The Growth of the Alt-Right in Canada: What is Missing in the Fight Against Right-Wing Extremism
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Purpose Statement

It can be argued that Right Wing Extremism (RWE) is a security threat to Canada because it appears to be a growing movement with a significant increase in violent incidents. It can also be argued that government agencies have yet to classify RWE as a significant threat to Canada's national security, and that the movement is being normalized in Canadian society. This briefing note suggests that to combat the purported normalization of RWE in Canadian society, several strategic options are available to policymakers. These include pushing public agencies to act, ending violent behaviour, and supporting efforts to fragment movements by deradicalization, de-mobilization, and re-integration as prescribed by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, which "has established itself as a global leader in research and praxis around RWE" (Perry & Scrivens, 2017 p. 538).

The Security Problem

RWE has been described as a movement to unite individuals, who subscribe to radical nationalist ideologies, against marginalized groups that are perceived to threaten their country and their status in society (Perry & Scrivens, 2016b, p. 821). RWE's immediate objectives are to create fear within other groups through violent crimes of opportunity and establish legitimacy by infiltrating government through campaigns for electorally held offices (Perry & Scrivens, 2016b, p. 826-830). Creating fear in marginalized groups could cause a security threat by destabilizing the Canadian population. The presence of RWE members in government could arguably give the movement a means through which they can achieve their goals lawfully and in an official capacity. While it can be argued that it is better for RWE to move through the proper political channels, it can also be argued that the movement poses a significant threat to the values currently upheld by the Canadian government and that political recognition may indirectly legitimize other aspects of the movement.

Background and Key Facts

Approximately 100 current alt-right groups active in Canada have shifted their membership demographic and sanitized their movement in order to avoid the scrutiny of the Canadian Government and NGOs (Mastracci, 2017, para 2-3). Instead of right-wing groups comprised of only young, white males, an increasing number of groups recruit women and the older demographic. Perry notes that new members tend to be more educated and are therefore able to "sanitize the movement" through formal

skills of articulation (as cited in Mastracci, 2017, para 3). This sanitization occurs when groups are able to adjust their arguments toward cultural integrity, which can be interpreted as less offensive than other arguments, such as racial supremacy (Bruce, 2018, p. 9). This technique is a more sophisticated shift in RWE's rhetoric, allowing groups to appeal to a more generalized audience (Bruce, 2018, p. 9). Sanitization also makes it more difficult for established governments and NGOs such as BC Hate Crime Team, Anti-Racist Canada (ARC), National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM), and the Social Media Education Every Day project (SOMEONE) to take legal action. Moreover, sanitization can also make it difficult to identify members of RWE groups (Perry & Scrivens, 2017).

The RWE rate of violent incidents, which include arson, assault, and homicide, are increasing at a significantly higher rate than Salafi-Jihadist incidents in Canada (Mastracci, 2017, para 5). In Canada's 2017 Public Report on the Terrorist Threat to Canada, right-wing extremism was mentioned only 12 times, whereas Daesh and Al-Qaeda were mentioned a total of 60 times (Canadian Ministry of Public Safety). In an environment focused on Jihadist rhetoric and extremism, it has "become a daunting challenge for community members, anti-racists, and academics to highlight the presence of the far right in Canada" (Perry & Scrivens, 2015, p. 92). This assertion is evidenced by a 2015 case study on violent incidents perpetrated by extremists done by Perry and Scrivens. They found 120 violent incidents of RWE in the last thirty years, whereas there have only been twelve reported violent incidents perpetrated by Salafi-jihadists, a group that has arguably been monitored more closely than any other identifiable group in Canada (as cited in Mastracci, 2017, para 5). An example of a RWE incident is the 2015 Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the West (PEGIDA) protest in Montreal, which was a rally against Muslims entering/immigrating to Canada (Perry & Scrivens, 2017, p. 820). Statistics Canada has reported that since 2012, the rate of hate crimes against Muslims has increased by 253 percent (as cited in Mastracci, 2017, para 18). Another recent RWE incident occurred when two neo-Nazi sympathizers were arrested and charged with conspiracy to commit both murder and arson, and illegal possession of weapons for a purpose dangerous to the public (Perry & Scrivens, 2016b, p. 820).

Key Considerations

It has been argued that the Alt-right remains inadequately monitored due to the improper assessment of their perceived threat to the other various identity groups in Canada, and that this underestimation has the potential to embolden the movement and grow their support base (Mastracci, 2017, para 6). There is a bias in Canada to focus primarily on the threat posed by radicalized Islamists that is fueled by the framing of these perpetrators as "other" (Mastracci, 2017, para 6). Extreme Conservative politics have arguably aided RWE through anti-immigrant and anti-democratic rhetoric that align with the objectives of the movement (Perry & Scrivens, 2017, p. 551). Perry and Scrivens have noted that current law enforcement responses to RWE may be enabling threats to public order (2017, p. 545). An emailed response to the 2017 Public Safety Report by CSIS suggests that the agency interprets the threat of RWE to be "extremely small" and takes issue with classifying RWE as "a growing concern in Canada" (as cited in Bell, 2018). RWE uses the fears of average and predominantly white Canadians to grow support for its agenda (Mastracci, 2017, para 8). Advocacy groups like ARC struggle to raise awareness of RWE because the threat has been trivialized (Perry & Scrivens, 2017, p. 549).

Alternative Perspectives to be Considered

It could be argued that Canadian government agencies have begun to identify and address RWE as a threat to Canadian sovereignty. The most recent Public Safety Canada report referred to RWE as "a growing concern" despite interagency debate and suggestions that some acts of RWE could rise to the level of terrorist activity (2017). Also, there has been high turnover for RWE groups in the past because law enforcement targeted leaders, which left the followers of the movement who often lack ideological commitment (Perry & Scrivens, 2017, p. 545).

It could also be argued that select law enforcement teams have made progress in limiting the growth of RWE groups in certain regions (Perry & Scrivens, 2016a, p. 74). The BC Hate Crime Team and the Alberta Hate Crime Committee have taken a multi-sectoral approach, involving experts in policing, policy making, victim services and community engagement in order to react effectively and prevent hate crime and extremism (Perry & Scrivens, 2016a, p. 74). The Surete du Quebec has more recently become active in monitoring and engaging with RWE groups as well (Perry & Scrivens, 2016a, p. 75). The counter-terrorism team has been successful in gathering and sharing intelligence on a multitude of RWE groups in that region (Perry & Scrivens, 2016a, p. 75).

What is Not Known

The dissemination of RWE propaganda is uncalculated. Due to the lack of research into the online behaviour and campaigns of RWE, scholars cannot determine how far-reaching the movement is (Perry & Scrivens, 2017, p. 535).

Next Steps

One can suggest that more extensive research and systematic analysis on RWE in Canada should be undertaken to understand the current scope of the threat and inform government on how to best fragment the movement. A broad scope for research is imperative in order to pinpoint specific practices of prevention and intervention at local and national levels (Perry & Scrivens, 2017).

Available Options

- Increase funding for research/systematic analysis of RWE in Canada to inform government/NGOs about who/where the specific threats are.
- Educate Canadian population and media through a RWE awareness campaign in order to stifle the growth of the movement.
- Provide specialized training to Canadian law enforcement agencies to better identify RWE and practice one-to-one interventions.

Recommendations and Justifications

Option number two is recommended. While all three options require government funding, option two provides for the fastest results for stunting the growth of the RWE movement. This is because one of the key techniques of RWE is the perpetuation of false narratives. To mitigate this, it can be argued that we need to "enable young and adult learners to engage in critical analysis" of media and information campaigns that aim to recruit prospective extremists (Davies, 2008, p. 9).

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