

## APPENDIX 1

### *Previous Militia Studies: Discrepant Findings and Methodological Problems*

This appendix includes information about previous militia studies, many of whose claims differ from mine regarding militia origins and characteristics. Here I discuss these differences and reasons behind them. I argue that most disparities result from various data problems in many past studies.

#### PREVIOUS RESEARCH: MILITIA ORIGINS

Previous militia authors have a variety of explanations for member involvement. Many do reference Waco, Ruby Ridge, and the Brady Bill and Assault Weapons Ban as the primary causes (Chermak 2002; Crothers 2003; George and Wilcox 1996; Levitas 2004; Stern 1996). Others identify the proximate cause not as the events themselves, but the sense of alienation experienced after them and brought on by a feeling of betrayal via the government (Churchill 2009). This explanation would fit with the theory of power devaluation, though no previous militia author uses this term or its implications explicitly.

Still more authors have focused on class-based concerns as initiating the movement, especially concerns rooted in the decline of the farming industry in the 1980s (Dyer 1998; Gallaher 2003; Kimmel and Ferber 2000; Levitas 2004; Wright 2007). This

literature claims that individuals become involved in militias because of a diminished ability to maintain an independent livelihood through agriculture and subsequent shared economic and identity frustration. In Michigan, however, there is no evidence to support this particular farming-based explanation.

Among my 40 interviewees, 11 (28%) had at least one grandparent whose primary income was from farming. No interviewees' parents relied on farming for this purpose, nor do interviewees themselves. Three (8%) of interviewees do maintain a few animals for their own eggs and milk, but again, this is not a source of income. I have little reason to expect that militia members I did not interview differ dramatically on this variable from interviewees. Few militia members in Michigan seem to have strong feelings about the farming industry, as I have never heard farming mentioned as a concern at any militia gathering. Most members live in the suburbs, rather than near rural farmland. When I asked and explained the farming connection, some members respond angrily, like Adam who sarcastically said, "Oh yeah we didn't have the Industrial Revolution, [or] anything like that!" This interviewee's response reveals his belief that the farming explanation implies militia members are "backward," or behind the times, and his annoyance is not entirely unfounded.

When explaining why people join militias, some researchers have also noted that many militia members have military experience prior to their militia membership (e.g., Ferber and Kimmel 2004; Kimmel and Ferber 2000; O'Brien and Haider-Markel 1998; Stern 1996). Few overtly made the connection that militia involvement might be an attempt to recapture the experience and comradery of military tenure, but a generous reading of these pieces might yet make the claim. This motive for joining would be

consistent with a desire to reinforce or participate in a normative expression of masculinity in U.S. culture—military participation—especially during war time. Militaristic participation might also be a way to enact a traditional understanding of national identity, which again relies on masculinity and shows of military strength. Both possibilities are consistent with the power-devaluation model.

It is worth noting here that a few authors have stated that status loss (the precursor to the power-devaluation model) is *not* the cause of right-wing involvement. Martin Durham (2001) for instance says that some right wing actors become involved even in times of economic growth; his formulation, however, fails to account for *perception* of threat, which is accounted for in the power-devaluation model. Similarly, James Aho's (1995) work on an Idaho group, considered foundational in the militia literature, charts economic growth and recession since 1900 to show that there is no correlation with religious right-wing extremism and status loss. Aho's findings challenging status loss can be questioned on another level because true militias should not be considered religious movements, and religion is the guiding force behind Aho's group of interest. Finally, Darren Mulloy questions the applicability of Lipset and Raab's (1978) status preservatism to militias, but nonetheless attributes militia formation to people "trying to assert their right to define Americanism, and in doing so [employing] the myths, metaphors, and perceived historical lessons of the American experience" (2008:30). My usage of the power-devaluation model takes into account nostalgia for the country's foundational myth, which in turn relies so heavily on an understanding of traditional masculinity, and there should be no conflict with Mulloy's claim.

Table 2. Past Militia Research: Characterizations and Data Sources (\*Wright's interviews were with Timothy McVeigh)

Author(s)	Watch group Affiliation?	Militias as Uniformly:				Primary Sources								
		Racist	Religious	Farming-Centric and/or Rural	Connected to McVeigh	Interviews	Constitutional Materials	Millenarian Materials	Other Scholarship	Media	Patriot Radio Data	Internet Posts	Non-Militia Newsletters	Watch group Data
Abanes 1996		•	•	•	•			++		++				
Chaloupka 1996		•	•	•	•				++					
Ferber 1999		•	•	•	•								++	
Ferber & Kimmel 2004		•	•	•	•								++	
Kelly & Villaire 2002		•	•	•	•					++				
Kimmel & Ferber 2000		•	•	•	•								++	
Levitas 2004	•	•	•	•	•					++				
Barkun 1997		•	•		•				++					
Dyer 1998			•	•	•					++				
Katz & Bailey 2000		•	•	•				++						
Stern 1996	•	•	•		•				++	++				
Wright 2007		•		•	•									
Aho 1995		•	•											
Crothers 2003		•			•									•
Dees & Corcoran 1999	•	•								++				
Freilich 2003			•											•
Gallaher 2003		•		•										
Kaplan 2000		•	•						++					
Pitcavage 2001	•	•			•				++	++				•

Author(s)	Watch group Affiliation?	Militias as Uniformly:			
		Racist	Religious	Farming-Centric and/or Rural	Connected to McVeigh
Swain 2004		•		•	
Barkun 1997			•		
Diamond 1995					•
Freilich et al. 2005					•
O'Brien & Haider-Markel 1998			•		
Van Dyke & Soule 2002			•		
Berlet & Lyons 1995	•				
Berlet 2004	•				
Chermak 2002					
Churchill 2009					
Duffy & Brantley 1997					
Durham 2001					
George & Wilcox 1996					
Karl 1995					
Lo 1982					
Mariani 1996					
Mulloy 2008					
Schlatter 2006	•				
Vinyard 2011					
Weeber & Rodeheaver 2003					

Primary Sources								
Interviews	Constitutional Materials	Millenarian Materials	Other Scholarship	Media	Patriot Radio Data	Internet Posts	Non-Militia Newsletters	Watch group Data
			++					
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## **PREVIOUS RESEARCH: MILITIA CHARACTERISTICS**

My findings differ in several respects from those in previous studies. In this section, I briefly discuss the areas where this manuscript has major discrepancies from multiple past militia studies. Following this section, I consider methodological differences between my study and others as a likely source for these disparate findings.

### **Education**

As summarized in Table 2, much of the previous militia picture paints a different picture than that I have outlined in this dissertation, and here I present an account of their conflicting findings before offering an explanation for the discrepancy. Whereas I note that my interviewees are slightly more educated relative to the average American, many previous authors state or at least strongly imply that militia members are undereducated relative to the average population (e.g., Kimmel and Ferber 2000; Levitas 2004; O'Brien and Haider-Markel 1998). Their evidence for this claim is based on statistics from non-militia groups, and most do not justify generalizing the statistics to militia groups.

### **Religion**

Many past studies often describe militia members as uniformly and strongly invested in their Christian faith. Other studies indicate that militia members follow a religious system called Christian Identity (e.g., Aho 1995; Ferber 1999; Kimmel and Ferber 2000), which holds that only Whites are descendants of the biblical Adam, while Jews were spawned from a liaison between Eve and Satan, and outgroup animosity extends to all nonwhites (Walters 2000). This sharply conflicts with my findings that while some Michigan

members are Christians, there are also many who are areligious, religion is not an organizing principle for group activity, and there are none I have encountered in Michigan who subscribe to the racist and cult-like Christian Identity philosophy or anything like it. Although it is possible that other religion trends are present in militias in other states, previous data is based on looking at singular groups (e.g., Aho 1995), or on unverified rumors from watch groups (e.g., Kimmel and Ferber 2000), so it is not clear that this is the case. The only militia group in Michigan with a strong religious affiliation was the Hutaree militia, whose members were arrested for allegedly plotting to kill police officers in 2009, and other militias in the state rejected this group.

### **Racism**

Many researchers similarly state that militias are necessarily racist (e.g., Crothers 2003; Gallaher 2003; Pitcavage 2001; Swain 2004). One goes so far as to say it would be "nearly impossible" to not encounter anti-Semitic or other white supremacist literature at militia events (Stern 1996:246). As Chapter Four of this manuscript explicates, it is my claim that most Michigan militias should not be considered racist at the group level, and that the prevalence of individual racism does not exceed what would likely be found in other gatherings of the same demographic.

### **Relationship to the Government**

The existing literature also tends to agree that militias do not recognize the legitimacy of the federal government and plot to take it over, or at least commit acts of terror in protest of it. The general consensus seems to be that militias are uniformly involved in anti-

government plots or illegal weapons stockpiling (e.g., Barkun 1997; Crothers 2003; Kimmel and Ferber 2000; Levitas 2004; Stern 1996). Some work that does not invoke a violent portrait of members still maintains that militia members refuse to vote, or otherwise participate normatively in the existing governmental-political system (e.g., Ferber and Kimmel 2004; O'Brien and Haider-Markel 1998). In fact, every militia member I have encountered proudly says they have voted in every election since they were old enough to do so; it is their civic duty, and they look with disgust at fellow citizens who have not exercised this right.

The Hutaree militia, discussed in Chapter Five, certainly serves as an example of a problematic militia unit that did discuss violence against the government. This group is an exception and was ostracized from the main thrust of the movement long before the law enforcement investigation became public knowledge. Other groups' distrust toward the Hutaree makes sense when working with an accurate understanding of the militia's ideological framework.

## **METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS IN PAST RESEARCH**

I suggest that the discrepancies between my work and previous militia studies are largely due to methodological differences with earlier pieces. Most of the previous studies sought to understand the militia as it was in the 1990s. As Chapter Two argues, the contemporary militia differs substantially from its 1990s form.

Additionally, there may be a variety of methodological problems in the past academic work. A major shortfall is that many past militia studies include no interviews or other direct interactions with militia members. Perhaps this is because of fear, or

because of difficulties accessing members, but primary data from one's population of interest in a qualitative, ethnographic study is essential to have an accurate and nuanced understanding of the group in question.

Other methodological hindrances more broadly relate to the sources that many previous studies use. For instance, some previous militia authors conflate militias with other groups: patriot groups, white supremacist groups, and the Posse Comitatus. As discussed in Chapter Two, these groups should not be considered identical with militia groups who have different ideological and behavioral orientations. Examples of work that conflate militias with other groups on the right include Michael Kimmel and Abby Ferber (2000) as well as Ferber's earlier work (1999) that uses white supremacist literature in all their examples of written "militia" ideology. As Robert Churchill says, "The authors thus published what purports to be a gendered analysis of the militia movement without examining a single militia-generated text" (2009:10). More to the point, if militias are completely racist as these authors claim, why not use their own materials to demonstrate this fact?

Taking care to use primary texts may not always be sufficient, however. It has been my experience that militia members allow a variety of loosely connected individuals to hand out texts at some functions. Michigan leaders are typically careful to look over such material to ensure it is not racist or otherwise problematic before they allow it, but other groups may not be so fastidious. This could easily explain discrepancies some authors have noted between relatively egalitarian verbal messages and anti-Semitic or other printed materials at large gatherings (e.g., Gallaher 2003). This is echoed in observations Richard Mitchell made in his work on survivalists:

"Advertisements for products and services must not be read as destinations, only signposts, not as evidence of survivalists' interests, only of survivalist-oriented marketeering. Speeches and handouts must not be judged without attention to their dramaturgic intent and subsequent interpretations. [...] Those who disregard these cautions may miss survivalism altogether> (2002:16).

Additionally, determining the date of archived materials that are actually generated by militia groups can be difficult, since these texts were not generated with archival or research purposes in mind, and militia materials printed in 1994 are likely to have a very different message than something printed in 2004, or 2011.

Another part of the methodological problem is that even some researchers who acknowledge Timothy McVeigh was never a militia member very often begin their books and articles with a full treatise on the horror of the Oklahoma City bombing. Violent and unpredictable assumptions about militias are thereby solidified in readers' minds as a result. This framework also seems to frequently guide the assumptions and tone of the writers as well (e.g., Crothers 2003; Wright 2007).

Other past militia researchers have relied only on online forums or old and undated website posts (e.g., Karl 1995; Weeber and Rodeheaver 2003). This is a substantial methodological problem since many forums, especially older ones, are public and there is no way to distinguish active militia members from non-militia students, law enforcement, or general rabble rousers. There is also rarely any effort made to distinguish between real group webpages, and webpages likely made by a lone, angsty teenager from his mother's basement. Even materials posted on official group websites are suspect; [www.michiganmilitia.com](http://www.michiganmilitia.com), for example, maintains links to dozens of un-updated pages from many years ago. Despite several attempts to clean up and update the site in the past

few years, group coordinators still urge people to alert them to outdated links that may be lingering from nearly a decade ago.

### **An Extended Note on Watch Group Data**

Researchers who do not rely on internet materials often use data from watch groups such as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) or especially the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC). There has been much written about the political and financial motivations watch groups may have for the positions they publish. In other words, the higher the perception of militia and other right wing danger among the general population, the more media attention and financial donations these agencies receive (Chermak 2002; J. Freilich and Pridemore 2005; Silverstein 2000). As Churchill notes, many of these watch groups have explicit goals of legally limiting the militia movement, and to use them as sources "is to allow the movement's opponents to define it" (2009:9). While this approach is certainly an option, it just as certainly leads to only a partial understanding of the movement.

Part of what these watch groups do is to continue conflating militias with other groups, as discussed above, or at least, to very strongly imply that more connections exist among them than actually do. Additionally, to call the data used by these watch groups questionable, is generous. The SPLC webpage with their most recent list of active militias states, "The list was compiled from field reports, Patriot publications, the Internet, law enforcement sources and news reports" (SPLC 2010a). Law enforcement sources and news reports alike may only be aware of a biased sample of militia members—those who are prone to violence or illegal behavior and only represent a small portion of the movement. Although "field reports" strongly implies SPLC members

conduct first-hand research "in the field," this term in fact refers to reports militias themselves generate and post online following their training sessions "in the field" that summarize the events of the day<sup>1</sup>. The SPLC's primary source certainly seems to be webpages, and these are methodologically problematic.

Starting in 2010, the front page of the SPLC's online "Hate Map" (SPLC 2010b) claims they no longer use wepages appearing to be the work of a single individual as sources, and presumably this rule would apply for their listing of militia groups as well. However, the 2010 list continued to include sites that most certainly were individual pages—sites exclusively using "I" instead of "we" and showing pictures of just one person instead of groups. There are also other sites that are likely to be individual pages but are better disguised as group pages: sites hosted on free servers (paid for by ads), sites with no pictures and no apparent change in writing style across very limited content, and pages that have not been updated in two years or more.

Looking more closely, the list for 2010 (SPLC 2011b) includes three sites that are not militia sites, even under the most generous understanding of the term. Excluding those three, 22.6% of the remaining 106 sites were inactive as of the report's release date in February 2011. Excluding these, another 9.3% are duplicates or subpages of sites already included in the list; for example, michiganmilitia.com and michiganmilitia.com/SMVM were listed as distinct sites even though they reflect the

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<sup>1</sup> The SPLC has declined to directly define "field report," stating only, "Our research analysts use several methods to get information on the various groups we list, including the patriots. We use Facebook, MySpace, Google Alerts, monitor their websites, read their magazines and other periodicals, listen to their radio shows, watch YouTube, and read field reports,' which we receive from law enforcement agencies from all over the country" (personal communication, November 15, 2010).

same entity. Yet another 9%<sup>2</sup> do not reflect anything "beyond the mere publishing of [the groups'] Internet material," (SPLC 2011b, 62), meaning these sites do not reflect organizations that meet or train in person, and thus may not be militias at all, and should not be included on the list per SPLC's own definitions. This leaves 70 sites, or slightly less than two-thirds of the original list for consideration. Of these, 24, or 34.3% are hosted on free, unreliable sites paid for by advertisements, and another 10, or 14.3%, are hosted on very cheap sites (\$2.75-\$19.99 a month, according to the host sites), which may not be any less temporary or any more reliable than the free sites. This leaves only 36 sites (one-third of the original list) that are likely on dedicated servers and supported by a functioning group.

Regardless of whether individual or group sites are included, other methodological problems with using the internet as a primary or sole source remain. Looking at the SPLC listing of 2010 Michigan militias (SPLC 2011a), evidently drawn from web searches, there is at least one group that does not exist at all, another that exists solely online, several that are missing, and a couple that do not have trainings or events separate from those of a larger group. The SPLC listing also has the names of militia groups are given alongside counties where they are located, implying that if a county is listed, the group has a presence there. This is incredibly misleading. To take an example, twenty counties are subsumed under the Michigan Patriot Alliance (MPA) on the SPLC list. During my three years of field work, the MPA had at most twenty regular *members* during its peak, and more typically had five to ten.

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<sup>2</sup> This includes six sites that the SPLC says do not correspond to in-person groups and an additional two sites that are unflagged, but clearly meet these criteria—they are online forums with no mention of training or group unity—but are not indicated as such on the SPLC list.

The SPLC takes the county listings from the group webpages, and the group themselves list counties which they "cover," meaning counties to which they have any kind of connection—a lone member, or even a friend in an entirely different group. Nor can using website data count for internal divisions and disagreements that are critical for understanding group delineations. One of the MPA's covered counties on the SPLC list is Jackson. However, prior to this list's creation, the two MPA members who lived in Jackson County formed their own group because the distance to MPA events was too far and they wanted to operate more independently of MPA leadership. This new group, the Jackson County Volunteer Militia (JCVM), disbanded from lack of local interest within just a few months of the split, and the former JCVM leaders now occasionally train with SMVM. However, the JCVM is also on the SPLC list (though with an incorrect name), despite its short life span, and despite its redundancy on the list with the MPA's county coverage.

Militia members take it as a badge of honor if their group makes the list each year, even as they laugh about its inaccuracies and low standards for including a group as a militia. One exchange on a national forum in which Michigan members participate read, for example:

Person 1: "Heck, they declared me a one man militia. [...] I set up a web page with just myself as a member. After [another member's] passing I changed directions and dropped it, but left the page active. So these boneheads didn't check anything more than Google. I will have to send them a note thanking them for putting me on the map."

Person 2: "This summer I am considering making my dogs militia commanders and giving them their own command and website. When they list them next year we will have grown even more."

Person 3: "[...] I will promote my rabbits and a couple of the neighborhood cats and it call it the Humane Society Militia, lol."

## CONTEXTUALIZING DATA

Reliance on watch group and other problematic data sources likely accounts for discrepancies between previous studies' characterizations of militias and my study's findings. However, it is also possible that earlier studies, particularly those conducted before 2000, are more accurate descriptions of the overall militia movement of the 1990s. As Chapter Two explains, there are important differences between the movement of today and its original instantiation, and prior studies may be accurate reflections of the movement's past. Moving forward to discussing the movement of today, however, it is important to avoid over-generalization of findings from the 1990s to the present.

Researchers studying nostalgic groups and militias in particular must further carefully consider their data sources. As Table 2 indicates, most studies that use interviews with militia members have fewer discrepancies with my findings. There are nonetheless two interview-based studies that have some notable differences from my findings here and are worth considering briefly.

First, Aho's (1995) group of interest were proud adherents of Christian Identity, an exclusionary, racist, belief system. I question whether groups with any religious ideology as their *primary* focus should be considered militias at all. Millenarian groups may be more likely to include religious discussion as part of their gatherings, but most still seem to preference political- or government-based concerns and conspiracy theories above religious ones (see Chapter Two, Churchill 2009). Most millenarian groups also engage in some degree paramilitary training (e.g., target practice, imitating military unit movements through the woods). Those who do not, such as the Militia of Montana, who has a reputation among modern groups for encouraging others to train while not doing so

themselves, perhaps deserve a different label than "militia." Groups that are singularly focused on religion, such as Aho's group, seem most in need of separation from that moniker—regardless of whether they adopt it themselves—and perhaps are best considered little more than religious sects or even cults.

Second and similarly, is Gallaher's (2003) study of a Kentucky group active in the 1990s. This group was comprised primarily of farmers who resented what they perceived to be the state government's disinterest in their economic wellbeing. Although they did express concerns about United Nations actions and other political events, their actions seemed to primarily coalesce around an effort to legalize local hemp farming that would presumably increase the farmers' involvement in the agricultural market. It is not clear that these farmers ever participated in paramilitary training. They did lobby for various gun rights legislation, but this is substantively different from the kind of training most militias do, and political support for gun rights is itself not sufficient to constitute militia membership or support. As a result, perhaps another label besides "militia" is most appropriate for this group, too

Interviews, ideally, should also be supplemented by observations from militia meetings and trainings, in order to understand whether interview responses are largely rhetoric, or enacted belief. Access to nostalgic groups can be difficult and time consuming, but Table 2 supports my claim that methods are very important for accurately contextualizing findings from these groups.