



## **RIGHT WING EXTREMISM AND YOUTH RECRUITMENT**

**Date:** March 18, 2021

*Disclaimer: This briefing note contains the encapsulation of views presented by the speaker and does not exclusively represent the views of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.*

### **KEY EVENTS**

On March 18, 2021, the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies (CASIS) Vancouver hosted its third digital roundtable of 2021, where the Director of the Centre on Hate, Bias and Extremism, and Professor in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology, Dr. Barbara Perry, presented on *Right Wing Extremism and Youth Recruitment*. The presentation was followed by a question and answer period with questions from the audience and CASIS executives.

### **NATURE OF DISCUSSION**

#### **Presentation**

Dr. Perry first took a top-down approach in a chronological order to account for the diverse and various threats Canadian right-wing extremism (RWE) poses. She began by highlighting the quantitative and qualitative change in Canadian RWE since the 2015 Centre on Hate, Bias and Extremism report. Dr. Perry also identified RWE emerging trends and discussed how these groups conduct recruitment and how to counter radicalization.

#### **Question Period**

The question period focused on current issues involving supporters and associates of RWE. Specifically, Dr. Perry addressed why supporters from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds seem to support extreme social movements. The link between organized crime (OC) groups and RWE groups was also examined.

## BACKGROUND

### Presentation

Canadian RWE movement has diversified to a great extent in the last five to six years. There is still reminiscence of traditional white supremacists such as Neo-Nazis and Skinheads, but the movement has been supplemented with other strands such as the anti-Muslim movement, which is closely related to anti-immigrant sentiment, alt-right movements, Patriot/militia movements, and accelerationism. The Skinheads, white supremacists, anti-authority movements, and lone actors have been studied historically but now there is more diversification within the movement.

Different groups that identify with the Patriot movement and accelerationism, represent a more dangerous threat due to their more aggressive stance and promotion of violence. The January 6, 2021 event in the U.S. highlights the accelerationist movement, which is concerned with provoking and promoting a civil war.

It is also important to note the Mano-sphere, which while being less focussed on the far-right movement, its core belief of misogyny has always been associated with the far-right movement. The misogynist belief is that there is a need to control women so that they know their place and the pureness of the white race is preserved. Their 14-word-motto, “we must ensure the existence of the white race and a future for our children”, highlights the key components of the movement. There are overlaps across the RWE movement, but the core remains the same.

On analyzing the emerging trends, Dr. Perry noted that there has been a growth in RWE since 2015. The distribution across Canada in 2015, was estimated to be about 100 active groups mostly concentrated in Quebec, Ontario, Alberta, and BC. The concentration is pretty much the same today, but estimates suggest that there are now about 300 active groups. Some of the changes also include the increase in activity in the Maritime provinces as the group leaders relocated after law enforcement started paying attention to these groups in Alberta and Ontario.

New groups have emerged, and new chapters are also forming within the existing extremist groups such as the Proud Boys and Soldiers of Odin. There are also more “floaters”, those who do not identify with any particular group but share ideologies and beliefs of multiple groups. Furthermore, there is a demographic shift towards middle aged and older people as well as middle class. This was represented in the Pegida and the Yellow Vest movements. However, educated and well employed people have also started to take part in these movements, and

this was seen during the January 6, 2021 event in the U.S., where many of those involved were lawyers, accountants, police, and military personnel.

On analyzing the formations of coalitions across groups and borders, Dr. Perry noted that rallies and demonstrations now seem more strategic. There has been a greater recourse to arms and the need to defend oneself with heavy weaponry. There is also evidence of involvement from active and former law enforcement personnel, who have the training and knowledge to engage in tactical strategies.

Regarding RWE Recruitment, Dr. Perry noted how social networks either online or offline can facilitate the grooming of new recruits. Seeking a sense of belonging, sharing grievances, or experiencing vulnerabilities generated by trauma or crisis can send individuals on a quest for answers. Another method is status offering, which works particularly well for those retired/ex-veterans who are still seeking status recognition.

RWE groups adopt a variety of strategies: posters, fliers, leaflets, and protests, as well as face to face strategies that include networking via social gatherings. Furthermore, mixed martial arts seem to be a powerful recruiting tool in the U.S. Lastly, online strategies enabled by social media apps, music, and gaming are focused on targeting youth (especially vulnerable youth).

Considering the trending growth of RWE groups, Dr. Perry recommended some counter strategies, such as education, public accountability, and resistance. We need to educate ourselves and enhance public awareness, build youth and adult resilience, encourage political leaders to call out and respond to hate, and safely challenge the far-right, the narratives, and the misinformation.

### **Question Period**

Far-right movements recognize shared grievances, which are usually the result of economic hardships. These shared grievances allow RWE movements to cross racial, religious, and economic lines to attract supporters, making the movement no longer White or Christian exclusive. The inclusion of minorities can increase their credibility if they can claim that they are not racists because one of their members belongs to one of those minority groups.

In addition, the 2015 report showed that OC groups and RWE groups can work together for mutual benefits. For example, while OC groups provide security and protection for RWE, RWE pays for their services in exchange. This is primarily seen in the U.S. The OC groups' commitment to the ideology is not very deep; it is mostly about the subcultural milieu.

## KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

### Presentation

- RWE movement has diversified to a great extent in the last five to six years within Canada; it has been supplemented with other strands such as anti-Muslim, alt-right, militia, and accelerationist movements.
- More educated and well employed professionals are joining RWE movements, as opposed to just disenfranchised individuals.
- Quebec, Ontario, Alberta, and BC are leading in the number of RWE groups, with considerable activities currently occurring in the Maritime provinces.
- Not only are new RWE groups emerging but also new chapters within the existing groups.
- Counter RWE strategies include increase of education and public awareness, build youth and adult resilience, and encourage public accountability.

### Question Period

- Dr. Perry provided an explanation to why non-ethnic whites and also non-Christians support far-right movements. She pointed that an overarching theme of economic grievances unite individuals to advance their perceived interests.
- The link between far-right movements and OC groups observed mostly in the U.S. can be explained by the financial benefits that OC groups receive in exchange for providing protection to RWE groups.



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