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Abstract | In this study we developed a profile of individuals aligned with the sovereign citizen movement. In a survey of 9,951 Australian adults conducted in late 2024, 1.8 percent of respondents identified with and held beliefs that aligned with this movement.

These respondents were a diverse group. They were more likely than other respondents to be male and under 35 years, to have had contact with the criminal justice system for violent offences, to own firearms, to engage in frequent religious observance and to have changed religion, and to be serving in the Australian military. They were also more likely to report various negative life events, to engage in conspiratorial thinking, to hold strong anti-government and other extreme views, to have misogynistic attitudes and to support extremist violence.

A profile of Australians aligned with the sovereign citizen movement

Anthony Morgan

Sovereign citizens hold strong anti-government beliefs, assert that they are exempt from laws they do not consent to and reject government authority (Fiebig & Koehler 2022; Hardy 2023). They attempt to disengage from societal structures such as taxation and road rules, and embrace pseudo-legal arguments. They are known to engage in 'paper terrorism', using false and frivolous legal documents to harass and obstruct their opponents, and to resist officials, especially police, in person (Sarteschi 2021). Many strains of thought underpin the movement, which has spread globally (Khalil & Hardy 2026), and it continues to evolve, including in its adaptation to the Australian context (Baldino & Lucas 2019; Berger 2016).

While we know there is relatively little wider community support for the movement (Morgan et al. 2024), data on the size of the sovereign citizen movement has proven elusive. The rise of pseudo-legal arguments and their impact on Australian courts, and the role of the sovereign citizen movement in promoting these arguments, has been well documented (McIntyre et al. 2025). There is less research into the risk of mobilisation to violence among those who are aligned with the movement, and much of what we do know comes from media reporting and small scale, non-representative samples focused predominantly on violent incidents overseas (Baldino & Lucas 2019; Fiebig & Koehler 2022). The exception to this is the recent study by Murphy, Cherney and Hardy (2026), which surveyed Australian adults recruited from social media and found that both a person's background characteristics and life circumstances and psychological factors shaped sovereign citizen beliefs.

Common profiles of sovereign citizens suggest they are predominantly white, middle-aged or older men (Fiebig & Koehler 2022). It is often thought that some financial stress or motive draws people to the movement (Berger 2016; Fiebig & Koehler 2022). Their erratic behaviour, including in court settings, is sometimes taken as a sign of mental illness, but there is little evidence to support this (Fiebig & Koehler 2022; Sarteschi 2021). The movement is, however, grounded in conspiratorial thinking (Baldino & Lucas 2019). Importantly, their ideology often overlaps with others, including those of anti-government and far-right groups (Sarteschi 2021), and proponents may hold a diverse range of views on other issues, including ideas from both the left and right sides of politics (Hardy 2023). As a movement, they are especially noteworthy for their lack of clear leadership, organisation and infrastructure (Sarteschi 2021). While the movement originated in the United States in the 1970s and is underpinned by several fundamental ideas, many adherents may know little about this history or these ideas (Berger 2016).

While not new, the sovereign citizen movement was particularly prominent during the COVID-19 pandemic, motivated by opposition to public health regulations. Research showed that individuals participating in anti-authority protests during this period were motivated by strong personal grievances based on perceived negative experiences, but these grievances were shaped by and amplified by adherence to conspiratorial ideologies and sovereign citizen beliefs, which fostered strong anti-government sentiment (Cubitt, Morgan & Voce 2024). When surveyed, many of these protesters agreed with statements reflecting attitudes aligned with the sovereign citizen movement—they also exhibited more risk factors and fewer protective factors for cognitive and behavioural radicalisation and were more likely to support violent extremism (Morgan, Cubitt & Voce 2024). While there is an overlap, we need to be careful not to conflate people with anti-authority or anti-government views with individuals aligned with the sovereign citizen movement.

Research specific to sovereign citizens is important because they have committed a significant number of violent acts internationally, especially violent confrontations with law enforcement. The latter most frequently occurs during traffic stops, though ambush attacks are not uncommon (Sarteschi 2021). In Australia, individuals aligned with the sovereign citizen movement account for only four of the 261 individuals recorded in the Profile of Individual Radicalisation in Australia database (Belton & Cherney 2025). However, the recent shooting deaths of two police officers in Victoria by a self-proclaimed sovereign citizen have once again drawn attention to the potential threat posed by individuals aligned with this movement (Shakespeare, Hardy & Murphy 2025). These examples highlight the risks of escalation that can come from interactions between sovereign citizens and representatives of government authority, especially law enforcement (Fiebig & Koehler 2022; Hardy 2023).

This study aimed to develop a profile of individuals in a community sample who indicated they were aligned with the sovereign citizen movement. We focused on a range of social, ideological and political beliefs, as well as exploring whether certain risk factors for extremist violence were present. It represents an important step in advancing our understanding of this group and the potential threat of violence.

Method

Data

The Survey of Social and Political Beliefs in Australia was developed by the Australian Institute of Criminology through extensive consultation with national security agencies. It included questions about known risk and protective factors for cognitive and behavioural radicalisation, exposure to fringe and radical content and groups online, and various social, political and ideological beliefs. The survey was conducted by Roy Morgan in October and November 2024 using its Single Source panel and panels managed by third-party providers. The survey was sent to members of these online panels aged 18 years and over. Proportional quota sampling, a non-probability sampling method, was used to ensure the sample was broadly reflective of the spread of people living in Australia. Quotas were based on the Australian adult population stratified by age and usual place of residence, derived from Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024) population data. Participants were first recruited from Roy Morgan's Single Source survey panel, which comprises individuals recruited through a rigorous cluster sampled, face-to-face survey approach. The data were subsequently weighted by age, gender and usual place of residence to ensure they were demographically representative of the Australian population (see Morgan & Cubitt 2026). Additional random iterative method weights (calculated from Roy Morgan's Single Source survey) were applied to account for differences between online panels and the general population in terms of education levels and social media use. The final sample size in the 2024 survey was 9,951 respondents.

Analysis

We began by identifying our cohort of interest. We did this based on their responses to a series of questions about whether they identified with the sovereign citizen movement and agreed with several statements reflecting the basic ideology underpinning the movement. Having identified respondents aligned with the sovereign citizen movement, we then compared this group with other survey respondents across key sociodemographic characteristics; religious observance; negative life events; contact with the criminal justice system; military service and firearm ownership; diagnosed mental health conditions; social, political and ideological beliefs; and support for violent extremism.

Categorical variables were analysed using chi-square tests of independence. This produced a Pearson χ^2 statistic, which was corrected for the survey design and converted into an *F* statistic. Continuous variables (eg mean scores for scales based on responses to multiple items) were compared using ordinary least squares regression, and we have reported the coefficients from these regressions. We have also reported whether the results from these analyses were statistically significant, which means we are confident the differences were not due to chance.

Limitations

While the sample is large and demographically representative of the spread of the Australian population, this was not a nationally representative sample and we are cautious not to generalise beyond the sample of respondents. While surveys using non-probability sampling methods can be less accurate than surveys using probability sampling, recent research has shown the level of inaccuracy is relatively small (Pennay et al. 2023). The approach used as part of this survey is also likely superior to other sampling methods, such as convenience or social media samples, which are common in this area of research.

We recognise that some respondents may have been reluctant to share information about their beliefs, especially given our role as a government research agency. Some individuals may have been unwilling to identify with the sovereign citizen movement, perhaps even rejecting the label (Baldino & Lucas 2019). However, research has shown that direct questioning obtains more accurate information for risk factors for violent extremism than other, less direct strategies such as list experiments (Clemmow et al. 2020). Recent studies using the same method have demonstrated how forthcoming respondents are with respect to their views towards government and participation in anti-authority action, and their responses to these surveys have shown a high degree of face validity (Morgan, Cubitt & Voce 2024). While we know that not all respondents will have been entirely honest, we believe the survey was designed in a way that maximised valid data collection. For example, respondents were not asked about ideological beliefs until the end of the survey, we repeatedly encouraged respondents to answer honestly and reminded them the survey was confidential, and there were measures in place to handle poor-quality responses and remove bots and bad actors—an increasing challenge for online survey research (Bonnamy et al. 2025).

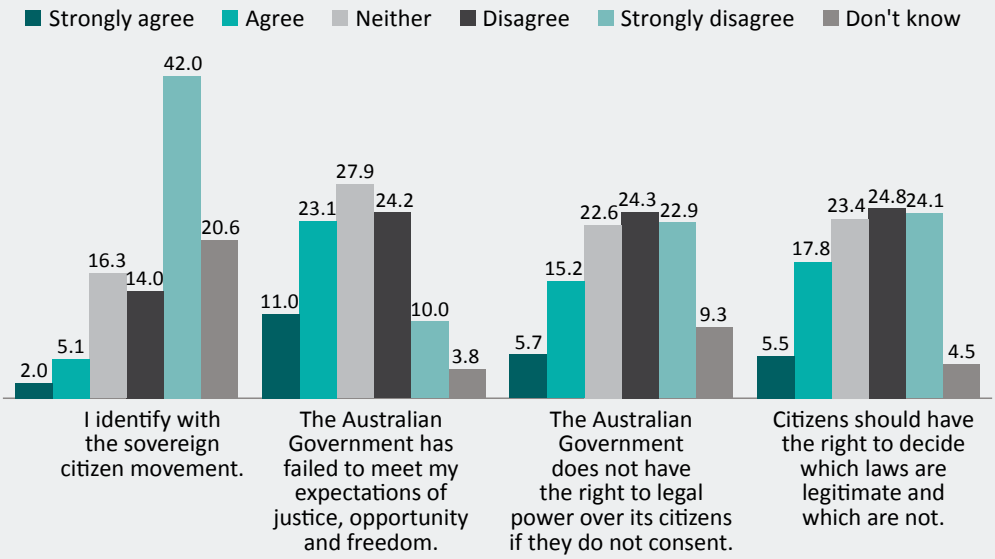
Results

Alignment with the sovereign citizen movement

When asked whether they identified with the sovereign citizen movement, 2.0 percent of respondents strongly agreed and 5.1 percent agreed. Respondents were also asked about three statements reflecting attitudes that were aligned with the sovereign citizen movement. A larger minority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with these statements (Figure 1):

- 11.0 percent strongly agreed and 23.1 percent agreed with the statement 'The Australian Government has failed to meet my expectations of justice, opportunity and freedom';
- 5.7 percent strongly agreed and 15.2 percent agreed with the statement 'The Australian Government does not have the right to legal power over its citizens if they do not consent'; and
- 5.5 percent strongly agreed and 17.8 percent agreed with the statement 'Citizens should have the right to decide which laws are legitimate and which are not.'

Figure 1: Extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed with statements reflecting attitudes aligned with the sovereign citizen movement (%) (*n*=9,951)



Note: Weighted frequencies and percentages may not add to total due to rounding

Source: Survey of Social and Political Beliefs in Australia 2024 [weighted data]

There is no definitive means of determining whether a person belongs to the sovereign citizen movement. Rather than rely solely on whether respondents said they identified with the movement, respondents were defined as being aligned with the sovereign citizen movement if they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement about identifying with the movement *and* all three statements reflecting attitudes aligned with sovereign citizen ideology. According to this definition, 1.8 percent of survey respondents (*n*=179) were aligned with the sovereign citizen movement. The remainder of our analysis compares this group with other survey respondents (*n*=9,772).

Sociodemographic characteristics

Respondents aligned with the sovereign citizen movement were more likely than other survey respondents to be male (58.9% vs 48.5%; F=6.6, p<0.05) and to be aged 18 to 34 years (42.8% vs 30.4%; F=6.9, p<0.01; Table 1). There was no difference between respondents who were and were not aligned with the sovereign citizen movement in terms of their usual place of residence (metropolitan, regional or remote areas). They were no less likely to say they were born overseas or that they spoke a language other than English most often at home.

Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics (%)

	Aligned with movement	Not aligned
Gender*[a]		
Male	58.9	48.5
Female	41.1	50.7
Other	0.0	0.8
Age**		
18 to 34 years	42.8	30.4
35 to 64 years	43.5	47.6
65 years and over	13.8	22.0
Usual place of residence		
Metropolitan	76.8	72.4
Regional	19.5	24.3
Remote	3.7	2.8
Born overseas	18.9	21.1
Spoke a language other than English most often at home	7.2	5.4

**statistically significant at p<0.01, *statistically significant at p<0.05

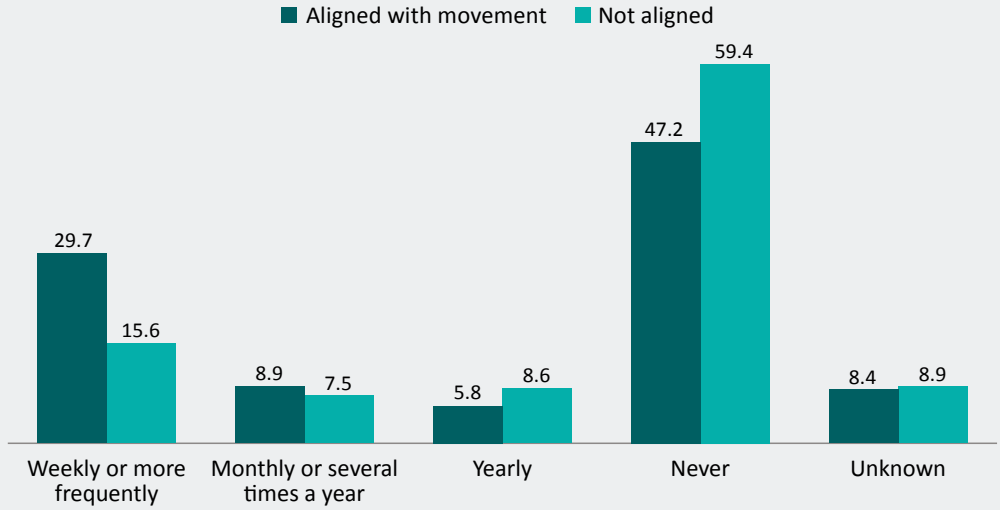
a: Statistical analysis excludes non-binary and other respondents due to small cell sizes

Source: Survey of Social and Political Beliefs in Australia 2024 [weighted data]

Religious worship

Respondents were asked several questions about religion, including how often they undertook some form of active religious observance, such as prayer, devotion or attendance at a religious building or place, and whether they had ever changed religions or belief systems. As shown in Figure 2, respondents who were aligned with the sovereign citizen movement were nearly twice as likely as other respondents to engage in religious observance at least weekly (29.7% vs 15.6%; F=6.1, p<0.001).

Figure 2: Frequency of religious observance (%)

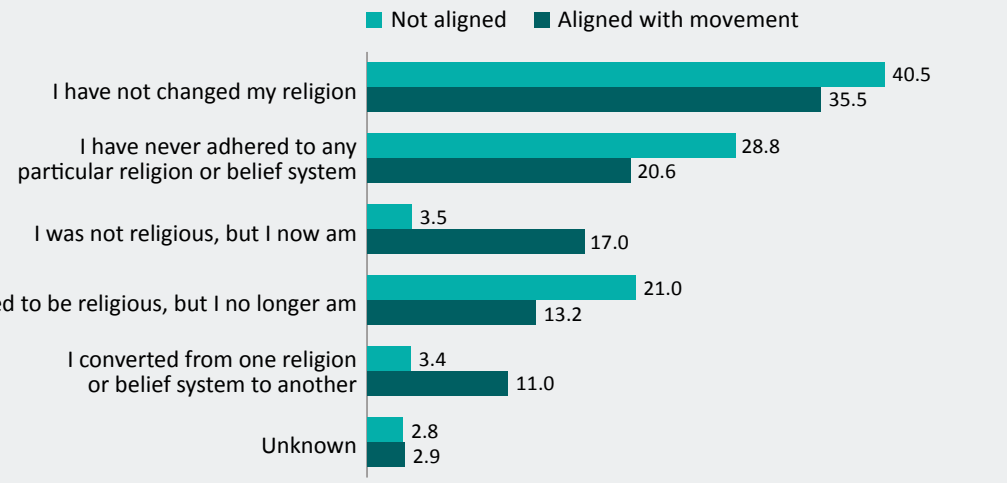


Note: Unknown includes respondents who answered 'prefer not to say' or 'don't know'

Source: Survey of Social and Political Beliefs in Australia 2024 [weighted data]

There were also important differences between respondents who were aligned with the sovereign citizen movement and those who were not in terms of whether they had changed their religion or belief system (Figure 3). Specifically, while respondents aligned with the sovereign citizen movement were less likely to say they used to be religious but no longer were (13.2 vs 21.0%), they were more likely to say they were previously not religious but now were (17.0% vs 3.5%) and that they had converted from one religion or belief system to another (11.0% vs 3.4%; F=22.4, p<0.001).

Figure 3: Changes in religion or belief system (%)



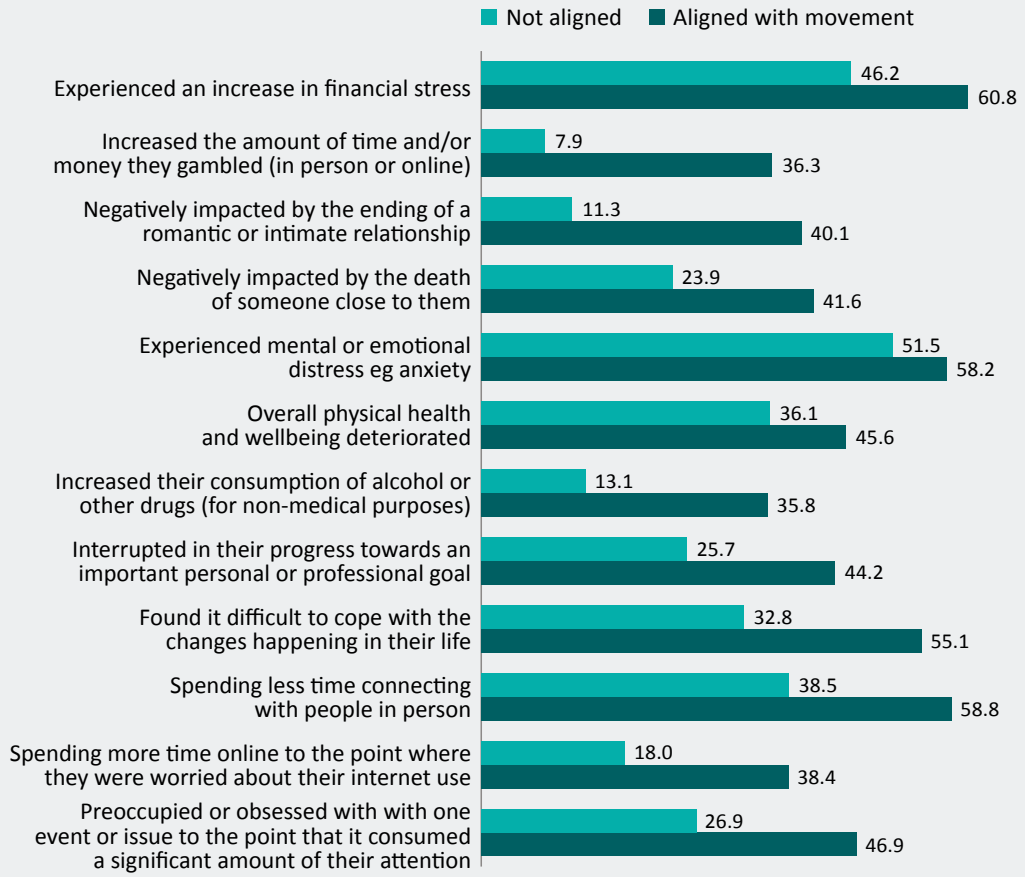
Note: Unknown includes respondents who answered 'prefer not to say' or 'don't know'

Source: Survey of Social and Political Beliefs in Australia 2024 [weighted data]

Negative life events or changes

We asked respondents whether they had experienced certain difficulties at any point in the last 12 months, even if their situation had since improved. Most respondents reported experiencing at least one of these difficulties (81.8%). As shown in Figure 4, respondents who were aligned with the sovereign citizen movement were more likely than other respondents to agree or strongly agree with each statement. This included having experienced an increase in financial stress (60.8% vs 46.2%; F=10.8, p<0.001). There were also notable differences in the proportion of respondents who said they were interrupted in their progress towards an important personal or professional goal (44.2% vs 25.7%; F=9.3, p<0.001), who found it difficult to cope with the changes happening in their life (55.1% vs 32.8%; F=16.0, p<0.001), and who were preoccupied or obsessed with one event or issue to the point that it consumed a significant amount of their attention (46.9% vs 26.9%; F=11.5, p<0.001).

Figure 4: Respondents who agreed or strongly agreed they had experienced certain difficulties in the 12 months prior to the survey (%)



Note: All comparisons were statistically significant

Source: Survey of Social and Political Beliefs in Australia 2024 [weighted data]

Contact with the criminal justice system

Respondents were asked whether they had ever had any contact with the criminal justice system, which included whether they had ever been arrested, charged, summonsed, convicted or had any findings of guilt for any offence. Overall, the prevalence of self-reported criminal histories was low, and lower than expected based on birth cohort studies of recorded offending (Payne & Morgan 2024). Nevertheless, respondents who were aligned with the sovereign citizen movement were slightly more likely than other respondents to say they had been in contact with the criminal justice system as an adult (11.2% vs 9.1%) and less likely to say they did not have a recorded criminal history (86.0% vs 90.3%). These differences were statistically significant (F=5.7, p<0.01). Respondents aligned with the sovereign citizen movement were also more likely to say they had been in contact for a violent offence (4.5% vs 1.5%; F=8.0, p<0.001). Similarly, these respondents were twice as likely to say they had contact with the criminal justice system as a juvenile (6.4% vs 3.4%) and less likely to say they did not have a recorded criminal history before age 18 (90.1 vs 96.2%). Again, these differences were statistically significant (F=15.8, p<0.001).

Exposure to fringe and radical content and groups online

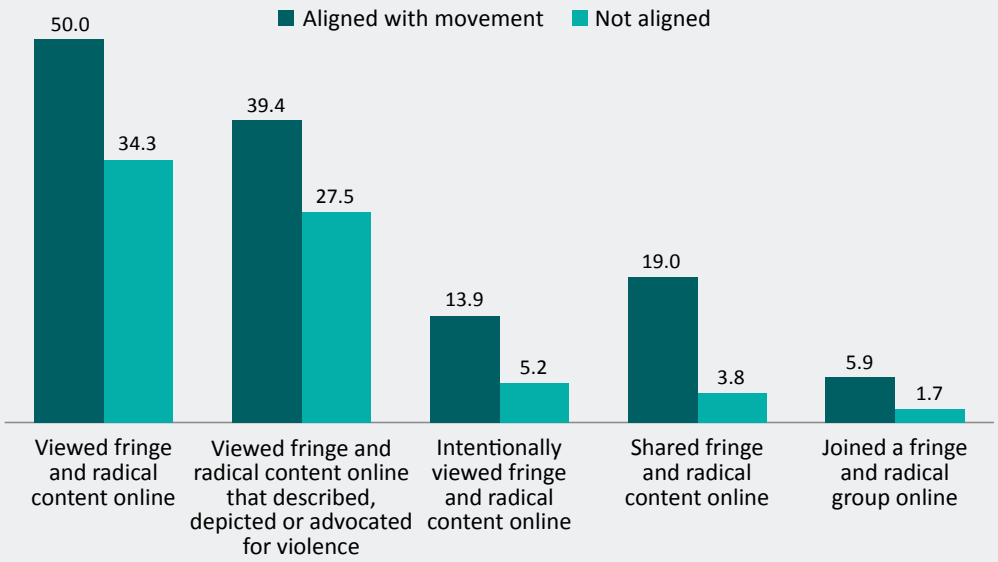
Respondents were asked a series of questions about whether they had intentionally or unintentionally viewed content that mainstream society or the government may describe as fringe, unorthodox or radical (see Cubitt & Morgan 2024 for a detailed definition), including content describing, depicting or advocating for violence. They were also asked whether they had shared the content with other internet users, and whether they had engaged with online groups promoting this type of content.

As shown in Figure 5, respondents who were aligned with the sovereign citizen movement were more likely than other survey respondents to have:

- viewed fringe and radical content online (50.0% vs 34.3%; F=9.1, p<0.001);
- viewed fringe and radical content online that described, depicted or advocated for violence (39.4% vs 27.5%; F=5.2, p<0.01);
- intentionally viewed fringe and radical content online (13.9% vs 5.2%; F=13.4, p<0.001);
- shared fringe and radical content online (19.0% vs 3.8%; F=49.6, p<0.001); and
- joined a fringe and radical group online (5.9% vs 1.7%; F=22.8, p<0.001).

This is in addition to being more likely to have said they were spending less time connecting with people in person (58.8% vs 38.5%; F=11.6, p<0.001) and more time online, to the point where they were worried about their internet use (38.4% vs 18.0%; F=16.1, p<0.001; see Figure 4 above).

Figure 5: Exposure to fringe and radical content and groups online (%)

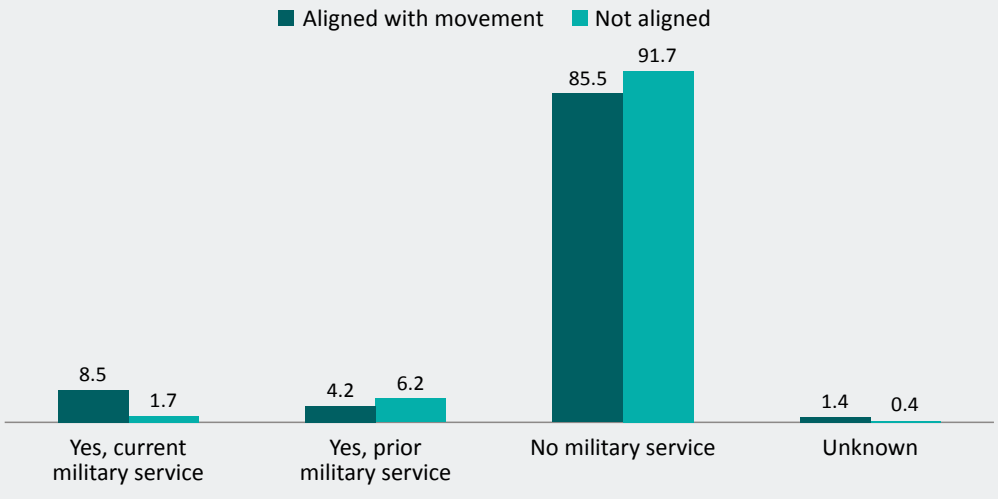


Source: Survey of Social and Political Beliefs in Australia 2024 [weighted data]

Firearm ownership and military service

Respondents were asked whether they had ever served in the military, whether for Australia or another country (Figure 6). This included Reserve forces. Overall, while they were in the minority, respondents who were aligned with the sovereign citizen movement were more likely than other respondents to have military service (12.8% vs 7.9%). This was primarily due to the higher proportion of respondents aligned with the sovereign citizen movement who were currently serving in the military (8.5% vs 1.7%). These differences were statistically significant (F=4.0, p<0.05).

Figure 6: Current or prior military service (%)

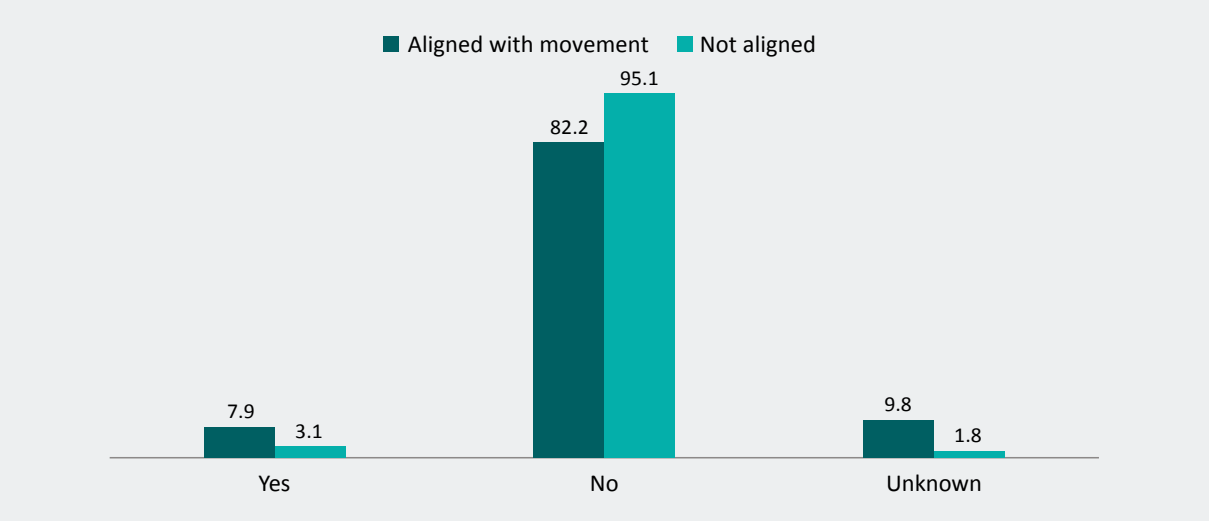


Note: Unknown includes respondents who answered 'prefer not to say' or 'don't know'

Source: Survey of Social and Political Beliefs in Australia 2024 [weighted data]

Respondents were also asked whether they owned any firearms (Figure 7). Respondents who were aligned with the sovereign citizen movement were more than twice as likely as other respondents to say they owned at least one firearm (7.9% vs 3.1%; F=34.6, p<0.001). They were also much more likely to choose not to answer the question about firearm ownership, meaning their firearm ownership was unknown (9.8% vs 1.8%).

Figure 7: Firearm ownership (%)



Note: Unknown includes respondents who answered 'prefer not to say' or 'don't know'

Source: Survey of Social and Political Beliefs in Australia 2024 [weighted data]

Diagnosed mental health conditions

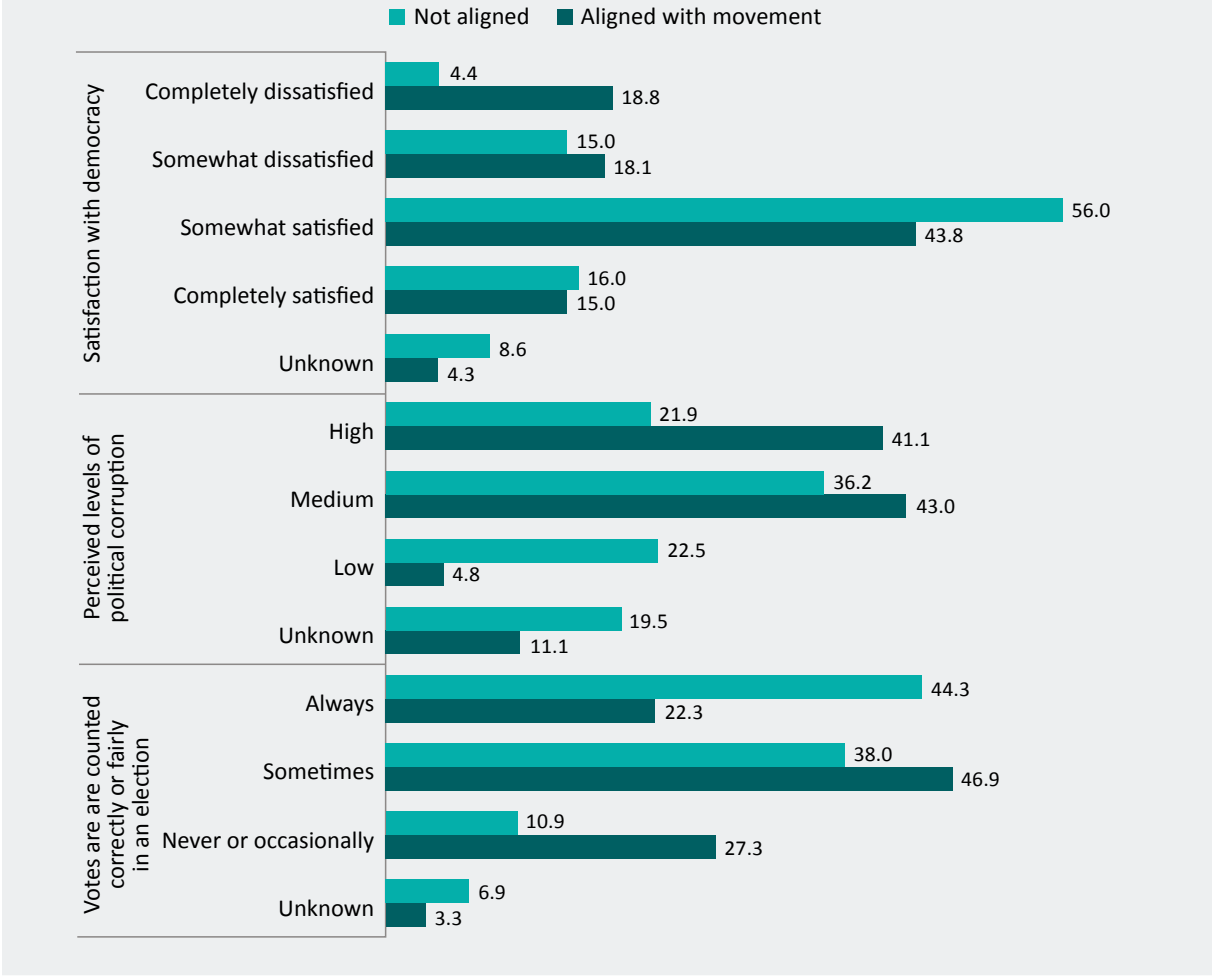
Survey respondents were asked whether they had ever been diagnosed with a mental health condition and, if so, which type of condition. Respondents who were aligned with the sovereign citizen movement and other respondents were equally likely to report having ever been diagnosed with a mental health condition (primarily depressive or anxiety disorders; 40.9% vs 37.7%; F=0.3, p=0.73). Though it was rare, they were more likely to report having been diagnosed with a psychotic disorder (5.4% vs 1.3%; F=8.8, p<0.001). They were much less likely to report having been diagnosed with a depressive disorder (11.9% vs 24.3%; F=6.0, p<0.01).

Social, political and ideological beliefs

Anti-government sentiment

Anti-government sentiment was measured using three items reflecting the extent of respondents' dissatisfaction with democracy, their perceptions of corruption among politicians and their level of distrust in the electoral process. As shown in Figure 8, respondents who were aligned with the sovereign citizen movement were more likely than other respondents to say they were completely dissatisfied with democracy (18.8% vs 4.4%; F=20.0, p<0.001). They were also more likely than other respondents to perceive levels of political corruption as high, meaning they thought more than 60 percent of politicians were corrupt (41.1% vs 21.9%; F=18.2, p<0.001), and to believe that votes were never or only occasionally counted fairly in an election (27.3% vs 10.9%; F=20, p<0.001).

Figure 8: Anti-government sentiment (%)



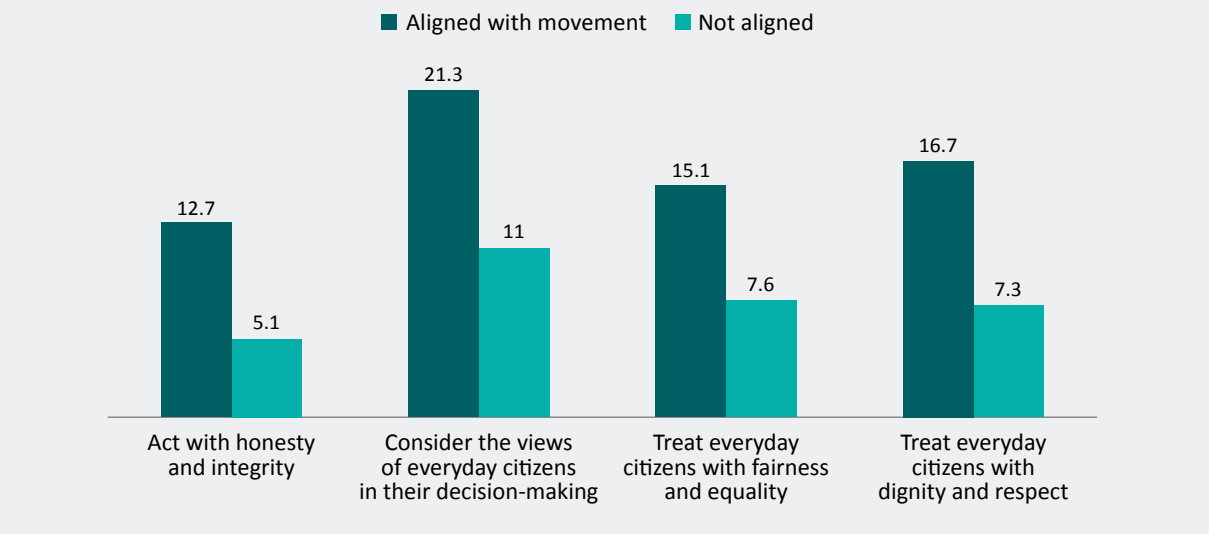
Note: All comparisons were statistically significant at p<0.001

Source: Survey of Social and Political Beliefs in Australia 2024 [weighted data]

Perceived legitimacy of the criminal justice system

We measured the perceived legitimacy of the criminal justice system by asking respondents whether the police, courts and other agencies acted with honesty and integrity, considered the views of everyday citizens in their decision-making, treated everyday citizens with fairness and equality and treated everyday citizens with dignity and respect (Figure 9). Responses were based on a five-point Likert scale ranging from never to always, which had good internal consistency (α=0.89). Respondents who were aligned with the sovereign citizen movement were significantly more likely than other respondents to say that the criminal justice system never acted with honesty and integrity (12.7% vs 5.1%; F=15.9, p<0.001), never considered the views of everyday citizens in their decision-making (21.3% vs 11.0%; F=15.3, p<0.001), never treated everyday citizens with fairness and equality (15.1% vs 7.6%; F=11.2, p<0.001) and never treated everyday citizens with dignity and respect (16.7% vs 7.3%; F=17.5, p<0.001). However, there was no difference in the overall mean scores of those who did and did not align with the sovereign citizen movement (3.0 vs 3.2; B= −0.2, p=0.11).

Figure 9: Perceived legitimacy of the criminal justice system (% of respondents who selected 'Never')



Note: All comparisons were statistically significant at p<0.001

Source: Survey of Social and Political Beliefs in Australia 2024 [weighted data]

Conspiratorial thinking

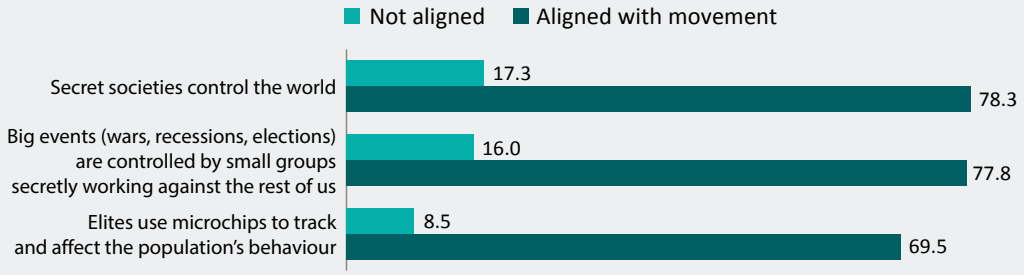
The survey measured conspiratorial thinking by asking whether respondents agreed with three statements:

- secret societies control the world;
- big events (wars, recessions, elections) are controlled by small groups secretly working against the rest of us; and
- elites use microchips to track and affect the population's behaviour.

While this does not capture the complexity of conspiratorial thinking, these statements reflect a general propensity to explain events as conspiracies and as being controlled by powerful groups, without naming specific events or actors, and therefore act as a useful proxy measure (Imhoff et al. 2022).

Agreement was measured on a five-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. A conspiratorial thinking score was then generated by calculating the mean response across the three statements. The resulting score for each respondent reflected their susceptibility to believing in conspiracy theories, with a higher score meaning stronger conspiratorial thinking. Respondents aligned with the sovereign citizen movement were much more likely to agree or strongly agree with each of these statements (Figure 10) and had a higher overall mean score for conspiratorial thinking (4.1 vs 2.2; B=1.8, p<0.001).

Figure 10: Respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with items measuring conspiratorial thinking (%)



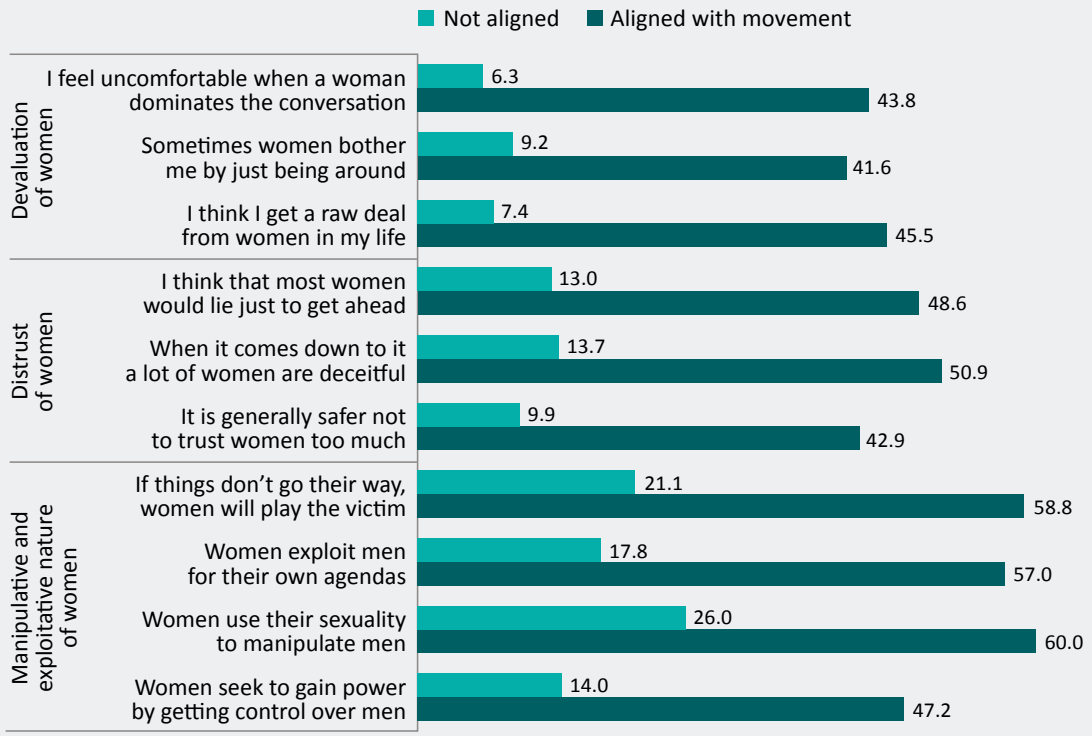
Note: All comparisons were statistically significant at p<0.001

Source: Survey of Social and Political Beliefs in Australia 2024 [weighted data]

Misogynistic attitudes

Misogynistic attitudes were measured using a validated 10-item scale developed by Rottweiler and Gill (2021). These items measured the extent to which respondents agreed with statements reflecting the devaluation of women, the distrust of women and the manipulative and exploitative nature of women. A misogynistic attitude score was then generated by calculating the mean response across the 10 items. Respondents who were aligned with the sovereign citizen movement were significantly more likely than other respondents to agree with each statement (Figure 11). The mean score for respondents aligned with the sovereign citizen movement was much higher than for other respondents (3.3 vs 2.2; B=1.1, p<0.001), meaning they were much more likely to hold misogynistic attitudes, even after controlling for age and gender.

Figure 11: Respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with items measuring misogynistic attitudes (%)



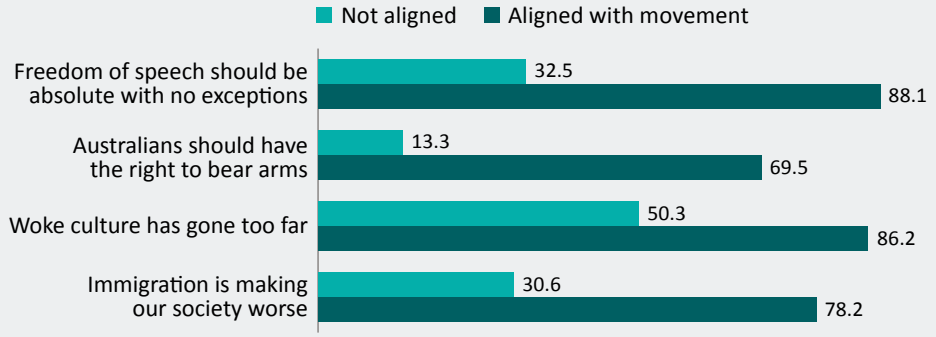
Note: All comparisons were statistically significant at p<0.001

Source: Survey of Social and Political Beliefs in Australia 2024 [weighted data]

Populist right-wing values

The survey measured agreement with several statements consistent with populist right-wing movements, including those values commonly associated with the conservative movement in the United States. As Figure 12 shows, respondents who were aligned with the sovereign citizen movement were much more likely than other respondents to agree or strongly agree that freedom of speech should be absolute with no exceptions (88.1% vs 32.5%; F=60.3, p<0.001), that Australians should have the right to bear arms (69.5% vs 13.3%; F=104.8, p<0.001), that woke culture has gone too far (86.2% vs 50.3%; F=19.7, p<0.001) and that immigration is making our society worse (78.2% vs 30.6%; F=50.8, p<0.001).

Figure 12: Respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with statements consistent with populist right-wing movements (%)



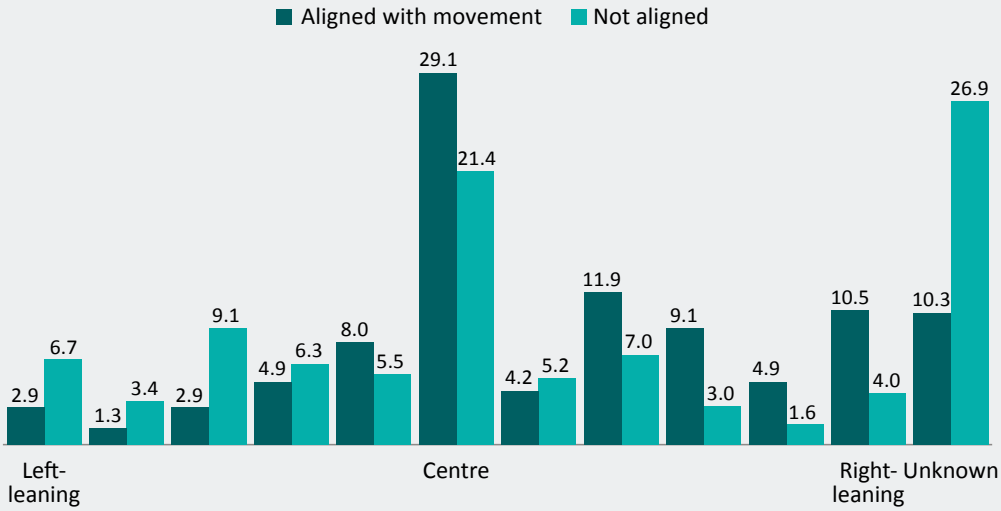
Note: All comparisons were statistically significant at p<0.001

Source: Survey of Social and Political Beliefs in Australia 2024 [weighted data]

Support for left- and right-wing ideologies

We asked respondents where they sat on a left–right political spectrum (Figure 13). Respondents aligned with the sovereign citizen movement were much more likely than other respondents to self-identify as right-leaning on a left–right political spectrum (40.5% vs 20.8%; F=7.9, p<0.001), and less likely to report being left-leaning (20.1% vs 30.9%) or to indicate they preferred not to say or did not know (10.3% vs 26.9%).

Figure 13: Position on the left–right political spectrum (%)



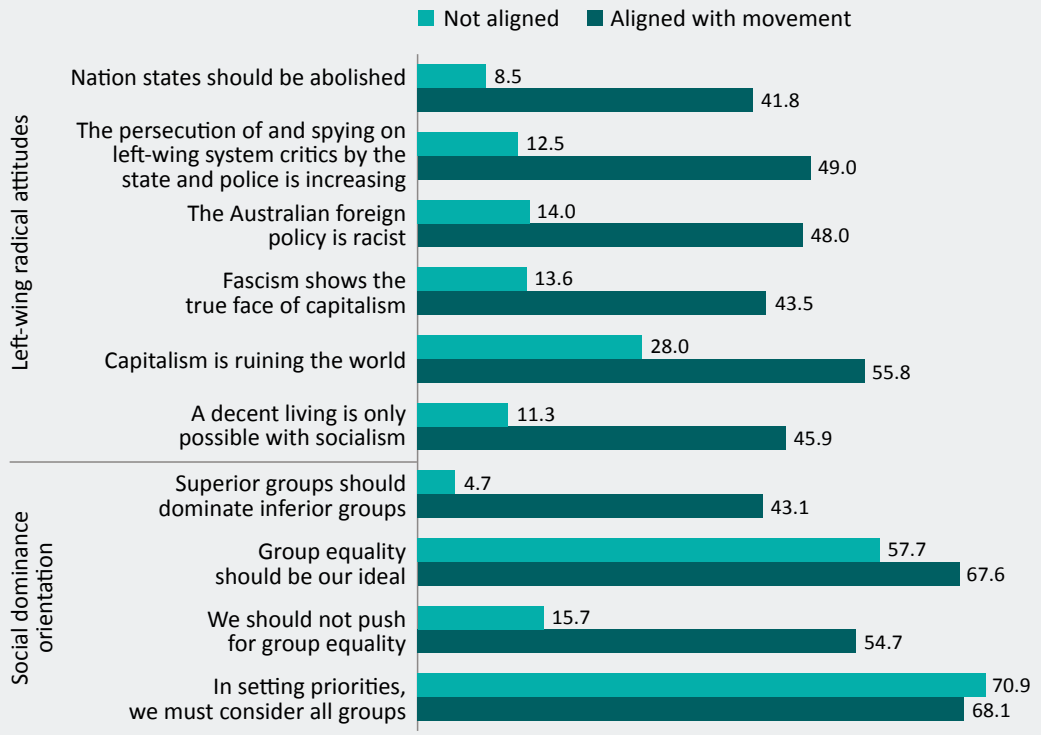
Note: Unknown includes respondents who answered 'prefer not to say' or 'don't know'

Source: Survey of Social and Political Beliefs in Australia 2024 [weighted data]

We then asked respondents a series of items consistent with left-wing radical attitudes. These were based on the recent multi-country study by Jungkunz, Helbling and Osenbrügge (2024) which validated a six-item scale. Respondents who were aligned with the sovereign citizen movement were significantly more likely than other respondents to agree with each item measuring left-wing radicalised attitudes (Figure 14), and the mean score was also significantly higher, even after controlling for age and gender (3.3 vs 2.5; B=0.8, p<0.001). We then used a slightly modified short version of the Social Dominance Orientation scale to measure respondents' views towards group dominance. While this is not a direct measure of right-wing ideology, it has been shown to be highly correlated with support for inequality, including racism and nationalism (Aichholzer & Lechner 2021; Pratto et al. 2013). Respondents aligned with the sovereign citizen movement were also more likely to agree with statements in support of the dominance of superior groups (43.1% vs 4.7%; F=447.7, p<0.001) and against pushing for group equality (54.7% vs 15.7%; F=170.2, p<0.001). The mean score for the Short Social Dominance Orientation scale was also significantly higher among respondents aligned with the sovereign citizen movement (2.8 vs 2.2; B=0.5, p<0.001). Two items in the Short Social Dominance Orientation scale are worded such that higher scores indicate lower social dominance orientation. These items were reverse scored so that higher scores indicate higher social dominance orientation. For these reverse-scored items, there were no differences between respondents who were and were not aligned with the sovereign citizen movement in terms of whether they demonstrated high social dominance orientation.

Importantly, the majority of respondents aligned with the sovereign citizen movement who agreed with the statements about the dominance of superior groups and not pushing for group equality also agreed (on average) with each of the statements measuring left-wing radicalised attitudes (68.1%) and vice versa (78.0%).

Figure 14: Respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with attitudes associated with left- and right-wing ideologies (%)



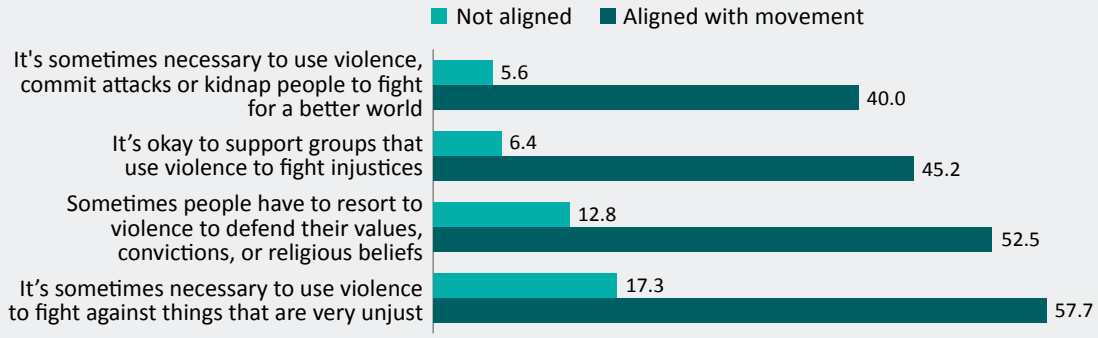
Source: Survey of Social and Political Beliefs in Australia 2024 [weighted data]

Support for violent extremism

Finally, we measured support for violent extremism using the violent extremist attitude scale (Nivette, Eisner & Ribeaud 2017). The scale was developed to measure generic support for violent extremism, defined as attitudes that condone the use of violence to achieve collective goals. More specifically, the scale measures whether a person is willing to encourage, endorse, condone, justify or support the use of violence to achieve collective goals, whether they be political, ideological, religious, social or economic. The scale consists of four items with responses measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Respondents who were aligned with the sovereign citizen movement were significantly more likely than other respondents to agree with each statement (Figure 15). The mean score for respondents who were aligned with the sovereign citizen movement was much higher than for other respondents (3.1 vs 1.9; B=1.1, p<0.001), meaning they were much more likely to support violent extremism, even after controlling for age and gender. Over a third (35.4%) of respondents aligned with the sovereign citizen movement supported violent extremism—meaning they agreed with all four statements—compared with 2.8 percent of other respondents.

Figure 15: Respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with items measuring support for violent extremism (%)



Source: Survey of Social and Political Beliefs in Australia 2024 [weighted data]

Discussion

This study provides new insights into the profile of individuals who are aligned with the sovereign citizen movement in the Australian context. Overall, we found that 1.8 percent of respondents identified with *and* held beliefs that were aligned with the sovereign citizen movement. These beliefs reflect the ideals of the movement, including that they question and reject the legitimacy of government and do not consent to and are therefore not subject to its legal authority.

We recognise that this may not capture the nuance of sovereign citizen beliefs or the degree of adherence to certain underlying ideas. Relying on self-identification as a sovereign citizen would have meant that some respondents were excluded because they reject the label—regarding it as a pejorative term or an oxymoron, believing that you cannot be both sovereign and a citizen (Khalil & Hardy 2026). Conversely, relying solely on attitudinal measures could have overestimated the size of the movement. Using a combination of self-identification and attitudes provides a more accurate albeit conservative estimate of the population of Australians who align with the sovereign citizen movement. Ideally we would also have captured information about behaviours that those affiliated with the sovereign citizen movement might engage in, including how active they are in pursuing their ideals. Nevertheless, this is one of the first attempts to describe individuals who are aligned with the movement in a community sample, at least within the Australian context, and an important step towards a better evidence base.

In building a profile of this group, we focused on certain features that have been identified in past research, as well as several risk factors associated with radicalisation to violence (see Wolfowicz et al. 2021). We found that respondents aligned with the sovereign citizen movement were more likely than other respondents to be male and below the age of 35, to have had contact with the criminal justice system as an adult for violent offences, to report having a diagnosed psychotic disorder, to own firearms, to engage in frequent religious observance and to have changed religion, and to be currently serving in the Australian military. However, while these risk factors were over-represented within this group, large proportions did not exhibit these risk factors. Respondents aligned with the movement were a highly diverse group of individuals.

The same was also true of their attitudes to government and to the criminal justice system—the latter being of particular interest given most sovereign citizen violence has occurred in the context of interactions with law enforcement (Sarteschi 2021). Similar to Murphy, Cherney and Hardy (2026), we found that those aligned with the movement were more likely than other respondents to hold strong anti-government sentiment; namely, they were more likely to be dissatisfied with democracy, to believe there was high degree of political corruption, and to think that votes were never counted fairly in elections. But many in this group did not share these views. Similarly, a much higher proportion of respondents aligned with the sovereign citizen movement questioned the legitimacy of the criminal justice system. At the same time, the mean score for the overall scale was no different for these and other respondents, indicating many aligned with this movement did not hold the same negative views of the legitimacy of the criminal justice system.

While most survey respondents reported at least one negative life event in the 12 months prior to the survey, respondents aligned with the sovereign citizen movement were more likely to report a range of recent negative life events or changes. These included an increase in financial stress—noteworthy given the role that financial motives are thought to play in people's decisions to embrace the movement (Fiebig & Koehler 2022; Murphy, Cherney & Hardy 2026). We know that negative life events are influential in pathways to grievance-fuelled violence (Corner & Taylor 2023), and they were common among people who participated in anti-authority collective action during the pandemic (Morgan, Cubitt & Voce 2024). These stressors may increase the attractiveness of the sovereign citizen movement, which both provides an opportunity to avoid financial responsibilities, such as taxes, and offers people empowerment and control (Roose 2025).

Again, while this was not universal, this group frequently exhibited problematic online behaviour. We already know that people learn about the sovereign citizen movement online (Sarteschi 2021). Our finding that they were more likely to view violent fringe and radical content, share that content and join fringe and radical groups online demonstrates the central role that the online environment plays in promoting and sustaining sovereign citizen ideas. The spread of the movement online has implications beyond the risk of violence. It has likely also played a significant role in the rise of pseudo-law cases observed in Australian courtrooms, posing a growing threat to the administration of justice (McIntyre et al. 2025). Interestingly, two in five respondents aligned with the movement were concerned about the amount of time they spent online, and more than half indicated they were spending less time connecting with people in person. Efforts to reduce the risk associated with the sovereign citizen movement must consider how to reduce the availability and attractiveness of online misinformation and propaganda that perpetuates the ideology, and reduce the sharing of narratives and tactics on different platforms that enables the movement to expand globally (Khalil & Hardy 2026).

Several findings point to the presence of overlapping and intersecting ideologies among those people who were aligned with the sovereign citizen movement. They were more likely to hold extreme views on a range of issues. First, they were significantly more likely to engage in conspiratorial thinking. There is a strong relationship between conspiratorial thinking, anti-government views and violence (Murphy et al. 2025). Similarly, they were much more likely to have misogynistic attitudes. This is especially noteworthy given the links between misogyny, gendered violence and extremist violence (Rottweiler, Clemmow & Gill 2025). Responses to the sovereign citizen movement would therefore likely benefit from integrated strategies that also address conspiratorial thinking, anti-government sentiment and misogyny. Indeed, Murphy, Cherney and Hardy (2026) concluded that ideological factors were more strongly associated with sovereign citizen beliefs than background characteristics and life circumstances.

When asked where they sit on a political spectrum, respondents aligned with the sovereign citizen movement were more likely to indicate they sat right of centre. When we asked questions based on validated scales measuring attitudes often associated with left- and right-wing radicalisation, they were more likely than other respondents to agree with both. Many who held strong right-wing views also agreed with strong left-wing views. This may reflect the contemporary radicalisation threat environment, where a growing number of people have extreme views underpinned by mixed ideologies (Burgess 2025). However, their views on group dominance and inequality—along with views typically associated with populist right-wing movements, particularly anti-immigration stances—are consistent with the white nationalist views that formed the basis of the movement in the United States (Berger 2016). For this reason, there have been signs of the sovereign citizen movement increasingly converging with the far-right movement in Australia (Roose 2025). Conversely, the views in line with left-wing radicalisation are also compatible with their anti-authority and anti-government ideals. This highlights the diversity of views that actually exist among individuals aligned with this movement, and the challenges associated with responding.

Finally, respondents aligned with the sovereign citizen movement were much more likely than other respondents to support violent extremism. While there is little evidence that sovereign citizens engage in planned or organised forms of violence, their willingness to use violence in support of an ideological goal, particularly when there is a perceived injustice or grievance, highlights the need for a response that can reduce the risk of violence. This is especially true given the presence of a range of risk factors for radicalised attitudes and behaviour, as we have shown. Participation in deradicalisation programs, especially for those individuals who are deeply immersed in the movement, may help reduce the likelihood of violence (Netolitzky 2018). While the vast majority of individuals who hold radicalised attitudes do not engage in violence, the recent incident in Victoria and similar incidents overseas demonstrate the importance of taking steps to minimise the risk of violence occurring during interactions with representatives of government authority. The fact that this is an increasingly global movement means that the sharing of intelligence, training and resources among responding agencies should be equally global (Khalil & Hardy 2026). It also highlights why further research is needed to better understand the risk associated with this group, the drivers of violence, and the effectiveness of different responses.

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