

The Lone Wolf's Pack: Strategic Disaggregation in White Supremacist Terror

Shea Minter
Georgetown University, Department of Government
Smm419@georgetown.edu

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Introduction

In the United States, white supremacist violence and extremism has been the predominant terrorist threat facing the country since its founding. Stretching as far back as the failures of reconstruction, thousands “or even tens of thousands” of Black southerners were killed with even more terrorized away from their homes.¹ In the modern era, right-wing attacks and plots comprised the majority of all incidents of terrorism since 1994.² White supremacist terrorism has been referred to as the “most sustained form of violence in the US,³ yet the comparative lack of attention to terror stemming from white supremacy shown by the media, public, and research communities alike fails to reflect this fact.⁴

One of the primary reasons academic attention to far-right terror has largely dismissed its threat, despite history and prevalence, is its lack of organization when compared to other groups, ideologies, and movements utilizing terror tactics. While a vast hierarchical organization was behind the 9/11 attacks and other sustained campaigns on foreign soil, the prototypical white supremacist attack is perpetrated by a lone gunman, with no group ties that indicate future attacks to come.⁵ One of the preeminent works on terrorist organization, Shapiro's *The Terrorist's Dilemma*, argues that “no individual or small group acting alone, nor even a group of individuals acting under a common rhetorical banner but without any coordination, can achieve

¹ Daniel Byman, “White Supremacy, Terrorism, and the Failure of Reconstruction in the United States,” *International Security* 46, no. 1 (2021): 53–103, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00410.

² Seth G. Jones et al., *The War Comes Home: The Evolution of Domestic Terrorism in the United States*, October 22, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/war-comes-home-evolution-domestic-terrorism-united-states>; Seth G. Jones et al., *The Escalating Terrorism Problem in the United States*, June 17, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/escalating-terrorism-problem-united-states>.

³ Kathleen M. Blee, “Racial Violence in the United States,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 4 (2005): 599–619, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870500092423>.

⁴ Laura Dugan and Daren Fisher, “Far-Right and Jihadi Terrorism Within the United States: From September 11th to January 6th,” *Annual Review of Criminology* 6, no. 1 (2023): 131–53, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-criminol-030521-102553>; Pete Simi, “Why Study White Supremacist Terror? A Research Note,” *Deviant Behavior* 31, no. 3 (2010): 251–73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639620903004572>.

⁵ Jacob N. Shapiro, *The Terrorist's Dilemma* (Princeton University Press, 2013).

the scale of violence that makes terrorism a real threat to modern society.”⁶ In this paper, I contend that this argument is worth challenging both in its facts and its theory.

I argue that although factors related to systemic racial inequities and islamophobia within the United States certainly contribute a bias toward misunderstanding both the organizational structure and the threat of white supremacist terror, some of lack of proportionate attention is the result of deliberate organizational strategies by white supremacists meant to evade public scrutiny. With less public attention and the perception of a disorganized structure, the movement can focus on recruitment, building numbers and waiting for the ideal climates to enact violence.⁷ In this paradigm, white supremacist terrorists are not merely utilizing a structure of weakness, but are in fact taking advantage of the best structure to accomplish their immediate goals.

White supremacist extremists and the White Power Movement (WPM) have utilized a strategy of “leaderless resistance” or cell-style terrorism for decades, so this is not a new phenomenon.⁸ However, despite white supremacist attacks growing in number over recent years, the phrase “lone wolf terrorism” is still commonly used, and multiple terrorism scholars have been forced to amend their position on the coherence of the threat posed by WST and the movement behind it to reflect perhaps a new understanding, but not necessarily a new threat.⁹

In order to illustrate the strategic nature in the organizational structure of white supremacist extremism (WSE) in the United States, and the potential usefulness that perceived

⁶ Shapiro, *The Terrorist's Dilemma*, 13.

⁷ In this piece I use both White Supremacist Extremists (WSE) and the White Power Movement (WPM) to refer to the actors within the ideology, and WST to refer to white supremacist terrorism or the acts being planned and carried out. WPM is the convention and preferred terminology of Kathleen Belew (2018).

⁸ Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (Harvard University Press, 2018); Kathleen Belew, “There Are No Lone Wolves: The White Power Movement at War,” in *A Field Guide to White Supremacy*, ed. Kathleen Belew and Ramón A. Gutiérrez (University of California Press, 2021); Simi, “Why Study White Supremacist Terror?”; Louis Beam, “LEADERLESS RESISTANCE,” *The Seditious #12*, February 1992.

⁹ For example, contrast Hoffman 2006 with Hoffman 2017 and more recent works.

disorganization contributes to the movement, I proceed in four sections. In the first section, I briefly review relevant discussions about general variation in terrorist strategy and terrorist organization. This is a large and varied literature that primarily focuses on jihadi, left-wing, and separatist terrorism—I do not pretend to have the nuanced expertise necessary to do justice to it all here, but I do attempt to bring forward key points that apply to how we think of WST as organizing itself. In the following section, I turn exclusively to WST to ask what white supremacist terrorism is and what its organizational structure is or appears to be. In this section, I build upon previous work that describes the interconnected nature of the racist right-wing and pushes back upon the label of “lone wolves,” then introducing the concept of “strategic disorganization” to describe the current *organizational* structure employed by racist far-right terrorists, arguing that when insights about terrorist organizational structure are amended to account for the context of white supremacist ideology, we can in fact identify a rational organizational logic at work. I contend that this method of organization is a rational choice of structure designed to accomplish present goals, and can also explain why WST perpetrators have consciously resisted conspicuous organization even if appearing strong in numbers would support their more distant political goals. In the third section I turn to data using a content analysis of manifestos from recent perpetrators of white supremacist terror from 2011 to present day, before concluding with implications for counterterror and counterextremist policy.

1) Terrorism: Definitions, Strategy, Organization.

Terrorism suffers from a glut of definitions, reflecting the fact that it is a phenomenon difficult to summarize concisely and one with many variations in purpose, perspective, and tactics. Perhaps even more relevant, terrorism is a political act where interested parties may want

to definitionally highlight different aspects.. For example, multiple definitions exist within the ranks of the US government—with the Department of Defense, Department of State, Department of Homeland Security, and FBI all having different legal definitions. For the purpose of this paper, I utilize Andrew Kydd and Barbara Walter's definition: "use of violence against civilians by nonstate actors to attain political goals."¹⁰ I note that many other definitions specifically include the term "group," which I would argue contributes to a misunderstanding of "lone wolf" or networked terrorism.

On the topic of terrorist goals, this paper agrees broadly with the concept that terrorism is a tactic or strategy used to overcome extreme power disadvantages. Kydd and Walter follow the logic that if war is a difference in agreement over relative power and willingness to fight,¹¹ terrorism is overcoming the enormous power imbalance and using costly signals to show their resolve to fight for their ultimate political goal anyway.¹² Kydd and Walter begin with 5 of these "ultimate goals": regime change, territorial change, policy change, social control, and status quo maintenance.¹³ Their study refers only to foreign national groups designated as terrorist organizations, so does not include domestic white supremacist terror, however they cite the Ku Klux Klan as an example of social control as an end goal—where Klan terrorists may be seeking to constrain individuals rather than the state. This highlights a tension in the two (or more) audiences that terrorists are speaking to:

"To obtain their political goals, terrorists need to provide credible information to the audiences whose behavior they hope to influence. Terrorists play to two key audiences: governments whose policies they wish to influence and individuals on the terrorists' own side whose support or obedience they seek to gain. The targeted governments are central because they can grant concessions over policy or territory that the terrorists are seeking.

¹⁰ Andrew H. Kydd and Barbara F. Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism," *International Security* (One Rogers Street, Cambridge, MA 02142-1209, USA) 31, no. 1 (2006): 49–80, <https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2006.31.1.49>.

¹¹ Blainey and Fearon

¹² Kydd and Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism."

¹³ Kydd and Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism."

The terrorists' domestic audience is also important, because they can provide resources to the terrorist group and must obey its edicts on social or political issues."¹⁴

If thinking about social control as the ultimate political aim for WST perpetrators, it makes sense that the government is less important to influence than the behavior of citizens whose cooperation and control they seek. It is true that it's unclear how credible of a target the government audience actually is for white supremacist extremists in the United States currently—it seems as if the US Government is far from changing policy either to lash out against these groups as many have argued the Bush Administration did to (mostly Islamic) terrorists following 9/11, or to offer any policy concessions in support of WST goals.¹⁵

However, I also believe it is incorrect to assume that the white power movement's only or even primary political goal is social control. The White Power Movement took a "revolutionary turn" in 1983 when the movement declared war on the federal government.¹⁶ Reflecting this grandiose statement, as the data analysis of perpetrator manifestos will show, the stated aims go beyond psychological manipulation and social control to actually mention widespread state-sponsored violence, territorial gains, and regime change—goals that notably cannot be accomplished without government concessions. Thus, WST has an interesting organizational dilemma: they appear to be in a poor position to appeal to the US government due to the gulf between the nature of their political aims and the infeasibility of yielding concessions on the matter of white supremacy from the U.S. Government. However, as history has shown us, it is also an ideology in which the targets of violence have independent meaning for the movement's political goals beyond as a tool for signaling. Put simply, a terror act that kills mostly Black shoppers in a NY

¹⁴ Kydd and Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism."

¹⁵ Dugan and Fisher, "Far-Right and Jihadi Terrorism Within the United States"; Kydd and Walter, "The Strategies of Terrorism."

¹⁶ Belew, *Bring the War Home*; Belew, "There Are No Lone Wolves: The White Power Movement at War."

grocery store accomplishes a goal for the movement just on its face, not only in the wider signal it sends. This aspect of white supremacist terror calls into question any judgement on its inability to achieve goals in the present state.

Shapiro directly addresses the concept of leaderless resistance in *The Terrorist's Dilemma*, writing that

“[the] ‘leaderless resistance’ concept entails a few ideologues providing guidance on the need for a struggle to defend the white race in America and on what types of actions should be taken, while making no efforts to conduct operations themselves. The actual operations are left to the initiative of individual ‘patriots.’ While this approach proved useful in keeping Beam [the movement’s biggest advocate of the concept] out of prison—he has been able to lead a de facto terrorist movement for many years without being successfully prosecuted—it has been a near total failure as a method of fomenting widespread armed resistance against the U.S. government.”¹⁷

In this quote he underexplains the historical context and misunderstands the current goals of the movement. First, “successfully prosecuted” is doing a lot of work. Beam, along with other members of the group *The Order*, was prosecuted in the Fort Smith sedition trial—charged with conspiracy to murder federal officials, conspiracy to manufacture illegal weapons, and “seditious conspiracy”. Shapiro is correct that Beam stayed out of prison, the seditionists were acquitted for multiple reasons. One key reason was that the government’s case was weak. They needed to demonstrate the existence of a “single, clearly directed and highly coordinated” conspiracy.¹⁸ It seems the law and jury largely aligned with Shapiro’s conception of terrorist organization, but the Order was semi-organized, and it still evaded conviction largely because of skirting the “terrorist’s dilemma.” The end result was a foiled terror plot, and the freedom of its would-be perpetrators, to go on and inspire more action. In fact, it was his acquittal in the Ft. Smith trial

¹⁷ Shapiro, *The Terrorist's Dilemma*, 14.

¹⁸ D. J. Mulloy, *Years of Rage: White Supremacy in the United States from the Klan to the Alt-Right*, The American Ways Series (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2021).

that would largely inspire Beam to write his treatise on and advocate for leaderless resistance. It's not a failed strategy so much as it is an adaptive one.

The second thing wrong with this anecdote is the purpose of action. Shapiro is objectively correct that the white supremacist movement in the US does not—at present—have the ability to mount a war against the U.S. government. But the movement is aware of that, and are pursuing a strategy much more in line with growing their ranks and sowing discontent. Judging every terrorist organizational structure by its ability to lead to a direct governmental challenge both leaves a lot of real loss of life without critical investigation, and assumes that the movement will never grow in strength.

However, it is useful examining the “terrorist’s dilemma” on its own terms and make a theoretical extension of the concept to white supremacist terror. Shapiro argues that terrorists face an “organizational dilemma,” where the structures and elements that would allow for smoother operational an organizational control are the very same factors also making them more vulnerable to errors and infiltration.¹⁹ One of the two main tradeoffs he identifies as being encompassed by the terrorist’s organizational dilemma is that between “operational security and tactical control”, where sometimes lower level operatives “clamor for more violence than is useful from the leader’s perspective or seek to make a profit for themselves in the course of their duties.”²⁰ An overuse of violence can, he argues, jeopardize the terrorists’ base of support. This, however, implies two main assumptions that may not apply to disaggregated white supremacist terrorists.

First, it assumes a strategy of coherent organization where indiscriminate use of violence will be tied back to the terrorist groups. By this logic, a structure where white supremacist extremists

¹⁹ Shapiro, *The Terrorist's Dilemma*.

²⁰ Shapiro, *The Terrorist's Dilemma*.

can avoid being identified as a group or movement can prevent these audience costs. Shapiro also argues that the extremely hierarchical nature of Al Qaeda was “the exception that proved the rule,” as intelligence failures and lack of attention allowed it to grow unchecked.²¹ Leaning into the extreme power imbalance and maintaining this clandestine posture that courts purposeful underestimation could be a viable strategy for right-wing terror.

Second, it assumes that the terrorist's base of support would be turned off by “unmanaged” violence. The average American surely is turned off by the idea of racist acts of terrorism, but this jumps the gun. As correctly observed by Shapiro and other scholars, the white supremacist movement in the United states (at least the violent faction) does not have the strength to directly confront the federal U.S. government. However, as is the case with many other terrorist groups and ideologies, would be perpetrators are not. In fact, as I have argued earlier and indicate with my data analysis, the ability to enact violence against their targets may directly appeal to them more-so in the case of white supremacist terror.

I now turn to the task of extending terrorist organizational theory to white supremacist terror more specifically.

2) White supremacist terrorism and its organizational logic

Earlier in this paper I have drawn some distinctions between other forms of terrorism and WST, and how that may relate to conventional wisdom and literature. Now, I'd like to take a step back and discuss in detail what other scholars have observed the organizational structure of WST and the larger white power movement behind it to be.

First, the White Power Movement operates as a heterogeneous but compatible ideology. At its core, it is ideologues that are committed to upholding and enacting white supremacy, often

²¹ Shapiro, *The Terrorist's Dilemma*, 11.

through racism targeted at nonwhite individuals. Kathleen Belew argues that despite some surface level differences and ideological veins, “amid this multiplicity of symbolic presentations and beliefs, most white power activists found common ground. They believed in white supremacy and the need for a white homeland. They feared that the government would eradicate the white population through interference with the birth of white children—through interracial marriage, rape, birth control, abortion, and immigration.”²² When the white power movement formed in the decades following the Vietnam War, it consisted of Klansmen, neo-Nazis, racist skinheads, and other activist strands, yet despite these differences in background the movement was able to unite these strands largely against the United States government and its abandonment of de jure white supremacy rather than any one sole target group.²³ Pete Simi, in a prescient research note from 2010 advocating the study of white supremacist terror, argues that “the extent to which U.S. white supremacist violence is connected to a broader strategy has been largely ignored by terrorism scholars, in part, because contemporary white supremacists participate in a decentralized network that is often confused with disorganization.”²⁴

Although the perspective amongst terrorism scholars that white supremacist terror is not a threat is out of date and has largely dissipated,²⁵ even recent articles have defended the terminology of “lone wolves.”²⁶ This reflects the fact that the vast majority of WST events in the United States have been carried out by lone gunmen and have not been attributed to or claimed

²² Belew, *Bring the War Home*, 7.

²³ Belew, *Bring the War Home*. For a full treatment of the White Power Movement spanning from post-Vietnam to the Oklahoma City bombing in 1994, see *Bring the War Home*; Daniel Byman, *Spreading Hate: The Global Rise of White Supremacist Terrorism*, 1st ed. (Oxford University Press, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197537619.001.0001>.

²⁴ Simi, “Why Study White Supremacist Terror?,” 252.

²⁵ Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, Rev. and expanded ed (Columbia University Press, 2006). For example—Hoffman wrote this edition in 2006 and has written extensively about WST since.

²⁶ Samuel Miller, “Supreme Gentlemen: The Path of Radicalization for the Incel Community’s Lone Wolves,” *Terrorism and Political Violence*, April 27, 2023, 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2023.2202779>.

by an organization, however as many journalists have investigated and shown, the term ignores the connections present between these gunmen and other perpetrators and ideologues,²⁷ and “lone wolves” rarely act truly alone.²⁸ White supremacist and far-right hate groups still exist within the United States, including those with international arms, however that is not where the terrorism is stemming from. Simi argues that the characterization of WST as isolated incidents and failing to identify the larger political aims and strategy behind these incidents leads to the propensity to discount its threat.²⁹

Belew argues that the public misunderstanding of disaggregation for disorganization had its seeds planted during the initial White Power Movement that forms the subject of her book, and stems from the movement's purposeful turn to *leaderless resistance*.

“In fact, we knew about white power activism as it happened.” The episodes I cover in *Bring the War Home* appeared in major newspapers, on public access television, on talk shows and morning shows, and on the radio. But nevertheless, white power activism was misunderstood by many Americans, and unchallenged and unresolved such that the movement could resurface in our present ... Beginning in 1983, a new strategy, ‘leaderless resistance,’ depended upon the action of independent cells without direct contact with movement leadership. The strategy, which had the specific aim of preventing prosecution, was distributed throughout movement literature and adopted widely throughout the underground... Leaderless resistance changed recruitment goals, emphasizing the importance of a small number of fully committed activists rather than large memberships of less committed followers. Because of this change, membership numbers could not forecast activity or the movement's capacity for violence”³⁰

Leaderless resistance, in essence, was a response partly to the terrorist's dilemma that Shapiro would write about 30 years after Louis Beam initially coined the term in the context of the WPM. It entirely gave up on hierarchical control in favor of operational security: the survival of the movement against infiltration. Shapiro describes leaderless resistance as a “few ideologues

²⁷ 8/15/2025 7:02:00 PM

²⁸ Daniel Byman, “How to Hunt a Lone Wolf: Countering Terrorists Who Act on Their Own,” accessed October 19, 2024, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-to-hunt-a-lone-wolf-countering-terrorists-who-act-on-their-own/>.

²⁹ Simi, “Why Study White Supremacist Terror?”

³⁰ Belew, “There Are No Lone Wolves: The White Power Movement at War,” 317.

providing guidance on the need for a struggle to defend the white race in America and on what types of actions should be taken.”³¹ While he means to discount it as a viable strategy for large-scale terroristic violence, he actually accurately describes one strategy available to a movement seeking to build its base of support and remain under the radar before seeking direct conflict with the U.S. federal government. This also conveniently discounts the threat of white supremacist terror in the United States. Prior to 9/11, the largest terror attack on US soil was the Oklahoma City Bombing and domestic right wing terrorism remains responsible for the highest US death toll in terrorist attacks.³² Taking the extremely basic premise from *The Terrorist's Dilemma* and extending it, it seems that organizational structure can be manipulated by terrorist groups to best serve their conflicting needs at any given time.

Right now, the “principal-agent” dilemma is solved largely by collapsing the distinction between the two. While some ideological texts from previous eras are still venerated, like the Turner Diaries, Mein Kampf, and other racist writings, the perpetrators also largely inspire each other and direct them to attack. Many also write explicitly that they do not intend to survive the attack, in essence they are not hoping to become a “leader” in anything more than example. This obviously changes the tradeoff dynamic, and essentially means control is broadly sacrificed.

With this in mind, I argue that leaderless resistance, or—as I’ve termed its modern incarnation “strategic disaggregation”—best allows the white supremacist movement to build a base of support while avoiding penetration, punishment, or persecution from the US government. In the next section, I elaborate on my theory that this organizational structure is particularly strategic for white supremacist extremists for two known reasons and one that I believe is either

³¹ Shapiro, *The Terrorist's Dilemma*, 16.

³² “Terrorism in America After 9/11,” New America, accessed August 15, 2025, <http://newamerica.org/future-security/reports/terrorism-in-america/>.

novel or newly articulated: 1) it can allow the movement to better avoid intelligence permeation. 2) It supports the recruitment of true ideologues, 3) it takes advantage of existing biases within the United States political context to allow the movement to focus on recruiting while avoiding attention.

Strategic Disaggregation in White Supremacist Terror.

I argue that the (hopefully waning) perspective that white supremacist terror consists of disorganized lone wolves is incorrect; instead the organizational makeup of white supremacist terrorists reflects an extremely disaggregated structure but not one without strategy. This strategy has its roots in the leaderless resistance concept, but adapted for an age of more connectivity through the internet, is better termed *strategic disaggregation*.

When writing for his white supremacist publication *The Seditonist*, Beam describes most organizational structures as a pyramid, and notes the vulnerability inherent in that hierarchy. He writes that “in the pyramid type of organization, an infiltrator can destroy anything which is beneath his level of infiltration and often those above him as well.”³³ Instead, Beam advocated originally in 1983, the year that the white power movement made a revolutionary turn,³⁴ for an extreme version of cell-style terror that replaces a horizontal leadership structure with no leadership structure: “a system of organization that is based upon the cell organization, but does not have any central control or direction.”³⁵ Under leaderless resistance as Beam conceived of it, communication between a movement or organizational “leader” would not exist and therefore only any individual cell would be vulnerable to infiltration at any given time. As a result, with no

³³ Beam, “LEADERLESS RESISTANCE.”

³⁴ Belew, *Bring the War Home*.

³⁵ Beam, “LEADERLESS RESISTANCE.”

central control there is an increased premium on both recruitment and ideological buy-in. Beam predicted that under a system where individuals were self-directed, committed ones would “acquire the necessary skills and information as to what is to be done,” and that “very small or even one man cells of resistance” could emerge.³⁶ Beam advocated for an extremely isolated form of terrorism, and wrote before the advent of the internet. In line with white supremacist terror practices of the time, he likely envisioned military or paramilitary training, which would be admittedly difficult for the average individual to obtain without some form of direction or financial support. However, as I illustrate in my examination of manifestos, the internet has created a wealth of available instruction on how to assemble bombs, chemical weapons, and even more simply—how to obtain and utilize firearms.³⁷

Importantly, Beam did not describe his concept of leaderless resistance as “lone actors” or as abandoning an organized movement. He repeatedly emphasized there were connections and a “structure,” even if communication was limited and/or nonexistent. One of the reasons to doubt the idea that white supremacist extremists are disorganized and structure-less is because they do not conceive of themselves that way. This structure, in fact, serves multiple strategic goals. First, it helps insulate the movement against counterterrorism efforts and infiltration. In the 1960s, many informants infiltrated Klan groups, which Daniel Byman argued effectively ended the third Civil-Rights-Era wave of the KKK.³⁸ It also, with fewer direct links between ideologues, could interfere with the type of court prosecutions that counterterrorism often seeks where lower level actors are forced to describe higher-ups. We saw this not only with the Ft. Smith sedition trial, but with the Oklahoma City bombing, where the larger strategy of white supremacist violence

³⁶ Beam, “LEADERLESS RESISTANCE.”

³⁷ Ramón Spaaij, “Introduction,” in *Understanding Lone Wolf Terrorism*, by Ramon Spaaij, SpringerBriefs in Criminology (Springer Netherlands, 2012), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-2981-0_1.

³⁸ Byman, *Spreading Hate*.

behind it—including McVeigh's connections to separatist compound and extreme right hideout Elohim city—were not reported on or revealed until later.³⁹

The second strategy that leaderless resistance serves is a shift to recruitment. Under strategic disaggregation, each individual would-be actor or cell is responsible for its own training and/or attraction of co-conspirators. Rather than a centrally operated recruiting drive, the responsibility for continuing the movement is shifted on to each member. We can see this in the way perpetrators discuss their acts in manifestos and public statements. Buford Furrow, who attacked a Jewish community center in 1999 “alone” but with previous ties to known hate group Aryan Nations, indicated he sought to spark a “race war” by providing a “wake up call to America to kill Jews.”⁴⁰ The phrase “race war” or “racial holy war” (RaHoWa) appears often in manifestos, on message boards, and in ideological texts of white supremacy such as *The Turner Diaries*.⁴¹ Domestic extremists being radicalized by other acts of terror is not a new phenomenon, and there are multiple instances of “homegrown terrorists” pledging allegiance to ISIS; notably the shooter of the attack on the Pulse nightclub in Orlando Florida.⁴² In fact, ISIS often claims these

³⁹ Simi, “Why Study White Supremacist Terror?,” 260.

⁴⁰ Simi, “Why Study White Supremacist Terror?,” 260.

⁴¹ Talia Lavin, *Culture Warlords: My Journey into the Dark Web of White Supremacy* (Hachette Books, 2020); J.M. Berger, “The Turner Legacy: The Storied Origins and Enduring Impact of White Nationalism’s Deadly Bible,” *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Studies*, ahead of print, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.19165/2016.1.11>; Robert Evans, “Shitposting, Inspirational Terrorism, and the Christchurch Mosque Massacre,” Rest of World, *Bellingcat*, March 15, 2019, <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/rest-of-world/2019/03/15/shitposting-inspirational-terrorism-and-the-christchurch-mosque-massacre/>.

⁴² Ralph Ellis McLaughlin Ashley Fantz, Faith Karimi, Elliott C., “Orlando Shooting: 49 Killed, Shooter Pledged ISIS Allegiance,” CNN, June 12, 2016, <https://www.cnn.com/2016/06/12/us/orlando-nightclub-shooting/index.html>.

terrorists back, even if there is little evidence that there was any direct recruitment or coordination, as part of deliberate propaganda efforts to create wide influence and recognition.⁴³

I argue that this discrepancy makes sense for the differing organizational structures of many, but in this example Jihadi, terrorist organizations in contrast to the strategic disaggregation of white supremacist terror. If we think back to the earlier discussion of power imbalance, terrorist strategy, and the various audiences a would-be terrorist group juggles--it seems clear that this propaganda and aggrandizement strategy benefits ISIS's position. This can suit their goals by increasing psychological impact and signaling more strength in foreign territory to the target government to potentially close the imbalance of power. Even if in reality ISIS is likely not successfully recruiting legions of US-based actors, it benefits their position for the US government and public to believe so. Why is this not the case for white supremacist extremists? As discussed earlier, white supremacist extremism seeks lofty political goals, the social control pursued by earlier terrorist white supremacist groups such as the KKK, and individual level violence. They also share territory with the adversary they have declared war on. Thus, if not in a position to attempt to pull concessions out of the government, it benefits them strategically to protect against infiltration and undue attention while growing in numbers and strength.

⁴³ Rukmini Callimachi, "Was Orlando Shooter Really Acting for ISIS? For ISIS, It's All the Same," U.S., *The New York Times*, June 13, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/13/us/orlando-omar-mateen-isis.html>.ca

ISIS, despite utilizing cells and a comparatively horizontal network, does have clear leadership and command. WST, utilizing strategic disaggregation, does not have one organization or group. Thus, it makes sense for ISIS to claim self-radicalized perpetrators, whereas in WST there is no command that can do the claiming. In this case, the actors claim themselves as part of the movement, and speak largely to an audience of their peers and potential peers. Because of this, Simi has argued before that ebbs and flows in white supremacist violence could be better understood within the framework of cycles of contention,⁴⁴ referring to the rise and fall of social movement protest activity which could include both violent and nonviolent political activity. In a recent tweet, Kathleen Belew applied this logic to the lack of protestors at the second arraignment of Donald Trump. She wrote on June 15th, “the absence of white power and militant right activists from the Trump arraignment doesn't mean the movement is cowed by the Jan 6 prosecutions, it means the movement has gone to ground and that mass violence is more likely.”⁴⁵

The threat of prosecutions has largely driven the more visible sides of the violent far right (which includes would be-white supremacist terrorists, despite the fact that of course not all

⁴⁴ Simi, “Why Study White Supremacist Terror?”

⁴⁵ Belew, Kathleen (@kathleen_belew). 2023. “The absence of white power and militant right activists from the Trump arraignment doesn't mean the movement is cowed by the Jan 6 prosecutions, it means the movement has gone to ground and that mass violence is more likely.” Twitter. June 15, 2023. 5:01 PM. “https://twitter.com/kathleen_belew/status/1669374635480104966?s=20”

supporters of Donald Trump fall into the white power movement) back underground and away from public protest and scrutiny.⁴⁶

These fundamental differences in strategy point to the third organizational advantage of strategic disaggregation for the white power movement. In the US context, the heuristic image of terrorism as grouped, primarily foreign, and Islamic (or nonwhite) violence allows for actions committed by individuals to be never connected with the broader ideology or other would-be terrorists waiting in the wings. Even if these connections are made, the threat is largely downplayed. This, in turn, allows for the movement to recruit and build. Beam writes—

“primarily though, whether any organization is allowed to continue in the future will be a matter of how big a threat a group represents. Not a threat in terms of armed might or political ability, for there is none of either for the present, but rather, threat in terms of potentiality.”⁴⁷

Under this logic, strategic disaggregation allows the movement to hide its potentiality. Much has been written on the bias and islamophobia in terrorism coverage, not to mention the rise of hate crimes committed on Muslim Americans following 9/11.⁴⁸ In addition, studies have shown that violence by white individuals is more likely to be perceived as ideologically neutral,⁴⁹ and that civilians are more likely to classify an experimental condition about a failed armed attack by

⁴⁶ I argue elsewhere in my dissertation project that the white supremacist movement does include nonviolent and largely electoral adherents, but bracket this discussion for the purposes of this paper.

⁴⁷ Beam, “LEADERLESS RESISTANCE.”

⁴⁸ Daniel L. Byman, “Should We Treat Domestic Terrorists the Way We Treat ISIS?: What Works—and What Doesn’t,” *Brookings*, October 3, 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/should-we-treat-domestic-terrorists-the-way-we-treat-isis-what-works-and-what-doesnt/>; Dugan and Fisher, “Far-Right and Jihadi Terrorism Within the United States.” (*Add more here*)

⁴⁹ Priscilla Parada, “White Supremacists Have Committed Domestic Terrorist Attacks, but Why Have the Attackers Not Been Indicted as Domestic Terrorists?,” *U. La Verne Law Review* 41, no. 1 (2019): 104–26.

someone with ties to Islamic organizations as terrorism but to white supremacist organizations as a mass shooting.⁵⁰ While Belew argues that a failure of journalistic storytelling is partly to blame for the success of white power organization in conveying this narrative, Dugan and Fisher argue that a failure of deterrence in criminal policy led to this culture.⁵¹ Additionally, there is variation in terrorism definitions, many of which refer to the actors as “groups.” This also contributes to the heuristic both practitioners and the population at large have of what terrorists look like. With either explanation, we see an organizational bias within the U.S. that makes a strategic disaggregation of the white power movement particularly advantageous—and dangerous for the public.

Lastly, why utilize “strategic disaggregation” to describe these terrorists rather than leaderless resistance? The strategy is certainly built on leaderless resistance, but I argue that both the primary purpose and adaptation to the modern era have led to some key differences.

First, leaderless resistance notably leaves a large vulnerability that organized hierarchical terrorism can address: funding and training. When leaderless resistance was popularized and written down by Louis Beam, it was the early 1980s and the white supremacist movement in the United States was largely utilizing small camps and conferences to provide training in survival,

⁵⁰ Vito D’Orazio and Idean Salehyan, “Who Is a Terrorist? Ethnicity, Group Affiliation, and Understandings of Political Violence,” *International Interactions* 44, no. 6 (2018): 1017–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2018.1500911>.

⁵¹ Dugan and Fisher, “Far-Right and Jihadi Terrorism Within the United States”; Belew, *Bring the War Home*.

tactics, and firearms.⁵² With the advent of the internet, leaderless resistance is better connected and able to share knowledge and even funds both covertly and efficiently.

While Beam and his fellow white supremacists were training for a “race war,” most of the instruction given in manifestos amounts to gun specifications, how to obtain a firearm, and occasionally points to instructions on bomb-building. Additionally, although research on the effectiveness of the Assault Weapons Ban in preventing gun violence is mixed, limited analysis has shown that gun violence has become deadlier, perhaps because of new technologies.⁵³ Regardless of potential lethality, most perpetrators that described their methods simply acquired a firearm and some gear, and began shooting. This is a far cry from the paramilitary training that “leaderless resistance” envisioned.

The second way in which strategic disaggregation differs from leaderless resistance is its purpose—which is more suited to the modern political landscape. Beam and his compatriots in the 1980s had undergone a “revolutionary turn,” and were still conceiving of the U.S. Government as the primary enemy. Texts from the time alluded to spontaneously striking a race war either through violent acts or as an outcome of resulting gun control debate.⁵⁴ While some manifestos still make reference to “Racial Holy War,” many more explicitly urge others to take

⁵² Mulloy, *Years of Rage*.

⁵³ Rob Arthur, “No Matter How You Measure Them, Mass Shooting Deaths Are Up,” *FiveThirtyEight*, November 7, 2017, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/no-matter-how-you-measure-them-mass-shooting-deaths-are-up/>; J. M. Berger, “The Dangerous Spread of Extremist Manifestos,” *Ideas*, *The Atlantic*, February 26, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/02/christopher-hasson-was-inspired-breivik-manifesto/583567/>.

⁵⁴ Berger, “The Turner Legacy.”

action to create a domino effect. In other words, the focus is on recruiting, rather than preparing to take on the government at present. In the next section, I delve into the text of these memos.

4) Data: Primary source analysis of manifestos.

In this section I turn to an original content analysis of WST manifestos. If the above contention—that the organizational structure of the white power movement is strategic disaggregation rather than disorganization—is correct, then we will see a few key indicators.

(1) we would see evidence that these perpetrators, all of whom acted alone, are **ideologically linked**. This would be apparent with shared phrasing and references and/or shared political goals. (2), we would see evidence that these perpetrators—even without direct interaction—are **organizationally linked**. This would take the form of shared posting sites and direct references to each other. (3) and finally we would see **recruitment and instruction**. This theory would predict not only that these perpetrators would be writing to recruit other actors, but that the primary or at least a significant audience of the manifesto would appear to be community-members rather than the public at large. It could also be expected that the manifesto would provide some practical advice or instruction for other would-be perpetrators, in order to purposefully work around the lack of a command structure.

My sample consists of 9 manifestos, which as of 2023, are all the publicly available English-language shooter manifestos from 2011 to present day, collected by the Repository of Extremist Aligned Documents database (READ). This specification includes some purposeful scope

conditions: It does not include the Discord (a social media platform) messages of the accused Buffalo shooter, or the social media postings of Robert Bowers (Pittsburgh Synagogue assailant) since social media posts differ in form and purpose than a manifesto. In this study, I am analyzing manifestos as a form of official political communication by actors. Including the social media posts of perpetrators would obscure the audience of the communication, and by including private communication I believe it would actually overinflate my argument rather than test it. Similarly, broadly including social media posts would certainly serve to inflate the size and perceived strength of the movement, so as a “hard case” I limit the analysis to perpetrators. I do include actors operating outside of the United States, such as Anton Breivik (Norway), Brenton Tarrant (New Zealand), and Juraj Krajcik (Slovakia. Despite the fact that this paper focuses on U.S. soil, the ideology itself is global. Elliot Roger—an “incel” attacker from Canada, is excluded. I, and many others, would consider ideological violent misogyny to be intricately entwined with the broader white supremacist extremist ideology,⁵⁵ however violent misogyny is broader than WST and is often treated as a separate ideological form of terrorism in official data, so I follow this custom.

⁵⁵ Miller, “Supreme Gentlemen”; Lavin, *Culture Warlords*.

Table 1

Perpetrator	Title	Location	Length (pg)	Date of attack
Anders Behring Breivik	2083: A European Declaration of Independence	Oslo/Utøya, Norway	1,518	July 22, 2011
Dylann Roof	rtf88	Charleston, SC, USA	5	June 17, 2015
Christopher Mercer	My Manifesto	Roseburg, OR, USA	6	October 1, 2015
Brenton Tarrant	The Great Awakening	Christchurch, NZ	74	March 15, 2019
John Earnest	An Open Letter	Poway, CA, USA	7	April 27, 2019
Patrick Crusius	The Inconvenient Truth	El Paso, TX, USA	4	August 3, 2019
Payton Gendron	You Wait for a Signal While Your People Wait for You	Buffalo, NY, USA	180	May 14, 2022
Juraj Krajčik	A Call to Arms	Bratislava, Slovakia	65	October 12, 2022
Ryan Palmeter	A White Boy Summer to Remember	Jacksonville, FL, USA	26 ⁵⁶	August 26, 2023

I choose manifestos as my data source for a few key reasons. First, going back to the strategies of terrorism discussed earlier, manifestos are key and purposeful communication to both audiences terrorists appeal to—the public and the government. In the realm that I am investigating—that of a decentralized network that appears to be “lone wolves,” purposeful political communication should be considered even more important for these actors to lay bare

⁵⁶ There are 26 pages of Palmeter’s manifesto released, but two additional documents were found by law enforcement and are unreleased to the public.

their motivations and goals. Second, these manifestos correspond to high-impact events. If I am challenging Shapiro's contention that there is no real way for leaderless resistance to do much as a strategy besides keep Louis Beam out of jail, it makes sense to focus my attention to these events that most clearly meet the definition of terrorism. Finally, writing a manifesto is a purposeful act by these perpetrators, indicating that this sample is a group that chooses to publicize and communicate their political aims. Thus, it is a particularly useful set of data to learn about what this movement envisions for itself and its eventual goals.

Ideological linkage

Beginning with my first argument—ideological linkage—the manifestos illustrate a coherence in language and political goals, as well as a continuation of ideological tenets of the white power movement. First, manifestos refer consistently to the same grievances and conspiracies. Namely the fear of *planned and coordinated* replacement of the white race through immigration, “race mixing”, and/or violence. One manifesto refers to the “...meticulously planned genocide of the European race,” and that “racial diversity will disappear as either race mixing or genocide will take place.”⁵⁷ Others mention this conspiracy theory by name such as “Zionist Occupied Government”⁵⁸ or “The Great Replacement.”⁵⁹ Additionally, they refer to the same milieu in the ideological far right, such as references to *The Turner Diaries*, a novel by

⁵⁷ Patrick Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth,” READ Database, 2019.

⁵⁸ Juraj Krajcik, “A Call to Arms,” READ Database, 2022.

⁵⁹ Brenton Tarrant, “The Great Replacement,” READ Database, 2019.

William Luther Pierce describing a fictional war by white supremacists against the US Federal Government. Juraj Krajcik also includes it in his “recommended reading” section.⁶⁰ The novel inspired the Oklahoma City bombing, which was carried out nearly identically to instructions and description in the book, and is often cited by members of the white power movement.⁶¹

These references include mention of “the day of the rope,” an event of mass execution that took place in *The Turner Diaries*:

“Some of you have been waiting for **The Day of the Rope** for years. Well, The Day of the Rope is here right now that is if you have the gnads to keep the ball rolling. Every anon reading this must attack a target while doing his best to avoid getting caught. Every anon must play his part in this revolution and no man can be pulling his punches. This momentum we currently have may very well be the last chance that the European man has to spark a revolution.”⁶²

And also include references to plans detailed in *The Turner Diaries* to spark the race war through gun control.

“...finally, to create conflict between the two ideologies within the United States on the ownership of firearms in order to further the social, cultural, political and racial divide within the United states. This conflict over the 2nd amendment and the attempted removal of firearms rights will ultimately result in a civil war that will eventually balkanize the US along political, cultural and, most importantly, racial lines... This balkanization of the US will not only result in the racial separation of the people within the United States ensuring the future of the White race on the North American continent, but also ensuring the death of the “melting pot” pipe dream.”⁶³

Additionally, all manifestos make some reference to the Fourteen Words⁶⁴, a white supremacist touchstone, by quoting/misquoting them in whole or in part.

⁶⁰ Krajcik, “A Call to Arms.”

⁶¹ Belew, *Bring the War Home*; Berger, “The Turner Legacy.”

⁶² John Earnest, “The Inconvenient Truth,” READ Database, 2019.

⁶³ Tarrant, “The Great Replacement.”

⁶⁴ “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children”, coined by David Lane the founder of the defunct terror group The Order.

In terms of shared political goals, multiple manifestos articulate a desire for regime change in the United States, making various references to ethnostates and the idea of mass deportation/genocide, “extermination”⁶⁵, or the author referring to themselves as a “white nationalist”⁶⁶ or “ethno-nationalist”⁶⁷

One manifesto⁶⁸ mentions the idea of a “northwest front” without subscribing to it. This alludes to the white supremacist origins of the Oregon territory and the belief that an all-white “homeland” should be built in the Pacific Northwest.⁶⁹ Another manifesto argues against mass deportation or genocide (alluding to having encountered these ideas before), and seeks a middle ground of splitting the United States into race based “territories.”

But the idea of **deporting or murdering all non-white Americans is horrific**. Many have been here at least as long as the whites, and have done as much to build our country. The best solution to this for now would be to divide America into a confederacy of territories with at least 1 territory for each race. This physical separation would nearly eliminate race mixing and improve social unity by granting each race self-determination within their respective territory(s).⁷⁰

Without replicating full quotes here, some manifestos do advocate for genocide and “elimination,”⁷¹ arguing that if the state will not take these actions, violence and war is necessary to impose a government that will.

⁶⁵ Ryan Palmeter, “A White Boy Summer to Remember,” READ Database, September 2023.

⁶⁶ Dylann Roof, “The Last Rhodesian,” READ Database, 2015.

⁶⁷ Tarrant, “The Great Replacement.”

⁶⁸ Roof, “The Last Rhodesian.”

⁶⁹ Alexandra Minna Stern, *Proud Boys and the White Ethnostate: How the Alt-Right Is Warping the American Imagination* (Beacon Press, 2019); Mulloy, *Years of Rage*.

⁷⁰ Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

⁷¹ Krajcik, “A Call to Arms.”

Organizational linkage

Turning now to organizational linkage, we would expect that manifestos would reveal links between the perpetrators. This can take the form of references to each other, their writings, and the forums on which these manifestos were shared. We see all three. John Earnest—the Poway, California assailant—writes at the end of his manifesto to “Spread this letter, make memes, shitpost, FIGHT BACK, REMEMBER ROBERT BOWERS [Pittsburgh shooter], REMEMBER BRENTON TARRANT [Christchurch shooter]”.⁷² Similarly, John Earnest references Tarrant and his manifesto specifically: “Tarrant was a catalyst for me personally. He showed me that it could be done. And that it needed to be done. WHY WON'T SOMEBODY DO SOMETHING? WHY WON'T SOMEBODY DO SOMETHING? WHY DON'T I DO SOMETHING? the most powerful words in his entire manifesto.”⁷³ Patrick Crusius, the El Paso shooter, begins his manifesto with: “In general, I support the Christchurch shooter and his manifesto.”⁷⁴ Later, he refers to the manifesto by its given title, writing “Actually the Hispanic community was not my target before I read *The Great Replacement*...”⁷⁵ Based on earlier context it is clear that he is referring to Tarrant’s manifesto, not *Le Grand Remplacement*,” a book by French racist intellectual Renaud Camus and one of the origins of the Great Replacement conspiracy theory.

However, regardless of whether referring to another manifesto or a racist philosophical text, Crusius is establishing himself within the community of the white supremacist movement. Krajcik (Bratislava shooter) mentions Tarrant, Earnest, Crusius and Payton Gendron—the accused Buffalo, NY shooter—by name and with the moniker “Saint.”⁷⁶ Gendron mimics the

⁷² Earnest, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

⁷³ Tarrant, “The Great Replacement”; Earnest, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

⁷⁴ Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

⁷⁵ Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

⁷⁶ Krajcik, “A Call to Arms.”

FAQ-style writing that Tarrant employs in his manifesto, which is unsurprising given that he also writes, “Is there a particular person that radicalized you the most? Yes and his name is Brenton Harrison Tarrant. Brenton’s livestream started everything you see here. Brenton started my real research into the problems with immigration and foreigners in our White lands, without his livestream I would likely have no idea about the real problems the West is facing.”⁷⁷ [formatting removed for clarity]. Ryan Palmeter, the Jacksonville shooter, mentions both Anders Breivik and Brenton Tarrant in a “shout out” section, and also mimics Tarrant’s FAQ section.⁷⁸ Tarrant, for his part, cites having read Roof’s manifesto, and claims his largest inspiration was Breivik.⁷⁹

In formatting style, three-part repetition is common. The style exemplified by Tarrant in the opener: “it’s the birthrates, it’s the birthrates, it’s the birthrates” is echoed in “It’s the jews” repeated by Juraj Krajcik. FAQ-style writing is also pervasive throughout multiple manifestos.

In terms of forum, many of these manifestos were posted on 8Chan before it was shut down, which was then referenced (and lamented) by Krajcik. Additionally, Gendron chose to pursue livestreaming his attack as a reference to Tarrant’s livestreaming, which is then referenced by Krajcik. It is clear that even if these men never spoke to each other—which is likely given that these conversations are not mentioned and most of these forums allow anonymous posting—they are connected and relish in these links.

Previous work on the organizational ties of terrorists/terrorist groups have looked—understandably, to the financial records. Some manifestos do make mention to financial sources, such as both Breivik detailing his pseudo fertilizer company, Tarrant describing an anonymous donor and his “donations to multiple nationalist groups,” but many perpetrators describe

⁷⁷ Payton Gendron, “You Wait for a Signal While Your People Wait for You,” READ Database, May 2022.

⁷⁸ Palmeter, “A White Boy Summer to Remember.”

⁷⁹ Tarrant, “The Great Replacement.”

themselves as self-funded. Palmeter makes reference to his gear only costing \$1000 for a gun and body armor, and explicitly urges others to take on the financial duties themselves. Gendron breaks down how and where he bought his weapon legally and then modified it illegally. One of the explicit strategies behind strategic disaggregation is that imitating and carrying out attacks does not require a vast central organization.

Recruitment and Instruction

The last set of indicators my argument would predict is that these manifestos would show deliberate attempts at recruitment and would be directed—at least in part—to other members of the community of white supremacists rather than the public at large. This indicates that rather than seeking to cause a broad psychological impact or support social control, these acts are serving a strategy of internal-movement building toward a bigger political aim.

In fact, all manifestos fit this criteria. They use language directed at spurring action, some include technical details about how the attacks were planned and carried out, and some address “supporters” or “community members” explicitly. Additionally, I looked at whether the manifestos included some form of instruction, advice, or technical information on how to perpetrate attacks.

Earnest wrote about the importance of spreading the ideology: “there are three roles that must be played in this revolution. **Those who spread the truth**, those who defend the race, and those who continue the race (having children). Where most people misunderstand is that all three of these must be performed by everyone to the best of his ability [emphasis added].⁸⁰ He dedicates a fair amount of his eight-page manifesto to recruitment, with quotes such as:

“That my act will inspire others to take a stand as well. And when this revolution starts gaining traction (if I am not killed) I expect to be freed from prison and continue the fight,” [emphasis added].”

⁸⁰ Earnest, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

“You do not have to ‘televise’ like I did and get caught. As more of these happen, we will no longer need to film it. I do believe that it is best at this stage that I make a statement and people know that I did this. We are in the early stages of revolution. We need martyrs.”

“I used a gun for the same reason that Brenton Tarrant used a gun. In case you haven't noticed we are running out of time. If this revolution doesn't happen soon, we won't have the numbers to win it. The goal is for the US government to start confiscating guns. People will defend their right to own a firearm civil war has just started.”

And simply, “I hope to inspire many more.”⁸¹ Crusius details the gun and bullet he used, and offers pointers for improving upon his decisions—such as using heat-resistant gloves. He also notes, “I didn’t spend much time at all preparing for this attack. Maybe a month, probably less. I have to do this before I lose my nerve. I figured that an under-prepared attack and a meh manifesto is better than no attack and **no manifesto**,” [emphasis added].⁸² Here it is notable that the manifesto is considered an important part of the preparation. Gendron includes detailed plans and information on his weaponry, including cost and how he obtained it.⁸³ The intention was clearly to aid others in imitating or building off of his tactics. Palmeter, the most recent attack included in this analysis, signs off with “Wake up. The clock is ticking, and time is running out,” and makes multiple references to his hope that he will inspire others.⁸⁴ He also includes advice on attack type—noting that bombs tend to lead to higher lethality—and the best firearms to use to commit suicide post-attack. Gendron sections part of his manifesto: “Answers to my people/supporters questions” [sic], and many other manifestos follow suit and explicitly address sections to those already in their ideological camp, rather than seeking solely to persuade.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Earnest, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

⁸² Crusius, “The Inconvenient Truth.”

⁸³ Gendron, “You Wait for a Signal While Your People Wait for You.”

⁸⁴ Palmeter, “A White Boy Summer to Remember.”

⁸⁵ Gendron, “You Wait for a Signal While Your People Wait for You.”

Table 2

	Anders Breivik	Dylann Roof	Christopher Mercer	Brenton Tarrant	John Earnest	Patrick Crusius	Payton Gendron	Juraj Krajčik	Ryan Palmer
<i>Ideological linkage</i>	Shared phrasing		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
	Shared references	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Shared political goals	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Organizational linkages</i>	Shared posting sites			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	References to each other			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<i>Recruitment</i>	Community audience	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Call to action	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Instruction	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓

Some actors even directly reference the concept of their movement structure or degree of coherence. Revealingly, Krajcik signs off repeating the premise of Beam's leaderless resistance—that dedicated actors will radicalize others until the numbers are insurmountable by penetration.

“And if I am to be the last person to ever fight for my Race, then so be it. I am content with being the last one. But I know I'm not the last one. After me, many more will come. First individually, men of action just like those before me, who will walk the path alone. Then in the dozens, men who seek to smash ZOG, will walk the same path. Then by the hundreds, individuals and cells and networks, will step onto the path and march into battle. Fighting and dying for the goal of the 14 Words.”⁸⁶

Palmer writes:

“The fear is that a lack of de jure organization among proponents of Total Nigger Death will lead to fruitless “lone-wolf” attacks. Doubtlessly, my actions will be decried as such. However, one can only be a “lone-wolf” if no other wolves follow behind them...consider this your call to arms”⁸⁷

Summary

A textual analysis of the manifestos posted by white supremacist perpetrators from 2015 to present day indicates that structural disaggregation is in fact serving a strategy, rather than reflecting disorganization of the movement. Although more attention of late has been paid to the connections between these manifestos⁸⁸, the phrase “lone wolf terrorism”⁸⁹ still endures and is applied relatively uncritically, and experimental evidence and survey data indicates that white supremacist terrorism is still not considered a threat to many—especially those who do not

⁸⁶ Krajcik, “A Call to Arms.”

⁸⁷ Palmer, “A White Boy Summer to Remember.”

⁸⁸ Evans, “Shitposting, Inspirational Terrorism, and the Christchurch Mosque Massacre”; “Attacks by White Extremists Are Growing. So Are Their Connections. - The New York Times,” accessed June 22, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/04/03/world/white-extremist-terrorism-christchurch.html>.

⁸⁹ Miller, “Supreme Gentlemen.”

identify as democrats or as liberal.⁹⁰ It is this dynamic that is exploited by the current organizational structure of white supremacist extremists, who can selectively use violence to build their movement as long as they are believed to be lone actors.

This is not to say that there is some on-high command orchestrating this organizational structure, in fact—I am arguing nearly the opposite. A heterogeneous movement of nevertheless like-minded ideologues has adapted its strategy to take advantage of the current landscape of the United States. Those perpetrators who have successfully carried out attacks, and in many cases directly inspired more, are likely self-radicalizing, self-training (or at least obtaining weapons operable with very little training), and speaking in part—if not mostly—to each other. My main point of divergence with existent literature on terrorism is that we should not be considering this disorganized, but should in fact conceptualize it as a form of organization in itself.

My data analysis of purposeful political communication by white supremacist terrorists (manifestos) shows that perpetrators are referencing the same key ideological touchpoints, organizational connections, and are speaking to other ideologues. They echo repeated tenets of white supremacy, such as conspiracies like White Genocide or Great Replacement Theory, and indicate a familiarity with other movement thinkers and texts, notably *The Turner Diaries*. They also make references to other attacks and manifestos, and often make use of the same internet forums to distribute manifestos. Lastly, they indicate their strategy in their audiences of communication, speaking in part to other members of the racist far right, not just the broader public or government audiences. This is accomplished by urging them to action and giving practical advice on weaponry they plan to use, or that others can use to carry out attacks.

⁹⁰ D'Orazio and Salehyan, "Who Is a Terrorist?"

Implications for policy and counterterrorism

The purpose of introducing a new concept to define the organizational structure of white supremacist terror is not merely semantic, but instead has implications for policies designed to counter it. While highly organized and sheltered terror groups provide the highest risk for large-scale attacks, that does not mean minimizing loss of life from white supremacist terror attacks is not of interest for government and law enforcement agencies.⁹¹ Taking into account the movement's current strength, counterterrorism efforts should focus not only on preventing attacks, but on not allowing the movement to grow.

Returning to *The Terrorist's Dilemma*, Shapiro offers insights based on the organizational structure of terror groups that can be extended here. As I have noted, we should be thinking of leadership in a much more disaggregated way. The leadership at hand in this movement, in terms of providing ideological and operational guidance, is largely other perpetrators. Additionally, the ideology itself, along with the size of the movement, means that target discrimination is not a key priority. With this in mind, the most effective counterterrorism would thus be limiting the ability of the leaders (in this case "lone wolf" perpetrators) to both **execute action** and **communicate**.

Stopping terrorists from executing their plans is not exactly a novel concept, but without a large intelligence signature generated from the bureaucracy of terrorism, we can instead look to

⁹¹ "White Supremacists Top Domestic Terror Threat, Officials Say - The New York Times," accessed October 21, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/12/us/politics/domestic-terror-white-supremacists.html>; Steven Chermak et al., "What NIJ Research Tells Us About Domestic Terrorism," *NIJ Journal*, no. 285 (June 2024), <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/what-nij-research-tells-us-about-domestic-terrorism.>; Celinet Duran, "Far-Left versus Far-Right Fatal Violence: An Empirical Assessment of the Prevalence of Ideologically Motivated Homicides in the United States," *Criminology, Criminal Justice, Law & Society* 22, no. 2 (2021): 33–49; *Strategic Intelligence Assessment and Data on Domestic Terrorism* (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2021), 1–40, <https://www.fbi.gov/file-repository/fbi-dhs-domestic-terrorism-strategic-report.pdf>.

the means of dissemination and control they *are* using. I have argued this is, in large part, manifestos and anonymous internet communication.

My first recommendation is to force the movement back into the age of “true” leaderless resistance by cracking down on the spread and availability of accessing manifestos (and other communication). By taking away some of the advantages of the internet—to the extent it can be regulated—we can sever the organizational links we do know of. Since manifestos are also how perpetrators share operational advice, it also can make the “training” aspect of terrorism tactics more difficult. The FBI found that in 88% of incidences of lone wolf terrorism from 1974 to 2019 (this dataset includes attacks beyond those considered white supremacist terror), the perpetrator published some form of manifesto before the attack.⁹² The practical policy implications would involve removing publicly posted instances of manifestos where possible, and refraining from releasing them. As J.M. Berger, an extremism scholar who also examines manifestos, notes: manifestos are not simply confessional but are propaganda, similar to ISIS beheading videos and al Qaeda’s *Inspire* magazine.⁹³ Removing already posted manifestos may be difficult, but not platforming them should be comparatively simpler. When Elliot Rodger released an 140 page manifesto, the *New York Times* published it and later defended their decision.⁹⁴ To quote Berger, “like those publications, journalists should report on manifestos, but they should mediate their propagandistic intent instead of blindly amplifying it.”⁹⁵

Additionally, “deplatforming,” or removing ideological leaders of the white supremacist movement from conventional social media forums, has shown to be effective in reducing overall

⁹² Kupper, “Preventing Attacks Using Targeted Violence Manifestos,” *FBI: Law Enforcement Bulletin*, n.d., accessed October 21, 2024, <https://leb.fbi.gov/articles/featured-articles/preventing-attacks-using-targeted-violence-manifestos>.

⁹³ Berger, “The Dangerous Spread of Extremist Manifestos.”

⁹⁴ Margaret Sullivan, “Giving Killers Coverage, Not Platforms,” Public Editor, *The New York Times*, May 31, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/01/public-editor/giving-killers-coverage-not-platforms.html>.

⁹⁵ Berger, “The Dangerous Spread of Extremist Manifestos.”

hate content.⁹⁶ However, this can drive the movement into “alternative media,” or into less regulated spaces.⁹⁷ Many of the perpetrators did not utilize conventional media sites—for instance Breivik emailed his manifesto to approximately 1000 other people, and others were posted on less regulated social media like Gab and 8Chan (which has been taken down but popped up in other forms, like 8kun).⁹⁸ Deplatforming can prevent some of the initial radicalization, where reducing the spread of manifestos and finding ways to regulate “alternative” platforms may reach the already radicalized.

My second recommendation speaks to another purpose of strategic disaggregation, for the movement to remain known as “lone wolves” and court a perception of disorganization. My prescription is not to make these actors into a paper tiger and inflate their strength in media, but instead to hone counterterrorism strategies in on the connections that do exist between these actors. Academics, media, and law enforcement alike should stop thinking of these attacks as “stochastic terrorism” and conceptualize the movement as a very horizontal structure that nonetheless does face the “terrorist’s dilemma.” The 2019 FBI investigation into lone wolf terrorism noted that 88% of attacks were preceded by published communications, termed “leakage.”⁹⁹ This leakage is only of the manifestos looked at in the study, not all communication, so the potential impact of scrutinizing these links could be quite high.

⁹⁶ Daniel Robert Thomas and Laila A. Wahedi, “Disrupting Hate: The Effect of Deplatforming Hate Organizations on Their Online Audience,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 120, no. 24 (2023): e2214080120, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2214080120>.

⁹⁷ UCL, “Analysis: Deplatforming Online Extremists Reduces Their Followers – but There’s a Price,” UCL News, August 26, 2022, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2022/aug/analysis-deplatforming-online-extremists-reduces-their-followers-theres-price>; Thomas and Wahedi, “Disrupting Hate.”

⁹⁸ Kupper, “Preventing Attacks Using Targeted Violence Manifestos”; Matthew Taylor, “Breivik Sent ‘manifesto’ to 250 UK Contacts Hours before Norway Killings,” World News, *The Guardian*, July 26, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jul/26/breivik-manifesto-email-uk-contacts>.

⁹⁹ Kupper, “Preventing Attacks Using Targeted Violence Manifestos.”

Conclusion

In this study, I have argued that the perception of white supremacist terrorism as largely disorganized is incorrect, and serves to help the movement's strategies. I've utilized existing work on terror organization to extend it to white supremacist terror, introducing the concept of strategic disaggregation. By seeming disorganized, white supremacist extremists are able to grow numbers and build a movement without attracting the attention of counterterrorism forces or public critique. Additionally, white supremacist organizations—even if they hold the same political goals as terrorists—benefit from remaining nominally nonviolent for the same reasons, and thus do not claim lone gunmen. As a result, minimizing hierarchical structure and collapsing the distinction between “principal” and “agent” as much as possible allows the racist far right to grow its movement and recruit other ideologues without the same scrutiny a group would face.

To investigate this theory, I conducted an original textual analysis of all available WST shooter manifestos written and distributed since 2011. I looked for indicators that my theory had merit and these “lone wolves” could be considered to actually have an organizational structure. These were 1) ideological linkage, 2) organizational linkage, and 3) evidence of recruitment. All manifestos clearly showed at least one indicator, and many displayed a majority. Every manifesto examined included recruitment, a key element of the theory of strategic disaggregation.

More remains to be investigated—especially a consideration of nonviolent and political arms of the movement and how they interact with terror violence—however this initial data shows strong evidence that violent white supremacists do not view their movement as lacking an organizational structure, and their strategic action reflects this fact.

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