The Increased National Threat of Domestic, Right-Wing Extremist Terrorism

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Executive Summary

The case can be made that Right-wing extremism (RWE) presents a national Canadian threat, requiring research and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) programming, which Canadian security and intelligence is arguably failing to recognize and address. An apparent rise in RWE activity, in response to U.S and European right-wing movements is occurring across the country, potentially placing Canada at risk of a large-scale RWE attack, or series of attacks. Canada could be perceived as ill-equipped against such attacks unless its security, intelligence, and law enforcement agencies begin to investigate and take seriously the RWE threat.

Purpose Statement

This briefing note argues that RWE in Canada is a security threat due to the rise in hate-related incidents, RWE group gatherings and militarization; the increase in RWE incidents across the border and in Europe, inspiring reactionary attacks in Canada; and the tendency for officials to trivialize the threat of RWE (Ellis & Parent, 2016; Perry & Scrivens, 2016; Perry & Scrivens, 2017; Public Safety Canada, 2017). Canada must engage in CVE programming which is multidimensional, involving law enforcement, education, social services, etc., to tackle the multifaceted foundations of RWE (Perry & Scrivens, 2017).

Problem Statement

It has been argued that Canadian RWE groups are capable of conducting acts of ideologically motivated violence, as evident during the right-wing militia demonstration in Calgary, as well as the cooperative right-wing rally in Vancouver, both in 2017 (Ball, 2017; Eagland, 2017; Lamoureux, 2017). Additionally, it has also been argued that RWE groups are mobilizing and militarizing themselves, to preserve white power and culture (Ellis & Parent, 2016; Jacoby, 2016). This would then present a threat to Canadian's human security, as a continued increase in hate-related incidents against non-White, and immigrant civilians, could arguably result in a large-scale RWE attack, or series of attacks (Ellis & Parent, 2016; Jacoby, 2016; Public Safety Canada, 2017).

Background & Key Facts

RWE can be defined as a loose movement with a focus on a racially, ethnically, defined nationalism. This nationalism is framed in terms of white power and/or preserving white culture from 'threats' posed by non-Whites, Jews, immigrants, homosexuals, and feminists (Perry & Scrivens, 2016).

RWE encompasses a collection of groups and individuals advocating a range of grievances, and positions (Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), 2016). RWE view the government as serving the interests of other groups at the expense of whites, and therefore, see it as illegitimate (Perry & Scrivens, 2016). RWE often advocate for offensive and defensive means to preserve their heritage and 'homeland' (Perry & Scrivens, 2016).

RWE incidents are conducted by individuals affiliated with alleged white supremacist groups, such as the Neo-Nazis, Aryan Guard, Blood and Honour, Western European Bloodlines, Hammer Heads, Northwest Imperative, The White Boy Posse, True White Boys, and Vinland Front Skinheads (Ellis & Parent, 2016; RCMP, 2016). It has been reported that Blood and Honour have been the most active and violent RWE group in Canada, with the Ku Klux Klan, Neo-Nazi Skinheads, and World Church of the Creator remaining active in Quebec (Ellis & Parent, 2016).

Increased mobilization and cooperation of RWE groups is evident via the right-wing rally in Vancouver in August, 2017, which involved numerous groups such as the Soldiers of Odin, the Cultural Action Party, and the Worldwide Coalition Against Islam gathering in supportive response to the Charlottesville RWE rally (Ball, 2017; Eagland, 2017). A militarized demonstration occurred in Calgary in 2017, by the group iii% (the Three Percent) who dressed in uniforms, armed with shock canes, regular canes, and clubs (Lamoureux, 2017). This group allegedly has a national presence, containing over 1600 members, and has been forming itself into a militia, discussing battle strategies, as well as stating that they are ready to go to war to stop the Islamic invasion of Canada (Lamoureux, 2017).

There are at least one hundred active Canadian RWE groups, and incidents have been steadily rising since 2003 (Ellis & Parent, 2016). RWE incidents since 2001 have been concentrated in Alberta, but have also occurred in British Colombia, Quebec, and Ontario (Ellis & Parent, 2016). It is reported that Canadian RWE incidents are often spontaneous, unplanned, and opportunistic attacks, conducted by an individual or a small group, involving unarmed or armed assaults, targeting individuals with specific racial or religious identities (Ellis & Parent, 2016).

Key Considerations & Implications

Limitations exist on countering violent extremism in Canada. It has been stated that there is a bias towards countering radical Islamic extremists (Perry & Scrivens, 2017). Arguably leading to a failure to address RWE (Perry & Scrivens, 2017). Second, there appears to be a tendency for officials to deny or trivialize the threat of RWE in Canada (Perry & Scrivens, 2016; Perry & Scrivens, 2017). It could, therefore, be argued that law enforcement has yet to monitor or take seriously, RWE activities, resulting in minimal engagement in CVE programming (Perry & Scrivens, 2017).

It has been argued that RWE is a prevalent, national security threat, that may climax into a large-scale attack (Ellis & Parent, 2016). This would be possible due to a lack of right-wing terrorists being monitored, and an investigative response being hindered by an absence of domestic terrorism intelligence, due to RWE being a low priority threat (Ellis & Parent, 2016). This lack of intel, and slow response, could allow for a subsequent attack or series or attacks to occur (Ellis & Parent, 2016).

Alternative Perspectives to be Considered

- New counter-terrorist ideas, such as community resilience, and the civilization of security may provide an alternative successful CVE strategy (Jacoby, 2016). A public-private government partnership, where the role of counter-terrorism is transferred to communities, may more efficiently discover radicalized individuals (Jacoby, 2016).
- RWE groups will remain fragmented, and therefore not pose such a significant threat to national security (Ellis & Parent, 2016).
- Right-wing terrorists will be subsumed into other activities (Ellis & Parent, 2016).

What is Not Known

- How the increasing spread of populist ideals across America and Europe will impact RWE in Canada?
- How technological advancement, specifically an increased use of the internet and social media, and the anonymity, global communications, and community-building opportunities these platforms offer, will impact RWE group dynamics and presence in Canada?
- What is the transition point of a RWE actor, from participating in an online community, and engaging in radical dialogue and thinking, to evolving into taking violent action?

Next Steps

- Invest in RWE investigation, intelligence, research, and multidisciplinary dialogue to analyze potential future of extremist groups.
- Examine RWE attacks against immigrants and make these communities empowered, and resilient (Ellis & Parent, 2016).

Available Options

- Canadian security agencies could reconsider and strengthen their public stances on RWE potential for violence, to better inform and prepare vulnerable communities.

Recommendations

In countering RWE, it is argued that preventative strategies opposed to reactive strategies are most effective (Perry & Scrivens, 2017). A consistent, evidence-based approach could potentially counter RWE in Canada. This could focus on: diverting people from being radicalized; responding to and countering hate speech; ending violent behavior and movements; supporting and empowering victims; and raising awareness of RWE (Perry & Scrivens, 2017). Countering RWE involves collaborative action, and the engagement of law enforcement, educators, social service providers, as well as the media (Perry & Scrivens, 2017).

Resources

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