

RESPONDING TO HATE

EDMONTON, ALBERTA RUGUST 2019

TABLE OF CONTENT

INTRODUCTION	3 5 8 10		
TRENDS IN HATE CRIMES AND INCI- DENTS IN CANADA AND ALBERTA COMMUNITY REACTION STEPS FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS STEPS FOR CITY OF EDMONTON AND THE EDMONTON POLICE SERVICE			
		CONCLUSION	14



INTRODUCTION

On January 25th 2019, four days before the second anniversary of the shooting at the Islamic Cultural Centre in Quebec City, members of a local anti-Muslim group who referred to themselves as "the Clann" entered the AI Rashid mosque in Edmonton during its Friday prayers. Three days prior to the incident, members of the group had discussed scouting local mosques on social media. These actions were a clear escalation within an established pattern of behaviour among hate groups in Alberta.

As a "patriot group," the Clann's actions are in line with intimidation tactics and vigilante-style street patrols conducted by similar groups in North America, Australia and Europe.³ Often these patrols take place in neighbourhoods or around places of worship that have high concentrations of visible and religious minority populations. More established groups such as the Soldiers of Odin, of which the Clann is a splinter group, have been engaged in similar activities since 2015.4 Specifically, what makes the Al Rashid incident unique and more concerning was the willingness of members of the Clann to physically enter a place of worship and confront worshippers, only days before the anniversary of one of the most significant terrorist attacks on Canadian soil - the 2017 Quebec City mosque shooting.

According to Noor Al-Henedy, a spokesperson for the Al Rashid, members of the Clann, donning toques and jackets with the imprinted words "infidel" or "non-believer" in Arabic, afterwards attempted to provoke worshippers through taunts and insults outside the mosque. ⁵ The Alberta Muslim Public Affairs

Council (AMPAC), called the hate incident an "attempt to intimidate and harass peaceful worshippers" as well as a representation of the "continued rise of white supremacist groups like the Soldiers of Odin." The AMPAC subsequently called upon law enforcement to take concrete actions against the group. In a press release, the National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM) stated the incident is an "exercise in hateful intimidation by known Islamophobic extremists of Canadian Muslims at their place of worship" and also expressed their solidarity with the Al Rashid community in denouncing this incident.

The impact of extremism and hate is felt by individuals and communities alike. In a recent poll conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs, over a quarter of Canadians (26 percent) believe it has become more acceptable to be prejudiced against Muslims and/or Arabs. 10 This correlates with the increase of anti-Muslim hate crimes and hate incidents experienced in Canada since 2014. In 2017, Muslim communities in Canada were subject to a peak 151 percent increase in hate crimes. 11 In 2018, the number of anti-Muslim hate crimes decreased in 2018 largely due to a fall in numbers in Ontario and Quebec. 12 With a concomitant rise of white supremacist violence (e.g., the mosque attack in Quebec City in 2017, at a synagogue in Pittsburgh in 2018 and at a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019) there are growing threats of violence and hate hanging over religious minority communities in Canada and the wider Western world. In this climate, hate incidents and crimes should be taken seriously.

After the incident at the Al Rashid, the Organization for the Prevention of Violence (OPV) conducted a survey with 70 attendees of

the AI Rashid mosque. The survey sought to better understand how community members initially react to these kinds of incidents while identifying proactive steps communities, the Edmonton Police Service and the City of Edmonton can take to prevent and address future occurrences. Based on the data collected from the survey and the findings of the OPV's 2019 **Building Awareness, Seeking Solutions** report, the organization has developed specific recommendations. These recommendations are as follows:

- Local civil society initiatives (e.g., #StopHateAB) should be expanded and promoted more rigorously. These initiatives create avenues for improved and more nuanced data collection. Data on non-criminal hate-based activities can be useful for organizations engaged in prevention and can aid in policy development. These kinds of initiatives also provide an avenue through which victims of hate can share their experiences.
- Law enforcement agencies should focus on the development of more proactive (versus reactive) responses to hate crimes and hate incidents. The development of these pro-active strategies should be done in tandem with impacted communities. The perception that police services do not take hate incidents seriously can undermine community-police relations and hinder reporting of incidents.
- The City of Edmonton and EPS should co-operatively engage in Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design Assessments (CPTED) of religious buildings impacted by hate crimes and hate incidents. At the request of impact-

- ed parties, this expertise will provide communities with an in-depth evaluation of how they can secure their place of worship from future hate crimes, hate incidents and acts of violence.
- Communities impacted by hate crimes and hate incidents should seek opportunities to learn from other communities that are similarly impacted by hate and identify shared good practices for prevention and mitigation of impacts. The development of co-operative actions plans in conjunction with key stakeholders (e.g., the police and municipality) could help to generate a city-wide prevention initiative. This approach will harness the strengths of community partnerships and policing and help to foster inter-community dialogue and resiliency among impacted communities.
- Civil society organizations focused on addressing issues of racism, hate and effective inter-cultural engagement should receive enhanced multi-government level support. These kinds of groups can provide grassroots programming that addresses the root causes of hate incidents and hate crimes.

TRENDS IN HATE CRIMES AND INCIDENTS IN CANADA AND ALBERTA

Canada is home to a peaceful and prosperous multicultural society. According to the 2016 census data, 22.3 percent of Canadians reported being members of a visible minority group, up from 19.3 percent in 2011. ¹³ One issue that has arisen from Canada's evolving demographics are increased occurrences of hate crimes and hate incidents that target visible minority communities.

Over the past the six years, there has been a steady increase in the number of police-reported hate crimes in Canada, with occurrences peaking in 2017 due in large part to a jump in the number of non-violent property crimes or "mischief" (vandalism, graffiti, etc.). ¹⁴ From 2016 to 2017, there was also an 83 percent increase in hate crimes motivated by hatred of religion, with Canadian Muslims (41 percent) second most targeted after Canadian Jews (43 percent). 15 However, recent data from 2017 to 2018, notes the overall number of police-reported hate crimes against Muslims meaningfully dropped by 50 percent. 16 Despite these fluctuation in the statistics, the upward trend observed in the data since 2014 remains established. 17 It is

worth noting that relatively high variability between years may speak to issues with data collection and reporting within census metropolitan areas (CMAs). Recognizing this, it is impossible to fully account for the impact of reporting on the statistical data and there is significant anecdotal evidence that reporting rates, while increasing, remain low.

Much like the rest of Canada, Alberta is home to an increasingly ethnically diverse population. In the 2016 census roughly one quarter of the population reported belonging to a visible minority community. This represented a 40 percent increase from 2011. Also reflecting national trends, from 2014 onwards there has been a pronounced increase in the number of police-reported hate crimes in the province, with the biggest increase taking place from 2016 to 2017 with 192 police-reported hate crimes in 2017 primarily targeting Muslim or Arab and West Asian populations.

In Edmonton specifically, the rates of victimization have fluctuated over the last few years, with the amount of hate crimes peaking in 2015 with 81 police-reported hate crimes. ²⁰ In 2016, the amount of hate crimes dropped to 50, and it has remained fairly stable since. ²¹ In 2017, there were 66 police-reported hate crimes and in 2018, there were 69. ²²

Lastly, it is important to note that while the rise in police-reported hate crimes is partially reflective of an actual increase in the numbers of incidents, hate crimes investigators in Alberta have noted that improved rates in reporting from victims are in part responsible for the increasing rates seen after 2014.²³

THE AL RASHID MOSQUE

The Al Rashid mosque is firmly entrenched in Edmonton's history and social fabric. It dates to 1938 when Edmontonians from different backgrounds banded together to raise money to build the city's first mosque.²⁴ As a result of its long presence in the city, the Al Rashid has attracted generations of Muslim families and has filled a number of community and social service roles for a growing Muslim population. Today the mosque and its associated institutions prioritize, among other areas of work, education and youth engagement. 25 In August of 1982, the "new" Al-Rashid building – also known as the Canadian Islamic Centre – opened its doors to serve a growing community. The original mosque is now housed in Fort Edmonton Park where Edmontonians can learn about its unique history.²⁶ As Edmonton's oldest and most established mosque, the Al Rashid offers a gathering place for a diverse local Muslim community.

In addition to its community service programs, the Al Rashid is engaged in inter-faith and inter-cultural initiatives - including the hosting of educational tours at the mosque. 27 Volunteers and staff at the mosque developed outreach programs that have a positive impact in the wider community. These outreach activities include providing food and shelter to evacuees of the 2016 Fort McMurray fires, and regularly opening the doors of the mosque to Edmonton's homeless population during the winter months.²⁸ The community-based activities conducted by the Al Rashid provide tangible social benefits to both the local Muslim communities and Edmonton as a whole.

THE CLANN

The Clann represents a splinter "patriot' group formed by some of the former members and leaders of the Edmonton branch of the international group: the Soldiers of Odin (SOO). The Soldiers of Odin have their origins in Finland as an anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim group whose leadership has well-established, though consistently denied, white supremacist and neo-Nazi ties. Like other patriot groups operating in western countries the SOO don uniforms and patches that resemble those of motorcycle gangs and engage in "street patrols" that are ostensibly framed as creating another layer of community safety.²⁹

Like its predecessor, the Clann is primarily focused on grievances and fears related to the control of borders, and criminality and terrorism among newcomers and refugees particularly Muslims. Patriot groups like the Clann are motivated primarily by xenophobia but also a strident opposition to the Liberal federal government under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the former provincial government of then-Premier Rachel Notley's NDP. The emergence of patriot groups in Alberta coincided with a sharp economic recession that commenced in 2014 and the election of the federal Liberal and provincial NDP governments in 2015. Subsequently, they can be seen as a response to local socio-economic conditions and a host of contentious international, national and provincial political issues, especially related to security, immigration and refugee policy (e.g., border controls, welcoming of Syrian refugees and fears over terrorism and conspiracy theories focused on the imposition of religious laws in Canada). 30 As evidenced by their public statements, social media activity and local protests, members of patriot groups feel

"left-behind" (i.e., culturally and economically) and are concerned that the character of their country is being irreversibly changed.³¹

As in other jurisdictions patriot groups combine activities like street patrols with acts of community volunteerism and charity – often around the needs of the homeless. ³² For example, in September 2018, members of local patriot groups had plans to operate around a local Mustard Seed Shelter and distribute food to the homeless. However, the event ended shortly after group's members were confronted by counter protestors. ³³

Soon after that, members of the then SOO made another public appearance when they met with prospective provincial political candidates at a public gathering where they took pictures together. This attracted negative media attention and resulted in a fracturing of relationships with the original chapter of SOO in Finland. After this incident, the group was disbanded and rebranded itself as the "Canadian Infidels" and continued its anti-Muslim online activism. Later, following a cycle of internal group fracturing and re-branding, an element of this group emerged as "the Clann".

The group's pattern of internal fracturing and escalating behavior peaked when members of the group confronted worshippers outside of the AI Rashid mosque.³⁸ Since the incident took place, the group has largely ceased public activity as it experienced significant negative media attention and internal rifts. The group's Facebook page has been shut down by the social media company for violating its community standards which prohibit extremist content and organized hate groups on the platform.³⁹ As of the summer of 2019, the group and its membership's future remains unclear. A fracture in the group could

lead to sustained decline or, as discussed in the OPV's earlier report on patriot groups in Alberta, lead to a segment of the group becoming further isolated and prompt a further escalation.

MEASURING COMMUNITY IMPACTS AND SEEKING PRO-ACTIVE SOLUTIONS

Several weeks following the hate incident, the Organization for the Prevention of Violence (OPV) conducted a survey with 70 attendees of the AI Rashid mosque. The participation of respondents in the survey was done on a voluntary and anonymous basis and the OPV is thankful for the participants time and insights. The survey was composed of three questions focused on impacted communities' experiences with hate crimes and hate incidents. Specifically, it accounted for the initial reactions of the mosque goers to the hate incident and the proactive steps that communities, police and municipalities can take to address future occurrences.

The research findings are organized below based on the topics of the questions:

- (1) What was your initial reaction to the incident (visit by members of a hate group to local mosques) in January?;
- **(2)** What steps should be taken by the community to address the actions of these groups and other hate incidents?;
- (3) What steps should be taken by the police and the City of Edmonton to address the actions of these groups and other hate incidents targeting the community?

COMMUNITY REACTION

This section reviews the initial reactions of community members to the hate incident. The responses from the surveys demonstrate that community members felt a range of reactions and emotions including fear, shock, anger and frustration.

Approximately one-third of survey respondents described themselves as feeling surprised or shocked by the incident. This initial reaction demonstrates that a sizeable portion of respondents view hate-based activity as an uncommon phenomenon in Edmonton. These respondents expressed the idea that such occurrences are atypical and not reflective of their experiences in the city and country.

- "I was in shock and disbelief as I had come to know Canada as a multicultural and accepting place, and at first could not believe that such actions could actually take place."
- "My initial reaction was shock that there are actually people in this multicultural city that still have hatred and mistrust against Muslims."

Another common reaction was concern for personal and communal safety. In particular, individuals were concerned about the safety of children and women who wear the hijab (a visible indicator of religious identity that can increase the risk of being targeted). Community members highlighted how outward

expressions of faith were now seen as a risk and this challenged their ability to practice their faith with dignity

- "[I felt] surprised and scared and was unsure of the safety of the Muslim community. For the safety of the girls and women who go out with hijabs that they might get attacked or targeted."
- "[I worry] for how this fear may cause Muslims to distance themselves from the Masjid as well as looking visibly Muslim."
- "I felt scared scared for my children and community – for fear that they [would] hurt someone."

Furthermore, survey respondents also expressed concern over "copycat" events occurring in the future that are motivated by similar rhetoric and extremism. Specifically, respondents highlighted a fear of escalation in hate incidents and the possibility that escalation could end in violence. As will be discussed in a later section in this report, most community members expressed the idea that copycat hate incidents are more likely in absence of pro-active responses from government and law enforcement.

"[I felt] unsafe, unwanted, having a thought in the back of my head say, "You don't belong" and feeling that MAYBE others might take more violent measures and that it will continue like a domino effect, one after another."

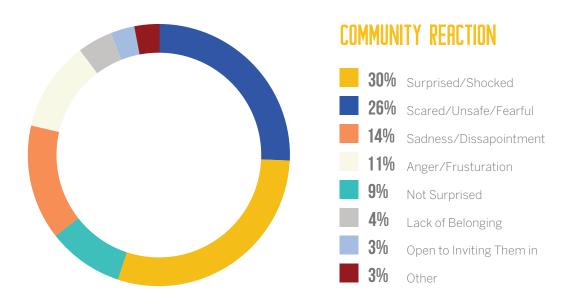
In the aftermath of the hate incident, approximately 14 percent of community members expressed feeling disappointment and dismay that they were being targeted and intimidated in a society that they also call their own. Amongst survey respondents, some viewed these hate incidents as a direct challenge to their "Canadian-ness" and expressed feeling marginalized. Hate, racism and violence that is aimed at minority communities can represent significant threats to social cohesion as it drives conflict and social polarization. In turn this can erode feelings of mutual trust and a shared sense of belonging to a national community. This threat is particularly exacerbated in a country that is as pluralistic and diverse as Canada.

"[I felt] astonished, because our community is friendly, and we integrate into society. I felt hurt because this person could be my neighbour."

"It saddens me and makes me feel otherized. Also, it lessens my sense of belonging in Canada." Furthermore, as revealed by these surveys these concerns are particularly acute for youth as they are trying to come to terms with their personal identity as second or third generation immigrants.

"Being a Canadian, this country is all I know. Although I identify with parts of my parents culture a huge part of my identity is shaped around being Canadian. That's why it's so difficult to come to terms with the increasing amount of Islamophobia in Canada."

As shown by these responses, while these kinds of hate incidents fall below the threshold of a hate crime, they still have significant negative impacts on community member's sense of security and belonging. The fear generated by these events can significantly impact community well-being and leave individuals feeling vulnerable to perceived and actual threats.



STEPS FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

With these reactions in mind the survey also sought to identify community suggestions for proactive measures that could be taken internally to meaningfully address hate incidents and hate crimes. Roughly 40 percent of survey respondents felt that the most effective community-based response to combat the actions of hate groups was to improve public awareness of Islam. Through this awareness community members believed they could combat myths, conspiracy theories, hate and narratives originating with the media (traditional and social), which can be used to spread divisive ideas. Suggestions here included public service campaigns aimed at combatting negative stereotypes, increasing representation from impacted communities in civil society, and the holding of community events which promote inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue and engagement. This response demonstrates a resilient approach by community members towards addressing hate incidents and a desire to co-operatively build safer and more inclusive societies.

- "Hold more community events and teach our members not to be afraid – I know that others are afraid too and are reacting from fear."
- "Be firm in our identity as both Muslims as well as Canadians. Often times people react to such incidents by watering down our identity, so we look more appealing to them. We need to

show others the beauty in Islam without watering it down."

Building on this theme, approximately 30 percent of community members indicated a desire to build intra- and inter- community solidarity with different ethnic groups that make up Edmonton.

- "The Muslim community is really divided and in order to overcome the stereotypes placed on us we need to come together regardless of our colour or race."
- "The Muslim community needs to come together to combat the misconceptions that people have about Islam because essentially those committing the hate crimes view Islam as evil. The Muslim community needs to expel the misconceptions and also make it clear that we do not accept the hatred that is being thrown at us."
- "I think that aside from working with authorities, it may also be beneficial to mix and work together with our non-Muslim neighbours more. While it often becomes tiring to carry the responsibility to always be the one teaching, these instances make it clear that it still necessary to work the larger non-Muslim communities."

As will be discussed in the next section, some survey respondents indicate openness to partnering with the government and civil society stakeholders to address the effects of hate crimes and build community safety. Roughly 28 percent of community members expressed a pressing need for increased vigilance within Islamic communities – including through the use of enhanced security and greater policing around mosques. Current

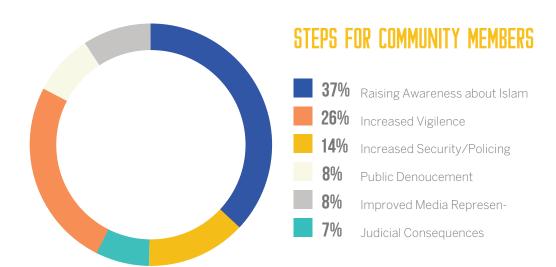
security-based initiatives, such as the Security Infrastructure Program administered by Public Safety Canada, is one avenue through which security efforts can be supported. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) assessments and training around security protocols at religious institutions represent other pro-active avenues for assisting communities impacted by hate which had already been implemented by some law enforcement agencies in Alberta. Another potential pro-active step for community groups and institutions may be working to identify individuals targeting them, and proactively seek legal remedies like restraining orders which would increase the probability of law enforcement being able to charge individuals if they were present at community centres or places of worship.

"I think that the community should have more sessions with police officers/policy makers to discuss the concerns in our communities that Muslims face, specifically hate crimes. As a woman of colour and a visible Muslim, I want to feel safe in the city I live in and continue to be an active member in my community."

"Our community should be helped with how to deal with such confrontations safely and in a manner which is reflective of our religious mannerisms and moral advocacy of peace."

"Engage in open conversations and develop safety measures...if the event would happen to us how can we protect ourselves and/or escape."

Finally, a small percentage of respondents - nine percent - also called upon political and community leaders of all affiliations and backgrounds to publicly denounce and condemn hate crimes and hate incidents. These community members expressed a desire for solidarity and support from public office holders who can help community members during periods of stress and uncertainty. In their survey responses, community members expressed that when they are targeted by hateful behaviors and actions, firm and unequivocal condemnations of these types of behaviors from public leadership can send a strong signal to communities and the public about acceptable behaviour



STEPS FOR CITY OF EDMONTON AND THE EDMONTON POLICE SERVICE

This section highlights proactive measures that community members suggest should be taken by the Edmonton Police Services and the City of Edmonton to address hate groups and hate incidents which target the Muslim community. Almost half (40 percent) of the survey respondents believed that hate crimes or incidents were not taken seriously by law enforcement agencies. These frustrations were similarly noted by community-members interviewed for the Building Awareness, Seeking Solutions report where individuals

seeking Solutions report where individuals highlighted that, recognizing that there a balance must be struck between individual and community rights (e.g., around the issue of freedom of speech), the response of law enforcement and the prosecution service to hate crimes was seen as inadequate. Community members noted that charges were rarely laid in these cases and they believed that community concerns were left insufficiently addressed. Community members worried that continued failure to lay criminal charges could increase the willingness of groups to target mosques and other places of worship. Therefore, a prompt response by police and the municipality was viewed as

essential to preventing further escalation of behaviour among hate groups.

- "I think that [the EPS] should go out in the public and make it clear that these things are not okay.
- "People need to be charged in order to deter other individuals from doing hate crimes."
- "The police, city, community (including other faiths) must condemn these hate crimes and show [that] they will never be tolerated."
- "[The] City of Edmonton needs to understand the magnitude of the issue and how this one event can cause others with the same (hate) to do the same or even worse. So, address[ing] this issue will reflect on Edmontonians' values as a city and their vision for the community now and into the future."

This lack of levying charges and seeking prosecution also influences the perception of law enforcement and the judicial system within impacted communities, which can create barriers to future reporting if the general perception is that police and the Crown are unwilling or unable to do anything.

"The police already [have]enforced laws yet the law itself is an inconsistent protection due to identifying individuals into two categories: mental illness or perpetrators. I do not have much faith in our system due to historical decisions that continue to permit inhumane acts."

"Notification by Muslim groups/others of these hate crimes needs to be taken as a high priority."

"For starters, EPS needs to have a more diverse work force and allow Muslims to take part in decision making."

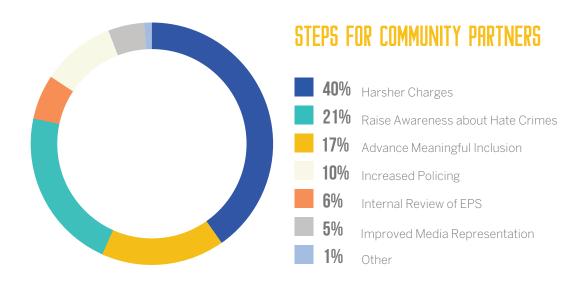
Despite these negative perceptions, there was a desire and openness among almost 17 percent of survey respondents to partner with these stakeholders to work proactively to raise awareness about hate crimes, build measures to address anti-Muslim hate incidents and hate crimes and advance initiatives which promote inclusion in the city.

"[There should be] campaigns to define, share the degree of, and enforce harsher punishments of these [hate] crimes."

"I think that the police and the City of Edmonton should be willing to meet with members of the Muslim community and be open to discussing safety, services offered like helplines or distress lines/to the community in order to deal with feel safe in the general public."

"City of Edmonton should organize more activities so people of all faiths can relate well with one another. They should [also] be more involving and engaging with the Muslim communities as well as other faith groups to promote inclusion."

Similar to the ideas expressed in the section above, there was a strong preference expressed for initiatives that promote public education about Islam and the need for inter-cultural engagement.



CONCLUSION

The events of January 25, 2019 left many Edmontonians shocked and fearful. The Al Rashid mosque and the Muslim community in Edmonton have a long and storied presence in the city and the actions of the Clann challenged community safety and the sense of belonging community members feel for their city and country. The event also represented a worrying escalation in confrontational and aggressive behaviour among local patriot groups.

The immediate response among politicians, community members, the Edmonton Police Service and City of Edmonton was expressions or support and solidarity. What this survey shows is that such expressions must lead to something greater – pro-active steps among both impacted communities and key stakeholders like the municipality and police.

The appropriate responses to the event, according to the community members who were directly targeted with the hate incident, are well reasoned. First, greater security measures including heightened policing and security infrastructure can act as a deterrence. Second, there is a need to tackle misconceptions about Islam and growing social polarization in Edmonton and Canada. Hate crimes statistics and these kinds of incidents speak to a growing trend that requires careful and strategic action. At its core, hate and extremism are fuelled by an us vs. them mentality and a sense of impending or ongoing crisis. Public education, awareness and inter-cultural engagement are important steps for addressing the root causes of hate. These are areas of policy that must be carefully planned and harness the positive elements of

Canadian national identity (e.g., as a successful, pluralistic society). Community members cannot pursue these initiatives without support – there is a need for a multi-stakeholder approach that includes Canadian civil society, multiple levels of government and law enforcement.⁴⁰

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