



“Doomsday Preppers” — or “Survivalists” — Prepare for the Worst

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An August 10 article in Britain’s *Daily Mail* cited British researchers at the University of Kent who have been studying a phenomenon they have called “doomsday prepping,” described as stockpiling food, medicine, and weapons in anticipation of “apocalyptic disaster” — or at least a complete breakdown of the distribution of essential goods. This phenomenon was first publicized following the election of Barack Obama to the presidency in 2008 and was seen primarily as a reaction among conservatives to their anticipation of widespread confiscation of weapons and an impending economic collapse owing to Obama’s expected socialist economic policies.

While their worst fears never materialized, recent articles published online by websites such as the Cambridge University Press, the *Journal of American Studies*, *EurekAlert!*, and *StudyFinds*, indicate that there has remained a strong interest in “doomsday prepping.”

The term “doomsday prepper” is a more recent (and more ominous sounding) term for what previously was described as “survivalism,” which included preparations not only for “apocalyptic disaster,” but also for more likely emergencies such as natural disasters, economic collapse due to government economic policies, or interruptions in the deliveries of essential goods due to natural or political causes.

Doomsday Preppers, a National Geographic Channel television series that aired from 2011 to 2014, was a reality program that profiled various survivalists, or “preppers,” who were preparing to survive various conditions they suspected would result in the end of civilization, including economic collapse, societal collapse, and electromagnetic pulse.

While being prepared for potential emergency situations should logically be viewed simply as prudent preparation for life’s emergencies, the fact that guns are among the items often stockpiled by survivalists has led the media to portray survivalists as “right-wing extremists.”

However, a research paper, *Obamageddon: Fear, the Far Right, and the Rise of “Doomsday” Prepping in Obama’s America*, published by the *Journal of American Studies*, disputes this view. The lead author



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on August 12, 2019

of the study, Dr. Michael Mills of the University of Kent, wrote: “Fear is now deeply entrenched in modern American culture and is the principal reason that so many citizens are engaging in ‘prepping.’” According to Mills, these preppers believe that if the worse were to happen, the government’s ability to protect and care for victims would be inadequate and that people would be left to take care of themselves. Concerned about this possibility, they stockpile food, medicine, and weapons in anticipation of apocalyptic disaster.

“Rather than seeing prepping as an exception within America’s right-wing political culture, we ought to see it as being reflective of increasingly established and popular outlooks,” Mills observed.

While preparing for emergencies and economic collapse is prudent, such preparations should be seen as a back-up plan rather than an end in itself. While no one can prevent natural disasters, the economic collapse that many preppers fear can be averted by wise governmental economic policies. Preppers would do well to join other citizens engaged in education and action to promote such policies, such as through the programs offered by The John Birch Society, the parent organization affiliated with *The New American*.

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Warren Mass has served The New American since its launch in 1985 in several capacities, including marketing, editing, and writing. Since retiring from the staff several years ago, he has been a regular contributor to the magazine. Warren writes from Texas and can be reached at wmass@thenewamerican.com.



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