

Key concepts to understand violent White supremacy

OVERVIEW

In recent months, a [man inspired by the 2015 terrorist attack perpetrated by Dylann Roof](#) was arrested for plotting an armed assault, while a [Georgia man with White supremacist ties](#) was investigated for possession of ricin. [Indian immigrants have been targeted in suspected hate crimes](#) in Kansas, Washington, and South Carolina, while an African-American man in New York City was stabbed to death in a racist ideologically-motivated homicide. [Jewish](#) and [African-American](#) institutions have been threatened with and subjected to armed protests, [Mosques](#) have also seen threats levied against them. Many of these attacks and threats have been linked to violent White supremacists¹ or used rhetoric commonly associated with violent White supremacy, making apparent the need to better understand this group of actors.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

This brief summarizes research from a larger project, the Counter-Narrative Knowledge Tool for CVE Practitioners and Communities, which seeks to curate a library of violent narratives and pair them with non-violent counternarratives and alternative narratives that will serve as a resource for anyone engaged in countering violent extremism. The curated library is intended to help raise awareness of the messaging used by violent extremists and their non-violent supporters to bolster their social legitimacy and recruit individuals into their movement. Additionally, the library can help inform and expedite counter-messaging efforts, which include identifying gaps in current counternarrative and alternative narrative content.

Though this brief focuses on violent White supremacists, the larger project examines extremist narratives across ideologies including violent Islamist actors such as al-Qaida and ISIL, and other violent U.S. far-right extremist actors including militia violent extremists, violent sovereign citizens and violent anti-abortion extremists. In surveying the relevant English-language literature of the U.S. violent far-right movements, START researchers identified key concepts in understanding violent White supremacists. The literature survey identifies at least thirteen different prominent narratives used by U.S. violent White supremacist extremists.

KEY CONCEPTS

IDEOLOGY

White supremacy operates on the belief that Whites are intellectually and morally superior to all other races. This belief is based on a mix of religious, socio-cultural and pseudo-scientific assertions that phenotype—including differences in skin tone and physiognomy, among other things—equate to differences in intellect, moral virtue, and social sophistication.

- While traditional targets of White supremacist rhetoric and violence have been Jews and African Americans, the movement has broadened its focus to include other ethnic and religious groups, including Latinos, Asians, Middle Easterners, Muslims, and Sikhs. They have also targeted individuals of different sexual and gender identities, such as gay/lesbian and transgendered individuals.
- White supremacy groups advocate for what they perceive as the appropriate and natural racial hierarchy, which places the Aryan race above any other racial groups. More specifically, they promote practices and policies that are supposed to ensure the privileged status of the “Aryan” people and their social control over (what they perceive as) lesser races, particularly within the United States.

TPOLOGY

There are five predominant types of White supremacist extremists in the United States: Ku Klux Klan members, neo-Nazis, racist skinheads, Christian Identity adherents, and Aryan prison gangs. They all subscribe to the same general belief that Whites are

¹ The researchers define violent White supremacist extremists as actors who enable the execution of violence indirectly through assistance—such as providing funding, transportation or logistical support, and/or training—or directly participate in acts of unlawful violence directed at the federal government, ethnic, racial, and/or religious minorities, including Jewish persons in support of their belief that Whites are intellectually and morally superior to all other races.

superior to other races. However, they also have major ideological differences – such as whether to embrace or reject Christianity (because Jesus was a Middle Eastern Jew) – as well as differences over leadership. Prison gangs, vis-à-vis other White supremacist types, appear to have an additional motives—such as gaining profit from illicit activities and finding personal protection from rival racial and ethnic prison gangs—which in many cases is greater than a purported ideological commitment to White racial supremacy.

WHITE SUPREMACIST NARRATIVES

Violent White supremacist extremist narratives are based in at least one of three types of arguments:

1. **Pseudo-scientific** (e.g., there is an “inherent” biological basis for these beliefs),
2. **Socio-cultural claims** (e.g., Whites are “civilized,” while non-Whites are not), and
3. **Religious**—which include racist interpretations of established religious traditions such as Christianity and Norse Paganism/Germanic Hedonism, as well as racist New Religious Movements (e.g., Cosmotheism and Creativity).

CONCORDANT *Embraced by all White supremacists*

- **White racial superiority:** This is the foundational belief and metanarrative that binds the different White supremacist movements and groups together. Rooted in a range of interpretations of various religious texts, socio-cultural claims, and pseudo-scientific theories (such as eugenics), it is a broader notion that Whites are morally and intellectually superior to individuals of other races.
- **White racial purity:** This is another foundational belief and metanarrative of White supremacy. Also referred to as “racial hygiene,” this is the idea that “there is an unadulterated, genuine, original race that must be protected, and is also based on the pseudo-science of eugenics. The unpolluted population must not be infected or otherwise sullied by contact with lesser races.”²
- **White Power:** This term and narrative is often exploited by White supremacists to promote racial separation, as well as pride in White racial identity (“White pride”) and solidarity of the White race using violence or other illegal conduct.
- **White Genocide:** Sometimes also referred to as “White elimination” or “White extinction,” this narrative claims that Caucasians are slowly being killed off due to a combination of shifting social and political norms that encourage race-mixing and intermarriage, open immigration policies allowing non-Whites from less developed nations to enter and settle into the United States and Europe, and shifting demographics toward more racially and ethnically-diverse societies.³
- **Weak Whites:** A sub-narrative to the broader White Genocide narrative, “weak Whites,” according to White supremacists, are those individuals who “do not possess the ability to respond to racial threats due to a lack of physical, emotional, or intellectual resources.”⁴
- **Race traitor:** These are Whites who “are collaborating with non-White members in efforts that threaten or harm the White race. Examples include the promotion of affirmative action, race mixing, or employment in purportedly anti-White organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union.”⁵

NON-CONCORDANT *Embraced by some but rejected by other White supremacists*

- **Jewish conspiracy to destroy the White race:** This meta-narrative asserts that Jews are the perennial adversaries of Whites and seek to undermine them through a number of different subversive plots and conspiracies. While many White supremacists are anti-Semitic, some leaders like Jared Taylor consider Jews to be White.⁶
- **Zionist Occupied Government (ZOG):** Sometimes also called “Jewish Occupied Government” (JOG), it is a phrase used by White supremacists and other anti-Semitic extremists to refer to the federal government, which they claim is controlled or manipulated by international Jewish interests.⁷

² Nicky Falkof, “The Myth of White Purity and Narratives that Fed Racism in South Africa,” *The Conversation*, May 15, 2016, accessed January 2, 2017, <https://theconversation.com/the-myth-of-white-purity-and-narratives-that-fed-racism-in-south-africa-59330>.

³ Mitch Berbrier, “The victim ideology of white supremacists and white separatists in the United States.” *Sociological Focus* 33, no. 2 (2000): 175-191.

⁴ Travis Morris, “Networking vehement frames: neo-Nazi and violent jihadi demagoguery.” *Behavioral sciences of terrorism and political aggression* 6, no. 3 (2014): 171.

⁵ Travis Morris, “Networking vehement frames: neo-Nazi and violent jihadi demagoguery.” *Behavioral sciences of terrorism and political aggression* 6, no. 3 (2014): 172.

⁶ “Jared Taylor,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, no date, accessed January 22, 2017, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/individual/jared-taylor>.

⁷ Bureau of Justice Assistance, “Investigating Terrorism and Criminal Extremism – Terms and Concepts,” Washington, DC: BJA, 2009, <https://1215.org/lawnotes/lawnotes/dojterrorismcriminal extremismterms.pdf>.

- **Holocaust denial:** Often referred to by its proponents as holocaust “revisionism,”⁸ it refers to intellectual attempts to severely downplay, obfuscate, and/or outright deny the deliberate and willful act of genocide against European Jews by Nazi Germany and its other European collaborators during WWII.⁹
- **Christianity is a Jewish conspiracy:** The narrative asserts that Christianity, which emphasizes forgiveness and compassion, makes the White race weak. Furthermore, the significance of Jesus, who was a Middle Eastern Jew, makes it especially anathema for any White person to follow Christianity.¹⁰ Members of Creativity, a racist New Religious Movement (NRM) founded by Ben Klassen, are particularly vocal advocates of this narrative.
- **White Homeland:** Used by White supremacists to describe their desire and plan to form a distinct geographical boundary within the United States where only Caucasians can live,¹¹ this phrase is a key narrative of White separatism, a particular form of White supremacy that seeks separate social, political and economic development for Whites.¹²

SEMI-CONCORDANT *A consensus on the broad contours of the narrative, but key differences on the details and framing*

- **White Race as the Chosen People:** This concept embraced by some White supremacists teaches that Whites have an innate quality that separates and make them superior from other races. For some White supremacists, particularly those affiliated with Christian Identity and the KKK, this “chosenness” comes from God.¹³ Therefore Whites, not Jews, are God’s chosen people. Others, such as Cosmotheists, who reject Christianity, believe this chosenness is due to biological determinism, in the form of evolutionary genetics.¹⁴
- **Racial Holy War (RAHOWA):** White supremacist extremists use this term to refer to an apocalyptic belief in a massive armed struggle between Whites and non-Whites that is yet to take place in the United States and elsewhere around the world. The specific details of RAHOWA as an apocalyptic belief differ based on the varied religious beliefs –Christian, Norse Pagan/Germanic Hedonist, or racist NRM – of violent White supremacists.¹⁵ Others use the term to describe an ongoing sometimes-armed struggle between Whites and non-Whites.¹⁶

METHOD

A research instruction manual was developed which outlined four key components to guide the systematic gathering and coding of sources used in the scoping survey. The first step was a literature search and identification. Guiding the selection of academic resources were surveys that sought to identify the most relevant scholarly outlets in the field of terrorism studies through methods such as citation analysis. This phase of the literature survey also involved Boolean searches of databases and search engines, including Academic Search Complete, WorldCat.org, Google Scholar, and Google Search.

During the second stage of this process, researchers catalogued sources thought to be relevant to the survey by entering them into a coding spreadsheet developed during the literature search. Third, researchers analyzed and triaged these sources according to their relevance. Sources were evaluated based on whether or not they informed the overall project and whether or not they specifically discussed one or more of the categories and sub-categories of U.S. far-right discourse listed in the coding spreadsheet. Finally, after identifying literature that best met the above-mentioned criteria and prioritizing it accordingly, researchers extracted information and relevant passages from those sources.

⁸ “Are ‘Revisionists’ Holocaust-Deniers?” *Nizkor Project*, no date, accessed January 15, 2017, <http://www.nizkor.org/features/revision-or-denial/>; Gord McFee, “‘Revisionism’ Isn’t,” *The Holocaust History Project*, May 15, 1999, accessed January 15, 2017, <http://www.phdn.org/archives/holocaust-history.org/revisionism-isnt/>.

⁹ “Are ‘Revisionists’ Holocaust-Deniers?” *Nizkor Project*, no date, accessed January 15, 2017, <http://www.nizkor.org/features/revision-or-denial/>; Gord McFee, “‘Revisionism’ Isn’t,” *The Holocaust History Project*, May 15, 1999, accessed January 15, 2017, <http://www.phdn.org/archives/holocaust-history.org/revisionism-isnt/>.

¹⁰ Jeffrey Kaplan, “Right wing violence in North America,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 7, no. 1 (1995): 63.

¹¹ “White Homeland,” *Stormfront.org*, Discussion Thread (August 2013), accessed May 30, 2016. <https://www.stormfront.org/forum/t989324/>

¹² Betty A Dobratz and Stephanie L. Shanks-Meile, *The White Separatist Movement in the United States: White Power, White Pride!* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997).

¹³ Chip Berlet and Stanislav Vysotsky, “Overview of US white supremacist groups,” *Journal of Political and Military Sociology* 34, no. 1 (2006): 11-48.

¹⁴ Brad Whitsel, “Ideological mutation and millennial belief in the American Neo-Nazi Movement,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 24, no. 2 (2001): 89-106.

¹⁵ Brad Whitsel, “Ideological Mutation and Millennial Belief in the American Neo-Nazi Movement,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 24, no. 2 (2001): 95.

¹⁶ Steelcap Boot, “Terminology,” *Stormfront* (blog), Feb. 2004. <https://www.stormfront.org/forum/t407182>.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This literature survey aims to provide future researchers with a resource that organizes the existing relevant literature describing these movements within the broader U.S. violent far-right milieu. Moving forward, the researchers recommend that scholars should survey existing counter-narratives and alternative narratives against U.S. violent far-right extremism. This should not only document findings from the existing scholarly literature but also incorporate existing insights from advocacy and activist publications, such as organizers' toolkits, as well as emerging scholarly findings on factors associated with exit from extremist organizations and movements espousing violent narratives. This can form the research basis for identifying and evaluating key counter-narrative and alternative narrative themes, and therefore for understanding the relevant marketplace of ideas surrounding White supremacy.

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