

# Survivalism

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**Survivalism** is a movement of individuals or groups (called **survivalists** or **preppers**) who are actively preparing for emergencies, including possible disruptions in social or political order, on scales from local to international. The word **prepper** is derived from the word prepare. Survivalists often acquire emergency medical and self-defense training, stockpile food and water, prepare to become self-sufficient, and build structures (e.g., a survival retreat or an underground shelter) that may help them survive a catastrophe.

The term *survivalist* dates to 1976.<sup>[1]</sup> The term *prepper* has grown in popularity after the 1990s, partly as a reaction to terrorists like Ted Kaczynski and Timothy McVeigh and stereotypes connected with them.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Contents

- 1 History
  - 1.1 1930s to 1950s
  - 1.2 1960s
  - 1.3 1970s
  - 1.4 1980s
  - 1.5 1990s
  - 1.6 2000s
  - 1.7 2010 to present
- 2 Outline of scenarios and outlooks
- 3 Common preparations
  - 3.1 Changing concerns and preparations
  - 3.2 Religious beliefs
  - 3.3 Mainstream emergency preparations
- 4 Survivalist terminology
- 5 Controversy
  - 5.1 Perceived extremism
- 6 Government preparedness efforts and training
- 7 Worldwide
- 8 Other related groups
- 9 In popular culture
  - 9.1 In fiction
- 10 See also
- 11 References
- 12 External links

## History

### 1930s to 1950s

The origins of the modern Survivalist movement in the United Kingdom and the United States include

government policies, threats of nuclear warfare, religious beliefs, and writers who warned of social or economic collapse in both non-fiction and apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction.

The Cold War era civil defense programs promoted public atomic bomb shelters, personal fallout shelters, and training for children, such as the Duck and Cover films. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) long directed its members to store a year's worth of food for themselves and their families in preparation for such possibilities;<sup>[3]</sup> but the current teaching advises only a three-month supply.<sup>[3]</sup>

The Great Depression that followed the Wall Street Crash of 1929 is cited by survivalists as an example of the need to be prepared.<sup>[4][5]</sup>

## 1960s



Basement family fallout shelter, circa 1957

The increased inflation rate in the 1960s, the US monetary devaluation, the continued concern over a possible nuclear exchange between the US and the Soviet Union, and the increasing vulnerability of urban centers to supply shortages and other systems failures caused a number of primarily conservative and libertarian thinkers to promote individual preparations. Harry Browne began offering seminars on how to survive a monetary collapse in 1967, with Don Stephens (an architect) providing input on how to build and equip a remote survival retreat. He gave a copy of his original *Retreater's Bibliography* to each seminar participant.

Articles on the subject appeared in small-distribution libertarian publications such as *The Innovator* and *Atlantis Quarterly*. It was

during this period that Robert D. Kephart began publishing *Inflation Survival Letter*<sup>[6]</sup> (later renamed *Personal Finance*). For several years the newsletter included a continuing section on personal preparedness written by Stephens. It promoted expensive seminars around the US on similar cautionary topics. Stephens participated, along with James McKeever and other defensive investing, "hard money" advocates.

## 1970s

In the next decade Howard Ruff warned about socio-economic collapse in his 1974 book *Famine and Survival in America*. Ruff's book was published during a period of rampant inflation in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis. Most of the elements of survivalism can be found there, including advice on food storage. The book championed the claim that precious metals, such as gold and silver, have an intrinsic worth that makes them more usable in the event of a socioeconomic collapse than fiat currency. Ruff later published milder variations of the same themes, such as *How to Prosper During the Coming Bad Years*, a best-seller in 1979.

Firearms instructor and survivalist Colonel Jeff Cooper popularized the concept of hardening retreats against small arms fire. In an article titled "Notes on Tactical Residential Architecture" in Issue #30 of *P.S. Letter* (April, 1982), Cooper suggested using the "Vauban Principle", whereby projecting bastion corners would prevent miscreants from being able to approach a retreat's exterior walls in any blind spots. Corners with this simplified implementation of a Vauban Star are now called "Cooper Corners" by James Wesley Rawles, in



1950 booklet *Survival Under Atomic Attack*, a civil defense publication

honor of Jeff Cooper.<sup>[7]</sup> Depending on the size of the group needing shelter, design elements of traditional European castle architecture, as well as Chinese Fujian Tulou and Mexican walled courtyard houses have been suggested for survival retreats.

In both his book *Rawles on Retreats and Relocation* and in his survivalist novel, *Patriots: A Novel of Survival in the Coming Collapse*, Rawles describes in great detail retreat groups "upgrading" brick or other masonry houses with steel reinforced window shutters and doors, excavating anti-vehicular ditches, installing warded gate locks, constructing concertina wire obstacles and fougasses, and setting up listening post/observation posts (LP/OPs.) Rawles is a proponent of including a mantrap foyer at survival retreats, an architectural element that he calls a "crushroom".<sup>[8]</sup>

Of course, the steel doors and window frames would expand in the summer heat, badly damaging masonry structures. The winter-summer cycle would destroy them.

Bruce D. Clayton and Joel Skousen have both written extensively on integrating fallout shelters into retreat homes, but they put less emphasis on ballistic protection and exterior perimeter security than Cooper and Rawles.

Other newsletters and books followed in the wake of Ruff's first publication. In 1975, Kurt Saxon began publishing a monthly tabloid-size newsletter called *The Survivor*, which combined Saxon's editorials with reprints of 19th century and early 20th century writings on various pioneer skills and old technologies. Kurt Saxon used the term *survivalist* to describe the movement, and he claims to have coined the term.<sup>[9]</sup>

In the previous decade, preparedness consultant, survival bookseller, and California-based author Don Stephens popularized the term *retreater* to describe those in the movement, referring to preparations to leave cities for remote havens or survival retreats should society break down. In 1976, before moving to the Inland Northwest, he and his wife authored and published *The Survivor's Primer & Up-dated Retreater's Bibliography*.

For a time in the 1970s, the terms *survivalist* and *retreater* were used interchangeably. While the term *retreater* eventually fell into disuse, many who subscribed to it saw retreating as the more rational approach to conflict-avoidance and remote "invisibility". *Survivalism*, on the other hand, tended to take on a more media-sensationalized, combative, "shoot-it-out-with-the-looters" image.<sup>[9]</sup>

One newsletter deemed by some to be one of the most important on survivalism and survivalist retreats in the 1970s was the *Personal Survival ("P.S.") Letter* (circa 1977–1982). Published by Mel Tappan, who also authored the books *Survival Guns* and *Tappan on Survival*. The newsletter included columns from Tappan himself as well as Jeff Cooper, Al J. Venter, Bill Pier, Bruce D. Clayton, Rick Fines, Nancy Mack Tappan, J.B. Wood, Dr. Carl Kirsch, Charles Avery, Karl Hess, Eugene A. Barron, Janet Groene, Dean Ing, Bob Taylor, Reginald Bretnor, and C.G. Cobb. The majority of the newsletter revolved around selecting, constructing, and logistically equipping survival retreats.<sup>[10]</sup> Following Tappan's death in 1980, Karl Hess took over publishing the newsletter, eventually renaming it *Survival Tomorrow*.

In 1980, John Pugsley published the book *The Alpha Strategy*. It was on *The New York Times* Best Seller list for nine weeks in 1981.<sup>[11][12]</sup> After 28 years in circulation, *The Alpha Strategy* remains popular with survivalists, and is considered a standard reference on stocking food and household supplies as a hedge against



Oregon gasoline dealers displayed signs explaining the flag policy in the winter of 1973–74 during the oil crisis

inflation and future shortages.<sup>[13][14]</sup>

In addition to hard copy newsletters, in the 1970s survivalists established their first online presence with BBS<sup>[15][16]</sup> and Usenet forums dedicated to survivalism and survival retreats.

## 1980s

Interest in the first wave of the survivalist movement peaked in the early 1980s, with Howard Ruff's book *How to Prosper During the Coming Bad Years* and the publication in 1980 of *Life After Doomsday* by Bruce D. Clayton. Clayton's book, coinciding with a renewed arms race between the United States and Soviet Union, marked a shift in emphasis in preparations made by survivalists away from economic collapse, famine, and energy shortages—which were concerns in the 1970s—to nuclear war. In the early 1980s, science fiction writer Jerry Pournelle was an editor and columnist for *Survive*, a survivalist magazine, and was considered influential in the survivalist movement.<sup>[17]</sup> Ragnar Benson's 1982 book *Live Off The Land In The City And Country* suggested rural survival retreats as both a preparedness measure and conscious lifestyle change.

## 1990s

Interest in the movement peaked again in 1999 in its second wave, triggered by fears of the Y2K computer bug. Before extensive efforts were made to rewrite computer programming code to mitigate the effects, some writers such as Gary North, Ed Yourdon, James Howard Kunstler,<sup>[18]</sup> and Ed Yardeni anticipated widespread power outages, food and gasoline shortages, and other emergencies. North and others raised the alarm because they thought Y2K code fixes were not being made quickly enough. While a range of authors responded to this wave of concern, two of the most survival-focused texts to emerge were *Boston on Y2K* (1998) by Kenneth W. Royce, and Mike Oehler's *The Hippy Survival Guide to Y2K*. Oehler is an underground living advocate, who also authored *The \$50 and Up Underground House Book*,<sup>[19]</sup> which has long been popular in survivalist circles. Because of extensive software testing and expensive code re-writing, the predicted Y2K crisis did not materialize, although many now regard Y2K as a hoax or conspiracy.



Logo created by The President's Council on the Year 2000 Conversion for use on Y2K.gov

## 2000s



A town near the coast of Sumatra lies in ruin after the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami.

The third wave of survivalism began after the September 11, 2001 attacks and subsequent bombings in Bali, Madrid, and London. This resurgence of interest in survivalism appears to be as strong as the first wave in the 1970s. The fear of war, avian influenza, energy shortages, environmental disasters and global climate change, coupled with economic uncertainty, and the apparent vulnerability of humanity after the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami and Hurricane Katrina, has increased interest in survivalism topics.<sup>[20]</sup> Preparedness is once more a paramount concern to many people who seek to stockpile supplies, gain useful skills, and develop contacts with like-minded people to learn as much as possible.

Many books were published from 2008 and later offering survival advice for various potential disasters, ranging from an energy shortage

and crash to nuclear or biological terrorism. In addition to the 1970s-era books, blogs and Internet forums are popular ways of disseminating survivalism information. Online survival websites and blogs discuss survival vehicles, survival retreats, emerging threats, and list survivalist groups.

Economic troubles emerging from the credit collapse triggered by the 2007 US subprime mortgage lending crisis and global grain shortages<sup>[21][22][23][20]</sup> have prompted a wider cross-section of the populace to prepare.<sup>[23][24]</sup>

The advent of H1N1 Swine Flu in 2009 piqued interest in survivalism, significantly boosting sales of preparedness books and making survivalism more mainstream.<sup>[25]</sup>

These developments led Gerald Celente, founder of the Trends Research Institute, to identify a trend that he calls "neo-survivalism". He explained this phenomenon in a radio interview with Jim Puplava on December 18, 2009.<sup>[26]</sup>

"When you go back to the last depressing days when we were in a survival mode, the last one the Y2K of course, before the 1970's, what had happened was you only saw this one element of survivalist, you know, the caricature, the guy with the AK-47 heading to the hills with enough ammunition and pork and beans to ride out the storm. This is a very different one from that: you're seeing average people taking smart moves and moving in intelligent directions to prepare for the worst. (...) So survivalism in every way possible. Growing your own, self-sustaining, doing as much as you can to make it as best as you can on your own and it can happen in urban area, sub-urban area or the ex-urbans. And it also means becoming more and more tightly committed to your neighbors, your neighborhood, working together and understanding that we're all in this together and that when we help each other out that's going to be the best way forward."

This last aspect is highlighted in *The Trends Research Journal*: "Communal spirit intelligently deployed is the core value of Neo-Survivalism".<sup>[27]</sup>

## 2010 to present

Events such as the 2010 Haiti earthquake, the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill, and the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami have revitalized the survivalist community.

A number of popular television shows and movies have also emerged recently to capitalize on "today's zeitgeist of fear of a world-changing event."<sup>[28]</sup> Doomsday ideas disseminated, especially on the internet, in relation to the 2012 phenomenon, and misunderstandings about the Mayan calendar fueled the activities of some preppers in the run-up to December 2012.

Preppers gained unwanted attention after the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting.<sup>[29]</sup> This was in part because the debate that ignited over the gun control revealed extreme distrust of the social structure in the United States.

## Outline of scenarios and outlooks

Survivalism is approached by its adherents in different ways, depending on their circumstances, mindsets, and particular concerns for the future.<sup>[30]</sup> The following are characterizations, although most (if not all) survivalists



fit into more than one category:

### **Safety preparedness oriented**

While these people accept the long-term viability of Western civilization, they learn principles and techniques needed for surviving life-threatening situations that can occur at any time and place. They prepare for such calamities as structure fires, dog attacks, physical confrontations, snake bites, lightning strikes, car breakdowns, third world travel problems, bear encounters, flash floods, home invasions and train wrecks.<sup>[31]</sup>

### **Wilderness survival emphasis**

This group stresses being able to stay alive for indefinite periods in life-threatening wilderness scenarios, including plane crashes, shipwrecks, and being lost in the woods. Concerns are: thirst, hunger, climate, terrain, health, stress, and fear.<sup>[31]</sup>

### **Self-defense driven**

This group focuses on surviving brief encounters of violent activity, including personal protection and its legal ramifications, danger awareness, John Boyd's cycle (also known as the OODA loop—observe, orient, decide and act), martial arts, self-defense tactics and tools (both lethal and non-lethal).



Astronaut Susan Helms gathers firewood during winter survival training.

### **Natural disaster, brief**

People who live in tornado, hurricane, flood, wildfire, earthquake or heavy snowfall areas and want to be prepared for possible emergencies.<sup>[32]</sup> They invest in material for fortifying structures and tools for rebuilding and constructing temporary shelters. While assuming the long-term continuity of society, some may have invested in a custom built shelter, food, water, medicine, and enough supplies to get by until contact with the rest of the world resumes following a natural emergency.<sup>[31]</sup>

### **Natural disaster, prolonged**

This group is concerned with weather cycles of 2–10 years, which have happened historically and can cause crop failures.<sup>[22]</sup> They might stock several tons of food per family member and have a heavy duty greenhouse with canned non-hybrid seeds.<sup>[33]</sup> Wood and natural gas can be converted into human edible food using a number of different mechanisms.<sup>[34]</sup> Alternative foods are inexpensive pre-catastrophe but must be scaled up post-catastrophe. A research agenda for analysis of specific food supply resilience decisions has been proposed as food supply resilience requires not just the food itself, but also the accompanying systems of food production and distribution.<sup>[35]</sup>

### **Natural disaster, indefinite/multi-generational**

This group considers an end to society as it exists today under possible scenarios include: global warming, global cooling, environmental degradation,<sup>[23]</sup> warming or cooling of gulf stream waters, or a period of severely cold winters caused by a supervolcano, an asteroid strike, or large scale nuclear proliferation.

### **Bio-chem scenario**

This group is concerned with the spread of fatal diseases, biological agents, and nerve gases, including swine flu, *E. coli* 0157, botulism, dengue fever, Creutzfeldt–Jakob disease, SARS, rabies, Hantavirus, anthrax, plague, cholera, HIV, ebola, Marburg virus, Lhasa virus, sarin, and VX.<sup>[36]</sup> In response, they might own NBC (nuclear, biological and chemical) full-face respirators, polyethylene coveralls, PVC boots, nitrile gloves, plastic sheeting and duct tape.

### Malthusian

Some marketers of survivalism literature and supplies argue that an increase in human population affects available fresh water, food, health-care, environment, economics, consumerism, and spread of diseases. These marketers seek to prompt sales of items that would respond to a Malthusian population crash.<sup>[37]</sup>

### Monetary disaster investors

Believe the Federal Reserve system is fundamentally flawed. Newsletters suggest hard assets of gold and silver bullion, coins, and other precious-metal oriented investments such as mining shares. They are preparing for paper money to become worthless through hyperinflation. As of late 2009 this is a popular scenario.<sup>[38][39][40][41]</sup>

### Biblical eschatologist

These individuals study End Times prophecy and believe that one of various scenarios might occur in their lifetime. While some Christians (and even people of other religions) believe that the Rapture will follow a period of Tribulation, others believe that the Rapture is imminent and will precede the Tribulation ("Pre-Trib Rapture"). There is a wide range of beliefs and attitudes in this group. They run the gamut from pacifist to armed camp, and from having no food stockpiles (leaving their sustenance up to God's providence) to storing decades' worth of food. In the context of Christianity, in Luke 12:22-31, Jesus, speaking of the future tribulation, unequivocally commands, "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. ... 31...for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. 33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." The principle of faithful trust in God's providence is denied by such Christians who, by storing up food and drink and other stores, appear to believe in the apocalyptic scenario but deny the faithfulness of the God behind it and teach others to do likewise. Yet another Biblical interpretation is having sought God, He is giving them the wisdom and means to prepare. This is exemplified in the story of Joseph, where God gave Joseph the insight and means to save up when times were good, seven years of bounty, so that he could be a blessing to his country (Egypt) and its neighbors, as well as his own family when times got bad, seven years of drought, as recounted in Genesis 41-48.

### Peak oil doomers

Although there is a general public policy debate over whether the world's supply of oil reserves has peaked and the need for alternative fuels, this group believes that peak oil is a near term threat to Western civilization,<sup>[42]</sup>



Artistic depiction of a cataclysmic meteor impact



Crowd at New York City American Union Bank during a 1931 bank run early in the Great Depression





the home.<sup>[52]</sup> Suggestions for building these kits are available from the Red Cross website.

The most ardent survivalists aim to remain self-sufficient for the duration of the breakdown of social order, or indefinitely if the breakdown is predicted to be permanent (a "Third Dark Age")—a possibility popularized in the 1960s by Roberto Vacca of the Club of Rome. Some survivalists allow for the contingency that they cannot prevent this breakdown, and prepare to survive in small communal groups ("group retreats") or "covenant communities".

## Changing concerns and preparations

Survivalists' concerns and preparations have changed over the years. During the 1970s, fears were economic collapse, hyperinflation, and famine. Preparations included food storage and survival retreats in the country which could be farmed. Some survivalists stockpiled precious metals and barterable goods (such as common-caliber ammunition) because they assumed that paper currency would become worthless. During the early 1980s, nuclear war became a common fear, and some survivalists constructed fallout shelters.

In 1999, many people purchased electric generators, water purifiers, and several months' or years' worth of food in anticipation of widespread power outages because of the Y2K computer-bug.

Instead of moving or making such preparations at home, many people also make plans to remain in their current locations until an actual breakdown occurs, when they will—in survivalist parlance—"bug out" or "get out of Dodge" to a safer location.

## Religious beliefs

Other survivalists have more specialized concerns, often related to an adherence to apocalyptic religious beliefs. Some New Agers anticipate a forthcoming arrival of catastrophic earth changes and prepare to survive them.

Some evangelical Christians hold to an interpretation of Bible prophecy known as the post-tribulation rapture, in which the world will have to go through a seven-year period of war and global dictatorship known as the "Great Tribulation". Jim McKeever helped popularize survival preparations among this branch of evangelical Christians with his 1978 book *Christians Will Go Through the Tribulation, and How To Prepare For It*.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has an official policy of food storage for its members. This is a hedge against unemployment and prolonged sickness, and is focused more on self-reliance than survivalism. The policy is referred to as "Provident Living" in official Church publications. It has existed throughout the Church's history, and has evolved to reflect changes in threats to personal independence.<sup>[54]</sup>

The Branch Davidians, an offshoot of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, were known for their belief in a coming apocalypse and the adoption of some survivalist practices.

The 2012 phenomenon had mystical or religious underpinnings, or both.

## Mainstream emergency preparations



*The Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, depicted in a woodcut by Albrecht Dürer (ca. 1497–98), ride forth as a group, with an angel heralding them, to bring Death, Famine, War and Plague unto man.<sup>[53]</sup>

People who are not part of survivalist groups or apolitically oriented religious groups also make preparations for emergencies. This can include (depending on the location) preparing for earthquakes, floods, power outages, blizzards, avalanches, wildfires, terrorist attacks, nuclear power plant accidents, hazardous material spills, tornadoes, and hurricanes. These preparations can be as simple as following Red Cross and U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) recommendations by keeping a first aid kit, shovel, and extra clothes in the car, or by maintaining a small kit of emergency supplies, containing emergency food, water, a space blanket, and other essentials.

Mainstream economist and financial adviser Barton Biggs is a proponent of preparedness. In his 2008 book *Wealth, War and Wisdom*, Biggs has a gloomy outlook for the economic future, and suggests that investors take survivalist measures. In the book, Biggs recommends that his readers should "assume the possibility of a breakdown of the civilized infrastructure." He goes so far as to recommend setting up survival retreats:<sup>[55]</sup> "Your safe haven must be self-sufficient and capable of growing some kind of food," Mr. Biggs writes. "It should be well-stocked with seed, fertilizer, canned food, medicine, clothes, etc. Think *Swiss Family Robinson*. Even in America and Europe, there could be moments of riot and rebellion when law and order temporarily completely breaks down."<sup>[23]</sup>

For global catastrophic risks the costs of food storage become impractical for most of the population <sup>[56]</sup> and for some such catastrophes conventional agriculture would not function due to the loss of a large fraction of sunlight (e.g. during nuclear winter or a supervolcano. In such situations, alternative food is necessary, which is converting natural gas and wood fiber to human edible food.<sup>[57]</sup>

## Survivalist terminology

Survivalists maintain their group identity by using specialized terminology not generally understood outside their circles. They often use military acronyms such as OPSEC and SOP, as well as terminology common among adherents to gun culture or the peak oil scenario. They also use terms that are unique to their own survivalist groups; common acronyms include:

- Alpha strategy: The practice of storing extra consumable items, as a hedge against inflation, and for use in barter and charity. Coined by John Pugsley.<sup>[58][59]</sup>
- Ballistic wampum: Ammunition stored for barter purposes. Coined by Jeff Cooper.<sup>[58][60]</sup>
- BOB: Bug-out bag.<sup>[58][61]</sup>
- BOL: Bug-out location.<sup>[58][62]</sup>
- BOV: Bug-out vehicle.<sup>[58][63]</sup>
- Crunch: A general term for a major, long-term disaster.
- Doomer: A peak oil adherent who believes in a Malthusian-scale social collapse.<sup>[58][64]</sup>
- EDC: Everyday carry. What one carries at all times in case disaster strikes while one is out and about. Also refers to the normal carrying of a pistol for self-defense, or (as a noun) the pistol which is carried.
- EOTW: End of the world<sup>[65]</sup>
- Electromagnetic pulse (EMP) – an extreme level of electromagnetic energy sufficient to burn out computer chips that may be caused by solar flares or by atmospheric nuclear explosions. Such an event would disable the Internet, telephones, computers, and devices that rely on computer controls, including automobiles, the electrical grid, and household appliances.



EDC (Every Day Carry)

- **Goblin**: A criminal miscreant, coined (in the survivalist context) by Jeff Cooper.<sup>[58][66]</sup>
- **Golden horde**: The anticipated large mixed horde of refugees and looters that will pour out of the metropolitan regions WTSHTF. Coined (in the survivalist context) by James Wesley Rawles.<sup>[58][67]</sup>
- **G.O.O.D.**: Get out of Dodge (city). Fleeing urban areas in the event of a disaster. Coined by James Wesley Rawles.<sup>[58][68]</sup>
- **G.O.O.D. kit**: Get out of Dodge kit. Synonymous with bug-out bag (BOB).<sup>[58][69]</sup>
- **I.N.C.H. Bag**: I'm Not Coming Home Bag. Similar to bug-out bag but usually kept to with the individual so as not to have to return to one's residence to get a bug-out bag.
- **Pollyanna or Polly**: Someone who is in denial about the disruption that might be caused by the advent of a large scale disaster.<sup>[58][70]</sup>
- **Prepper**: A synonym for *survivalist* that came into common usage during the early 2000s. Used interchangeably with *survivalist* much as *retreater* was in the 1970s. Refers to one who is prepared or making preparations.
- **SHTF**: Shit hits the fan. A term used generically by survivalists to describe disaster situations.<sup>[58]</sup>
- **TEOTWAWKI**: The end of the world as we know it. In use since the early 1980s.<sup>[58][71]</sup> The term was coined in 1996, in the Usenet newsgroup misc.survivalism.<sup>[72][73]</sup>
- **Uncivilization**: A generic term for a great catastrophe.<sup>[74]</sup>
- **WTSHTF**: When the shit hits the fan. A term used generically by survivalists to describe disaster situations.<sup>[58][75][76]</sup>
- **WROL**: Without rule of law. Describes a potential lawless state of society.<sup>[77]</sup>
- **YOYO**: You're on your own. Coined (in the survivalist context) by David Weed.<sup>[58][78]</sup>
- **Zombie**: Unprepared, incidental survivors of a prepped-for disaster, "who feed on... the preparations of others"<sup>[79]</sup>
- **Zombie apocalypse**: Used by some preppers as a tongue-in-cheek metaphor<sup>[79]</sup> for any natural or man-made disaster<sup>[80]</sup> and "a clever way of drawing people's attention to disaster preparedness".<sup>[79]</sup> The premise of the *Zombie Squad* is that "if you are prepared for a scenario where the walking corpses of your family and neighbors are trying to eat you alive, you will be prepared for almost anything."<sup>[81]</sup> Though "there are some... who are seriously preparing for a zombie attack".<sup>[82]</sup>

## Controversy

Despite a lull following the end of the Cold War, survivalism has gained greater attention in recent years, resulting in increased popularity of the survivalist lifestyle, as well as increased scrutiny. A National Geographic show interviewing survivalists, *Doomsday Preppers*, was a "ratings bonanza"<sup>[83]</sup> and "the network's most-watched series",<sup>[84]</sup> yet Neil Genzlinger in *The New York Times* declared it an "absurd excess on display and at what an easy target the prepper worldview is for ridicule," noting, "how offensively anti-life these shows are, full of contempt for humankind."<sup>[85]</sup>

Gerald Celente, founder of the Trends Research Institute, noted how many modern survivalists deviate from the classic archetype, terming this new style "neo-survivalism"; "you know, the caricature, the guy with the AK-47 heading to the hills with enough ammunition and pork and beans to ride out the storm. This [neo-survivalist] is a very different one from that".<sup>[27]</sup>

## Perceived extremism

In popular culture, survivalism has been associated with paramilitary activities. Some survivalists do take active defensive preparations that have military roots and that involve firearms, and this aspect is sometimes emphasized by the mass media.<sup>[30][86]</sup> Kurt Saxon is one proponent of this approach to armed survivalism.

The potential for social collapse is often cited as motivation for being well-armed.<sup>[87]</sup> Thus, some non-militaristic survivalists have developed an unintended militaristic image, and the term *survivalism* has been incorrectly used to signify unrelated right-wing reactionary paramilitary activities.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in their "If You See Something, Say Something" campaign says that "the public should report only suspicious behavior and situations...rather than beliefs, thoughts, ideas, expressions, associations, or speech...".<sup>[88]</sup> However, it is alleged that a DHS list of the characteristics of potential domestic terrorists used in law enforcement training includes "Survivalist literature (fictional books such as *Patriots* and *One Second After* are mentioned by name)", "Self-sufficiency (stockpiling food, ammo, hand tools, medical supplies)", and "Fear of economic collapse (buying gold and barter items)".<sup>[89][90]</sup>

The Missouri Information Analysis Center (MIAC) issued on February 20, 2009 a report intended for law enforcement personnel only entitled "The Modern Militia Movement," which described common symbols and media, including political bumper stickers, associated with militia members and domestic terrorists. The report appeared March 13, 2009 on WikiLeaks<sup>[91]</sup> and a controversy ensued. It was claimed that the report was derived purely from publicly available trend data on militias.<sup>[92]</sup> However, because the report included political profiling, on March 23, 2009 an apology letter was issued, explaining that the report would be edited to remove the inclusion of certain components.<sup>[93]</sup> On March 25, 2009 MIAC was ordered to cease distribution of the report.<sup>[94]</sup>

## Government preparedness efforts and training

The government of Switzerland with its long-standing militia system, mandatory construction of fallout shelters in all newly constructed multi-unit housing, and its network of reduit fortresses is one of the best prepared. An earlier civil defense effort in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s fell into disrepair by the 1970s. These preparations included the designation of structures as official fallout shelters, and duck and cover drills in schools. A booklet released by the Executive Office of the President of the United States shortly after the start of the Cold War called *Survival Under Atomic Attack* depicts the nature of the early civil defense initiatives.

The U.S. government civil defense program was minimal during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, despite efforts by Christian writer Gary North to lobby the government to resume civil defense efforts and build fallout shelters. Gary North co-wrote a book *Fighting Chance* to advocate for the return of the civil defense program. A renewal of U.S. government interest in preparedness and training did not happen until after the September 11th attacks and Hurricane Katrina. This renewed interest is typified by Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) organizations.

## Worldwide

Individual survivalist preparedness and survivalist groups and forums—both formal and informal—are popular



Official fallout shelter placard in Chinatown, New York City



worldwide, most visibly in Australia,<sup>[95][96]</sup> Austria,<sup>[97]</sup> Belgium, Canada,<sup>[98]</sup> France,<sup>[99][100]</sup> Germany<sup>[101]</sup> (often organized under the guise of "adventuresport" clubs),<sup>[102]</sup> Netherlands,<sup>[103]</sup> New Zealand,<sup>[104]</sup> Russia,<sup>[105]</sup> Sweden,<sup>[106][107][108]</sup> the United Kingdom,<sup>[109]</sup> and the United States.<sup>[23]</sup>

## Other related groups

Adherents of the back-to-the-land movement inspired by Helen and Scott Nearing, sporadically popular in the United States in the 1930s and 1970s (exemplified by *The Mother Earth News* magazine), share many of the same interests in self-sufficiency and preparedness. Back-to-the-landers differ from most survivalists in that they have a greater interest in ecology and counterculture. Despite these differences, *The Mother Earth News* was widely read by survivalists as well as back-to-the-landers during that magazine's early years, and there was some overlap between the two movements.

Anarcho-primitivists share many characteristics with survivalists, most notably predictions of a pending ecological disaster. Writers such as Derrick Jensen argue that industrial civilization is not sustainable, and will therefore inevitably bring about its own collapse. Non-anarchist writers such as Daniel Quinn, Joseph Tainter, and Richard Manning also hold this view. Some members of the Men Going Their Own Way subculture also promote off-grid living and believe that modern society is no longer liveable.<sup>[110]</sup>

## In popular culture

There are several television shows such as *Doomsday Castle*,<sup>[111]</sup> *Doomsday Preppers*,<sup>[112]</sup> *Man vs Wild*<sup>[113]</sup> and *Man, Woman, Wild*,<sup>[114]</sup> that are based on the concept of survivalism.

### In fiction

Survivalism and survivalist themes have been fictionalized in print, film, and electronic media. The survivalist genre was especially influenced by the advent of nuclear weapons and the potential for social collapse in wake of a Cold War nuclear conflagration.

## See also

### Concepts

- Air-raid shelter
- Alternative food
- American Redoubt
- First aid and wilderness first aid
- Intentional community
- Living off the land
- Off-the-grid
- Primitive skills
- Resilience (organizational)
- Survival skills

### Communication

- Amateur radio
- Citizens band radio
- Family Radio Service
- General Mobile Radio Service
- Multi-Use Radio Service
- Scanner (radio)
- Wireless mesh network

## Authors

- Jerry Ahern
- Bruce Clayton
- William R. Forstchen
- Pat Frank
- Dean Ing
- Cody Lundin
- Jerry Pournelle
- James Wesley Rawles
- Joel Skousen
- S. M. Stirling
- Mel Tappan
- Lofty Wiseman

## Other

- 10 Ways to End the World
- *Alas, Babylon*
- The American Civil Defense Association
- New Tribalism
- Risks to civilization, humans, and planet Earth
- Standby generator
- Urban farms
- CD3WD library

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