

Toward a Useful Taxonomy of White Supremacist Attitudes

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By David Hines

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INTRODUCTION

The rise in white supremacist organizing efforts in the United States should be neither ignored nor exaggerated. While unpopular, poorly organized, and subject to persistent opposition, white supremacists will always find some small number of devoted adherents to their cause. Some of them are extremely dangerous. Accurately estimating the level and nature of that danger is a serious issue.

Though analysis and commentary often treat white supremacy as a monolith, its adherents are – perhaps ironically – significantly diverse in actual attitudes and practice. Broadly speaking, most members of white supremacist organizations are criminal gang members who are focused on professional criminal activity, rather than politics. White supremacists who are focused on producing political change may be classified into three categories: the pugnacious, who seeks confrontation; the square, who seeks normalization; and the chaotic, who seeks destruction. These types are attitudinal rather than ideological. They present different challenges and different threat profiles. Understanding how each sees the world is essential to clearly understanding the nature of the white supremacist movement, the challenges the ideology's adherents pose to mainstream politics and public safety, and how to address them properly.

In recent decades adherents have undertaken to move away from the term white supremacy in favor of terms such as white nationalism or identitarianism. More recently, leftist writers have sought to broaden the term white supremacy to any form of social inequality rather than explicitly legislated political dominance. While supporters and opponents often invoke ideological arguments for the use of one term over the other, in practice the press and general public use such classifications as white supremacist, white nationalist, and identitarian more or less interchangeably. The term white supremacist is used here in the sense of those who seek explicit white political dominance – whether in America as it currently exists, in some imagined breakaway ethnostate, or in a transnational movement that is not nationalist at all – rather than in the overly broad leftist usage.

KEY POINTS TO UNDERSTAND

1. White supremacists are genuine radicals who envision and hope to bring about a society that is drastically different from the society that exists in America today.
2. As groups, white supremacists typically exhibit low membership numbers, and as individuals demonstrate generally weak organizing skills, poor discipline, worse operational security, and incompetent tradecraft.
3. Different types of white supremacist groups and individuals present different kinds and levels of challenges for citizens, political leaders, and law enforcement.
4. White supremacist groups that are explicitly opposed to violence and property destruction can and do still attract individual members who are very much interested in those things.
5. White supremacist groups explicitly in favor of violence and property destruction can be surprisingly reluctant to act on these fantasies and are often incompetent when they do.
6. White supremacy is overwhelmingly a magnet for impulsive incompetents and social outcasts, who cause headaches for the smaller numbers of more stable and organized members of the movement.
7. The more politically savvy white supremacists in the movement are actively interested in subverting mainstream groups and organizations to their own ends. While this is unlikely to result in the normalization of white supremacy as a cause or belief, it is potentially damaging for the mainstream groups they seek to exploit.
8. There are three types of white supremacist violence. In decreasing order of frequency, these are violence committed by criminal gangs; impulsive violence committed by individual adherents; and deliberate violence plotted with political intent.
9. White supremacists are most meaningfully differentiated not by ideology, affiliation, or goals, but rather by underlying attitudes.

ESTIMATING WHITE SUPREMACIST NUMBERS

Estimating the numbers of white supremacists is a thorny subject. The largest groups in existence today are not politically minded organizations but criminal gangs. The Southern Poverty Law Center estimates the Aryan Brotherhood, a white supremacist prison gang, has perhaps 20,000 members (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.).¹ The Anti-Defamation League's report on another such gang, the Aryan Circle, estimates that gang's numbers at 1,400 (ADL 2009). No politically oriented white supremacist group in the United States currently approaches the size of either.

Critical accounts often inflate the numbers of the white supremacist movement by encompassing criminal gangs or even anyone who has read white supremacist literature (eg. Bellew 2018: p. 3-5). White supremacists' own accounts are famously even more inflated and unreliable. In the early 1980s Richard Butler's Aryan Nations group claimed 6,000 members in the US and Canada, 300 of whom lived in the vicinity of the Aryan Nations compound, but he could still only draw 30-35 people for weekly services and had to invite other groups to get above 200 people for major annual events (Flynn and Gerhardt 1995). By the late 2010s, white supremacists numbered far fewer. The Traditionalist Worker Party's Matt Heimbach could field only 45 members when he went to speak at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and only about that many joined a failed attempt to escort Richard Spencer to a speaking engagement. (Ohm and Crocker 2018; Mathias 2018).

The most reliable way to assess the number of active members is by the number of people the groups field, particularly at meetings of their local chapters. This is not difficult; many white supremacist groups post pictures of their activities on social media, and local chapters are often exposed by antifascist infiltrators, journalists, and law enforcement. The results can be tallied by anyone who can count. As a rule of thumb, local chapters of groups dedicated to white supremacy are most often two to eight people. A good-sized local gathering might be 25-35 people. A very good turnout for a regional event bringing together members from multiple groups would be 120-150 people.

¹ Editor's Note: The Center for Security Policy regards the Southern Poverty Law Center as a politically motivated leftist group which smears those it opposes (including the Center) by associating them with white supremacists. Nevertheless, we recognize the inclusion of the SPLC's data here as a necessary to understand how white supremacists have traditionally been identified and categorized and aiming towards an improved understanding of this threat.

Larger assemblies are rare and notable. The 2017 Charlottesville “Unite the Right” rally, the largest and most notorious white supremacist gathering in years, is estimated to have numbered only between 500-600 people (Ellis 2018). (By this author’s count, the drone video taken of the march the night before the Unite the Right rally showed approximately 160 torches.)

The publicly verifiable membership numbers are remarkably stable, in part because white supremacists often do not recruit new members so much as shuffle membership around. As an example, the Nationalist Front, an umbrella group containing such groups as the Traditionalist Worker Party (TWP), the National Socialist Movement (NSM), and Vanguard America (as well as Vanguard America’s successor group Patriot Front), mustered approximately 125 attendees at a 2017 rally in Pikeville, Kentucky (Estep 2017). In February 2020, following the implosions of both the TWP and NSM, Patriot Front held a rally in Washington DC for which they mustered approximately the same number of attendees from the Pikeville event three years earlier (It’s Going Down, 2020).

This contrast between large criminal gangs and small groups of politically motivated radicals complicates assessments of the risks posed by white supremacists. The Anti-Defamation League, which keeps statistics on deaths related to domestic extremism dating back to 1970, reports that “In 2019, right-wing extremists were responsible for the great majority (38 of 42, or 90%) of domestic extremist-related murders” (ADL 2020, p. 18). These numbers are subject to criticism for inaccuracy (Fisher 2020) and are also inflated by their inclusion of the actions of white supremacist criminal gangs. As the ADL acknowledges (ADL 2020, p. 18):

Over the past 10 years, the number of ideological-related killings and non-ideological killings by extremists has been virtually equal (218 versus 217), with the majority of non-ideological killings coming from right-wing extremists, especially white supremacists. These killings include murders of informants, domestic violence murders, drug- and gang-related murders, and other murders connected to traditional crime.

White supremacist gang members, for example, have committed hate crime murders, but have killed even more people as part of organized crime activities. They also not infrequently target their own members and associates for death, most commonly as suspected informants or for breaking gang rules.

In other words, most white supremacist murders are non-ideological, and are committed by criminal gangs for criminal gang reasons rather than reasons associated with racist politics. The inclusion of these groups in the statistics provides a distorted picture of the problem and its solution. White supremacist criminal gangs disappearing would greatly decrease the number of white supremacist murders but would not notably affect white nationalist political terrorism. The opposite is also true.

The University of Maryland's National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) tracks terrorism incidents and deaths in the United States. Most years between 1995 and 2017 saw fewer than ten deaths from terrorism in the United States, and the total number of terrorist attacks in the United States for this period never rose above 65 (Miller and Jensen, 2018). Because the absolute numbers are low, "the overall trends in terrorism in the United States with respect to ideology are highly sensitive to the influence of individual mass-casualty attacks" (Miller 2017, p.5). More than two-thirds of the deaths from terrorist attacks in the US in all of the 1990s, and 99% of all deaths in all of the 2000s, were the results of the Oklahoma City bombing and the September 11, 2001 al Qaeda attacks (ibid, p. 4).

The motivations for terrorism in America fluctuate. Ideological groups have turned away from terrorism before: in the 1970s there were 1,471 terrorist attacks causing 172 deaths in the United States, the motives dominated by far left ideology (Miller 2017, p.3). Domestic terrorist incidents of all types have since plummeted and continued to decline. Deaths at the hand of far left terrorists plummeted even further as the far left pivoted away from violence and toward working through institutions. When environmental direct action and terrorism rose, practitioners sought to avoid the mistakes and setbacks of the 1970s by focusing on property damage or assault rather than murder (Miller 2014). This deliberate effort is in part due to movement continuity in a far left that includes a wealth of practical experience in radical action and a culture of learning from mistakes (Kauffman 2017). The far right lacks this movement continuity and culture of learning; compounding the problem, people drawn to far right beliefs tend to be stubborn, argumentative iconoclasts. As a result, the far right is much less able and less inclined than the far left to learn from mistakes and take advantage of new opportunities.

TYPES OF WHITE SUPREMACISTS AND WHITE SUPREMACIST GROUPS

From the perspective of media, academics, or the activists countering them, the differences among white supremacist groups, or even between them and other types of fringe right groups, may not be worth mentioning. Academics and antifascist researchers may seek to encompass the white supremacist ecosystem in very broad terms, such as white identity or white power (e.g. Bellew 2018). Journalist Leonard Zeskind (2009) described his view of the key factions operationally, as mainstreamers (who seek to normalize white nationalism) vs. vanguardists (militants in favor of direct action and building a party for revolution). Law enforcement may describe white supremacists with a focus on specific ideological or subcultural affiliation.

In actual practice, among radicals on the right, affiliation, operation, and even ideology are less a key to understanding behavior than attitude. Affiliations come and go, groups rise and fall, operational patterns change, ideology varies, but the attitudes of politically minded white supremacists tend to be quite consistent. Moreover, these attitudinal differences are unusually persistent in the community over decades, to the point that a historical survey of white supremacist literature in America will leave the reader with a strong sense of déjà vu. Though operating in different contexts decades apart and coming from disparate ideologies and backgrounds, the attitudes expressed are remarkably similar. The names and faces change, but the personalities change but little.

There are three major attitudes among politically minded white supremacists. This author has identified them as the pugnacious, the square, and the chaotic. These attitudinally different types of white supremacists form different kinds of groups, have different operating profiles, and – if criminal – commit different types of crimes.

THE PUGNACIOUS WHITE SUPREMACIST

The pugnacious white supremacist is the most common and ideologically diverse branch of the movement – or indeed, of the fringe right in its entirety, including those that eschew white supremacy.

The pugnacious will never pass on a fight, an argument, or strife of any sort: he wants to fight, he wants to fight now, he wants to get the fight over with, and he

wants to win. If on the off chance he does win — and sometimes even if he doesn't — he will shortly find something new to fight about. He likely has an ideology and will defend it full-throatedly, but the ideology is often less reasoned than felt, so it may not be particularly coherent. His political convictions are visceral. Whatever the pugnacious adherent believes, he believes fiercely and whole-heartedly. He does not brook compromise or patience. If the pugnacious person sees something as wrong, the people espousing it are not merely misguided. They are supporting evil and must be fought. It is the mindset of a paladin, but not a careful or a patient one.

This attitude is, of course, not limited to white supremacists, and exists across the political spectrum in various degrees. Pugnacious anticommunists in the 1960s often sought out the John Birch Society (Mulloy 2014); those even farther right sought out the Minutemen (Jones 1968). The pugnacious attitude is not uncommon, in a lesser form, even among populist journalists and columnists on the mainstream right. It by no means guarantees a radical evolution. Few in the mainstream will become radical, but when a pugnacious individual radicalizes he typically remains pugnacious.

The pugnacious white supremacist admires the dramatic, so the type of actions he favors tend to be broad. Rallies and demonstrations are a favorite — there is nothing the pugnacious loves more than rubbing opponents' faces in the fact that he believes what he believes. Pugnacious radicals may be drawn to pugnacious fringe or mainstream events, or may construct their own, often for the purposes of baiting or battling their pugnacious opposites. Some of these events may require expensive security responses for the community where the rallies are held in order to minimize unrest involving attendees and counter-protestors. Some pugnacious white supremacists may escalate to brawling, assault, or, in rare cases, lone-wolf terrorist attacks. But the majority of violence pugnacious white supremacists produce comes not from spectacular events, but from innumerable poorly planned or impulsive criminal acts.

A classic specimen of this type of behavior occurred on October 19, 2017, after prominent white supremacist Richard Spencer gave a speech at the University of Florida. William Fears and his brother Colton, Tyler Tenbrink, and Matt Mears had come from Texas to the event. The Fears brothers and Tenbrink had been involved in numerous white supremacist actions in Texas; William Fears was associated with Patriot Front and Tenbrink with Daily Stormer Book Clubs, but both men had been in events with multiple groups. All three had attended the

Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, VA in 2017 (Anti-Defamation League 2017).

The speech drew large protests and at one point Tenbrink, swarmed by protestors, vaulted a barricade to escape an angry crowd (Reitman 2018). Afterward, Fears's Jeep stopped at a local bus stop, where a few protestors were waiting for a bus. According to the police report, the no-longer-outnumbered men in the vehicle taunted the protestors with Nazi salutes and yelled "Heil Hitler." One of the protestors smashed the rear window of the vehicle with a retractable baton. The Jeep drove forward, then stopped. With the Fears brothers urging him on, Tenbrink got out of the car, drew a gun, and fired. His shot missed. Tenbrink got in the car and drove away; the protestors called police and reported the license number of the car (Alachua County Sheriff's Department 2017).

The action was spontaneous, reckless, pointless, and facilitated by bad decisions (in this case, interstate transport of firearms illegally owned by convicted felons, the decision to open a confrontation with the protestors, the decision to further escalate it, and then the calls from the Fears brothers for Tenbrink to use his firearm). In short, it was classically pugnacious. (It is worth noting as an aside that Mears, the only person in the car apparently not involved in the confrontation and thus ignored in subsequent write-ups, is of Asian descent and was born in South Korea. While unusual, it is not unprecedented for people of color or Jews who go far-right to become white supremacists, and even be accepted within some quarters of the movement. One South Korean man living in Texas became a Neo-Confederate who harassed other immigrants (Ramirez 2018, KLTV 2019), and white supremacist congressional candidate Paul Nehlen's campaign spokesman was Jewish (O'Brien 2018).)

When pugnacious white supremacists turn violent, their violence is often impulsive or poorly planned. As a result, pugnacious murderers have a highly variable body count. The aging longtime Klansman Frazier Glenn Miller fantasized of killing large numbers of Jews; he opened fire at a Jewish community center, killing three people, none of whom was Jewish (Yaccino and Barry 2014). Robert Bowers, who did the same at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, murdered twelve, all of whom were Jewish. His last words on social media were perhaps the best summary of the attitude of the pugnacious white supremacist who turns to violence: "Screw your optics, I'm going in" (Turkewitz

and Roose 2018). He was addressing the second of the attitudinal groups of white supremacists: the squares.

THE SQUARE WHITE SUPREMACIST

The square white supremacist seeks to mainstream his ideas. Square white supremacists manifest in a variety of forms, but generally emphasize professional or sharp casual dress, a normal demeanor, and downplay or soften the racial issues that lie at the core of what they believe. Younger squares call this approach “optics.” Pugnacious white supremacists, who have a low opinion of this approach, refer to them as “optics cucks,” short for “cuckolds.”) Squares are more likely to refer to themselves as “racialists,” “race realists,” or “identitarians.”

Square organizations may seek to recruit by emphasizing areas of commonality with larger, more mainstream audiences — opposition to LGBT issues for social conservatives, the need for strong borders for immigration hawks, critiques of capitalism for the left-leaning — but no matter the issue, for the square white supremacist the root of all causes is a racial analysis, and the solution a racial one. The prominent square white supremacist Patrick Casey, president of the American Identity Movement (previously Identity Evropa) expressed the contrast between his views and conservatism frankly in a 2018 interview:

“We find ourselves in a situation now where the ‘right,’ the ‘conservatives’ in this country, they would rather preserve a country for conservative values than for their own people, for white people. They’d rather America, if given a choice between America being a hundred percent, like, Hispanic but a hundred percent conservative, and a hundred percent white and a hundred percent liberal, they would choose the former, right? And obviously, we would choose the latter” (Kohne 2018, timestamp 9:46).

Squares may be willing to work with non-whites in the service of their politics, but place restrictions on who joins their groups (Schiano 2019). Operationally, their actions are more subversive or political than criminal. Targets of infiltration have included student groups and local Republican parties (Schechter 2018). On-campus confrontations with mainstream campus conservative speakers represented what appear to be the first public step in developing an affiliated front group or broader movement (Coaston 2019). This effort’s plausible

deniability was dealt a setback when the announced leader of the group proudly had his picture taken with prominent white supremacists Nick Fuentes and Patrick Casey, and other student groups influenced by the far right are now taking a more subdued approach.

The square is the most likely of the attitudinal groups to object to the white supremacist label, used by earlier generations of white supremacists to refer to political supremacy, by stating that he does not view whites as being morally superior to other races. The square argues passionately for unfettered self-determination for an unbreakable white demographic majority voting lockstep in interests that prioritize racial solidarity, and is frustrated by the refusal of the white public at large to agree with him.

Square white supremacist organizations face three problems. The first problem is that the number of ordinary people who want to associate even with square white supremacists is quite low (hence efforts toward deception, concealment, and front groups). The second problem is that true squares are rare. Particularly among the younger adherents, many members of square white supremacist groups are still at heart pugnacious. This poses challenges to the square white supremacist organization staying on mission. The third problem is that is that an organization presenting a stable front for a radical ideology is still promoting an radical ideology, and as such will draw people who are already radicals, including individuals who are unstable and potentially even violent extremists. This tension between the goals of their leadership and the sources of their membership pose problems for the squares.

In August 2018, a young married couple applied for admission to Identity Evropa. The couple passed the initial vetting and met with another married couple who recruited for the organization. The new would-be members neglected to mention to their recruiters that two weeks before the interview they had vandalized a synagogue, spray-painting Nazi symbols on an outbuilding and lighting a fire on the grounds (Koerner 2019).

The perpetrators were not the sort of person a square white supremacist organization wants among membership, which requires a vetting process. Unfortunately for the squares, the sort of people attracted to white supremacist groups are often not wedded to stability. Even those who make it through vetting do not necessarily agree with square approaches. An older, less discreet

white supremacist at AFPAC, a gathering of ostensibly square white supremacists, noted that:

“More than a few people said to me something along the lines that we cannot vote our way out of this. I don’t think these guys see conventional politics as an end in itself, but just one of the many tools to be used in the larger project of building an alternative orthodoxy. . . . For now, ideology and argument are the tools required to win people to our side, but ultimately the goal must be boundaries that do not require constant maintenance” (ZMan 2020).

As a measure of organizational and operational capacity of Identity Evropa and the American Identity Movement, the male perpetrator’s FBI interview reported the online name of one of his recruiters (United States vs. Nolan Brewer 2019), enabling antifascists to identify the recruiter using court documents and internal American Identity Movement communications previously collected by infiltrators. They identified the recruiter and her husband, farmers who regularly sold produce at a farmers’ market in Bloomington, Indiana. Protests and counter-protests ensued, and the farmer’s market was at one point temporarily shut down to try to defuse tensions.

In the wake of these events, the Identity Evropa recruiter announced her intent to sue the town. She filed a lawsuit on 14 February 2020 and opened a legal defense fund less than a week later (WBIW 2020). The fundraiser sought \$25,000. After four months, the fundraiser had raised a total of only \$3,475 (Dye 2020).

The pugnacious white supremacist believes that white people would join the white supremacist movement if they would only wake up, which the pugnacious white supremacist believes will naturally occur if white people only hear white supremacist ideas often enough. The square’s theory of politics that there is a large supply of white people eager to join the white supremacist movement *en masse* if only there were a group of attractive, well-groomed, stable white supremacists for them to join. The square’s problem is that there is in fact not a large supply of such people.

THE CHAOTIC WHITE SUPREMACIST

The most violent and dangerous attitude found among white supremacists is the chaotic. Chaotic white supremacists are the most ambitious and bloody-minded of the movement. They are prone to extensive and often impractical fantasies of

victory through violence. Their organizational skills and tradecraft are usually poor. Many are incompetent daydreamers. They are potentially extremely dangerous.

White supremacists may be ideologically wedded to chaos in a spiritual sense, or because they think chaos will create a wider political environment in order to motivate mainstream white people into becoming white supremacists. This view is often described as “accelerationist,” a philosophy that, in brief, holds that increasing chaos is the way to create a breakthrough. Before accelerationism entered common parlance, the belief that chaos somehow will result in great gains has been part of the movement for decades. In the 1980s, the white supremacist group known as the Order planned to create chaos by attacking urban infrastructure; this, the group believed, would be guaranteed to foment race riots that would radicalize the white race (Flynn and Gerhardt 1990). (It should be noted that this strategy was formulated by white supremacists who had themselves been radicalized by race riots, and who did not stop to consider that while their whole generational cohort had undergone the same experiences, very few of them had become white supremacists.)

Accelerationism is not inherently white supremacist. It has been embraced by a variety of political or social extremists across the spectrum. One variant of accelerationist may believe, for example, that increasing the rate of technological disruption of everyday life is not just an acceptable price for change, but essential to reaching the Singularity – a technological breakthrough to a vastly different and currently unimaginable society. Socialist and environmentalist accelerationists also exist, but the white supremacist accelerationists have become the most notorious.

Accelerationism was the philosophy that inspired Brenton Tarrant, the Australian white supremacist who committed mass murder at two mosques in New Zealand, killing 52 people. While his crime bears a superficial similarity to that of Robert Bowers, the pugnacious Tree of Life perpetrator, the two differ in every important particular. Bowers’s reaction on reaching his epiphany that he should commit mass murder was to announce his intent and promptly carry it out. According to his manifesto, Tarrant maintained silence and planned methodically for two years before committing a horrific massacre, which he live-streamed (Tarrant 2019). Bowers hoped only that he would inspire fear in Jews that would dissuade them from courses of actions he opposed. Tarrant hoped to inspire his enemies to action against people like himself. As he explained in his

manifesto, he hoped his use of firearms would result in a wave of gun control legislation, including an effort in the United States to repeal the Second Amendment, thus radicalizing American gun owners (ibid.).

Tarrant is an example of what the chaotic white supremacist aspires to be. He is also an outlier. More typical of chaotic white supremacists, rather than actual mass murder, is damage to people in their immediate vicinity. The Order is notorious for the murder of talk show host Alan Berg; it is less remembered that the first person its members murdered was a fellow white supremacist (Flynn and Gerhardt 1990).

In the present day, there is no better exemplar of the tendency of chaotics to damage those in their own vicinity than Atomwaffen. An accelerationist group formed on a web forum, Atomwaffen was influenced by the Order of Nine Angles, an occult group formed in the UK in the 1970s (Hanrahan 2018). Unlike many self-styled satanic and occult groups, O9A practitioners literally believe in demons and advocate deliberately doing evil things to increase demonic influence and bring evil into the world. In a sense, Atomwaffen became less a Nazi movement than a cult that targeted Nazis for recruitment.

Aside from its occult teachings, Atomwaffen was heavily influenced by *SIEGE*, a compendium of the newsletter writings of James Mason. Mason, a former member of George Lincoln Rockwell's American Nazi Party, corresponded with 1960s race war cult figure Charles Manson, whom he greatly admired and whose notoriety influenced Mason's own philosophy. The message Mason hammered home in *SIEGE*, repeatedly and at length, was that the way to destabilize and destroy the existing system was by committing lone-wolf terrorist attacks.

SIEGE became the bible of Atomwaffen: reprinted in paper and electronic form, widely circulated, memes, and propounded as the solution to every white supremacist problem. Lone wolf terrorist attacks lay at the core of Atomwaffen doctrine. As of this writing, no Atomwaffen member has committed an actual lone wolf terrorist attack. This is noteworthy because on a per capita basis members of Atomwaffen are especially murderous.

In May 2017, an 18-year-old member of Atomwaffen murdered two of his roommates — fellow members of Atomwaffen — after his ideological journey led him to convert to radical Islam. Another surviving roommate, who was then the leader of the group, was prosecuted after police investigating the murders found his cache of explosives (Bromwich 2017). In December of the same year, a

young admirer of Atomwaffen who had corresponded with the head of its Colorado chapter murdered his girlfriend's parents after they demanded the young couple break up because of his neo-Nazi sympathies (Jouvenal 2019). In January of 2018, an Atomwaffen member reunited with a high school friend, who was Jewish and gay, and murdered him (Thompson, Winston, and Hanrahan 2018).

For such a small group — a former member estimated a maximum of 40 to 50 members (Thayer 2019) — five separate homicides is a remarkable number. Yet despite Atomwaffen's fetishization of lone wolf terrorist attacks, none of the group's murders were committed against the public at large or even strangers. The murderers knew all their victims personally. The actual operations of the Atomwaffen Division were largely limited to tagging, harassing people online, and attempting to SWAT journalists. It was the last that led to multiple arrests of Atomwaffen members (Mallin and Barr 2020). Subsequently, the group announced its disbandment online via a recording from its mentor James Mason, who stated that arrests and federal infiltration had so compromised the organization that it could not continue (Mason 2020). The surviving leadership reconstituted in July 2020 under the banner of the National Socialist Order (Makuch 2020). Henceforth, they announced, their organization was eschewing action and dedicating itself to propaganda only, with a special focus on advancing the ideas of Italian fascist F.T. Marinetti.

Chaotics share a common trait of failing to realize their horrifying mass murder ambitions. Their desires typically exceed their grasp. When the FBI arrested Conor Climo, a member of the Atomwaffen splinter group Feuerkreig Division, in Las Vegas in August 2019, he had developed multiple detailed plans to commit mass murder. He professed serious intent. He told the FBI informant and undercover FBI agent who befriended him that he had become fed up with Feuerkrieg Division because nobody in it was actually interested in acting, by which he meant committing terrorism (*United States of America vs. Conor Climo* 2019).

It should be noted that the plans devised were beyond the would-be perpetrator's capacity. One plan involved an eight-man sniper squad; another involved two squads attacking a synagogue. Climo lacked eight men, let alone two squads, and when he tried to recruit even one person — a homeless man — to perform surveillance for him, this attempt failed. Like the vast majority of far right extremists, he was incapable of finding others like himself or even new

recruits whom he could be shape. A member of one of the most bloody-minded groups on the far right, with terrorism as a component of its doctrine, could not find anyone in the organization who wanted to join him in actually murdering people.

Internationalization of the movement online failed to draw capable leadership or followers. In April 2020, Estonian police announced they had located “Commander,” the enigmatic leader of Feuerkrieg Division. He was a thirteen-year-old boy (Gonzalez 2020).

The best demonstration of the chaotics’ combination of deadly serious dreams and incompetence is the Base, a remarkable study in white supremacist tradecraft. Not knowing any far-right revolutionaries in person, the Base’s founder posted advertisements online looking for members. He did so in channels monitored by antifascists. The Base became infiltrated and exposed immediately (Anti-Defamation League, n.d.). A journalist made it through the Base’s vetting, as did antifascist infiltrators and an undercover FBI agent. The reporter got his story and left; the antifascists and FBI agent stayed. Not only did the Base have an infiltrator running their vetting; one was responsible for its official Telegram channel (Thayer 2020).

The reporter’s story identified his would-be vetter, a soldier in the Canadian Armed Forces (Thorpe 2019). The soldier had deserted and made his way illegally across the border to meet American members of the group. According to the FBI’s request for detention until trial, two American members — displaying a remarkable ineptitude of tradecraft — arranged and navigated to the rendezvous with a border-jumping fugitive from justice using Google Maps and their own phones, picked up the fugitive, and only then went out and got a burner cell phone.

The Base stashed the fugitive from justice and two of its members in a safe house in Delaware which, thanks to the undercover FBI agent, was promptly wired for video and audio surveillance. The Base members discussed visiting a gun rights rally in Virginia incognito, and wondered how to radicalize attendees. They considered and rejected using firecrackers to start a gunfight. They imagined that chaos at the event would cause a civil war, and that they could emerge heroic in such a conflict. They fantasized about violent scenarios, including murdering leftists and rescuing besieged libertarians and MAGA fans (*United States of*

America v. Brian Mark Lemley, Jr., Patrick Jordan Mathews, and William Garfield Bilbrough IV 2020).

Eventually, however, they decided to not go to the rally, but to camp out in the woods and wait for the event to spark the civil war they all expected. Their plan was to connect somehow with National Socialist groups, unleash chaos, and join the civil war, which they expected to last three to five months and conclude with their absolute victory (*ibid.*). Instead they were arrested, as were other members (Basalmo and Martin 2020). The antifascist infiltrator in charge of their Telegram channel began merrily uploading anti-Base memes on the group's account (Wilson 2020).

The reason for the inclusion of so many examples of chaotics is to convey an accurate picture of the wide range of hazards that chaotics present to the public. Chaotics' ideology should be taken seriously, not taken as colorful hyperbole. They truly do believe that creating violent chaos will bring about the world they want. If competent they can be extremely dangerous. Their norm, however, is one of incompetent fantasists. The groups are easily detected, easily infiltrated, and incapable of enacting their most fervent fantasies.

CONCLUSION

The three attitudinal types of white supremacists present different threat profiles.

The squares are the least violent of the white supremacists. Temperamentally not inclined to violence and ideologically opposed to it, they may yet attract individuals who feel differently. The greatest threat posed by squares, however, is one of subversion of mainstream groups, which they seek to infiltrate and co-opt for their own purposes. In practice, this is less likely to benefit the squares than it is to taint the work of the groups they try to infiltrate. Accordingly, the best counter for squares is having strong mainstream institutions that are responsive to their bases and on guard against infiltration of themselves and of their community.

The chaotics are explicitly the most murder-minded white supremacists. Their aspirations to mass homicide should be taken seriously. Competent, stable individuals who lean chaotic may become horrifyingly dangerous. At the same time, however, many chaotics are surprisingly reluctant or timid to act on their fantasies. Often they are unskilled and lack the most basic of the capabilities they fantasize about. Their seriousness of intent means those best equipped to handle them are law enforcement.

The pugnacious white supremacist is most likely to make headlines or worse. Pugnacious types are not necessarily violent. Many are, at worst, likely to complain endlessly in comment sections and social media posts. But the pugnacious is the most numerous of the types of white supremacist, so even a small percentage moved to action will mean pugnacious actors outnumber their square or chaotic compatriots. When the pugnacious white supremacist does act, the results can be catastrophic. Short-sighted and short-tempered, the pugnacious white supremacist plunges forward where the square would not tread and where the chaotic may hesitate.

Much of the time the pugnacious white supremacist who does damage will inflict it at a low level — often to himself. But some will look to seriously hurt or even kill other people. Violent actions by a pugnacious white supremacist can take place on a moment's whim; their operations are almost unvaryingly poorly planned and without strategic purpose. Pugnacious murders involve less planning than blind faith and opportunity. Because his motivations are visceral

and his strategic understanding nonexistent, the pugnacious white supremacist is unlikely to be dissuaded by pressure from outside sources; in some respects, it may make him more likely to turn violent by increasing his sense of urgency. This set of traits makes the pugnacious white supremacist the most complicated problem of the three attitudinal types, but also potentially the most susceptible to intervention or positive redirection and potentially even deradicalization. (Note that deradicalization of ideology does not mean deradicalization of personality; a pugnacious type is likely to find something new to believe with equal fervor.) Because the white supremacist radicalization process often involves a period where the convert is unable to contain himself about his new learnings, those closest to him – his family, his friends, even his fellow radicals – are in the best position to intervene before his radicalization spirals to dangerous levels.

Ultimately, understanding an individual white supremacist or organization of his fellows should involve an assessment of attitude. Though often overlooked by analysts focused on individual personalities, outrageous statements, flights of ideology, or alarming fantasies, the attitude of white supremacists is an essential key to understanding what they are likely to actually try to do. Understanding a group or individual's place on an attitudinal spectrum also enables an assessment of standing and likely relations within the movement – and provides key insights into risk level and likely activities, as well as likely future ideological development.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Hines has a professional background in international human rights work with a focus on forced disappearances and mass homicide. His interests include the study of history, community organizing, and fringe political movements.

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