

## **Abstract Kerrin-Sina Arfsten**

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**Working Title:** *Public Problems/Private Solutions: Border Control and Vigilantism at the U.S. - Mexico Border*

The *Minuteman Civil Defense Corps* (MCDC) is a group of private law enforcers that was founded by Arizona citizens in 2005 in order to secure the borders and coastal boundaries of the United States against the unlawful and unauthorized entry of immigrants across the U.S. - Mexican border. These "border vigilantes" have painted the border as a dangerous locus of criminal and terrorist activity, necessitating citizen action because in their eyes the government is unwilling or at least unable to secure the borders effectively.

While civilian border patrol groups are not a new phenomenon along the U.S. - Mexico border, the MCDC is much larger and far more influential than any other such group in recent history. Initially brushed aside by politicians as little more than "vigilantes far outside the mainstream of public opinion," they have managed to generate incredible media coverage and their persistence on this issue has more than ever turned public attention to America's "permeable borders" and to the "failure" of the federal government in protecting its own country against terrorist threats.

In light of this, this presentation will explore why this group of private law enforcers emerged in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, and why it was able to become as influential as it arguably is today. After briefly conceptualizing "vigilantism" (or "extra-legal violence") and providing a short overview of the historical, legal and cultural background of American vigilantism, this presentation will then show that two larger developments have played a significant role in the (re-)emergence of this form of vigilantism: (a) a transformation in the governance of security based on economic principles and (b) an increased securitization of immigration in the wake of 9/11. In fact, it will be argued that these two developments not only contributed to the emergence of this group and to some degree functioned to legitimize their activities, but that they arguably even encourage this form of extra-legal citizen activism.

Finally, this presentation will conclude by reflecting on some of the larger implications of this development (for the law and the state) and will question why - although similarly struggling with undocumented immigration and border control - we have not (yet?) witnessed similar citizen involvement in security matters in Europe.