Navigating Sovereignist Beliefs
and
Anti-Authority Resistance

A Guide for Psychosocial Professionals, Authorities, and Law Enforcement

modus | zad

OPV | organization for the prevention of violence

About the PreP-Ex Project

The manual is based on research conducted as part of the ***Preparing Professionals for the Rising Threat of Anti-Authority Extremism*** (henceforth called the Prep-Ex project) which examines sovereignism and anti-authority extremism in both Canada and Germany. This research draws on interviews with experts from diverse backgrounds, including psychosocial professionals, government authorities, and law enforcement. The study also included interviews with individuals who hold sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs, as well as a survey conducted with family members, friends, and close contacts of individuals involved in these movements. In addition to this manual, a detailed *research report* offers an in-depth analysis of the complexity of this phenomenon in each national context, its commonalities and differences, exploring its ideology, pathways into and out of involvement, and associated risks. A *policy brief* is also available, providing policy recommendations to prevent and counter sovereignism and anti-authority extremism.

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Disclaimer

The information and recommendations in this document have been printed on the basis of publicly available information and research. It should not be interpreted to represent the opinions of the individuals or agencies who provided funding for this project.

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Introduction

So-called "Reichsbürger" in Germany or "Freemen-on-the-Land" in Canada – movements that reject the legitimacy of the state – have long posed a growing challenge to democratic societies in which they exist. Their confrontational behaviour and deep distrust of institutions create significant risks not only for the individuals involved, but also for social cohesion and public safety.

This manual contains guidance and practical insights for engaging with individuals who espouse sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs. It is specifically tailored for psychosocial and helping professions, government authorities, and law enforcement – those most likely to encounter these individuals and their families as they carry out their professional duties. Equipping these practitioners with informed strategies is essential to ensure effective and safe responses. While this manual is geared toward those involved in the professions previously mentioned, it may also be of value to anyone who interacts with individuals influenced by sovereignism and anti-authority extremism.

This manual begins with a brief overview of the phenomenon, outlining key characteristics and behaviours of its adherents. It explores potential underlying motivations and offers insights to better understand their behaviours, and way of communication. Furthermore, it presents practical approaches and strategies, offering a range of options when engaging with individuals who espouse these beliefs. The suitability of each approach is highly context-dependent, shaped by factors like institutional or organizational goals, as well as the personality, resources, and current state of the individuals involved. As a result, some recommendations may appear contradictory: an approach that is effective in one case may be counterproductive in another. We therefore leave it to the professional discretion of the practitioner to determine which approaches are most appropriate in each context.

This manual gives specific guidance for:

- **Psychosocial and helping professionals** who provide support and interventions aimed at improving mental, emotional, and social well-being for both the service recipient and their families. They encompass a range of frontline roles, including social workers, counsellors, psychologists, psychiatrists, caseworkers, mentors, or addiction workers. These professionals focus on supporting individuals with sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs, facilitating their distancing from these ideologies, or assisting family members, friends and close contacts.

- **Government authorities** are public-facing civil servants and government workers, who may encounter individuals who hold sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs during their duties such as public health officials, child welfare and protective services, municipal administrators, immigration officers, and tax authorities.
- **Law enforcement** are police officers, peace officers, community safety officers, and criminal justice personnel who may engage with individuals or their families while in crisis or because of a criminal or legal violation.

About the Sovereignist and Anti-Authority Phenomenon

At the core of sovereignist and anti-authority extremism is a fundamental rejection of the state, which is viewed as illegitimate, corrupt, or oppressive. This is accompanied by a profound distrust of both government and established institutions or figures of authority. Beyond these core grievances, the ideology is highly fragmented, with adherents tailoring their beliefs to various national, political, social, or cultural contexts.

Conspiracies are a central component of sovereignist and anti-authority narratives, often intertwining with esoteric and spiritual ideas. These can serve as entry points into the broader ideology, particularly in areas linked to health concerns and personal well-being. This was especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, when sovereignist and anti-authority narratives gained significant traction by exploiting health-related fears about vaccines and other medical treatments. Additionally, these worldviews frequently overlap with far-right, antisemitic, racist, and anti-2SLGBTQIA+ sentiments, leading to exclusionary narratives and beliefs.

Anti-authority and sovereignist ideologies vary widely based on local, national, or regional contexts. In North America, many people who hold these beliefs refer to themselves as "sovereigns," "freemen," or as "state citizens" (as opposed to a citizen of the federal government). In Germany, such individuals are often publicly referred to as "Reichsbürger" or "Selbstverwalter," though many adherents themselves prefer the terms "freie Menschen" (Eng: "free people"), "Menschenrechtler" (Eng: "human rights activist"), "Schicksalsgemeinschaft" (Eng: "community of fate"), or as "Erwachte" (Eng: "awakened").

The following statements reflect core beliefs commonly associated with sovereignist and anti-authority movements, though their specific expression may vary depending on national and historical contexts.

- The government is illegitimate or illegal.

- The government has been infiltrated or replaced by malicious actors.

- Individuals are not legally obligated to comply with state requirements (e.g., taxes, utility bills, etc.).

- Government authorities, including law enforcement, have no legal authority.

- The illegitimate government is trying to manipulate, exploit, or "brainwash" the population as part of a hidden agenda or conspiracy.

Recognizable Behaviours

Interacting and communicating with individuals who hold sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs can be challenging due to the nature of their ideology and their distrust of anyone they view as representing, or acting on behalf of, the state. Sovereignist and anti-authority adherents often believe they possess knowledge of a hidden "truth," and view anyone who challenges their beliefs with suspicion. This mindset fosters a non-cooperative attitude, making them resistant to engaging in discussions which might challenge their worldview.

In some cases, individuals who hold sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs can be very confrontational, sometimes resorting to threats, provocation, or violence to assert their beliefs. Their communication style is often one-sided and didactic, as they attempt to lecture, persuade, or even "convert" others to their worldview. This can make conversations difficult to navigate, as they try to dominate discussions, leaving little space for meaningful dialogue. Rather than engaging in an exchange of ideas, they often use conversations as a platform to vent.

In addition to these general dispositions, individuals who espouse sovereignist or anti-authority beliefs may also exhibit specific behaviours towards psychosocial and helping professionals, public and government authorities and administrations, as well as law enforcement, which are detailed in the respective sections below.

Underlying Motivations

To effectively engage with individuals who hold sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs, it is helpful to understand the possible motivations behind their behaviours. Individual involvement reflects a complex interplay of personal, social, psychological, economic, political, and ideological factors. Engagement with sovereignist and anti-authority ideas may be triggered or intensified by personal crises, disruptions, or turning points in an individual's life. However, their ideology is often rooted in a deep-seated fear or conviction that authorities and established institutions such as media and healthcare systems pose a direct threat to their well-being, which can lead to defensive actions or, in rare cases, violent behaviour.

As a result of believing they know a hidden "truth," these individuals often feel a sense of duty to protect or "enlighten" others, seeing themselves as defenders of righteous values. However, they may fail to recognize that their beliefs and actions can be harmful not only to themselves but to those around them.

In some cases, individuals may be drawn to these beliefs for personal or financial benefits, such as avoiding taxes or legal obligations. Additionally, as with other conspiracy or extremist-driven ideologies, sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs can provide psychological perks by boosting self-esteem, simplifying complex societal issues, and offering a perceived sense of significance, status, control, and security, often accompanied by the belief that one is fighting for a "noble" cause. The challenge in questioning these beliefs, let alone renouncing them, is that the individual risks losing these perceived advantages, including a loss of identity, making distancing particularly difficult.

Engaging with Sovereignist and Anti-Authority Perspectives

Psychosocial and helping professionals, public authorities and administrators, as well as law enforcement, are all occupational groups that may interact with individuals who adhere to sovereignist and anti-authority ideologies as part of their work. The following sections focus on the possible challenges these specific professionals may face and explore helpful approaches and strategies that may be effective.

1 Psychosocial and Helping Professionals

Psychosocial and helping professionals include individuals who provide support, care, or interventions aimed at improving mental, emotional, and social well-being for both individuals and families. They can encompass a range of frontline roles, including social workers, counsellors, psychologists, nurses, psychiatrists, caseworkers, mentors, or addiction workers.

Counselling and psychosocial support can also be provided to family, friends, and close contacts who are negatively impacted by the beliefs of an adherent. Often, it is family members, rather than adherents themselves, who seek support to cope with the emotional or relational strain caused by sovereignist and anti-authority ideologies.

A) Individuals with Sovereignist and Anti-Authority Beliefs

Barriers to Psychosocial Support

Deep Distrust of the State

- Many individuals who espouse sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs perceive counselling and other forms of psychosocial support as extensions of government control or authority, therefore viewing them as untrustworthy.

  ▶ For example, they may view counselling or psychosocial professionals as agents of the state attempting to manipulate or coerce their thoughts and actions.

- This distrust can also extend to non-government organizations, including non-profits and charities, if they receive government funding or are otherwise perceived to be aligned with government policies or mainstream institutions and narratives.

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Stigma Around Seeking Help

- While mental health stigma exists broadly, it may be even more pronounced within sovereignist and anti-authority communities who claim to have access to hidden "truths" about the world.
- Accepting help may be viewed by others in the community as a sign of submission to the very system they seek to oppose.

Rejection of Support as Unnecessary

- Many individuals may believe psychosocial support is unnecessary because they see their worldview as legitimate rather than problematic.
- Instead of self-reflection and recognizing personal struggles, many externalize blame and attribute their difficulties to government oppression and corruption.
- Sovereignist and anti-authority ideologies often promote self-reliance, isolation, and personal sovereignty, which directly contradicts external support.
- Support mandated by the criminal justice system may be viewed as an infringement of individual freedoms.

Challenges During Practice

Establishing Trust is Difficult

- Many individuals who hold these beliefs have a deep distrust of authority figures, including psychosocial professionals, and view them as either agents of the state or indoctrinated by the established system they seek to oppose.
- Individuals may question the intentions of psychosocial professionals, which creates a barrier to meaningful engagement and progress.
- Some individuals may only attend counselling or psychosocial support sessions under legal obligation (e.g., as part of a court order), limiting their engagement to only what is necessary to fulfill their legal obligation.

Communication Challenges

- Individuals may speak excessively about their beliefs and dominate conversations while showing little interest in the counsellor's responses, making conversations unproductive and unidirectional.
- Many individuals focus on lecturing, debating, or "educating" rather than listening and reflecting.
- The way individuals express their thoughts can often be fragmented, convoluted, or filled with pseudolegal and conspiratorial jargon, making conversation difficult to follow and engage with.

- Some individuals become so immersed in their beliefs that they tend to speak repetitively and struggle to stay focused during sessions.

Aggression, Self-Importance, and Resistance to Change

- Because adherents view themselves as possessing privileged or "hidden" knowledge, they may display high levels of self-righteousness and a sense of superiority, making it difficult to engage in self-reflection.
- Some might display hostility or aggression when their beliefs are questioned, which can create an uncomfortable and possibly unsafe environment for psychosocial professionals.
- Resistance to acknowledging mistakes can be heightened due to the fact that their identity is often deeply tied with their ideology, which can feel like a loss of identity.
- Questioning one's beliefs can become increasingly emotionally painful and destabilizing, particularly when personal and financial investments or sacrifices have been made in support of their beliefs.

  ▶ For example, some adherents may go into debt to pay for psuedolegal courses or may accumulate significant fines for failure to pay taxes and fees.

Approaches to Psychosocial Support

The following approaches can be useful to adopt in preparation for interacting with someone who holds sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs.

- Patience, as well as a judgment free mindset, are essential when communicating with individuals who hold sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs to promote a safe space for the individual to share.
- It is crucial to recognize the ideology is not only harmful to society and loved ones, but also to the individual themselves.

  ▶ For example, adherents may face financial or legal repercussions as a result of their actions in accordance with their beliefs.

- Their behaviour and beliefs may serve as coping mechanisms for personal experiences and struggles. Often, there are underlying psychosocial reasons for their openness to these beliefs, making those reasons important to address.

  ▶ For example, someone who experienced discrimination from a government employee may come to believe all government is discriminatory. Helping the individual process and understand this experience may address an underlying grievance driving their ideological beliefs.

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- Promoting resilience to process and recover from adversity should be a central focus.

   ▶ For example, the individual may have adopted harmful coping strategies because of this adversity, so it is important to identify and explore healthier alternatives outside of their ideological beliefs to build sustainable resilience.

- Prioritizing the individual's needs and meeting them where they are is crucial to a person-centered approach, which can help develop trust and engagement.

- Acknowledge and appreciate even small steps forward, while recognizing that progress may be slow, incremental, and non-linear.

- Working with people who hold sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs can be challenging. It is important to regularly exchange in supervision or professional consultation with colleagues and other professionals who can provide support, new insights, and mitigate burnout.

- Maintaining clear personal and professional boundaries is important when interacting with individuals who hold sovereignist or anti-authority beliefs. Doing so preserves one's professional role, supports a constructive and respectful interaction framework, and safeguards one's own mental and emotional well-being.

Tips for Psychosocial Professionals

The following strategies and approaches can be useful when directly interacting with individuals who hold sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs.

Clear and Constructive Communication

- Establishing a clear and constructive framework for communication (e.g. reminding them of the amount of time available during the appointment, boundaries for topics of conversation, reasons for seeking psychosocial support) can help avoid getting off topic.

   ▶ Of note, it is important to strike a balance between setting clear boundaries to prevent hostile behaviours from the individual, while also maintaining enough flexibility to allow for honest and curious questioning.

- Continuously evaluate and adjust your approach and the way of communication.

- Generally, avoid engaging in debates about sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs, when possible, to maintain the focus on the individual's needs and well-being.

  ▶ However, in some cases, it may be helpful to discuss beliefs, such as by offering counterarguments, asking questions which may challenge their beliefs, offering alternative perspectives, or debunking. This should be carried out with curiosity and goodwill to maintain the constructiveness of the conversation and only in cases where sufficient rapport has been built and the person is open to it.

Keeping and Establishing Respect and Engagement

- Treat the individual with respect and take their experiences seriously, even if you disagree with their beliefs – this builds the foundation for a productive working relationship.

- Acknowledge and respect the individual, their emotions, and their concerns while avoiding validation of their ideology. By separating the individual from their beliefs, this can help to foster trust between the psychosocial professional and the individual.

- Communicate using neutral and non-political language to avoid triggering ideological debates.

- Adopt the language the individual uses to describe themselves as this can create a more open and non-confrontational environment for dialogue. Conversely, avoid labels not used by the individuals as they may unintentionally stigmatize or reinforce an "us vs. them" mentality.

  ▶ For example, if an individual has not explicitly identified themselves using labels like "Reichsbürger" or "Sovereign Citizen," applying these terms to them can reinforce rigid, black-and-white thinking about those who do not share their beliefs, hindering constructive dialogue.

- If needed, ask for clarification about unclear terminology to ensure you are speaking about the same concepts.

  ▶ For example, "I've heard you say the word 'fiduciary' several times and I want to make sure I'm understanding you. Would you tell me more about what you mean by that?"

Responding to the Person and Their Needs

- Prioritize the individual's well-being and emotional state, rather than focusing solely on their beliefs. Understanding and acknowledging the personal experiences, struggles, and grievances that contribute to their worldview can create constructive discussions.

- Gently redirect conversations toward their personal needs and emotions by asking open-ended questions, even when they try to steer discussions back to ideological debates. Using a strength-based approach and compassionate inquiry can be helpful. For example:

  ► "What's going on in your life right now?"
  ► "What matters most to you?"
  ► "What aspects of your belief system are working well for you and why?"

- Sometimes it can be helpful to allow the individual to vent, but it is important to know when to refocus the meeting on other issues.

- Acknowledge both real and perceived grievances with empathy. Recognizing their concerns without validating their ideological beliefs can help to create trust and make them feel understood.

- Focus on addressing the practical problems caused by the ideology and the resulting behaviours, and work together to identify alternative solutions. This includes recognizing and responding to underlying challenges that may fuel feelings of frustration, such as financial or legal hardships. Offering support in these areas can help to alleviate some of their broader grievances. For example:

  ► Assisting with financial planning and improving financial literacy can help reduce stress and reduce some of the grievances they may hold against the government.
  ► Helping individuals navigate legal processes, such as preparing for and attending court appearances, support filling out paperwork, and connecting them with appropriate legal resources.

Encouraging Self-Reflection

- Promote self-reflection by encouraging individuals to explore the origins and motivations behind their beliefs. Asking open-ended and non-critical questions can help initiate this.

  ► For example:
    ► "Who created the rules in your group or community, and what were their motivations?"
    ► "When did you first hear about…? What was going on in your life at that time?"

- Use hypothetical scenarios to encourage deeper reflection on the real-world implications of their beliefs.

  ► For example: "How would putting your ideology in practice affect you and others?"

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- Gently point out and challenge inconsistencies in their beliefs to encourage critical examination and reflection.

- Empathetically point out the hardships and harmful consequences of their behaviour. Show how these actions not only impact themselves but can also negatively affect those around them.

- Acknowledge and validate the positive experiences they may have had within their beliefs, such as meaningful relationships or a sense of belonging and purpose. Recognizing positive aspects while acknowledging the negative ones can help individuals see the nuances of their experience and develop a greater tolerance for ambiguity.

Promote Practical Ways for Distancing

- Help individuals build a healthier framework for identity by recognizing and focusing on aspects of their life beyond their sovereignist or anti-authority beliefs.

  ▶ For example: Encourage them to reconnect with other positive roles and identities such as being a parent, a partner, spouse, friend, or colleague.

- Supporting substitution of the harmful and maladaptive behaviours and thinking patterns with healthier ones can promote resilience.

  ▶ For example: Encourage them to take up a new hobby or one they abandoned because of their involvement in their beliefs.

- Facilitate reconnection with positive social structures where individuals can find meaning, support, belonging, and recognition outside of their current belief system.

  ▶ For example: Exploring old or new hobbies, rebuilding relationships with family and friends, or pursuing new employment or educational opportunities.

B) Family, Friends and Close Contacts

The beliefs and behaviours of sovereignist and anti-authority adherents can have a profound impact on their family, friends and close contacts. The extent of this impact, as well as how those affected cope, varies depending on the nature of the relationship (e.g., partner, child, friend, colleague) and is also influenced by the individual's personality, circumstances, and personal or emotional capacity to navigate the situation. When working with families, it may be important to include a safety assessment of the current situation, as well as to consider potential risks if the adherent becomes aware that a family member, friend, or close contact is speaking with a psychosocial professional.

Family members, friends or close contacts may also share, align with, or in some cases may fully adopt sovereignist or anti-authority beliefs themselves. The following information and suggestions focus primarily on situations where loved ones are not aligned with such beliefs and are seeking ways to deal with the resulting tension, conflict, or emotional burden.

Challenges Experienced by Family, Friends and Close Contacts

Challenging Communication

- Adherents of sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs may use any topic related to politics or government to shift the conversation towards conspiracy beliefs.
- Challenges to sovereignist and anti-authority ideas may be perceived as personal attacks, leading to defensiveness.
- Rational arguments are often ineffective, making it emotionally exhausting for family, friends and close contacts to remain objective during these conversations.
- Family, friends and close contacts may feel frustrated and overwhelmed by repeated attempts to persuade or convert them to sovereignist or anti-authority beliefs.
- Conversations can frequently escalate into verbal arguments or conflicts.

Emotional Distress

- Family, friends, and close contacts often grapple with a range of difficult emotions, including fear, anger, sadness, helplessness, guilt, shame, and a sense of disconnection.
- Many may feel as though a meaningful connection has been lost, or as if they are living in two separate realities. This is particularly the case when the individual has recently adopted or deepened their beliefs.
- In parent-child relationships:

  - Children raised in these environments may experience fear and anxiety due to their parents' ideology and worldview.
  - Children may feel increasingly at-odds with environments that do not align with the parents' worldview.

    ▶ For example, if children attend school, the perspectives they encounter from teachers or other students may contradict the beliefs taught at home. This can lead to confusion, emotional uncertainty, and may negatively affect their identity development.

  - As they grow older, children may begin to question their parental beliefs, which can lead to feelings of betrayal or a loss of trust in their parents.

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- This strain can weaken the parent-child bond, making it more difficult for children to seek guidance, support, and emotional connection from their parents.
- Alternatively, children may adopt the beliefs of their parents, perpetuating the cycle of spread to others within their own social circles.

Consequences in Daily Life

- Financial or legal difficulties may arise when individuals with sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs refuse to pay utilities, mortgages, or taxes, which can place a burden on their immediate family.
- Non-compliance with authorities can extend beyond the individual, and can affect family members as well, including spouses or children.

  ▶ For example, sovereignist or anti-authority parents may refuse to access necessary medical care for their children which can result in health issues or developmental problems.

- Refusal to send children to school and opting for homeschooling, while within the legal right of parents in Canada, can limit children's exposure to diverse perspectives and social interactions, and can increase exposure to the beliefs of parents who hold sovereignist or anti-authority views.
- Failure to register a child's birth can carry significant consequences, including lack of legal protection, limited or difficult access to education and healthcare, and challenges integrating into society.

Tips for Family, Friends and Close Contacts

- If possible, maintain contact with your loved one by focusing on shared interests or emotional connections to preserve the relationship.
- Avoid engaging in discussions about their worldview or being drawn into arguments by redirecting to conversations about neutral topics or shared interests.
- Set clear boundaries by explicitly naming the topics you are unwilling to discuss.
- In most cases, it is best to refrain from attempting to disprove their beliefs through debate, as conspiracies are structured in ways that are highly resistant to logical refutation. However, if comfortable, it may be helpful to introduce subtle questions or alternative perspectives that encourage critical thinking without directly confronting their beliefs.

> ► For example, asking questions like "what would life look like in the Freistaat Preußen?" or "what rights and freedoms would a sovereign individual have?" can help highlight inconsistencies in their worldview.

- Gently but firmly express that you disagree with problematic statements or positions. This can also prevent bystanders, including children, from perceiving these views as valid.

- Be cautious when offering help, as solving their problems, such as paying their bills, may inadvertently reinforce their beliefs by validating their actions.

- Try to find a balance between showing empathy and respect while also maintaining your own boundaries.

- Keep realistic expectations and recognize that meaningful change is unlikely to happen quickly, if at all.

Coping Strategies for Family, Friends and Close Contacts

- In-person or online peer support groups may be a useful venue to discuss your relationship with the individual and the emotions you experience.

- Repeated exposure to sovereignist perspectives can lead family, friends and close contacts to question their own views. In such cases, applying information literacy skills can be helpful in critically evaluating and independently debunking these claims.

- Setting clear boundaries or agreeing on certain rules about things like the topics of conversation can allow the relationship to continue while avoiding contentious topics.

> ► For example, agreeing to respect differing opinions without attempting to change the other person's views can help maintain a more neutral dynamic.

- In some cases, reducing contact can help manage emotional distress.

- Cutting off contact entirely is an option:

> ► It is always an option to step away from the relationship. If maintaining contact becomes too emotionally taxing or harmful, it may necessary to reconsider maintaining communication with this individual to preserve your own well-being.

2 Public Authorities and Administration

Resistance to government and institutions is a core element of sovereignist or anti-authority ideologies, as these institutions are perceived as illegitimate, unlawful, or corrupt. This distrust extends to employees, representatives, and agents of the government, such as civil and public servants employed in local or municipal governments, passport offices, child welfare services, as well as professionals in other institutions like hospitals, banks, and insurance companies. As a result, individuals with sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs often exhibit hostility and non-compliance, leading to repeated encounters that perpetuate a cycle of confrontation and conflict. For example, refusing to pay fines or settle debts can lead to escalating consequences, such as property seizures or evictions. These escalations can also culminate in direct confrontations with law enforcement.

It is important to recognize that this refusal to cooperate is sometimes perceived by these individuals as an act of self-defence. While some may be seeking to regain a sense of control or provoke errors among authorities, others may be driven by a genuine sense of distrust and fear.

Several factors make interactions with individuals who hold sovereignist or anti-authority beliefs among administrative authorities particularly challenging:

- **Legal Obligations to Engage:** In some cases, authorities cannot simply ignore individuals or their correspondence, as they have a legal obligation to respond. However, responses – depending on their type – can sometimes reinforce sovereignist or anti-authority beliefs because adherents consider it as "acknowledging" their worldview. Alternatively, a lack of response may be considered by some adherents as an admittance of wrongdoing. In most cases, it is important to have standardized language which reinforces the legal procedures and denies the legality or applicability of sovereignist or anti-authority arguments.

- **Limited Resources:** Constraints on time and personnel can impede the effective handling of these cases.

- **Lack of Institutional Support:** Employees may feel inadequately supported when managing complex or hostile interactions. These employees often include frontline workers or civil servants such as court clerks, social service providers, and municipal staff.

- **Insufficient Training:** A lack of specialized training or awareness can hinder appropriate responses.

Typical Behaviours

Resistance and Refusal

Individuals who reject state authority may display a range of resistant or non-compliant behaviours and refuse to engage with government systems or disregard their legal obligations. This can include:

- A refusal to participate in the state system <u>entirely</u> and a rejection of their legal obligations, such as paying taxes, registering their vehicles, or obtaining government-issued identification like drivers' licenses.

- They may refuse to comply with <u>all</u> state directives and orders. Examples include:

  - ▶ Rejecting court summons or warrants.
  - ▶ Ignoring official correspondence, including collecting and responding to all mail from government authorities.
  - ▶ Physical resistance may be more likely in situations involving invasive interventions like seizures, evictions, child safety visitations, or the confiscation of weapons.

- During their interaction with public servants and authorities, individuals may:

  - ▶ Request to speak with a manager and reject government-issued proof of identity or authorization.
  - ▶ Insist on being treated differently, claiming that standard procedures or laws do not apply to them.

- Individuals may attempt to use various tactics to opt out of the system or to avoid obligations and interactions with the state. For example:

  - ▶ In Germany, individuals may stop paying insurance fees, which can lead to debt and further issues.
  - ▶ In Canada, individuals may attempt to delay or prevent evictions by preemptively transferring property ownership to others.

Impact on Family

Resistance to state authority or disregarding public health guidelines can also impact family members. Examples include:

- ▶ Refusing, delaying, or avoiding assistance from child and youth welfare services.
- ▶ Refusing, delaying, or avoiding routine or urgent healthcare checks, including dental care, vaccinations, or eyecare.

- Providing alternate education for their children:

  ▶ In the German context, some parents may withhold their children from attending school, something that is generally prohibited by law.
  ▶ In the Canadian context, parents may opt to homeschool their children but may refuse to follow provincially regulated and mandated curriculum (if required).

- Parents may refuse or refrain from registering a child's birth, which can result in long-term legal and social challenges for the child.

Pseudolaw Tactics and Paper Flooding

Pseudolaw refers to ideas, beliefs, or practices that are falsely presented as being rooted in established legal principles, but in reality, lack legitimate legal foundation. Pseudolegal arguments deviate from conventional understandings of law and jurisprudence, often by relying on non-existent statutes, misinterpretations of existing laws, or by drawing from outdated legal principles.

Paper flooding, which is sometimes known as "paper terrorism," can be used as a tactic by some pseudolaw adherents. This tactic relies on the use of legal documents like false liens, petitions for bankruptcy, frivolous lawsuits, or other bogus paperwork like cease-and-desist orders to intimidate or harass perceived opponents, or to clog up and delay legitimate proceedings.

- Individuals may inundate authorities with an excessive amount of correspondence, deliberately slowing down administrative processes and wasting state resources.
- Individuals may file unreasonable or confusing requests or engage in stalling tactics to intentionally delay the management of their cases.
- Instead of addressing the authority that is responsible for a specific issue, they may instead involve multiple actors or institutions, including federal or even international bodies, to further complicate and overwhelm the system.
- Common pseudolegal tactics may include:

  - Invoking pseudolaw to resist or refuse compliance with laws or state orders.
  - Creating and using fake documents such as fabricated identification cards, licenses, or other administrative documents.

- Applying for documents to prove a certain heritage.

  - ▶ For example, in Germany, sovereignists may apply for a certificate of citizenship (Staatsangehörigkeitsausweis, so-called Gelber Schein). The certificate of citizenship documents are an inherent part of the sovereinist identity, as many refer to the Reich and Nationality Act (RuStAG) in its 1913 version and believe that this secures their full legal capacity.
  - ▶ In Canada, some anti-authority adherents make false claims to Indigenous identity under the belief that it bestows a special form of sovereignty.

- Introducing or trying to use a fabricated currency.
- Using outdated terms for documents that refer to previous societal systems or other governmental systems

  - ▶ For example, in Germany, specifying "Königreich Preußen" (Eng: "Kingdom of Prussia") as their place of birth.
  - ▶ In Canada, some individuals may refer to the "Magna Carta," a royal charter signed by King John in 1215, as the true law of the land.

- Correcting authorities to use their own terminology:

  - ▶ For example, in Germany, requesting to be referred to as a "natürliche Person" (Eng: "natural person") instead of "juristische Person". (Eng: "legal entity").
  - ▶ In Canada, some anti-authority actors may refer to the name on their birth certificate as a corporate entity and refuse to acknowledge or respond to it.

Threats and Insults

Individuals who adhere to sovereignist or anti-authority beliefs may sometimes resort to a range of aggressive or coercive tactics to intimidate, undermine, or challenge authority figures.

Threats, Harassment, and Violence

- Verbal harassment, threats, and aggressive behaviour can be directed to government employees, civil servants, law enforcement, and other authority figures. In extreme cases, this can escalate to physical violence, death threats, or attempts to commit violence.
- Threats can also be made through pseudolegal tactics using paper documents, such as bogus cease-and-desist orders which can escalate into threats of execution if demands are not met.

Filming Interactions

- Interactions with authorities are often filmed and shared online. This functions as an example or instruction for other adherents, as well as a way to pressure authorities.
- This practice can also serve as a form of "doxxing," where personal information is exposed online, leading to harassment.

Gathering Personal Information, Surveillance, Intimidation, and Extortion

- Some individuals may gather and collect personal information about authority figures with the intent of holding them "accountable" for their alleged crimes or actions at a later stage. This can also extend to the families or close contacts of public authorities, who are often viewed as being "complicit" in the perceived crimes of the government.

- Individuals may pass by the homes or other personal properties of authority figures as a means of intimidation, information gathering, and surveillance.

- Individuals may attempt to manipulate or pressure civil servants or public authorities through extortion using pseudolegal tactics.

- Individuals may pretend to be lawyers or legal representatives and send falsified financial or legal demands to civil servants or public authorities, using legal loopholes and tactics to intimidate authority workers (financially).

> ▶ For example, German sovereignists used the "Malta Scam," in which they registered unauthorized monetary claims against employers or state representatives in the U.S. Uniform Commercial Code (UCC) register and attempted to make them legally effective through a Maltese debt collection agency. This scheme was intended to threaten and intimidate individuals. The scam method is now suspended in Germany.
>
> ▶ In both Canada and Germany, adherents may carry out a tactic known as SLAPP (Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Participation), which is a type of lawsuit intended to censor, intimidate, or silence critics by burdening them with the cost of a legal defence until they abandon their criticism or opposition.

Interaction with the Individual

Preparation

Effective interaction with individuals who hold sovereignist or anti-authority beliefs requires careful planning and preparation. Some key considerations when preparing for a conversation with a known sovereignist or anti-authority individual include:

- Defining the timeframe (i.e., consider how much time you have or are willing to devote to the conversation).

- Will there need to be a follow-up appointment?

- What is the main purpose of the interaction?

- What are the specific issues that need to be resolved, and how can they be resolved in a timely manner?

- What documents, evidence, or legal identification are needed to resolve the issue?
- Has this individual(s) made threats in the past?
- Do I feel safe interacting with this individual(s) alone?

  ▶ It may be beneficial to designate two team members to engage with sovereignist and anti-authority extremist individuals, both to serve as observers and to provide support.

Clear Communication

- Communicate clear boundaries for the conversation and the time frame of the interaction. For example:

  ▶ "Our appointment is until 2pm."
  ▶ "We are here to discuss …"

- Maintain focus on the circumstances of the case and always try to guide the conversation back to the matter under discussion:

  ▶ "This is not why we are here today. Let's circle back to …"
  ▶ "You already said that, but it is not relevant to the situation here. We need to talk about …"

- Be as transparent as you can about your own work, the process, and the issue at hand. This helps to reduce preconceived notions of civil servants as untrustworthy or part of a clandestine conspiracy.
- Stick to clear, precise and factual communication, including in written correspondence:

  ▶ For example, make clear that a request has been rejected and the legal or administrative reasons why.

- Try to stay calm and avoid defensiveness which might be perceived as a personal attack.
- Remind yourself of the scope of your responsibilities and duties:

  ▶ For example, while you are not responsible for changing the mindset of the individual by discussing the ideology, it is useful to outline in clear language the legal or administrative rules which guide your interaction.

Deflect Their Behaviours or Practices

When interacting with individuals who employ pseudolegal tactics or strategies, it is crucial to carefully assess and choose an appropriate approach based on the specific situation at hand. Some of the following suggestions may contradict one another, so discretion must be used to identify which situations are most suitable for each approach.

Identify and Dismiss Pseudolegal Tactics Early

- If you recognize the use of pseudolegal arguments or tactics, it is best to directly inform the individual that these strategies are not applicable or legally valid.

  ► For example, in the Canadian context: "I am following the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. This is the law that applies to this particular situation. You are welcome to read it as well."

- Avoid engaging within the framework of pseudolaw.

  ► For example, by using their invented names or titles, this may inadvertently legitimize their claims.

- It can be counterproductive to leave pseudolegal actions unchallenged. In some cases, it is crucial to demonstrate both the authority and legitimacy of the institution by taking appropriate legal or administrative action when necessary.

- Timely intervention is critical to prevent individuals from perceiving delays or indecision as a sign of victory or validation.

  ► For example, laying fines for criminal offences or bylaw violations years after the violation took place can give the impression that the behaviour had no immediate consequences.

- Avoid responding to unreasonable demands to conserve resources.

  ► For example, avoid confirming the receipt of pseudolegal documents unless legally required. Instead, using standardized responses that clearly state the illegitimacy or irrelevance of such documents and outlining the applicable legal or administrative procedure can be a more efficient and effective way to respond.

- Do not deviate from standard procedure as this can give the impression that they have the upper hand:

  ► For example, do not escalate the matter by calling a manager simply because the individual refuses to engage with subordinates.

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Empathetic and Respectful Interactions

- Keep the topic of conversation about the matter at hand and avoid discussing the ideology. Redirect conversations back to the issue at hand if they get off topic.

  ▶ For example, "you have had the opportunity to make your point about the government. I have understood what you have said. We disagree on this, but we still need to come back to [this administrative procedure]."

- Refrain from stigmatizing, ridiculing, dismissing, or judging. Instead, focus on engaging with the individual in an empathetic way. This creates positive interactions with the government that challenges their expectations or prejudices.

  ▶ For example, simply being nice, rather than dismissive, can give them a different impression of a person who works for the state or break their previous cycle of negative experiences.

- Take your time to answer genuine questions to ensure the individual's legitimate requests are addressed.
- If respectful conversations are not working, consider breaking off communication and/or seeking support from a colleague.
- Do not tolerate aggressive behaviours and always follow your organization or institution's proper procedure for responding to and reporting violence and intimidation.

Improving Capacities to Respond

Facilitation of Work

- Consider raising awareness and knowledge within your institution, as well as sharing informational material and trainings about sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs.
- Using standardized forms or texts is helpful to navigate the case once pseudolegal argumentation is identified.
- Remaining consistent or developing standard procedures when confronted by individuals who hold sovereignist or anti-authority beliefs can help protect and support employees.

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Safety Measures

- Based on a range of risks, there are a variety of safety measures that can be implemented in advance:

  - ▶ Installing an alarm system to notify others in case of feeling threatened.
  - ▶ Allowing entry to the building only for those with an appointment.Letting colleagues know about an appointment which you suspect may be a risk and leaving the door open so that someone can intervene.
  - ▶ Informing security services of the building or local law enforcement.
  - ▶ Having two people involved for support and to serve as witnesses in case of an incident.

- Consider when it is necessary for law enforcement to accompany certain situations.

  - ▶ For example, in Germany it is possible to use administrative assistance (German: Amtshilfe). This means that authorities can seek the support of other authorities if they cannot carry out their administrative action alone (e.g., bailiffs can be accompanied by police when resistance is expected).

3 Law enforcement 👮

Individuals who hold sovereignist or anti-authority beliefs may refuse to comply with the law, can challenge the authority of police officers, and can engage in pseudolegal tactics to obstruct or delay legal proceedings and threaten police institutions, agencies, and individual officers or their families. While many sovereignist and anti-authority adherents are non-violent, interactions with law enforcement are often time-consuming and can become confrontational or, in rare cases, escalate to violence.

Common Behaviours Displayed During Law Enforcement Encounters

"Opting Out" of Legal Obligations Using Pseudolegal Tactics

- Disobeying or disregarding traffic or other laws.

- Refusing to recognize or comply with law enforcement orders and instructions.

- Refusing to recognize court authority by ignoring summons or other court orders.

- Declining to carry or provide government-issued identification or other documentation, such as vehicle insurance.

- Making invalid claims related to "common law," "natural law," or other legal systems to justify their refusal to comply.

- Refusing to sign any legal or law enforcement documentation as it signifies a "contract" in the sovereignist and anti-authority ideology.

Filming and Recording

When confronted by law enforcement or legal authorities, individuals with these beliefs may declare they are "sovereign," "freemen," or insist that police officers lack jurisdiction over them. A common tactic used by these individuals is filming or recording their interactions for the purpose of:

- Provoking or entrapping officers into making mistakes they believe can be used to challenge legal authority.

- Baiting officers into lengthy debates about legal principles to manipulate the narrative of the encounter.

- Posting footage of the encounter online to "educate" others, spread misinformation, or attempt to discredit law enforcement or the legal system.

Retaliatory or Sabotaging Legal Tactics

- Engaging in paper flooding (i.e., "paper terrorism"), which can include the use of false paperwork, frivolous lawsuits, or placing fraudulent liens on police property (e.g., police vehicles), or property privately owned by officers and their families as a form of retaliation.

Defiance of Legal and Regulatory Orders

Law enforcement officers can encounter individuals who hold sovereignist or anti-authority beliefs in various other legal and civil scenarios. This is because individuals who hold these beliefs not only reject government and law enforcement authority, but also frequently resist compliance with civil or non-criminal orders related to housing, family law, regulatory orders, or protests. For example, individuals who hold these beliefs may frequently encounter law enforcement or legal authorities during:

- Evictions or property disputes, such as refusal to vacate foreclosed or rented properties.
- The seizure of firearms permits and weapons.
- Child welfare and protection or family court orders, such as a refusal to allow children to be transferred to state or provincial custody, or a failure to comply with supervised visitation orders.
- Regulatory or licensing enforcement, such as a refusal to comply with health or environmental regulations in business or private settings.
- Civil disobedience during public demonstrations and protests.
- Fraud and financial crimes, such as providing false legal advice, claiming fraudulent tax exemptions, or filing fraudulent or fabricated financial and legal documents.

Hostile and Violent Reactions

- Individuals may perceive law enforcement as a direct threat and respond with violence or intimidation during a confrontation, leading to armed standoffs or violent escalations such as during routine traffic stops.
- Some individuals may deliberately target law enforcement officers or agencies in the form of planned attacks, ambushes, or attempts to lure officers to specific locations to harm them.

Approaches and Strategies

Effectively managing interactions with individuals who hold sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs requires a combination of strategies, including strategic communication and de-escalation techniques, officer training and awareness, threat level assessments, as well as awareness of community resources.

Strategic Communication and De-Escalation Strategies

- Sovereignist and anti-authority individuals will often try to bait officers into pseudolegal arguments. Law enforcement officers should avoid engaging in these debates and instead reiterate the lawful and legal procedures recognized in their local, provincial, or federal context.

- Sovereignist and anti-authority individuals may also insist on filming or recording their interactions with law enforcement. As with other interactions, officers should assume all interactions are being recorded and refrain from engaging in pseudolegal debates.

- Finally, law enforcement officials should avoid language which may escalate hostility.

Training and Awareness

- Specific training modalities, such as roleplaying, should be considered to practice managing interactions with individuals who hold sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs.

- Officers should receive training to recognize common pseudolegal arguments, tactics, key phrases, and behaviours, enabling them to better identify and navigate interactions with these individuals.

- Officers should conduct threat level assessments before engaging with known sovereignist or anti-authority individuals during high-risk situations, such as evictions, child custody disputes, or serving arrest warrants.

- In identified high-risk cases, officers can respond with heightened situational awareness and, where necessary, secure additional backup support.

- Implementing and considering alternative ways to approach individuals that help to neutralize the risk rather than escalate can create safer situations.

  ▶ For example, approaching with weapons drawn is likely to reinforce the individual's worldview that law enforcement are "coming for them" and provoke a defensive reaction. In situations like this law enforcement should consider how they can minimize risk rather than escalate it, such as by entering a situation without weapons drawn (where it is considered safe to do so), and clearly communicating their intentions before acting.

Community Resource Awareness and Collaboration

- Law enforcement officers should be made aware of community and alternative resources, such as psychosocial support programs, counselling services, anti-violence training and competency development workshops available to individuals who hold sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs.

- Where appropriate, officers may share information about these services to individuals and/or their family and friends.

- When appropriate, these resources should be framed as measures to help divert individuals away from the criminal justice system.