Canadian Security
Intelligence Service

Service canadien du
renseignement de sécurité

Right-Wing Extremist Networks

Security Implications of a Re-emerging Movement

Highlights from an Academic Outreach workshop

Canada

World Watch: Expert Notes series publication No. 2019-06-03

Aussi disponible en français sous le titre : *Réseaux d'extrême droite : Incidence d'un mouvement en résurgence sur la sécurité*

This report is based on the views expressed during, and short papers contributed by speakers at, a workshop organised by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service as part of its academic outreach program. Offered as a means to support ongoing discussion, **the report does not constitute an analytical document, nor does it represent any formal position of the organisations involved.** The workshop was conducted under the Chatham House rule; therefore no attributions are made and the identity of speakers and participants is not disclosed.

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Published June 2019

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Cat. No. PS74-11/2019E-PDF (Electronic PDF, English)
ISBN: 978-0-660-30740-4

Photo credit: gettyimages.com

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Security Implications of a Re-emerging Movement

Highlights from an unclassified workshop of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS)

6 February 2019, Ottawa

Table of Contents

The Workshop and its Objectives 1

Executive Summary 5

Beyond Hate: Vigilantism and the Modern Far Right 13

Contemporary Right-Wing Extremism in Western Europe 23

Diffusion of Far-Right Ideas in Western Europe:
The Role of Social Media 35

Using Search Traffic Analysis to Understand
Canadian Right-Wing Extremism Online 43

The Radical Right in Québec 53

Endnotes 63

Annex A: Agenda 69

Annex B: Academic Outreach at CSIS 73

The Workshop and its Objectives

On 6 February 2019, the Academic Outreach program of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) hosted a workshop to consider the manifestation of the violent right wing in North America and Europe, discuss international connections and similarities between groups, and reflect upon the evolution of the threat posed by right-wing extremism.

Held under the Chatham House rule, the workshop was designed around the work of five experts from Canada, the United States and Europe, and benefited from the insights of security practitioners representing a range of domestic and international experiences. The papers presented at the event form the basis of this report. **The entirety of this report reflects the views of those independent experts, not those of CSIS.**

The CSIS Academic Outreach program seeks to promote a dialogue between intelligence practitioners and leading specialists from a wide variety of disciplines working in universities, think-tanks, business and other research institutions. It may be that some of our interlocutors hold ideas or promote findings that conflict with the views and analysis of CSIS, and it is for this specific reason that there is value to engage in this kind of conversation.

Executive Summary

This report is based on the views expressed during, and short papers contributed by speakers at, a workshop organised by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service as part of its academic outreach program. Offered as a means to support ongoing discussion, ***the report does not constitute an analytical document, nor does it represent any formal position of the organisations involved.*** *The workshop was conducted under the Chatham House rule; therefore no attributions are made and the identity of speakers and participants is not disclosed.*

Contributing Societal and Political Variables

Right-wing organisations have gained strength in Europe and North America, fuelled by the impact of economic globalisation and high levels of immigration. Radical and extremist groups occupy ideological space at the margins of populist political parties focused on related grievances. Extremists reject consensus political responses and many advocate violence. There are many organisational categories and sub-groups, but they are increasingly able to coalesce to pursue common objectives. Some support populist parties with the potential for electoral success.

- Globalisation has led to job losses in many regions and generated working-class resentment. Right-wing groups believe immigrants absorb employment opportunities which would otherwise be available to native citizens. Immigrants are viewed as culturally and religiously alien, illegally present in the country, attracted to criminality, and destined to dilute national identity and culture.
- Radical and extremist narratives are driven by political frustration which compounds the sense of economic and cultural alienation. Political elites are perceived as representing a globalist and liberal ideology which ignores the grievances of the excluded; the political establishment uses its security and legal powers to support minorities rather than the national collectivity.
- Populist parties validate parts of the extremist narrative and attract the support of extremist group members.
- Technology—including dedicated servers, social media and hacking tools—enable extremist groups to spread their ideas, interact with potential allies, organise festivals and demonstrations, support populist parties and intimidate opponents.

Anatomy of the New Right Wing

Radicals and extremists represent different but overlapping beliefs. Radicals are illiberal democrats who work within democratic systems while rejecting the norms protecting human rights and procedural

safeguards. Extremists reject democratic institutions and believe in violence to attain their goals. They attack political opponents and immigrants, and the most extreme advocate murder and genocide. Differences between group agendas do not prevent cooperative action.

- Immigrants have become the visible symbol of all the grievances embraced by radicals and extremists. Cultural nationalists defend Western culture against Islam, but will accept Muslims already present if they are assimilated. Ethnic nationalists accept cultural equality but are nativist in believing each culture should have its own state. Racial nationalists hate immigrants, Jews and other minorities, and advocate expulsion or extermination.

- While extremists are mostly on the ideological right, some have adopted more leftist views which reinforce the necessity of excluding alien cultures. Women and LGBTQ rights are portrayed as reflecting the Western value of individual freedom which is threatened by intolerant Muslim newcomers. Social welfare programs are acceptable if they support the state's true citizens, and are not distorted by payments to immigrants who have no right to be in the country.

- The establishment, including politicians, intellectuals and mainstream media, are portrayed as traitors to their own culture and the true interests of the nation. They cannot be trusted to take effective action against illegal immigration, crime or cultural dilution.

- Extremist narratives are reinforced by conspiracy theorists, such as QAnon, and Russian state-sponsored news networks.

Evolution of Right-Wing Extremist Activity

Extremist groups are tactically and technically sophisticated. Many direct-action strategies, such as vigilantism, are common to similar groups in different countries.

- Many groups use a variant of vigilantism to draw attention to their agenda with direct action. Vigilantism may include terrorist attacks on immigrants; pogroms, lynchings or arson; and border

patrols or street patrols. Border patrols demonstrate that the authorities have lost control of immigration and need help from patriotic citizens. Street patrols single out immigrants as targets but are also designed to reinforce the culturally-positive theme of protecting vulnerable women from immigrant criminals.

- Extremists infiltrate populist parties and protest movements and engage in sophisticated re-branding exercises to identify themselves more closely with popular political causes and attach their brand to popular values. Some groups place themselves strategically as bridges between different radical and extremist groups, increasing the potential for coordinated action.

- There is a sub-culture of music, festivals, mixed martial arts competitions, clothing, code words and symbols which provide opportunities for extremist networking aided by subtle identification signs. Festivals and special merchandising raise funds for group activities. Aspects of youth culture, such as gaming, have been weaponised by including extremist themes.

- Groups may build their own IT platforms, but they also use the IT platforms of sympathetic organisations and hijack the vulnerable forums of others to spread their message. Individual influencers with ideological or charismatic appeal expand the reach of radical and extremist ideas. Groups may harass individual opponents, particularly by hacking into their computers and releasing compromising information. Information can be distorted or invented, and many have the sophistication to create deep fakes through advanced IT capacity.

Right-Wing Extremism in Canada

As a multicultural country with historical support for immigration, Canada represents more of a challenge than some European countries for right-wing extremists. Recent protections against misuse of social media data makes tracking radicals and extremists difficult, but research suggests that right-wing extremism is growing in Canada, a conclusion supported by Statistics Canada hate crime data.

- Support for extremism is strongest in Ontario, Alberta and British

Columbia, but trends in Québec are also notable.

- Support is strongest in the 25-to-34 age group, but differences between age cohorts are not marked. Most activists are male. Younger supporters tend to look for information on groups, suggesting they are looking for pathways to participation. Older supporters focus on influencers, suggesting greater interest in exploring ideologies.

- Targets are similar to those in Europe—immigrants, Jews, blacks and homosexuals. The same common culture pattern is also present, with an emphasis on music and specialised music labels and bands.

Extremists in Québec are in contact with those in the rest of Canada, but there are some characteristics of extremism which are more marked there. The influence of Scandinavian, neo-pagan groups is strong. French extremist ideologues and French extremist movements are also influential. The anti-Muslim theme is prominent because of the same fears of cultural and religious incompatibility as in Europe, but with the additional fear that Muslims represent a return to the strong religious influence in Québec life that was ended by the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s.

- Québec extremist groups can be classified as follows: violent and semi-clandestine; nativist; ultra-nationalist; and anti-immigrant. Some mainstream political sentiments on immigration and cultural values align with extremist narratives.

- Action in the US to restrict visas, which has contributed to illegal border crossings into Canada, and particularly Québec, have helped extremists suggest a crisis at the border, and reinforced the anti-immigrant narrative.

- There is evidence of splintering among extremists trying to reconcile a Québec nationalist perspective with European versions of extremism. However, connections with Scandinavian extremists remain important. There are also Québec groups promoting greater coordination of all organisations with related goals.

- Some Québec radicals and extremists look to both French politician Marine Le Pen and US President Donald Trump as inspirational leaders. Radical right ideologues in France, and influencers elsewhere in Canada, have an impact in Québec. Québecers follow the Alt-Right media in the US, and some attended the Unite the Right demonstration in Charlottesville.

Conclusion

Modern technology and common grievances have the potential to sustain radical and extremist organisations, and unless mainstream parties can find effective counter-strategies and convincing economic policies, extremist groups may continue to grow. Trends suggest that extremists will increasingly influence radical and populist parties with the potential to gain legislative strength, and in some cases power. Countering extremism requires the maintenance of popular trust in leaders, political institutions and the police.

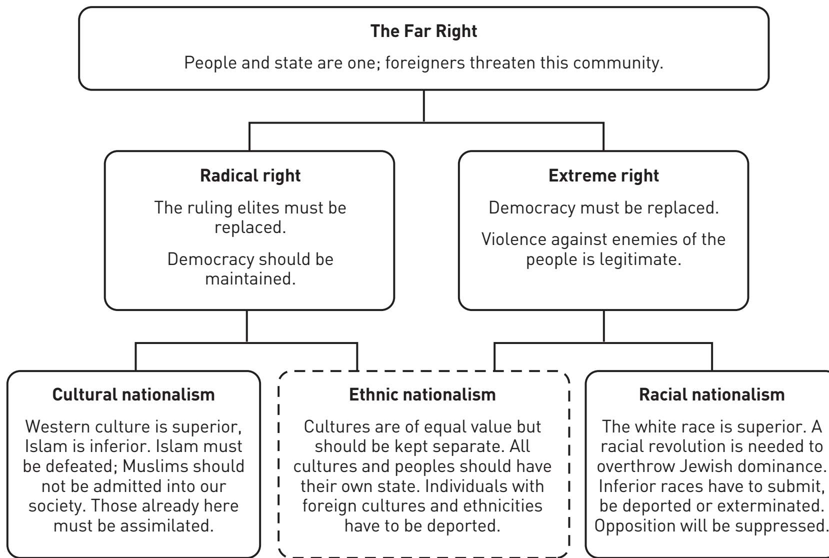
Beyond Hate: Vigilantism and the Modern Far Right

Right-wing democratic radicals and authoritarian extremists can be further subdivided into overlapping categories that share the belief that a country belongs to its traditional inhabitants, and not foreigners. The motivations and intensity of the exclusionary agendas ranges from firm to violent. This agenda can be advanced if immigrants are successfully portrayed as criminals and the authorities as negligent. It is hindered if immigrants are accepted as unthreatening, and authorities are trusted and firmly reject vigilante violence.

The Far-Right Landscape

A discussion of the far right requires a modern conceptual clarification of what is meant by such terms as *far right, radical right* or *extreme right*. Although they are often used interchangeably, these terms should be applied in a more precise way. The terms *left* and *right*, stemming from the French revolution, continue to represent their original meanings: leftists generally support policies designed to reduce social inequality, whereas rightists regard social inequality—and corresponding social hierarchies—as inevitable, natural or even desirable. One can also distinguish between radical and extreme versions of both the far left and far right, where the radical movements work for change within the framework of democracy whereas the extremists reject democracy and are willing to use violence to achieve their goals.

An attempt to construct a 'family tree' of the far right would yield the following modern representation[1]:



The lower level of this family tree illustrates, in the present political context, the three main 'families' of far right movements: cultural nationalists, racial nationalists and ethno-nationalists.

Cultural nationalists

Typically represented by right-wing populist parties and movements against immigration and Islam, these parties and movements generally operate within a democratic framework and do not promote violence, although they may differ in their respective degree of radicalism. These movements are usually not preoccupied with racial differences but focus on cultural ones, claiming that Islam is incompatible with Western culture and society. However, they may accept that individuals of a different ethnic and cultural origin may be assimilated into their culture and become one of them. In recent years, some of these movements have embraced liberal values such as women's liberation and gay rights—values they claim are threatened by Islam's 'invasion' of Europe and North America.

Racial nationalists

On the other extreme, these groups are fighting for a society based on racial and totalitarian principles, like National Socialism, fascism, Christian Identity or varieties of white supremacy. Their world-view

is typically based on anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, claiming that the Jews promote racial mixing to destroy the white race. These movements oppose democracy and notions of universal human rights and consider violence necessary and legitimate to achieve their goals. They expect that a racial war will eventually come, and that 'racial traitors' and people of the wrong race will be exterminated, or at least expelled.

Ethno-nationalists

Between these two extremes, ethno-nationalists are exemplified by the Identitarian movement in Europe and the Alt-Right movement in the US. The European versions in particular prefer to avoid the term 'race' and speak instead about 'ethnic identity'. They claim that all ethnicities are of equal value but should be kept separate in order to maintain their valuable characteristics (ethnic pluralism). Cultural mixing and assimilation is considered to be harmful. In contrast to many cultural nationalists, Identitarians tend to distance themselves from some core liberal values like gender equality and gay rights, instead promoting conservative views on gender roles. The Alt-Right movement may be considered as the US version of ethno-nationalism. They are less hesitant to talk about race, often presenting themselves as 'white nationalists'. In their rhetoric, alt-right proponents often try to present themselves as a mirror image of the Citizens' Right movement, talking about white rights rather than black rights. Ethno-nationalist groups generally distance themselves from the use of violence (although some activists do not), but these movements' views clash with basic values on human rights, equality and democracy to the extent that they border on extremism. Other varieties present themselves in such moderate terms that they are closer to right-wing populists or cultural nationalists.

The distinctions between these three main types of right-wing movements are not sharp. Although a specific group or organisation may be placed within one of these categories, there might be wings or individuals that lean towards one of the other types. There may also be links and collaboration between groups and activists from different ideological camps.

Vigilantism Against Migrants and Minorities

While the popular understanding of vigilantism is 'to take the law into one's own hands', the term refers to organised civilians acting in a policing role without any legal authorisation, using or displaying a capacity for violence, and/or claiming that the police (or other security agencies) are either unable or unwilling to handle a perceived criminal problem[2]. This is a phenomenon closely associated with the far right, and activists from all three ideological camps described above can be involved in vigilante activities in an effort to re-establish a certain social or moral order they claim is threatened by minorities and migrants. Four types of contemporary vigilante activities have been identified: vigilante terrorism, pogroms and lynching; paramilitary militia movements; border patrols; and street patrols.

Vigilante terrorism, pogroms and lynching

The classic case of vigilante terrorism is the Ku Klux Klan lynching of blacks and other minorities, usually accused of having committed crimes or breaking the 'moral order' of white supremacy. Similar processes took place in Russia, with a murderous campaign against migrants and homosexuals from 2006 to 2010, during which time vigilante terrorism and violence continued as the police ignored the (mostly) skinhead gangs that killed hundreds and injured thousands. Another extreme case of vigilante terrorism was the murder of Roma people in Hungary in 2008 and 2009. A killer commando of four perpetrators killed 10 people (including a child) and wounded six more when they attacked Roma villages with guns. They justified their actions by claiming that they intended to take revenge for 'Gypsy crimes' and provoke violent reactions from the Roma to trigger an ethnic civil war. In reality, the victims were selected randomly and had no particular relation to 'Gypsy crime'.

Paramilitary militia movements

What distinguishes these militias from other forms of vigilante groups is that they are modelled on a military style and form of organisation. They usually wear military-like uniforms, perform parades and marches,

and have a structured chain of command and training in military skills and/or firearms. In Central and Eastern Europe, there are long traditions of paramilitary militias, often affiliated with parties on the extreme right. In recent years, the most significant initiative was the establishment of the Hungarian Guard in 2007, as a militia wing of the right-wing extremist Jobbik party. The Hungarian Guard was tasked with protecting Hungarian citizens against 'Gypsy crime', sometimes marching through Roma villages and neighbourhoods to intimidate the inhabitants. Although banned the year after its establishment, it inspired similar movements in other Central and Eastern European countries, such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland.

In Central and Eastern Europe, there are long traditions of paramilitary militias, often affiliated with parties on the extreme right.

In the US, there are also long historical traditions of vigilantism as well as citizen militias. For example, anti-government militias prepared to resist or even fight against alleged repression from the federal government (often identified as the Zionist Occupation Government, or ZOG), and the Minutemen patrolled the US-Mexican border. Although participants—mostly military veterans—tend to share far-right views, they see their mission as helping the government patrol the border in order to stop illegal migrants from entering the US.

Border patrols

Times of heavy refugee influx or of undocumented migrants crossing national borders (coupled with extensive political or media coverage) have frequently seen an elevated vigilante response. Claiming that the governmental border agencies are unable to fulfill their tasks of controlling the borders due to lack of capacity or determination, some activists have volunteered to 'help' in protecting the borders. In Bulgaria, vigilante border patrols affiliated with far-right political parties have patrolled the border to Turkey and even arrested undocumented migrants. A rather sophisticated attempt to demonstrate the capability to control sea borders against migrants in the Mediterranean is

connected with the Identitarian group Defend Europe attempting to crowd-fund a ship. While the sea patrols did not achieve their official goals, they won huge media attention and popularised the Identitarian movement amongst a sector of the European public with anti-immigrant attitudes. The Storm Alliance in Canada has also conducted media stunts on the US-Canada border, although is not engaged in any serious patrolling of the border.

A common feature of all these vigilante border patrols is that they rarely or never detect or apprehend any undocumented migrants crossing the borders (with the exception of the Bulgarian case). Their activities appear to be completely symbolic, demonstrating the willingness of vigilantes to protect their 'own country' in the face of increased migration flows. Their efforts amount to a media strategy to affect the public support for ideas which vigilantes represent, including undermining the legitimacy of the political regime.

Street patrols

The most common type of vigilante activities against migrants and minorities, street patrols are composed of organised groups who walk together in the streets or near particular places with the stated goal of providing protection against people who might constitute a 'criminal risk', typically migrants and Roma people. Claiming that their presence will deter criminals and provide a sense of safety to the good and vulnerable citizens (and to women in particular), such patrolling activities typically start in the aftermath of criminal events which cause fear and anger in the community, especially when migrants or minorities have been involved as (alleged) perpetrators. Sometimes radical right organisations seize the opportunity to organise vigilante patrols to promote their group under the auspices of providing safety to the community.

Alternatively, such patrols may be organised spontaneously by concerned (or angry) citizens without any particular political sponsorship. Some of these groups maintain that they will only observe and report incidences to the police whereas other groups take a more

active stance by intending to deter and even intervene against acts of crime. A more aggressive form of vigilantism is to patrol outside asylum centres, homes for refugees, schools for minorities or even inside villages inhabited by Roma people or other minorities. The intention—or the outcome—might be to prevent the people living there from going outdoors, or to leave their homes entirely.

Although some vigilante groups make extensive use of violence, most do *not* actually carry out acts of violence. However, they customarily display a violent capacity through the performance of force, whether they parade as a paramilitary militia (with or without weapons), or patrol the streets in groups dressed in group symbols or uniforms. Their display of force is obviously intended to have an intimidating and deterring impact on their designated target groups as well as political opponents.

Influential Factors: The Emergence and Decline of the Far Right

Several factors come together to encourage the emergence and spread of far-right and vigilante ideas:

- A widespread perception of crisis and threat to their society and life style—real or imagined—which is magnified by extensive media coverage and far-right rhetoric;
- The identification of criminality with specific groups (the recent focus is on migrants), who then become objects of hatred and fear;
- The occurrence of specific shocking events, such as the New Year's Eve 2016 celebrations in Cologne, where local women were sexually harassed and abused by men of mainly North-African and Middle-Eastern origin, which caused a moral panic;
- The perception that the police and other authorities are either unable or unwilling to protect the citizens from threats to their safety;
- A lack of trust in governmental institutions in general, and the

police in particular;

- Liberal and permissive legal frameworks for gun ownership and armed self-defence;
- A historical tradition characterised by frontier justice, lynching and a popular culture where street justice and revenge are glorified;
- The tacit acceptance or active support of this kind of violence by police and other authorities; and
- A base of support among the public or among political parties.

Obviously, the absence, reduction or reversal of the facilitating conditions described above may also serve as impeding factors. However, there also exist additional conditions that may play a role in reducing the appeal of far-right movements and vigilantism:

- When the perceived threat is reduced or appears less acute;
- When the police and other authorities are able to demonstrate that they are in control of a situation;
- When there is a level of trust and respect in the police and other authorities;
- When the police and other authorities strike down hard on vigilante violence and hate crime, and legislation exists to support such enforcement; and
- When the inherent inclination towards internal conflict in extreme-right movements leads to a dissolution of their activities.

Right-wing and vigilante groups and their activities tend to emerge and flourish in settings where there is a convergence of several facilitating conditions and an absence of impeding or repressive factors. They fail and decline when the facilitating conditions are reduced and repressive measured are implemented against them.

Contemporary Right-Wing Extremism in Western Europe

Far-right networks follow four distinct ideologies but they are increasingly cooperating to intensify their collective impact. Some specific groups are dedicated to building cross-national coalitions using social media and dedicated IT platforms. Serious divisions within the overall movement persist despite common targets, but by using a variety of overt and covert activities, neo-Nazis, white nationalists, counter-jihadists and conspiracy theorists are gaining influence. A significant trigger event could lead to mass protests and a still greater impact on far-right politics.

The European Landscape

The far right in Europe is dominated by a range of loose networks of activists that work together around common rallying points and critical strategic junctions such as elections, referendums, data leaks, scandals and protests. For example, the *gilets jaunes* ("yellow vests"), Brexit and the European Parliament election have featured highly on the far right's 2019 agenda to build cross-ideological and transnational coalitions. Four main ideologically separate but strategically intertwined networks can be distinguished in Europe: the neo-Nazis, the white nationalists, the counter-jihadists and the far-right conspiracy theorists. Over the past several years, emerging opportunistic alliances among these far-right networks have allowed fringe groups to mobilise much larger audiences, stage mass protests and launch high-impact social media campaigns.

Currently, groups such as Right Wing United (RWU) illustrate efforts to bridge ideological gaps between US and European networks, bringing together conservative, traditionalist, and counter-leftist groups in order to engage in safe and effective activism against the radical left. The movement has a social media presence on Facebook, YouTube, Minds, Reddit, Gab, Telegram and Twitch and uses a calendar to keep track of

all major political events of strategic importance. Its Discord server, which counts hundreds of active members, functions as its main organisational hub and encourages participation in far-right protests across the world.

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Despite efforts to unite the different corners of the far right, disagreement over the limits of transgression and neo-Nazi symbolism have led to divisions and in-fighting[3]. Similar to the widening rifts in the US alt-right following the backlash of the lethal Charlottesville rally, events that cause negative publicity or challenge the movement's legitimacy tend to heighten such internal tensions.

Drivers, Enemies and Goals

Shared drivers, enemies and visions have provided these different networks with a lowest common denominator that can be leveraged for the sake of temporary cooperation and impact.

- **Shared drivers** include the anxieties and angers related to terrorism, migrant rape and crime rates, a loss of cultural identity and socio-economic stability, and perceived freedom of speech infringements;
- **Common enemies** include migrants, Muslims, the left, the political establishment and traditional information sources such as established media outlets and academic institutions; and
- **The shared vision** is to provoke changes in the political space by shifting acceptable discourse to the right through transgressive and provocative campaigns. Strategies to mainstream their ideologies include sophisticated rebranding, gamified propaganda

and media manipulation campaigns, as well as the infiltration of populist parties and protest movements.

Networks and Groups

Neo-Nazi networks

The past few years have seen the rise of several underground terrorist organisations across Europe, such as National Action in the UK and Nordadler in Germany. Both groups continued operations after their networks were discovered and exposed: National Action reappeared under the aliases NS131 and Scottish Dawn, thereby mirroring a tactic that Islamist organisations such as Al-Muhajiroun had previously used after being banned. Meanwhile, the group Nordadler is still active on Telegram, where its members pose with guns, post about Day X and reach out to other far-right groups such as Patriotischer Widerstand in an effort to recruit new members[4].

Mixed martial arts (MMA) and rock music (especially black metal, hardcore and hatecore) are key cultural pillars that European neo-Nazi groups use as gateways for recruitment and as springboards to foster international connections with other white supremacist networks. Festivals such as the Schild & Schwert Festival, which is held bi-annually in the town of Ostritz at the German-Polish border, provide regular meeting points for the European neo-Nazi scene and allow groups to raise funds through ticketing, merchandise sales and online promotion[5].

> *Mixed martial arts…and rock music…are key cultural pillars that European neo-Nazi groups use as gateways for recruitment and as springboards to foster international connections with other white supremacist networks.*

A prominent figure in these networks is Denis Nikitin, a Russian neo-Nazi who has been funding and supporting extreme-right MMA events and ultranationalist hooligan movements in Russia and across Europe[6]. Large-scale neo-Nazi festivals feature political speeches, white power rock gigs, MMA competitions and fashion shops, including Nikitin's

own MMA White Rex label and nipster ('Nazi hipster') brands like Ansgar Aryan.

White nationalist networks

European white-nationalist groups operate in similar ways as the US alt-right and form the bridge between US and European groups. Their loudest voice in Europe is Generation Identity, a movement that originated in France and has offshoots in Germany, Austria, Italy, the UK, Ireland, Denmark, Norway and other countries. Although Generation Identity's propaganda focuses on narratives of a white genocide and calls for ethno-culturally homogeneous societies, its language is carefully tailored to the legal hate-speech limits in each country. Thanks to its branding as a trendy and transgressive counter-culture movement, it has attracted young and educated audiences and connected the more extreme ends of the far-right spectrum to the mainstream. The Identitarians' innovative hybrid media stunts, which pair carefully orchestrated offline action with slick social media operations, have generated disproportional attention for their causes and allowed them to exercise pressure over politicians and the media.

Counter-jihadist networks

The English Defence League (EDL) founder and former British National Party (BNP) activist, Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (aka, Tommy Robinson), has been at the heart of the British far right as well as the global counter-jihadist networks. His bold campaigns against grooming gangs, the 'mainstream media' and freedom of speech infringements, as well as his focus on topics such as working-class grievances and declining trust in the establishment, have turned him into a popular figure among a wide range of audiences.

In North America, Yaxley-Lennon works closely with the US counter-jihadists Robert Spencer and Pamela Geller, as well as the Canadian far-right news outlet Rebel Media and social media influencers such as Lauren Southern. Across Europe, he has kept strong ties with the leaders of Generation Identity, the German PEGIDA street protest movement and the Dutch far right. An analysis of Stephen Yaxley-

Lennon Twitter and Gab networks, conducted by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), shows that the British counter-jihadist has strong followership which overlaps with international white nationalist, alt-right, Make America Great (MAGA) and QAnon networks. His heavy investments in the far right's Anglo-European and trans-Atlantic relations have not only swelled the ranks of his online followers; they have also helped him attract significant financial support from donors across the world, including the Middle East Forum and the David Horowitz Freedom Centre.

Conspiracy theory networks

The QAnon community has expanded quickly to Europe over the past few months, with groups such as Q Europe, Q Britannia and Q Deutschland counting a total of tens of thousands of followers and linking US-centred conspiracy theories to local contexts. These conspiracy-theory groups have coordinated their activities on the gaming app, Discord, and established a presence across the entire social media space, producing their own videos and mobilising for protests. European QAnons have recently focused on boosting the Yellow Vest movement, the #BrexitBetrayal and #StandUp4Brexit campaigns, as well as the #FreeTommy protests.

Activities and Tactics

Creating online safe havens

The introduction of stricter anti-hate speech frameworks across Europe, in particular the German NetzDG and the removal of many prominent far-right accounts, have prompted many extremists to migrate to the so-called alt-tech space. Such platforms range from alt-right social media platforms and crowdsourcing apps to white-nationalist dating apps. Generation Identity has even developed its own messaging app, Patriot Peer, which promises to 'connect the silent majority' and was advertised on AltRight.com[7].

Apart from extremist in-house creations and ultra-libertarian platforms such as Gab, coordination and recruitment activities also take place on

hijacked platforms such as Discord and fringe forums on platforms like 4chan, 8chan and Voat.

There are four different types of alt-tech platforms:

1. *Extremist in-house creations.* Those platforms created for the purpose of offering a safe haven for extremists (ie, Hatreon, MuslimCrypt, PatriotPeer);
2. *Ultra-libertarian platforms.* Those platforms created by libertarians or commercially driven developers which tend to operate in the name of free speech, tolerate violent/extremist contents, do not proactively take down any contents, and are not willing to cooperate in any CVE efforts (ie, Gab, Minds);
3. *Hijacked platforms.* Those platforms created for an entirely different purpose which have been hijacked by extremists but are proactively engaging in CVE efforts (ie, Discord, justpaste.it); and
4. *Fringe platforms.* Popular platforms that serve as the engine rooms for Internet culture, and often serve as a home for 'chaos agents' (ie, #chan imageboards).

Rebranding and covert operations

The growing popularity of nipster brands in Europe reflects a wider trend in the changing optics of neo-fascists, both on the streets and in their online campaigns. By using twisted swastikas and word games, which escape legal prosecution by a narrow margin and serve as internal codes and jokes, they [neo-fascists] have created a new counter-culture.

> *By using twisted swastikas and word games, which escape legal prosecution by a narrow margin and serve as internal codes and jokes, ...* [neo-fascists] *have created a new counter-culture.*

Similar to the US alt right's 'It's okay to be white' campaign on university campuses, European far-right activists have also piloted covert

operations to inject their ideologies into the mainstream. For example, Generation Identity has championed this approach with its 120 Dezibel and AHA (Alternative Help Association) initiatives, which attempt to create new brands under which they can pretend to campaign for women's and human rights.

Gamified influence campaigns

Since the 2016 election victory of Donald Trump in the United States, European far-right networks have adopted the alt-right playbook of media manipulation operations and memetic warfare tactics to influence the outcomes of elections in favour of populist parties. Analysts at ISD have found evidence of European alt-right mobilisation in the run-up to the national elections in Germany, Italy, Sweden as well as in the Bavarian state election[8]. These interference campaigns followed similar mobilisation patterns, with its actors tapping into various online sub-cultures by gamifying their recruitment and propaganda. For example, the German neo-Nazi trolling army Reconquista Germanica, which counted 7,000 members on the day before the German national elections in 2017, used military-like structures and reward systems for its disinformation operations[9]. Currently, a range of nationalist and traditionalist groups across Europe are gearing up for influence campaigns around the European Parliament elections. In January 2019, Right Wing United even started a competition for Eurosceptic and nationalist memes they can use in the campaign, with monetary prizes being awarded to the best ideas.

Political infiltration

UK Independence Party (UKIP) leader Gerald Batten appointed Stephen Yaxley-Lennon (aka Tommy Robinson) as his grooming gang advisor in November 2018, despite party rules banning former members of the EDL and BNP from UKIP membership[10]. There have also been reports that Batten is planning on making Yaxley-Lennon his successor after he retires. Far-right Youtubers Paul Joseph Watson, who was reporting for the Alex Jones' Infowars, Mark Meechan (aka Count Dankula), who was convicted of hate crime for teaching his girlfriend's dog to perform the Hitler salute in response to calls for a Jewish genocide[11], and Carl

Benjamin (aka Sargon of Akkad)[12], who was heavily involved in the misogynist Gamergate scandal, all joined UKIP as new members in 2018[13].

Hijacking protest movements

In November 2018, the Yellow Vests started out as a non-partisan, pro-democratic street protest movement triggered by French President Macron's fuel tax increases. Both left- and right-leaning activists descended into the streets to voice their discontent with the government's socio-economic policies. As the demonstrations morphed into a much wider mobilisation against the political establishment and frustrations started growing among its protestors, extreme-right groups such as Bastion Social, Action Française and Groupe Union Défense (GUD) seized the opportunity to infiltrate and hijack the movement[14]. Some of the Yellow Vests spin-off movements in countries such as the UK, Germany and Canada have been strongly encouraged or even initiated by far-right actors. European conspiracy theory communities of QAnon have also joined campaigns across Europe.

Outlook and Conclusions

On at least three levels, far-right actors across the ideological spectrum are currently ahead of those institutions and networks that are trying to counter them: the use of modern technology, the creation of international alliances and the weaponisation of youth culture have allowed them to expand their reach far beyond their traditional audiences. Over the next few years, we can expect far-right actors to build out these comparative advantages in an effort to launch even more sophisticated radicalisation campaigns targeting their sympathisers, manipulation campaigns targeting the 'normies', and intimidation campaigns targeting their opponents.

In the UK, a softer Brexit deal or a new referendum could exacerbate grievances among Brexit voters that the British far right could exploit to kick off mass protests. In France, a failure to provide a response to the demands of the Yellow Vests might create a similar scenario by increasing the vulnerability of these protestors to far-right radicalisation.

Likewise, new cases of Islamist terrorism, migrant crimes, grooming gangs, media scandals or anti-hate speech laws could set in motion fresh waves of frustrations that the European far right can use to lure more people into its networks.

When such trigger events are coupled with sophisticated disinformation operations backed by Russian media networks and conspiracy theorist communities like QAnon, the damage can go far beyond the political fringes. Reciprocal radicalisation dynamics—both in the form of mutual amplification of Islamist and far-right extremism, and far-left and far-right escalations—are likely to further polarise Europe and might exacerbate the risk of far-right terrorism.

Additionally, the far right is likely to continue targeting its enemies with coordinated harassment and doxing campaigns. The latest hacks and data leaks of hundreds of German politicians and left-leaning activists demonstrated the far right's willingness to silence and discredit political opponents and undermine trust in democratic institutions and processes. The use of more high-skill hacking techniques to steal sensitive data or the use of more cutting-edge technology (ie, deep fakes) to manipulate evidence would allow for an entirely new level of disinformation and intimidation campaigns.

Diffusion of Far-Right Ideas in Western Europe: The Role of Social Media

Right-wing organisations may be extreme or radical, but all are nativist and authoritarian. Many are also populist. Most extremist movements are marginal in impact, but radical right and populist parties have had electoral success in some European national elections. An examination of Twitter content illustrates that the most active Twitter communicators on the right are political parties rather than movements, and that Islamophobia and economic nativism are the most resonant themes.

The presence of far-right organisations, activists and politicians online and the diffusion of their ideas through social media is becoming the bogeyman of many commentators on contemporary politics. On 1 May 2017, *The Guardian* warned "the far-right thrives on global networks[15]" based on exchanges through social media, and a 31 October 2018 article by *Time Magazine* suggested that far-right content may foster offline violence[16]. Indeed, the dissemination of far-right ideas through social media platforms is increasingly and emphatically portrayed as the new challenge for contemporary democracies.

While scholars agree that far-righters invest heavily in social media to promote their ideas, the extent to which such diffusion actually occurs remains a matter of debate. The novelty that social media represents for politics in the 21st century has intrinsically limited the amount of evidentiary research in this area, but the diffusion of far-right ideas between like-minded organisations and their audiences across countries in Western Europe on Twitter is being examined. This chapter discusses the heterogeneity of the far-right milieu in Western Europe, examines diffusion between Western European far-right organisations and their audiences on Twitter as explored by one research study, and considers the implications of this activity to counter far-right ideas online in contemporary democracies.

Identifying Far-Right Ideas

The Western European far right is heterogeneous, including organisations diverging in ideological and organisational terms. Ideologically, 'extreme right' organisations oppose democracy *tout court* and want to replace it with non-democratic political orders (fascism or Nazism). Examples of this are neo-fascist and neo-Nazi organisations such as the Greek Golden Dawn or the Italian CasaPound. With few exceptions, most extreme-right organisations remain marginal in contemporary politics.

For their part, radical-right populist (RRP) organisations oppose fundamental values of *liberal* democracy, in particular pluralism and minority rights, but remain (at least formally) democratic. Examples of RRPs include political parties such as the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), the Alternative for Germany (AfD), the National Front/ National Rally (FN) in France and the Italian (Northern) League (L). Some of these parties entered parliaments, such as the Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang (VB) and the Dutch Centre Party (CP). Others became important in government formations (for example the Hungarian Fidesz, the Italian League, the FPÖ, the Bulgarian Ataka, and the Greek LAOS) or supported minority governments (the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands and the Danish People's Party). Organisationally, it is possible to distinguish between political parties (running for elections) and social movements, grassroots and/or intellectual groups aiming to influence politics through non-electoral channels. Overall, while 'extremist' groups are often openly racist and oppose the democratic constitutional order, 'radical-right' organisations formally accept the rules of liberal democracy but oppose minority rights. These differences are important to make sense of the heterogeneity of the contemporary far right.

Despite these differences, far-right organisations share at least two core ideological features: nativism and authoritarianism. Nativism is an ideology positing that only native people may inhabit the state and that non-native elements (personas or ideas) are a threat to the homogeneity of the state. Authoritarianism may have different interpretations. It may refer to nostalgia for non-democratic political orders such as

historical fascism and Nazism (in the case of the extreme right) and/or to a belief in a strictly ordered society where infringements must be punished harshly.

Although there is no agreement in the literature, for some researchers the far right has also a third ideological feature: populism. Populism is one of the most disputed concepts in contemporary political science. It refers to a set of ideas depicting society as being divided in two homogenous and antagonistic groups: the 'pure people' and the 'corrupt elite'. Populism argues that politics must be an expression of the general will. In the case of the far right, 'the people' are the natives. These core ideological features inform far-right ideas on immigration, but also on different issues such as welfare (ie, more state aid programs for natives) and education (ie, free access to education for natives).

The Diffusion of Far-Right Ideas on Twitter: A Qualified Assessment

There are many ways to define and observe the diffusion of the above-mentioned far-right ideas on social media. To explore the diffusion of far-right messages on social media, one research study considered messaging diffusion on Twitter in Western European countries between 2016 and 2017, focusing on exchanges between France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom—four countries differing in terms of configuration of the far-right spectrum. Far-right movements and other loosely organised groups are particularly more active in Italy and France than in Germany and the UK. While France and Italy host two of the most electorally successful and long-lived radical-right populist parties (the National Front/National Rally and the League respectively), the far right in Germany and the United Kingdom (ie, the British National Front) has thus far experienced relatively modest electoral support.

In each country, the study examined the most popular far-right Twitter accounts and their content. To build the initial sample (10 per country), researchers relied on country reports by watchdog organisations. To avoid artificial accounts, scholars selected only Twitter handles belonging to existing far-right organisations, their leaders and/or high-rank officials. The expansion of the initial sample was made by means

of snowball sampling. The study identified the diffusion of far-right ideas across audiences in different countries by building a network of tweets that were retweeted—more than five times—from more than one country, such as a user that retweeted content from Germany and from France. Subsequently, to examine what ideas were more likely to spread on Twitter among far-right audiences, the study explored the content of tweets that were retweeted from more than one country. To detect the initiators, researchers also accounted for whether the Twitter handle belonged to a far-right organisation (distinguishing between political parties and movements) or to a politician.

Overall, the study results suggest that the extent to which Twitter diffuses far-right ideas needs to be qualified. More specifically, the results highlight two main patterns:

1. Political parties (rather than movements) are the most active far-right entrepreneurs on Twitter. Marine Le Pen, leader of the French National Rally, is among the most popular accounts across countries; and
2. In terms of content, only select few themes garner traction from one country to the other: immigration and the economy.

More than immigration in general, it is Islamophobia and the portrayal of Muslims as both a cultural and security threat to the West which are most widely promoted by far-right groups. These tweets capitalise on fears of ethnic invasion and replacement and on the vision of Islam as a monolithic, fundamentalist and imperialistic religion. In this respect, many far-right organisations position themselves as the defenders of civil rights (such as women and/or LGBTQ rights) supposedly associated with a so-called Western national identity.

More than immigration in general, it is Islamophobia and the portrayal of Muslims as both a cultural and security threat to the West which are most widely promoted by far-right groups.

Another significant theme, economic nativism, illustrates how the far

right values the economy not as a goal, but as a means of protecting the interests of the nation and its nationals from foreign competition. In economy-related tweets, this theme is politicised by describing economic programs as catalyzers of the interests of native people. Here again, anti-migrant nativist arguments prevail over purely economic ones, or at least encompass them. Hence, more than about the state-market dichotomy, in general the far right speaks about protectionism or neoliberalism to preserve the natives' economic interests.

Implications

While observers of contemporary politics are concerned about social media fostering the diffusion of far-right ideas, the true extent of this remains unclear. The above-noted study illustrates that the argument that social media foster the diffusion of far-right ideas among like-minded organisations and audiences across different countries needs to be qualified, at least when it comes to Twitter messaging in Western European countries. Findings highlight that the types of issues emphasised in tweets play an important role in whether or not the messaging is shared among far-right organisations and their audiences on Twitter. Compared to other issues, only immigration and the economy are significantly more likely to generate resonance.

> *Twitter is a social media platform on which the far right is successful in diffusing its* core *ideas regarding immigration and the economy across heterogeneous audiences in Western Europe.*

The need to expand the focus of the study is noted, particularly by comparing Twitter results with results collected from other social media platforms. As well, the exploration of these patterns beyond Western Europe and over a longer time span would add to the body of evidence in this area. Future research should also consider the important role of fake accounts, fake content and bots in the diffusion of far-right ideas across broader audiences. Eventually, more evidence is needed to bridge online patterns to offline, real-life outcomes, including support for far-right parties and movements.

Despite any shortcomings, the findings of this study have broader implications to address far-right ideas online in contemporary democracies. The results highlight the necessity to decrease inappropriately alarmist tones regarding the perceived profuse and widespread diffusion of far-right ideas on social media. That being said, results do underscore that Twitter is a social media platform on which the far right is successful in diffusing its *core* ideas regarding immigration and the economy across heterogeneous audiences in Western Europe.

Using Search Traffic Analysis to Understand Canadian Right-Wing Extremism Online

A promising technique for assessing the degree of support for right-wing extremism is the analysis of online search queries. Research shows that interest in extremist groups and influential leaders is male-dominated, with the highest interest levels in Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. Right-wing extremist preoccupations are similar to those in Europe, with a strong anti-Semitic, anti-immigrant and racist focus. Results illustrate an increase in the popularity of extremist views consistent with the statistical increase in hate crimes.

Data Collection to Counter Right-Wing Extremism Online: The Challenge

The problem of right-wing extremism (RWE) is increasingly acknowledged as a significant threat by the Canadian security and law enforcement communities and highlights the vital role the Internet plays in nurturing the RWE's culture of fear, hatred and mistrust[17]. Outside the security and law enforcement communities, Canadian researchers are working to build a clearer, data-driven picture of the RWE movement's online activity, in order to inform government efforts and inspire new mechanisms for Canadians citizens to counter the culture of hate online. The number of Canadian researchers conducting large-scale data-driven analyses nevertheless remains relatively small. Barbara Perry and Ryan Scrivens' seminal 2015 review of Canadian RWE included qualitative analysis of Canadian RWE web sites, and their more recent work on anti-authority movements included structured online data collection[18]. Similarly, recent work on the Canadian Soldiers of Odin by Yannick Veilleux-Lepage and Emil Archambault draws on structured data collection and network analysis[19]. Otherwise, most work to date on the behaviour of Canadian RWE online has been conducted by other online interest groups who tend to focus on collecting evidence for advocacy rather than for large-scale data analysis[20].

A number of factors help to explain the relatively small number of such studies. Simply maintaining access to extremism-related data is an ongoing technical challenge, which in many cases exceeds the capacity of social science researchers. In the wake of the Cambridge Analytica scandal and others, social media companies have dramatically limited programmatic access to data on their platforms[21]. These companies have also moved to more aggressively suspend and delete suspected extremist accounts, putting the data from those accounts further out of reach for researchers[22]. Similarly, many long-time RWE web sites, such as Stormfront and The Daily Stormer, have struggled to stay online (and therefore be available for analysis) in the aftermath of the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia[23].

Even if these technical challenges can be overcome, collecting a verifiably Canadian RWE dataset is an added difficulty, since the Internet is an inherently trans-national environment. Establishing the geographic location of online activity using publicly available information is a perennially challenging task. Most often, researchers have to infer location based on factors like language, context and user-reported location, all of which are difficult to establish and verify at scale.

The final and perhaps most consequential challenge is establishing and implementing rigorous, ethically sound methods for collection and analysis. RWE activity in Canada and elsewhere often pollutes wider right-wing political discourse online. Otherwise ordinary political conversations can be hijacked by extremist users. Moreover, drawing clean analytical distinctions between what is acceptable, problematic, criminal and violently extreme online is much easier done in theory than it is in practice[24]. The RWE movement online further exacerbates this ambiguity by employing an arsenal of coded language and imagery, and by playing on the inherent obscurity of Internet culture. This creates a significant risk of over-collection and stigmatisation of legitimate political activity online. Even if they create a technological solution for collecting data, researchers must confront and address the very real privacy and ethical challenges of responsibly collecting and analysing this data. These and other challenges have created headwinds for Canadian RWE online research.

Measuring Appetite for RWE Content in Canada

Search traffic analysis offers a new opportunity for analysis of Canadian RWE activity that is both anonymous and geographically-specific. Rather than looking at what users post online, search traffic analysis examines what people look for through online search engines. Search data can also provide rich detail on demographic factors like age and gender.

Social media and forum posts are inherently performative, and as such provide insight into how users want to be perceived online. This can be valuable for the study of rhetoric and group dynamics, but the fact that users are posting in order to be seen makes it difficult to accurately establish users' intentions and level of commitment. Some users may exaggerate their level of commitment by posting a high volume of high-risk content, while other more committed users may post very little or not at all, for a variety of reasons. Recent research in other extremist fields has shown, for instance, that female participation in online extremist activity is lower when the activity is thought to be public[25]. By contrast, search engines are widely used by all users, who do so without the expectation that they will be seen or judged by others. People tell Google things that they might not tell their closest friend or spouse. As such, search traffic provides both an intimate and broad-based picture of user interests and views. Analysis of search traffic requires the development and deployment of large databases of search phrases that indicate an interest or affiliation with extremist groups or ideologies. Much of the knowledge required to build this database is available from experts and researchers studying RWE, supplemented by additional research and prior experience.

In the present case, a database was developed containing more than 16,000 potential search phrases in English and French, including both Canada-specific phrases and phrases used widely elsewhere. Phrases covered a range of subjects, from Québec ultranationalist hardcore bands, like "Coup de Masse", to acronyms and phrases like "LOTIE" (Lady of the Invisible Empire, to describe a female member of the KKK) and "Meine Ehre heißt Treue," the motto of the Nazi SS, which is now used by neo-Nazi groups globally[26]. Each search phrase was coded

according to a range of variables, including the type of content being sought, whether it included a specific group or ideology, and a risk rating based on the intent of the search and the level of prior knowledge required to perform the search. Searches that required substantial prior knowledge and/or convey an intent to act (for instance, join a group or commit an act of violence), received higher risk ratings. Searches that convey little more than curiosity received lower risk ratings.

Data was collected over a 30-day period from 18 December 2018 to 16 January 2019, resulting in 13,357 relevant searches from across Canada. Interpretation of these results requires caution: collection over a longer period will provide greater fidelity and enable longitudinal analysis. It is nevertheless possible to highlight some early findings on the themes, demographics, and regional distribution of RWE searches.

Initial Findings: Search Appetite for RWE Content in Canada

Canadians searching for RWE-oriented content are mostly male (67 per cent), and the most prolific searchers are between 25 and 34 years of age (24 per cent). The most common searches at every age are looking for RWE groups and influential personalities. Searches for groups are more prominent among younger users, while older users tend to search more for influential personalities. The trend away from groups and towards personalities increases steadily with age: while searches for influential personalities make up 30 per cent of searches performed by those aged 18 to 24, they make up 49 per cent of searches performed by those over 65. One possible interpretation is that younger users show more interest in joining RWE organisations, while older users show more interest in consuming online content produced by prominent RWE personalities.

> *The most common searches at every age are looking for RWE groups (mostly youth) and influential personalities (mostly older users).*

Ideologically, Canadian users are mainly seeking neo-Nazi and white supremacist content, with a consistent habit of seeking out RWE bands and record labels. Neo-Nazi related search terms account for just over

half (52 per cent) of all searches. While the most prominent search phrase related to neo-Nazism was "Heil Hitler" the next most popular neo-Nazi search term is "Vaginal Jesus", which is a now-defunct white power grindcore band from Connecticut known for songs like "Happy Hanukaust" and "The Gestapo Stomp". Nazi military paraphernalia also featured prominently, including the iron cross pin/badge/patch and SS Totenkopf, which could either refer to the SS unit responsible for administering the Nazi death camps, or to a Belarussian neo-Nazi band by the same name.

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White supremacist-related searches, which made up just over a quarter of searches nationwide (28 per cent), also focused heavily on music. The most widely searched term in this category is "Graveland", which is a Polish pagan metal band active since the early 1990s that has been banned by German authorities for promoting white supremacist rhetoric. A variety of searches related to Tightrope Records (an online white power retailer based in the US) indicate Canadians are seeking out their music and merchandise. Finally, a group of related searches for The Daily Stormer indicate that Canadians are trying to find this white supremacist web site, which has struggled to stay online after the 2017 Unite the Right rally[27].

While nearly all of the most searched terms in Canada refer to non-Canadian content, the most searched for online personality is in fact Canadian: Evalion, a YouTube star made Internet-famous in 2016 for videos praising Hitler and instructing viewers on how to identify Jews[28].

Nationally, three provinces account for roughly 70 per cent of all medium- to high-risk searches in Canada, and have the highest per capita search activity: Alberta (8.003 searches per 100,000 population), British Columbia (6.871 per 100,000 population), and Ontario (6.130 per 100,000 population). While Alberta has the highest per capita search

appetite, searches from Ontario account for the largest proportion of searches in the highest risk category: searches that show an intent to commit an act of violence or join a violent group. Alberta accounts for nearly all searches (78 per cent) specifically seeking out membership in a violent group. The two most widely sought-out groups in Alberta are Atomwaffen and Soldiers of Odin. While the number of searches is relatively small, this trend merits continued attention.

While Alberta had the largest share of searches related to joining a group, Ontario's high-risk searches are more focused on intent to commit violence, comprising 43 per cent of all such searches in Canada. The most targeted group in Ontario are Jews (23 per cent of searches), followed by blacks (15 per cent). Nationally, the most targeted group are homosexuals (25 per cent of searches), followed by Jews (22 per cent) and blacks (11 per cent). This is broadly consistent with data on police-reported hate crimes in Canada compiled by Statistics Canada, in which Jews, blacks and people targeted for their sexual orientation are three of the four most victimised groups[29]. Canadian Muslims are the fourth victim group targeted most often in Statistics Canada reporting, but searches targeting Muslims for violence are all but absent in search data, composing only 4 per cent of searches with violent intent. Given the prominence of Muslims as a target of hate crime in Canada, it is likely that searches targeting them will increase over a longer duration of data collection.

Conclusion: Building a Holistic Evidence Base to Counter RWE

Statistics Canada's hate crime data showed a 47 per cent increase in hate incidents from 2016 to 2017, which is a sharp increase over previous years[30]. This statistic, coupled with the search traffic analysis above, demonstrates that the culture of fear, hatred and mistrust nurtured by the RWE has both online and real-world manifestations. Addressing the RWE problem in Canada will require concerted effort and a holistic evidence-base from both domains, based on a recognition that the online and offline worlds are mutually reinforcing.

While RWE activity in public online venues will continue to be an important component of this evidence base, search traffic provides a

less performative, more intimate source of evidence for what users are seeking from the RWE online environment. This opens up a much wider range of possible responses, including many that can be implemented earlier and more constructively than traditional security responses.

The Radical Right in Québec

Extremist right-wing organisations in Québec generally reflect the preoccupations of counterpart movements in North America and Europe. Irregular border crossings from the US into Québec and the debate on religious values have increased concerns about immigration. Some Québec opponents of Muslim immigration cite the danger of reviving religious influence in politics. The province's extremists follow French right-wing ideologues, US Alt-Right outlets and personalities such as French politician Marine Le Pen and US President Donald Trump. Several groups are dedicated to building right-wing extremist coalitions.

In recent decades, socio-political dynamics have created a favourable context in Western states for the dissemination and acceptance of ethnocentric and xenophobe ideologies. In particular, the decline of the manufacturing and industrial sectors, the concurrent globalisation of production and the subsequent decline of the working classes, alongside the rise of financial capitalism, the emergence of new interest groups and the perceived indifference of neo-liberal institutions to these trends, have all contributed to the increased global influence of radical-right groups.

These socio-political dynamics, combined with the strong waves of migration from the Global South, have profoundly altered popular political discourse throughout the Western world, with discourse centred around religion and ethnic nationalism surpassing angst over power and class conflict. This is also true in Québec, which is currently contending with a range of distinct radical-right groups.

Composition and Motivation

In the province of Québec, radical-right groups can be roughly divided

into four categories based on the identity they construct and the tactics they employ:

1. Potentially violent semi-clandestine groups, such as: Atalante, Northern Order, Légitime Violence, Dead Boys Crew, Légion Nationaliste, Québec Radical, Ragnarok, Vinland Front, Québec Stompers, Nouvelle France Skinhead Crew; Section de Guerre, and Coup de Masse;

2. Nativist reformists. Ultranationalists who are motivated by the conviction that Québecers of French-Canadian stock must actively protect their language, culture and identity against the threat posed by immigrants. These include: the Fédération des Québécois de Souche, Pégida Québec and the Northern Guards;

3. Groups on the margins of established political movements, with similar—but generally more inclusive—discourse to nativist reformists and a profound anti-establishment outlook, such as: La Meute, Storm Alliance, and le Mouvement traditionaliste du Québec; and

4. Vigilante groups, which posture as guardians of the law in the face of unfit authorities, typically targeting communities whose values do not correspond to nativist values, including Soldiers of Odin and the Three Percenters.

Despite constructing their identities differently and employing different tactics, these groups do not operate in complete isolation. Instead, they routinely coordinate their activities. For example, on 25 November 2017, La Meute, Atalante, Soldiers of Odin and Storm Alliance worked together to coordinate a protest in Québec City[31]. This increasing level of collaboration mimics a wider trend also perceived abroad, where radical right groups are frequently collaborating internationally, putting aside their differences and cooperating to increase their influence, reach and impact[32]. Notable examples of this collaboration include the campaigns around the Defend Europe mission in the Mediterranean and the Charlottesville rally (aptly titled Unite the Right). Both campaigns received financial and operational support from numerous European and North American groups.

Environmental scans of the radical right movement in Canada have identified it as a highly fragmented and diverse collection of independent groups[33]. However, analysis of 1,200 posts on key accounts on the Facebook groups of five popular radical-right groups (namely the Soldiers of Odin, La Meute, Atalante Québec, Fédération des Québécois de Souche and Storm Alliance) surfaced five common themes:

1. The fear of the return of religion into the public space;
2. The perceived inertia of the political class and its complicity with media and minorities;
3. The misuse of legal instruments to dilute collective rights in favour of minority rights;
4. A strong opposition to multiculturalism, as a factor of de-nationalisation and social fragmentation; and
5. The perceived emergence of a Muslim enemy whose values are irreconcilable with Québec culture.

The themes of Islamic religious practices being 'irreconcilable' with Québec's values, and multiculturalism as a source of de-nationalisation and social fragmentation are particularly prevalent across all groups[34]. While concerns over immigration, refugees and the status of non-Christians are presented as major pillars in radical right discourse in several Western democracies, two unique characteristics specific to this discourse in Québec are noteworthy.

The themes of Islamic religious practices being 'irreconcilable' with Québec's values, and multiculturalism as a source of de-nationalisation and social fragmentation are particularly prevalent across all groups.

First, mainstream political parties in Québec have periodically elevated tensions by tabling bills such as Bill 62 and the proposed *Test des valeurs* ("values test"). As evidenced by the debates surrounding the Québec Charter of Values, these initiatives served to crystalise anti-immigration

and anti-Muslim sentiments in Québec in a fashion akin to that of European radical right parties such as Le Front National and the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP).

Second, there is the intrinsic link in the discourse to the collective historical trauma emerging from the institutional meddling by the Catholic Church in both private and public life. The so-called Great Darkness took place in Québec until the 1960s. Invoking this time period, during which progress was halted by the power of the Catholic Church, La Meute (which claims to be a nationalist but centre-left organisation)[35] routinely frames its opposition to Muslim immigration as the logical continuation of *laïcité* tradition and the shedding of religious control over the state. By exploiting images and symbols most often diverted from their original meanings, Islam is thereby presented as a totalitarian ideology inherently incompatible with secularism and the progress accomplished during the Quiet Revolution.

International Influence

Far-right groups in Canada also borrow from political rhetoric that is repeated in international discourse, both from leaders such as Donald Trump and Marine Le Pen, as well as an array of far-right political parties in Europe. Indeed, the discourse and ideology of extremist groups in Québec appear to be largely shaped by four sources: 1) domestic rhetoric from within Québec and from other parts of Canada; 2) Scandinavian neo-Nazi organisations; 3) pre-eminent radical-right philosophers and groups in France; and 4) the political context and alt-right movements in the US.

Like radical right groups abroad, groups in Québec appear to be profoundly influenced by Scandinavian neo-Nazi organisations that popularise the use of neo-pagan iconography, symbols and identity. This is far from a new phenomenon; in fact, since the 19th Century, North American white supremacists have co-opted pagan symbols, ostensibly attracted by the notions of virile Northern European hypermasculinity (the chance at re-enacting the glory of their presumed Viking ancestors), and by the idea of "Vinland" (the portion of eastern

Canada explored by Vikings prior to the conquest of Christopher Columbus)[36].

In fact, Nordic religious motifs of revenge and action are prominent amongst radical right groups in Québec, arguably because they resonate far more than the values of Christianity and allow them to reframe their struggle as fighting a sacred battle against white genocide. Indeed, research has demonstrated that the members of the Soldiers of Odin in Québec were not only distinct from other Canadian chapters but more closely interlinked with their Swedish and Finnish counterparts[37]. This partly explains why the Soldiers of Odin in Québec remained affiliated with the worldwide movement despite the distancing and rejection of the Finnish leadership by the Canadian executive. This is particularly concerning given that the Finnish and Swedish Soldiers of Odin have previously been involved in violent street fighting and altercations[38].

However, despite the clear links to Scandinavia, France is another country by which the radical right in Québec is inspired, both in terms of organisational capacity and ideology. When the Fédération des Québécois de souche emerged in 2007, it did so as the Québec branch of the Mouvement National-Socialiste Français (MNSF) and originally received its web-hosting service from MNSF. More recently, the group Atalante adopted the slogan *Exister, c'est combattre ce qui me nie* ("To exist is to struggle against what denies me"), a tribute to Dominique Venner, a French ethno-nationalist thinker and former member of Organisation Armée Secrète, who committed suicide in the cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris to protest the legalisation of same-sex-marriage in France. French thinkers such as Jean Renaud Gabriel Camus are also gaining significant prominence within radical right circles in Québec. Philosophies such as Camus' *Great Replacement* theory, which states that white Catholic French populations (and the white Christian European population at large) are being systematically replaced with non-European people through mass migration and demographic growth, provide the radical right in Québec with a basis for their framing of current demographic trends and immigration policies.

Lastly, while Canadian extremists have long borrowed far-right narratives from the United States, the election of Donald Trump to the presidency in 2016 seems to have had two main effects on the radical right in Québec. First, Trump's rhetoric on immigration and his politicisation of immigrants have fed the rhetoric of radical right groups in Québec and emboldened these groups across North America. Discourse surrounding the threat of illegal immigration has grown more prevalent, mirroring the discourse of the president and other politicians, which also further emboldened the radical right in the US. Second, observing the subsequent stimulation of the US radical right, Canadian groups sought to coordinate and participate in this resurgence. As such, many Canadians were involved in radical right media platforms such as Stormfront[39], and a number of radical right militants from Québec travelled to the Unite the Right rally[40].

The final effect of the Trump presidency on the Canadian radical right relates to the implementation of controversial policies, notably the revocation of several categories of temporary visas. The ensuing increase in irregular border crossings by asylum seekers into Canada—particularly in Québec—fed into the radical right rhetoric and created a mirror image of the putative crisis on the US southern border that has also fuelled much of US political discourse of late. The Trump administration's contribution of this situation at the Canadian border gave Canadian radical right groups the opportunity to entrench themselves in public discourse, gain visibility, and created the false impression of a crisis that legitimised their actions; as such, one can note Storm Alliance's 'monitoring' of the border in the summer of 2018, as well as two large-scale protests by La Meute and other groups in Québec City.

> *Despite an initial rapid growth, groups with a more European focus (such as the Soldiers of Odin in Canada) have been plagued by splintering and defections.*

Groups like La Meute have tailored their narrative of Québec identity carefully. Their incorporation of narrative threads from traditions as

disparate as the First Nations, neo-pagans and Christians into more widely understood and accepted narratives of Québec identity and history resonates with a wider audience. As a result, they appear to be more successful in gaining mainstream support, particularly when compared to other groups with a more distinctive European focus and ideology.

Despite an initial rapid growth, groups with a more European focus (such as the Soldiers of Odin in Canada) have been plagued by splintering and defections. Experts argue that this at least in part due to tensions between feelings of Canadian nationalism and the group's transnational European orientation[41]. Indeed, the tensions resulting from the desire to prioritise local concerns over transnational ideologies led to a large number of Soldiers of Odin defecting to other groups such as La Meute and Three Percenters, and to the creation of splinter groups, notably Storm Alliance. Nonetheless, ideological and organisational links between Québec-based groups and Scandinavian structured neo-Nazi organisations remain important.

Endnotes

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ANNEX A

Agenda

RIGHT-WING EXTREMIST NETWORKS
SECURITY IMPLICATIONS OF A RE-EMERGING MOVEMENT

An unclassified workshop of the Academic Outreach program of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS)

6 February 2019, Ottawa

AGENDA

8:30 - 8:45	Opening remarks: Context and objectives of the workshop
8:45 - 9:30	**Scene-setter**
	Beyond hate: The 'new' right-wing extremism
9:30 - 10:30	**Module 1** - Assessment of an international uprising
	Right-wing extremism in the EU
	Global connectivity of right-wing extremist networks
10:30 - 10:45	Break
10:45 - 11:45	**Module 2** - Foreign and domestic targets, impacts and future considerations
	Online activity of Canadian right-wing extremists
	The re-emergence of right-wing extremism in Québec
11:45 - 12:00	Closing comments
12:00	Adjourn

ANNEX B

Academic Outreach at CSIS

Intelligence in a shifting world

It has become a truism to say that the world today is changing at an ever faster pace. Analysts, commentators, researchers and citizens from all backgrounds—in and outside government—may well recognise the value of this cliché, but most are only beginning to appreciate the very tangible implications of what otherwise remains an abstract statement.

The global security environment, which refers to the various threats to geopolitical, regional and national stability and prosperity, has changed profoundly since the fall of Communism, marking the end of a bipolar world organised around the ambitions of, and military tensions between, the United States and the former USSR. Quickly dispelling the tempting end of history theory of the 1990s, the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, as well as subsequent events of a related nature in different countries, have since further affected our understanding of security.

Globalisation, the rapid development of technology and the associated sophistication of information and communications have influenced the work and nature of governments, including intelligence services. In addition to traditional state-to-state conflict, there now exist a wide array of security challenges that cross national boundaries, involve non-state actors and sometimes even non-human factors. Those range from terrorism, illicit networks and global diseases to energy security, international competition for resources, and the security consequences of a deteriorating natural environment globally. The elements of national and global security have therefore grown more complex and increasingly interdependent.

What we do

It is to understand those current and emerging issues that CSIS launched, in September 2008, its academic outreach program. By drawing regularly on knowledge from experts and taking a multidisciplinary, collaborative approach in doing so, the Service plays an active role in fostering a contextual understanding of security issues for the benefit of its own experts, as well as the researchers and specialists we engage. Our activities aim to shed light on current security issues, to develop a

long-term view of various security trends and problems, to challenge our own assumptions and cultural bias, as well as to sharpen our research and analytical capacities.

To do so, we aim to:

- Tap into networks of experts from various disciplines and sectors, including government, think-tanks, research institutes, universities, private business and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in Canada and abroad. Where those networks do not exist, we may create them in partnership with various organisations; and
- Stimulate the study of issues related to Canadian security and the country's security and intelligence apparatus, while contributing to an informed public discussion about the history, function and future of intelligence in Canada.

The Service's academic outreach program resorts to a number of vehicles. It supports, designs, plans and/or hosts several activities, including conferences, seminars, presentations and round-table discussions.

While the academic outreach program does not take positions on particular issues, the results of some of its activities are released on the Canada.ca web site. By publicising the ideas emerging from its activities, the program seeks to stimulate debate and encourage the flow of views and perspectives between the Service, organisations and individual thinkers.