White Nationalism

White nationalism is a dangerous ideology that was the motivating force behind nearly 350 terrorist attacks between 2011 and 2017. Recent attacks motivated by white nationalist ideology include the shootings in a Walmart in El Paso, Texas; in mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand; in the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and in the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. White nationalist violence is not a new phenomenon, even if it is taking on new forms. In the United States, the 1979 Greensboro shootings, various attacks committed in the 1980s by “the Order,” and the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, were all motivated by the white nationalist ideology. Increasingly, white nationalists are targeting young people for recruitment online, and white nationalism has been linked to bullying, threats, and violence in schools. For these reasons, it is critical that we all understand what white nationalism is and why it is harmful.

What do white nationalists believe?

- There is a “white race,” and it is genetically and culturally superior to other “races.”
- In reality, the concept of “race” was invented to justify the African slave trade and European colonialism. Statistically, a person is likely to have more in common genetically with any given person of a different “race” than someone who shares their “race.” Variations in skin color have existed throughout human history, but it was only in modern times that these variations were considered to be linked to immutable differences between groups of people. There is no scientific evidence demonstrating that skin color is linked to any “superior” or “inferior” characteristics.
- White people should have their own nations, where they hold the power.
- It is not possible to define clearly who is “white” and who is not, since racial categories are subjective. If a person were to walk across Europe and Asia—from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean—it would be impossible to determine where one “race” ends and another begins, because groups always blend into each other. Most genetic variation occurs at an individual level, and genetic differences do not map directly onto modern racial categories. Certain groups of people have been labelled both as “white” and as “non-white” in different contexts, which reveals how arbitrary racial classifications are. For example, people with Japanese heritage were considered to be white in South Africa during Apartheid, but non-white in the United States at the same time.

What you should know

- It is not possible to define clearly who is “white” and who is not, since racial categories are subjective. If a person were to walk across Europe and Asia—from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean—it would be impossible to determine where one “race” ends and another begins, because groups always blend into each other. Most genetic variation occurs at an individual level, and genetic differences do not map directly onto modern racial categories. Certain groups of people have been labelled both as “white” and as “non-white” in different contexts, which reveals how arbitrary racial classifications are. For example, people with Japanese heritage were considered to be white in South Africa during Apartheid, but non-white in the United States at the same time.

- Even if it were possible to categorize people racially, creating a country for just one group of people would require the segregation and subjugation, violent removal, or killing of everyone who is not considered as belonging.
### What do white nationalists believe?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What you should know</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Majority white countries are suffering (economically and culturally) because of non-white immigration and increased civil rights for women, religious minorities, LGBTQ people, and people of color.</td>
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<td>Many countries are experiencing growing economic inequality. When people suffer economically, or fear that cultural changes will result in a loss of their status, they are more likely to be intolerant toward historically marginalized groups of people. However, immigration and rights movements are not the cause of inequality. In fact, immigration can help countries thrive. Countries with declining birth rates rely on immigration in order to sustain their economies. Additionally, immigrants to the United States—including unauthorized immigrants—are less likely to commit violent crimes than native-born residents. Currently, Germany hosts over one million refugees, and yet in 2017, crime was at its lowest level in 25 years.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jewish people have infiltrated powerful institutions and are conspiring to bring about the downfall of white people.</td>
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<td>This conspiracy theory draws on a harmful yet persistent antisemitic trope that falsely claims that Jewish people secretly control powerful institutions and are manipulating social and political changes to bring about the fall of the “white race.” Many white nationalists believe that Jewish people are working to increase immigration and promote social justice movements in order to cause “white genocide,” which is an unfounded conspiracy theory that white people are being erased or replaced. Antisemitic tropes, such as this one, fuel hatred and violence.</td>
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<td>White women should be under the control of white men and have more children in order to increase the white population.</td>
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<td>White nationalists often use the idea that white women need to be “protected” as a justification for their violence, while in reality, white nationalist ideology may constrain women’s ability to exercise their rights, including the right to work outside the home, hold political power, and control their own bodies.</td>
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### How do white nationalists spread their ideas?

They target people whom they think will connect with some aspects of their ideology—such as people living in areas with high unemployment, recent demographic shifts, or recent migration waves—and then slowly indoctrinate them to the rest. White nationalists specifically target children and teenagers for recruitment.

They harass, assault, and may even kill people whom they consider to be a threat to their goal of creating a “white nation,” and then use the publicity to recruit more followers.

They spread their ideas online, using YouTube videos, message boards, and online gaming communities.

They take advantage of social media algorithms to get their content recommended to new audiences. Algorithms on some sites, such as YouTube, have a tendency to show viewers increasingly extreme content on a topic. The first time someone is exposed to white nationalist content, it may seem extreme and unappealing, but often the more immersed they become in white nationalist content, the more normal it seems.

They create content that disguises white nationalist ideology behind humor and coded language—which feeds dangerous stereotypes without appearing overtly discriminatory—and then try to get people to unknowingly share this content online.

They manipulate scientific studies to falsely claim that white people are superior and that “white genocide” is a reality.

### How does white nationalism impact schools?

White nationalists target teenagers for recruitment. They are not allowed to directly recruit at schools, but they reach out to youth in online spaces. Teenage boys who lack strong community ties are especially vulnerable to recruitment.

White nationalist ideology may appear in schools in numerous forms, such as graffiti or flyers that contain white nationalist symbols or promote white nationalist ideology. Some students may also raise white nationalist ideas in class or try to form clubs that are aligned with white nationalism.

White nationalism can contribute to a harmful school atmosphere. The ideology can fuel violence and bullying in schools.
Terminology

The Alt-Right

Short for the “alternative right,” this is a recent term coined by a white supremacist in an attempt to make the movement sound more acceptable. This rebranding is part of an effort by members of the movement to influence mainstream conservative groups in order to advance a white supremacist agenda. “Alt-right” is now used to refer to a loose network of white nationalist groups in the United States that espouse white nationalist ideology.

Neo-Nazis

A subset of the white nationalist movement that reveres Adolf Hitler and focuses its hatred particularly against Jews. Neo-Nazis believe that Jewish people control the government, and many are Holocaust deniers.

“Race War”

Many white nationalists believe that by attacking and killing non-white people, they can incite a “race war,” in which violence would escalate until non-white people are killed or driven from their homes, and white people can create white-only nations.

“White Genocide”

A term white supremacists use in their propaganda. It refers to a conspiracy theory that Jewish people are working to erase the “white race,” by promoting immigration, intermarriage, and multiculturalism. The “Great Replacement” is another term for the white genocide conspiracy theory.

White Power

This is the preferred term of some scholars to refer to the white nationalist movement. Kathleen Belew, for example, argues “white power” is a more appropriate term, because “white nationalism” refers to only a section people who are in the “white power movement,” or “the social movement that brought together members of the Klan, militias, radical tax resisters, white separatists, neo-Nazis, and proponents of white theorolgies such as Christian Identity, Odinism, and Dualism.”

White Separatism

This term is meant to make white nationalism sound more acceptable to the mainstream by implying that whites just want to live separately and obscuring the fact that creating separate white nations requires killing and displacing non-white people.

White Supremacy

Systems that uphold the dominant status of white people over all other people. White supremacists believe in the superiority of white people.

Kathleen Belew, Bring the War Home, (Harvard University Press, 2018).

White nationalism is an ideology, or a set of ideas that try to explain problems in society, offer a vision for the future, and tactics for how to reach that future. Not all white nationalists believe in every aspect of the ideology. This document describes key aspects of the ideology.


Kathleen Belew, Bring the War Home, (Harvard University Press, 2018), ix.