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Violence risk assessment of Sovereign Citizens: An exploratory examination of the HCR-20 Version 3 and the TRAP-18

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Abstract

Sovereign Citizens comprise an understudied right-wing extremist movement in the United States who have grown in notoriety in recent years due to several high-profile instances of violence. Despite this, little empirical research has been conducted on Sovereign Citizens, including research on assessing their risk for violence. In this study, we sought to replicate and extend a prior study on Sovereign Citizen violence. Using open-source data, we added several new cases to a pre-existing dataset of violent and non-violent Sovereign Citizen incidents, yielding a total sample of 107 cases, 69 of which were scored using the HCR-20^{V3}, and 83 of which were scored using the TRAP-18. Our findings indicated that higher scores on both instruments were significantly associated with greater odds of cases being violent. We also observed that several risk factors occurred with significantly more frequency among violent cases than non-violent ones. Implications for future research and professional practice are discussed.

KEYWORDS
extremism, forensic psychology, HCR-20, risk assessment, TRAP-18

1 | INTRODUCTION

The Sovereign Citizen movement is a loosely affiliated far-right extremist movement in the United States (U.S.) whose adherents subscribe (to varying degrees) to a complex web of anti-government beliefs, core among them being the illegitimacy of one or more levels of government, whether federal, state, or local (Loeser, 2015; Parker, 2014;

Portions of data reported in this manuscript were previously reported in Challacombe and Lucas (2019).

Sarteschi, 2021). While the exact number of Sovereign Citizens is difficult to ascertain, MacNab (2010) estimated the movement to have 100,000 adherents and estimated that a further 200,000 people have engaged in some form of Sovereign Citizen-like behavior (e.g., tax protesting). Over the last two decades, the Sovereign Citizen movement has grown in both size and notoriety (Hoge, 2019), the latter owing to several high-profile instances of violence against law enforcement officers. Such is the concern about violence that the movement is considered a domestic terrorist threat by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI, 2011). The movement has also spread beyond the U.S., and adherents can be found in several Commonwealth nations, including Australia (Baldino & Lucas, 2019), Britain (Anti-Defamation League [ADL], 2012), Canada (Hoge, 2019; Pytyck & Chaimowitz, 2013), and New Zealand (ADL, 2012). In countries outside of the United States, movement adherents are sometimes referred to as "Freemen on the Land" (Hoge, 2019, p. 2).

Due to its loosely organized form, absence of a centralized leadership structure, and lack of criteria for membership, the Sovereign Citizen movement is difficult to define with precision; as Sarteschi (2020) notes, the only requirement to join the Sovereign Citizen movement is to identify oneself as such. This definitional challenge is not limited to Sovereign Citizens; a lack of clarity and consistency in defining right-wing extremist movements in general was recently highlighted as a problem by the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs (HSGAC, 2022). The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has provided the following definition of the movement: "groups or individuals who facilitate or engage in acts of violence directed at public officials, financial institutions, and government facilities in support of their belief that the legitimacy of the U.S. citizenship should be rejected; almost all forms of established government, authority, and institutions are illegitimate; and that they are immune from federal, state and local laws" (DHS, 2014, p. 1). This is the definition we adopt for the purposes of our review of the movement's history and ideology, presented below.

1.1 | A brief overview of Sovereign Citizens' ideology and behavior

Relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to the Sovereign Citizen movement, and much of what is known about it comes from law enforcement reports and civilian watchdog groups that track extremist activity (e.g., the ADL, the Southern Poverty Law Center [SPLC]). From these and other sources, a portrait of the movement's core ideological underpinnings and common behavioral tendencies has emerged. While the constellation of beliefs may differ across individual Sovereign Citizens, they are all connected by a set of core ideological commitments. These commitments, by many accounts, predate the modern Sovereign Citizen movement, having been inherited from various adjacent right-wing political or religious movements, including mid-century tax protestors, Christian Identity, Posse Comitatus, and the U.S. militia movement (see Hoge, 2019, Parker, 2014, and Sullivan, 1999, for a more detailed review of the origins and ideology of the Sovereign Citizen movement).

The most fundamental belief that unites this relatively diffuse movement is that nearly all forms of government, in particular the federal government, are illegitimate (Parker, 2014; Sarteschi, 2020). In the U.S., there is a common belief among Sovereign Citizens in the supremacy of so-called "common law," which Sovereign Citizens believe originated during the American Revolution and which, upon freeing the colonists from the rule of the British monarchy, also rendered each of them "sovereign over his own property" (Parker, 2014, p. 343). This common-law system, as understood by movement adherents, cannot be infringed upon by any government. Sovereign Citizens maintain that the U.S. federal government, following the passage of the 13th and 14th Amendments in 1866 (which abolished slavery and granted citizenship and other rights to African Americans), and the abandoning of the gold standard in 1933, shifted to a system of so-called "admiralty law" (Parker, 2014, p. 344; Sullivan, 1999) from which they are exempt.

Many Sovereign Citizens (particularly those adhering to the tenets of the Moorish Sovereign Citizen movement[1]; Sarteschi, 2020) believe that the U.S., deeply in debt after abandoning the gold standard in 1933, transformed into a "corporate entity" (Parker, 2014, p. 345) and pledged its own citizens as collateral (Parker, 2014). To accomplish this, many Sovereign Citizens believe that the federal government files citizens' birth certificates

with the U.S. Department of Commerce in the creation of financial securities, and that the U.S. Treasury holds secret bank accounts for each citizen. This belief is referred to as the "Redemption" belief (Parker, 2014, p. 345; Theret, 2012), and many Sovereign Citizens further believe that they can access these accounts by filing a precise set of pseudo-legal documents with the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (Parker, 2014). It is also the belief of many Sovereign Citizens that agents of the state (e.g., judges) are aware of this scheme, and knowingly participate in it and keep it secret (Sarteschi, 2020).

In addition, many Sovereign Citizens maintain that, in the process of pledging the citizenry as collateral, the federal government has created artificial, corporate "strawman" (Loeser, 2015; Sarteschi, 2020, p. 61) versions of each citizen, which are distinct from an individual's true, "flesh and blood" self (Parker, 2014, p. 345). This "strawman" version of oneself, according to Sovereign Citizens, is represented with capital letters that appear on one's birth certificate and other official documents and is legally separable from the individual. Once an individual has freed themselves from this "strawman" entity (e.g., by renouncing their driver's licenses or vehicle registrations; Sarteschi, 2020), they become sovereign, and so adherents believe, are exempt from government laws that they maintain only apply to the "strawman" (Parker, 2014; Sarteschi, 2020).

These beliefs, among others, lead to a common set of behaviors and tactics frequently seen in the Sovereign Citizen movement. One of these is the creation of so-called "common law courts" (Parker, 2014, p. 344), which Sovereign Citizens and members of the U.S. militia movement may convene to issue specious arrest warrants, fines, summons, and pardons, often targeting government officials involved in legal actions against Sovereign Citizens. This is related to a broader tactic that has become a hallmark of the movement, namely the use of "paper terrorism," which Loeser (2015) defines as "...the filing of fraudulent liens and frivolous lawsuits against public officials..." (p. 1126). Such tactics are often used to harass or intimidate officials or attempt to achieve some form of relief from legal penalties. Frivolous commercial liens are perhaps the most notable of these filings and are often targeted at attorneys, clerks, judges, or law enforcement officials who encounter Sovereign Citizens.

Three other common behaviors of Sovereign Citizens are worth noting in this context. The first is their frequent use of homemade identification documents (e.g., false driver's licenses, false license plates; ADL, 2012), which follow logically from their beliefs that they are exempt from government regulations (particularly the laws of the road). Consequently, Sovereign Citizens frequently encounter law enforcement in the form of traffic stops. During these stops, they are often oppositional, and some encounters have resulted in violence directed at officers (see Sarteschi, 2021).

The second common behavior, often seen during traffic stops or in courtrooms, is resisting arrest and refusal to cooperate with legal proceedings. As Sarteschi (2020) explains, Sovereign Citizens take care to avoid entering what they refer to as a "joinder" with a government entity (p. 11). Though they maintain that the law only applies to their "strawman," Sovereign Citizens also believe that they can inadvertently bring themselves under the jurisdiction of the law if their "flesh-and-blood" self becomes enjoined with the "strawman." In the minds of Sovereign Citizens, such a joinder could occur were they to voluntarily participate with the state in various ways, such as registering their vehicles, getting a driver's license, cooperating during a traffic stop, or participating in court proceedings.

Lastly, the third common behavior of Sovereign Citizens worth noting is squatting in unoccupied homes. As noted by Sarteschi (2020), some movement adherents maintain that they have a right to live in unclaimed property and may attempt to occupy and lay claim to unoccupied homes. As Parker (2014) notes, this is one behavior that is the most likely to bring the general public into contact with Sovereign Citizen tactics.

1.2 | Sovereign Citizens and violence

Though Sovereign Citizens are most associated with "paper terrorist" tactics and violations of driving rules, adherents have also engaged in violence (Challacombe & Lucas, 2019). As Sarteschi (2020) notes, one of the nation's most well-known domestic extremists and one of the perpetrators of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, Terry Nichols, was a self-identified Sovereign Citizen. While it appears that only a minority of Sovereign Citizens engage in violence,

the movement has been associated with several instances of threats and physical violence against law enforcement, often in the context of traffic stops, being served with legal papers, or attempts by police to execute arrest warrants (MacNab, 2010; Sarteschi, 2021). There have been several instances where such violence was fatal, either to law enforcement, the Sovereign Citizen, or both (Challacombe & Lucas, 2019; Sarteschi, 2021).

In a qualitative study of anti-authority groups in Canada, including Sovereign Citizens, and Freemen on the Land, Perry et al. (2020) identified three primary forms of violence members of these groups engage in. The first form was so-called "offensive/extremist violence" (Perry et al., 2020, p. 1783), wherein adherents conducted a premeditated attack without apparent provocation. Though the authors noted that this represented the least common form of violence, there have been several high-profile examples of such violence both in Canada and the U.S. (see Perry et al., 2020; Sarteschi, 2021). The second form of violence identified, and more common than offensive/extremist violence, was so-called "defensive/reactionary violence" (Perry et al., 2020, p. 1785), which typically occurs following some form of contact between the perpetrator and a state agent. In the case of Sovereign Citizens, this form of violence is perhaps most often seen in the context of traffic stops (Sarteschi, 2021). Such violence could also occur at legal venues such as courthouses, or when law enforcement attempts to evict Sovereign Citizens from vacant houses or execute arrest warrants. The third form of violence identified by Perry et al. (2020) was "harassment/intimidation" (p. 1786), including "paper terrorism." As noted above, this is one of the most common forms of Sovereign Citizen violence.

Though there exists no strong empirical research on the statistical rate at which Sovereign Citizens engage in violence (i.e., base rates), there are some prima facie reasons to be concerned about an elevated risk of violence among Sovereign Citizens as a group due to the characteristics of some of their beliefs. Perhaps the most concerning is the core ideological commitment among Sovereign Citizens that they are exempt from so many laws and regulations. Acting on this belief (e.g., refusing to file taxes, driving with homemade license plates, squatting) inevitably results in many Sovereign Citizens encountering police and the courts. When coupled with a belief that such officials are illegitimate, and in the minds of some Sovereign Citizens, complicit in a conspiracy designed to infringe on individual liberty, the consequence of these beliefs may be acts of violence, be them defensive or offensive in nature.

However, not all Sovereign Citizens engage in violence, even if they maintain many, or all, of the ideological commitments noted above. Thus, it remains to be identified what factors differentiate those that engage in non-violent forms of criminal behavior (e.g., tax fraud and filing false liens) and those that do engage in violence.

1.3 | Violence risk assessment and Sovereign Citizens

Despite the growing concern over Sovereign Citizen violence, the movement has received relatively little empirical attention, particularly in the field of forensic psychology. This gap mirrors the broader lack of empirical psychological research with respect to extremist violence generally (Gill, 2015; Monahan, 2012, 2017). While a small body of conceptual and empirical work on evaluating competency with Sovereign Citizens (and others with extreme political beliefs) has begun to emerge (e.g., Cunningham, 2018; Paradis et al., 2018; Parker, 2014; Pytyck & Chaimowitz, 2013), little is known about another crucial task for professionals interacting with this population: violence risk assessment. In particular, it is not known whether well-researched risk factors for general violence are useful for distinguishing between those Sovereign Citizens who commit acts of violence and those who do not. If some of the risk factors found in the general violence literature (e.g., pro-criminal attitudes, substance use, employment problems, antisocial peers) do possess utility and validity in assessing Sovereign Citizens' risk for violence, then professionals engaged in risk assessments with this population may be able to draw on well-established methods and measures already available.

To date, it appears that only one study has empirically examined the validity of a risk assessment instrument with Sovereign Citizens. Challacombe and Lucas (2019) examined the postdictive validity of the *Terrorist Radicalization Assessment Protocol* (TRAP-18; Meloy, 2017) in a sample of 58 Sovereign Citizens using freely available, open-source information. The authors found that the TRAP-18 was able to differentiate between known violent and non-violent

Sovereign Citizens, suggesting that the instrument may have utility in conducting risk assessments with this unique subpopulation. Furthermore, though there are now several specialized instruments oriented around assessments of extremist violence, only the TRAP-18 has been subject to empirical investigation with respect to Sovereign Citizens (Challacombe & Lucas, 2019). It is also unknown whether existing risk assessment instruments oriented toward general violence, already in widespread use, may have validity with this population.

1.4 | The present study

The present study is an extension of the one conducted by Challacombe and Lucas (2019) and sought to examine the ability of portions of two risk assessment tools to differentiate between violent and non-violent Sovereign Citizens who had contact with law enforcement. However, this study builds upon Challacombe and Lucas (2019) in two important respects. First, in addition to the TRAP-18, this study also examines the Historical scale of *Historical-Clinical-Risk Management 20*, *Version 3* (HCR-20[V3]; Douglas et al., 2013), a set of structured professional judgment (SPJ) guidelines for assessing the risk for general violence. The HCR-20[V3] and its predecessors are among the most commonly used risk assessment instruments globally (Singh et al., 2014) and a large body of research supports the reliability and validity of the HCR-20[V3] and its earlier iterations (Douglas & Shaffer, 2021). However, its application to violent extremism has not yet been empirically examined; thus, the current study seeks to fill this important gap in the literature. Second, this study added several new cases to the dataset of Sovereign Citizen events in the 2004–2014 window reported by Challacombe and Lucas (2019), using open-source information.

We had several hypotheses prior to conducting analyses. First, based on the findings of Challacombe and Lucas (2019), we expected that violent cases would have higher average TRAP-18 scores than would non-violent cases. We also anticipated that increases in TRAP-18 scores would increase the odds of a case being categorized as violent. Though there has been no prior published research on the application of the HCR-20[V3] to Sovereign Citizens, there is a growing body of research on risk factors for extremist violence in general, which suggests substantial overlap between factors associated with general violence and extremist violence (e.g., Desmarais et al., 2017; Gill et al., 2020; Smith, 2018; Wolfowicz et al., 2020). Thus, we hypothesized that violent cases would have higher average scores on the HCR-20[V3] Historical scale than non-violent cases. As well, we anticipated that increasing scores on the HCR-20[V3] Historical scale would be associated with increased odds of a case being categorized as violent.

2 | METHOD

2.1 | Sample of cases

As noted above, this study used and expanded Challacombe and Lucas's (2019) dataset of 58 U.S.-based Sovereign Citizens—30 who had planned or committed violent acts, and 28 who committed non-violent criminal acts (e.g., fraud, tax evasion, etc.) between 2004 and 2014. In the original dataset, cases were identified through searches of LexisNexis, the SPLC website, the Global Terrorism Database, and press releases using the search terms "sovereign," "freeman," and "paperless" (Challacombe & Lucas, 2019). In the current study, we identified new cases of Sovereign Citizen incidents occurring in the U.S. between 2004 and 2014, which were not located during the creation of the original dataset. We did not expand the sampling window to ensure that data collection remained feasible for two researchers.

These cases were identified from three sources. The first source was a list[2] of violent right-wing extremist acts and plots (including by Sovereign Citizens) in the U.S. between 2000 and 2018 compiled by J.J. MacNab, a recognized expert on the Sovereign Citizen movement. We included cases occurring between 2004 and 2014 wherein the actors involved were categorized by MacNab as Sovereign Citizens. The second was a list[3] of Sovereign Citizen incidents in the U.S. occurring between 2007 and 2010, compiled by the ADL. Third, some cases were identified via articles published by the SPLC.[4] A small number of cases were identified incidentally while completing case searches.

When combined with the original dataset, we had a list of 194 Sovereign Citizen incidents occurring in our sampling window. We were unable to find adequate data for 87 of these cases. This yielded a final sample of 107 cases. Most of these cases came from the MacNab list (61.7%), followed by the ADL list (31.8%), SPLC articles (3.7%), and other incidental sources (2.8%).

Cases were included in the sample by virtue of having been labeled as Sovereign Citizens in the sources from which they were drawn and having an index offense (i.e., the offense for which the case was detected) occurring between 2004 and 2014. The sources from which these cases were identified (i.e., ADL, MacNab, and SPLC) did not provide information about the criteria used to classify individuals as Sovereign Citizens. Based on our review of the cases themselves, these categorization decisions appear to have been based on an individual's own self-identification as a Sovereign Citizen, or details of their behavior that strongly suggest the presence of Sovereign Citizen ideology (e.g., driving with homemade license plates, espousing Sovereign Citizen theories in court, claiming vacant properties, and filing false liens). We did not make secondary judgments as to the categorization of cases as being Sovereign Citizens for two reasons. First, because there is no one agreed-upon definition of a Sovereign Citizen, secondary judgments have the potential to introduce another source of bias into the sample selection. Second, applying criteria derived from a definition such as that proposed by the DHS (2014), particularly to open-source data whose scope and depth may be limited, would likely artificially decrease the sample size by excluding those whose Sovereign Citizen ideology may not be explicitly stated, but may be reasonably inferred on the basis of their behaviors. We review the implications of this decision in the Discussion. Cases were categorized as violent and non-violent based on the index offense. To make this determination, the authors relied on the definition of violence as per the HCR-20[V3]: "...actual, attempted, or threatened infliction of bodily harm on another person" (Douglas et al., 2013, p. 36).

2.2 | Data collection

This study used an open-source method of data collection similar to that employed by Challacombe and Lucas (2019) and Gruenewald et al. (2013). In the present study, the names of the Sovereign Citizen(s) in each case were searched in paid databases (NexisUni [formerly LexisNexis], Proquest, Westlaw), freely available search engines (Google and Yahoo), and the Homeland Security Digital Library. Any relevant information was collected and saved, including newspaper articles, blog posts, transcripts of news broadcasts, and court documents. In addition, where reference was made in open sources to existing court documents that were not found using search engines, the authors conducted additional searches in PACER. The searches were divided between the authors, and all collected information were shared between authors.

2.3 | Variables of interest

2.3.1 | Demographics

We coded two demographic variables for each case. The *age* of the perpetrator at the time of the index offense was coded in years. The *sex* of the perpetrator was coded as either male or female. Because many sources did not include information on *ethnicity*, this variable was not coded.

2.3.2 | Case characteristics

We coded several variables related to the characteristics of the case. The *year* of the index offense was coded from the lists of sources from which cases were drawn. The *region*[5] of the index offense was coded based on the U.S. state the perpetrator(s) committed the offense in. The presence of a *proximal group* was coded as present if there was evidence that the perpetrator was affiliated with a larger group, or if the perpetrator formed part of a dyad. As noted above, the case was categorized as *violent* if the index offense (i.e., the offense for which case included in the

dataset) met the definition of violence put forth by Douglas et al. (2013). If the index offense was violent, we coded whether the violence was *lethal*. Lastly, among violent offenses, we coded whether there was evidence of *premeditation*. This variable was coded based on the presence or absence of the TRAP-18 item of *Pathway* warning behaviors, which refers to indicators of planning or preparation for violence.

Because open-source information of the sort collected in this study is likely to be heterogenous with respect to its reliability (i.e., the accuracy and trustworthiness of the information), we sought to systematically evaluate the reliability of the information used in this study so that its impact on the study's findings might be explored. To this end, we used the reliability scale for rating open-source information developed for the Center for Homeland Defense and Security's *K-12 School Shooting Database* (Riedman & O'Neill, 2020a, 2020b). We followed the scoring rules outlined on the *K-12 School Shooting Database's* website, which are as follows:

> 1 = Blog: Privately operated blogs that may or may not include source citations. May be reported anonymously; 2 = Single Newspaper Article or Online News Report: Stories published by network, cable, or online mainstream media sources. Stories include an author. 3 = Multiple News Sources: Reports from multiple news sources showing consistent information from different independent sources. 4 = Hundreds of News Sources OR Statement/Interview from Law Enforcement Official: Hundreds of reports from different news sources (e.g., thousands of stories have been published about the Columbine High School shooting). 5 = Court Records or Police Report: Official records of the incident.
>
> (Riedman & O'Neill, 2020a, 2020b)

2.3.3 | Risk assessment measures

HCR-20^{V3} Historical scale

The HCR-20^{V3} is a set of SPJ guidelines for assessing and managing the risk for general violence. The HCR-20^{V3} divides its 20 risk factors into three scales: The 10-item Historical scale considers an individual's history of problems in several areas related to violence risk (see Table 1 for a list of each item in the Historical scale); the five-item Clinical scale considers a set of factors related to an individual's recent functioning (e.g., insight, violent ideation, symptoms of major mental illness); and the five-item Risk Management scale, which considers a set of factors related to future concerns regarding the management of an individual's risk (e.g., access to professional services and potential problems with supervision or treatment).

In the present study, only the items comprising the Historical scale of the HCR-20^{V3} were coded. This was done because of the inability to adequately code many of the risk factors comprising the Clinical and Risk Management scales using limited open-source information. For proper coding, many of these items require either some degree of close clinical contact with or access to files containing clinical information about the individuals being assessed. The HCR-20^{V3} is coded on a trichotomous scale with items being rated as either "Present," "Possibly/Partially Present," or "Absent." In addition, if there in insufficient information with which to make a rating, items can be scored as

TABLE 1 Items comprising the HCR-20^{V3} Historical scale

History of problems with...	
H1. Violence	H6. Major mental illness
H2. Other antisocial behavior	H7. Personality disorder
H3. Relationships	H8. Traumatic experiences
H4. Employment	H9. Violent attitudes
H5. Substance use	H10. Treatment or supervision response

Note: Adapted from Douglas et al. (2013).

"Omitted." In the current study, items were scored numerically, where "Absent" = 0, "Possibly/Partially Present" = 1, and "Present" = 2. Items were summed to produce a total score with a maximum possible value of 20. While items on the HCR-20^{V3} are not intended to be recorded or summed numerically, such procedures are common in research with SPJ instruments (Douglas & Shaffer, 2021; Hart & Boer, 2021).

TRAP-18

The TRAP-18 is a risk assessment instrument designed to aid in the assessment of an individual's risk for lone-actor terrorist violence. It is composed of 18 items divided into two scales. The eight-item Proximal Warning Behaviors scale is composed of factors presumed to be observable closer in time to the commission of an act of violence and thus may signal an imminent risk of the same. By contrast, the 10-item Distal Characteristics scale is composed of factors presumed to be observable in an individual's background that serves to elevate their risk (see Table 2). While research on the TRAP-18 is nascent, there is evidence that the instrument possesses reliability, validity, and clinical or operational utility (Allely & Wicks, 2022; Brugh et al., 2020; Challacombe & Patrick, 2022; Collins & Clark, 2021; Corner & Pyszora, 2022; Guldimann & Meloy, 2020; Meloy et al., 2019), including with Sovereign Citizens (Challacombe & Lucas, 2019). Furthermore, there is some research that supports the ability of the Proximal Warning Behaviors items to distinguish between those who did and did not commit violence (Goodwill & Meloy, 2019).

The TRAP-18 is coded dichotomously, and items are rated as either "Present" or "Absent." For the purposes of quantitative analyses, items were scored numerically and summed to produce a total score, where "Absent" = 0 and "Present" = 1. The maximum total score was 18. The maximum possible scores on the Proximal Warning Behaviors scale and the Distal Characteristics scale are 8 and 10, respectively. It should be noted that like the HCR-20^{V3}, the TRAP-18 is not intended to be scored numerically in practice (Meloy, 2017). Though the HCR-20^{V3} manual contains explicit instructions on omitting items (noted above), the TRAP-18 manual does not. As such, the authors applied the guidance provided by Douglas et al. (2013) when omitting items on the TRAP-18. Lastly, though the HCR-20^{V3} permits evaluators to code "Other Factors" not included on the tool but deemed relevant to a given case (Douglas et al., 2013), we did not add any additional factors.

2.4 | Coding

Initially, both authors independently coded a subsample of cases, and coding decisions were compared. Reliability of coding decisions on these cases was observed to be poor. As such, we adopted a consensus coding approach wherein each case independently double-coded based on the open-source information collected, and disagreements were discussed and resolved. Consensus codes were then recorded. The HCR-20^{V3} Historical scale and the TRAP-18 were

TABLE 2 Items comprising the TRAP-18

Proximal warning behaviors	Distal characteristics
1. Pathway	9. Personal grievance and moral outrage
2. Fixation	10. Framed by an ideology
3. Identification as pseudocommando	11. Failure to affiliate with an extremist or other group
4. Novel aggression	12. Dependence on the virtual community
5. Energy burst	13. Thwarting of occupational goals
6. Leakage	14. Changes in thinking and emotions
7. Last resort	15. Failure of sexually intimate pair bonding
8. Directly communicated threat	16. Mental disorder
	17. Creativity and innovation
	18. Criminal violence

Note: Adapted from Meloy (2017).

scored according to the instructions contained in Douglas et al. (2013) and Meloy (2017), respectively. In scoring the TRAP-18, the authors also reviewed Meloy and Yakeley (2014) as recommended by Meloy (2017).

We reviewed all the available information collected for each case and recorded two codes for each item on the HCR-20^{V3} Historical Scale and the TRAP-18. The first was termed the *post-index score*, which reflected the scoring of the item based on all known information about the case, including that information pertaining to the index offense itself and the period after the index offense (e.g., behavior in court, behavior in custody, and court-ordered mental health evaluations). The second was termed the *pre-index score*, which only reflected information pertaining to the period before the index offense. This decision was made for two reasons. First, the use of *post-index scores* (i.e., those that make use of information concerning the index offense and events occurring after) cannot be used to examine whether risk assessment instruments can predict violence. Coding information related to the index offense and subsequent events contaminates the predictor (e.g., risk assessment scores that reflect the violent index offense) with the outcomes (e.g., violent index offense). As such, *pre-index scores* were coded for use in validity analyses. However, in order to better understand the distribution of risk factors demonstrated by Sovereign Citizens, *post-index scores* may have descriptive value, as risk factors may become evident in a case on the basis of behaviors exhibited during the index offense or in the courtroom, for example, Thus, the second reason for this coding decision was to examine the distribution of risk factors between violent and non-violent Sovereign Citizens on the basis of all available information, including that related to the index offense and events occurring afterward. In real-world practice, particularly when tasked with appraising the risk for recidivism posed by a Sovereign Citizen who has already offended, such information is likely to be highly relevant.

We examined the interrater reliability of coding decisions using mixed-model, absolute agreement intraclass correlations (ICCs), using interpretive benchmarks from Cicchetti (1994). The sample for these analyses was slightly restricted (*N* = 100), as it excluded the first seven cases that were used as practice cases and collaboratively coded. For the K-12 School Shooting reliability score, the ICC was 0.45, indicating "Fair" agreement. For the pre-and post-index scores on the HCR-20^{V3} Historical scale, ICCs ranged from −0.09 ("Poor") to 0.47 ("Fair"). For post-index HCR-20^{V3} Historical scale scores, ICCs ranged from 0.08 ("Poor") to 0.51 ("Fair"). For TRAP-18 pre-index scores, ICCs ranged from −0.19 ("Poor") to 0.60 ("Good"). Lastly, TRAP-18 post-index scores, ICCs ranged from 0.20 ("Poor") to 0.63 ("Good"). These results support the use of a consensus coding approach to enhance reliability.

2.5 | Analytic strategy

We first analyzed the data descriptively, examining case characteristics, risk assessment scores, and the distribution of individual risk factors. We calculated means and proportions for all continuous and nominal variables, respectively, both for the sample as a whole and stratified by offense type (violent vs. non-violent). Mean differences were compared using *t*-tests, and differences in proportions were compared using chi-square tests.

To examine whether increased pre-index scores on the HCR-20^{V3} Historical scale and the TRAP-18 were associated with greater odds of a case being violent, we conducted binary logistic regressions. In addition, a second logistic regression was performed for each of the risk assessment scales with the K-12 School Shooting Database reliability score included in the model to examine whether this moderated the association between the scores and violence. Each of the risk assessment tool scores retained a significant association with violence after the inclusion of the reliability scores, and thus, we are only reporting the original models. Prior to performing the logistic regressions, we verified that the assumption of linearity was not violated using the Box-Tidwell (1962) procedure.

2.5.1 | Missing data

While an effort was made to code as many items as possible, in cases where information was limited such that a judgment about a risk factor's presence or absence could not be made, we recorded the items as "Omitted." When the number of omitted items met or exceeded 30% on the HCR-20^{V3} or the TRAP-18, the case was excluded from

the analyses of that tool's descriptive statistics and validity. This resulted in a sample size of 69 retained cases with adequate HCR-20^{V3} data, and 83 retained cases with adequate TRAP-18 data. In retained cases, omitted items were counted as "Absent." The proportions of omitted items for each risk assessment tool, based on pre-index information among the retained cases and for the whole sample, are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3 Proportion of omitted items based on pre-index offense information

HCR-20^{V3} Historical item	Retained for validity analyses (n = 69) % of cases with item omitted	Whole sample (n = 107) % of cases with item omitted
H1. Violence	0	2.8
H2. Other antisocial behavior	0	2.8
H3. Relationships	2.9	22.4
H4. Employment	4.3	33.6
H5. Substance use	1.4	31.8
H6. Major mental illness	0	33.6
H7. Personality disorder	0	33.6
H8. Traumatic experiences	0	34.6
H9. Violent attitudes	2.9	15.9
H10. Treatment/supervision	0	14.0
TRAP-18 item	Retained for validity analyses (n = 83) % cases with item omitted	Whole sample (n = 107) % cases with item omitted
1. Pathway	0	1.9
2. Fixation	1.2	21.5
3. Identification as pseudocommando	1.2	18.7
4. Novel aggression	0	9.3
5. Energy burst	3.6	22.4
6. Leakage	0	6.5
7. Last resort	0	8.4
8. Directly communicated threat	0	5.6
9. Personal grievance and moral outrage	1.2	18.7
10. Framed by ideology	1.2	9.3
11. Failure to affiliate with extremist or other group	0	11.2
12. Dependence on virtual community	1.2	15.9
13. Thwarting of occupational goals	16.9	35.5
14. Changes in thinking and emotion	20.5	37.4
15. Failure of sexually intimate pair bonding	22.9	39.3
16. Mental disorder	10.8	28
17. Creativity and innovation	0	3.7
18. Criminal violence	0	0.9

3 | RESULTS

3.1 | Case characteristics

The vast majority of the sample was composed of males (89.7%). The average age was 46.6 years and ages ranged from 16 to 84 years. When stratified by type of offense (violent vs. non-violent), 92.3% of violent perpetrators were male compared to 85.7% of non-violent perpetrators who were male. The difference in the proportion of sexes across the offense type was not statistically significant, $\chi^2 = 1.20$, $p = 0.273$. The average age of violent perpetrators (43.4 years), however, was significantly lower than that of non-violent perpetrators (52) years; $t = 2.94$, $p = 0.004$, and this difference was moderate in magnitude ($d = 0.60$).

A breakdown of violent and non-violent cases by year, lethality, and number of victims is presented in Table 4. Most of the cases examined were violent (60.7%), and in 22.4% of cases, the violence was lethal. The cases appeared somewhat uneven in their geographic distribution, with most occurring in the West (28%), followed by the Midwest (22.4%), Southeast (21.5%), East (15.9%), and Southwest (12.1%). There was evidence of clear group affiliation on the part of the perpetrator(s) in 14% of the cases, and in 11.2% of the cases the perpetrators formed a dyad. In 43.4% of violent cases, there was evidence of premeditation, based on the presence or absence of the Pathway item on the TRAP-18, coded using pre-index offense information. The mean scores on the K-12 School Shooting Database Reliability Scale did not differ significantly between the violent (3.92) and non-violent (3.62) cases, $t = 1.17$, $p = 0.244$.

Among the retained HCR-20^{V3} cases, we observed that violent cases had a significantly higher average number of omitted pre-index items than did non-violent cases (0.19 vs. 0) average omitted items, $t = 2.44$, $p = 0.019$, though the magnitude of this difference was small ($d = 0.48$). No significant differences were observed between the average number of omitted post-index HCR-20^{V3} Historical items, $t = 0.90$, $p = 0.372$. Among the retained TRAP-18 cases, we observed that non-violent cases had a significantly higher average number of omitted pre-index items than did violent cases (1.30 vs. 0.48 average omitted items), $t = 2.83$, $p = 0.007$, and this difference was moderate in magnitude ($d = 0.68$). A similar pattern was observed among post-index omitted TRAP-18 items, $t = 2.76$, $p = 0.008$, and the difference was also moderate in magnitude ($d = 0.66$). The implications of these differences will be discussed in Section 4.3 below.

TABLE 4 Cases separated by year, violence, and lethality

Year	Violent	Non-violent	Lethal cases
2004	3	0	1
2005	4	3	4
2006	0	1	0
2007	4	6	0
2008	5	9	3
2009	2	10	1
2010	8	4	3
2011	10	1	1
2012	7	1	3
2013	6	3	0
2014	19	1	8
Totals	68	39	24

3.2 | Risk assessment scores

As noted above, prior to examining the descriptive statistics for each risk assessment instrument, we excluded cases with more than 30% omitted items. Among the 69 retained cases with sufficient HCR-20^{V3} Historical scale data, the average pre-index total score across was 5.78, while the average post-index score was 8.22. Among the 83 retained cases with sufficient TRAP-18 data, the average pre-index score on the Proximal Warning Behavior scale was 1.52, while the post-index average was 2.20. On the Distal Characteristics scale, the average pre-index score was 2.16, while the post-index average score was 3.29. With respect to TRAP-18 total scores, the pre-index average was 3.67, while the post-index average was 5.49.

The average pre-index score on the HCR-20^{V3} Historical scale in violent cases (6.88) was significantly higher than in non-violent cases (4.07), $t = 3.32$, $p = 0.001$, and the magnitude of this difference was large ($d = 0.82$). On the TRAP-18 Proximal Warning Behavior scale, the average pre-index score in violent cases (1.96) was significantly higher than in non-violent cases (0.85), $t = 3.29$, $p = 0.002$. Similarly, on the Distal Characteristics scale, the average score among violent cases (2.64) was also significantly higher than among non-violent cases (1.42), $t = 3.51$, $p < 0.001$. The magnitude of these differences was moderate for both the Proximal Warning Behaviors scale ($d = 0.74$) and the Distal Characteristics scale ($d = 0.79$). Lastly, the average pre-index total score for the TRAP-18 was significantly higher in violent cases (4.60) than in non-violent cases (2.27), $t = 3.81$, $p < 0.01$, and the magnitude of the difference was large ($d = 0.86$).

To examine whether increased scores on the risk assessment instruments were associated with an increase in the odds of cases being violent, we conducted a series of logistic regression analyses. The results of these analyses are presented in Table 5. Higher pre-index total scores on the HCR-20^{V3} Historical scale were significantly associated with increased odds of a case being categorized as violent (sensitivity = 66.7%, specificity = 52.4%, positive predictive value [PPV] = 72.9%, negative predictive value [NPV] = 66.7%).

Pre-index TRAP-18 total scores were also significantly associated with increased odds of case being categorized as violent (sensitivity = 74%, specificity = 63.6%, PPV = 75.5%, NPV = 61.8%). This pattern was also observed for pre-index Proximal Warning Behavior scores (sensitivity = 78%, specificity = 57.6%, PPV = 73.6%, NPV = 63.3%) and pre-index Distal Characteristics scores (sensitivity = 68%, specificity = 60.6%, PPV = 72.3%, NPV = 55.6%). We observed that increases in Proximal Warning Behavior scores yielded the greatest increase in odds that a case would be violent, followed by Distal Characteristics scores, TRAP-18 total scores, and HCR-20^{V3} Historical scale scores.

3.3 | Distribution of risk factors

We next examined the distribution of individual risk factors between those violent and non-violent cases with sufficient pre-index offense information. This was done to identify relatively common risk factors across cases as well as to examine whether certain factors appeared more frequently in violent cases. The percentage of risk factors rated as absent or present in violent and non-violent cases, and the corresponding χ^2 values, are presented in Table 6. There was at least partial evidence (i.e., scores of either 1 or 2) for the presence of several HCR-20^{V3} Historical factors across both violent and non-violent cases, indicating that they were relatively common in the sample as a whole.

TABLE 5 Results of logistic regression analyses

Risk assessment score	B	S.E.	Wald	Odds ratio	95% CIs Lower	Upper	p
HCR-20^{V3} historical total score	0.25	0.09	8.49	1.29	1.09	1.53	0.004
TRAP-18 proximal total score	0.55	0.19	8.59	1.73	1.20	2.50	0.003
TRAP-18 distal total score	0.51	0.16	9.98	1.66	1.21	2.28	0.002
TRAP-18 total score	0.33	0.10	11.0	1.39	1.15	1.70	0.001

TABLE 6 Percentages of risk factor scores based on pre-index offense information among retained cases, stratified by case type

	Violent		Non-violent		
HCR-20^{V3} Historical item	Absent	Present	Absent	Present	χ^2
H1. Violence	59.5	40.5	74.1	25.9	1.53
H2. Other antisocial behavior	57.1	42.9	55.6	44.4	0.02
H3. Relationships	10.0	90.0	33.3	66.7	**5.61**
H4. Employment	43.6	56.4	63.0	37.0	2.40
H5. Substance use	70.7	29.3	92.6	7.4	**4.76**
H6. Major mental illness	81.0	19.0	96.3	3.7	3.41
H7. Personality disorder	85.7	14.3	85.2	14.8	0.00
H8. Traumatic experiences	90.5	9.5	100	0	2.73
H9. Violent attitudes	22.5	77.5	51.9	48.1	**6.16**
H10. Treatment/supervision	69.0	31.0	96.3	3.7	**7.55**
TRAP-18 item	Absent	Present	Absent	Present	χ^2
1. Pathway	46.0	54.0	72.7	27.3	**5.78**
2. Fixation	55.1	44.9	87.9	12.1	**9.78**
3. Identification as a pseudocommando	63.3	36.7	78.8	21.2	2.24
4. Novel aggression	94.0	6.0	100	0	2.05
5. Energy burst	94.0	6.0	90.0	10.0	0.43
6. Leakage	88.0	12.0	97.0	3.0	2.07
7. Last resort	82.0	18.0	97.0	3.0	**4.20**
8. Directly communicated threat	80.0	20.0	90.9	9.1	1.79
9. Personal grievance and moral outrage	36.7	63.3	72.7	27.3	**10.2**
10. Framed by an ideology	40.0	60.0	53.1	46.9	1.36
11. Failure to affiliate with an extremist or other group	96.0	4.0	100	0	1.35
12. Dependence on the virtual community	91.8	8.2	93.9	6.1	0.13
13. Thwarting of occupational goals	79.5	20.5	84.0	16.0	0.21
14. Changes in thinking and emotion	44.7	55.3	42.1	57.9	0.04
15. Failure of sexually intimate pair bonding	69.8	30.2	90.5	9.5	3.37
16. Mental disorder	91.3	8.7	100	0	2.57
17. Creativity and innovation	96.0	4.0	100	0	1.35
18. Criminal violence	78.0	22.0	87.9	12.1	1.31

Note: HCR-20^{V3} Historical scores have been dichotomized such that scores of 1 and 2 are coded as present. Bolded χ^2 values are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$.

HCR-20^{V3} Historical factors that occurred in over a quarter of both violent and non-violent cases included prior violence, prior non-violent antisocial behavior, problems in relationships, and problems with employment. However, there were also some notable differences between violent and non-violent cases. As noted in Table 6, a significantly greater proportion of violent cases score positively on items reflecting problems with relationships, substance use,

violent attitudes, and problems with treatment and supervision than did non-violent cases. Of these risk factors, problems with relationships and violent attitudes were present in the vast majority of violent cases.

With respect to the TRAP-18, only two risk factors were present in over a quarter of both violent and non-violent cases: personal grievance and moral outrage and changes in thinking in emotion. However, as with the HCR-20^{V3}, several differences emerged. As reflected in Table 6, a significantly greater proportion of violent cases demonstrated pathway behaviors, fixation, perceiving themselves to be in a position of last resort, and personal grievance and moral outrage than did non-violent cases.

We then examined the percentages of positive scores for each risk factor among the retained cases based on post-index offense information (see Table 7). This was done to examine the contribution of post-index offense

TABLE 7 Percentages of post-index risk factor scores among retained cases

	Violent		Non-violent		
HCR-20^{V3} Historical item	Absent	Present	Absent	Present	χ^2
H1. Violence	0	100	74.1	25.9	**43.8**
H2. Other antisocial behavior	47.6	52.4	11.1	88.9	**9.86**
H3. Relationships	7.5	92.5	22.2	77.8	3.01
H4. Employment	35.9	64.1	51.9	48.1	1.66
H5. Substance use	65.9	34.1	88.5	11.5	**4.30**
H6. Major mental illness	78.6	21.4	85.2	14.8	0.47
H7. Personality disorder	83.3	16.7	77.8	22.2	0.33
H8. Traumatic experiences	90.5	9.5	100	0	2.73
H9. Violent attitudes	2.4	97.6	42.3	57.7	**17.2**
H10. Treatment/supervision	50.0	50.0	51.9	48.1	0.02
TRAP-18 item	Absent	Present	Absent	Present	χ^2
1. Pathway	44.0	56.0	72.7	27.3	**6.64**
2. Fixation	49.0	51.0	63.6	36.4	1.71
3. Identification as a pseudocommando	51.0	49.0	69.7	30.3	2.83
4. Novel aggression	94.0	6.0	100	0	2.05
5. Energy burst	88.0	12.0	90.0	10.0	0.08
6. Leakage	82.0	18.0	97.0	3.0	**4.20**
7. Last resort	54.0	46.0	90.9	9.1	**12.6**
8. Directly communicated threat	60.0	40.0	78.8	21.2	3.20
9. Personal grievance and moral outrage	30.6	69.4	54.5	45.5	**4.70**
10. Framed by an ideology	16.0	84.0	6.3	93.8	1.73
11. Failure to affiliate with an extremist or other group	96.0	4.0	93.9	6.1	0.18
12. Dependence on the virtual community	83.7	16.3	90.9	9.1	0.89
13. Thwarting of occupational goals	75.0	25.0	76.0	24.0	0.01
14. Changes in thinking and emotion	38.3	61.7	42.1	57.9	0.08
15. Failure of sexually intimate pair bonding	69.0	31.0	76.2	23.8	0.35
16. Mental disorder	91.3	8.7	96.4	3.6	0.73
17. Creativity and innovation	94.0	6.0	97.0	3.0	0.38
18. Criminal violence	14.0	86.0	72.7	27.3	**29.3**

Note: HCR-20^{V3} Historical scores have been dichotomized such that scores of 1 and 2 are coded as present. Bolded χ^2 values are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$.

behaviors to the constellation of identified risk factors across the sample. It is important to note that increases in the percentage of violent cases scoring positively on items measuring violent or other offending behavior often reflect the fact that the coding of post-index offense scores accounted for the violent index offense(s) when scoring the risk assessment tools. Thus, these figures do not always reflect an actual increase in violent behavior occurring after the index offense. With that said, there were some cases wherein individuals did go on to commit a new violent offense during their legal proceedings, such as issuing threats to judges.

We observed that the proportion of cases scoring positively on several risk factors increased when coded using post-index offense information. On the HCR-20^{V3}, for example, we observed increases in the proportion of positive scores on items reflecting problems with relationships, mental health, violent attitudes, and treatment and supervision. Some of the increases in the prevalence of these factors reflected the impact of the index offense and legal proceedings on the perpetrators' lives, such as intimate relationship problems following arrest, or the detection of mental health problems following a court-ordered evaluation. Others reflected individuals' behavior in court or in custody, including new or ongoing associations with antisocial peers, the filing of false liens from custody, threatening people involved in their prosecution, or committing other new offenses.

We also observed, when examining the distribution of post-index HCR-20^{V3} Historical factors that both problems with relationships and problems with treatment and supervision were no longer significantly more likely to be present in violent cases than in non-violent ones. This loss of statistical significance reflects the finding that in the post-index period, the proportion of non-violent cases scoring positively on these factors increased. This indicates that a combination of the individuals' behaviors (e.g., filing false liens, making threats, associating with antisocial peers), as well as the impact of the legal proceedings on their lives (e.g., disruptions in relationships and employment), appears to have increased their risk factor scores to some extent.

On the TRAP-18, similar increases were observed in factors reflecting fixation, identification of oneself as a pseudocommando, perceiving oneself as being in a position of last resort, making directly communicated threats, experiencing a personal grievance and moral outrage, and framing one's behavior in terms of Sovereign Citizen ideology. As with the HCR-20^{V3}, many of these factors reflected individuals' behaviors post-arrest or in court. Post-index scores on factors related to grievances, ideological commitments, rigid thinking patterns, and threats, for example, were often coded based on an individuals' statements in court, their refusal to participate in proceedings (citing common Sovereign Citizen beliefs about the illegitimacy of such proceedings), making threats, or otherwise planning violence against judges.

As was the case with the HCR-20^{V3}, we observed changes in the profile of risk factors that were significantly more likely to be observed in violent cases than in non-violent cases once post-index information was considered. Two new factors emerged as significantly more likely to occur in the violent as opposed to non-violent cases: leakage and criminal violence. That leakage reached significance is likely the result of a small number of cases wherein individuals communicated their intent to threaten or otherwise harm the legal professionals working on their cases (e.g., judges). That criminal violence reached significance is not surprising, as index offenses that meet this item's definition are included in post-index codes for this factor.

4 | DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study was to examine whether higher scores on two risk assessment tools—the Historical scale of the HCR-20^{V3} and the TRAP-18—were associated with increased odds of a Sovereign Citizen being violent. To accomplish this, we began by nearly doubling the Challacombe and Lucas (2019) dataset of Sovereign Citizen incidents from 58 to 107. We then coded the TRAP-18 and HCR-20^{V3} Historical scale for all 107 cases, excluding any cases where we did not have enough data to accurately code. This yielded a final sample size of 69 cases with sufficient HCR-20^{V3} information and 83 cases with sufficient TRAP-18 information. This study used a consensus coding process for both tools. While this approach was chosen to reduce inconsistency in coding, this method likely

better mirrors real-life practice (vs. scientific exploration), as threat assessment professionals often work in teams to evaluate individuals of concern.

In addition to expanding the dataset, this study also expanded on the methods of Challacombe and Lucas (2019) in that it recorded risk assessment scores reflecting both pre- and post-index offense information. This increases this study's ecological validity with respect to whether these tools may be said to have predictive validity (as opposed to solely postdictive validity) among Sovereign Citizens, while also providing descriptive information about common, risk-relevant behaviors Sovereign Citizens may engage in during their legal proceedings. This study is also, to our knowledge, the first peer-reviewed study to empirically examine the HCR-20^{V3} Historical scale as specifically applied to a sample of individuals with involved in violent extremism.[6]

4.1 | Validity of risk assessment tools

Overall, this study found that higher scores on both the HCR-20^{V3} Historical scale and TRAP-18 were associated with Sovereign Citizen violence. First, we observed that average pre-index scores on the HCR-20^{V3} Historical scale were significantly higher in violent cases than in non-violent ones. We also found that increases in scores on the HCR-20^{V3} Historical scale significantly increased the odds that a case would be classified as violent as opposed to non-violent.

This study also replicated the main finding of Challacombe and Lucas (2019), specifically that higher TRAP-18 total scores were associated with increased likelihood of violence on the part of Sovereign Citizens. As with the HCR-20^{V3} Historical scale, average TRAP-18 total scores were higher in violent cases than in non-violent ones. In addition, increases in TRAP-18 total scores were significantly associated with an increased odd of a case being classified as violent. This study also expanded on Challacombe and Lucas (2019) by disaggregating the TRAP-18 into Proximal Warning Behavior and Distal Characteristics scores in addition to total scores. We found that the two subscales independently performed in a manner similar to TRAP-18 total scores.

In terms of relative performance, increases in Proximal Warning Behavior scores yielded the largest increase in the odds of a case being violent, followed by the Distal Characteristics, the TRAP-18 total score, and the HCR-20^{V3} Historical scale. To the extent that the differences between the TRAP-18 and the HCR-20^{V3} Historical scale can be considered meaningful, this finding may reflect the ability of the TRAP-18 to measure a greater number of extremist-specific risk factors (e.g., personal grievance and moral outrage, ideological commitments, and changes in thinking and emotions) not indexed by the HCR-20^{V3}, as the latter was developed to assess risk for general violence. It is perhaps also unsurprising that higher scores on the Proximal Warning Behavior scale were associated with the largest increases in the likelihood of a case being violent—this scale is comprised of some items that, arguably, reflect behaviors that themselves could be said to constitute violence (e.g., making a direct threat) or preparations for violence (e.g., pathway behaviors).

Taken together, these findings suggest that both instruments provide relevant information concerning Sovereign Citizens' risk for violence. Furthermore, given this study's effort to use of pre-index offense in analyses, it could be argued that these findings provide provisional support for the *predictive* validity of these tools. However, this characterization of the results will be discussed in Section 4.3 subsection.

4.2 | Distribution of risk factors

Notwithstanding findings about the validity of these instruments, this study also provided descriptive information about (1) which TRAP-18 and HCR-20^{V3} Historical risk factors commonly occurred in a sample of Sovereign Citizens, (2) the frequency of risk-relevant post-index offense behaviors among Sovereign Citizens, and (3) the limitations of instruments developed to predict general violence when applied to individuals involved in violent extremism. The results of this study suggest that several risk factors are relatively common (present in at least 25% of both violent and non-violent cases in this study) among Sovereign Citizens, whether or not they engage in violence. These included prior histories of violence and other offending behavior, problems with relationships, and problems with

employment. Also included were the presence of cognitive and emotional features, such as a sense of grievance and moral outrage, as well as changes in one's thinking such that it becomes more rigid, extreme, and less open to alternative beliefs (Meloy, 2017).

Additionally, this study also points to the presence of some risk factors that may have particular importance when seeking to prioritize cases of concern. As noted in Table 6, the proportion of HCR-20^{V3} Historical items related to relationship problems, substance use, violent attitudes, and problems with treatment or supervision was significantly greater among violent cases than among non-violent ones. Similarly, the TRAP-18 factors related to pathway behaviors, fixation, and the presence of a grievance or a sense of moral outrage were also significantly more likely to be observed among violent cases than among non-violent ones. Such factors may represent critical targets for both monitoring and intervention among cases of concern.

It is perhaps not surprising that these factors emerged as being more prevalent among violent cases, given current theoretical scholarship on risk for violent extremism. Among the most promising domains of risk for violent extremism, according to theoretical accounts such as those of Borum (2014, 2015) and Monahan (2012, 2017), include things such as moral emotions, cognitive styles, beliefs and ideology, attitudes, social relationships, and a capacity for violence, among others. These superordinate categories of risk encompass each of the factors noted to be significantly more prevalent among the violent Sovereign Citizen cases in Tables 6 and 7.

This study also provided a description of several risk-relevant behaviors commonly exhibited by Sovereign Citizens during their legal proceedings, which have relevance for risk assessments taking place following their conviction or sentencing. In some cases, a Sovereign Citizen's risk may be assessed for the first time following their conviction, such as to inform sentencing decisions or release planning. In such instances, the individual's behavior during their legal proceedings (e.g., disruptive behavior in court or remand, espousing Sovereign Citizen legal theories in court, making threats, filing false liens, etc.) may provide critical information as to the presence of important risk factors. These might include information concerning the intensity and pervasiveness of an individual's grievances, fixations, cognitive rigidity, extremist ideological commitments, attitudes supportive of violence, and problems complying with supervision.

4.3 | Limitations

This study and the conclusions that can be drawn from it are subject to several important limitations related to the nature of the data and methodology. These limitations partially stem from several interrelated consequences of relying on open-source data.

4.3.1 | Sample definition

This study relied on the categorization of cases as being Sovereign Citizens provided by the sources from which they were derived (i.e., ADL, MacNab, and SPLC), and we did not make secondary judgments regarding this. While this may have reduced the introduction of a second source of bias in the definition of the sample, as well as avoided artificially reducing sample size, this decision introduces limitations. Due to the lack of clarity provided by the sources as to how cases were defined as being Sovereign Citizens, and due to the often-limited depth of open-source information, it is likely that some of these categorizations reflected inferences about an individual's ideology on the basis of their behaviors. Thus, we cannot be sure that each of these cases would conform to a hypothetical, broadly agreed-upon definition of "Sovereign Citizen"—no such definition currently exists, so classifying cases such as those studied in the paper is often reliant on behavioral inferences about underlying ideologies. This is, unfortunately, reflective of the real-world difficulty in defining diffuse, extremist ideologies whose boundaries often overlap (see HSGAC, 2022). The consequence of this may be that the precise applicability and generalizability of these findings are obscured by a lack of precision in defining the sample.

4.3.2 | Open-source data

Open-source data can often be limited in the breadth and depth of information it can provide about a given individual. Some risk assessment instruments, such as the HCR-20^{V3}, make extensive use of information most often gleaned in real-world practice through a detailed file review, psychological testing, and interviews. High-quality detailed information of this kind is seldom included in openly available court documents and media reports and may only be available for high-profile (often violent) cases that generate considerable media attention. As such, it may be that for cases for which relatively little information was available (as compared to what would likely be available in a real-world operational setting), this study may have under- or overestimated the number or extent of an individual's risk factors.

This limitation is also the reason the HCR-20^{V3} was not completed in its entirety, as scoring the Clinical and Risk Management scales would have required a depth of information not available for nearly all the cases reviewed. As such, conclusions drawn from this study can only be applied to the Historical scale; the applicability and validity of the other two scales to Sovereign Citizens remain an area for additional empirical research. In addition, as was noted above, in real-world practice, SPJ instruments are not intended to be used numerically, though this is a common practice in SPJ research (Douglas & Shaffer, 2021). Thus, our coding procedure departs from real-world practices in this respect as well.

4.3.3 | Differential volume of information

A related limitation is the possibility of bias introduced by the tendency for high-profile violent cases to receive more in-depth media coverage than non-violent cases that may never be reported beyond the local level. Notable violent cases such as those of Jerry and Joseph Kane (e.g., MacNab, 2010) and Jerad and Amanda Miller (e.g., Las Vegas Sun, 2014) were the subject of several detailed media reports that provided considerable insight into the sorts of information necessary to conduct a comprehensive risk assessment. In our study, we found limited evidence of such a trend among TRAP-18 scores, wherein non-violent cases had a higher average number of omitted items than did violent cases. As such, it is possible that the average risk scores for violent cases were artificially inflated as a function of available information. However, we observed an opposite trend (albeit small in magnitude) among pre-index HCR-20^{V3} Historical scale scores.

Though we attempted to investigate the presence of bias in the available information by scoring cases using the K-12 School Shooting Reliability Database (and indeed did not find a significant mean difference in average scores between violent and non-violent scores), such a scale likely does not fully capture important differences in the nature and depth of the available information, which are not necessarily synonymous with the reliability of that information.

4.3.4 | Missing data

Another consequence of sometimes limited open-source information is missing data both at the case level and the item level. In this study, it was often true that the available information was not sufficient to adequately code all the risk factors for a given individual. These missing items, when summed for the purposes of analyses, can artificially decrease an individual's score, which may have an impact on validity. While we attempted to mitigate this limitation by omitting cases with more than 30% missing items from analyses, the findings must be interpreted with this caveat in mind. At the case level, it is always possible that the existing information about a particular case was missed, despite our best efforts at conducting a thorough search procedure. Additionally, we did not adopt a systematic protocol for collecting case information from search engines (e.g., prespecifying the minimum or maximum number of Google pages searched). Given the variability in the quantity and relevance of search results, such rules would likely have been difficult to implement; nevertheless, it reduces the replicability of the current study.

4.3.5 | Predictive versus postdictive validity

The final limitation we will note concerns the characterization of this study as either supporting the *predictive* validity of these two risk assessment tools or their *postdictive* validity. We coded pre-index offense scores to approximate a pseudo-prospective. In a pseudo-prospective design, retrospective information reflecting the state of affairs *before* the follow-up period begins (i.e., the period wherein the individual is at-risk for a particular outcome) is coded in order to examine whether particular variables can predict the outcome of interest. Pseudo-prospective designs attempt to eliminate the contamination of the predictor (e.g., risk assessment scores) by the outcome (e.g., violence), which would be the case had post-index offense information been used to "predict" whether a case would be violent. In this way, it could be argued that the use of pre-index offense information for validity analyses constitutes an examination of these risk assessment measures' predictive validity.

However, it must also be acknowledged that neither coder in this study was blind to the outcome, as the identification of cases necessarily involved knowledge of outcomes. This had the potential to influence the coding of information concerning the period before the offense. As well, much of the information about the cases under study was generated after the offense had occurred (e.g., court documents, news coverage after a violence incident). While such information may have reflected the state of affairs that existed before the individual committed their offense, it may well be that such information would have been inaccessible to a hypothetical professional conducting a risk assessment prior to that individual offending. Thus, it could be argued that these limitations preclude the characterization of this study as supporting the *predictive* validity of these tools; rather, it may only support their *postdictive* validity. For this reason, we did not conduct Receiver Operator Characteristics analyses, which are common in risk assessment validity research (Hanson, 2021; Helmus & Babchishin, 2017), as these analyses require the predictors to occur prior in time to the outcome, and as noted above, that is a debatable point in this context.

4.4 | Implications

This study has four main implications for professional practice as related to risk assessment of Sovereign Citizens. First, our findings suggest that many of the risk factors known to predict general violence are also prevalent among Sovereign Citizens. The implication here is that such factors, when present, should *not* be considered irrelevant, and professionals should routinely consider these factors when conducting comprehensive risk assessments of Sovereign Citizens.

Second, the HCR-20[V3] Historical scale does appear to be applicable to Sovereign Citizens and seems to capture important information related to their risk for violence. While this claim can only currently be applied to the Historical scale, future research may find that the Clinical and Risk Management scales also possess utility in this context; indeed, there is no strong theoretical reason to presume otherwise. Third, though the HCR-20[V3] Historical scale appears to be applicable in this context, our findings suggest that it may not be sufficient for fully understanding an individual Sovereign Citizen's risk, as it does not contain some of the more extremism-specific risk factors found in tools like the TRAP-18. These include factors related to the presence of risk-relevant ideological commitments, the presence of grievances and fixations, the presence of strong moral emotions, and situational variables such as perceiving oneself to be in a position of last resort.

Lastly, our study highlights some of the key differences between the HCR-20[V3] and the TRAP-18 as applied to Sovereign Citizens. While both instruments follow an SPJ format with respect to the identification and measurement of risk factors, the TRAP-18 places a greater emphasis on the identification of warning behaviors that may signal imminent violence, reflecting the influence of models such as the Pathway to Intended Violence (Calhoun & Weston, 2021). This departs from SPJ instruments' (including the HCR-20[V3]) emphasis on guiding the development of case formulations intended to identify those factors that serve to cause and facilitate violent behavior. Thus, comprehensive assessments of Sovereign Citizens will ideally involve multiple methods of information gathering and the use of multiple, complementary risk assessment guides (such as the HCR-20[V3] and TRAP-18) that capture relevant information not included on the other.

4.5 | Future directions

Given the scarcity of empirical research relevant to the risk assessment and management of Sovereign Citizen violence, further research on this understudied movement is essential for equipping professionals with a knowledge base on which to make operational decisions. The challenges of conducting rigorous empirical research on terrorism have been well-documented (Gill, 2015; Monahan, 2012) and represent significant impediments to advancing the field. Nevertheless, future research on Sovereign Citizen risk assessment should seek, wherever possible, to assemble larger datasets and attempt to gather more detailed information concerning the psychosocial history of the individuals under study. This information, more so than information about the offense itself, is essential for being able to code risk assessment tools accurately. Such information could also provide the basis for more detailed research on the particular relevance of mental health variables to Sovereign Citizen violence.

In addition, future research on violent extremism in general, and Sovereign Citizens in particular, should strive to achieve greater precision in the definition of the extremism being studied. Such precision is essential for more clearly understanding and communicating which ideologies the findings actually refer to, and which ideologies the findings might generalize to. In the absence of this, we run the risk of masking important nuances and distinctions *between* certain violent extremist ideologies that may be relevant in their assessment and management.

Though open-source research of the kind reported in this study are, at present, the most feasible way to study relatively infrequent forms of violence, future efforts should prioritize studies that make use of operational-level information (e.g., case files). Such data is likely to be far richer than open-source data, and that data would allow for more ecologically valid coding of risk assessment tools. However, we acknowledge that there may be organizational and legislative barriers to doing so. In addition, whenever relying on open-source information, future research should make use of a consensus coding procedure in order to enhance reliability. As we observed in this study, interrater reliability of independent coding decisions was relatively poor, and this may be due, in part, to the difficulty of coding limited open-source information.

Lastly, future efforts should prioritize studies that make use of prospective or pseudoprospective designs with risk assessments coded blind to outcomes, such that the *predictive* validity of risk assessments in this context can be more rigorously evaluated. However, as Meloy (2017) has noted, efforts at achieving prediction may ultimately be fruitless given the relatively low base rates of extremist violence, including Sovereign Citizen violence. Thus, research on the predictive validity of these tools should not aim to support prediction in and of itself, but the evidence-based identification of those cases about which there is an evidence-based reason for elevated concern, so that resources can be prudently applied to prevent violence. Research can also support this aim by studying, for example, whether the use of risk assessment instruments in operational decision-making yield better (i.e., less violent) outcomes compared to cases where such tools are not used.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST
The author declares that there is no conflict of interest that could be perceived as prejudicing the impartiality of the research reported.

ENDNOTES

[1] Despite the racist lineage of some Sovereign Citizen beliefs (e.g., those inherited from Christian Identity and Posse Comitatus), the movement has attracted a sizable number of African American adherents who often identify as "Moors." Moorish Sovereign Citizens are a distinct but related group whose ideology appears to be a blend of "traditional" Sovereign Citizen beliefs and those of the Moorish Science Temple of America (MTSA). The MTSA has made several public statements disavowing Moorish Sovereign Citizens (see Sarteschi, 2020).

2 The list is available from http://www.seditionists.com/AGEreport.pdf.

3 The list is available from https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/assets/pdf/combating-hate/sovereign-citizen-incidents-by-state-2007-2010.pdf.

4 Available at https://www.splcenter.org.

5 East = MD, NH, NJ, NY, PA; Midwest = IL, IN, KS, MN, MO, ND, OH, OK, SD, WI; Southeast = AL, AR, FL, GA, NC, SC, TN; Southwest = AZ, NM, TX; West = AK, CA, CO, ID, MT, NV, OR, WA, WY.

6 Prior studies have applied the HCR-20^{V3} to case studies of extremist violence (e.g., Hart et al., 2017; Nowopolski et al., 2018).

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