



Countering neo-Nazi Ideology in the United States

# WAGING A WAR OF INFORMATION

John Patrick Wilson & Caitlyn Ryan

Rise To Peace





## WAGING A WAR OF INFORMATION TO COUNTER NEO-NAZI IDEOLOGY



**ABOUT RISE TO PEACE:**



*Rise to Peace was founded with the mission of providing information and education to counter radicalization and violent extremism. Utilizing analysis and field research, and with the aid of our partners around the world, we seek to provide solutions that will aid in reducing violent extremism globally.*

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge the hard work of Ahmad Shah Mohibi, founder and president of Rise to Peace for his undying drive to counter violent extremism across the globe. With your passion, I believe we can truly make a difference in this world.

My research has been inspired by the work of Simon Wiesenthal, famed hunter of justice. For decades, Mr. Wiesenthal, whom was a Holocaust survivor, relentlessly pursued Nazi war criminals who escaped justice in World War II as well as countering Nazi ideology around the globe.

*“You’re a religious man, ... You believe in God and life after death. I also believe. When we come to the other world and meet the millions of Jews who died in the camps and they ask us, ‘What have you done?’ there will be many answers. You will say, ‘I became a jeweler.’ Another will say, ‘I smuggled coffee and American cigarettes.’ Another will say, ‘I built houses.’ But I will, ‘I didn’t forget you.’”*

- *Simon Wiesenthal*

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## **Introduction**

The world has long suffered from what seems like one extremist ideology after another. One is hard pressed to deny that the Nazi regime in Germany, and the ideology that it spread, was one of the very worst tragedies in human history. The deep ideological driving factors behind such tragedies as those observed during the holocaust should never survive in the free world. On 7 May, 1945, Nazi Germany officially surrendered to the allies and victory over Europe was declared. However, almost 75 years after the Nazi surrender in Berlin, the threat of Nazi ideology has yet to fade. Over several decades, ‘neo-Nazism’ as it is often called, has evolved and morphed to a modern ideological movement that runs adjacent to the very same Nazi beliefs that dictated the direction of the Third Reich.

This research will provide a potential solution to countering the surging Nazi ideology in the United States. Understanding that Nazism has faded and returned in the United States for decades, this solution seeks to curb Nazi ideology long-term. As with all ideologically driven violent movements, understanding the motivation and justification for the movement is critical to developing a strategic campaign to reduce the movement’s strength. A brief historical section will highlight the history of neo-Nazism in the United States. Further examination of Nazi ideology will develop an understanding of the movement’s motives, driving factors, objectives, and overall belief system. A comprehensive assessment of the current neo-Nazi movement in the United States is provided in this report to better provide context in which a counter-narrative strategy can be produced as well as to identify a target population in which to address the counter-narrative messaging.

Upon the foundation built through these sections, a strategy can be made to create an information campaign that will discredit the neo-Nazi ideological framework, provide information that will create an identity crisis amongst followers of neo-Nazi groups, and reduce neo-Nazi radicalization and recruitment strengths.

In conjunction with the University of Virginia Center for Politics, Reuters/Ipsos conducted a poll of 5,360 American adults to research support for various extremist ideologies. While support for all of the ideologies are relatively low, translated to the broader population figures of the United States, the results are concerning. Neo-Nazi ideology was found to have support from 4 percent of the polled population (Rosenberg, 2017). If the survey was accurately representative of the American population, that is over 10 million neo-Nazi supporters. That is almost double the entirety of the Jewish community living in the United States.

Utilizing a strategic campaign of information, vulnerable individuals can be targeted prior to their radicalization as well as individuals already radicalized who have the potential of becoming deradicalized. Strong emphasis must be placed on individuals vulnerable to recruitment and radicalization. Post (2005) stated, “once an individual is in a body, especially underground, group dynamics will enforce his psychological commitment to its goals” (p. 106). The focus of the counter-narrative strategy will seek to exploit inherent vulnerabilities found in the neo-Nazi radicalization process and ideology.

This project will seek to first build a comprehensive understanding of neo-Nazi history, ideology, and the current operating picture of the actors involved. Interviews with neo-Nazis and former neo-Nazis are included to enhance the project’s understanding of the driving factors that bring one to the belief in Nazism.

## **Disclaimer & Definitions**

Throughout this research, neo-Nazi ideology is discussed in depth. This is to include the historic ideals from the original Nazi party to the modern neo-Nazi movement. Many of the ideals discussed include racial and religious conspiratorial claims. In no way do the ideals and claims discussed in this research reflect the beliefs or values of Rise to Peace or the authors of this writing. The ideology is discussed in a way to reflect, as accurately as possible, the narrative that the neo-Nazi movement seeks to emanate. Only by discussing the underlying messages of such a narrative can one develop a strategy to counter it.

Neo-Nazi groups are mentioned by name throughout this writing and at times, specific individuals connected to these groups may be mentioned. It is important to distinguish that the explicit mention of these groups and/or individuals does not necessarily indicate that these groups or individuals have committed crimes, including acts of violence or terrorism, unless specifically mentioned. The inclusion of the names of groups or individuals is meant to link them to the modern neo-Nazi movement and its ideology.

The groups acknowledged as neo-Nazi groups have been identified by multiple sources. While other groups who may be inspired by neo-Nazi ideals do exist, this research seeks to focus on groups who are primarily neo-Nazi in origin. There are links between many white supremacy groups and Nazism/neo-Nazism, however, there are idealistic differences between a primarily white supremacist group and a neo-Nazi group. These differences will be discussed throughout this writing.

There is brief mention of neo-Nazi groups around the world, despite the scope of this writing being directed towards such groups in the United States. The information provided about internationally based neo-Nazi groups provides further context into analyzing the current state of the neo-Nazi movement.

For the sake of this research, we have defined select terms to better understand exactly what is being referred to throughout the project. A couple of terms that are often used, but deserve clarification are as follows:

*Terrorism:* Using violence or the threat of violence to further a political objective.

*Nazi:* The term Nazi is an acronym, it stands for National Socialist German Workers' Party. The terms Nazi and Nazism are used in this writing to highlight the ideals of the Nazi Party during their Third Reich, up until 1945.

*Neo-Nazi:* Refers to followers of Nazi ideology, post-WWII. Often these ideologies have adapted and vary in degree in which followers believe in pure Nazi ideology.

*Psychological Warfare:* Often associated with information warfare, psychological warfare seeks to alter the hearts and minds of an individual or group through various means of distributing communicable information. There are various definitions and meanings when one uses the term 'information warfare' that can include a wide variety of operations and activities. Manipulative information and disinformation are often coined terms associated with information warfare but only make up part of a total information campaign.



## **Understanding neo-Nazi History in the United States**

Almost immediately after the second World War ended, neo-Nazi groups, as they are now known, began to develop across the globe. Much to the dismay of a world ready to move on from the horrors caused by Nazism, these groups continued to believe in fundamental Nazi ideologies. Overtime, the neo-Nazi ideology spread and evolved to varying degrees through an assortment of neo-Nazi factions and groups.

The American Nazi Party, like all other neo-Nazi groups, believes that there is a Zionist Occupied Government (ZOG) which seeks to control the world. The American Nazi Party, in its monthly newsletters, often references that while members of the Jewish faith make up a relatively small portion of the total population in the United States, there is a larger (proportionally) amount of Jewish senators and representatives that are currently serving. The American Nazi Party claims that this is proof of the existence of the ZOG (American Nazi Party, 2018). George Lincoln Rockwell, the founder of the American Nazi Party became radicalized during his time in the United States Navy. Upon his release from the Navy, Rockwell became increasingly politically active, founding the American Nazi Party in 1959. Rockwell often referenced the anti-communist rhetoric, that was prevalent at the time, to paint communists as the true evil and national socialism as a source of good. Having become a well-known Nazi apologist, Rockwell adamantly denied that the holocaust had occurred and was vocally anti-Semitic. It was under the American Nazi Party that neo-Nazi ideology in America became diluted from original Nazi ideology. In an attempt to find allies and potentially recruit new members, Rockwell often aided the Ku Klux Klan, whom does not fall under Nazi ideology. Interestingly, Rockwell looked favorably on Black nationalist groups as proponents who were operating at the time as they also desired racial separation. In 1967, Rockwell was assassinated by a former-member of the American Nazi Party and the group has had several leaders since his assassination. Many groups have splintered off from the American Nazi Party, making the group itself incapable of holding full power in neo-Nazi circles. However, various factions of the group still operate today.



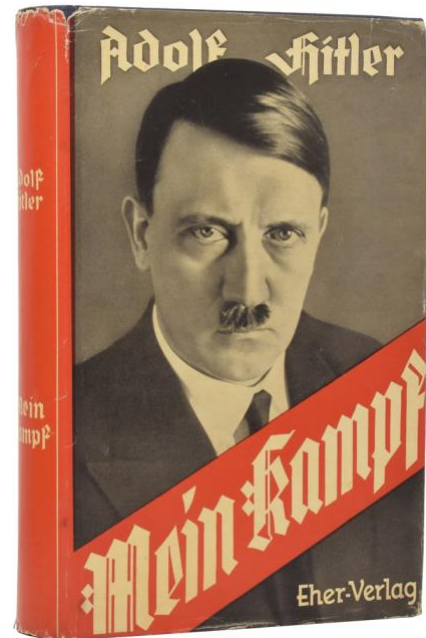
George Lincoln Rockwell,  
founder of the American Nazi  
Party

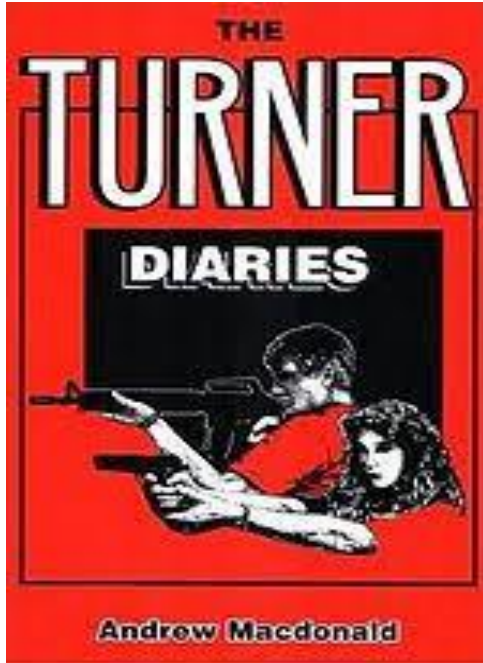
*Waging a War of Information: Countering neo-Nazi Ideology in the United States*

Neo-Nazism ideology is still often spread through various propaganda outlets, to include books. Mein Kampf, Hitler's manifesto, remains popular amongst neo-Nazis still today. Interest in Mein Kampf is potentially concerning. After the second world war, Mein Kampf was essentially banned from publication in Germany. This was the case until 2016 when copyright laws allowed Mein Kampf to be re-published. The result was stunning; The manifesto became a bestseller in Germany once again (Fox, 2017).

The Turner Diaries, a text written by famed neo-Nazi William Luther Pierce under the pseudonym of Andrew Macdonald, is arguably the most famous American neo-Nazi text in circulation. The story tells of a great civil conflict happening within the United States that goes on to become a race war. In the text, the neo-Nazis emerge victorious. Many neo-Nazi groups view the text as something of a prophecy and many violent acts have been influenced by the book. Pages from The Turner Diaries were found on the person of Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma City bomber, when he was taken into custody by law enforcement. Pierce was a founder of the National Alliance, a neo-Nazi group still in operation, and one that is discussed later in this project.

*Mein Kampf, Adolf Hitler's personal writing and reasoning for his ideology. Translating to "my struggle", Mein Kampf is another example of extremist ideologies stemming from the belief that the individual or group is engaged in a greater struggle or conflict that they must participate in to overcome their enemy.*





*The Turner Diaries is one of the most influential neo-Nazi books in circulation. The story depicts a revolution in the United States that turns into a race war, with the neo-Nazis emerging victorious. The book was written by famed neo-Nazi William Luther Prince under the pseudonym of Andrew Macdonald.*

From a terrorism standpoint, much of the acts of violence thus far by individuals or groups who follow neo-Nazism have been disorganized. By this, it is meant that the planning and organization prior to the act of violence has been limited. An individual or group may wish to carry out such an act, but not have a set target, location, or time that they desire to carry it out. Such acts can often be described as opportunistic and are often fueled with more or less raw anger. It is common to see such acts carried out in close proximity to or associated with civil protests.

The most prolific organized terror campaign in the United States associated with neo-Nazism to date was carried out by the group recognized as The Order. The Order, otherwise known as the Brüder Schweigen Silent Brotherhood, was a terrorist group that operated between 1983 and 1984. Founded by Robert Jay Mathews, the group was partially inspired by the above discussed Turner Diaries. Mathews, was born into the Mormon faith but developed devout white supremacist, anti-Semitic, and anti-communist beliefs while growing up. This led to his involvement and belief in Nazi ideals. With a tight-knit and loyal list of members, The Order engaged in multiple criminal conspiracies to secure funding to launch their terror campaign. The campaign resulted in multiple terror attacks, ranging from bombings of facilities to the murder of talk show host Alan Berg in front of his home. The terror campaign was executed in conjunction with a string of armed robberies and hold-ups, with the proceeds to be used to fund the future of terrorist campaigns by the group (McClary, 2006).

Law enforcement began to track The Order, seeking to prosecute the terrorist group's members. Mathews was tracked to a house on an island in the state of Washington, where he refused to surrender. Mathews was killed in the stand-off when flames engulfed the residence. Law Enforcement utilized the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organization Act (RICO) to convict ten members of The Order as part of an organized criminal conspiracy. The prosecution successfully ended The Order's operational capabilities, but their activities have continued to inspire many within the neo-Nazi movement. One of The Order's key members, David Lane,

was imprisoned in the fallout of the law enforcement crackdown on the group. He went on to co-found a sub-movement within neo-Nazi ideology; Referred to as Wotansvolk, or neo-völkisch, it focuses on the links between Nazism and Odinism. Odinism, or the following of select parts of Norse mythology, has close links to Nazism under the Third Reich and maintains a presence in the neo-Nazi movement today. Odinism is discussed in more depth in the “Understanding neo-Nazi Ideology” section of this research.

Prison has provided a deep recruitment pool for neo-Nazi inspired groups in the United States. The desegregation of the United States prison system in the 1960s led to increasing divide amongst organized crime in prisons along racial lines. San Quentin Maximum Security Prison in California saw the foundation of the Aryan Brotherhood (Sothern Poverty Law Center, 2005). The Aryan Brotherhood is a white supremacy group that utilizes select neo-Nazi ideals and symbols. New members have been encouraged to read *Mein Kampf*, with the swastika and Nazi SS lightning bolts being common symbols associated with the group. The group functions primarily inside both federal and state prisons throughout the country. While the group does partially rely on Nazi ideology, it is primarily a white supremacist criminal organization whose objectives are primarily the safety of its members in prison, acquisition of funds through illicit means, and the control of specific rackets in the prison system. The group has not been observed to have any real political objectives or terroristic desires. This is not to say that they are incapable of launching terrorist attacks, but their objectives lead to acts of violence that are associated with their criminal organizational needs and not grander political motivations. Nonetheless, the prominent featuring of Nazi ideals and symbols has further spread the overall neo-Nazi movement. Numerous groups have formed along the Aryan Brotherhood’s neo-Nazi and white supremacist ideals outside of the prison system in the United States. Due to their position as a white supremacist criminal organization with neo-Nazi sub-themes, they are not included in the list of neo-Nazi groups operating in the United States below; However, one should remember that they are affiliated with the larger neo-Nazi movement.

In recent years, the political climate in the United States has brought new attention to extremist ideologies, both on the right and left. The modern neo-Nazi movement has sought to attach itself traditionally to those on the fringe right of the political linear spectrum.



*Figure 1 Man espousing traditional Nazi symbolism during political protests in Charlottesville, NC. The protests saw numerous injuries and a death when a neo-Nazi and white supremacist crashed his vehicle into a crowd of counter-protestors. Image source [Time Magazine \(Online\)](#)*



*Figure 2 Neo-Nazis in Charlottesville, NC. Image Source [USA Today \(Online\)](#)*

It should be noted that the neo-Nazi presence, even amongst the far right, is extremely small. The presence of neo-Nazis amongst right-wing protests are an attempt to spread the ideology and movement. While it is probable that this recruitment effort will likely succeed in introducing individuals to the narratives of the neo-Nazi movement, only time will tell if it will result in rises of neo-Nazi followers.

## Neo-Nazi Groups Operating in the United States

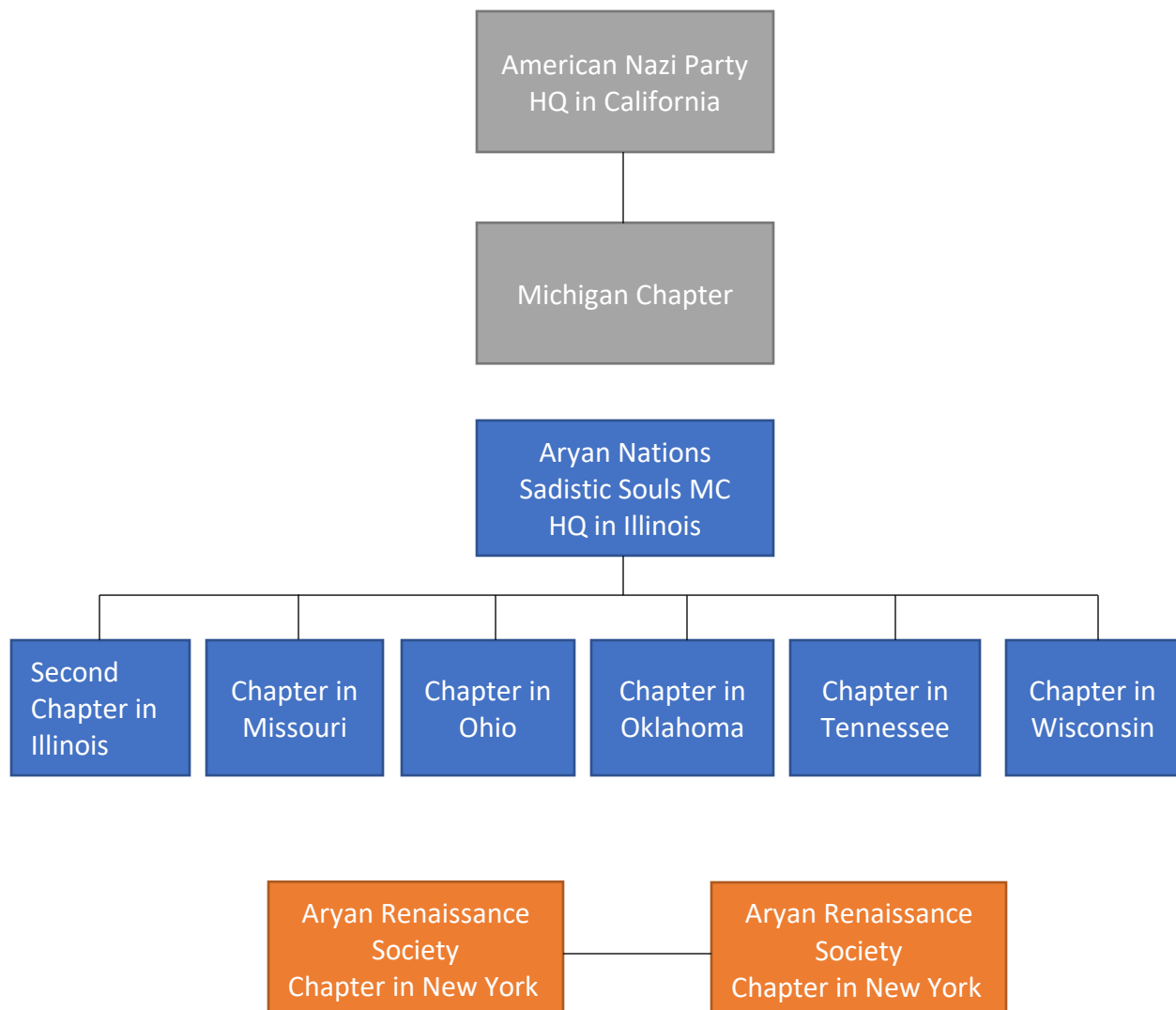
According to the Southern Poverty Law Center, these are the neo-Nazi groups actively operating in the United States as of 2017:

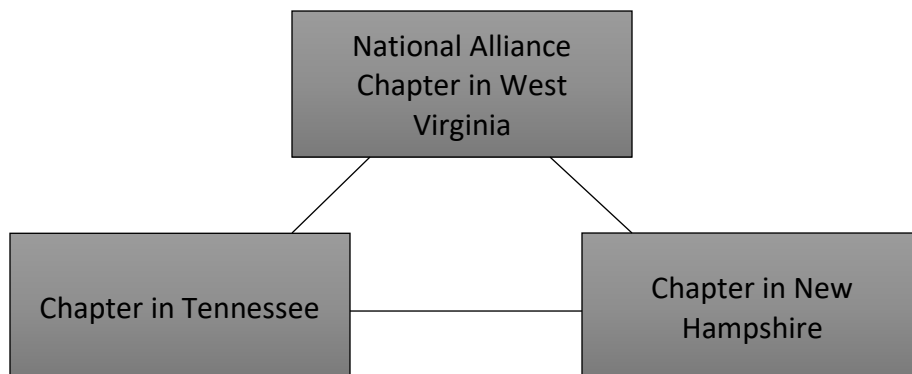
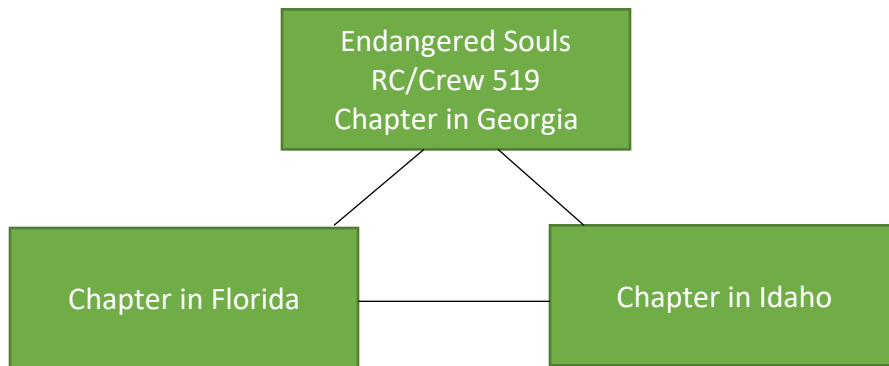
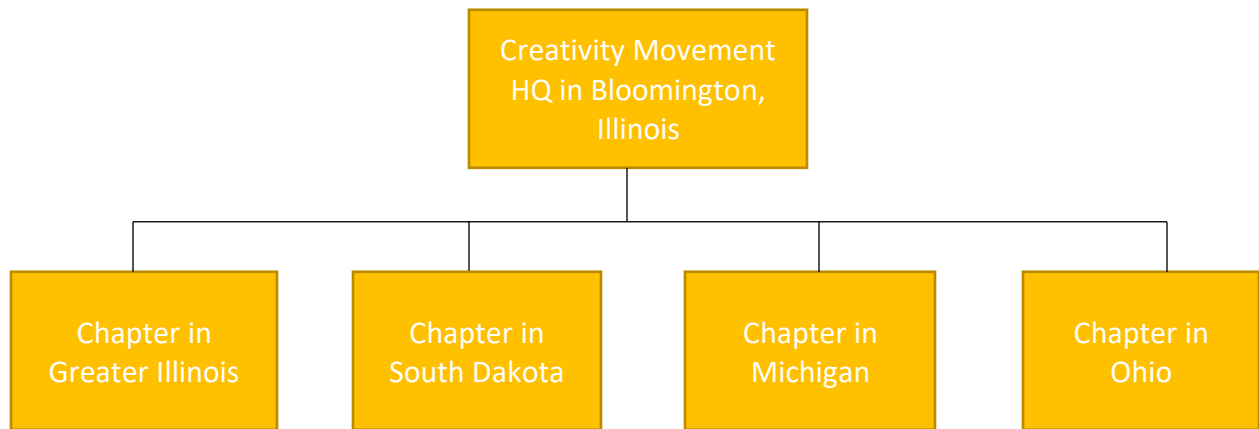
- America First Committee (Illinois)
- American Nazi Party (Chapters in *Michigan* and California)
- Aryan Nations Sadistic Souls MC (Chapters in *Illinois*, Missouri, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Wisconsin)
- Aryan Nations Worldwide (Georgia)
- Aryan Renaissance Society (Chapters in New York and Texas)
- Atomwaffen Division (Florida)
- Creativity Movement (Chapters in Dakota, *Illinois*, Michigan, Ohio)
- Endangered Souls RC/Crew 519 (Chapters in Florida, Georgia, Idaho)
- Golden Dawn (New York)
- National Alliance (Chapters in West Virginia, Tennessee, New Hampshire)
- National Alliance Reform and Restoration Group (Nevada)
- National Socialist German Workers' Party (Nebraska)
- National Socialist Liberation Front (Chapters in Alabama, California, *Pennsylvania*)
- National Socialist Movement (Chapters in Ohio, Georgia, Indiana, South Carolina, Oregon, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Kentucky, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, Arizona, *Michigan*)
- Nationalist Women's Front (California)
- New Order (Wisconsin)
- Noble Breed Kindred (California)
- NS Publications (Michigan)
- PzG Inc. (South Dakota)
- The Daily Stormer (Chapters in Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, *Ohio*)
- Third Reich Books (Nebraska)
- Traditionalist Worker Party (Chapters in Alabama, North Carolina, Ohio, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, *Indiana*)
- Vanguard America (Chapters in Connecticut, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wyoming, *Indiana*)
- Vanguard News Network (Missouri)
- White Aryan Resistance (California)
- White Devil Social Club (Wisconsin)
- Wolfhook Life Clothing (Indiana)
- Women for Aryan Unity (Chapters in Ohio and Wisconsin)



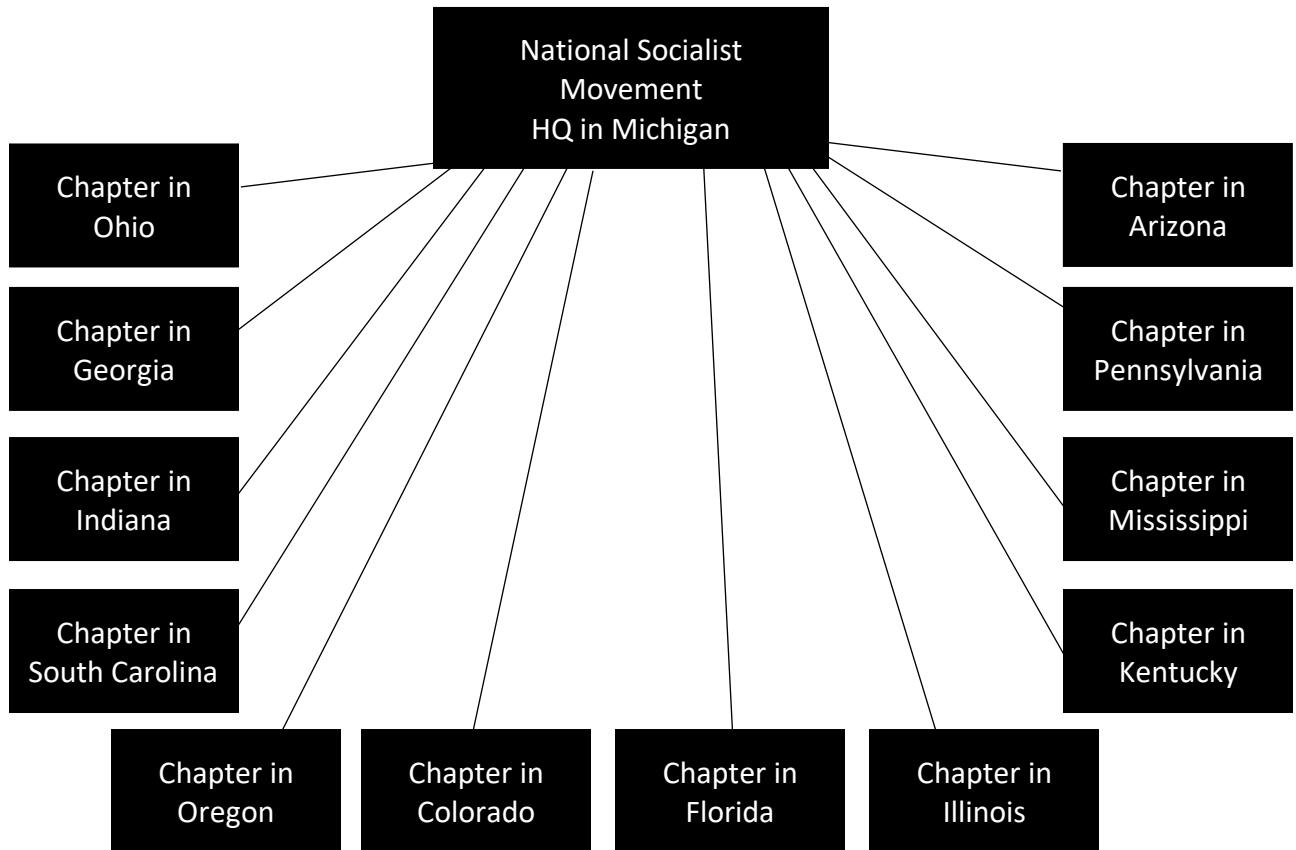
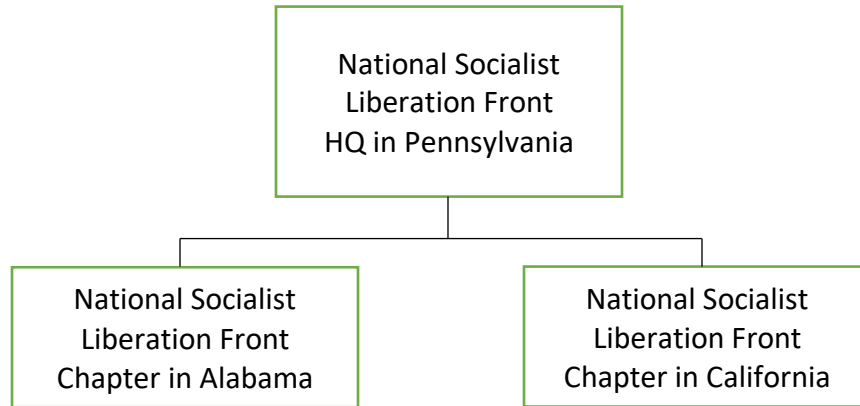
## **Neo-Nazi Movement's Organizational Structure(s): Breakdown and Analysis**

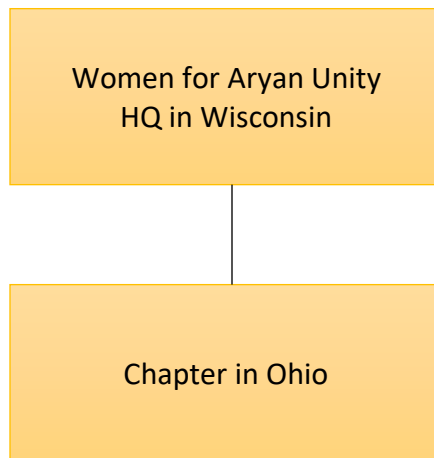
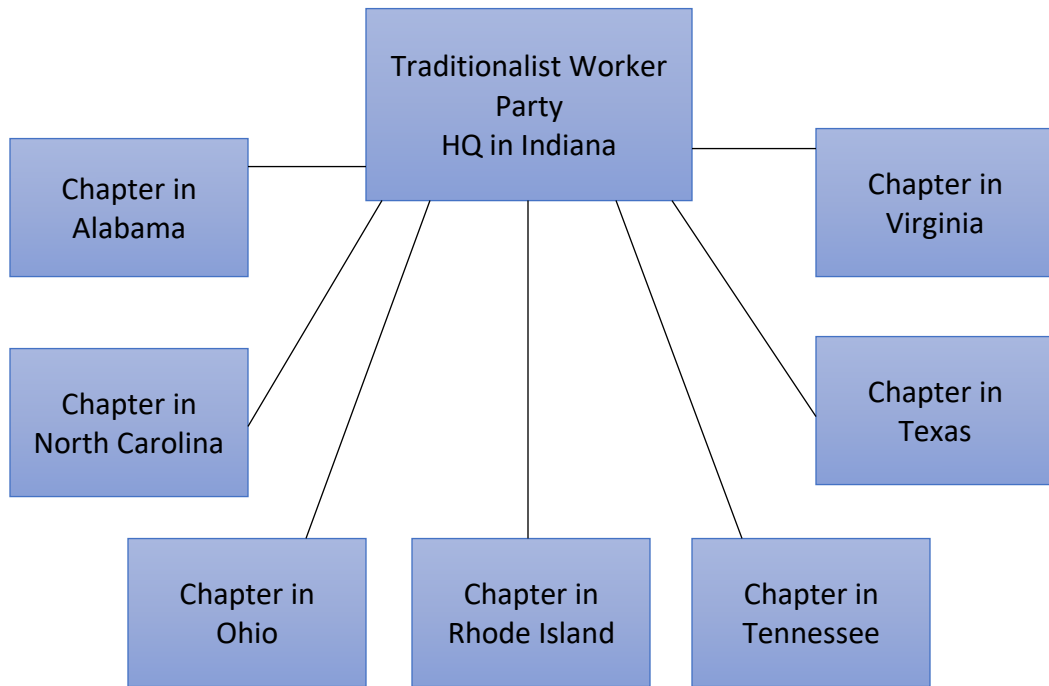
The below link networks represent the organizational structure of neo-Nazi organizations. If there is a known central headquarters (HQ) of a group, it is represented at the top of the network with its linked chapters below it. If there are multiple chapters, but none are known to report to each other, they will be linked adjacent to one another or represented as a triangle formation for multiple chapters in which none are known to report to each other. Below are link networks of neo-Nazi Groups operating across multiple states:

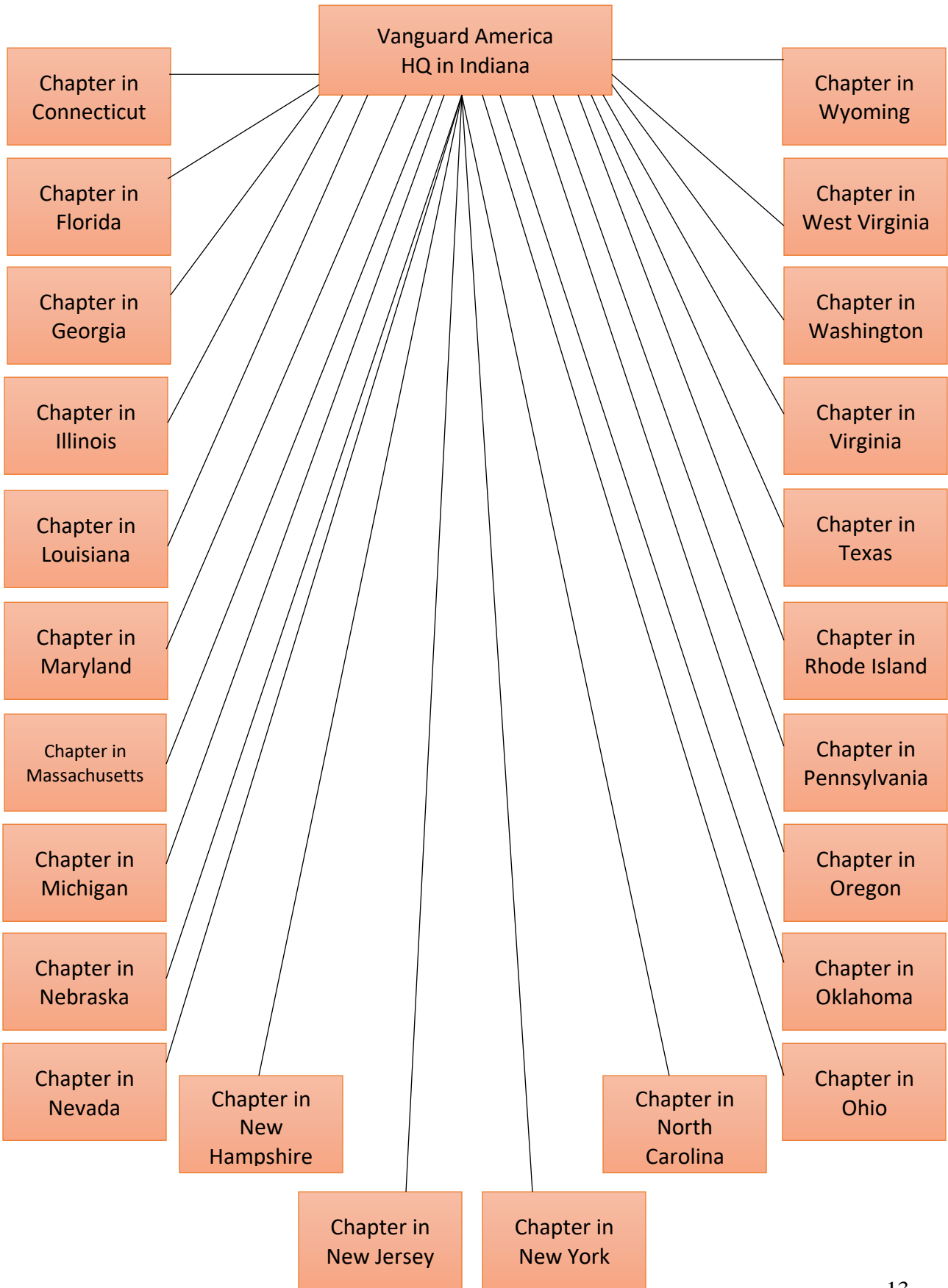












*Waging a War of Information: Countering neo-Nazi Ideology in the United States*

As can be observed, the structures of the individual groups with chapters spread across multiple states varies greatly. There appears to be no clear indication that neo-Nazi groups have formed their organizations based on similar mindsets or shared strategic objectives.

The largest of organizations with multiple chapters in multiple states (Vanguard America and the National Socialist Movement) utilize a loosely centralized structure with each group having a headquarters that is tasked with disseminating propaganda and recruiting individuals into their ranks. Even amongst the largest neo-Nazi groups, the ability or desire to maintain a structured, top-down hierarchy appears limited.

*Geographic breakdown of known headquarters for neo-Nazi groups operating in multiple states:*

Out of the list of neo-Nazi groups, many of the known organizations that operate across multiple states have a central headquarters that has been identified. Below are states that host a headquarters for a neo-Nazi group:

- Illinois (2)
- Indiana (2)
- Michigan (2)
- Ohio (1)
- Pennsylvania (1)



Figure 3 Map retrieved from Rosenberg (2018) <https://www.thoughtco.com/smallest-states-in-the-united-states-4071971>

It is interesting to note that 4 out of the 5 states that host multiple neo-Nazi groups operating in multiple states are in the Midwest, while the fifth state (Pennsylvania) is geographically connected to the Midwest. This counters the incorrect narrative by many that Nazism is a problem most concentrated in southern states. This also highlights the difference between groups that identify as neo-Nazi versus groups that have more of a white supremacist basis that are supplemented with select aspects of Nazism.

*Waging a War of Information: Countering neo-Nazi Ideology in the United States*

Below is a map, taken from the Southern Poverty Law Center's 'Hate Map', that shows known neo-Nazi group's locations spread across the United States.



Figure 4 Photo represents neo-Nazi groups operating in the United States, Source: Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed December 2018

*Neo-Nazi groups operating as sources of Nazi information, propaganda, clothing, and News:*

There are select organizations that cater to spreading Nazi ideology through various methods. Methods for the spread of the ideology come from the following:

- Creativity Movement
- Daily Stormer
- Vanguard News Network
- Wolfhook Life Clothing
- Third Reich Books
- PzG, Inc.
- NS Publications

These groups handle propaganda, news, clothing, books and other written material. While it is easy for one to fall into the trap of dismissing media neo-Nazi groups as less of a threat than operational, action-based groups, this is ill-advised. Golden Dawn, a neo-Nazi group in Greece, found its roots around a neo-Nazi magazine in the 1980s. The group would go on to become an official political party in Greece in the early 1990s. By 2013, the group polled politically between 11% and 12 % in national surveys (World Jewish Congress, 2013). This is just one example of how a media group can transform relatively quickly into a powerful operational movement.

## **Analysis of Group Structures**

For simplicity purposes, the neo-Nazi groups operating in America will be broken down into two sub-group types; centralized groups and decentralized groups. Both types of groups represent unique concerns and should be taken as potential threats for violent terror attacks. For the sake of this research, lone wolves will be discussed as a sub-section of decentralized groups.

### *Centralized Groups:*

Structures of centralized groups can vary greatly. However, represented in all centralized groups is a command-and-control structure, which can vary in how strictly this structure is followed.

Several of the neo-Nazi groups have a “headquarters” as documented in the group charts above. Being deemed a headquarters signifies that the chapter is at the top or at least near the top of the particular neo-Nazi group’s command-and-control structure.

Centralized groups have both benefits and shortcomings in their operational lives. Having a command-and-control structure allows groups to coordinate and plan activities, pulling together human capital, monetary funds, and ideas. For neo-Nazi media groups, having a centralized structure, even a loosely centralized structure, allows for greater capabilities to disseminate propaganda and information.

However, having a centralized structure of operation does create some drawbacks, namely in operational security. Through link analysis, centralized groups are often easily identified and tracked. If law enforcement entities were to be tipped off to a potential attack, a centralized group would be easily identified and surveilled, leading to far less likely abilities to successfully carry out an attack.

### *Decentralized Groups and lone wolf actors:*

Decentralized is a large and somewhat generalized term to describe a group that does not have a clear command-and-control structure. Like centralized groups, a decentralized group has some natural benefits as well as shortcomings.

Decentralized groups benefit from a certain level of natural operational security as their activities will often leave less of an operational footprint. Decentralized groups often are made up of smaller cells or individuals whom are associated with the group. Plans for violent acts are created within these smaller cells or by individuals and are not often discussed openly across the larger group, as there is far less trust across the structure. Without a leadership structure in place that dictates the actions of the group, internal communications will be limited to generalized propaganda and discussion of rallies or various meetings.

One of the critical shortcomings of decentralized groups comes in their operationally secure choice to operate in smaller cells. These cells limit the ability of these groups to pull significant human and financial resources together when planning violent acts.

Data on lone wolves within the larger neo-Nazi movement is limited. Much more in-depth research has been done on lone wolves whom fall under different extremist ideologies such as Islamic extremism and anarcho-extremism. A lone wolf would fall under a decentralized structure, as while they are ‘alone’ in their actions, they have likely been connected via some

means to the larger movement. This has become a well discussed topic in the wake of the Islamic State's online media presence and their ability to radicalize individuals remotely to the point of carrying out violent acts. These individuals are 'alone' but are still connected through their shared ideologies with the larger movement. They may even receive online guidance on attack tactics or methods to acquire funds or weapons. For this reason, research still connects lone wolves to the disorganized group structure. Like other disorganized groups, lone wolves have limitations and benefits. A lone wolf can practice strong operational security as long as they are capable of concealing their intentions and not drawing too much attention via their presence in any online blogs/forums or social media pages. Lone wolves do not have to worry about an accomplice being arrested and confessing to their desired plot. Where lone wolves lack, however, is their ability to have logistical support for their planned actions. All the work of their plan must be carried out by one person and their training may likely be limited to what they can access online.

*Summary:*

The end of World War II coupled with the founding of the American Nazi Party under George Lincoln Rockwell in 1959, ultimately led to the growth of the neo-Nazi movement within the United States. Nazi ideologies spread across the country, with white supremacist groups utilizing Nazi sub-narratives and symbols. Books such as *Mein Kampf* and *The Turner Diaries* influenced these groups and individuals, inspiring them to carry out violent attacks, including Oklahoma City Bomber Timothy McVeigh. The Order, a neo-Nazi terrorist group that operated between 1983 and 1984, was believed to be partially inspired by *The Turner Diaries*.

Many wrongfully believe that neo-Nazi groups are concentrated in the southern U.S. region, while most neo-Nazi group headquarters are actually located in the Midwest (Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio). The largest neo-Nazi chapters, The National Socialist Movement and Vanguard America, utilize loosely centralized structures, with each group having a headquarters tasked with disseminating propaganda and recruiting individuals into their ranks. While this loosely centralized structure allows for more efficient communication and information dissemination, this structure also makes these chapters easier for law enforcement to track and identify members. In centralized networks, members are more connected, and may all be tied to the same central leader. Power and decision-making capabilities are concentrated at the top of the organization and information is able to be spread throughout the entire group rather quickly.

Decentralized chapters allow for groups to adapt to their local context and make decisions based on their surroundings. These networks are typically broken into smaller cells with each cell being responsible for their own operational activities. Due to the fact that there are multiple decision-making bodies within decentralized groups, it is more difficult for law enforcement to track operations and communications of the group.

General counter-narrative campaigns aimed at delegitimizing the neo-Nazi ideology while also presenting the risks to individual members are necessary in order to prevent future vulnerable individuals from becoming radicalized and joining one of the many chapters across the U.S. It is clear that the Midwest hosts multiple neo-Nazi groups operating in multiple states, suggesting that a targeted campaign within that region could be successful. Understanding the demographics of the neo-Nazi movement and identifying individuals that may be vulnerable to radicalization is also another critical aspect to establishing an effective counter-narrative strategy.

## **Demographic analysis of the areas where neo-Nazi groups are located**

As was mentioned in the previous section, neo-Nazi groups are at times concentrated. In order to better understand the capabilities for neo-Nazi groups, analysis must be conducted that examines the demographics of the areas in which the neo-Nazi movement has support (even if limited). This section will focus on the states that house the headquarters of multi-state neo-Nazi groups. The demographic analysis in this section is not exhaustive, however, it may lead to a clearer image of the operating environments in which the modern Nazi movement finds itself in. The demographics highlighted were chosen to reflect factors that are often associated with various ethnic superiority extremist ideologies. Race, immigrant communities, economic well-being, and education are the primary focus of this section as one would reasonably believe that these may contribute to the radicalization process. The demographic ranges between the various states will then be compared to the national demographic census to examine any potential connections.

Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania are the headquarters of neo-Nazi groups that operate across multiple states. All demographic data has been accessed from the United States Census (2019) website.

### Illinois:

- Population: 12,741,080
- Race
  - Caucasian: 77.1%
  - Black or African American: 14.6%
  - Asian: 5.7%
  - Hispanic: 17.3%
- Foreign Born Persons: 14%
- Education background
  - High school graduate or higher: 88.6%
  - Bachelor's degree or higher: 33.4%
- Income/Poverty
  - Median household income: \$61,229
  - Persons in Poverty: 12.6%

### Indiana:

- Population: 6,691,878
- Race
  - Caucasian: 85.4%
  - Black or African American: 9.7%
  - Asian: 2.4%
  - Hispanic: 2.1%
- Foreign Born Persons: 5%
- Education background
  - High school graduate or higher: 88.3%
  - Bachelor's degree or higher: 25.3%
- Income/Poverty



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- Median household income: \$52,182
- Persons in Poverty: 13.5%

Michigan

- Population: 9,995,915
- Race
  - Caucasian: 79.4%
  - Black or African American: 14.1%
  - Asian: 3.2%
  - Hispanic: 5.1%
- Foreign Born Persons: 6.6%
- Education background
  - High school graduate or higher: 90.2%
  - Bachelor's degree or higher: 28.1%
- Income/Poverty
  - Median household income: \$52,668
  - Persons in Poverty: 14.2%

Ohio

- Population: 11,689,442
- Race
  - Caucasian: 82.2%
  - Black or African American: 12.9%
  - Asian: 2.3%
  - Hispanic: 3.8%
- Foreign Born Persons: 4.3%
- Education background
  - High school graduate or higher: 89.8%
  - Bachelor's degree or higher: 27.2%
- Income/Poverty
  - Median household income: \$52,407
  - Persons in Poverty: 14.0%

Pennsylvania

- Population: 12,807,060
- Race
  - Caucasian: 82.1%
  - Black or African American: 11.9%
  - Asian: 3.6%
  - Hispanic: 7.3%
- Foreign Born Persons: 6.6%
- Education background
  - High school graduate or higher: 89.9%
  - Bachelor's degree or higher: 30.1%
- Income/Poverty
  - Median household income: \$56,951
  - Persons in Poverty: 12.5%

Out of the five states discussed, the demographics fall within the following range, and they are compared to national averages (**in bold print**):

- Population: 6,691,878 - 12,807,060
- Race
  - Caucasian: 77.1% - 85.4% (**76.6%**)
  - Black or African American: 9.7% - 14.6% (**13.4%**)
  - Asian: 2.3% - 5.7% (**5.8%**)
  - Hispanic: 2.1% - 17.3% (**18.1%**)
- Foreign Born Persons: 4.3% - 14% (**13.4%**)
- Education background
  - High school graduate or higher: 88.3% - 90.2% (**87.3%**)
  - Bachelor's degree or higher: 25.3% - 33.4% (**30.9%**)
- Income/Poverty
  - Median household income: \$52,182 - \$61,289 (**\$57,652**)
  - Persons in Poverty: 12.5% - 14.2% (**12.3%**)

In comparison to national averages, the five states that house the headquarters of some of the largest neo-Nazi groups are generally normal. The only areas in which the range of the five states falls outside of the national average are in percentage of the population that is White/Caucasian, high school educated individuals, and the Persons in Poverty. The five states analyzed have a range in which there is a higher percentage of White/Caucasian persons amongst the population in comparison to national averages. High school graduates (or higher) in the five states represent a slightly larger amount of the population than the national average. The percentage of persons in poverty in the five states is higher than national averages.

Without making too broad of judgements based on this limited demographic profile, there does appear to be a larger population of White/Caucasian individuals who have at least basic education, who are still living in poverty in the states where larger neo-Nazi groups are headquartered. While the difference in these states are not substantial, they are worth noting as potential contributing factors towards the larger presence of neo-Nazi groups in these areas.

It should be observed that the ranges noted in the examined states are not substantially beyond the national average but nonetheless do demonstrate a notable difference.

*Summary:*

In conclusion, it has been found that among the five states that house headquarters of the largest neo-Nazi groups, there are only three areas in which they fall out of range of the national average. These areas are percentage of population that is White/Caucasian, high school educated individuals, and the Persons in Poverty. These ranges tell us that there is a higher percentage of White/Caucasian individuals that are at least high school educated and are still living in poverty. This suggests that individuals who are vulnerable to neo-Nazi ideology may fall into these categories and should be noted as potential recruitment targets for these neo-Nazi groups.

## **Understanding neo-Nazi ideology**

If one had to simplify the driving factors behind neo-Nazi and Nazi ideology, one would focus on race conspiracy and religious conspiracy. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (2007) described Hitler's pseudo-scientific approach to understanding the complexities of the world. Hitler believed that one's personal abilities, attitudes, and behavior were pre-determined by their racial makeup. Hitler, and those who followed Nazism, believed that all races and peoples had certain traits that would be spread one generation to the next and that these traits could not be overcome. Due to occultist ideals and belief in elements of Norse mythology (discussed further below), Hitler believed that he and the bulk of the Germanic people were descendants of a superior racial makeup that sat atop the other races and peoples. The belief in this superior race, which has been infamously designated as the Aryan race, still resonates amongst the modern neo-Nazi movement. No race was more hated by Hitler than that of the Jewish people, who he did not recognize as a faith, instead viewing it simply as a race of people. Hitler further associated territorial control with the right for a race to exist. When the Romans removed the Jewish peoples from Israel, this should have begun the gradual extinction of the race. However, because the Jewish people had not become extinct, Hitler reasoned that they must have learned to exist on the fringes of society. The only way that this was possible, according to Hitler, was that traits such as deceitfulness and deviousness allowed the Jewish race to survive. These conspiratorial and anti-Semitic beliefs are still present amongst the neo-Nazi movement.

Many who follow neo-Nazi ideologies believe that there is a global Jewish conspiracy in which a secretive plot is underway, ultimately resulting in global Jewish domination.

Golden Dawn, a neo-Nazi political party in Greece which was discussed earlier in this research, provides an example of socio-economic vulnerabilities that feed into neo-Nazi groups recruitment. In 2009, Golden Dawn polled at only .29 percent of the vote in Greece. This was prior to when the effects of economic downturn in the country became fully felt (World Jewish Congress, 2013). The group pulled in double-digits only four years later, providing a strong case that economic crisis in a country will help drive extremist neo-Nazi ideology support.

National identity represents another area in which we see neo-Nazi ideology capitalize on perceived marginalization. Internationally, many have felt the struggle of self-identity in the shifting national borders and power structures in the last century. A case example would be in Hungary, where the once powerful Austro-Hungarian Empire has now been reduced and has left some in the country to seek fulfillment of their proud national identity. Jobbik, originally formed as a youth organization, has gone on to become a full political movement, capturing 16.7 percent of the national vote in 2010's elections in Hungary (World Jewish Congress, 2013). Jobbik has not fully embraced white supremacy like many other neo-Nazi groups, portraying a more fundamentalist Nazi ideology. Officials from the Jobbik political party have utilized anti-Semitic propaganda and compared their struggle in Hungary to that of the Palestinian territories, fighting the perceived global Jewish conspiracy. Jobbik has also come out in support of Iran and several other non-western countries, showing a clear belief that is more representative of original Nazism as opposed to neo-Nazi groups whom have morphed with white supremacist groups around the world.

Traditional Nazism was often associated with occultism and, to a degree, other mythologies, namely some elements of Norse mythology. This has been reflected by a portion of the modern neo-Nazi movement where variations of Odinism are increasingly common. It is important to note that not all followers of Odinism are neo-Nazis or even white supremacists.

Introduced into the U.S. prison system in the 1980s, Ásatrú or the polytheist religion that follows various Norse gods, can be described as a subset or closely related religious following to Odinism (Weber, 2018). Often, those practicing Ásatrú refer to it as or use Odinism interchangeably. The introduction of Odinism into the U.S. prison system corresponded with rising neo-Nazi/white supremacy groups operating within the confines of prisons and jails across the nation. This can reasonably be observed as the origin of Odinism being found in modern neo-Nazi groups. Not surprisingly, elements of Norse mythology appeared in the beliefs of the Nazi hierarchy in the Third Reich.

The appeal of Odinism for neo-Nazism is the façade of the idealistic northern European, hypermasculine males who are believed to be the descendants of the Vikings (Weber, 2018). This allows neo-Nazi groups to exploit claims of racial purity and strengthen these ideas along religious lines.

The Christian Identity movement has a long history, beyond its connection with modern neo-Nazism. Where the movement really began to become associated with neo-Nazism was in the United States under prominent neo-Nazi Gerald L. K. Smith (Anti-Defamation League, n.d). Smith really developed and spread the “two-seed” theory within the movement. Smith taught that Cain, being the product of a sexual seduction between Eve and the Serpent in Eden, was the start of the Jewish people and faith (Anti-Defamation League, n.d). Based on this, Smith believed that all members of the Jewish faith are descendants of the devil. On the other side of Eden, Adam and Eve’s son, Abel, led to the founding of white Europe. This narrative fits smoothly into the anti-Semitic ideals of Nazism and further enforces them along religious lines. In the 1970s, one of these Christian Identity groups, the Church of Jesus Christ Christian, moved to Idaho and was rebranded as the Aryan Nations. The Aryan Nations was a highly influential white supremacist and neo-Nazi group that many modern groups have been influenced by. This has resulted in a continuing belief in parts of the Christian Identity movement amongst neo-Nazi groups.

Odinism and Christian Identity can be linked to traditional Nazi beliefs throughout the Nazi party’s existence. However, modern neo-Nazism has been partially morphed with other extremist ideologies that less closely align with traditional Nazi ideology. White nationalism and relevant race-based extremist ideologies are now associated with neo-Nazism. While the extremist ideologies share some common traits, they are theoretically distinct from one another. The combining of ideologies started decades ago and were a source of divide amongst the American Nazi Party, originally founded by George Lincoln Rockwell and discussed in further depth earlier in this research. It is now common to see members of the Ku Klux Klan holding Nazi flags or even being marked with Nazi tattoos.

This phenomenon can partially be attributed to lackluster recruitment capabilities amongst both neo-Nazi groups and white supremacy groups. The ‘Aryan’ image of traditional Nazism is actually quite difficult to fulfill, with relatively few individuals meeting the standards that the Nazi party laid out. This hampered the neo-Nazi groups of the United States from recruitment and perhaps led to increasing reliance on unifying with white supremacist groups. The differences go both ways between neo-Nazi groups and select white supremacy groups. For example, the Ku Klux Klan’s stated objective is the purification of American society. Neo-Nazi groups in the United States desire a Fourth Reich to rise in the country and restore the Germanic/Aryan empire. Without oversimplifying this extremist ideology, this alone creates a sharp contrast in what each group seeks to accomplish.

The combining of multiple extremist ideologies creates unique opportunities to exploit vulnerabilities in the narrative of neo-Nazi groups. Purposed strategies are discussed later in this

research, but it should be noted that due to the complexity and contradictions in place in the modern neo-Nazi movement, creating divide amongst the movement should be plausible.

## **Insights from the field: Interviews with former neo-Nazis**

In furtherance of understanding neo-Nazi ideology and potential strategies to counter the narrative that they produce, interviews were conducted with former neo-Nazi movement followers. In this section, a summary of the findings from these interviews is discussed as well as a brief background of the individuals interviewed to provide context.

Due to the limited scope of the interviews, the insights below should be viewed as qualitative information and not as an attempt at collecting quantitative data. The questions asked in these interviews were often similar, but questions were also asked regarding the particular history of the individual. Prior to participating in the interviews, the questions were sent to the interviewees. The purpose of this was to provide them with the context of questioning and foster a more fluid conversation. For the sake of transparent research, the questions asked are provided in the Appendix section at the end of this report.

### **Interview 1: Elizabeth Moore (Appendix A)**

Elizabeth Moore was born in Scarborough, Canada. Looking back on it, Moore states that she is surprised she became radicalized towards these ideologies. Being an only child in a middle-class family, the early part of her life was relatively normal. Growing up with various food allergies and asthma, Moore was restricted in what activities she could participate in as a child. Her family was financially stable, but Moore acknowledged that her father was a functioning alcoholic. Her father never became violent towards the family, but his behavior left him essentially absent from her upbringing. At the time, Moore states that there was not a lot of information available about emotional abuse or neglect. Moore's view of a perfect family often came from seeing families on television, ultimately leading to an underlying belief that she had done something wrong and that she was the problem.

Things began to change for Moore in high school. Moore began to feel several frustrations with various aspects of life. Having become the subject of intense bullying, Moore grew increasingly angry and desperate. This corresponded with a changing demographic in her area, as she described, "it went from being nearly 75% white students to the opposite by the time I graduated high school". One day after a social sciences course, Moore was walking home with a fellow student, a German-immigrant, who she had befriended. On this walk, Moore became the target of particularly harsh physical bullying and the perpetrators referenced Moore's race as the reason for the abuse. Her new friend listened intently as Moore described her pain and frustration, having been the target of bullying because of her white skin color. Moore wanted to know why these bullies got away with treating her this way. Her friend echoed back her frustrations and presented a helping hand. He reached into his backpack and retrieved propaganda flyers for the group The Heritage Front. The Heritage Front, at the time, was a major neo-Nazi and white supremacist group in Canada. After acknowledging her concerns, her friend stated that The Heritage Front was a lobbyist group that was trying to help people like her in

their struggles. It was here that Moore first became introduced to the concept of a Euro-Canadian way of life, and how minorities were trying to destroy it. Moore took the flyers and shortly thereafter began to call the hotline phone number for the group to get the latest news updates for the group and overall movement. Not long after, Moore was receiving magazines of propaganda and her further belief in the movement began.

At first, Moore's involvement in the movement was relatively limited to simply hanging out with skinheads. Surprisingly, what led to Moore becoming a real activist in the movement was misogyny. While reading propaganda articles, she stumbled upon a writing by David Lane of the neo-Nazi group, The Order. Moore did not know who Lane was at the time. In it, Lane described white women as being disloyal to their race. Lane went as far as to suggest that women needed to be returned to their rightful place within the race by persuasion – or by force. At the time, Moore did not realize that Lane was writing from prison, all she knew was that Lane was of the infamous group, The Order.

Angered by the article, Moore wrote to the magazine's editor to voice her opinions and concerns; Moore did not expect what was to come. Another member of The Order, Gary Lee Yarbrough, read Moore's letter and was impressed. This individual wrote a letter to Moore, indicating how good he thought her letter was. Due to positive feedback stemming from Moore's letter, The Heritage Front decided it wanted her to begin to contribute to the magazine on a regular basis. This was the hook for Moore; She found a movement in which she felt valued and important. Her pieces for the magazine discussed a range of topics from ongoing court cases to other news worthy stories relevant to the movement.

In college, Moore described herself as something of a campus agitator, driving her further and further into the ideals of neo-Nazism and white supremacy. Consumed with her role within this movement, Moore began to feel more strongly that she was indeed doing important work that would make a difference. This furthering of belief in the movement was aided by a continued culture of urgency fostered by The Heritage Front – action needed to be taken and it needed to be taken now. Even when faced with expulsion from her university, Moore held firm that she was on the right side of things.

The process towards de-radicalization was slow and painful for Moore. The Heritage Front and the overall movement had consumed her entire life. Seeing life through a racist lens, it dictated what clothes she wore, what media she consumed, who she associated with, even what food she ate; It was non-stop. At the time, Moore was being followed around for a documentary that would air on television across Canada. The Heritage Front saw Moore as a young, well-spoken, female rising star and recommended her to be the spokesperson for the group in the documentary. As filming went on, Moore became more and more comfortable with the film crew and began to develop personal connections. During conversations with these new connections, the crew would ask her questions about her beliefs and ideals. Now separated from movement members, Moore began to consider her own accountability for her personal actions. She began to consider other perspectives and feelings, something that had disappeared as her involvement in neo-Nazism and white supremacy grew. This was the beginning of the gradual chipping away at her involvement in the movement. As Moore began looking at herself and her actions, she became dissatisfied with how she was carrying herself, seeing that she had been acting in a way that was so inconsistent with her beliefs prior to joining the movement.

Then came a shock to The Heritage Front. It was revealed that Grant Bristow, a member of the group, had been a mole for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS). Grant had become influential in the movement and it was quite embarrassing for the group. At a party

shortly after the reveal of Bristow, Moore was listening to other members discuss the revelation. Suddenly, group leaders were stating the Bristow was actually responsible for all the bad things that The Heritage Front was associated with, particularly illegal activities. Moore had always defended the group, stating that they did not participate in illegal activities or crimes. The group's leader's discussion about Bristow led her to realize that they had indeed known about, and likely were involved in, the criminal activities the group had been accused of. Moore began to look around the party, at the bizarre assortment of neo-Nazis present. There were elderly grandparents, hardened skinheads, college students, strippers, and children of some of the members. Looking at this odd collection, Moore realized that the only thing that any of them had in common was hate.

Moore struggled with disentangling herself from the movement and her life in it. One day, Moore reached out to a representative of the Canadian Jewish Congress and requested to speak. The representative, Bernie Farber, agreed to meet and speak with her. A powerful trip with this individual brought Moore to a nearby Holocaust memorial. There, the representative showed her pictures of children killed at Auschwitz and asked her a simple question; what did this child have to do with the Jewish conspiracies that the Nazis would claim? It was a painful but important moment for Moore, she stated "how do you even come to terms with yourself when you promote such lies, hate, such as Holocaust denial?"

She was now ready to move on, but it would prove to be difficult to return to an even somewhat normal life. Moore was well known on her college campus and not in a good way. Someone even tried to hit her with a car on one occasion. This treatment was not helped when the documentary finally aired on national television. By the time of its airing, she had already left the movement, but this was only covered briefly in the film. It had been less than two months since she had left the movement, not nearly enough time to explain to people that she was no longer involved. This forced Moore back into the light, this time in an effort to explain herself and her actions. She wanted to make sure that she would make a difference, educating people about what The Heritage Front was really about and speaking out against neo-Nazism and white supremacy.

Moore did not have access to any literature regarding the de-radicalization process at the time. It was a constant struggle, dealing with her own grief as well as struggling to make a new life for herself. Moore acknowledged that she never believed in Odinism or Christian Identity, which could have made her de-radicalization process more difficult.

When Moore was asked about a counter-narrative strategy, she stated that there is no single narrative that will change everyone. Everyone in life comes from different backgrounds with different perspectives. Moore believes that as a society we need to focus on kids and young people, but even some adults. Through counseling, therapy, school activities, and other things that will help address the issues that lead someone to becoming vulnerable to recruitment into these ideologies, Moore believes we can make the biggest difference. In discussing countering neo-Nazism, Moore did acknowledge that we need to address the myths and lies that the Nazi platform is based on. Moore referenced that there was no narrative or messaging taking place that educated her and the countless people who became radicalized towards neo-Nazism about the immigration wave that she struggled to adjust to growing up. The Heritage Front, and other neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups, take advantage of the frustrations felt by some in times like this to spread their myths and lies, leading to further recruitment. To summarize, Moore believes that a strong counter-strategy must involve presenting a myth present in neo-Nazism, and then presenting the truth.

Moore now is an active public speaker, speaking out against hate and extremism. The film *White Lies* is partially based on her experience in The Heritage Front. For further information on her, visit her website <https://onemooreliz.com>

## Interview 2: Christian Picciolini (Appendix B)

Christian Picciolini is an author, public speaker, producer and former neo-Nazi and white supremacist. He was involved in the movement from 1987 until 1996.

Picciolini stated that he tracks his path towards radicalism to the day he was born. Citing real or perceived incidents where he felt marginalized, the radicalization process happened somewhat naturally. Being born to Italian immigrant parents, Picciolini grew up with his parents mostly working, leaving him to attempt to process the world and all its stresses without much parental guidance. Picciolini often turned to music for comfort, with his favorite music being punk rock.

Growing up in an Italian-American immigrant bubble on the south side of Chicago, Picciolini referenced incidents of bullying that made him question his identity and questioned the ideals of the community in which he was raised. A continuous breakdown of everything he knew, accompanied by incidents of bullying and increasing feelings of being marginalized within society led to a potentially vulnerable youth.

One day, Picciolini was smoking in an alleyway in Blue Island, a city on the south side of Chicago. A man approached him, removed the joint from his mouth and stated that the Jews and communists wanted him to engage in this type of frowned upon behavior. In the man's spiel, he informed Picciolini that his ancestors were great warriors and began to insert the foundations of neo-Nazism and white supremacy at a time that he deeply desired a new community to identify with. Picciolini felt as though this man was the first person to provide him real attention. Interestingly, in hindsight, Picciolini believes that it did not matter what ideal the man was preaching at this point. As was mentioned earlier, his path towards radicalism began at birth. This man was simply the first vessel carrying extremist ideology to reach the vulnerable Picciolini. Craving a sense of purpose, this pushed Picciolini to dive head first into the neo-Nazi and white supremacist movement.

Picciolini was actively involved in furthering the spread of neo-Nazi ideology through his participation in punk rock music that espoused the movement. When asked if he believed neo-Nazi music still served as an important method for spreading the movement's ideals, he stated that he did not believe it factored in as much in today's world. During his time in the movement, CDs and concerts were powerful propaganda tools. The concerts that featured groups that supported neo-Nazi ideology would happen a couple of times each year and neo-Nazis from all over the nation would attend. These concerts would become pep rallies and professional networking events for the movement. With the advent of the internet, these events began to fade in their importance; Internet chatrooms now serve as the neo-Nazi concerts of old.

A successful counter-narrative strategy, in Picciolini's opinion, is not so much a strategy that seeks to counter the narrative of the neo-Nazi movement but a strategy that makes an emotional plea to the individual. According to Picciolini, individuals who are radicalized towards extremism are not in the right state of mind and their ideology cannot be questioned in an effective way to walk back their extremism. An indirect path towards deradicalization is required to defeat the neo-Nazi narrative.



In fact, Picciolini prefers to use the term *disengagement*, as opposed to the more often used deradicalization. Picciolini now leads the Free Radicals Project, an organization that helps to aid in the *disengagement* of individuals from extremist groups. The Free Radicals Project is currently balancing almost 400 requests for interventions from family members, friends, or simple bystanders of individuals who have become radicalized. In his efforts to aid extremists in their exit from the movement, he believes that the focus should be getting the individual to invest their energy into something positive. He calls his process the “Seven L’s”:

- Link
- Listen
- Learn
- Leverage
- List
- Love
- Live

Beginning with linking with the individual, Picciolini seeks to guide them through the process and to reidentify and reengage with a more positive life.

Since leaving the movement and becoming actively involved in trying to get others out, Picciolini believes his largest difficulty has been leveraging communities to provide support networks in which the *disengaged* individual can link to.

For more information about Christian Picciolini and the Free Radicals Project, see the below links:

<https://www.christianpicciolini.com>

<https://www.freeradicals.org>

## **Information Warfare Against non-State Actors**

In a bit of irony, one believed origin of the term ‘psychological warfare’ stems from the German phrase *Weltanschauungskrieg*, which translates to ‘worldview warfare’ (Hamiti, 2016). This term was used by the Nazis during the second World War to define propaganda, terror, and government pressure to further the Third Reich’s ideology. The history of psychological warfare dates back to the beginning of human combat, but nonetheless, the influence of Nazism on the American understanding of psychological warfare is without doubt. In this section, the conceptual understandings of psychological and information warfare are discussed in order to establish a foundation in which counter-narrative strategies can be structured around.

Throughout history, the use of force to coerce behavior has been found to be ineffective and subsequently leads to additional problems. As an alternative to the use of force, Bates and Mooney (2014) describe psychological operations (PSYOP) as plans to convey selected information to influence emotions, motives, and behaviors of targeted groups and individuals. Psychological operations is a crucial element to combatting extremism due to the fact that every conflict has a psychological dimension. Economic sanctions, threat of military force, loss of external support, and group defections all take psychological tolls on extremist groups. Bates and Mooney (2014) present three types of psychological operations:

- Tactical
- Strategic
- Consolidation

In Bates and Mooney's (2014) research, tactical psychological operations are the targeting of specific groups in an effort to get them to perform specific actions that will impact a specific situation. Strategic psychological operations represent a broader campaign of information that targets a far larger population with a far larger goal of influencing that population going forward. Consolidation psychological operations involves not only consolidating the gains won from psychological operations but also deciding on future policy or action in order to take full advantage of those gains. Perhaps more important than the classification of psychological operations is the propaganda that is produced. Bates and Mooney (2014) present three types of propaganda used in psychological operations:

- White
- Gray
- Black

Bates and Mooney's (2014) categorization of propaganda demonstrates the strategic decision that must be made as to how to present information that will go on to counter neo-Nazi ideology. White propaganda is attributed, accurately, to the source of the propaganda. Gray propaganda is unattributed information and efforts are made to conceal the source of the information. Black propaganda is falsely attributed to another source in an effort to cause that source embarrassment, damage its prestige, or undermine its credibility. In order to effectively disseminate propaganda to a targeted group, counterterrorism professionals must have an effective strategy. Post (2005) discusses a 5-phase strategy for conducting psychological operations against terror groups, which includes:

- Inhibiting potential terrorists from joining a group
- Producing dissension within groups
- Facilitating exit from said groups
- Reducing support for groups and their leaders
- Insulating the target audience, the public, from the intended goals of the terrorists

In the first phase, discrediting radical belief systems is vital to preventing a vulnerable individual from joining an extremist group or becoming self-radicalized. Post (2005) mentions a particular concern during the second phase that should be remembered throughout a campaign against neo-Nazi groups: *When an extremist group feels attacked, it often will galvanize its ranks and push the group towards a stronger sense of unity.* This obviously would run counter to the initial goal of sowing the seeds of tearing the group apart. Distrust, dissent, and discrediting the group from the inside must not appear like an all-out attack from an exterior actor, otherwise the campaign will fail. This is particularly true of neo-Nazi ideology in which there is already a strong belief that a Jewish conspiracy is seeking to secretly control the world. Under an onslaught of information coming at a neo-Nazi group from an outside entity, the group would likely attempt to turn this around and state that it is further proof of the "ZOG" trying to

eliminate resistance. Counter-Terrorism professionals must be aware of this concern when disseminating counter-propaganda.

Post's fifth and final phase requires a coordinated information campaign in order to separate the target audience from the terrorists' narrative. Post (2005) also discusses the importance of implementing psychological operations early on, as it is a long process that requires a great deal of planning. Dörtbudak (2008) delves deeper into the planning of psychological operations, breaking it into several stages, namely:

- Concept of Operations
- Definition of target groups
- Clear definition of objectives
- General thematic guidance for objective
- Injunctions or prohibitions in themes
- Timetable and or schedule of plan
- Definitive instructions for operatives involved

Dörtbudak (2008) explains that psychological operations are intentionally planned and executed, whereas psychological effects brought about by other operations are not categorized as psychological operations. After this initial planning phase, Dörtbudak (2008) states that analysis must be done of the target audience and development of the design of the psychological product must be completed. By identifying the vulnerabilities of the target audience, an effective psychological operations strategy can be developed. Both phases must occur prior to the production of material and start of dissemination. Terror group's motivations, radicalization, recruitment & conversion processes, goals, strategies, and structure are all crucial pieces of the intelligence collection process that are necessary to effectively produce psychological operations in counterterrorism.

### **The Digital Domain in Psychological Operations**

The digital domain in psychological operations became a major battleground on the global stage in the years since the attacks of 9/11. Al Qaeda kick started social media utilization in its own war of information and the Islamic State brought this war to a whole new level with a highly sophisticated, and successful, information campaign. As was noted earlier, there are numerous neo-Nazi media groups operating in the United States. None of them represent the sophistication that has been observed with the Islamic State's media department, however, efforts must be made now to prevent them from gaining momentum and hence sophistication.

Dörtbudak (2008) explains that the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime identified six areas in which terrorists use the internet to advance their cause. These areas include:

- Propaganda (Recruitment, Incitement, Radicalization)
- Financing
- Training
- Planning
- Execution
- Cyberattacks

Through web apps such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, terrorist groups are able to spread their ideologies and garner sympathy on a global stage. They will send messages in text, video, and audio form in order to fuel anger in marginalized youth, encouraging them to take action and join their cause. Internet propaganda has also led to the radicalization of lone wolf terrorists, who absorb the information and take action on their own. Terrorist organizations also finance their operations through the internet, operating online stores that sell merchandise, acquiring stolen identities and credit cards, or even through donations to shell corporations. The U.S. has recently begun to crack down on material support of terrorist organizations which is defined as a war crime under the Military Commissions Act of 2006.

There has also been an increase in virtual training, allowing mentors and mentees to connect and form social bonds without meeting face to face. Training handbooks are now easily accessible online, leading to an increase in self-radicalized individuals and lone wolves. The planning and execution of attacks is also simplified through the internet, as terrorists can communicate, observe potential targets, translate pro-jihadist materials, and study step-by-step instructional videos in preparation for an attack. Although the digital domain provides terrorists with an easier way of disseminating information, raising funds, and planning attacks, the cyber footprint left behind by these individuals could allow authorities to interrupt potential plots. In addition, cyberattacks are often aimed at undermining infrastructures or natural resource supplies through viruses, malware, overloading of servers, and hacking.

Online blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Google+, YouTube, Snapchat, Tumblr, and various encrypted sources provide a massive platform for non-state actors to deliver their message (Bates & Mooney, 2014). They allow terrorists to post propaganda easily with minimal regulation or censorship at a low cost. While this is an undeniable fact, it also means that these platforms exist for counter propaganda to be delivered to the same audiences. The internet provides an almost entirely free and limitless channel in which terrorist organizations can recruit, finance, and spread their particular political propaganda (Bates & Mooney, 2014). Neo-Nazi groups have a significant digital footprint, with the Aryan Nation developing a Twitter feed as well as publishing a website that posts pro-racist videos (Dörtbudak, 2008).

These privately-owned companies represent a key ally in the effort to disrupt the dissemination of extremist information. While official government policy is limited in what it can achieve due to free speech, privately owned companies can certainly be encouraged to regulate the information that is being disseminated through their services, particularly information that promotes extremist ideology. Counter-terrorist professionals can also better understand the presence of psychological operations in the digital domain by observing collective behavior (Dörtbudak, 2008). The rise of digital media presents a unique challenge for countering extremist propaganda. Movies, TV shows, video games, blogs, and other social media accounts are being exploited more and more to promote these extremist ideologies and aim to radicalize marginalized youth. The government must work to create a hostile online environment for extremist materials and must empower online communities to self-regulate in order to minimize the spread of extremist propaganda.

## **Psychological & Informational Warfare Strategy to Combat neo-Nazi Groups in the United States: Recommendations**

The narrative approach in which to combat the neo-Nazi movement can be described as strategic with instances of tactical informational/psychological operations. Much of the strategy recommended is based on Post's (2005) research on psychological operations.

Post (2005), as discussed in the previous section, provides that the first phase of a strategy must discredit a narrative so that individuals whom are vulnerable will not be as willing to accept the messaging of the narrative being presented. Below are several recommendations to be used in conjunction with one another or individually:

- Information campaigns to discredit radical Odinism, Christian Identity, and occult teachings of the Third Reich and Nazism
  - Concentrate on the conspiratorial messaging of these ideologies. Show with simple but articulated counter-messaging that these are false.
- Disseminate information that highlights the differences between neo-Nazism and white supremacy
- Disseminate material that presents the risks of joining and taking part in these movements

Post (2005) goes on to caution that when developing dissension within a group, one must be careful not to galvanize its members, as they could feel attacked. In terms of violent extremism, this very well may be what brings a group that espouses violent rhetoric and occasional disorganized incidents of low-level violence to change modus operandi and begin planning violent acts.

- In the first phase, information has been disseminated to show that neo-Nazism and white supremacy are in fact, not compatible with one another
- The information should not be stated in a way that can be taken as mocking or speaking down to the individuals whom are the target audiences of the messaging (neo-Nazis)

Upon sufficient dissent being established within a group, one must facilitate an exit from the group and provide a welcoming community that the individual can join. This can only be done when sufficient breakdowns occur in the ideological beliefs of the individual, which the previous steps seek to accomplish. Programs such as Christian Picciolini's Free Radicals Project represents a perfect example of a source that can be leveraged to facilitate and/or aid such a transition.

- Facilitate public sector/private sector collaborative relationships that seek to develop real solutions to reintegrate individuals into a community
- Public sector financial assistance to non-governmental organizations whose expertise in counter-violent extremism is needed

Once a divide has been placed between neo-Nazi groups and white supremacist groups, both movements should lose strength. For years, the two have fed off each other to make up for low overall recruitment capabilities. But with the two separated, there will be an increasing diminishment of leaders' influence amongst both movements.

- As the leaders' see their influences diminish, open-source research should be used to highlight their past flaws within the movement and any personal hypocritical actions that they have committed that further discredits them and the overall movement
- Any past group actions that fall outside of the espoused ideology that the group believes in should be highlighted to show how hypocritical the group has acted in the past
- This step should be highly concentrated and should be executed by private sector partners and non-governmental organizations that are involved
- The concentration of this section is to target those still holding on within the movement and to make them 'vulnerable' for deradicalization or disengagement from their ideology

As goes the leaders and a significant amount of their followers, so goes the overall movement.

The strategy must be carried out with a close working relationship between the public and private sectors. That being said, it would most likely be carried out successfully if the private sector and non-governmental organizations acted as the face of the operation. Real or perceived government interference or activities involving messaging have not traditionally been successful in removing individuals from an extremist ideology. This is attributed to the conspiratorial claims within these ideologies. With neo-Nazism, the United States government is at best a proxy of the 'Zionist Occupation Government', hence messaging coming from them is easier to discredit. If the messaging strategy is coming from a coordinated effort of multiple sources, it is much more likely to have success.

As was mentioned earlier, and specifically mentioned in the 'Insights from the field' section of this writing, the internet is the current and likely future of extremist communication. For this reason, it will be critical to target this method of communication to disseminate a counter-narrative strategy.

The world was shocked when it observed how easily the Islamic State was utilizing social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to spread their narrative. The techniques used by the Islamic State have been, to a lesser degree, used by other extremist narratives to spread their messaging online as well. The private companies that operate these platforms have begun to take steps to remove profiles and address dissemination tactics utilized by extremist groups, but there may be additional ways they can assist in the effort to counter violent extremism. The Islamic State, for instance, used hashtags to disseminate their propaganda to millions of people around the world within seconds. The companies that operate the social media applications could be used to disseminate counter-narrative information as laid out above in the same method. This would allow them to spread a counter-narrative message to those who have been radicalized or are potentially at-risk of being radicalized.

These social media applications can also assist by utilizing their geo-filters to specifically target the geographic areas in which neo-Nazism is more prevalent. As discussed, the states that house concentrations of neo-Nazi groups can be specifically targeted for increased counter-narrative information to increase the likelihood that our intended audience, neo-Nazis, receive the information.

## **Unintended Consequences of Action**

While the purpose of this research was to develop a foundational understanding of the current state of the neo-Nazi movement as well as the narratives that they espouse in order to develop a strategy to counter these narratives, it should be acknowledged that countering violent extremism is a risk-based endeavor. While well intentioned, successful strategies that impact an ideology may result in consequences that are unintended.

Some of the above-mentioned recommendations highlight the strategy of seeking to divide the neo-Nazi movement. While the recommendations above describe the benefits of such a strategy, a potential consequence would be that those who still follow neo-Nazi ideology become more and more disorganized. The benefits and drawbacks of dealing with such a disorganized extremist group were discussed in the “Neo-Nazi Movement’s Organizational Structure(s): Breakdown and Analysis” section of this report. In summary, this increase in disorganization may result in significantly more difficult surveillance and monitoring of individuals or groups by counter-terrorism organizations and law enforcement.

Another strategy discussed, bridging an ideological gap between neo-Nazism and white supremacy, could in fact create more fanatical followings for one or the other of those distinct extremist ideologies. By highlighting the ideologies of these two groups, individuals may be presented with new and resonating information, making them more vulnerable to radicalization.

## **Conclusion**

This research sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current neo-Nazi movement by exploring the movements history, ideals, and narrative. By establishing these sections, one was able to state how to best counter the neo-Nazi narrative to diminish the current state of the movement as well as reduce their capability to recruit in the future. The strategy outlined above must be done as a true collaborative effort between the United States government, private partners, and non-governmental organizations. As extremism is an issue that transcends the borders between these entities, all parties have a vested interest in committing to countering the narrative spread by such ideologies.

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## Appendix A

Interview questions asked during conversation with Elizabeth Moore

- Prior to being introduced to neo-Nazi and white supremacist extremist ideologies, can you describe briefly your upbringing and childhood?
- How did you first become introduced to the concepts of neo-Nazism and white supremacy?
- After being introduced to these ideologies, can you describe how the radicalization process developed for you?
- Looking back on it, do you feel that there were any vulnerable traits you exhibited that made you more susceptible to being radicalized towards neo-Nazism and white supremacy?
- Do you believe that there are some traits amongst youth that do generally make them more vulnerable to recruitment into such movements?
- I read that you wrote articles for The Heritage Front’s website, what kind of narrative was this group trying to spread? Were you directed to write a certain type of narrative or was it more independent?
- Did you view neo-Nazism and white supremacy as one ideology or as two separate ideologies?
- How did you first begin to start the process of de-radicalization?
- What were some of the biggest challenges you felt throughout the de-radicalization process?
- Since leaving the neo-Nazi and white supremacy movements, you have become an advocate for education to help prevent radicalization as well as aid in de-radicalization. What strategy do you believe is necessary to help educate people and prevent them from joining into such movements?

## Appendix B

Interview questions from conversation with Christian Picciolini:

*Waging a War of Information: Countering neo-Nazi Ideology in the United States*

- Looking back on it, do you feel that you were “high-risk” for radicalization into an extremist ideology?
- Can you briefly just discuss your process from apparent normal youth towards Nazism?
- In an interview with you I read on *NPR*, you stated that recruitment into neo-Nazi ideology targeted vulnerabilities and did not present itself in an ideological sense, can you expand on that?
- Being a member of White American Youth, and being inspired by extremist messages present in some bands in the punk-rock subculture, do you think this method of spreading extremist ideology is prevalent still today?
- Do you believe that there is an effective way to counter neo-Nazi ideology? If so, what do you believe can be done to develop a counter-narrative strategy?
- Do you think music can provide an outlet to present anti-Nazi messages just as some have used it to promote pro-Nazi messages?
- I am aware that you are involved in some projects to help in the deradicalization process, can you describe some of your work thus far? Where have you seen the biggest challenges in the process and where do you feel you have succeeded?
- Since you left the movement, can you describe the difficulties that you experience in deradicalization? What helped you through the process?
- Being a Chicago Area native, what can you say about the current state of the neo-Nazi movement in the area?