

Summary of Research on Ethnic Grievances and Support for Violent Extremism in Aotearoa New Zealand

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The Research Question

The research was designed to investigate the predictors of support for violent extremism (VE) in Aotearoa New Zealand, specifically focusing on the intersection of perceived ethnic grievances and ethnic identity. This analysis was conducted against a backdrop of rising politically motivated violence from far-right extremists in Western nations, highlighted domestically by the 2019 Christchurch mosque attacks.

The study sought to answer the following specific question: How does the perception that one's ethnic group is being discriminated against (grievances and victimhood) impact on support for VE among the general adult population in Aotearoa New Zealand? Does this depend on the extent to which someone has an insecure, inflated sense of group identity (ethnic narcissism)? Or does any form of white ethnic identification allow ethnic grievances and victimhood to metastasize into support for VE?

The research was premised on the understanding that individual narcissism can lead to hyper-vigilance to perceived threats and aggressive reactions to criticism. The study extended this concept to the group level, examining "collective narcissism"—a fragile yet grandiose belief in a group's greatness that is highly sensitive to perceived threats. The researchers hypothesized that ethnic narcissism would act as a 'volume knob,' amplifying the relationship between perceived grievances and support for violent extremism.

The study contrasted this insecure attachment (ethnic narcissism) with a secure, positive form of ethnic identification to determine whether *any* strong attachment to one's ethnic group is problematic, or if the danger is unique to the narcissistic form.

Methodology and Sample

Data was drawn from the Time 15 (2023-2024) wave of the New Zealand Attitudes and Values Study (NZAVS), utilizing a large national sample of 32,857 adults. The study specifically tested the relationships across the four largest ethnic groups in the sample: NZ Europeans, Māori, Asians, and Pacific Islanders.

Key Conclusions

The findings revealed a critical interaction between perceived discrimination and ethnic narcissism, which primarily drives support for violent extremism among the majority ethnic group (i.e., white Pākehā adults).

1. The Interactive Role of Grievances and Ethnic Narcissism

The central conclusion is that a sense of perceived grievances—the belief that one's ethnic group is unfairly discriminated against in society—predicts greater support for violent extremism, but only under specific conditions: when it is paired with high levels of ethnic narcissism among white NZ Europeans (Pākehā).

- **Ethnic Narcissism as the Catalyst:** Ethnic narcissism, characterized as an insecure, fragile yet inflated sense of ethnic superiority, acts as a "volume knob" that converts grievances into support for VE. This mechanism is consistent with individual narcissism theory, where heightened sensitivity to ego threats leads to a tendency to "lash out violently" when perceived to be under threat. The study concludes that "insecure, defensive attachments to white identity" are what relate to support for violent extremism, not white ethnic identification itself.
- **The Toxicity of Narratives:** This interaction suggests that specific grievance narratives, such as the "Great Replacement Theory," become particularly toxic when they resonate with individuals who hold high levels of ethnic narcissism.

Table 3. Summary of findings for ethnic attachment and violent extremism

Type of Ethnic attachment	Effect on violent extremism	Illustrative statements
Insecure ethnic attachment	Linked to higher violent extremism	<i>If my ethnic group had more say in the world, the world would be a better place</i> <i>The true worth of my ethnic group is often misunderstood.</i>
Secure ethnic attachment	Not linked to higher violent extremism	<i>The fact that I am a member of my ethnic group is an important part of my identity.</i> <i>I often think about the fact that I am a member of my ethnic group.</i>

2. Group Specificity of the Effect

The crucial finding regarding the link between grievances and violent extremism through ethnic narcissism was specific to the **white NZ European (Pākehā) majority group**. This relationship did not emerge among the minority groups in the sample, including Māori, Pacific, and Asian participants.

3. Contrast with Secure Ethnic Identification

The study established a key distinction between insecure and secure forms of group attachment.

- A healthier, secure form of attachment to one's ethnic identity (simple ethnic identification) is considered benign and is **not** related to support for violent extremism, even when mixed with white victimhood.
- It is only the insecure form of attachment—ethnic narcissism—which is characterized by entitlement, insecurity, and ethnic superiority, that predicts support for violent extremism when mixed with white victimhood.

4. Overall Low Threat and Small Effect Sizes

The research notes two important mitigating factors:

- **Low Population Support:** Generally, support for violent extremism within the New Zealand adult population is low. Similarly, levels of ethnic narcissism (the insecure form of attachment) are also generally low.
- **Small Predictive Role:** The observed effects were consistently small, meaning that while these factors are significant contributors, they play a small role in the overall prediction of support for violent extremism.

Recommendations for policy

The policy implications focus on intervention points related to group identity and the rhetoric used to frame perceived grievances, particularly within the white NZ European population.

1. **Address White Grievance Rhetoric:** Policy-makers are advised to focus attention on perceived grievances, specifically the belief that white NZ Europeans are discriminated against in society. This is due to the finding that grievance narratives like the "Great Replacement Theory" become especially problematic when they combine with ethnic narcissism.
2. **Promote Secure and Healthy Ethnic Identification:** The findings suggest that policymakers should promote a secure, positive connection with one's ethnic heritage among white NZ Europeans. Since healthy identification is unrelated to hostility toward others, fostering this secure attachment offers a benign alternative to potentially replace unhealthy ethnic narcissism.
3. **Prevent Identity Metastasis:** Promoting a positive identification with ethnic identity is necessary to prevent group attachment from "metastasizing into a form of ethnic narcissism that is poisonous". Focusing on promoting a more secure and healthy form of ethnic identification may consequently reduce the risk of grievances escalating into support for violent extremism.

Notes

A full version of the research report is available from DPMC.