



POLICY BRIEF INITIATIVE

WHITE GENOCIDE FEAR AND EXTREMISM IN NEW JERSEY

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While many people think of white power extremism as something that exists in rural areas and in the South, it has a long history throughout the United States, including in New Jersey and the Tri-State area. Indeed, people and groups from New Jersey participated in the 2017 Charlottesville demonstration and in the 2021 Capitol Insurrection. At a time when polarization in the U.S. remains high and a surprisingly large number of people believe in the reality of white replacement – the idea the white demographic decline, sometimes also referred to as “the great replacement” and “white genocide,” is being driven by nefarious, and often Jewish, actors – is real, it is critical to understand extremism in such less studied places like New Jersey. The Patriot Front, New Jersey European Heritage Association, and White Lives Matter are among the groups actively espousing replacement and other white power hate speech in New Jersey. Anti-government, militia, and far-right groups like the Proud Boys also remain active and take up these issues.

A third continuity between New Jersey white power extremism past and present is antisemitism. If the KKK is antisemitic, this motif is even more foregrounded by neo-Nazi groups. During the 1930s, for example, the New Jersey chapter of the pro-Nazi German American Bund was quite active and even established the 205-acre Camp Norland in Sussex Hills in 1937.

During meetings, members chanted that the U.S. needed to become “a white man’s Christian country again” and sang “Our great joy will come when Jewish blood flows through the streets.” In 1940, the KKK and German American Bund held a joint rally at Camp Norland, illustrating a fourth link to contemporary white power extremism in New Jersey and the U.S. more broadly: collaboration and communication between groups. A variety of neo-Nazi groups continued to operate in New Jersey, including the National Socialist Movement, which, in 2011, held its annual meeting in New Jersey.

History of White Power Extremism in New Jersey

Perhaps because New Jersey is located in the Northeast, many people are unaware that white power extremism in the state directly aligns with the broader history of North America, including settler colonial violence, enslavement, and, after the establishment of the U.S., waves of xenophobic nativism linked, in part, to the state’s proximity to New York Harbor and Ellis Island.

Such xenophobia is one key throughline to the nativist replacement emphasis of contemporary New Jersey hate groups, which often invoke anti-immigrant and Islamophobic themes. This rhetoric also focuses on race, including anti-Black hate speech. Indeed, New Jersey was the last state in the North to abolish slavery (1866), and the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) has been active in New Jersey since the early 1920s. In 1979, David Duke, the Imperial Wizard of the KKK held a rally in New Jersey during his failed Presidential Election bid. And, as recently as 2018, a KKK group was active in New Jersey.

Contemporary White Power Extremism in New Jersey

White power extremism remains robust in New Jersey. As recently as 2014 there were 40 hate groups active in the state – the fourth highest number in the U.S. – the majority of which were white power in orientation. Perhaps due to the increased law enforcement focus on white power extremism, these numbers have recently declined.

In 2021, the Southern Poverty Law Center found 12 hate groups active in New Jersey, half of which operated statewide. If the number of white power hate groups in New Jersey decreased in 2022 (while antigovernment groups increased), many continue to operate and other non-affiliated white nationalists remain active online. In keeping with a national trend, for example, the Anti-Defamation League found that New Jersey had a record number of antisemitic incidents (408) in 2022; the Council on American-Islamic Relations note a similar rise in anti-Muslim incidents. More broadly, several white power extremist groups are disseminating hate propaganda such as posters, stickers, flyers, and banners. The three most active – the Patriot Front, European Heritage Association, and White Lives Matter – all spread messages related to white replacement.

- Patriot Front: The Patriot Front is a large and national white power group that emerged out of Vanguard America, a semi-defunct neo-Nazi group that gained notoriety during the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville. While the Patriot Front has distanced itself from Vanguard America's more overt neo-Nazism and seeks to position itself as patriotic, its manifesto makes clear that the group remains white nationalist as illustrated by statements that American identity is European and "firmly rooted in our blood." These ideas are reflected by their hate propaganda, which plays on white replacement themes.
- New Jersey European Heritage Association: While operating outside of the state, the New Jersey European Heritage Association (NJEHA) is a smaller group firmly rooted and active in New Jersey. NJEHA members participated in the Unite the Right rally and the Capitol Insurrection. Their white replacement focus is quite overt as illustrated by its white genocide 14 Words "creed" and propaganda material that includes slogans like "The White Race: Earth's Most Endangered Species" and "Stop the Third World Invasion of America."
- White Lives Matter: While the roots of White Lives Matters date back at least to 2015, the group gained momentum after the Black Lives Matter protests following the murder of George Floyd. The group has a neo-Nazi orientation and directly invokes replacement discourses, as illustrated by stickers featured on their Telegram channel that state, "Stop White Replacement." If WLM is large and is national, it has a strong presence in the New York area and remains active in New Jersey.
- Other Groups and Actors: A variety of other white power groups and actors espousing white replacement discourse are active in New Jersey. Some, like the Proud Boys, refer more generically to the need to reclaim "Western civilization" and invoke other replacement themes. Skinheads and members of militia groups like the Oath Keepers are also active in New Jersey – as are smaller neo-Nazi, anti-government, and white power groups. And The Base, a dangerous white power extremist group advocating accelerationist race war, has strong ties to New Jersey.

Implications and Research Directions

- Hate groups adapt their messages to current issues. Given the long history and current robustness of white power extremism in New Jersey, such hate groups are not going away. The groups seek to promote their ideology by tapping into the issues of the moment. During the first part of the Trump administration, for example, NJEHA invoked the language of immigrant “invasion.” When the COVID pandemic occurred, the group began adapting its language with slogans that read “(((Media)))” [the triple “echo” brackets signifying Jewish identity], “Globalism,” “Multiculturalism,” and “Open Borders” are “the virus.”
- Anti-trans / queer animus is rising. Amid the culture wars of the upcoming 2024 election, these groups will likely increasingly take up related issues, such as LGBTQ+ identity and the demonization of transgender people – both of which converge with gendered replacement fears about patriarchy and declining white birth rates. Members of the Patriot Front, for example, were arrested in 2022 as they attempted to disrupt a Pride event in Idaho, and white power extremists disrupted a drag story hour in Ohio in 2023. White power groups in New Jersey have also begun to foreground such issues, as illustrated by social media posts and postering like a 2023 NJEHA anti-LGBTQ+ sign that read, “Reject Degeneracy.” Along these lines, researchers should focus on how extremist groups are seeking to make their hate speech more appealing by tapping into such issues, especially in spaces like Telegram and GAB where they communicate.
- Some extremists belong to groups, others do not. Many white power extremists do not formally identify with or join a specific group. Instead, they often gain a sense of belonging by interacting with other extremists – both domestically and around the globe – on platforms like 4chan, 8kun, and reddit. White replacement language is common on such sites and has also served as an inspiration for white power shooter massacres in places like Christchurch, Pittsburgh, El Paso, and Buffalo. Future research should explore how New Jersey white power actors participate in these larger digital networks.
- The replacement narrative is being mainstreamed. In addition to following current trends and nodes of white power extremist interaction, researchers also need to attend to the ways in which hate speech, including white replacement ideology, has been mainstreamed. White replacement narratives are openly invoked by actors ranging from politicians to television personalities like Tucker Carlson. Polls have shown that white replacement was a significant issue for January 6 Insurrectionists – some of whom, including a leader of the Proud Boys, were from New Jersey – as well as Republicans more broadly. Accordingly, and especially given misperceptions about the prevalence of white power extremism in New Jersey, researchers should undertake research that is broad in scope.

Recommended Reading:

1. “The Year in Hate and Extremism 2022.” Southern Poverty Law Center, <https://www.splcenter.org/year-hate-extremism-2022>
2. “2023 Threat Assessment,” New Jersey Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness, February 24, 2023, <https://www.njohsp.gov/analysis/2023-threat-assessment>
3. Anti-Defamation League New York / New Jersey, <https://nynj.adl.org/>
4. Global Network on Extremism and Technology (GNET), <https://gnet-research.org/>
5. Aguilar, Luis M. Hernandez. “Memeing a conspiracy theory: On the biopolitical compression of the great replacement.” *Ethnography*, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14661381221146983>
6. Hinton, Alexander Laban. *It Can Happen Here: White Power and the Rising Threat of Genocide in the U.S.* New York: NYU Press, 2021.