

# MIGRATION, CONFLICT, & ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

**E**xtrémism changes depending on political and even environmental conditions. The coming decades will see further political and environmental stress brought about by global climate change and competition, even wars, over resources. Violent attacks carried out by extremists tragically accompany such stress and struggles. Extremists use these conditions to sow division and suspicion between groups, to use emotions to scapegoat and dehumanize others in attempts to radicalize and recruit youth and adults.

**Migration** is a constant source of anxiety for extremist groups and the target of much of their hostility. For white supremacist extremists, changing demographics in the United States threaten white dominance. Immigration from countries that are not majority white is, therefore, presented as a threat to the existence of white majority countries, like the United States. Such thinking is used to justify any response up to and including genocide. This is the underlying attitude behind the “white genocide” conspiracy theory—sometimes referred to as “the great replacement” by far-right extremists—and behind attacks like the mass shooting that occurred at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, in 2019. Mainstream politicians and media carry significant responsibility for creating and maintaining this atmosphere of anti-migrant violence whenever they frame immigration in terms of “crisis,” a “wave,” an “invasion,” or explicitly repeat extremist positions. Extremists often falsely position foreign governments or political parties at the center of schemes related to migration.

**Pressures** such as violence connected to war, conflict and/or crime, dictatorship and persecution, and economic hardship are driving forces behind migration to the United States. More often than not, these hardships are the direct result of American policies that are themselves symptomatic of unjust and exploitative practices. Mass migration from Iraq and Syria during 2015 provided much fodder for far-right propaganda, but was the direct result of aggressive foreign interventions in the region, such as the Iraq War. Migration into the United States from Central and South America is likewise the direct outcome of decades of the United States’ involvement in the region, from fomenting civil war in El Salvador to aggressively supporting economic austerity in Mexico. The same assumptions of privilege and entitlement behind these policies underlie anti-immigrant sentiment—that the United States and its citizens have the right to put our own enrichment above the peace, prosperity, and basic stability of other nations, particularly those seen as non-white and/or non-Western.

**Climate change** exaggerates existing inequalities by shrinking the pool of resources necessary to sustain life on earth. As with migration, many in the United States blame the people most impacted by climate pressure rather than recognize the role that resource consumption by privileged classes and corporations plays in perpetuating and worsening this crisis. As the existence of climate refugees become more visible—and their needs more pressing—extremists will inevitably target them with further fear-mongering and scapegoating.

**THE CONCEPT OF “PRODUCERISM”** is a common feature of far-right extremism, which is used to stoke anti-migrant ideology and violence here in the United States and elsewhere. Producerism imagines a group of “elites” who are conspiring to give a group of “lesser persons” the opportunities that extremists believe rightfully belong to them and those like them. Extremists imagine themselves and people like them as the most productive members of society, and the “lesser persons” as parasites and thieves. Some mainstream politicians and media bear responsibility for spreading claims rooted in producerism.

Extremists use producerism to dehumanize or demonize migrants. At the same time, they use producerism to paint “elites” as universally belonging to a class or grouping of people who have acquired their wealth dishonestly. For example, extremists often falsely assign Jews the status of “elites.” Belief in producerism raises risks for radicalization, as believers come to feel unjustly (albeit falsely) trapped between undeserving groups—one poor and parasitic, the other rich and exploitative. This, in turn, convinces some that violent action is their only recourse.

