

Explanations of Racism and Antisemitism in Global White Supremacist Thought

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Explanations of Racism and Antisemitism in Global White Supremacist Thought

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Abstract

Arguments made by white supremacists to explain, promote, and gain support for their ideology fall into five categories: religious arguments, biological arguments, cultural arguments, arguments based on “protectionism,” and arguments relating to freedom of speech. Furthermore, while nationalism can lead to differences and conflicts between nations, global support for white supremacy can act as a common glue, uniting even historical adversaries, such as Americans and Russians. To explain and exemplify these phenomena, the pseudo-philosophical and pseudo-scientific arguments in support of white supremacy are examined in the light of historical, social, and political trends, which all develop the concept of global white supremacy. Thus, while religious arguments in support of white supremacy date back thousands of years, “protectionist” arguments have become more prominent in the wake of terror events in the twenty-first century. They have also entered the mainstream as populists argue that “self-defense” is the only rational response to such threats. Ironically, it is the main idea behind each one of these arguments that ultimately serves to nullify it.

Keywords: white supremacy, racism, the far right, antisemitism, protectionism.

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Introduction

The recent rise in the power and prominence of the far right, and white supremacists in particular, is an alarming phenomenon for liberal and democratic values not only because radical far-right groups endanger democracy but also because they threaten the rights of all non-white people—minorities, migrants, Muslims, and Jews—that have been gained through blood and tears over the course of many centuries. This paper seeks to understand the core concept and ideology of contemporary white supremacists by identifying and analyzing their underlying arguments and justifications. In particular, it examines the pseudo-philosophical and pseudo-scientific explanations, or arguments, espoused by white supremacists, as well as the social and political explanations and justifications they use to increase their power and legitimize their ideology in order to widen their appeal and encourage people from the mainstream to support their radical ideas. The analysis demonstrates that white supremacists commonly use five types of arguments to explain their perceived superiority: religious arguments, biological arguments, cultural arguments, protectionist arguments, and arguments relating to freedom of speech. Ironically, as illustrated in the latter sections of this paper, these arguments are bidirectional and can also be used to argue against white supremacy.

Methodologically, this paper is a conceptual review of historical and socio-political radical ideas and trends. In an effort to highlight key concepts, it is not bound by chronological or geographical limitations and focuses on global and comparative perspectives and concepts rather than on a single area or case study. This is the first paper of its kind to summarize, analyze, and discuss all five arguments used by white supremacists. The main part of this paper is divided into three sections. The first of these sections explains the core concepts and ideas of white supremacy in general terms. It notes that the essence of white supremacist ideology is that white people of European descent are superior to other people, particularly non-whites, Jews, and Muslims. White supremacists believe and argue that they are

entitled to control—even enslave—other people for the benefit of the white race and exterminate “dangerous” races like the Jews. This section also includes a short description of the historical and social trends of antisemitism and racism.

The next section presents several examples and case studies from different countries and time periods. Far-right parties have gained significant political power in recent years, and the ideology of white supremacy is becoming prominent in many countries around the world, especially in Europe, North America, Russia, and Australia. It is important to note that white supremacy differs from radical nationalism in that it is a global rather than a local phenomenon that is common to many radical people of white and/or Christian origin. Various groups promote white supremacy and racism, including neo-Nazis, fascists, those associated with the so-called alt-right, and even members of the political mainstream in cases where the theories of securitization and protectionism are prominent. The third section of this paper, finally, focuses on the reasoning and logic of white supremacists and analyzes their five core arguments.

I. White Supremacy: Key Concepts

What exactly is white supremacy? In order to answer this question and define the term precisely, some basic concepts pertaining to racism and antisemitism are presented below. These are organized conceptually to highlight the main ideas. According to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, George M. Fredrickson (2015), and Ibram X. Kendi (2016), white supremacy is a term used to describe a set of ideas and beliefs purporting that people with a lighter skin color, mainly those of European descent, are a superior human race from both a genetic and a cultural perspective.¹ Proponents of

¹ For a common definition of the term “white supremacy,” see these examples by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: <https://www.adl.org/resources/glossary-terms/white-supremacy> and <https://www.britannica.com/topic/white-supremacy>.

white supremacy commonly use the terms “white race” or “Aryan race” to describe themselves as people of European origin who are descended from an ancient Indo-European or Nordic race. They regard themselves as a separate, superior sub-race of the Caucasian race. White supremacists such as Arthur de Gobineau argue that the white race can trace its origins to Adam and Eve (de Gobineau 1915, 117-140; Scales-Trent 2001). More significantly, they argue that white people are superior to people from other races, such as Asians, Slavs, Black people, Arabs, Muslims, Jews, and other racial and ethnic groups. Those who believe in and promote the idea of white supremacy call on white people to exert their dominance over other races, either through slavery or discrimination. In general, white supremacists strive for homogeneity—a society consisting solely of white people. In cases where coexistence is tolerable, they strive to dominate other races. However, white supremacists who follow Nazism claim that some races, like the Jews, must be exterminated.

White supremacy can be traced back to the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries, when pseudo-scientific concepts pertaining to race and humanity emerged. Unlike existing forms of racism and antisemitism, the concept of white supremacy became more popular in white European society during the Enlightenment, when scientific and philosophical explanations began to be applied to every aspect of life, including discrimination. In other words, while discrimination and antisemitism were already widespread, people from all social classes now sought to scientifically justify their actions, especially with regard to slavery and colonialism. They accordingly set out to prove that enslaving other people was natural or reasonable (Poliakov 1982, 55-64; Fredrickson 2015, 16-48; Mosse 2020, 1-17, 71-84). Prominent nineteenth and twentieth-century proponents of white supremacy include Arthur de Gobineau and Georges Vacher de Lapouge, two French anthropologists who promoted ideas of racial superiority and eugenics, Richard Wagner from Germany, and Adolf Hitler, who sadly needs no introduction (Mosse 2020, 1-17, 71-84, 136-156). Other prominent figures in the world of white supremacy

include John Hutchins Tyndall, former leader of the British National Front (NF) and the British National Party (BNP) and author of *Six Principles of British Nationalism*, and American neo-Nazi and Ku Klux Klan (KKK) Grand Wizard David Duke, who was banned from Twitter in 2020 (*Irish Times* 2005; Beckett 2020).

Racism and antisemitism are significant components of white supremacy. From a historical perspective, racism is a modern concept: it has its roots in the birth of European colonialism in the sixteenth century and the development of scientific racism in the nineteenth century, as discussed above. Until the sixteenth century, there was little consciousness of racial differences, although the biblical story of Noah and Ham² (Fredrickson 2015, 16-48) and ancient Christian antisemitism serve as a counterpoint in this regard (Nicholls 1995; Klein 1984). And even before this era, Aristotle, among others, regarded the barbarians as slaves (Lewis 1992, 3-15). However, the ancient world was not as globalized as today's world, and most people had no encounters with other races. The Greco-Romans and the Germanic barbarians were very similar in physical characteristics and had few encounters with people from Asia or Africa. When racism did occur, hate and antagonism were motivated by cultural, religious, and linguistic differences. Likewise, there was little interest in racial domination for its own sake, and such behavior was generally motivated by economic or military concerns. Leaders simply wanted slaves: they were not concerned about the color of their skin (Snyder 2001, 91-97; Allen 2001, 357-379).

It was European colonialism in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries that gave rise to the modern concept of racism. In fact, as Ibram X. Kendi (2016, 22-31) points out, Portuguese colonial leader Prince Henry the Navigator prompted Chronicler Gomes De Zurara to develop the concept of the superiority of certain types of people over other types of people. This idea was invented to justify

² Genesis 9:18-25.

and promote colonialism and the slave trade. To ensure a source of free labor to increase their financial gain, European rulers promoted the idea that people from Africa were inferior and barbaric (Fredrikson 2015, 16-48; Kendi 2019).

Antisemitism is a much older phenomenon than racism, as ancient as Judaism itself. Throughout history, Jews have been discriminated against, persecuted, and oppressed. It already started in Biblical times when, as described in the *Book of Esther*, Haman tried to commit genocide against the Jews of Persia. Jews have thus suffered the hatred of others since at least the time of Esther (the fourth century BC) and up to the present day. Originally, Jews were not discriminated against because of their skin color or accent but rather because they promoted monotheism over polytheism and the divinity of emperors and kings. Later, following Christ's crucifixion and the rise of a new type of Judaism—namely Christianity—they were persecuted because they competed with the new religion. The birth of Islam some centuries later led to similar persecutions as its adherents sought to eradicate the opposition (not only Judaism but also Christianity and various non-monotheistic but polytheistic religions). During the Middle Ages, antisemitism was very prominent in Europe. The minority status of Jews led them to be treated as scapegoats, and they were frequently blamed for social and economic problems such as inequality, poverty, crime, war, and even disease (Sacks 2017, 93-135; Topor 2020; Fox and Topor 2021, 64-90).

Jews were perceived as being inhuman, associated with the devil, and cut off from God's inheritance after failing to accept the true gospel and betraying Jesus. The fact that it was socially and politically more complex and that early Christianity had started out as a Jewish sect was disregarded (Nicholls 1995, 3-4, 209-210). For thousands of years, Jews have been accused of having a secret agenda for global domination and plotting against non-Jews, mainly Christians (Wistrich 2010). A contemporary conspiracy theory and prejudice about Jews is that they use their ability to "pass" as whites to covertly

manipulate Christian whites. White supremacists argue that white Ashkenazi Jews are dangerous because they can become a fifth column. They are regarded by white supremacists as a “faux-white” race that has tainted America, Europe, and the entire world (Green 2016; Ward 2017; DiAngelo 2018, 16-18). As Topor (2020) recently demonstrated, white supremacists have even blamed Jews for spreading COVID-19.

Racism and antisemitism are expressed through prejudice and violence. The main pillar of racism is prejudice, which takes the form of discrimination, ethnocentrism, favoritism, bias against a group, out-group derogation, social antagonism, stereotyping, and social distance. Typically, racist or antisemitic prejudice is a negative attitude toward a certain group from another race, nationality, religion, gender, or even political ideology (Augoustinos and Reynolds 2001, 1-23; Fox and Topor 2021). According to the Cambridge Dictionary, racism is “the belief that some races are better than others, or the unfair treatment of someone because of his or her race” like “policies, behaviours, rules, etc. that result in a continued unfair advantage to some people and unfair or harmful treatment of others based on race.”³

In conclusion, white supremacy is a set of ideas and beliefs that hold the white European race to be superior to all other races. The white race is often defined as Christian, although many white supremacists describe themselves as pagans and claim to follow the ancient religion and beliefs of Nordic culture. Theoretically, white supremacy can be divided into several ideas about race, religion, and culture. At present, however, these ideas have become mixed, and it is very uncommon to find a white supremacist who harbors hateful or antagonistic feelings only toward Jews or Black people—he or she is more likely to hate both and all other supporters of multiculturalism

³ See definition of “racism” by the Cambridge Dictionary at: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/racism>.

(i.e. immigrants, liberals, LGBTQ+ community). In general, white supremacists can be said to oppose anyone whose origin is “other” (Erbschloe 2017; Lavin 2020).

II. White Supremacy from a Global Perspective

Although it was less acceptable immediately after the Second World War and the fall of Nazism, white supremacy is on the rise in the twenty-first century. The political expression of white supremacy takes shape in far-right and nationalistic political parties and groups and far-right leaders. While racism and antisemitism also exist on the left side of the political spectrum, it is often covert, indirect, and more publicly acceptable. Left-wing racism often masquerades as an attempt to promote other human values—the leftists are just doing it wrong. Racism on the left can generally be found in people rather than in ideologies. In fact, leftist ideas generally promote diversity and multiculturalism (Fox and Topor 2021, 152-163; Topor 2018; Topor 2021). After the end of the Second World War in 1945, democracy and liberalism prevailed in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere. Under the shadow of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, Europe focused on promoting human rights. Over the years, however, new generations and ideas changed the face of politics again.

Since the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, in particular, the American far right has grown much stronger, advancing the rationale that the homeland needs to be protected. In the years following the attacks, the Muslim minority in the United States was collectively blamed for the wrongdoings of extreme Islamists and suffered disproportionately high levels of discrimination. This process, which is widely known as the securitization of Islam (SOI) (Cesari 2009, 19-37; Edmunds 2012; Fox and Akbaba 2015), increased the already hostile nature of certain extreme American groups, such as the KKK, that harbor negative attitudes not only toward Muslims but also toward Jewish, Black, Latino, and Asian people (Smith 1995; Newton

2005, 3-22, 168-183; Beirich 2021). In the United States, many minority groups suffer from social processes that are similar to SOI, such as criminalization (or the racialization of crime) (Hinton and Cook 2021; Young 2005; Bonilla-Silva 2001; Rios 2007; Brewer and Heitzeg 2008).

In Europe, the far right has also gained ground as a result of terror attacks across the continent, which strengthened neo-Nazi and fascist communities in countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Greece, and Poland. The primary factor that has pushed Europe toward the political right in the twenty-first century is the migration crisis, which has caused many social problems for both migrants and existing populations (*New York Times* 2016). Native Europeans, who are mostly white and Christian, were and still are those who rule Europe and, as of 2021, still make up the vast majority of the population in most European countries, with the exception of Albania. In addition to the ongoing association of Muslims with terrorism, political leaders increasingly promote ideas favorable to the majority, such as associating social problems like crime and inequality with migrants. A survey carried out in 2016 shows that people on the right are more likely to have hostile attitudes toward immigration, although the median share of immigrants in the population of ten European countries was 12.2 percent at the time. Applying Machiavellian thought alongside Europe's history of antisemitism and racism, it is much easier to find a scapegoat and blame problematic domestic affairs on "outsiders" rather than on the native majority (Wike, Stokes, and Simmons 2016; Sanders, Molina Hurtado, and Zoragastua 2017).

Russia, which has been heavily influenced by European Christian culture, particularly since the eighteenth century and the rule of Peter the Great (Peter I), has adopted many features of traditional European antisemitism and racism. The country, which was known as Kievan Rus at the time, adopted Christianity following the baptism of Saint Olga in 957 and through the Christianization process spear-

headed by her grandson Vladimir the Great (Vladimir I Sviatoslavich) in 988. In adopting Christianity, Russia embraced not only its good qualities but also some of its bad ones, including hostility toward the Jewish people. White people from Kievan Rus also discriminated against groups from other parts of the country that is today considered Russia. In fact, Jews were not even allowed to enter the Russian Empire east of the Pale of Settlement until the first partition agreement with Poland in 1772. By 1750, the European Enlightenment had taken firm root in Russia. As with Christianity, the Russians adopted the positive liberal and humanistic thinking of the Enlightenment but also some of its negative aspects, including pseudo-scientific racism. Thus, the idea of white Christian superiority was embedded in Russia even before the pogroms of the nineteenth century, before the publication of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in 1903, and well before the collapse of the Soviet Union in the late twentieth century (Bushkovich 2011, 1-19, 37-58, 172-185). In the twenty-first century, the idea of “Russianness” as a superior quality is accepted by many Russians, as their leaders emphasize the characteristics of the ruling majority (Alapuro, Mustajoki, and Pesonen 2012; Zakharov 2015; Laryš and Mareš 2011). It is estimated that around 50,000 skinheads were active in Russia in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Understanding race and racism in Russia, the former Soviet states, and Eastern Europe is crucial to understanding the dissemination of white supremacy worldwide, as discussed in more detail below (Zakharov 2015; Arnold and Umland 2018; Law and Zakharov 2019).

Turning back to Europe, rising populism and appeals to the majority have not only created the idea of the existence of a “pure” native group and a corrupt elite in the eyes of the majority but has also led to officials being blamed for the migration crisis and the failed integration of mainly African and Arab migrants in local societies. Simultaneously, racists and antisemites have started to blame the Jews for economic problems and terrorism—and even for the migration crisis (Golder 2016; Lazaridis, Campani, and Benveniste 2016, 1-23, 239-272). In several national European elections in 2017, 2018,

and 2019, far-right parties gained significant power. Specifically, they gained over twenty percent of the vote in elections in Hungary, Austria, Switzerland, Denmark, and Belgium, and over ten percent of the vote in elections in Italy, Estonia, Spain, Finland, Sweden, France, the Netherlands, Germany, and the Czech Republic (BBC 2019). In the German general election of September 2021, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party similarly gained over ten percent of the vote (Hasselblach 2021).

Even within the political mainstream, racist and antisemitic people generally discriminate against Jews and blame them for everyday problems due to their belief in anti-Jewish conspiracy theories (Fox and Topor 2021). What makes the European case interesting is that these attitudes can be traced back centuries. The most prominent proponents of populist antisemitism in Europe include former Viennese mayor Karl Lueger, a member of the Austrian Christian Social Party, who was in office from 1897 to 1910, and Nazi leader Adolf Hitler, who ruled Germany between 1933 and 1945 (Wistrich 1983; Boyer 2010). Hostile attitudes are also found in the history of the United States, although many of the original proponents of racism and slavery had a European cultural and educational background. For instance, the KKK was established immediately after the American Civil War (1861-1865) in response to the downfall of the South. Between 1866 and 1875, approximately 3,500 Black people and poor people were killed by Klansmen in the United States (Seltzer and Lopez 1986; Erbschloe 2019, 9-14).

Far-right movements around the world differ from each other, as they do in Europe and the United States. This is particularly true in the twenty-first century due to the increase in social and political problems. These movements no longer focus solely on antisemitism and anti-Black racism but also on Islamophobia, anti-immigration sentiments, and anti-LGBTQ bigotry. In general, far-right movements are characterized by several ideological traits: extreme nationalism, ethno-centrism, anti-communism, anti-parliamentarism, anti-pluralism,

militarism, law-and-order sentiments, demand for strong political leadership, anti-Americanism, and cultural pessimism. However, white supremacy is the only factor that is common to all movements (Merkl and Weinberg 2003; Falter and Schumann 1988; Mudde 1996).

Far-right movements take many shapes, from underground terrorist movements to more palatable and legal political parties. In Germany, for instance, the far-right AfD party is criticized for its hostile attitudes toward immigration and Muslims, yet it is much more widely accepted than other far-right groups (Hammerstein 2019). In contrast, the German terror group known as “Gruppe S” was put on trial in late 2021 for planning attacks on migrants, Muslims, and even local politicians (BBC 2021). Prior to the arrests of members of this group, German domestic intelligence managed to stop a plot to take over Germany by members of the elite *Kommando Spezialkräfte* (KSK) special forces command. These soldiers were preparing for the collapse of Germany, which they referred to as “Day X.” The rogue KSK company was disbanded, but extremism within the KSK and German military and intelligence in general has not been eradicated (Bennhold 2020).

Far-right extremism poses a great threat to democracy worldwide (Walters and Chang 2021). In general, the archetype of far-right movements is found in Italian fascism and German Nazism. Although each country and movement has a different focus based on its local characteristics, there is an underlying idea and method that is common to all. The underlying idea common to the vast majority of far-right movements in Europe, the United States, Australia, and even Russia is white supremacy—an extreme version of ethnocentrism (Peucker 2021). As discussed in the previous section, white supremacy is a set of ideas and beliefs that ascribe superiority to the white race. The underlying method common to all far-right movements is scapegoating, that is, finding another group to blame for all society’s ills. The aforementioned Karl Lueger famously said, “I decide who is a

Jew!” In other words, Lueger pointed out that “a Jew” was merely a scapegoat upon whom society’s miseries could be cast (Wistrich 1983). In the twenty-first century, such scapegoating is applied not only towards Jews but towards Muslims, Black people, Asians, and immigrants in general.

III. Explanations of White Supremacy in Modern Racist Thought

Why is white supremacy on the rise? Does it arise out of pure hatred or is there a rational foundation for some of its core concepts that might make sense not just to its radical followers but also to members of the mainstream? To answer these questions, it is necessary to understand the current reasoning of white supremacists worldwide by examining the explanations and justifications for their ideology. This ideology of hate is common to white Christian men and women globally. Just because some Americans may not like Russians and some Western Europeans may not like Eastern Europeans does not mean that they hold totally dichotomous world views regarding religion and race. As Hanna Arendt (2006, 154-155) pointed out in the early sixties, when reporting on Eichmann’s trial in Jerusalem, there are huge differences between antisemites in various countries, but there is also one common idea that binds them together. Although Nazis regarded people from the East, such as Ukrainians, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, and Romanians, as subhuman, they did have one thing in common with each other. Antisemitism was the ideological glue that bound them together, as white supremacy does today.

How then do white supremacists explain their ideologies and actions? Based on the concepts and cases described above, it appears that white supremacists from all over the world—even from countries that are historically hostile to each other—embrace and disseminate five key explanations for their hatred and discrimination: (1) they argue that one religion is superior to all others; (2) they argue

that one race is superior to all others; (3) they argue that one culture is superior to all others; (4) they argue for protectionism—that they must protect against terror, as in the securitization of Islam, or against criminal activity, in the case of Black people and immigrants. They argue that they are not racists or extremists, they merely protect their own group from an alleged “White Genocide” (a systematic liquidation of the white race) or simply from criminals and drug dealers; (5) lastly, when pushed to the limit, especially in the United States, they argue that they are entitled to think and say what they like based on the principle of freedom of speech. Yet, as demonstrated below, this freedom of speech often crosses the line into incitement to violence. Each of these explanations is explored in the following paragraphs.

The first argument concerns religion. Historically, religious reasons for hatred and discrimination date back further than modern racism. As mentioned above, although people in the ancient world did engage in conflicts, massacres, and slavery, this was done for the purpose of gaining power, not to prove the supremacy of one skin color over another. Moreover, although ethnocentrism existed in the ancient world, it was used by groups of people to promote themselves in a utilitarian manner. Groups of pagan or polytheistic believers argued that their gods were better or stronger than other gods, leading to conflict between different groups. However, with the emergence of Judaism and its monotheistic approach, the hostility escalated. The ancient Israelites, who believed in a single god, were regarded as competitors by polytheistic believers. Then, following the emergence of the Christian sect within Judaism, the new Christians presented their religion as a replacement for Judaism. After Christ’s crucifixion, Jews were further persecuted by Christians and pressured to convert to Christianity. Several centuries later, when Islam emerged in Mecca, Muslims perceived both Christians and Jews as rivals. Thus, they began to pressure Jews and Christians to convert to Islam. In short, every religion in history has perceived itself as superior to other belief systems (Fox and Topor 2021, 64-90).

The second argument is biological. At the time of the Enlightenment, science became a prominent social agent. Scientific facts and philosophical arguments caught the public's attention, at times at the expense of their religious beliefs. One of the most significant scientific theories is Darwinism, named after its creator Charles Darwin. Darwinism argues that species of organisms develop and evolve through a process of natural selection. In other words, stronger or better groups of organisms survive while weaker ones vanish. Given that these theories emerged while European colonialism was thriving, Darwinism and eugenics were also applied to the human race. In Europe, Darwinism merged with traditional prejudices against Jews. This gave rise to the belief that white Christian Europeans were biologically superior to Jews as well as to non-white people under colonial rule. Naturalists and anthropologists such as Arthur de Gobineau and Georges Vacher de Lapouge and politicians such as Karl Lueger and Adolf Hitler promoted the argument that the white (or Aryan) race was superior to and should therefore rule over or exterminate other races. The biological argument ultimately merged with the traditional religious argument (de Gobineau 1915, 117-140; Snyder 2001, 91-97; Allen 2001, 357-379).

The third argument relates to culture. That is, the idea that some cultures are superior to others on the grounds that they have progressed further and become better. This is a "light" version of biological ethnocentrism. Those who espouse it suggest that European culture is superior to other cultures and reject multiculturalism. In this context, the "superior" European culture is based either on Greco-Roman or Scandinavian culture. The cultural superiority argument has evolved not only from the Ancient Romans' view of outsiders as uncivilized or primitive "barbarians" but also from the progress of colonialism and imperialism. The cultures of Africa, Asia, South America, and the Middle East were thus perceived as being of lesser quality. In the twenty-first century, the cultural superiority argument has merged with the biological and religious arguments. Foreign interventions, modern-day imperialism, and even religious

missions to convert people around the world can be regarded as expressions of cultural superiority. Nevertheless, it should be noted that a belief in religious and cultural superiority is not just a Western sin. For example, Islamic fundamentalists have also attempted to convert people and have at times even murdered those who rejected their religion (Fredrickson 2015, 16-48; Gannon 2020).

The fourth argument is based on protectionism. In other words, it is based on the idea that one group of people is endangering the existence of another group or that a hostile race of attackers is harming a group of victims. In the context of white supremacy, the victims are white people while the attackers may be anyone else—Muslim terrorists, Black drug dealers, or Jewish conspirators plotting global domination. Those who embrace this argument believe that the white race is under attack and must therefore defend itself. This argument is the most palatable to people with less extreme views. While some might find the religious, biological, and cultural arguments irrelevant or insignificant, the protectionist argument can induce people to embrace a more extreme political mindset. This is where extreme ideologies encroach on mainstream society. To further elaborate on this argument, one might ask what white supremacists actually wish to protect. The answer is simple: themselves—white, Christian people (Weisman 2018, 3; Moses 2019). In October 2018, for example, Pittsburgh synagogue shooter Robert Gregory Bowers claimed that he had carried out his attack because Jewish people had brought migrants to the United States to allegedly harm white American people (Amend 2021).

This protectionism is a form of new racism. Yet, as Lars Erik Berntzen (2019) points out, it is also a paradox. New racists present themselves as promoters of human rights and defenders of Western civilization, democracy, liberalism, and freedom of speech. They may even promote gender equality and support Israel and the Jewish people in the framework of their anti-Muslim and anti-immigration arguments. On the other hand, right-wing extremism has been a

major threat in the United States, and to some extent in Europe, for at least a decade (Stevenson 2019). The new racists adopt liberal positions to make themselves more attractive while maintaining a core ideology of hate in the form of antisemitism, Islamophobia, and anti-Black, anti-Latino, anti-immigration, and anti-LGBTQ+ views, as well as other forms of racism and xenophobia (Barker 1979; Dovidio and Gaertner 2000).

When a majority white country suffers from crime, corruption, economic problems, or war, some of its citizens still choose to turn the outsider into a scapegoat, since it is easier to blame others than face up to one's own problems. Both Lueger and Hitler used this strategy. Jews are still frequently accused of conspiring against white Christian people by committing economic fraud and promoting unnecessary wars. Other examples include the securitization of Islam and the racialization of crime—theories that can be categorized as protectionist arguments since it is only natural to want to defend oneself against outside threats. This type of argument has greater mainstream appeal because it sounds less overtly racist. For example, those who promote this argument claim they are not anti-Muslim but merely need to protect their country from an ongoing war with radical Islamists, and that if the borders were closed to Muslims they would not have to persecute them. They also claim that they are not anti-Black but merely need to protect white people and white neighborhoods from the criminal activities of Black people. According to this argument, if Black people would stay away from white neighborhoods, no anti-Black actions would need to be taken. Taken to its natural conclusion, however, this argument would lead back to segregation, discrimination, and inequality. In the 2016 US presidential election—and even in the 2020 presidential election—Donald Trump won a majority of white votes using populist and protectionist rhetoric (Tyson and Maniam 2016; Pertwee 2021; Sherkat and Lehman 2018). However, those who support this argument ignore the fact that only a small proportion of Muslims engage in terrorism and that only a small proportion of Black people engage in crime

(Cesari 2009; Fox and Akbaba 2015; Weisman 2018, 3; Moses 2019). They also tend to ignore the fact that white people engage in terrorism and crime just like any other group, conveniently forgetting events like the Oklahoma City bombing or the Centennial Olympic Park bombing.

The fifth argument relates to freedom of speech (as a concept). White supremacists who assert their religious, biological, or cultural superiority and/or argue that they are merely protecting the white race from outsiders often use the freedom of speech argument as a last resort, especially in the United States, where it is a constitutional right, but also in most democratic countries in Europe. White supremacists claim that, even if certain people oppose their ideology and arguments, they still have a right to think and say whatever they wish. Freedom of speech and expression is indeed an important democratic right. In this case, however, the argument is being used fraudulently. White supremacists want freedom for themselves while calling for the freedom of others to be restricted. Furthermore, words lead to actions, and extreme public expressions encourage other extremists to commit terror and crime (Glass 1978; Kretzmer 1986, 445; Topor 2019).

Ironically, it is the main idea behind each argument that nullifies it. The religious argument can be spun in any direction. Jews can claim that their religion is the original monotheistic religion, while Muslims can claim that, as the world's fastest-growing religion, Islam is superior (Lipka and Hackett 2017). The biological argument does not stand up to scrutiny either. If the white race is indeed superior to other races, how can white supremacists explain situations in which Black people defeat white people, for example in sports or science competitions? White supremacists nevertheless use this logic to defend their call to enslave or exterminate other races. Applying similar logic, should other races not enslave white people if they perform poorly in sports competitions? Arguments relating to cultural superiority are similar to arguments relating to religious

superiority and often amount to a struggle between collective and individual rights (Kukathas 1998; Kymlicka 1995).

Arguments relating to protectionism are also incorrect. It can be assumed that white supremacists use such arguments to make their racism seem data-driven and reasonable, as historically attempted in the case of scientific racism. However, these arguments are easy to disprove. For instance, the American Office for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) published information on the frequency of criminal offenses among American juveniles and young adults in 2019. Of the 10,085,210 offenses recorded, white people committed 7,014,550, while Black people committed 2,667,010, American Indians (term used by the OJJDP) committed 244,200, and Asians committed only 159,450. Furthermore, the commonly cited example of drug abuse, which is frequently used in white supremacist circles and even in the mainstream, is also misleading. Information from the OJJDP shows that white people committed 1,109,600 drug-related offenses while Black people committed only 406,940. It stands to reason that the majority population will always almost exclusively be responsible for any problematic social issue or behavior (OJJDP, n.d.). However, since it is politically unpopular and even difficult to hold the majority accountable for social problems, many nationalists and populists blame minorities instead. This, of course, is one of the reasons Jews have been scapegoated for thousands of years (Fox and Topor 2021).

Lastly, white supremacists defend their position by appealing to freedom of speech, especially in the United States where they enjoy the protection of the First Amendment. There is a catch, however. In the United States, they can indeed say and argue whatever they like, but under Title 18 of the U.S. Code solicitation (incitement) to riot or commit a crime of violence is illegal.⁴ Since many white supremacists fail to draw a line between theoretical arguments and actual calls to

⁴ See <https://uscode.house.gov/browse/prelim@title18/part1&edition=prelim>.

action, they are acting illegally. Researchers and activists argue that radical speech and literature play a significant role in inciting people to commit crimes and terror attacks against minorities and even the government, especially in the United States (Glass 1978; Kretzmer 1986, 445; Topor 2019; Lowe 2020; Alter 2021). Furthermore, white supremacists use the freedom of speech argument in a utilitarian, hypocritical manner since they also call for enslavement of and discrimination against others, which would restrict this very same right for minorities. Essentially, white supremacists argue that freedom of speech should apply only to them (Bleich 2021).

Conclusion

This conceptual paper examines the key explanations and arguments used by white supremacists worldwide in an attempt to better understand their core ideology and beliefs. White supremacists use five main arguments to justify their racism and render it more acceptable or palatable to themselves and others. These arguments relate to religion, biology, culture, protectionism, and freedom of speech. They often have historical roots. For example, antisemitism predates anti-Black discrimination and Islamophobia and the securitization of Islam theory. White supremacists often combine their arguments, using explanations relating to protectionism and freedom of speech to support religious, biological, or cultural arguments, and vice versa. Moreover, arguments are often used selectively and presented differently depending on the audience. Thus, arguments with a stronger basis in ethnocentrism and racism (religious, biological, and cultural arguments) are meant to appeal to radical right-wingers, while more palatable or rational arguments (protectionism and freedom of speech) are meant to appeal to white people from the political mainstream as people often seek to justify an ideology or voting decision. As George Hawley (2017) notes, “the Alt-right made sense to some.”

Ironically, these arguments are bidirectional and can also be used to argue against white supremacy. While Christian white supremacists argue that Jews and Muslims are inferior because they have lost god's blessing, Jews and Muslims can argue the same. The same holds true for arguments relating to cultural superiority. The biological or scientific argument is not only bidirectional but also ironically amusing. For instance, if white supremacists claim that the white race is better and stronger than other races and argue for a racial hierarchy, shouldn't white people be enslaved by Black or Asian people whenever they lose in sports or science competitions? Furthermore, the protectionist argument is clearly specious, as crime figures show that most crimes are committed by white people in white-majority countries like the United States. Finally, according to white supremacists, the argument in support of freedom of speech is meant to allow them to restrict the rights of non-white people, making it irrelevant as well. In short, this paper strives to present a framework that will prove useful to researchers of white supremacy. It is my hope that researchers and practitioners who seek to combat radicalism, as well as readers in general, can use this framework to better understand and abolish racism and hatred.

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Founded in 2004, the Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy (ISGAP) is the first interdisciplinary research center dedicated to the study of antisemitism to be established in North America. Its mission is to explore antisemitism from a wide range of approaches and perspectives within an academic framework, including the study of such topics as the changing historical phases of antisemitism, how antisemitism relates to other forms of hatred, to what extent it is unique, how some societies are able to resist antisemitism, and how policies can be developed and implemented to combat it.

ISGAP's Occasional Paper Series covers topics that have profound implications for our understanding of contemporary antisemitism, its impact on Jews and non-Jews, and our efforts to combat this irrational yet enduring prejudice. With the publication of this series, as well as its other academic efforts, ISGAP continues to fight antisemitism on the battlefield of ideas.