

# Nationalism and Discussion of Two Theories

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**Abstract:** With the development of extreme ideological trends around the world, nationalism has gradually become the focus of researchers around the world. This paper reviews the characteristics, development and some influencing factors of nationalism. Two theories that might explain the role nationalism plays in groups are discussed.

**Keywords:** Nationalism; Terror; Management theory; Collective nostalgia

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## 1. Nationalism

In 2016, Donald Trump became president of the United States. In this election, the strongest predictor of popular vote was Christian nationalism (Baker et al., 2020).

Christian nationalism is a cultural model that advocates the integration of American civic life with particular forms of Christianity (Gorski, 2017). The Puritans believed that God had a contract with them and had chosen them to lead the rest of the nations on Earth. Over time, assumptions about race, nativism, and the hierarchical order of society have also been included in this cultural framework in favor of historically powerful white, heterosexual, native-born Protestant men (Whitehead and Perry, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has been accompanied by a rise in nationalism across countries. The threat of the novel coronavirus has triggered nationalism and prejudice among authoritarian leaners (Golec de Zavala et al., 2021; Hartmann et al., 2021). Kachanoff et al. (2021) found that those who see COVID-19 as a symbolic threat will confirm their national identity by cooking American food or listening to American music. This behavior can provide relief to those dealing with loneliness or isolation during isolation or quarantine. That is to say, individuals will feel secure by belonging to a certain group, and the country and nation are the most direct targets, thus increasing the nationalist sentiment of the whole group.

Perry et al. (2021) focus on nationalism and xenophobia in the context of COVID-19. They believe there is a pervasive and politically strategic racist ideology, white Christian nationalism. During the 2019-20 coronavirus outbreak, American political leaders and pundits on the far right offered xenophobic explanations for the virus pandemic. Surveys of these sentiments show that Christian nationalism is a particularly strong predictor of white racist and xenophobic views.

Others argue that white nationalists are dissatisfied with accepting such a world. Their narrow and bigoted celebration of white American talent and virtue, their admiration for a once-white-dominated America, and their inability to accept white America's degraded status quo. This fundamentally contradictory ideology has led to dangerous consequences, such as incitement to violence against groups that threaten the status and resources of white people (Reyna et al., 2022). Sloopmaeckers(2019) analyzes the contradictory characteristics of nationalism by linking nationalism and masculinity. This paper argues that the link between masculinity and nationalism is constructed together through their overlapping "other" processes. In this case, "homophobia" is the "other." This theory suggests that the link between the hegemonic structures of masculinity and nationalism can be understood as their reliance on other similar technologies. That is to say, we can imagine ourselves through common contradictions and build a community so as to achieve our own identity.

Nationalism can also be combined with sport. A study was conducted by Knoester and Davis(2021). They used data from the National Survey on Sport and Society (N= 3,993) to examine the extent to which American adults recognize that sports teach several ideas, including love of country and how to be American. The results of these surveys indicate that American adults generally believe that sports use the game as an attitude to life and as a way to show their love for their country.

Studies show that people have very different ideas about what it means to be a "real American" in the United States today. Hanson and Dwyer(2019) investigated nationalism in the United States. The results show that individuals' perceptions of national identity are mainly along left/right ideological lines rather than patriotic/nationalist lines. This suggests that ideological differences may be driven not

just by differences over particular political issues, but also by how citizens perceive their American identity and their relationship to the country and its people. At the same time, different groups may also increase the awareness of individual nationalism. Sengupta et al. (2019) selected large local samples in New Zealand to study the relationship between white nationalism and relative deprivation. The belief that one's group is losing out to others is known as "group-based relative deprivation" (GRD). They argue that whites not only have a numerical advantage over other ethnic groups in majority-white countries, but also have many political and economic advantages. However, relative deprivation theory suggests that perception is more important than reality (Walker & Smith, 2002). The combination of extreme ideologies and nationalism often leads to unbearable disasters. Malone(2022) uses Italy's fascist regime as a representative to study the role model's support for nationalism. Under fascism, morality is based on concrete examples rather than abstract principles. The fallen soldiers and those who died for their country constituted a major category of fascist models. To make people aware of the importance of role models, the fascist regime built ossuary chambers whose main purpose was to display the dead as role models in order to promote support for nationalist, militaristic and imperialist projects. As a result, those who have died for their country are portrayed as warriors and martyrs, and are used to represent heroism, obedience, violence and sacrifice.

To sum up, nationalism is a social influence factor that cannot be ignored. It can play a covert role in interactions between different groups and can lead to racial discrimination or other similar negative attitudes.

## 2. Theoretical Explanation

In this part, I try to explore the factors affecting nationalism with two theories.

One theory is terror management theory (TMT). This theory suggests that people's perception of their eventual death is at odds with their evolved desire to survive, and that humans try to resolve this psychological conflict by investing in cultural worldviews that immortalize symbols or words.

The theory of terror management (Greenberg et al., 1986) derives from the work of the late cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker. The theory assumes that humans, like most living things, have the basic drive to continue life. However, humans also have the wisdom to know that they exist, and logically, one day they won't. People wanting to live but knowing that death is inevitable are probably the two most important realizations a person can have, and the resulting anxiety or fear can be debilitating. To cope with death consciousness, humans rely on a dual buffer of cultural anxiety made up of cultural worldviews and self-esteem. Scott et al. (2021) show that only those who do not believe in an afterlife believe that their culture can last for thousands of years, and this belief cannot be explained by universal religious beliefs. Meanwhile, perceived cultural longevity was associated with reduced death anxiety for those who were heavily invested in the state but did not believe in an afterlife.

Terror management theory also suggests that two psychological structures (an individual's cultural worldview and an individual's self-esteem) alleviate the fear of inevitable death by providing the individual with hope of transcending death or immortality. Terror management theory further proposes that the hope of immortality brought about by the attainment of cultural values can be literal or symbolic. Literal immortality is a belief advanced by religion throughout history in some form of afterlife. Symbolic immortality is the belief that a symbolic relic of one's own will persist in the culture after death.

People protect their values through nationalism. Placing oneself in an imaginary community, so as to obtain social roles and titles with cultural value in such a group, thus enabling individuals to obtain a sense of immortality, thus gaining the hope of transcending death, and alleviating the fear of inevitable death. Nationalism may provide comfort precisely in the sense of individual immortality and immortality, so many people are inclined to nationalism.

Another possible theory of influence is called collective nostalgia. Collective nostalgia is defined as an emotional longing for a past period of time for a certain group (Wohl et al., 2020). For those in transition, collective nostalgia allows them to reconnect to a common cultural environment and strengthens bonds between people with shared experiences and memories.

A common theme in white nationalist rhetoric is nostalgia for a time when white people dominated and had an undisputed place in American culture. Reyna et al. (2022) examined the collective nostalgia of racial nostalgia and its relationship to negative intergroup attitudes and extreme ideologies. Researchers have found that racial nostalgia is associated with higher racial identity, anti-immigrant attitudes and white nationalism. At the same time, racial nostalgia is associated with extreme ideologies. This racial nostalgia can be manipulated, and it can significantly affect white nationalism by increasing racial nostalgia and its association with perceived threats.

Nostalgia for the good old days has made white nationalism more widespread. Collective nostalgia can work differently and may have restorative or palliative properties in some cases, but it can also lead to more negative intergroup attitudes and behaviors, especially

when the outside group may be blamed for a lost but desired situation. This nostalgia paints an idealized picture of a "safe and prosperous society." By creating this temporal contrast, racial nostalgia can trigger feelings of relative deprivation and loss in one's racial group compared to before, as well as a desire to restore the lost status quo.

### **3. Conclusion**

This article briefly discusses how nationalism develops in the context of the worsening global environment such as the impact of the novel coronavirus pandemic and some characteristics of nationalism. Finally, two theories are used to explain the change of nationalism. Both theories can make logical reasoning on the occurrence and development of nationalism. The world today is complicated and the international situation is constantly changing. Extremist ideas are constantly creating conflicts and chaos in the world. Psychology should be a practical discipline that encourages different individuals and groups to understand each other, rather than allowing such extreme nationalism to make the world worse.

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