressed potential objections, the implication of this statement, however, is tantamount, as this complicates the nature of the interactions within the selection process but also validates the latter part of Proposition, as the selective acknowledgement of the State would mean selective compliance with the law. The broader implication, however, is that the relationship between the sovereign citizen movement and the State should not be antagonistic. This is not to undermine Proposition 1 because rejecting citizenship is not antithetical to a selective acknowledgement of the existing State, as acknowledgement does not equate to recognition. Nonetheless, it denotes a porous selection process utilized by sovereign citizens, that the selection process does not necessarily happen within the abstract sociological space of the constructed sovereign citizen identity but can happen in conjuncture with an active acknowledgment of the State, as seen in this case.

The third and the last instance concerns the selective utilization of State laws. Unlike conventional portrayals, the legal arguments by Martinez are far from being entirely illogical, as shown in the following excerpts,

“However, the remaining categories lack objective standards. As Martinez points out by referencing the Eleventh Circuit's decision in *United States v. Blake*, a search of a Facebook account typically differs from a traditional search because Facebook can search an account and provide precise data for law enforcement.” (p.12)

This excerpt shows a defence by Martinez regarding the police warrant against his Facebook account. The Facebook warrant, containing seven categories, has authorized law enforcement to seize a comprehensive range of information from Martinez's Facebook account, which Martinez objects to. (Ibid.) Facebook offers the option for law enforcement to seek specific information germane to the matter concerned instead of a general range of information. (Ibid.) In other words, Martinez questions the particularity of the Facebook warrant. The court subsequently agrees to this in its subsequent comment,

“Without any objective standards, like limits on time or topics, the warrant could authorize law enforcement to seize many years of data... the Court does not find that-other than category 1 and 7-the categories in the warrant were sufficiently particular.” (p.12-13)

This conclusion was later followed by the court's grant of suppressing the evidence collected under categories 2 to 6 of the Facebook warrant. (p.15) However, this demonstration of due process is also relevant to this study because it shows the selective application of State laws by Martinez in his interaction with the State. In other words, Martinez is “playing along” with the laws to achieve his objectives. This is unsurprising given the selective acknowledgement of the State seen above. However, it again reveals the porous nature of the selection process, that it must not be treated as passive, with the sovereign citizen on the receiving end. Instead, this case shows the selection process to be dynamic, with active interpretation, compliance, acknowledgement, and utilization. With these, this study validates Proposition 2.

Robustness Check

Having analyzed the two court cases, this study proposes a robustness check of the findings. This robustness check aims to validate the previous cases' findings from the perspective of the sovereign citizens instead of the State. This robustness check stems from this study's effort to mitigate the potential bias induced by court cases, where a State-centred perspective may induce negative connotations when describing sovereign citizens. By introducing the robustness check, this study presents a balanced analysis of the sovereign citizen ideology and conceptions of national identity.

David Lester Straight (Hereafter referred to as David Straight) is considered one of the most prominent sovereign citizens in the United States in recent years, notwithstanding his arrest for selling fake license plates (Gilbert 2023). David Straight is closely associated with the organization “American State Nationals” (Gilbert 2023) and has been giving lectures throughout the United States and Canada, preaching his sovereign citizen ideology. Although the contents of the lectures change slightly after each series, this study can identify and use common characteristics to validate Propositions 1 and 2.

Proposition 1, which outlines the definition of sovereign citizen identity, is validated in this case. The most critical component of the proposition, the rejection of citizenship, is validated through David Straight's organizational affiliation, the so-called "American State Nationals" (Gilbert 2023). Although David Straight's lectures do not feature Straight's explicit promotion of the ideology, other participants do. This official and on-the-record promotion leads this study to its official webpage, aorhelp.com, where it is noted the following,

"Becoming a State National restores your status as a party to the Constitution and other founding documents, and the positive guarantees contained within... It frees you from being subject to statutory legislation, which is rightfully only supposed to be applicable to those involved in commerce and contracts, and public officials in the course of their duties." (AOR)

The proclamation of breaking free from the legislation by becoming a "National" shows the explicit rejection of citizenship since citizenship, as theorized, implies the acceptance of civic duty. Like Martinez, this rejection of citizenship is overarching, as it does not specify the laws or legislations it seeks to reject. This proclamation also provides a clear relationship between the rejection of citizenship and the rejection of laws. As it implies the restoration of status following one's transformation from a citizen to being a National, and only as the consequence of such transformation is one liberated from legislation. This meant that citizenship precedes the legislation and demonstrates the more profound ideological conviction rooted within the sovereign citizen identity. It rejects legislation because it rejects citizenship, leading Proposition 2 to pass the condition test.

Similar statements have also been observed during Straight's lectures, where he proclaims that the Bible and the Founding Documents of the United States are the primary sources of law (P2 49:44). The rejection of the current administration is more explicitly seen when Straight rejects the legitimacy of the Biden administration, claiming Biden was dead in 2020, and that a double is currently ruling the United States (P1 2:29:33). This claim is further buttressed by his claim that the corporation under the name "United States of America" was dead under Trump, and that the current corporation is called "White House Office Inc." (Ibid.) Both statements demonstrate a rejection of citizenship – that the current administration is illegitimate and thus should not be followed. The notion of illegitimacy is mainly seen in Straight's former conspiratorial statement, as it implies that the ruling of the United States is now a hoax. A reasonable objection here would imply that the statement simply supports Trump. However, this misconstrues the target of Straight's statement, which is towards the State, not Biden as a person. This is further shown as Straight proclaims that "They know nothing about law, and about five hundred [inaudible] in Congress, they don't know." (P1 38:32). This implies that, like Martinez, Straight's target was towards the State in its entirety, as there are well-known Trump supporters within Congress, such as Majorie Taylor Greene. These statements, then, are signs of Straight's rejection of citizenship and that alternative reality has been constructed according to sovereign citizen ideologies.

Unlike the court cases, however, Straight's organization and lecture include explicit construction of an alternative reality created upon sovereign citizen ideologies and manifested through daily interactions with the State. However, unlike Dennis, whose reference to his alternative reality revolves around non-material elements with explicit religious references, Straight's construction involves detailed imaginations that involve daily life. Straight's extensive use of real-life examples is the most apparent feature of such construction. However, these

examples lack specificity and accuracy, as Straight mainly does not include names of the story's characters by referring to them by their occupations. For instance, Straight mentions the a Cornell law student telling him that people are going to the "common law," instead of "admiralty laws" (P1). However, the descriptions provided by Straight lack any verifiable details available to third parties, as this study fails to find any indication online of the existence of such an event. A similar story involved Straight suing the State of New York for tolls incurred due to the use of the Interstate, for which he won and received large amounts of compensation (P2). However, this study fails to find a specific reference to the case online that explicitly mentions David Straight. Straight similarly claims that the federal government owns the Interstate highways (P2), which this study quickly debunks using the Department of Transportation's webpage, indicating state ownership of the highways and, consequently, the states' legality in collecting tolls ("Interstate Frequently Asked Questions"). Lastly, Straight's claims also concern the American State, where he claims Canada has been the 13th district of the District of Columbia since 1778 (P1 2:35:00). This claim is wrong. However, combined with the examples, it illustrates an alternative reality parallel but encroaching vis-à-vis the actual reality.

These examples also show that the constructed identity is a national one. The examples above, although touching on different topics, all show a common characteristic: an idealized United States constructed along the sovereign citizen ideology. It creates a fantasy world in which sovereign citizen ideals are realized and put into action. It is also clear that in addition to the rejection of the current citizenship, this constructed reality portrays the existence of an alternative United States within not only an abstract sociological but also historical space, and along with the constructed reality comes the constructed citizenship. However, as seen from the previous cases, this construction is porous and interactive, as shown in this case, where it closely relates to the current American political arena.

The other three conditions of Proposition 1, decentralization, civic, and non-physically discriminating, are also demonstrated in Straight's lectures. First, the lack of centralization is more challenging to demonstrate in this case, as Straight is the leader of a relatively well-known sovereign citizen organization. However, both third-party and primary sources show the decentralized nature of the organization concerning the system-level sovereign citizen movement. Specifically, the third-party sources from Google show the existence of not one but multiple web pages portraying to represent the "American State National." It was only through Straight's Telegram page that this study managed to find aorhelp.com. Similarly, Straight, during his lectures, never mentions any organizational structure or any position within broader organizations.

Similarly, Straight's identity is civic. This also needs further analysis, as Straight and his wife, Bonnie, use explicit religious references, including but not limited to portrayals of religious apocalyptic scenes. (P2) Similar mentioning of religious miracles, such as Straight's refusal to take heart medication and miraculous healing following his claim of having five heart attacks and six strokes every ten days at 16:00 in 2013, of which he explains his refusal of the medications as divine instructions. (P2 27:33) This type of religious reference is like Dennis' case but more intense. Straight's preachings, however, do not have any explicit religious reference, nor does aorhelp.com contain any religious teachings that are commonly present within other far-right extremist groups. The civic nature of Straight's ideology comes from his portrayal of who is the enemy. To Straight, the heretic enemy is not any demographic group but the State. Precisely, the heresies lie within the judicial system, of which Straight describes the

lawyers and judges as “bankers,” and that they are the “cabal.” (P1 27:49). This shows that notwithstanding the explicit religious references present within lectures, the enemy Straight targets, however, is not a religious heresy but the secular State. Straight does not express the desire to create a religious State based on Christianity as the end goal of his movement but that the sovereign citizens are fighting to be left alone (P1). These all show that the identity is a civic one, despite its connections to religion, which serves as merely the stimulant, justification, and glorification of Straight, a legitimating factor or a metaphor to the overall movement, which has a very secular objective, although closely resembling conspiracy theories.

Lastly, the identity is not physically discriminating. This largely stems from the lack of racial expressions within Straight’s lecture, although this study observes the prevalence of whites during the lectures. On the contrary, Straight praises women for “standing up.” (P2 52:09) This shows the non-physically discriminating factor. Further, the administrator of aorhelp.com, known as “butterfly mom,” is a woman. Although most participants in various recordings this study found appear to be White, no racist expressions are observed from Straight or the audience. These factors validate Proposition 1.

Proposition 2 is likewise easily validated. Similar to Dennis and Martinez, Straight demonstrates a self-interested selection process about laws and regulations, as exemplified by his statement, “Then they [the police] went to red and blue, land and water. Now they’re now just blue, they are all in the water, all in admiral law. They don’t even know that” (36:34) This notion of the State’s ignorance of the “true laws” is omnipresent within Straight’s lectures. Straight claims the “true laws” come from various irrelevant legal sources, including the United States Code and the UCC (P1), which is the same body of law Dennis claims to form the basis of his legal arguments. Like Dennis and Martinez, Straight’s selection process is also based on the sovereign citizen ideology, of which he proclaims one’s duty in “explaining” the law to the judge and that the rulings will become in favour of the sovereign citizen (P3). This demonstrates a selective process between the sovereign citizens vis-à-vis the law that only “legitimate” laws are to be selected by the sovereign citizens to be applied. A further summarization of this process can be found within Straight’s statement, “We the people are the government, and they are our public servants.” (P1 2:16:00). This statement can be seen as another proclamation for the legitimacy of the selection process, that, as a sovereign citizen, only civic rights are to be protected while civic duties are to be avoided and delegitimized.

The manifestation of Straight’s selective interpretation of the law can be best observed from the various “formalities” practiced by Straight and his followers. For instance, the role of silver is vital within the ideology, as, according to Straight, it is the proper tool for paying off debts; as a result, the act of giving officials silver coins is routinely observed within Straight’s lectures. (P1) Similar importance given to silver has also been observed in Dennis’ case, where he accuses Crystal of possessing \$250,000 in silver bullion (p.8 [32]). The exact reason why silver becomes vital in the context of the sovereign citizens is beyond the scope of this study, but what this study can observe is a selective interpretation of the laws in their favour, that the various formality and procedural processes, as in the case of silver, acknowledge the common adherence to legal principles (paying off debts) but through having a unique and unconventional means.

Similar to Dennis and Martinez, it would be wrong to conclude that Straight is driven entirely by self-interest. Straight also demonstrates selective compliance, best demonstrated by

his attitude towards the police, of which he claims, “Don’t argue with a cop... You can educate them as best as you can... Don’t do it, you can end up dead.” (P1 39:40) This, similar to this study’s observation of Martinez, shows both a selective – although implicit – acknowledgement of the State and recognition of State as a credible source of violence. Likewise, Straight does not incite violence against the authorities throughout his lecture, asking his followers to remain calm. (P1) This again shows Straight’s implicit recognition of the existence of the State, and that the latter has physical power over him. The selection process can then be understood as conditioned on the acknowledgement of the State that one cannot use their pseudo-legal arguments to confront law enforcement but only for post-ante actions. Whether this is Straight’s strategy to avoid lawsuits from injured followers is unknown to this study, but aorhelp.com provides another statement,

“By using AORHELP's services, you understand that the information provided is intended not as legal advice... you will hold harmless and indemnify AORHELP from any obligation whatsoever.” (AOR)

It is almost contradictory to witness the same website that incites a rejection of citizenship to proclaim such a statement. Indeed, like Dennis and Martinez, this statement shows that the selection process does not exist within a sociological vacuum but is premised on an implicit – probably reluctant – recognition of the State, although selectively regarding physical consequences. The statement also implies, in addition to the selective acknowledgement of the State, selective compliance and utilization of State laws, like Martinez, from the term “legal advice,” which refers to the legal system of the actual State. This non-violent confrontational attitude and the selective compliance and utilization of laws are also reflected during Straight’s arrest in Texas due to an accusation of selling fake license plates, which resulted in Straight paying a bond to be released. (Gilbert 2023) The police encounter no violent resistance by Straight or his supporters. All examples show that Straight cannot be concluded as purely self-interest driven, as his selective interpretation of the law is premised on an implicit recognition of State power, which he is cognizant of his inability to resist meaningfully. With this, Proposition 2 is validated.

Discussion

The sections above have concluded the case studies. While the inherent academic values presented by these case studies are undeniable, Broader implications can be extracted from them, that these exciting cases not only fulfill this study’s propositions within the realm of study one fringe group – that of the sovereign citizens – but contribute to the more substantial academic discussion on citizenship, nationalism, and national identity.

What can be said about this study is its contribution to the discussion around the relationship between citizenship and identity. Earlier in this study, it was suggested in the literature review that one should be cautious in linking citizenship and national identity in a commensurate fashion, and the case studies above stand as yet another testament to this statement. While this disjuncture might be more pronounced among migrant societies, such as by Mavroudi (2008) and Ip et al. (2011), studies like Fulbrook (1996) and Jugé and Perez (2006) have also shown such phenomenon among the native population in Germany and France, respectively. The findings of this study reinforce these scholarly findings. Consider works

including Ariely (2023), who have demonstrated the temporally protean nature of this relationship. The cases of this study might become irrelevant someday to future researchers, but this is not the essence of this study. What matters is this study's results against the broader academic background that a disjuncture has existed and will continue to exist between national identity and citizenship.

Specifically, this study shows at least two societal realities on one temporal trajectory. As Fulbrook (1996) and Ariely (2023) have witnessed, this creates a situation where one physical State coexists with multiple national identities within a given geographical space. In Fulbrook's (1996) case, this refers to the two different notions between the official and societal German. In this study's case, this refers to the State-sanctioned identity associated with citizenship and the alternative national identity of the sovereign citizens. However, unlike Fulbrook (1996), Jugé and Perez (2006), or Mavroudi (2008), this alternative reality is not confined by ethnicity, as Smith (1988) would posit, but is united under a common ideology within a defined national space. This is like the observation made by Ariely (2023), where the national identity is a civic one united under implicitly or explicitly agreed-upon principles and ideologies, subsequently forming the basis for constructing an alternative identity. The triggers of these constructions can come from a variety of factors, in the sense that this study does not deny or attempt to nullify the findings of Sarteschi (2020) and others on the movement's economic motives but that these motives manifest themselves into the construction of an alternative national identity that elevates itself above economic factors into to the societal realm.

The products of such constructions are visible throughout the cases. All three cases have demonstrated clear definitions and functions of certain State institutions under the sovereign citizen ideology, such as using silver as the legitimate means to pay off debts or Canada as a part of the United States. Though not officially sanctioned, these features closely resemble the symbolisms of the "nation" McLean (1998) finds that are presented among museums. Furthermore, these constructions and their manifestations in the actual world show that they are not only what things *should* be but what things *must* be. The observations of this study of the persistence of sovereign citizen ideology during legal processes show the salience and importance of the ideology, or as Tajfel (1974) would posit, that the ideology represents an identity that improves and validates great self-worth. This confirms that the sovereign citizen ideology has completed the elevating process described above and is now an alternative national identity that supersedes simple economic objectives. However, this study does not deny that economic factors represent the most visible feature of the sovereign citizen identity.

Returning to the existing literature, this study's findings show the multifaceted and ever-changing nature of the concept of "nation" and "citizenship." It reinforces previous scholarly observations that disjunctions exist between citizenship and national identity. It shows, in a different arena, by applying studies on nationalism and national identity to a fringe group, that national identity does not equate to citizenship, at least in the legal sense. Similar to previous studies, this study shows that such disjuncture and disagreement do not require one to be migrant – that is, coming to a foreign land, but can be facilitated domestically. In other words, this creates a situation of one State coexisting with many nations.

Furthermore, this study confirms the observations made by Ariely (2023) and Tinsley (2022) that such national identities are not necessarily bounded by ethnicity but by non-visible factors, including physically invisible ideologies, yet still confined to a given national space. In

this sense, this study, against the background of existing literature, shows that the concepts of citizenship and national identities are far more flexible and potentially distant than conventional wisdom would exist. While it is often the case that one adheres to the national identity that citizenship posits, this should not and does not inhibit the existence of alternative national identities that reject or redefine citizenship, as the case of sovereign citizens shows.

A further implication of this study, then, connects to broader topics within political science, namely the question of the legitimacy of the State. While this is beyond the scope of this study, this study's theory, which suggests the existence of multiple nations, suggests that the legitimacy of a State – with its physical institutions – requires to be examined in greater detail since the notion of a State justified through a singular nation – as Brubaker (1990) observes in the case of France – becomes objectionable once one has shown that only one nation exists could potentially be a mere façade that masks the multitude of nationalisms that underline the society. Where the legitimacy of the State comes from – including both “traditional” and settler-colonial countries – is a question this study believes requires further scholarly attention and theorizing.

Conclusion

What do sovereign citizens in North America think of themselves? This study provides a preliminary answer to sovereign citizens' conception of national identity. It proposes two propositions of national identity by sovereign citizens as defined by a rejection of citizenship and characterized by a selective interpretation and compliance of laws. This study has validated the two propositions using a qualitative approach involving two case studies and a robustness check. It shows the current sovereign citizens movement to comprise a rejection of citizenship and a selective interaction with the State through laws. These validations provide valuable insights into the identities of sovereign citizens. It shows an alternative reality that remains elusive to the eyes of criminologists and policy analysts. This study's findings serve as a pilot project into the fascinating world of sovereign citizens. Furthermore, this study has shown that regardless of geographic location, the two propositions stand. This meant that this study has also successfully achieved its objectives, that it unites three seemingly unrelated cases into an overarching political definition and shows the possibility of identifying sovereign citizens by characteristics rather than individual proclamations.

However, limitations exist within this study, particularly over case selection. The sovereign citizen movement, now proven to be decentralized, requires more significant efforts to understand it fully. For instance, the “formalities” and parlance of the movement are out of the research scope of this study and could only be examined through extensive field work and direct interactions with sovereign citizens. Further, this study's generality, while being beneficial in providing an overarching framework, potentially lacks predicting power as it merely elaborates an already known relationship rather than finding a previously unknown relationship. Unfortunately, uniting different groups under a definition provides little micro-level details of the movement's internal dynamics, which can only be achieved via extensive fieldwork and data collection.

To conclude, while this study serves as a pilot project into the political analysis of the sovereign citizen movement, it still needs to be completed by being an initial step within a larger project. Future research should dive deeper into the sovereign citizen movement. While studying

sovereign citizens can be both amusing and frustrating at once, the movement nevertheless provides a unique glimpse into the world of far-right identity distinct from white supremacists and conspiracy theorists. It is reckless for scholars to continue their current negligence by failing to provide a deeper, more significant analysis of the movement, of which the study serves as both a reminder and a call for action. Future research should pay greater attention to particular cases, using qualitative methods to uncover more fascinating details of this elusive movement.

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