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A Qualitative Analysis of White Nationalist Patriotic Discourse

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A Qualitative Analysis of White Nationalist Patriotic Discourse

A Thesis

Presented in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirement of the Degree of

Master of Arts

By

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Biography

The Author was born in Chicago, Illinois, on July 10th, 1997. He graduated in 2015 from Oak Park River Forest High School in Oak Park, IL. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from DePaul University in 2021.

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Abstract

In the last decade, the U.S. has seen a significant uptick in White nationalist ideology, particularly because individuals espousing these extremist ideologies believe their group and the U.S. are under attack by non-White groups (Osborne et al., 2019). As a result, there are prevailing narratives that are used as patriotic rallying cries that center around the desire to progress the country towards White nationalist ideals (e.g., a country for a by White people), to regress the country back to a time where White people had their own eco-system of Whiteness (i.e., the golden days), and to protect and fight for the country they hold near and dear to their hearts (i.e., the U.S.). The present research examined patriotic rhetoric within White nationalist spaces utilizing RStudio and deductive analyses to investigate how various manifestations of patriotism (e.g., progressive, regressive, and protective) manifest. After collecting 50 quotes from various White nationalist websites, this investigation found that progressive patriotism manifested as calls to progress the county towards a reform to make the U.S. an all-White nation or to completely secede from the U.S. (research question 1). In addition, results indicated that regressive patriotism manifested as calls to bring the U.S. back to a time where White people lived in their own segregated communities (i.e., the golden days) (research question 2). Moreover, findings indicated that protective patriotism manifested as calls to protect and fight for the U.S. (research question 3). Finally, for the White nationalist groups in this sample, we found there was this condemning of returning the U.S. to how things used to be (i.e., regressive patriotism) and we found that our progressive and protective patriotism constructs interacted with one another (research question 4). The ecological implications of White nationalist ideology and avenues for further research are discussed.

Introduction

White nationalism, defined as the endorsement of White supremacy and calls for White ethno-states, is on the rise in the U.S. and across the globe (Osborne et al., 2019; Reyna et al., 2022a). Since 2001, 73 percent of U.S. terrorist attacks that have resulted in death have been committed by far-right extremists (U.S. Government Accountability office, 2017). In addition, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has labeled White racial extremism as one of the greatest domestic threats in the U.S. (Reyna et al., 2022a; Department of Justice, 2023; U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2020). What is concerning about White nationalist ideology is how this ideology is able to become more mainstream and appealing through ideological underpinnings (Reyna et al., 2022a; Vazquez & Reyna, 2023). For example, patriotism, defined as the love and support of one's country, plays a central role in furthering White nationalist ideologies (Patriot Front Manifesto; Serazio & Thorson, 2020; Vazquez & Reyna, 2023).

Although patriotism is often regarded as a positive phenomenon (Hroch, 2020; McKenna, 2007; Muzropovich, 2021), White nationalist groups utilize patriotic expressions (e.g., “we must protect the U.S. from radical forces” and “we must progress the country towards our founding values”) to garner support and further their ideologies (Borum, 2011; De Koster & Houtman, 2008; Patriot Front Manifesto; Wolfgang, 2022). White nationalist ideology is an ambivalent ideology, where on one hand there is a perceived feeling of injustice, that stems (in part) from the belief that there is a deliberate plan to eradicate the White race in the U.S. (Ekman, 2022; Obaidi et al., 2022; Reyna et al., 2022a; Walton, 2020). On the other hand, White nationalist groups believe they are superior to all other racial groups and are entitled to special legal treatment and deserve separate geographical locations (Embrick & Moore, 2020; Obaidi et al., 2022; Kamali, 2022). As a result of this ambivalence (specifically the feeling of injustice), White

nationalist groups use patriotic expressions to “take back” what they believe has been taken away from them (e.g., the U.S., privilege, status, geographical locations, jobs, resources) and to legitimize their actions (Kruglanski et al., 2022; Patriot Front Manifesto; Ribet & Bunnage, 2023; Van den Bos, 2020; Vazquez & Reyna, 2023).

These patriotic expressions manifest as calls to progress the country towards White ideals (e.g., a country for and by White people) (changing), to regress the country back to a previous, idealized state (changing) (e.g., the Jim Crow Era), and to protect the country and the White race from perceived threats (protecting) and unwanted change (preserving) (Amaya, 2018; Beirich & Hicks, 2009; Patriot Front Manifesto; Reyna et al., 2022a; Vazquez & Reyna, 2023). These far-right patriotic agendas have serious downstream consequences (e.g., calls for mass violence) and are becoming more mainstream (e.g., the support and implementation of racially discriminatory policies aimed at protecting Whiteness) (Beliso-DeJesus et al., 2023; Mondon & Winter, 2020; Rana, 2023). Hence, research aimed at better understanding what role patriotism plays in White nationalist ideology is needed given the highly sacralized nature of patriotism in White nationalist groups (The Klansman’s Manual, 1924) and the deadly societal consequences that may ensue if these ideologies are not challenged (Vazquez & Reyna, 2023; Wolfgang, 2022).

Therefore, the purpose of this master’s thesis is to delve into the intricate dynamics between patriotism and White nationalist ideologies, seeking to understand how patriotism manifests within White nationalist spaces. By examining the discourse within these groups, the current research hopes to shed light on patriotism’s role in far-right ideology and which patriotic narratives make it more likely that White nationalist ideologies will be embraced. To provide background for this thesis, first the psychology of patriotism will be introduced. Patriotism will then be discussed in terms of the psychology of sacred values and legitimizing ideologies.

Following these sections, the action tendencies associated with patriotism will be discussed and the manifestations of patriotism that will be studied in this thesis will be introduced. Lastly, the intersections between patriotism and White nationalism will be discussed.

Section I: The Psychology of Patriotism

Patriotism¹ is the devoted love and support of one's country (Gries et al., 2011; Knoester & Davis, 2021; Montez de Oca & Suh, 2020; Pena & Sidanius, 2002; Spry & Hornsey, 2007) and has been historically tied to war and violence (Chroust, 1954; Crowley, 2020; Muller & Scheppele, 2008; Somerville, 1981). Patriotism can be seen across the globe, but the way it is viewed varies across individuals and cultures (Bar-Tal, 1993; Davidov, 2009). For example, cross-cultural studies have shown that individuals in Sweden and Spain often view patriotism in a positive way (e.g., as a civic virtue), whereas in countries such as India, individuals view patriotism in a negative way (e.g., a tool used to marginalize lower-status groups) (Ariely, 2018). Patriotism can be a motivational (e.g., motivating individuals to act), cognitive (e.g., an ideology, set of beliefs, moral obligation) and/or an emotional (e.g., a warm feeling an individual gets when they hear their country's national anthem) phenomenon (Bar-Tal, 1993; Gilboa & Bodner, 2009; Vazquez & Reyna, 2023). In addition, patriotism fulfills the human needs of connectedness and safety (Bader, 2006). Individuals may connect over similar patriotic expressions (e.g., standing up and reciting the national anthem) and may have similar patriotic standards (e.g., a country's flag should never touch the ground) (Bader, 2006; White, 2008). In addition, during times of threat or insecurity (e.g., the terrorist attack on 9/11), people may turn to the country or to others in their patriotic group for comfort and security (Bader, 2006; Li & Brewer, 2004).

¹ Patriotism derives from the Latin word "patriota," which means "fellow countryman" or "compatriot." The Latin term itself is derived from the Greek word "patris" which means "fatherland" or "ancestral land."

Patriotism can also foster individual and group identities (Bar-Tal, 1993; Li & Brewer, 2004), creates a sense of community, and enhances group collaboration (Hroch, 2020). For example, during the formation of groups, patriotism may emerge as a central belief of the group, and thus lays the groundwork for individual and group identity development (Suhay et al., 2016). Phrases such as “we are a group” emerge to unite individuals (i.e., sense of community) and in turn, individuals self-categorize themselves as an in-group member (Hroch, 2020; McMillian, 1996; Mennell, 1994). When an individual becomes aware that they are a part of the group, their membership becomes part of their self-concept which forms their social identity (Hogg, 2016; Stets & Burke, 2000). Once these identities are formed, individuals will come together as one through a shared attachment to patriotism, which motivates the group to pursue goals that benefit their country, and ultimately their group (i.e., group collaboration) (Kloos et al., 2012; Sanchez-Leon, 2020).

At the individual and group level, patriotism may be expressed in passionate ways (e.g., the protection of flags, symbols, and social institutions), and in some cases, this passionate attachment may lead an individual to believe they have an *overt* duty to protect and progress their concept of patriotism (Bader, 2006; Vazquez & Reyna, 2023). When an individual is highly attached to the symbolic nature of patriotism, their concept of what patriotism is and how it should be displayed and respected is absolute (Serazio & Thornson, 2020). Therefore, when one’s object of patriotism is perceived as being violated, there is a moral obligation to care for and protect one’s country and individuals may act on behalf of patriotism (Haggerty & Bucerius, 2020).

Section II: Patriotism as a Sacred Value

A value (e.g., an object, place, belief) is deemed sacred when an individual believes that value cannot be monetized nor can it be replaced or questioned (Hartley et al., 2022; Tetlock, 2003). For example, loyalty to a country or God is seen as a sacred value for many people (Atran & Ginges, 2012; Hartley et al., 2022; Tetlock, 2003). In addition, a sacred value is “a value that incorporates moral and ethical beliefs that can motivate action independently of its prospect of success” (Atran, 2007, p. 1). For many individuals, their commitment to patriotism is absolute and inviolable (i.e., sacred) (Muzropovich, 2021; Tetlock, 2003). Therefore, patriotism may be seen as a sacred value that cannot be challenged and must be protected at any cost (Do & Quang, 2023; Muzropovich, 2021). Research has shown that when sacred values are violated, the emotional and behavioral components of moral outrage arise (Berns et al., 2012; Tetlock, 2003). For example, anger and acts of violence are often a response to a violation of one’s sacred values (Atran & Axelrod, 2008; Atran & Ginges, 2012; Jackson & Hinsz, 2022; Jordan & Dykes, 2022; Tetlock, 2003).

When one’s sacred values are being violated, violence is seen (by some) as the only acceptable way to eradicate the threat (Pinckney et al., 2021). When an individual is devoted to safeguarding the groups sacred values, there is an enduring obligation to the sacred value (i.e., the willingness to surrender oneself to promote or preserve the sacred value), an enduring certainty about the sacred value, and the belief that their actions are justifiable (Katsafanas, 2018; Khalil et al., 2022). Research on radicalization (Sheikh et al., 2016)² and group actors³ (Gomez et al., 2017) has found that when sacred values are under threat, “devoted actors” are willing to defend the groups sacred values and make the ultimate sacrifice, that is, the taking of one’s life

² Radicalization is a process by which an individual or group endorses radical views that are contrary (and extreme) compared to political, social, or religious norms (Sheikh et al., 2016)

³ Group actors are individuals willing to make costly sacrifices for the group’s cause (Gomez et al., 2017)

for the groups cause (Atran et al., 2007; Pretus et al., 2018). Sheikh et al. (2013) found that when an individual is committed to the journey of protecting a group's sacred values (e.g., patriotism) through violence, their mindset often cannot be changed, and the costs of such actions are often not considered.

From an outside perspective, the pursuit of defending the group's sacred values and sacrificing one's life may be seen as inconceivable, but for the individual, this journey is completely sensible (Post et al., 2009; Katsafanas, 2018; Kruglanski et al., 2009). The individual who descends on this journey seeks to not only establish the groups sacred value as the norm but yearns for a personal feeling of significance (Kruglanski et al., 2022).

In far-right groups, patriotism is a sacred value and must be upheld at any cost (Haugstvedt & Koehler, 2023; The Klansman's Manual, 1924). For as long as far-right patriots continue to sacrifice their life to defend patriotism, the future of the group becomes clear (Vitolo-Haddad, 2019). Through this sacralization of giving oneself to the group and country, far-right patriots believe that the groups values will prevail, and their people and culture will prosper in the coming years (Michael, 2010). When far-right patriots are called upon to rectify the threat to their groups object of patriotism, they are doing the work of God and their forefathers (Mudde, 2021). In this case, there is an *overt* commitment to the love of country (i.e., patriotism) and the fighting spirit of patriotism lives on (Atran et al., 2014). Hence, when an individual believes their groups' sacred value (e.g., patriotism) is under threat, the violent actions taken by the individual and/or the group are seen as legitimate because by protecting that value, they are safeguarding the groups interests and ensuring the future well-being of the group (Atran, 2007/2020; Jordan & Dykes, 2022; Kruglanski et al., 2022; Michael, 2010; Pretus et al., 2018).

Section III: Patriotism as a Legitimizing Ideology

Legitimizing ideologies are belief systems that are used to justify or legitimize the actions of a particular group (Major et al., 2002; Tyler, 2005). Research on radical Islamist groups has found that these groups often use religious and cultural legitimizing ideologies to rationalize their acts of violence (Salem et al., 2008). For example, groups such as Al Qaida legitimize their actions through religious connotations, such that the sacrificing of one's life grants an individual access to heaven and that their sacrifice will protect the country (Kursuncu et al., 2019). In addition, some radical Islamist groups use honor (i.e., an adherence to what is right) to rationalize their actions and restore balance to the group's legacy (Glick et al., 2016; Tomac, 2020). These similar patterns are also seen in far-right extremist groups in the U.S. (Kamali, 2022). For some far-right groups, Christianity is a central belief of their group and we have seen across the country the rationalization of hate crimes (Jones, 2021) and acts of terrorism (Gorski & Perry, 2022) in the name of Christianity (Berry, 2017). In addition, in recent years the U.S. has seen a significant uptick in "honor killings", or the use of honor to legitimize the mass-killings of minoritized communities (e.g., the mass-shooting in Buffalo, New York) (Kelly & Alexander, 2022; Srikantiah & Sinner, 2018).

Beyond religion and honor, patriotism may also act as a legitimizing ideology (Ribet & Bunnage, 2023; Vazquez & Reyna, 2023). Research in China has explored the role patriotism plays in legitimizing the actions of the Chinese government and found that state-sponsored patriotism (i.e., the love for one's state) is used to legitimize the political control of Xi Jinping (Chen et al., 2021; Wang & Shi, 2022). Similarly, in Spain, patriotism is used as a legitimizing ideology to rationalize the historical negative connotations of patriotism in Europe (i.e., a tool used to rationalize genocide), which often highlights Spain's "glorious past" (Pineda et al., 2022, p. 88; Seixas, 2005). In Russia, the love of one's country (i.e., patriotism) is consistently used to

legitimize the war against Ukraine (e.g., by engaging in war, we are protecting Russia's global superiority) and is used to garner support from the younger generations (Krawatzek & Friess, 2022). In sum, across the globe we see that patriotism (i.e., the love of one's country or state) is used to legitimize acts of authoritarianism and oppression (Chen et al., 2021; Kamionka, 2020; Krawatzek & Friess, 2022; Pineda et al., 2022).

In a U.S. context, Vazquez & Reyna (2023) found that patriotism may act as a legitimizing ideology that fortifies White nationalism. When a far-right group's status (e.g., social, racial, economic) or sacred values (e.g., patriotism) are threatened, they may use legitimizing ideologies such as the love for one's country to rationalize their actions and "restore" balance to their group and the country (Bar-Tal, 1993; Major et al., 2002; Vazquez & Reyna, 2023). These claims can be situated in Albert Bandura's theory of moral disengagement (Bandura, 1990)⁴, which maintains that individuals will not engage in immoral acts "until they have justified to themselves the rightness of their actions" (p. 163).

Research on moral disengagement and violent extremism has found that when violent extremists carry out acts of violence, they justify their actions through blaming the "enemy" (i.e., scapegoating) for the damage they have done to the groups values and that their enemies deserved the punishments they received (Blanco et al., 2022). We see these common narratives in White nationalist groups, where White racial violence is seen as legitimate and virtuous because White nationalists are soldiers in a persisting battle in which people of color, immigrants, non-Christians, the Jewish community, and the Muslim community are the antagonizes (Ribet & Bunnage, 2023). These far-right groups have continuously legitimized their

⁴The moral disengagement theory refers to the process by which an individual or group of people distance themselves from moral principles and behaviors and convince themselves that immoral acts are justifiable because someone (or something) is threatening their groups (or individual) values (Bandura, 1990).

actions through patriotic connotations, such that violent acts are often committed to defend the homeland and their “enemies” deserved to be punished for diluting American greatness (Kinnvall & Kisic-Merino, 2023; Patriot Front Manifesto; Reyna et al., 2022a). Hence, when White racial extremists carry out violent actions, they use expressions of patriotism to legitimize their immoral behaviors (Windisch et al., 2018).

In this case, patriotism is framed outside of its normative definition (i.e., a healthy love and support of one’s country) and a new narrative is promoted to address the grievances of the group (Entman, 2007; Wolfgang, 2022). This new narrative often centers around progressing the country towards extreme far-right goal’s (e.g., a country for and by White people), regressing the country back to a previous idealized time point (e.g., the Jim Crow era), and protecting the country from perceived threats (Reyna et al., 2022a; Vazquez & Reyna, 2023). By (re)framing patriotism in this way, White nationalist groups are able to spread messages that resonate with the concerns, attitudes, and beliefs of members and non-members (Borum, 2011; De Koster & Houtman, 2008).

This reframing constructs a shared identity (Snow & McAdam, 2000; Wolfgang, 2022) and the actions committed by the group are seen as justifiable because patriotism is seen as absolute and inviolable (i.e., sacred) (Muzropovich, 2021; Tetlock, 2003), and there are moral obligations to uphold patriotic norms (e.g., to protect the country) (Bar-Tal, 1993; Thompson, 2016). In addition, those who further this (re)framed patriotism become noticeable and important (Entman, 2007; Kruglanski et al., 2022; Minhha, 2012; Wolfgang, 2022) and gain a better sense of belonging and connectedness to their group (McMillian, 1996; Mennell, 1994). Thus, patriotism as a legitimizing ideology frames White nationalist ideology as more appealing (Borum, 2011) and rationalizes the immoral acts of violent extremists because through their

perspective, their image of patriotism is seen as absolute and sacred, and those who dilute their concept of patriotism must be held accountable (Bandura, 1990; Ozer & Bertelsen, 2020; Ribet & Bunnage, 2023).

Section IV: Patriotism and Regulatory Focus Theory

The action tendencies associated with patriotism can be situated in regulatory focus theory (see Higgins, 2012). The regulatory focus theory is a psychological framework that describes how individuals pursue goals and make decisions based on their underlying motivations (Higgins, 2012). For example, when the object of a sacred value is under threat (or violated), individuals may be in a promotion (i.e., change) or prevention (i.e., protect) state (Higgins, 2012). During the promotion state, individuals may seek to advance certain goals or agendas (i.e., concerns of growth and/or change), and during the prevention state, individuals may seek to meet moral obligations and ensure safety/security (Cornwell & Higgins, 2013; Higgins, 2012). Research has shown that violent extremists may be in a promotion state when the glorification of violence is displayed (e.g., an individual will gain a special heroic status for progressing the groups sacred values) and the success of their goal pursuit is high (Quinn & Olson, 2011; Webber et al., 2020). In addition, research has shown that violent extremists often use violence to ameliorate their groups grievances, particularly when their groups sacred values are violated and to prevent the further “marginalization” of one’s group (Kruglanski et al., 2018; Webber et al., 2020; Zaal et al., 2011).

On August 3rd, 2019, Patrick Wood Crusius killed 23 people and injured 22 others in a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, in which he framed the attack as a response to the influx of Mexican immigrants to the U.S. and a violation to his object of patriotism (i.e., the U.S.) (Alaniz et al., 2021; Branscomb, 2021 Crusius, 2019; Shear, 2019). Crusius outlines in his manifesto that the

U.S. was under threat (i.e., his object of patriotism was under threat) and to rectify this threat, he must progress the fighting spirit of the country's forefathers (i.e., promotion focused) and also prevent the country from destruction (i.e., prevention focused) (Branscomb, 2021; Crusius, 2019.). In a similar light, on May 14th, 2022, Payton Gendron killed 10 people at a supermarket in Buffalo, New York, the majority of whom were individuals who identified as people of color (Kelly & Alexander, 2022). Similar to Patrick Wood Crusius, Payton Gendron framed the attack as a violation to his object of patriotism (e.g., minoritized communities are threatening the U.S. and its symbolic values) (Peterka-Benton & Benton, 2023). The actions of Crusius and Gendron were both promotion and prevention oriented, such that they not only sought to advance certain goals (e.g., to bring America closer to White nationalist ideals) but were fulfilling a moral obligation to ensure the future safety and security of the White race (Blazak, 2022).

Another example of the promotion (i.e., change) and prevention (i.e., protective) actions that may transpire when one's object of patriotism is perceived as being violated was the insurrection of the Capitol building on January 6th, 2021 (Jordan & Dykes, 2022). In a speech given by Donald Trump that eventually sparked the insurrection of the Capitol building, he labeled his loss of the 2020 election as a direct threat (or violation) to his supporter's and the country's object of patriotism (Lee et al., 2022; Jordan & Dykes, 2022). As a result, nearly 2,000 people stormed and entered the Capitol building, where five people were killed and over 140 people suffered serious injuries (Lee et al., 2022; Rubin et al., 2022).

A violation of one's object of patriotism was used to mobilize extremist and non-extremist groups toward action (Flores-Saviaga et al., 2018; Jordan & Dykes, 2022; Lee et al., 2022; Long, 2022; Smith & King, 2021; Woods & Blackmon, 2021). These actions were both promotion and prevention oriented, such that there was a motive to change (promotion focused)

the outcome of the 2020 election (e.g., “stopping the steal”), to return the U.S. back to an idealized state (e.g., a time where Trump was still president) (promotion focused), and a motive to protect (prevention focused) the homeland from radical change (Bennett, 2021; Jordan & Dykes, 2022).

These tragedies that occurred on domestic soil were a form of *redemptive violence*, or violence that is rewarded and righteous because it is against the “evil other” (Kinnvall & Kisic-Merino, 2023, p. 233; Severino & Morrison, 1999). These Domestic Violent Extremists (DVE’s) (i.e., individuals within the country who commit violent acts to further their social or political goals) are threatening the foundation of our democracy and are using patriotism to not only address their groups grievances, but to also rationalize acts of terrorism (Department of Justice, 2023; Serazio & Thornson, 2020). When events transpire that create a perceived existential threat to the values an individual and group cherishes the most that often defines “what I am” and “who we are” (e.g., patriotism), extreme violence is bound to erupt (Atran, 2021; Atran & Gines, 2012). This stems from a feeling of *anomie*, that is, the feeling that contemporary society no longer reflects the social norms and values that one’s group has for so long upheld and revered (Atran, 2021). Hence, when society no longer reflects ones’ patriotic vision of one’s country, the love for one’s country may manifest in three unique action orientations that can be situated in the regulatory focus theory: progressive patriotism (i.e., change oriented), regressive patriotism (i.e., change oriented), and protective patriotism (i.e., prevention oriented) (Vazquez & Reyna, 2023).

Progressive Patriotism

Progressive patriotism is changed oriented and seeks to bring the U.S. closer to its founding ideals such as justice, freedom for all, and equity (Denham, 2017; Vazquez & Reyna,

2023). Progressive patriotism, in its ideal form, brings Americans together through shared values, creates feelings of significance (Denham, 2021), and may inspire Americans to ensure our country is living up to and manifesting these ideals (Vazquez & Reyna, 2023). However, progressive patriotism can have a negative manifestation. For some individuals and particularly White nationalist groups, progressive patriotism is devoted to progressing extreme White ideals (e.g., legalized White superiority, racial segregation, and racial/cultural purity) and progressing the U.S. towards a certain discriminatory goal (e.g., a country for and dominated by White people) (Hartzell, 2018/2020; Panofsky et al., 2021; Reyna et al., 2022a). In addition, White nationalist groups may distort ideals such as justice for all and equity in an attempt to benefit and expand their own group interests (e.g., framing these ideals in terms of civil rights violations against White people; Blake, 2011; Noor et al., 2012; Reyna et al., 2022a).

Regressive Patriotism

Regressive patriotism is change oriented (similar to progressive patriotism) but with a narrow and exclusive focus on an idealized past state or incarnation of the country. Regressive patriotism can have positive manifestations such as being used as a motivator to bring back a time where women's reproductive rights were not restricted or a time when affirmative action was not banned from colleges (Coen-Sanchez et al., 2022; Long & Bateman, 2020). Regressive patriotism may also manifest to call the country back to a time of economic stability and low inflation rates (Saez & Zucman, 2020; Stansbury & Summers, 2020). On the contrary, regressive patriotism can have negative manifestations. For example, for some individuals and especially White nationalist groups, they may call for a return to the "golden days" of the U.S. The "golden days" (aka the "good ol days"; Reyna et al., 2022ab) were a time of legalized White superiority,

normalized racial violence, and White hegemonies (i.e., the Jim Crow era) (Isom et al., 2021; Keisch & Scott, 2015; Reyna et al., 2022a; Rothstein, 2015).

Protective Patriotism

Protective patriotism is prevention orientated and focuses on protecting and preserving the U.S.; its territorial integrity; and its social, economic, and political systems and institutions (Bradford, 2021; Staerkle et al., 2005; Vazquez & Reyna, 2023). Similar to progressive and regressive patriotism, protective patriotism can have positive manifestations such as preserving American traditions and values and protecting the country in times of threat (Vazquez & Reyna, 2023). For example, people in the military and those who work as first responders often express protective patriotism as motivations for their work (Bradford, 2021; Gibbs, 2020; Howard III & Prividera, 2006; Vazquez & Reyna, 2023). However, protective patriotism can have negative manifestations, especially amongst White nationalist groups. For example, for some people in the U.S. and particularly White nationalist groups, protective patriotism is devoted to safeguarding the U.S.'s White cultural coherence and purity from outgroups (Palumbo, 2009; Reyna et al., 2022a; Vazquez & Reyna, 2023). Since progressive, protective, and regressive patriotism are relatively new concepts and have been unexplored, more research is needed to fully understand both the positive manifestations of these forms of patriotism and the interconnectedness between these manifestations of patriotism and White nationalist ideology.

Section V: Patriotism and White Nationalism

Historically, patriotism has played a central role in White nationalist ideology (e.g., since the inception of the Ku Klux Klan) and the same patriotic narratives that were embraced in the early 1900's are still being used in modern day White nationalist groups (Griffin, 2001; Reyna et al., 2022a; The Klansman's Manual, 1925; Vazquez & Reyna, 2023). As argued in section IV,

we see that patriotism can be situated in the regulatory focus theory (Higgins, 2012) and may manifest in three unique ways (e.g., progressive, regressive, and protective orientations). These types of patriotism are important to far-right racial extremists because they are hard set on a mission to progress the country towards White cultural purity, to regress the country back to an idealized fascist state, and to protect the country from perceived cultural and racial threats (Vazquez & Reyna, 2023).

For example, in a manifesto written by a prominent White nationalist group called Patriot Front, they call for (White) Americans to progress the ideals and values of America's forefathers and seek to progress the U.S. towards a certain goal (e.g., a country dominated by White supremacist ideology) (see Patriot Front Manifesto). Although these narratives are circulating in far-right spaces, they are also beginning to play out in contemporary society, such as the push to ban Critical Race Theory (CRT) within U.S. education systems, which the sole purpose of these bans is to progress the glorification of the White race through the teachings that only White people have created and achieved the most in this world (Miller et al., 2023), and to hide or even erase the negative history of Whites in the U.S. (Rana, 2023).

In addition, a common narrative within far-right groups is to return the U.S. to the shining light it was once (i.e., regressive patriotism) and to not forget the past because if the past is forgotten, "we" are in jeopardy (Patriot Front, 2020). Similar to progressive patriotism, we continue to see these themes of regressive patriotism in mainstream U.S. systems. For example, legislation aimed at rolling our country back (e.g., the supreme court ban on affirmative action in colleges, the banning of books and curriculum that focus on non-White perspectives and experiences) seeks to not only reverse the efforts made to eradicate racial disparities within U.S.

education systems, but also to maintain the ecology of White supremacy in the U.S. (Embrick & Moore, 2020).

For far-right groups, the need to safeguard White cultural coherence in the U.S. (i.e., protective patriotism) has been exacerbated due to the changing demographics (Bellovary et al., 2020; Brown et al., 2022; Palumbo, 2009) reflecting a decline in White birth rates (Kearney et al., 2022; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). This change in demographics has sparked many far-right conspiracy theories and propaganda (Bai & Federico, 2021; Walton, 2020), including a White nationalist website with a clock counting down to the time where White people will no longer be over 50% of the population (see Daily Stormer, n.d.). Amongst the conspiracy theories that are prevalent in White nationalist groups is the “great replacement theory” (Cosentino, 2020). Advocates of the theory (primarily White nationalist groups) argue that declining birth rates among White populations and increasing birth-rates and immigration from non-White countries are deliberate attempts to undermine White identity and replace White majorities with non-White populations (Walton, 2020). Consequently, the over-protection of Whiteness in the U.S. is resurging and is leading to extreme xenophobia and anti-immigrant attitudes and policies (e.g., the SB 1718 bill in Florida) (Canizales & Vallejo, 2021; Lee, 2020; Rensmann & Miller, 2010).

Despite the fact that these incarnations of patriotism are manifesting in far-right spaces, they are also seeping into mainstream U.S. systems (Canizales & Vallejo, 2021; Lee, 2020; Rensmann & Miller, 2010; Reyna et al., 2022a; Walton, 2020). As a result, there is a two-fold issue at hand that needs particular attention if we are to combat the spread of White nationalism in the U.S (and globally) (Wolfgang, 2022). In both far right and mainstream spaces, we see narratives that seek to bring the country closer to a country defined by White/Euro culture, to bring the U.S. back to an idealized state, and to protect U.S. systems and “its” people from

radical change (e.g., racial equality, liberal “wokeness”, and immigration) (Vazquez & Reyna, 2023). If we neglect the ecological implications of White nationalism, this ideology will continue to spread; minoritized communities will be further marginalized; and innocent lives will continue to be lost (Embrick & Moore, 2020; U.S. Government Accountability office, 2017; Vazquez & Reyna, 2023).

Online Spaces and White Nationalism

Social Movement Online Communities (SMOC’s), defined as an online network of individuals who strive towards a common goal, have similar identities, and maintain their social movement through online spaces are on the rise along with online radicalization (Caren et al., 2012; Holt et al., 2022; Marwick et al., 2022; Perry & DeDeo, 2021; Reyna et al., 2022; Winter, 2019). Over time, White nationalist groups have created an eco-system of SMOC’s, which has allowed these groups to spread their ideologies and messages across the U.S. and the globe at unprecedented rates (Berger et al., 2020; Miheji & Jimenez-Martinez, 2021). Interestingly, even when certain White nationalist groups rise and fall over time, their online presence almost always stays consistent (Shahrukh et al., 2023). Although today many White nationalist groups still hold face-to-face meetings, demonstrations, and protests, online spaces are where many White nationalist groups organize and plan their activities (Caren et al., 2012). These online spaces act as a virtual community in which White nationalist groups are able to radicalize individuals by creating a sense of community and belonging amongst fellow members (Perry & Scrivens, 2016). However, this process of radicalization does not happen quickly, but rather individuals are groomed into the ideology (Reyna et al., 2022a). During the radicalization process, these online spaces cater to vulnerable individuals and tap into not only their grievances, but their interests as well (Hartzell, 2020).

For example, many White nationalist online spaces will create various forum posts, blogs, articles, or manifestos about various topics that highlight what an individual may be worried about or have resentment towards (e.g., immigration, changing demographics, the economy, the education system) but may also reel people in through interests' posts (e.g., posts about fitness tips, dietary tips, survival tips and tricks, online book clubs) (Anderson, 2021; Berger et al., 2020). From a holistic perspective, online spaces that openly endorse and perpetuate White nationalist ideology are platforms that fulfill various psychological needs (e.g., the need to belong) and create a socialized setting that engages individuals in radical discourse that exploits individuals' vulnerabilities and interests (Hroch, 2020; Hawkins & Saleem, 2023). Hence, research that dives into these White nationalist spaces and investigates the underlying mechanisms in which this extremist ideology continues to spread is much needed in today's context.

Rationale and Hypotheses

The current study builds upon previous literature on White nationalist ideology and patriotic rhetoric (e.g., Graham et al., 2023; Kamali, 2022; Reyna et al., 2022ab; Vazquez & Reyna, 2023; Wolfgang, 2022) while also filling gaps in the literature. The gaps in the literature often lie in the methodological approach past research has taken, such that previous research has *often* focused on theoretical and/or quantitative measures in better understanding White nationalist ideology (e.g., Hartzell, 2018/2020; Kulig et al., 2021; Reyna et al., 2022ab; Vazquez & Reyna, 2023; Wolfgang, 2022) and qualitative measures have been under used. This is a major limitation in the literature because if we are to fully understand and eventually combat White nationalist ideology, we must gather and articulate the *authentic* voices of White nationalist

groups, rather than relying on a researcher's theoretical interpretation or research participants (e.g., convenience samples, cloud research) in informing us about such a complex ideology.

In addition, past research has not examined multiple White nationalist websites during the research process (e.g., see Caren et al., 2012; Castle & Chevalier, 2011; Dixit, 2022; Hartzell, 2020; Sunderland, 2023). By limiting the scope of one's research to one website, there may be underlying themes and/or rhetoric that we may be missing and thus the conclusions we make about this complex ideology may be inaccurate if we are not articulating data from different resources. Also, past research has not employed web scraping methodologies when collecting qualitative data from White nationalist websites (e.g., however, see Ebner et al., 2023; Lokmanoglu & Veilleux, 2020; Veilleux et al., 2023 for research on web scraping methodologies and radical Islamist groups). Moreover, although progressive, regressive, and protective manifestations of patriotism exist within White nationalist groups (e.g., *The Klansman's Manual*, 1924), they are relatively new concepts (see Vazquez & Reyna, 2023) and have not been fully examined through a psychological lens. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to provide a nuanced and contemporary understanding of how patriotism manifests within White nationalist spaces by taking a more authentic, bottom-up approach. To do this, we used qualitative measures (e.g., web-scraping and deductive analyses) to collect and analyze rich and diverse quotes from multiple White nationalist websites in order to investigate which incarnations of patriotism (e.g., progressive, regressive, protective) may be relevant to these White nationalist groups.

Research Question and Predictions

The following research questions will guide this study:

Research Question 1: How is progressive patriotism manifesting in White nationalist groups? Progressive patriotism may be displayed through rhetoric that advocates for the

progression of the U.S. towards far-right ideals (e.g., White superiority, racial separatism, and racial, cultural and/or religious purity).

Research Question 2: How is regressive patriotism manifesting in White nationalist groups? Regressive patriotism may be displayed through rhetoric that calls for the return of an idealized past time point in the U.S. (e.g., legalized White superiority, legalized racial segregation).

Research Question 3: How is protective patriotism manifesting in White nationalist groups? Protective patriotism may be displayed through rhetoric surrounding the protection of the country from radical forces (e.g., “liberal wokeness”, Critical Race Theory (CRT), multiculturalism, LGBTQ+ people) and/or the protection of U.S. borders.

Research Question 4: Which manifestations of patriotism (e.g., progressive, regressive, and protective) are more prevalent than others?

Method

Website Selection

The websites selected for this study were from a database of about 80 websites gathered by the author for a larger research program investigating White nationalism. The websites for this study were selected because they met certain criteria such as being a White nationalist website, being a publicly available website, were accessible without being a member, were formatted in line with RStudio’s web scraping process, and were based in the U.S. The website content that was used for this study consisted of manifestos, articles, blogs, and chat forums and were deemed suitable for this study based off of this definition: A White nationalist website is a website that promotes and disseminates White nationalist ideology, which is characterized by its extreme nationalism, authoritarianism, and often racist or xenophobic views. These websites

advocate for White supremacy and may promote violence and hate speech against minoritized communities. These websites may also serve as a platform for recruitment and organizing among White nationalist groups.⁵

The number of sites that were included in this study was 10 and was deemed suitable due to the target sample size (e.g., $N = 50$) we gathered for this study, which gave us about 5 (more or less) quotes per website. In addition, we chose 10 websites because we aimed for diversity in terms of our content, such that having 10 websites allowed us to have a more representative sample of data (Drury et al., 2011). Also, 10 websites were deemed appropriate because if we were to scrape data from too many websites (e.g., >10), the qualitative data we collected may have become redundant and thus data saturation may have never been achieved (Rust et al., 2017).

For the current study, data ($N = 50$ quotes) were collected via RStudio's web scraping packages. A sample size of 50 was deemed appropriate because the research question for this study is specific and well-defined, such that a small sample size was sufficient enough to address the research question adequately (see Boddy, 2016). In addition, the purpose for collecting only 50 quotes was to collect rich and diverse quotes, ensuring that data saturation was achieved within the parameters of our sample size (Mwita, 2022). Within this study, the 50 quotes we collected allowed us to achieve data saturation and this was determined when no new themes, insights, or information emerged from the data we collected, indicating that further data collection was unlikely to yield novel findings (Mwita, 2022).

Data Collection

⁵ The content of interest (or the source of data) from these websites will be quotes from blogs (e.g., written text by author of blog), articles (e.g., written text by author of article), discussion forums (e.g., individual comments on chat forum), and/or manifestos (e.g., written text by author of manifesto).

RStudio is an integrated development environment (IDE) for the R programming language, and it provides several libraries and tools to facilitate web scraping tasks (Bradley & James, 2019; Racine, 2012). Data collection via web scraping in RStudio is the process of automatically extracting qualitative data from websites via content analysis (Bradley & James, 2019; Speckmann, 2021; Thota & Ramez, 2021). Data collection via web scraping has been considered a time efficient methodology (Bradley & James, 2019) and is considered a helpful tool in psychological research (Speckmann, 2021).

When we selected the quotes that were extracted from the websites, search engines within the websites were used to determine which quotes would be extracted. During this process, in order for a quote to be extracted from the search engine output, it had to align with the operational definitions listed in Table 1. Once we found the quotes we wanted to pull from the search engine results, we used a google chrome extension called “selector gadget” to highlight the text we wanted and then extracted the text from the website, which was then inputted into RStudio (see Joshy et al., 2016 for further review on google chrome’s selector gadget). During data collection, we randomized the order of which construct of patriotism (e.g., progressive, regressive, protective) was searched for within the websites chosen for this study. In essence, for each website, every construct of patriotism was searched for and we either started our search with progressive, regressive, or protective patriotism, which allowed us to ensure that by the end of data collection, each type of patriotism was searched for equally. By randomizing which constructs of patriotism were first searched for and ensuring that each type of patriotism was searched for equally, we believe this process allowed us to collect a random but reliable sample of quotes (see Boegerhausen et al., 2022 for further review on how to ensure validity when randomly extracting data from websites). We stopped collecting data once we achieved our

target sample size of 50. The timeframe of the quotes that were pulled from the various websites were between 2016 and 2023 and was deemed appropriate given the unprecedented rise in White supremacist events and propaganda the U.S. experienced between these times (see ADL, 2022 for further information).

Data Extraction

Several RStudio packages were used to read the link of the specified websites and extract qualitative data from these websites. The quotes were pulled from post threads (e.g., individual comments on a forum post) or text from an article, blog, or manifesto and we only extracted one quote per user (e.g., on a chat forum, if “American eagle” commented on a post five times, we will only use one of their quotes). If there were multiple quotes from the same source (e.g., in a manifesto, forum, article, or blog), the principal investigator reviewed the multiple flagged items per data source and selected the text that provided the most context for the study. The extracted data were passages (1-5 sentences) that included content that aligns with the operational definition for progressive, regressive, and protective patriotism (see Table 1).

Data Cleaning

Once a quote was extracted, it was placed into a text string (e.g., a format in RStudio that pieces together each quote into one large paragraph) and then various RStudio packages were used for data cleaning. Data cleaning included removing stop words and extra spaces between words.

Data Storage

The extracted data was stored in an RStudio script. Data storage adhered to appropriate data privacy and security protocols (see Krotov et al., 2020), and any personally identifiable information (PII) was not available throughout the entire web-scraping process.

Ethical Considerations

The web scraping process used in this study was conducted within the ethical and legal guidelines outlined by Krotov et al. (2020) and the qualitative data used in this study was publicly available, which does not promise privacy and was used for research purposes only (see also Bradley & James, 2019). See Figure 2 for an overview of the web scraping process.

Analysis Strategy

A theoretical thematic analysis (or deductive analysis) was implemented to answer research questions 1-4. The theoretical thematic analyses were driven by my theoretical area of interest (e.g., the psychology of White nationalism) and focused on a specific aspect of the data. In this sense, the deductive analysis was used to understand what is being said beyond the actual data (e.g., how the rhetoric of the White nationalist members falls into progressive, regressive, and protective patriotism). The following steps were taken during the theoretical thematic analysis and were adopted from the work of Braun and Clarke (2006).

First, three coders read, familiarized, and took notes of the text strings from the web scraping. Next, each coder generated and identified latent codes from the text string and then each coder searched for which latent codes fell into the various patriotic themes (e.g., progressive, regressive, protective), which were based off of the operational definitions listed in Table 1. After this, each coder reviewed the latent codes individually then collaboratively to ensure agreement on the latent codes was achieved. After all three coders agreed on which latent

codes fell into the various patriotic themes, each coder then reviewed each latent code in every type of patriotism (e.g., progressive, regressive, protective) individually then collaboratively to identify over-arching themes (i.e., the central idea's that emerged in each type of patriotism, see results section for further details). The investigator triangulation process used throughout our analysis strategy was essential and helped us to ensure our data was creditable and valid (Archibald, 2016; Flick, 2004). Lastly, the results from the theoretical thematic analysis were written up and directly addressed Research Questions 1-4.

Results

In total, 50 quotes were pulled from the websites outlined in Appendix A (see Table 2 for breakdown of quotes pulled for each website).⁶ The number of instances that arose for each type of patriotism are as follows: progressive patriotism had 29 codes; protective patriotism had 15 codes; and regressive patriotism had 12 codes. In addition, an interaction between progressive patriotism and protective patriotism arose 2 times (see Table 3 for the breakdown of the different types of patriotism).

Research Question 1

A thematic qualitative analysis was conducted to investigate how progressive patriotism was manifesting in White nationalist groups. Across the sample, White nationalist groups spoke about progressing the country in two distinct ways: to rebuild the U.S. in order to make the

⁶ To prevent the further spread of White nationalist ideologies, the websites and groups used in this study were fully anonymized because the author was concerned that by displaying direct links and names of the groups throughout the document, they may have an indirect role in perpetuating and/or spreading White nationalist beliefs. In addition, Krotov et al. (2020) maintained that in order to uphold ethical and legal guidelines during the web scraping process, any and all identifying material must be anonymized. However, if someone wishes to gain access to the websites we used in this study, they may contact the principal investigator.

country a White dominated nation (1st-over-arching theme) or to completely secede from the country with the hope to create White ethnostates (2nd over-arching theme).

Rebuilding the U.S.

For the groups in this sample, they claim that the U.S. is being destroyed by multiculturalism and “liberal wokeness” and to progress the country forward, they will have to rebuild on the diluted landscape of the U.S. In a blog post by *group 5*, they stated that:

“...the degenerative forces now destroying America will plunge us all into chaos first, and we’ll have to try to [re]build an entirely new society on the ruins of the old.”

In line with this quote by *group 5*, the ultimate goal in mind for some of these White nationalist groups in this sample is to rebuild the U.S. and progress the country towards a White nation. For example, in an article from *group 6*, they claimed that:

“America should become what it was always intended to be: a White nation welcoming only other White men of good character into the country. Abroad, the US should seek friendship and cooperation with other White countries. The US should be a model – living proof that cooperation and friendship among different ethnic groups of Whiteset is possible. You want a vision for the future? Why not instead of making the world safe for democracy, making the world safe for White people again? There will be no shortage of besieged White communities to intervene on behalf of in the years to come. If America needs a new vision to refresh and rejuvenate its flagging understanding of her mission in the world – let it be this.”

On a similar note, in a forum post by *group 4*, a member claimed that “we” must rebuild the country in order to progress it towards a White nation which is characterized by having:

“A racially clean area of the Earth for the further development of our people. We must have White schools, White residential neighborhoods and recreational areas, White workplaces, White farms and countryside. We must have no non-Whites in our living space.”

In the grand scheme, reforming the U.S. and progressing it towards a White nation is an obsessive fantasy for these groups, and is particularly evident in *group 9*. In a forum post, an individual stated:

“Within me burns a deep fanaticism, a fanaticism which not only stems from the correctness of our ideals, but more importantly also stems from the clarity of my vision of the world to come, the beautiful world we shall have following the victory of [group 9]. With a clear vision of how beautiful the world will be once this world is a White World, inspired and guided by [group 9] we will be all the more closer to achieving it. We shall mark the magnitude of our victory by renaming our nation, by making it clear to all the world that the racial idea has prevailed: we shall call our land, Whiteland. Whiteland shall come when the RAHOWA is won.⁷”

Seceding from the U.S.

Contradictory to the calls to reform the country and progress it towards a White nation, within our sample, there were also calls to progress the U.S. towards a secession (i.e., creating White ethno-states) and to not rebuild on the dying corpse of the U.S. For example, in a forum post by *group 4*, an individual stated that:

“We can not build an empire on top of the rotting corpse of our nation. We need something new, a new leader, a new government, a new flag, and a new national ethos.

⁷ RAHOWA is an acronym for "Racial Holy War," which is used as a rallying cry for many White nationalist groups.

We don't want to prop up the Jewish controlled corporate state. We want something far more ambitious.”

Similarly, in a forum post by *group 9*, a member claimed that:

“We [are] committed to not resuscitating the corpse of America but committed to bringing about a worldwide White Racial Order... Trying to ‘reform’ a system [the U.S.] which is dedicated to the annihilation of our children's future is foolhardy at best and treason at worst. It is like trying to stop a rupture in a dam by sticking one's finger in the gaping hole.”

Hence, given that some groups in the sample are condemning the notion of reforming the U.S., there is an aspiration to progress the U.S. towards a White ethno-state. In a manifesto by *group 1*, they claimed that:

“Our answers must come from outside the current system. We must establish our own country – by Southerners and for Southerners, founded upon the laws of God and the principles of our own culture, which is rooted in, and nourished by, those laws. Southern nationalism, led by [group 1], is the only vehicle that will get us to that destination. As likely as not, the South will find it necessary to break away from a decrepit Union that has already succumbed to the poison of multiculturalism and then form a new polity dominated by the mores and institutions of our own civilization.”

In parallel, in a blog from *group 7*, they claimed that:

“In fact, our nation is already on an inexorable path toward increased political violence as the demographic situation deteriorates. However, a variety of peaceful political strategies may still remain for us, not the least of which are devolution and, if need be, secession. Secession, however, must be race-based and enforced. With the right leaders, we may

still assert the doctrine of interposition, nullification, and state sovereignty against the tyrannical kritical and administrative state that currently reigns in our nation.”

In line with this rhetoric to progress the U.S. towards secession, in an article by *group 6*, they stated:

“...The white ethnostate is no pipe-dream. This is why the white ethnostate in America is so vital, as a vision, as a goal. Americans are past the point of fed up, as they should be. The unconscionable but now conventional (mis)behavior of the parasites in Washington is a daily red pill for most Americans. Americans are ready to disgorge this criminal, corrupt government, which makes the 15th Century Vatican look scrupulous by comparison. They just need a spark and some guidance, and though I don't know what it will take to get there, get there we shall, by whatever means necessary.”

Thus, within our sample, progressive patriotism manifested as rhetoric that called upon fellow White nationalists to progress the U.S. towards a rebuild with one goal in mind, that is, to take back the U.S. and make it a White dominated nation. In addition, progressive patriotism manifested as rhetoric that condemned the notion of reforming the U.S. and rather some groups claimed that the U.S. is beyond reform and White nationalists should consider leaving the sovereignty of the U.S. to build their own ethno-states.

Research Question 2

A thematic qualitative analysis was conducted to investigate how regressive patriotism was manifesting in White nationalist groups. Across the sample, White nationalist groups spoke about regressing the country back to the “golden days”, which was characterized by a racially pure and segregated eco-system.

The Golden Days of the U.S.

To begin, in a blog from *group 5*, they claimed that:

“It wasn’t always this way in America. Until about 1960, America was a White country — racially, culturally, morally. We still had a civilization and a culture which were essentially European, essentially ours. We didn’t persecute or abuse the minorities here, but we didn’t mix with them. We understood that they were different from us, and that if we mixed with them, our civilization, our culture, our lifestyle, our standard of living, and eventually our people — our genes — would change irreversibly. We didn’t want that, so we remained separate: We kept our own identity; we raised our children our way; we controlled our borders; we didn’t coddle criminals; we didn’t tolerate racially mixed couples; we had laws against miscegenation. We didn’t put up with the sort of public behavior which has become common today. And we kept our society decent and orderly and White, with much less governmental intervention in our lives than we have today — because that’s the way our people wanted it.”

This statement by *group 5* mirrors many of the calls we saw within our sample, which centered around rolling the country back to an idealized past state. For example, in a forum post by *group 8*, an individual stated that:

“We must return America back to a national society of whites freed from the ruling class of judeokike political correctness.”

And in a similar light, in a blog from *group 7*, they claimed that:

“With each passing day the situation gets worse, and every week brings new horror stories. Sam Francis tried to warn us, but America didn’t listen, and now good and brave men like Tou Thao, the McMichaels, and scores of others are being sacrificed to the cult

of diversity. May God bless these men, and may he give us the courage to rise up and destroy anarcho-tyranny and restore the nation that once was."

In line with the calls to restore the nation that was once so great, pure, and holy, in a forum post by *group 8*, a member stated:

"I caught the tail end of White America as a child. I was born in a small Midwest town, almost totally White at the time. I can remember being 4 and 5, riding a big-wheel, all alone up and down the sidewalk, all around the block. Not a care in the world. Safe in the care of the Whites that lived all around me. We have to get that back. Safe all white wholesome communities, free of nonwhite violence, fear and hate."

On a similar note, in a manifesto by *group 1*, they stated that:

"It must be the mission of Southerners that we return America to an honorable society that values reputation and defending one's honor. Unlike the haughty Yankee modernist, we acknowledge that honor matters and is worthy of defense. Such laws that attempt to thwart our right to self-defense should be relegated to the trash can with all other anti-white legislation and will be mercilessly repealed in a Free South."

Thus, within this sample, regressive patriotism manifested as calls to return the U.S. to a previous idealized past time point in which White people lived in their own culturally pure communities, where society upheld (extreme) White ideals, and where White people had unchallenged power within society.

Research Question 3

A thematic qualitative analysis was conducted to investigate how protective patriotism was manifesting in White nationalist groups. Across the sample, White nationalist groups spoke

about how the U.S. is under attack and that they should protect (1st over-arching theme) and fight for (2nd over-arching theme) their country.

Protecting the U.S.

To begin, in a blog from *group 2*, they claimed that:

“For decades now this Republic [the U.S.] has been under attack, with little to no relief.”

And that it is:

“Time to seal our borders against this Mexican invasion.”

These statements by *group 2* are similar to the rhetoric we saw with other groups, where there were explicit calls to protect the U.S. and its borders. In a forum post by *group 8*, an individual claimed that:

“The border must be militarized to keep the migrants out. It must be militarized to such an extent that it will make the East German Berlin Wall of the 1960s, 70s, 80s and early 90s look like a Sunday School picnic. The Wall must be impenetrable with enhanced "Death Zone" mechanisms. The coyotes and politicians who facilitate and encourage the invasion must be hunted down and liquidated like the feral dogs they are.”

And in an article by *group 6*, they stated that to protect the U.S. and its borders, “we” should:

“...use live ammunition. Shoot the invaders. Shoot low, but shoot nevertheless. You don't have to shoot to kill every time but put those bastards on notice. If you invade the sovereign territory of the United States of America, in defiance of our laws and the will of our people, hijacking our democracy in the long-run and by extension our fate, you do so at risk of your own life. People won't invade America under the pretext of seeking a better life if there is a real, substantial chance that they lose their life in the process.”

Fighting for the U.S.

In conjunction to wanting to protect U.S. borders, there were also explicit calls within our sample to fight for U.S. soil. For example, in a manifesto by *group 1*, they stated that:

“When we and our symbols cease to be threatening, divisive, and offensive to our enemies, then it can mean only one thing. We have lost. For our own sake and that of our posterity, may we always be a stumbling block to our enemies. May we always be prepared to fight tooth and nail for our land and our people.”

Similar rhetoric was also found in a forum post by *group 9*, in which a member stated:

“Whiteland [the U.S.] shall be the land for which all [of us] fight. Whiteland shall be another facet of our clarity of vision. Let us fight for our Blood, our Soil, and our Honor. Let us fight for the Whiteland. RAHOWA!”

And in a blog from *group 7*, they describe fighting for the U.S. in pugnacious language:

“We will never forget our valor and our splendor. We will never forget the conquest of a continent, the building of a new Rome, or landing on our own moon. We will never forget our Destiny. We will keep you up at night, watching the countryside from our windows and nervously petitioning the Leviathan for a bigger garrison. We will hold fast and defeat you, because you will ultimately leave us no choice.”

Hence, throughout the sample, protective patriotism manifested as violent calls in which fellow White nationalists called upon their brothers in arms to protect the U.S. from the “invasion” at the southern border and to fight for the motherland.

Research Question 4.

A thematic qualitative analysis was conducted to investigate which manifestations of patriotism (e.g., progressive, regressive, and protective) were more prevalent than others. Based off the code counts, progressing the country (i.e., progressive patriotism) towards a certain goal,

whether that was towards a rebuild or secession, was a prominent theme in our qualitative data (see Table 3). This, however, is not surprising because the groups in this sample were very future oriented and, in many cases, there was rhetoric that rejected the construct of regressive patriotism (i.e., bringing the U.S. back to an idealized time point). For example, a forum post by a member of *group 9* claimed that:

“White nationalists aspire thus not to recapture the rotting corpse of the US government, but to free themselves from it — in order to be themselves, in their own land, in their own way. White nationalists, as such, politically define themselves in wanting to create a sovereign state in North America. They endeavor, therefore, not to “put things back the way they were” as conservatives wish, but to rid themselves of them completely. Inspired by the birthright handed down by the blood and sacrifice of ancestors, their project, relatedly, is not about restoring the Third Reich, the Confederacy, or Jim Crow, as leftists imagine, but about creating a future white homeland in which their kind will be able to pursue their destiny without interference from other races.”

And in another forum post, a member of *group 9* stated that fellow members should:

“....Step forward, stop looking back and help change the future of our people and the country.”

On a similar note, in a forum post by *group 4*, an individual stated that:

“...any attempts to make America great again are missing the point.”

Another example of the groups in this sample rejecting the construct of regressive patriotism (i.e., returning the U.S. to how it used to be) comes from an article from *group 6* in which they stated:

“The country is on the edge of a radical conflict that will change the very geopolitical and demographic makeup of the North American continent. The old America of 1965 is dead and it’s time her former peoples go their separate ways to forge a new existence apart from one another.”

Beyond the groups in this sample rejecting the construct of regressive patriotism, results indicated that progressive and protective patriotism interacted with one another. For example, in a manifesto by *group 1*, they stated:

“[Our group] does not advocate the overthrow of the government of the United States; rather, we wish to leave peaceably and form our own country (or countries), as the people of the South shall freely decide. In order to make secession work, we must be tough-minded and willing to stand up to the forces of tyranny that are loose in the land.”

In this quote, we see this desire to progress the country towards a secession (2nd over-arching theme in Research Question #1) and to fight for (2nd over-arching theme in Research Question #3) this “new” country. An interaction between progressive and protective patriotism also arose in a forum post by a member of *group 4* in which they stated:

“Instead of this, we should be working to rebuild a new nation, whose soldiers and missiles will be devoted to protecting the White gene pool, and securing whatever territory we need so that it can thrive forever.”

Similar to the rhetoric in the manifesto by *group 1*, within this quote from *group 4*, they claimed that they want to rebuild a new country (1st over-arching theme in Research Question #1) and when they rebuild this new country, they will need ethno-soldiers who are devoted to fighting for their new land (2nd over-arching theme in Research Question #3). Thus, within our sample, some groups were more future than past oriented and, in some cases, rejected the notion of regressive

patriotism. In addition, progressive and protective patriotism interacted with one another and manifested as calls that sought to progress the country towards a certain vision (e.g., towards a rebuild or secession) and once this vision is achieved, these groups maintained that they would do anything to fight for their land and country.

Discussion

White nationalist ideologies are rapidly spreading in the U.S. and across the globe (Osborne et al., 2019; Reyna et al., 2022a; Zhang, 2023). For example, the U.S. has seen a 2000% increase in White supremacist events and propaganda since 2016 (ADL, 2022). A powerful mechanism in which these ideologies are perpetuated in White nationalist and mainstream spaces is through the rallying cries of patriotic rhetoric. In these extreme narratives, scapegoating techniques are used to blame outgroups for feelings of deprivation and loss, which fuels violent calls to progress the U.S. towards extreme White ideals (e.g., progressing the U.S. towards a rebuild to make it an all-White nation or seceding from the U.S.), to regress the U.S. back to the good ol' days (Reyna et al., 2022b), and/or to protect and fight for the U.S. and its sacred land.

The present research took a bottom-up qualitative approach to better understand how patriotism (e.g., progressive, regressive, and protective) manifested within White nationalist spaces. The main findings from our study suggest that the various manifestations of patriotism were used as rallying cries to not only rationalize groups actions, but to motivate and empower members to take action (Kenes, 2021). Consistent with prior research (Reyna et al., 2022a), our findings indicate the groups within our sample are worried about a “changing America”, which facilitated feelings of threat, deprivation, and loss. In order to deal with these feelings, the groups in this sample maintained that they must either progress the U.S. towards a rebuild to make the

country an all-White nation or to secede from the nation (i.e., progressive patriotism), they must bring back a time where White people had unchallenged power and lived in a culturally pure environment (i.e., regressive patriotism), and/or they must protect and fight for the U.S (i.e., protective patriotism).

Interestingly, with our sample, there seemed to be some ambivalence towards how the U.S. should be progressed forward. In some cases, some groups within our sample wanted to reform the country within U.S. boundaries to make it an all-White nation. For other groups in our sample, they rejected this notion of reforming the country within U.S. boundaries and called upon their fellow group members to secede from the U.S. and create their own White ethnostates. This ambivalence was also prevalent within our regressive patriotism construct. For some groups in our sample, there was this notion of wanting to return the U.S. back to the golden days (e.g., the Jim Crow era). However, for some groups in our sample, they claimed that movements towards “Making America Great Again” or returning to “how things used to be” are missing the point of the White nationalist movement.

Based off of our results, it appears that for some groups in our sample, they have given up on the notion of returning to something that was once great (i.e., hopelessness) and are now looking towards something new (i.e., hopefulness). This feeling of hopelessness stems from a feeling of *anomie*, or that contemporary society no longer reflects the social norms and values one’s group has for so long upheld and revered (Atran, 2021). This, in turn, led many of the groups in our sample to blame non-White groups for the injustices they are experiencing, which motivated and rationalized calls to progress the country towards a “brighter and Whiter” future (i.e., hopefulness). These feelings of hopelessness and hopefulness are further reinforced by our

code count in which our sample seemed to be much more future than past oriented (see Table 3 for further information).

Within our protective patriotism construct, the rhetoric within this manifestation of patriotism was volatile, particularly because there were explicit calls for blood shed, in which many White nationalist groups stated that individuals crossing the southern border should be shot and killed. Beyond this, there were calls to fight for the land and soil of the U.S., which again, mirrored very violent and gruesome rhetoric. The horrific and violent rhetoric throughout our sample should not be taken lightly, but we should be especially wary and bring attention to the rhetoric within our protective patriotism construct. This is because hate-filled rhetoric may manifest itself as physical violence directed at certain groups, especially minoritized groups (Bilewicz & Soral, 2020). However, as Bennett-Furlow and Goodall (2011) maintained, hate-filled rhetoric leads to violence only when the environment gives the rhetoric force and when the individual is so intertwined with the narratives of the ideology that they view themselves as a savior willing to sacrifice themselves for the groups cause (Kruglanski et al., 2022; Michael, 2010). Thus, greater attention on this issue of hate-filled rhetoric and violence is needed in order to *prevent* the killings of individuals who are migrating or have already migrated to the U.S. with hopes and dreams of finding a better life.

Within our sample, two interaction codes arose from our data, which centered around progressing the country towards a certain goal (e.g., a rebuild or secession) and then protecting/fighting for that certain goal. This finding suggests that although these various manifestations of patriotism are theoretically distinct, they may manifest at the same time (i.e., one after another) within White nationalist rhetoric. Although this finding is interesting and provides another nuanced layer to this study because we originally believed that the various

manifestations of patriotism would manifest separately in White nationalist rhetoric, further research will be needed to investigate this finding.

To our understanding, this is the only paper that we are aware of that has explored these various manifestations of patriotism (e.g., progressive, regressive, and protective) and that has utilized a qualitative analysis of patriotic rhetoric within White nationalist spaces. Although research has been conducted that has found how certain White nationalist groups want to: make the U.S. an all-White nation (Battalora, 2021; Hage, 2012); build their own ethnostates (Stabile, 2019; Stern, 2019); protect the U.S. and its borders (Sharma, 2016; Walia, 2021); and bring the country back to an idealized time point (Mayne, 2018; Reyna et al., 2022b); these theoretical and empirical findings were not explored through the lens the current study took. In addition, one could argue that there is a similar construct that exists within the literature for progressive patriotism (e.g., constructive patriotism; Schatz et al., 1999; Staub, 1989). However, this manifestation of patriotism is still theoretically distinct from our progressive patriotism construct, particularly because the main part of the definition for constructive patriotism has this “critical loyalty” to one’s country piece (Schatz et al., 1999, p. 153), whereas our progressive patriotism construct focuses solely on changing one’s country (Vazquez & Reyna, 2023). In addition, the current literature on patriotism across disciplines has not looked into our protective and regressive forms of patriotism. Hence, the results of the present study provide a nuanced understanding of how these various incarnations of patriotism manifest within White nationalist spaces and showcase how White nationalist groups co-opt patriotic narratives to garner support, to drive their movement forward, and to rationalize their groups cause.

Despite the current study taking a deep dive into one of the darkest places on the internet, we do not need to venture this far to see extremist narratives. Unfortunately, the findings from

our study mirror the mainstream rhetoric we see from politicians such as Greg Abbott and Donald Trump, in which they have made implicit and explicit calls to their supports claiming it is their duty to protect the U.S. from “invaders” (Campani et al., 2022; Gulasekaram et al., 2019). Although we may be quick to blame these White nationalist groups for perpetuating these extreme narratives and enacting horrific acts of violence (rightfully so), we must acknowledge the greater ecological systems that reinforce the very ideologies these White nationalist groups have. Given the sweeping movements of anti-CRT and extreme anti-immigration laws across the U.S. (Bissell, 2023; Lou & Kostandini, 2023), which aim to progress the U.S. towards a predominately all-White nation (i.e., progressive patriotism), to bring back a time where White people had unchallenged power and lived in racially segregated neighborhoods (i.e., regressive patriotism), and to protect the cultural purity of the U.S. (i.e., protective patriotism), are we shocked that these groups openly endorse these ideologies?

By publicly degrading non-White groups in the U.S. through legislation, U.S. systems are inviting these White nationalist groups to our doorsteps. This, however, sadly speaks to an even larger issue, which is that the U.S. is still steeped in systems of White supremacy. Through a historical lens, the U.S. was built upon a system of White supremacy, genocide, and oppression and it appears that the systems in which the country were built upon are still functioning well. Due to the historical perpetuation of White supremacy in the U.S., we see that this extremist ideology continues to impact various contemporary systems, from systemic racism embedded within institutions such as law enforcement (German, 2020), education (Keisch & Scott, 2015), and healthcare (Pitts, 2015), to the enduring social disparities in wealth (Williams, 2022), employment (Jason, 2020), and access to opportunities (Wilson, 2018). In addition to these ecological systems, media outlets continue to reinforce White supremacist ideologies by

promoting a worldview that further privileges Whiteness, which ultimately creates an “us” versus “them” mentality (Baker-Bell et al., 2017; also see Alamo-Pastrana & Hoynes, 2020 for further review on what they call “White media”). Although progress has been made to combat White supremacy within the U.S. through various civil rights movements and legislative reforms, the deep-rooted nature of White supremacy within the U.S. underscores the importance of empirical research aimed at combating this extremist ideology. Hence, there is a multi-level issue at hand and if we are to combat White supremacy broadly and White nationalism specifically in the U.S., we must treat it as so.

Limitations and Future Research

The present research contributes a nuanced perspective of how various forms of patriotism may manifest within White nationalist spaces. Although interesting and new perspectives emerged within this study, we must be mindful of the limitations of this study. To begin, given that this is the first study we are aware of that has explored these various forms of patriotism, more empirical evidence either through qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method designs is needed to gain a better understanding of these constructs. Moreover, given that the current study focused solely on White nationalist groups in the U.S., future research should include groups that are not U.S. based to investigate if the results of this study generalize to other national and cultural contexts. In addition, future research should expand on the sample size of this study and collect more qualitative data to see if the patterns found in this study are consistent across different groups that may prioritize different issues.

Also, for one of the websites in this study, we were unable to gather the target number of quotes per website (e.g., $N = 5$) because of inactivity within the website and because there was consistent posting from only one user throughout the website, which the latter comment goes against our inclusion criterion (see Table 2). Future research should either expand the number of

websites chosen, expand the number of quotes drawn for each website, and/or broaden the inclusion criterion to include multiple quotes from one user. In addition, about half of our websites were forum-based websites (e.g., 4 out of 10) (see Table 2). Future research should expand on the types of websites chosen to include more manifestos, blogs, and articles to see if the results found in this study are consistent. Lastly, we recognize that the web scraping approach we used in this study has its limitations, particularly because the principal investigator was involved in selecting the websites chosen for this study and collecting the qualitative data. Hence, it is possible that there was selection bias during the web-scraping process. Future research should include methods to minimize selection bias by employing diverse sampling techniques, such as random sampling across different websites.

Conclusion

White nationalism is continuing to spread across the globe and has deadly ramifications, such as ethnocentric violence and the perpetuation of prejudice and discrimination within society (Jokic, 2020; Osborne et al., 2019). To combat an ideology that is so deeply ingrained in the infrastructure of the U.S. and continues to grow as time evolves, research aimed at better understanding both the psychological underpinnings and systemic perpetuation of White nationalism is critical. Within the present research, it is evident that White nationalist groups are attempting to rally their fellow members through patriotic appeals. Although the various manifestations of patriotism in this study can have positive implications in other contexts such as bringing everyone (i.e., all groups across intersecting identities) together through a shared value system (Bar-Tal, 1993), it appears that White nationalist groups are co-opting these forms of patriotism to unite and empower their group, to blame non-White groups for the problems they are facing, and are using these patriotic narratives to rationalize their actions. The rhetoric we

collected within this study should not be taken for granted, particularly because individuals espousing White nationalist ideals have and unfortunately will continue to commit gruesome acts of mass violence and political upheaval in the name of their group. Thus, it is imperative that we begin to investigate what patriotism means to these White nationalist groups and find ways we can intervene to stop the dystopia we are witnessing in contemporary U.S. systems.

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Table 1. Operational Definitions for Progressive, Regressive, and Protective Patriotism

Progressive Patriotism
Any manifesto, blog, article, or post that includes words and themes, for example, related to “changing,” “improving,” “transforming” (and their synonyms) the U.S. Those that discuss progressive patriotism in any manner will be eligible for inclusion.
Regressive Patriotism
Any manifesto, blog, article, or post that includes words and themes associated with rejection, dismantling, rolling back, or removing (and their synonyms) certain values, ideas, or policies in the U.S. Those that discuss regressive patriotism in any manner will be eligible for inclusion.
Protective Patriotism
Any manifesto, blog, article, or post that includes words and themes, for example, related to “protecting,” “preserving,” “defending” “fighting for” (and their synonyms) anything associated with the U.S. Those that discuss protective patriotism in any manner will be eligible for inclusion.

Table 2. Breakdown of Quotes Pulled from Each Website

Source	Type	Numbers of Quotes Pulled
Website #1	Manifesto	6
Website #2	Blog	5
Website #3	Article	5
Website #4	Forum	5
Website #5	Blog	6
Website #6	Article	5
Website #7	Blog	6
Website #8	Forum	5
Website #9	Forum	5
Website #10	Forum	2
		Total: 50

Table 3. Breakdown of the Different Types of Patriotism

Type of Patriotism	Number of Codes
Progressive Patriotism	29
Regressive Patriotism	12
Protective Patriotism	15
Progressive x Protective Patriotism	2

Figure 1*Overview of Web Scraping Process*