

HATE, EXTREMISM, AND TERRORISM

In Alberta, Canada,
and Beyond

The Shift from 2019 to 2022

II. Ideologically-Motivated Violent Extremism

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organization for
the prevention
of violence

IDEOLOGICALLY MOTIVATED VIOLENT EXTREMISM (IMVE) - A BACKGROUND

Ideological motivated violent extremism (IMVE) is the term used by the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS) for various grievances and ideas that have traditionally been described as ranging from far-left extremism to far-right extremism.¹ The term encompasses four subcategories of beliefs that justify using violence to advance ideological goals.

The first is xenophobic violence, which is racially or ethno-nationalist motivated ideologies such as those found in white supremacism and neo-Nazism. It includes former groups like Atomwaffen Division or the Base.

The second is violence motivated by anti-authority or anti-government sentiments. This is characterized by the current pseudo-legal movement in Canada and can include groups like the Sovereign Citizens or the Freemen-of-the-Land (FOTL). The third is gender and identity-driven violence, which is violence fuelled by a hatred of those of a different gender or sexual orientation. This can include violent involuntary celibates (incels) and others within the so-called 'manosphere.'

Finally, CSIS includes a final category for other grievance-driven and ideologically motivated violence for those individuals who act without clear affiliation to an established group.

While the activity level of some IMVE categories appears to be rising since the OPV's 2019 report, such as xenophobic violent extremists, these have been counter-balanced by a decline or plateauing of other forms of extremism in the province.

This was echoed by law enforcement officials we interviewed for this report:

"Some of the symptoms that we see seem to have increased. We follow the federal government's definition.... [drawn from] the CSIS Act, like Political, Ideological, and Religious [violent extremism]. So, if we're looking at all those cumulatively, since 2017 there probably would have been an increase, but that would have to acknowledge that that's coming off a dip in religious extremism. So, I think there's been growth in some areas and recession in others."
– Law enforcement official

This section divides the discussion of these movements by their ideological subgrouping within the four categories described above. Each section will begin with a background, a description of the activity in Alberta and Canada, and will then provide information on specific groups, movements, and manifestations.

XENOPHOBIC VIOLENCE

The year 2015 marked the beginning of an increase in xenophobic violence demonstrated by a series of lone-actor attacks around the world, including in Canada, the United States, New Zealand, and Germany. Since the early 2000s, most xenophobic violence has been carried out primarily by lone actors. However, we witnessed a series of largely unsuccessful attempts during the 2010s to build small networks or cells, exemplified by groups like Atomwaffen Division (recently rebranded as the National Socialist Order) and the Base.

After attracting attention from law enforcement, many of these groups suffered major blows to their organizational integrity, such as the arrest of the groups' leaders and infiltration by undercover law enforcement. As a result, many sympathizers have since refrained from organizing into 'named' groups, preferring to operate alone or in small, unconnected cells. This follows the legacy of two prominent white supremacist writers – Louis Beam's "Leaderless Resistance" and James Mason's "Siege."

It remains to be seen what effect the global pandemic and more regional events like the last two U.S. Presidential elections, civil rights movements, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine will have on xenophobic violence in the next several years. However, it does appear that the move away from group-based activities and toward lone-actor and small-cell activity has some momentum.

Individuals who identify as part of these movements are emboldened by the current global security climate, the growing power of populist politicians, movements, and social issues that generate contentious debates online.

Recent attackers associated with xenophobic extremist ideologies are also particularly engaged with popular conspiracy theories in IMVE, including white genocide and the great replacement. Both theories mobilize popular fears and tropes for xenophobic movements and actors by focusing on what is perceived as a demographic shift in Western states away from Caucasian majorities. Moreover, evidence of transnational networking and collaboration, particularly in some Eastern European countries – a historical trend within the xenophobic extremist movement which has recently received renewed attention – suggests activity and violence associated with xenophobia is likely to persist.

While the current trend in xenophobic activity takes the form of lone actors or small, disaggregated cells, this trend must be understood as having developed from the legacies of organized groups like Atomwaffen Division (AWD) and the Base. Equally influential were online hubs, such as Iron March, which, while being the birthplace for Atomwaffen and the Base, was also responsible for the re-popularizing ideologies that eschew group-based activities.

First, this section will begin by outlining the current trends in xenophobic violence in Alberta and will then review and describe the important historical developments which have influenced the current iteration of the movement.

Status of Xenophobic Violence in Alberta

Since 2019, the landscape of xenophobic violence has changed in Alberta. Today, like the trends elsewhere, the landscape is defined less by organized groups and more by loosely connected or lone individuals. One factor potentially influencing this shift was the Government of Canada's listing of Blood & Honour and Combat-18 as official terrorist entities in 2019. These two neo-Nazi groups originated in the United Kingdom.

Two years later, following the January 6th riots at the U.S. Capitol building, the Government of Canada added AWD, the Proud Boys, the Base, and the Russian Imperial Movement to the list of terrorist entities.

There has been a marked rise in IMVE violence and activity over the last five years in Canada. However, the extent to which this violence is linked to organized groups versus lone actors has led to some disagreement over the utility of the listing process.²

For example, listing a group will likely have little to no impact on individuals who are fully committed to an extremist ideology, as they may move to another non-listed group or operate alone. The fluidity of IMVE is also a key defining feature that distinguishes this form of violent extremism from Religiously Motivated Violent Extremism (RMVE).

In the latter, generally speaking, allegiance to a specific group can have major implications for an individual's role and approach to violence. In the former, individuals can act in ways that advance a perceived cause without ever affiliating themselves to a group. These differences have raised doubts about the effectiveness of the terrorist listing as a tool used to combat these groups and their followers.

Some law enforcement officials we interviewed, however, praised the positive impact that Canada's listing had on several of the groups which previously operated in the province:

"In the last few years, we've had a number of additional groups added to the terrorist entity list in Canada. So, that has affected the groups that we had – actually a few groups that we had – here in [locally]. Three of them specifically – Combat-18, Blood and Honour, they had a small group here. They don't [now], they've been wiped out. And they don't really exist here anymore.

Three Percenters – same thing, they had a group here, a leader, and a couple followed, and with their listing as a terrorist entity it's pretty much silenced them. Proud Boys – same thing, once they got listed as a terrorist entity, they've really been silenced. We haven't seen them. They weren't overly active to start with. They were kind of small groups... But they were here, they existed, but now they don't. I think the terrorist entity listing has really clobbered [them]."

– Law enforcement official

However, not all interviewees attributed as much credit to the terrorist entities listing, and instead noted that some of the groups were already largely defunct or in decline in the province, and the effects of listing on groups' activity were limited only to some groups:

"I think there's been essentially no change, because [those] groups were publicly defunct in the province before the [listing]. We hadn't really seen any organized in-person activity from the Three Percenters since late 2019, maybe early 2020, but that wasn't... actual organized activity, that was attempts to organize that failed.

So, their group had essentially fizzled out by then. I think it's very similar with Atomwaffen, [which] had been publicly dissolved before the listing. I'll say no impact on some groups... the Proud Boys are difficult because they were still technically active, they were present in the province, they stopped activity but the history of the Proud Boys in the province has been stop-start... So, it could have been part of that natural cycle. The timing was probably right, just to prevent them from reorganizing again."

– Law enforcement official

According to CSIS' 2020 Public Report, there has been a significant rise in IMVE activity in Canada. Much of this has been observed online, and the report notes that "threat narratives within the IMVE space have evolved with unprecedented multiplicity and fluidity."³

However, several offline incidents involving xenophobic extremism have also been observed. For example, in October 2020 propaganda clippings promoting the websites of white supremacy and the alt-right movement were littered in front of several schools in British Columbia;⁴ in Manitoba, propaganda and recruitment posters have appeared advertising groups like the Base;⁵ and members or supporters of various groups have conducted 'swattings' across the country, whereby false reports are called in causing emergency services to unnecessarily expend resources.⁶

Alberta has seen similar trends recently. For example, in Brooks in 2021, multiple stickers with phrases like "white lives matter" and "make white kids" were found around the city, including in mailboxes and in playgrounds.⁷ Like in other similar incidents around the country, the stickers contained a QR code that leads the user to a white supremacist website. Law enforcement officials we interviewed in the province echoed these trends, citing several recent instances of neo-Nazi propaganda:

"We've seen stickers around the [area], white pride, and those [include] links to get you down and connect folks to a neo-Nazi [web]site. So, you get into that. You'll see different posters and signs put up, we've had banners hung around the [area]. And, it's just to get people down that thought process. But again, we don't know if it's linked to any groups but when we do identify those individuals, we do take it very seriously. I'd call them recruiting sites... it's where you start to get into that world, you see the literature. From there you can get inside some of the chat rooms and have some conversations and all that."

– Law enforcement official

"One thing that we have noticed is that throughout the last couple of months there's been a propaganda campaign from the Folkish Resistance Movement/Volksfront. I know that they've been pushing out poster designs and stickers and stuff for their followers to put up, and encouraging accountability posts where the person puts it up, takes a picture, [and] sends it in. They repost it on their website and say "Hey, look at how great we are." So, there has been a small propaganda campaign in the province. I can't say if it's more than one person though, because the incidents are so few and far between that it could just be one person who's travelling to a bunch of different towns and doing it themselves."

– Law enforcement official

In addition to some sporadic propaganda campaigns, law enforcement officials we interviewed noted that there have been some, albeit unsuccessful, attempts by neo-Nazis in the province at organizing:

“I haven’t heard a lot of actual successful in-person organization. We have had some reports of attempts to organize in-person meetings. But... I can’t recall hearing... that [they] actually happened. So, it seems mostly online.”

– Law enforcement official

“No [organized neo-Nazi] groups, not that we’ve noticed. We’ve been trying to just look into a few people [whose] speech on Facebook [was problematic], just to see if they are forming a collective within the community, and we haven’t found any [evidence to suggest] there’s a group of people that are going out and doing these types of things or have that same ideology. All the stuff that we’ve looked into, even random people that have popped up in the last little bit with [that] kind of rhetoric... we haven’t found anybody that’s actually engaged in a group of people that meet or anything like that.”

– Law enforcement official

One law enforcement interviewee noted that, despite their lack of organization, neo-Nazi propaganda by a single individual appeared to encourage others who were previously unknown to law enforcement in the area:

“[One individual] was leaving pamphlets, putting up stickers, and being very evasive with police. And then there were a few other people that just came out of the woodwork... so, [he was] charged... and then a few others popped up as kind of neo-Nazi, lone-[actors], saying “this is my ideology [too].” [The individual of concern] never did connect with those people but it was interesting how these people we didn’t really know existed in the community just popped up and were like, “but what about me?” It basically made it okay for them to come out publicly.”

– Law enforcement official

Despite their lack of cohesiveness, this new wave of xenophobic extremists poses a potential threat in Canada and Alberta. For example, in the summer of 2021, a man deliberately targeted and rammed his vehicle into a Muslim family in London, Ontario, killing 4. Like other recent acts of violent xenophobic extremism, there is currently no evidence to link the perpetrator to any organized groups, and the attack can likely be attributed broadly as a grievance or ideologically-driven one. Additionally, federal prosecutors elevated the charges to include terrorism; the third time terrorism charges have been laid against an individual in Ontario since 2020.⁸

As the new wave of xenophobic extremists continues to embrace lone actor tactics, the difficulty in tracking and intercepting these individuals may also increase. According to at least one law enforcement official we interviewed, despite the trend toward a post-organizational movement, xenophobic violent extremism (amongst others) still poses a threat in the province.



“I think there’s been a slow growth in neo-Nazis. Especially in what I consider [to be] the modern accelerationist, nihilist, new-wave neo-Nazis that have been around since like 2011.”

– Law enforcement official

“I’ll start by saying that I don’t think any of the groups that I’m aware of – any of the subcategories of the IMVE categories – I don’t think any of them are a particularly high risk of violence right now in the province. And that’s violence against persons. The risk is, Canada’s rate of terrorist violence is so low... so many of the attacks are just individually-driven.

The individualized nature of the attacks that we’re seeing in Canada right now in our current context makes it so difficult to draw any kind of conclusions. [However], if I was going to say which ones are they most likely to come out of I’d probably say neo-Nazis. But, the probability in my opinion is equally close for jihadists [or] incels.”

– Law enforcement official

Others noted that, while the groups may have dissolved, the individuals acting alone remain a potential concern, echoing the trend within the larger xenophobic extremist movement:

“I think there’s always these individual people, like, there’s always going to be a white supremacist in the crowd somewhere. There’s always going to be somebody who espouses that ideology, But, in terms of an organized group like with Combat-18, Blood & Honour, [those] group[s] are dead here. And, the few [individuals] that were still remaining, their leader moved [away]. Nobody really picked it up and said, “Okay, I’m going to carry on, I’ll be the leader now.”

We haven’t heard a thing from them or about them. But hey, those [people] are still out there and every now and then we’ll see a report of an interaction that a uniformed [officer] has with somebody... And they might report back to us, “Hey, this [person] had a swastika on [their] arm,” or “[they] had Mein Kampf on [their] coffee table,” of whatever. But, there’s no evidence to support that those types of people are actively engaging in promoting hatred or trying to start a group, or targeting any individuals or groups.”

– **Law enforcement official**

Background and Ideological Trends

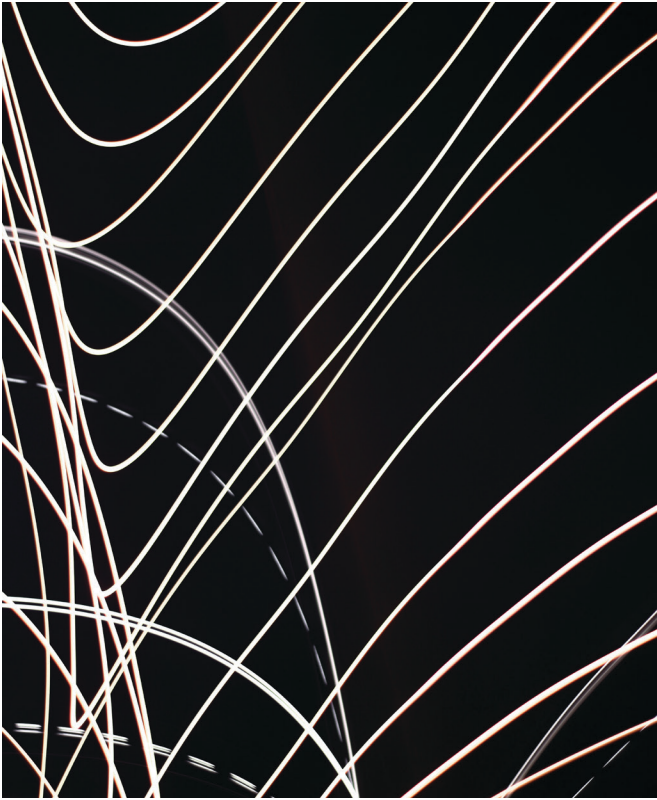
Groups and individuals who espouse xenophobic extremism, including white supremacists, white nationalists, and Neo-Nazis, share hatred and distrust of specific racial, ethnic, or religious groups. In the West, this includes, but is not limited to, visible minorities and non-Christian religious groups such as members of Jewish and Muslim communities.

In tandem with a belief in ethnic and cultural superiority, white supremacists and national socialists believe that white culture and heritage is threatened by people of colour migrating to Western countries. By contrast, neo-Nazis share many similar beliefs with white supremacists and national socialists. Still, they tend to place a heavier emphasis on hatred of the Jewish community specifically and focus more on contributing to an armed revolutionary struggle for a fascist political state.

Traditional and historically established white supremacy groups like the Ku Klux Klan or the online alt-right movement prevalent during the mid-late 2010s believe that existing political and power structures can be used to create a racially organized hierarchical society. However, an emerging doctrine known as accelerationism rejects this in favour of violent ethno-nationalism. While not all accelerationists are xenophobic extremists, nor is the doctrine new, xenophobic extremists are increasingly adopting accelerationism.

Accelerationists believe that modern liberal democracy and post-industrial society is irreparably flawed and riddled with contradictions, all of which must be destroyed to rebuild a different world in its place.⁹ To be successful, the seeds for society’s destruction must come from the inherent contradictions and instability within liberal democracy itself. As a result, the cumulative individual actions of accelerationists are critical for identifying these inconsistencies, sowing the seeds of discontent, and adding fuel to the fire.¹⁰

By distorting political discourse and focusing on polarizing subjects, exploiting confirmation biases, and dismantling widespread trust in political institutions, accelerationists hope to speed up what they consider to be the inevitable collapse of liberal society.



This can be accomplished through a variety of violent and non-violent means, like using firearms during attacks on minorities to provoke polarizing discussions of white supremacy and Second Amendment rights; or by pointing out inconsistencies in media reporting on controversial topics to suggest confirmation of their conspiracies.

Ultimately, the goal is the destruction of the current status quo and governing principles, after which the “true Aryans” will take governing control through the principles of “natural” order and traditional racial hierarchies.

In tandem with this ideological trend, xenophobic extremists today are increasingly likely to operate as lone actors or in small cells and less likely to organize as groups.

The lone-actor phenomenon within xenophobic extremism is not a new one. It has been a frequent tactic of xenophobic extremists for decades. However, during the mid-to-late 2010s, prominent groups like Atomwaffen Division and the Base attempted to organize their activities within small groups, which became a dominant form of neo-Nazi activity in North America for several years.

Today, however, xenophobic extremists – like other forms of extremism – view this model as being largely unsuccessful due to the relative ease by which these groups were infiltrated by law enforcement. Therefore, violence is once again more likely to come from individuals who have been radicalized by the wider ideology and who act alone. Contemporary manifestations of this tactic trace their origin to a phenomenon called ‘Siege Culture.’

Siege Culture is an appropriation of the writings by prominent neo-Nazi James Mason entitled *Siege*, a series of newsletters he wrote in the 80s and 90s which garnered a large following in the broader neo-Nazi community.¹¹ The newsletters-turned-book regained popularity over the last 10 years – partly due to Atomwaffen Division members who took an interest in repopularising its message – and became de rigueur in many online neo-Nazi and white nationalist communities like Iron March and Fascist Forge.

A 5th edition of the book was released in 2022. Mason’s primary message in *Siege* urged the modern-day neo-Nazi to take action independently to spark chaos leading to a race war, much in line with accelerationism. *Siege* encouraged lone-actor violence and argued that organized groups drew too much attention from law enforcement and should be avoided.

As noted by one of our interviewees,

“It’s interesting because that’s a reflection of a lot of the conversations I’ve seen in neo-Nazi groups. There’s [a] post-organizational move. There’s a lot of previously influential neo-Nazis who have said “stop giving yourself names. Groups like Atomwaffen or the Base are stupid, they’re fed traps. If you’re going to be a neo-Nazi, be a neo-Nazi, but do it on your own and get a couple friends together and buy a house in the woods and go do that.”

That was really the main thrust of Siege, where a lot of the groups were penetrated and shut down by law enforcement and so the leading [neo-] Nazis were all saying “stop being stupid. Go out and do this on your own. Wait for society to collapse or shoot people when you can, and help it move forward.” It exposed the lack of stability within their movement...”

– Law enforcement official

Siege Culture is also reminiscent of earlier writings by the prominent white supremacist Louis Beam Jr., who wrote an infamous essay titled “Leaderless Resistance.” He argues that extremist organizations were too vulnerable to law enforcement action and instead called upon lone actors to pick up arms.

It is no coincidence that Siege Culture has become popular alongside accelerationism. According to accelerationists, organized groups are not needed to be successful. They can be an obstacle to their perceived success. So instead, accelerationists tend to rely on small cells, lone-actors, and online engagement to spread their ideas. And, unlike older generations of xenophobic extremists, accelerationists believe efforts to engage in mass politics are a lost cause because the political system itself is corrupt.¹²

Where they do engage, many believe that voting for the most politically extreme candidate – no matter their ideological leaning – is a way to usher in the chaos that will eventually rip the system apart.¹³

Due to accelerationism’s focus on violence, groups and individuals who espouse this ideology may also be more likely to pursue violent tactics to achieve their objectives and reject peaceful attempts to influence existing political structures.

Many of the newer generation of xenophobic extremist groups espoused this type of ideology, including the former Atomwaffen Division (AWD) and the Base, which blended neo-Nazism with violent accelerationism and operated mostly via small and localized cells that focused on tactical training for the coming race war. However, due to their affiliation under a central name and leader, they were susceptible and eventually succumbed to law enforcement infiltration, as will be described below.

Xenophobic extremists acting alone have leveraged accelerationist ideas in several recent attacks around the world. Additionally, their attacks have utilized the internet in new ways. For example, their manifestos – often posted online before their attacks – have become a popular way to provide inspiration and ideological material for others. For example, the 2022 Buffalo, New York supermarket attacker posted his manifesto online, detailing his belief in the ‘great replacement’ conspiracy before the attack.¹⁴

Livestreaming the attack has also become a recent trend.¹⁵ For example, the 2019 Christchurch shooter livestreamed the attack via Facebook. He also wrote and published his manifesto online. In one section titled "Destabilization and Accelerationism," he wrote that his motivation for the attack was to "add momentum to the pendulum swings of history, further destabilizing and polarizing Western society in order to eventually destroy the current nihilistic, hedonistic, individualistic insanity that has taken control of Western thought... The change we need to enact only arises in the great crucible of crisis."¹⁶

Unfortunately, the ease with which manifestos can spread online has provided a way of inspiring others to mobilize to violence. A month after the Christchurch attack, a man entered a synagogue in Poway, California, and opened fire on worshippers. He left a manifesto detailing his admiration for the Christchurch shooter and promoting key accelerationist ideas.

In particular, he wrote that he "encouraged" others to use firearms to provoke "the US government to start confiscating guns. People will defend their right to own a firearm – civil war has started... Make the Jew play all of his cards to make it apparent to more people how their rights are being taken away right before their eyes."

09A/ONA

Order of the Nine Angles (O9A) is an occult group whose ideology is underpinned by a blend of supernatural beliefs, Satanism, and neo-Nazism. Founded in the U.K. in the 1970s, adherents believe that history can be divided into a series of Aeons which involve cycles of struggle, power, domination, societal collapse, and chaos. Each of these cycles is inevitable, but adherents believe that corrupt Judeo-Christian elites have sabotaged the current Aeon.

Adherents praise Nazi Germany and believe the Holocaust was a sham designed to delegitimize and erase their 'achievements' from the global collective consciousness. As a result, they believe the only way to rescue the current Aeon is to ignite a neo-Nazi revolution and violently overthrow the Judeo-Christian elites. One of the core features of initiation for new members, which makes this group of particular security concern, is the expectation they spend a minimum of 6 months in 'insight roles' by infiltrating established organizations such as religious groups, the police, or the army.¹⁷

O9A received a fresh wave of attention due to several recent high-profile incidents. In the U.S. over the summer of 2020, a soldier was arrested after allegedly passing on sensitive details about his unit to O9A, hoping that an attack would be carried out against it.¹⁸ In Toronto in 2020, police arrested and charged a man after the gruesome murder of a local Mosque volunteer, Mohamed-Aslim Zafis. New information since his arrest indicates the perpetrator likely adhered to O9A.¹⁹ The number of recent incidents related to O9A indicates that the group warrants continued monitoring and study.

Iron March Data Leak

Iron March – a now-defunct online messaging forum for neo-Nazis – was once one of the most important online hubs which facilitated the emergence of a new generation of xenophobic extremists. The site was founded by a Russian nationalist in March 2011 and stayed online until it was shut down abruptly in 2017.²⁰

Despite its short-lived existence, Iron March quickly became a bustling platform for militant neo-Nazi and white nationalist groups and sympathizers across the world, including the Nordic Resistance in several Nordic countries, National Action in the U.K., the Ukrainian Azov Battalion, the Atomwaffen Division (AWD), Combat-18 and the Base in the U.S. and Canada; and the Antipodean Resistance in Australia, to name a few.²¹ While some of these groups existed before Iron March, like the Nordic Resistance, others were formed due to online collaboration like National Action, the Base, and AWD.

Many of the site's users and groups embraced Siege Culture and accelerationism, seizing the opportunity for transnational collaboration. For example, due to communications through Iron March, groups like the Nordic Resistance and CasaPound – a neo-fascist political party in Italy – began collaborating with other, newer groups online.²²

Additionally, several site members went on to commit or attempt acts of violence around the world, including in Canada. For example, in 2015, the RCMP foiled a plot by three individuals – two men from Halifax and a woman from Illinois – to commit a mass shooting at the Halifax Shopping Centre.²³

The American woman and one of the Canadian men met online and formed an online romance over their shared admiration of the Columbine massacre. The pair routinely visited websites that glorified mass killings, and the American woman routinely posted on Iron March, where she also allegedly had a brief online relationship with the site's founder.²⁴

After several weeks, the two planned to meet in Canada in February 2015 and commit a mass shooting at the shopping centre. However, a tip to the police led the woman to be arrested at the airport. Her online romantic interest took his own life shortly after police surrounded his home. The third Canadian individual is serving a ten-year sentence for his role in the plot.

In 2019, many of Iron March's records were leaked and posted online by an anonymous anti-fascist activist, which included private messages and posts between members, IP, and email addresses, and in some cases, names. The data leak revealed the identity of many Iron March users, including several Canadians who attempted to foster connections with individuals across the United States and Europe.²⁵

According to a CBC News report, at least 88 users were based in Canadian cities.²⁶ Analysis by Bellingcat – an investigative journalism group based in the Netherlands, specializing in online investigations and fact-checking using open-source materials – revealed that many groups on Iron March sought to recruit current and former military members to destroy and overthrow the government through a fascist paramilitary insurgency.²⁷ Atomwaffen Division (described next) set up funding networks and actively tried to infiltrate the U.S. military to recruit and learn combat and tactical skills.²⁸

THE NEW GENERATION OF VIOLENT WHITE SUPREMACISTS AND NEO-NAZIS

The Legacies of Atomwaffen Division/ National Socialist Order

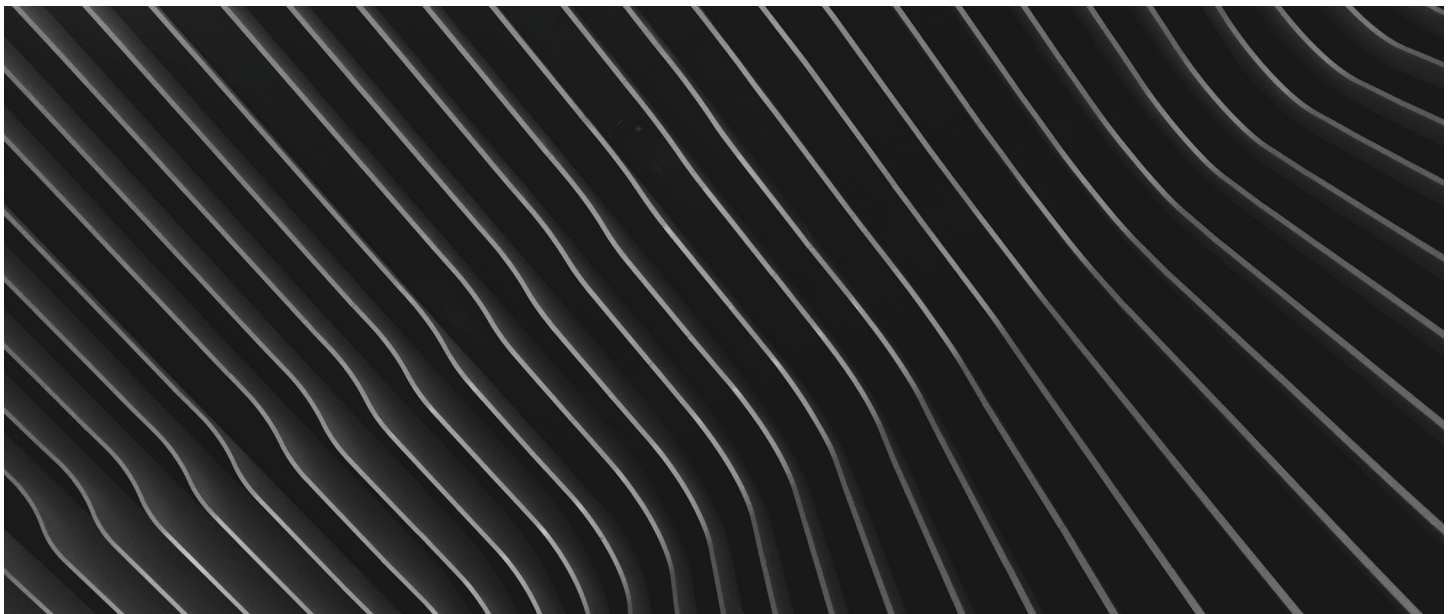
Atomwaffen (AWD), recently rebranded as the National Socialist Order, was one of the higher-profile accelerationist neo-Nazi groups to emerge in the last decade. It is also one of the most recent additions to Canada's official list of terrorist entities, added in February 2021.²⁹ It began as many similar groups did on the now defunct online hub for neo-Nazis, Iron March.³⁰ Iron March and associated websites like Fascist Forge – the now-defunct heir-apparent to Iron March – played an important role in facilitating the emergence of a new generation of white nationalist and neo-Nazi groups who blended accelerationism with their pre-existing ideas on race and ethnicity.

During the height of the group's activities during the mid-to-late 2010s, AWD members and supporters were found across the U.S., Canada, Europe, Ukraine, and Russia.

AWD supporters have also been involved in several high-profile criminal and terrorist offenses in the U.S. and Canada.

For example, in 2019, the FBI stopped two individuals from Washington traveling in northern Texas with assault rifles and nearly 2,000 rounds of ammunition.³¹

In the same year, Kaleb James Cole – a 24-year-old leader of AWD's Washington State Cell – was deported and banned for life from Canada.³² Cole made frequent trips across the border into British Columbia, eventually attracting the attention of the Canadian Border Services Agency after press reports linked him to AWD and identified that he had travelled overseas to Ukraine. He was subsequently held by Canadian authorities and deported and barred for life due to his involvement in "an organization that may engage in terrorism," as per Section 34 [1][F] of the Canadian Immigration Code.



More recently, a Texas leader of AWD was sentenced in the spring of 2021 for what the Assistant U.S. Attorney on the case called “the most widespread swattingⁱ conspiracy in the country.”³³ According to officials, the perpetrator was not alone and had co-conspirators in Canada and the U.K., who chose their targets based on race. By calling in false emergencies, perpetrators accomplish two goals: strike fear in the location of the emergency, which can be xenophobically motivated (e.g., a historically black college; religious institutions like a synagogue, etc.), while also causing emergency services to waste precious resources on false emergencies.

These and other arrests were part of a large sweep carried out around the U.S. against AWD, whose members have been linked to at least five murders.³⁴ These arrests left the group largely defunct and shattered their ability to form and operate anything resembling a traditional hierarchical terrorist organization.

Although the structure of AWD as an organization has since fallen out of favour with most xenophobic extremists, its legacy and the ideas its members spread persist. Perhaps one of the most important ideological legacies left by AWD was re-popularizing James Mason’s Siege.

In 2017, members of AWD tracked Mason down in Denver, where he lived, and received his blessing to promote his ideas online and within the group itself.³⁵

Unfortunately, AWD’s post-organizational legacy and absence in favour of smaller and more isolated individuals and cells may also make identifying and preventing xenophobic extremist attacks more difficult.

This is evidenced by the recent mass shooting at a Buffalo, New York supermarket by an accelerationist lone actor inspired by the ‘great replacement’ conspiracy theory. In his manifesto, he detailed the same accelerationist points emphasized earlier by AWD.³⁶

Another important legacy left by AWD are the significant transnational ties established across Europe and Russia. This creates the potential for AWD’s ideas to continue to spread and can make rooting out sympathizers more difficult.

For example, in April 2022, German police arrested 4 individuals, and are investigating 10 others who are allegedly supporters of a group called Atomwaffen Division Deutschland, an offshoot of the North American brand of AWD.³⁷

More recently, in May 2022, Swedish police arrested a man with enough bomb-making materials to “kill hundreds.”³⁸ According to court documents obtained in the case, the man drew inspiration from AWD, and other infamous neo-Nazis like Anders Breivik.

Elsewhere in Eastern Europe, Ukraine is particularly important as the ongoing conflict acts as a physical “battlefield laboratory” where followers can travel to gain combat experience.³⁹

During its height, AWD allegedly established connections with the Azov Battalion, a Ukrainian paramilitary militia that has promoted Nazi symbols and ideas.⁴⁰ With the ongoing war in Ukraine, it remains to be seen if individuals linked to the xenophobic extremist movement will continue to leverage these transnational linkages to participate in combat. This has occurred in other instances with tragic consequences.

ⁱ Swatting is the action of making false bomb threats to emergency services with the aim of overwhelming law enforcement.

For example, The Russian Imperial Movement (RIM), an ultranationalist white supremacist group based in St. Petersburg, Russia, also actively encourages white supremacists from around the world to travel and participate in combat training in Ukraine.⁴¹ To date, at least one terror attack in Europe has been directly linked to white supremacists who trained with RIM.⁴²

Like the transnational ties forged in Europe and Russia, in the past, AWD supporters and members have also engaged in some cross-border movements and collaboration between the U.S. and Canada prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. One notable series of arrests in 2019 involved an AWD plot to attack power stations in the south-eastern U.S.⁴³

In an unsealed affidavit, the FBI alleges that an Ohio teen communicated over encrypted messaging applications with more than a dozen people to plan an elaborate attack on the U.S. power grid during the summer of 2020 and aspired to create militant cells inspired by AWD around the country. One of these contacts was a Canadian man who attempted to cross the border into Detroit. Border agents stopped him and found an assault rifle, two other guns, and white supremacy and neo-Nazi content on his phone, including a copy of *Siege*.⁴⁴ From this arrest, officials discovered the plot, which would set off the wider investigation.

Although North American chapters of AWD are now largely defunct, its ideas continue to inspire others, and recent arrests in Europe indicate that outside North America, remnants of the network remain.⁴⁵ Although AWD is certainly not responsible for creating ideas such as *Siege Culture* or accelerationism, AWD's rapid rise and widely publicized fall as a keynote group espousing these ideas has certainly had an impact on and inspired and inspired the current landscape of the xenophobic extremist movement today.

The Base

The Base, another recent addition to Canada's terrorist list alongside AWD, is a similar white nationalist accelerationist group.⁴⁶ Founded around the same time as AWD, it emerged from the same online ecosystem of white nationalist and neo-Nazi forums and boasted significant transnational ties and opportunities for paramilitary training.

Like AWD, the Base was also the subject of a similarly effective police takedown that has effectively dismantled the group's organizational capacity in the last few years. However, the group's ideas are still popular amongst neo-Nazi sympathizers and supporters. Like AWD, it retains the potential to inspire small cells or individuals from across the xenophobic extremist movement to conduct violent attacks.

Founded online by an American living in Russia, Rinaldo Nazzaro was heavily involved in recruitment and instructing members on how to avoid detection and carry out attacks.⁴⁷ Unlike AWD, which touted a largely leaderless structure, Nazzaro acted as a key decision-maker and moral leader for the group throughout its existence.

The group promoted the importance of paramilitary and survivalist training and sought out current or ex-military personnel. For example, in a series of covert recordings passed on to U.S. civil rights organizations, Nazzaro and other Base leaders were recorded during recruitment meetings indicating the group was eager to recruit experienced soldiers from western militaries across North America, the U.K., and Europe.⁴⁸



The Base's activities, rooted in their accelerationist ideas, included physical survival and weapons training in preparation for the aftermath of an imminent collapse of western governments. For example, a string of arrests across the United States in 2020 targeted individuals involved in operating a series of 'hate camps' for Base members to engage in tactical and firearms training.⁴⁹

The paramilitary structure of the Base is also a concern from a recruitment perspective. To date in Canada, other militia-type groups that offered this type of training, namely the Canadian iteration of the now defunct Three Percenters, possessed some, albeit weak, norms against violence and demonstrated a willingness to expel overtly homicidal individuals from their ranks. These norms, however, were largely absent within the subculture of the Base, whereby its extreme rhetoric and activities appealed to individuals deemed 'too extreme' for other militia-type groups.

One of the Base's 'hate camps,' purchased by a corporate entity affiliated with Nazzaro (most of the other properties were owned by its members), was located roughly 50 kilometres south of the Canada-U.S. border in north-eastern Washington state. It is unclear, however, if training occurred at this specific location.⁵⁰ Its location in a remote area in the Pacific Northwest (PNW) has long captured the imagination of white supremacists and militia movements in the United States and Canada. They view the region both as being a safe "fallback" area post-governmental collapse, and as a region hospitable to the emergence of a white proto ethno-state.⁵¹

This belief dates back to at least the 1980s and white supremacist ideologues like Richard Butler, David Lane, and Harold Covington. Lane and Butler were linked to two important groups active during the late 20th century, namely the Order and Aryan Nations. Covington was active in a number of domestic and international white supremacist groups and was an advocate for the "Northwest Territorial Imperative".

The continued resonance of the PNW in the minds of the next generation of xenophobic extremists is further evidence of some inter-generational transfer of beliefs and ideas between successive manifestations of the movement. For example, several members of the Base expressed affinity for Covington's beliefs and attempts at organizing. And at least two Base members, including Nazzaro himself, met or tried to meet Covington before his death in 2018.⁵²

Like the cross-border activities of AWD discussed above, the relative porosity of the Canada-U.S. border (e.g., across British Columbia and Alberta) raises the possibility that the region could serve as a conduit for illegal travel between the two countries in the furtherance of xenophobic extremist goals, including those once held by the Base and its supporters.

Cross-border cooperation between members in the U.S. and Canada has occurred in the past. It presents the opportunity for Canadians to gain direct access to paramilitary training in 'hate camps' described above. For example, in 2020, an American was sentenced to 5 years in prison after he transported a Canadian man from Winnipeg, Patrik Mathews, to participate in paramilitary training camps including firearm drills.⁵³ However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and its impacts on cross-border activity, it remains to be seen if cross-border collaboration between American and Canadian xenophobic extremists will increase.

Similar to AWD, the Base in the U.S. suffered serious setbacks by law enforcement. In January 2020, the FBI conducted a series of raids and arrests targeting the group's leadership structure. The FBI also planted an infiltrator in the Georgia Base cell, leading to several members' arrests.⁵⁴ In a series of leaked phone calls hours after members received news about the arrests, Navarro is heard giving a pep talk to other nervous Base leaders, citing AWD as inspiration:

"Look at Atomwaffen. They've been through everything. They've been through the satanic panic, through all kinds of doxxing, now through their own series of arrests, et-cetera, et-cetera... There was a time where they almost disappeared, but they stuck it out and are still around. The important thing about maintaining the brand is it can be salvaged and be rehabilitated, and that would give us more credibility in the long run."

– Navarro on a call with other remaining Base leaders following news of several Base member arrests.⁵⁵

After the initial arrests, phone and chat logs show that some members began to panic, begging Nazzaro to remove them from chat groups or announcing their departure from the group altogether. Others, like a high-profile Base leader in Michigan who had organized 'hate camps,' strengthened their resolve, stating they would not be arrested without a fight. However, he was later arrested and taken into custody peacefully.⁵⁶

Several days later, the Guardian published an article that revealed Nazzaro's identity, which sent him into hiding.⁵⁷ Before doing so, Nazzaro gave another member access to the group's Telegram and email accounts, who turned out to be an anti-fascist infiltrator.

The infiltrator publicly embarrassed the group by changing the group's Telegram name to 'the Base is a Honey Pot,' and posting memes that poked fun at Nazzaro and the neo-Nazi community.⁵⁸ This last act by the infiltrator likely permanently damaged the group's reputation beyond repair, and so far, the group has shown no credible signs of resurgence.

As stated above, it is still possible the group's legacy will inspire lone actors and small cells from across the xenophobic extremist movement.

The Canadian Armed Forces

White supremacy and neo-Nazi groups across many countries have a clear desire to recruit current and former military personnel.⁵⁹ The media highlighted this after the January 6th Capitol riots in the U.S., where the Pentagon found that at least 1 in 10 rioters had links to the U.S. military.⁶⁰ Similarly, several members of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) have been found to have links to Proud Boys groups, The Base, Atomwaffen, Combat-18 and others.⁶¹

A notable case was the arrest of a former CAF reservist in the U.S., who prosecutors accuse of attempting to recruit for the Base to set off a race war.⁶² He fled from Winnipeg after the local media publicly revealed his involvement in a hate group, which sparked an investigation by the CAF. The RCMP raided his home and seized several weapons.⁶³ The FBI later arrested him in the U.S. where he was found carrying a firearm and allegedly participated in paramilitary training provided by Base members.⁶⁴ Later in 2021, he and one of his co-conspirators were sentenced to 9 years in prison.⁶⁵

This case indicates what some argue is a larger CAF issue. An internal CAF report from November 2018 indicated that since 2013, 16 members of the Canadian armed forces and reserves were found to have links with extremist groups, including the Proud Boys, Atomwaffen, La Meute, Hammerskins Nation, the Three Percenters and the Soldiers of Odin; though not all of these classify as white supremacy or neo-Nazi groups.⁶⁶ In addition, at least 37 other CAF members were alleged to have engaged in racist or hate-motivated conduct between 2013 and 2018, though not associated with a formal group.⁶⁷

Overall, these numbers represent a very small proportion of the CAF, and the report ultimately concludes that, at present, there is no “significant threat to the CAF/DND.”⁶⁸

A more recent report by the Minister of National Defence Advisory Panel on Systemic Racism and Discrimination from January 2022 noted that “membership in extremist groups is growing, it is becoming increasingly covert, and technological advances such as Darknet and encryption methods pose significant challenges in detecting these members.”⁶⁹ Although the report does not specify the number of individuals with links to extremist groups or ideologies, publicly reported cases underscore the disproportionate effects even one CAF member’s involvement with an IMVE group can have on the military.⁷⁰

The presence of extremists – particularly xenophobic extremists – within the CAF confirms the larger trend of valuing combat training and explicitly recruiting current and former members of the armed forces.

Correspondingly, the 2019 Iron March data leak exposed the identity of at least 88 users based in Canadian cities, several of which claimed to be CAF members.⁷¹ Many users on Iron March, including these self-proclaimed CAF members, actively encouraged other Canadians on the forum to join the CAF or the armed forces in their country to obtain firearms training.⁷²

As a result of a series of data leaks, high-profile incidents and media reporting, the issue of white supremacy and neo-Nazi sympathies within Canada's military has since been acknowledged by the Department of Defence.⁷³ Researchers are developing policy frameworks to improve recruitment, moderation, and security processes for the CAF, which aims to shut out violent extremism from its ranks and address the more pervasive issues of racism, discrimination, and bias within the institution.⁷⁴

As part of these efforts, the CAF has announced a new system to monitor and track suspected incidents of hateful conduct and adapted a series of new policies designed to address hate and extremism in its ranks.⁷⁵

For example, in 2020, the CAF introduced its "hateful conduct" policy, which seeks to help identify and weed out service members with potential ties to hateful or extremist groups.

Alongside its new policy, the CAF has also broadened the definition of "hateful content" to include "the display or communication of words, symbols, or images, by a CAF member, that they knew or ought reasonably to have known would constitute, encourage, justify or promote violence or hatred against a person or persons on an identifiable group, based on their national or ethnic origin, race, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, genetic characteristics or disability."⁷⁶

IDEOLOGICAL FLUIDITY BETWEEN IMVE GROUPS

A recent trend within the IMVE spectrum has been the mixture of various ideological motivations traditionally seen as distinct from each other. For example, in several instances of violence perpetrated by incels, the assailants also espoused a variety of xenophobic extremist ideologies.

For example, in May 2020, a man from Queens, New York, was arrested in a sting operation after allegedly purchasing illegally defaced weapons known as "ghost guns" from undercover agents. He intended to use them during the impending "boogaloo," a term used by several extremist groups to refer to a race or civil war.⁷⁷

According to the federal complaints, the man wanted to form an "incel hit squad" and expressed anti-Semitic sentiments, similar to many neo-Nazi groups.

In February of 2020, a man committed two mass shootings in Hanau, Germany, which left 10 people dead, including himself. He left behind a manifesto that included a myriad of ideas drawn from across the IMVE spectrum, including calling for the extermination of non-whites and his self-identification as an involuntary celibate, noting he hadn't had a relationship with a woman in 18 years. However, his association with the broader online incel community remains contested.⁷⁸

Finally, in 2017 a member of the Atomwaffen Division converted to Islam and then killed two of his roommates (also members of Atomwaffen) for allegedly disrespecting his beliefs.⁷⁹

ANTI-AUTHORITY EXTREMISM

Background and Ideological Trends in Alberta

Individuals and groups espousing anti-authority extremism are motivated by belief systems centered on rejecting the power and legitimacy of the modern state, as well as the sovereignty of the individual. To justify their beliefs, anti-authority extremists refer to a body of false but legal-sounding rules they claim to be the 'true' law.⁸⁰

Adherents lay claim to privileged knowledge of certain processes by which historical documents like the Magna Carta or the U.S. Constitution, paired with a defined set of pseudo-legal arguments, can be used to 'liberate' people from the necessity of following laws or being subject to the whims of corporations.

In Canada and Alberta, individuals espousing particular anti-authority ideologies have gone by different groups' names, including the loosely connected detaxer movement, Freeman on the Land (FOTL) or Sovereign Citizens (SC). However, today, many anti-authority adherents no longer associate themselves with groups and can instead be categorized broadly as the pseudo-legal movement (PLM).

PLM adherents are under the false assumption that they are exempt from Canadian civil law simply by claiming legal impunity. Like other extremist ideologies, many of these pseudo-legal beliefs are built on conspiratorial foundations. PLM adherents believe that the current government authority is illegitimate, yet this 'fact' is unknown by the general population.⁸¹ In this way, PLM adherents claim to have 'privileged' knowledge of the 'true' nature of government and authority.

Many PLM adherents use historical but legally-irrelevant documents such as the Magna Carta to justify what they view as "lawful dissent." The Magna Carta refers to a treaty between sovereign people and King John of the English monarchy in 1215. This treaty has no relevance or implication in Canada's legal framework and cannot be used as a permissible argument in a Canadian court of law. However, "lawful dissenters" take on an Oath of Allegiance to the Barons committee as part of their "lawful duty to disobey statutes" under Article 61 of the Magna Carta.

Variants of pseudo-legal beliefs exist in multiple countries, particularly in the U.S., the U.K., and Canada. The most prominent manifestation of this type of belief system in Canada was the FOTL movement, which evolved from the earlier detaxer movement, an adaptation of U.S.-style pseudo-law for Commonwealth countries.

Since the early-to-mid 2010s, however, the FOTL ideology has experienced a steady decline in popularity, largely due to the withdrawal of key FOTL figures – like Robert A. Menard – from the public as a result of arrests and public losses in court, as well as the general failure of FOTL legal arguments and concepts in court.⁸² However, communications with a confidential Government of Canada source indicate that, despite the academic consensus of a decline in activity, the FOTL have seen somewhat of a resurgence during the Covid-19 pandemic. It remains to be seen if this resurgence will continue or decline due to fewer public health measures.

Despite the fluctuating popularity of the FOTL, belief in 'lawful dissent' and the misapplication of the Magna Carta has remained to define features of the current PLM wave. Specifically, the last several years have seen the re-emergence of pseudo-legal 'gurus': individuals looking to profit from instructing others about how to opt-out of the social contract, as well as an increase in the number of protest groups using pseudo-legal arguments borrowed from the anti-authority ideological space.

There have also been increasing signs of anti-authority activity outside of the traditional hotspots in North America, particularly in some European countries, such as the Reichsbürger in Germany, and Australian variants of FOTL. As mentioned in OPV's 2019 report, anti-authority adherents tend to be overwhelmingly non-violent and prefer to rely on using false liens, lawsuits, or other legal documents that lack credible factual basis as a tool of harassment. This continues to be true, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, where we have seen a disorganized but prominent new wave of PLM adherents in Canada and Alberta, which blend traditional anti-authority narratives, anti-public health order rhetoric, and conspiracy theories.

Although rare, when anti-authority extremists resort to violence, their primary target tends to be law enforcement and government officials. In a recent example, a 26-year man in Alberta was arrested in February of 2021 on charges related to possessing weapons prohibited in Canada, explosive substances, police gear, and impersonating a peace officer.⁸³

It is worth noting that the man also possessed small amounts of triacetone triperoxide (TATP), a substance used in the making of explosives and has been used in other high-profile terrorist attacks, including the London bombings in 2005.⁸⁴ The arrest was allegedly prompted by posts he made online, which the RCMP described as "involving anti-government messaging."⁸⁵

Although details of the online messages were initially limited, later investigation revealed the man was a frequent poster on the anonymous message board known as 4chan, and his beliefs appeared to align closely with other xenophobic extremists.⁸⁶ However, the RCMP noted that despite these beliefs, there was also "some anti-government type of sentiment" to many of his posts.⁸⁷

A new trend since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic has been the targeting of public health authorities, which rarely occurred before 2020. Additionally, PLM adherents have also increasingly attended protests, which has become a common way to increase visibility and make their sentiments known.

For example, a highly militarized anti-authority fringe group known as the Boogaloo movement in the U.S. found fertile ground in the wake of Covid-19 and civil rights movements, and individuals linked to the movement have since been involved in several high-profile attacks and plots.⁸⁸ Like other anti-authority movements, the Boogaloo movement is only loosely connected and individuals appear to operate in small, disconnected cells. Although this particular movement has yet to gain similar momentum in Canada, many attendees of the 2022 Trucker Convoy across the country evidenced similar anti-authority sentiments.

Many anti-authority groups and PLM ideologies at anti-public health rallies have led some to speculate if the Covid-19 pandemic will lead to an increase in extremist radicalization. However, the link between the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and extremist activity is not yet known. For example, research published in March 2021 by OPV researchers has found that while online extremist activity has increased since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, particularly amongst anti-authority groups, it has yet to translate into a commensurate rise in terrorism.⁸⁹

Status of Anti-Authority Extremism in Alberta

Due to the lack of reliable and consistent data on membership, the number of people within Alberta who are connected to the Freeman on the Land (FOTL) and other similar anti-authority ideological groups is difficult to ascertain.⁹⁰ This is largely because, unlike some other groups within the IMVE category, anti-authority ideologies are often adopted as a way of life rather than based on association with a group.

Therefore, although individuals may borrow ideas and beliefs from FOTL ideology, they may not view themselves as 'members' or even be connected to the FOTL in any meaningful way. This creates a constellation of loosely or entirely disconnected individuals with varying beliefs. This was echoed in our interviews with law enforcement officials across Alberta, who overwhelmingly agreed that individuals who hold anti-authority beliefs tend to be unconnected and largely independent of one another:

"A lot of these people that have these anti-societal views, a lot of them are loners, that's what I'm finding. And so, you have that plus you have the whole Covid thing, if you have someone who's a Freeman on the Land – because we have a few of those too – they're more individualized."

– Law enforcement official

"We're fairly isolated and we only have one highway in and out. And so, we do have people that come here [and] who believe this area is somewhat untouched... We have had in the past, actually one individual who came to Canada on a visa, and then decided to use that visa to start a cabin in the woods. And built that cabin on Crown land, which is obviously unlawful."

"So, we have had that kind of isolationist mentality exhibited. We also have someone else in the community who kind of adheres to the Freeman code or ethos, or anti-government. But, very much those individuals, their main objective is to be left alone. They don't really have a strong interaction [with us]; they're not trying to muster up a following. They're not trying to influence the local community."

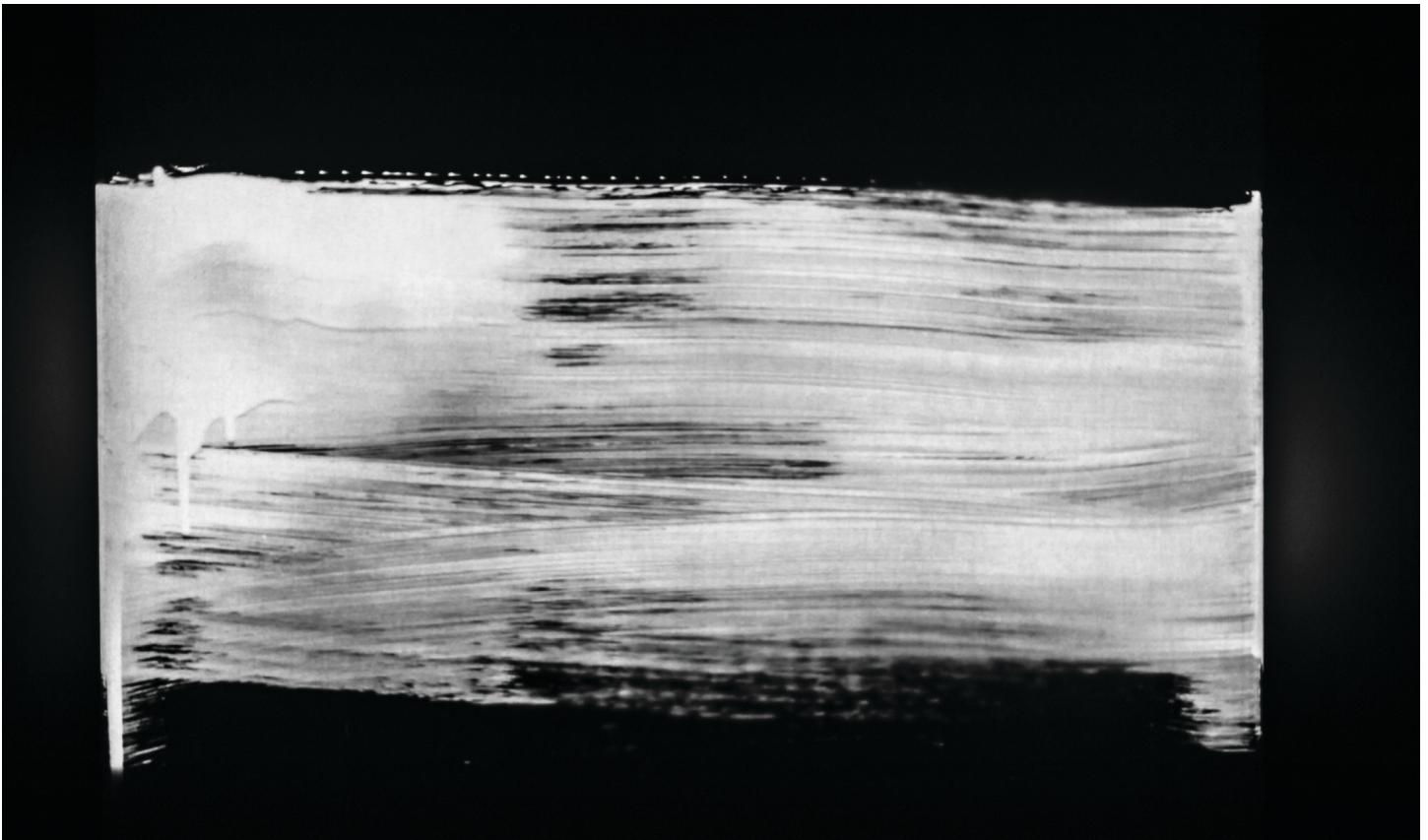
– Law enforcement official

"I don't think the [anti-authority extremists] I remember encountering here subscribe to that specific ideology of Freeman on the Land, or Sovereign Citizens. Just more of, well, they'll say some of the phrases that those groups use. The one's we've seen are not like outright full members of those groups."

– Law enforcement official

"We do have Freeman on the Land... [But] they are kind of scattered, and we haven't seen any instances where they're gathering together or working collaboratively."

– Law enforcement official



“We get the sporadic popping [up] of [FOTL]. Usually, it’ll be something as simple as a traffic stop, and they claim that they’re Freeman and they don’t have to follow the rules. They don’t have to have a license and stuff like that. But commonly, for two things, we don’t see them grouped together because they’re Freeman and they don’t really seem to want to follow the rules or be [linked] up with anyone. [They] just want to be left alone.”

– Law enforcement official

Despite their historically disconnected nature, the FOTL remain one of the most well-known anti-authority ideological groups in Canada and Alberta, and their rhetoric continues to be used by the contemporary PLM or other anti-authority extremists. Research suggests that throughout its existence, the FOTL has splintered and has multiple arms, of which adherents may only loosely connect themselves to FOTL.⁹¹ For example, according to law enforcement officials we interviewed, FOTL ideas continue to be influential in the PLM today, even if individuals do not identify themselves as Freeman:

“[The new wave of anti-authority extremism is] getting very close [to Freeman on the Land]. If you look at the Freeman ideologies, their different beliefs, and now you’re seeing this anti-government [wave]... it’s getting to that very gray area... my concern is it does start to look like the Freeman ideologies.

And, it’s very hard for society, even law enforcement, when you deal with these individuals, to try and figure out are they pseudo-law promoters? When they start to identify they’re trying to break government and police laws, and bend them to their will... is this someone who’s going down the FOTL road, or is this just a watered-down version? It makes it really challenging right now, because we’re used to a more defined line between the two. But now we’re starting to see a lot of anti-government sentiment rise. If anything, it seems like it’s been a rejuvenation in some [FOTL] beliefs.”

– Law enforcement official

Although researchers have noted a decline of FOTL since about 2014, as noted above, a confidential Government of Canada source has said that the FOTL are currently experiencing a resurgence. Although it remains to be seen how sustainable this is, many law enforcement officials we interviewed noted a substantial increase in broader PLM in the province over the last few years:

“Anti-authority is, in my opinion, growing rapidly right now... For pseudo-law and pseudo-legal anti-authority groups and individuals, there’s been a substantial growth. Again, this is something that seems cyclical. So, there was a big pseudo-law cycle from 2009 until about 2014 that peaked around 2011-2012. That was the Freeman on the Land in Canada, Sovereign Citizens in the States. They were the dominant brand of pseudo-law that caught on back then. Nowadays, it’s a bit different. Again, we’re [seeing] that massive appetite [for that brand of extremism].”

– Law enforcement official

“The last two years with Covid has created an entirely new number of groups. Whether it’s anti-mask, anti-vax, [there’s] much more anti-government rearing its head.”

– Law enforcement official

FOTL, like other PLM adherents, commonly use dubious or illegitimate legal strategies to make their objections known and to obstruct or intimidate others.⁹²

For example, in 2020, an Alberta court decision barred a prominent anti-authority figure known as Jacquie Phoenix from representing a mother in a child-custody dispute.⁹³ Phoenix is part of a pseudo-legal scheme known as the Magna Carta Lawful Rebellion, which is “a loose collection of individuals who, in 2020, notified a collection of Alberta courts of their “legal immunity.”⁹⁴

This court decision is particularly notable for the lengths the judge went to refute the arguments made by Phoenix about the Magna Carta, noting that Article 61 —which pseudo-legal adherents argue justifies lawful dissent — was removed 700 years ago.⁹⁵

In response, Phoenix continued to send letters to court staff, threatening them with trial and life in prison, prompting the judge to issue a second ruling which addressed pseudo-legal and pandemic-related conspiracies.⁹⁶ The judge has since threatened Phoenix with contempt for threatening court staff.

Phoenix is a particularly prolific ‘guru’ in the online pseudo-legal community and offers Zoom courses on Magna Carta theory.⁹⁷ She also makes pseudo-legal arguments and tactics more accessible for anti-authority adherents by providing pseudo-legal documents that can be downloaded via her Facebook page.

Her beliefs are highly emblematic of this new wave of the PLM in Canada, whereby adherents deny the Covid-19 pandemic and related public health orders as “nonsense” and promote a variety of conspiracies, including QAnon-linked conspiracies. Indeed, many law enforcement officials have noted that these new anti-authority adherents overwhelmingly target public health officials as a result of public health orders and directives:

“Out of that anti-[Public Health Order] movement... especially the ones who have made threats of violence..., the majority of them seem to be more invested in the pseudo-legal part of anti-authority extremism... All of the threats of violence that we have seen have involved some kind of invalidation of government in general. Whether it’s because they believe that the Magna Carta has created a band of rebel barons and they’re going to pledge loyalty to them. Or, whether they believe there’s some offenses that have been committed by conventional politicians, and they believe that invalidates all of their authority and they just want the whole system gone. Those are the two main themes that we see.”

– Law enforcement official

“We’ve had some [anti-authority individuals] try to serve the mayor with special papers for the lockdowns or vaccinations and stuff like that. We’ve had some send letters to the chief, especially the Sovereign Citizen or Freemen on the Land people.”

– Law enforcement official

When anti-authority extremists resort to violence, they tend to target members of government and law enforcement. One notable, albeit dated, example is Ian Bush’s murder of a retired Chief Court of Canada tax judge Alban Garon, his wife and their neighbour in Ottawa in 2007. Bush was found guilty of triple homicide in 2015 and had long held contempt for the Canada Revenue Agency.

Although Bush had no formal ties to anti-authority groups, he likely ascribed to some form of anti-authority ideology, similar to that of the detaxers or the FOTL. Although the attacks occurred 15 years ago, the atrocity of Bush’s actions continue to inform court-dealings with anti-authority actors today. For example, an Ottawa-based human rights lawyer filed a criminal complaint against Phoenix in 2020, citing the murders committed by Bush as evidence that this kind of behavior and ideology should be taken seriously to avoid further tragedies.⁹⁸

Although violence by members of the anti-authority movement has been far less common in Canada than in the U.S., the threat cannot be ignored. A closer study of on-duty murders of members of law enforcement in Canada may reveal more cases where perpetrators were influenced, at least in part, by anti-authority grievances or ideologies. While the majority of law enforcement officials we interviewed agreed that their dealings with anti-authority extremists to date had been peaceful, they were careful to note that there is always the potential for an escalation to violence:

“The one we were involved with was actually a tax enforcement issue, initially, and then when we went and assisted Alberta Revenue folks with executing a warrant of arrest for their charges, it ended up then bringing [the individual] into physical conflict with police and now [they are] facing some criminal code charges in relation to resisting arrest. [This individual] had made some posts to local Facebook groups talking about the police being the Storm Troopers of the state, you know, that kind of stuff we see on and on.”

– Law enforcement official

“If [the province suffered a mass casualty] attack within the next three years, [xenophobic extremists are] probably the category I’d be least surprised for it to come out of. But, the probability in my opinion is equally close for jihadists, [and] incels. I’d give a lower rating to pseudo-legal groups. But, that is, I think, way more likely to be [an individual event]. That’s going to be, you know, somebody stabs a police officer during a traffic stop, or something like that.”

– **Law enforcement official**

“I think that potential [for violence] is there. There’s evidence to show it’s there. We haven’t had somebody act out, no. Not recent[ly]. But, the evidence is there to show it could happen.”

– **Law enforcement official**

Additionally, the current increase in PLM activity in the province could provide an environment which encourages violence. However, for now, the current and increasing trend in the province is for members of the PLM to resort to vexatious litigation as a way to make their sentiments known. As one member of law enforcement noted, this can have a substantial impact on government service, particularly during the pandemic:

“As far as actual radicalization into violence, it’s very limited out of the pseudo-law crowd. We’ve only seen a handful that I can think of in the last couple years who have actually started collecting weapons. For the most part, those people are just at the nuisance level, [but] that nuisance varies in impact. During the pandemic, the nuisance has been substantial. So, the impact on government service is pretty significant, but it’s not violent extremism, necessarily. It’s just extremism.”

– **Law enforcement official**

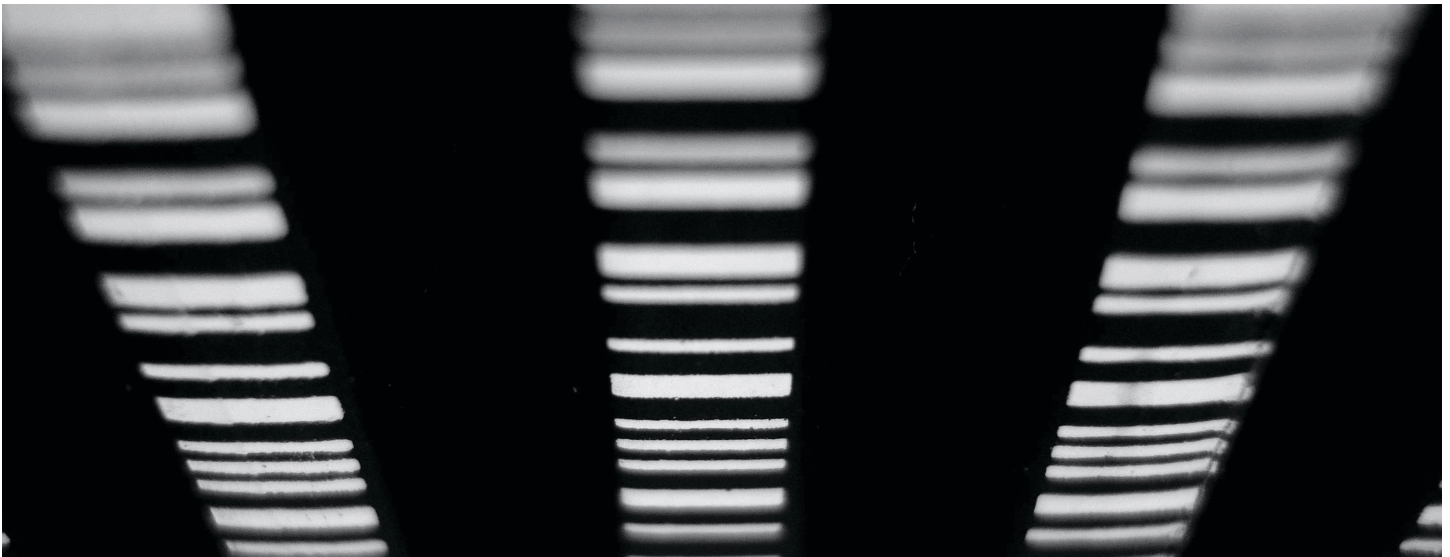
BOOGALOO MOVEMENT

The Boogaloo movement is a loosely organized movement that has been most active since 2019 and is based around a collection of anti-government beliefs. The group’s name is derived from a 1980s breakdancing movie *Breakin’ 2: Electric Boogaloo*, whose title was the subject of an online phrasal joke and became dubbed by adherents as *Civil War 2: Electric Boogaloo*. The term ‘boogaloo’ itself refers to a violent uprising or civil war and got its start online in the early-to-mid 2010s on 4chan.⁹⁹

The term ‘boogaloo’ has since been adopted by various extremist movements like radical gun rights activists, white nationalists, and neo-Nazis. It is meant to reference an impending civil or race war that will overthrow the government and establish a new order. Members of the Boogaloo movement tend to be heavily armed and espouse accelerationist violence, though they lack the hierarchy emblematic of other militias.¹⁰⁰

The ‘Boogaloo’ movement is a somewhat unique threat in that, despite being relatively ‘young,’ individuals claiming to be ‘boogaloo bois’ have engaged in a significant amount of violence in the U.S. in a short period. In line with the target selection common among the anti-authority movement, most violence has targeted government and law enforcement officials.

For example, two individuals in Minnesota were charged and sentenced to prison for attempting to provide material support and resources to Hamas, a foreign terrorist organization.¹⁰¹ The two self-proclaimed ‘boogaloo bois’ believed that providing support to Hamas would aid in their desire to overthrow the U.S. government because, as they believed, Hamas shared the same goals to harm the U.S. government.



Individuals claiming to be 'boogaloo bois' were also engaged in various protests in the U.S. in 2020, including civil rights and police reform protests and anti-Covid lockdown protests. In Las Vegas, three men connected with the Boogaloo movement were charged with conspiracy to cause destruction during the civil rights protests there, and for possessing Molotov cocktails.¹⁰² The extent to which the movement's support of civil liberties movements was genuine rather than opportunistic, however, remains open to debate.

In some cases, members have used the protests as cover to carry out attacks against law enforcement. In May and June of 2020, two ambush-style attacks were carried out in California. The first attack targeted two security officers in front of a federal courthouse in Oakland and resulted in the death of one officer.¹⁰³

The second occurred a week later in Santa Cruz, where sheriff's deputies were shot at and had pipe bombs thrown at them, resulting in the death of one deputy.¹⁰⁴ Both attacks were carried out by the same individual who wrote phrases like "boog" (short for boogaloo) and 'I became ungovernable' with his blood on the hood of his car before his arrest. The number of violent attacks and plots linked to the Boogaloo movement suggests the threat from their nascent movement in the U.S. is high.

Given the movement's growing presence and threat in the U.S., several Canadian media outlets and experts have since reported that there appears to be some growing online support in Canada.¹⁰⁵

This online growth was largely prompted by a long-promised federal ban on 'assault style weapons' introduced in the spring of 2020. However, despite initial concern about the threat a Boogaloo-style movement could pose in Canada, it appears that, at least for now, the movement has gained little traction in Canada. This is presumably at least partly due to differences in Canadians' political culture and relationship to firearms ownership.¹⁰⁶

Despite initial fears over the group's growing popularity online, there is currently no evidence that the group is particularly active in Canada. For example, there have been no reported Boogaloos at Canadian protests or organizations in person.¹⁰⁷ Additionally, many of the Facebook pages, which were allegedly populated by Canadian members discussing killing protesters and the RCMP, have since been removed.

In January 2021, a Montreal-based anti-government website claiming to be the “press platform” of the Boogaloo movement, which promoted armed protests in the U.S. ahead of the 2021 presidential inauguration, was taken down.¹⁰⁸ Although it remains unclear if the site’s moderator was indeed Canadian—as the RCMP investigation is ongoing—indications suggest there is at least some nascent online support for the movement within Canada. Law enforcement officials Alberta:

“I divide anti-authority in two directions – there’s the pseudo-law or pseudo-legal driven versions of anti-authority; and the [second] one is the catch-all anti-authority, so that would include groups that are loosely anti-government, but are kind of libertarian-driven. So, the Boogaloo movement [in the U.S.] was a symptom of that appetite being filled. But, we also haven’t seen very much of that anti-authority category in Alberta. There’s a substantial appetite [for those types of narratives], but as far as actual extremism emerging out of that, we haven’t seen very much of it.”

– Law enforcement official

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Anti-Lockdown Protests

The global Covid-19 pandemic has invoked many anti-government sentiments both within and outside of Canada. The ideologies espoused by many anti-authority groups and movements have been used, knowingly and unknowingly, by anti-lockdown protesters around the world. For example, a woman in Singapore who claimed to be a sovereign citizen was arrested after refusing to wear a mask in 2020.¹⁰⁹

Although Covid-19 protests have been overwhelmingly non-violent, there are several reports of protestors espousing anti-authority views or outright claiming to be sovereign citizens and resorting to violence against law enforcement.

Notably, within the last two years, Australia has seen a marked increase in lockdown resistance – particularly violent resistance – which law enforcement attribute to a resurging sovereign citizens movement.¹¹⁰ In Melbourne, one woman repeatedly smashed a policewoman’s head into the ground after being stopped for not wearing a mask; meanwhile others have engaged in “baiting” police at checkpoints around the city.¹¹¹

In Germany, members of the Reichsbürger movement have joined in protests against Covid-19 measures and lockdowns, which, for the most part, have been non-violent.¹¹² However, several of these protests ended in violence, for which German authorities have blamed extremist agitators, including Reichsbürger members.

For example, in August 2020, hundreds of anti-Covid lockdown protesters attempted to storm the Reichstag, which houses the German parliament. Many of the individuals involved displayed Reichsbürger insignia and Nazi symbols.¹¹³ Additionally, at the end of 2020, German intelligence agents placed a particular group of anti-Covid lockdown protesters under observation due to significant influence from extremists. According to German intelligence, several leaders of this particular protest group were also known Reichsbürger members.¹¹⁴

These international trends, coupled with the presence of Boogaloo movement members at many civil rights and anti-COVID lockdown protests, indicate that anti-authority groups are increasingly taking advantage of the current global state of affairs to promote their ideas and beliefs. It also demonstrates the popularity of these ideas across a variety of audiences around the world. A table has been included here to demonstrate this. It lists all the known terrorism incidents by anti-authority groups in the U.S. and Canada that have been linked to the pandemic and civil rights protests during 2020.

U.S. ANTI-AUTHORITY INCIDENTS LINKED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC OR CIVIL RIGHTS PROTESTS

Date (2020)	Group/Affiliation	Location	Incident	Pandemic link	Civil Rights Protests link
March	Boogaloo Movement	Missouri, USA	A Missouri man planned to bomb a Kansas City-area hospital. ¹¹⁵	Although the man had plans in place before the beginning of the pandemic, the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns seem to have accelerated his plans and resulted in him targeting a hospital. ¹¹⁶	N/A, civil rights protests had not yet begun, though it is evident that the man held racist views.
May	Boogaloo Movement	Minnesota, USA	A man who had travelled from Texas to meet up with other Boogaloo Bois was charged after shooting 13 rounds from an AK-47 style rifle into the Minneapolis Police Department building during civil rights and police reform protests, and then assisted other looters in setting the building on fire. ¹¹⁷	Unknown	The attack occurred during civil rights and police reform protests in the city.
May	Boogaloo Movement	Nevada, USA	Three men were arrested on terrorism-related charges after they conspired to spark violence during anti-lockdown and civil rights and police reform protests. ¹¹⁸ Authorities arrested them on their way to the protests carrying Molotov cocktails.	Unknown	The men were specifically targeting civil rights and police reform protests.
May & June	Boogaloo Movement	California, USA	One individual carried out two ambush-style attacks were carried out, the first targeting two security officers in front of a federal courthouse in Oakland, which resulted in the death of one officer. The second occurred a week later in Santa Cruz, where Sheriff's deputies were attacked with gunshots and a pipe bomb, resulting in the death of one deputy. The individual wrote the word "boog" with his blood on the hood of his car before being arrested. ¹¹⁹	An exact link is unclear, but a friend interviewed after the attacks said that the individual said that Covid-19 quarantine rules may have played a part.	The first attack occurred purposefully while civil rights and police reform protests were taking place as a way to divert police attention.

CANADIAN ANTI-AUTHORITY INCIDENTS LINKED TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC OR CIVIL RIGHTS PROTESTS

Date	Group/ Affiliation	Location	Incident	Pandemic Link	Civil Rights and Police Reform Protest Link
September 2020	Yellow Vests; Soldiers of Odin	Red Deer, AB	During a civil rights protest, a group of counter-protesters showed up. A counter-protester proceeded to assault a protester. Disruptions to civil rights and police reform protests continued in October. ¹²⁰	The Red Deer mayor noted high tensions due to the Covid-19 pandemic. ¹²¹	Pat King asked his supporters to disrupt a civil rights and police reform protest, calling them Antifa and "left-wing anarchists," and that they were threatening people in the community.
June 2020	WEXIT; Yellow Vets	Innisfail, AB	The organizer for a civil rights protest was met with racist comments and threats. One of the individuals was the WEXIT leader, Peter Downing. During the protest, they met two counter-protesters, one of them being Pat King. ¹²²	Unknown.	The organizer of the civil rights protest was the main target. During the protest, two individuals shouted, "All Lives Matter," a common criticism of the Black Lives Movement. ¹²³
November 2021	Unknown.	Grand Prairie, AB	Anti-masker protesters hung a noose outside an Alberta MLA with a note that said, "no to masks, end the gov't, hang 'em all." ¹²⁴	The Alberta MLA spoke out against Covid-19 restrictions and was forced to resign after a trip to Hawaii in December 2020. ¹²⁵	None.
July 2021	[Supporters of Kevin Johnston]	Calgary, AB	The Alberta Health Minister, Tyler Shandro, was harassed by supporters of Kevin J. Johnston. The supporters chanted, "lock Shandro up," and called them a war criminal. ¹²⁶	Johnston supporters are anti-mandates. Kevin J. Johnston is currently facing charges of allegedly harassing an employee of Alberta Services.	None.
February 2022	Diagolon; Plaid Army	Coutts, AB	13 individuals were arrested during a search warrant, which found firearms, body, armour, high-capacity magazines, and a machete. Some members of the group conspired to murder RCMP officers. ¹²⁷	This group was a part of the blockade in Coutts, Alberta. The blockade was protesting COVID-19 vaccines and government mandates. ¹²⁸	None.

Canadian “Freedom Convoy” Protests 2022

In January 2022, vehicles from across the country joined a self-declared “Freedom Convoy” headed for Ottawa to protest the continued public-health restrictions and mandates related to Covid-19, including a vaccine mandate for truck drivers crossing the Canada-U.S. border.

On January 27, the first trucks arrived in downtown Ottawa, blocking traffic. Hundreds of vehicles remained parked in front of Parliament Hill in downtown Ottawa for the following three weeks and were joined by thousands of protesters.¹²⁹

Concurrently, similar protests took place in other cities and at several border crossings around the country, and in the U.S., Germany, New Zealand, and Australia. Altogether, it became one of the largest anti-authority events in Canadian history. Although most protesters were peaceful and not connected to extremist groups, some individuals displayed symbols or acted in ways that indicated either their affiliation with certain groups or sympathies toward their ideologies.

These protests were emblematic of a growing trend amongst the anti-mandate and anti-lockdown movement in Canada, which has spurred the revitalization of several Freeman tropes for those seeking an ‘alternative’ explanation to the law.

In Ottawa, Robert A. Menard – largely credited as the founder of the modern Freeman movement in Canada – held several Canadian Common Corps of Peace Officers (C3PO) “peace officer” swearing-in ceremonies.¹³⁰ Once sworn in, these self-proclaimed “peace officers” believe they have the power to detain and arrest members of the public who they view as “breaching the peace.” However, a C3PO is not a recognized nor a legitimate law enforcement organization. Moreover, it is against Canada’s **Criminal Code** to falsely represent oneself as a peace officer or public officer.

This phenomenon has been a problem for law enforcement in the past, particularly during the height of Freeman activity in the early to mid-2010s.¹³¹ Many so-called C3PO “peace officers” wear self-made badges for to confuse and convince the public of their legitimacy. For example, in 2014 Menard was arrested and charged in Ontario on multiple counts of impersonating a peace officer,¹³² and a year later unsuccessfully sued to be recognized as one.¹³³

One of the most notable events during the Freedom Convoy protests occurred in Coutts, Alberta, which serves as a border crossing into the state of Montana. Here, individuals linked to the protests blocked the border crossing for more than two weeks, disrupting normal and commercial traffic. Protesters were eventually removed by law enforcement. However, after several raids on trailers near the protest site, which led to the seizure of a cache of weapons and body armor, 13 individuals were charged for making threats to harm members of the RCMP.¹³⁴ In addition, four of these individuals were charged with conspiring to murder RCMP officers, all from southern Alberta.

Of these four southern Alberta men, two allegedly had ties to a relatively new IMVE movement known as Diagonal. This loosely organized militant accelerationist group blends neo-fascism and anti-authority ideologies.¹³⁵

Like the Boogaloo movement, the notion of Diagonol originally began as an online joke, referring to a fictional diagonal geographic line from the Canadian prairies to Florida, dividing the 'sane' people who reject the government and current status of society and the 'insane' people who blindly accept it. However, according to the Canadian Anti-Hate Network, it has attracted a growing network of anti-authority individuals.¹³⁶ However, despite initial reports of the men's alleged affiliations, it remains unclear if Diagonol played a role in motivating these individuals. Despite this, however, this group is certainly one to continue to monitor in the future.

GENDER AND IDENTITY-DRIVEN VIOLENCE

Introduction: Incels

Incels, or "involuntary celibates," are a predominantly male online community whose rhetoric dehumanizes women. The online incel community began in the 1990s as an online support group for those struggling to find a partner.¹³⁷ Since the 2000s, however, the term "involuntary celibate" was hijacked by online misogynists and has grown into a substantial and active online community comprised of different online forums where users regularly share memes, interact, and commiserate with one another.

However, some lone actors on the fringe of the incel community have mobilized offline to commit mass attacks, including against women in places like salons, spas, or gyms. Individuals who ascribe to violence and identify as incel have been involved in a range of deadly attacks, including several recent violent incidents within Canada and around the world. As a result of increased attacks in Canada, the 2019 CSIS Public Report recognized incel attacks as a form of IMVE known as gender and identity-driven violence.¹³⁸

Importantly, there is a distinction between the overwhelmingly non-violent self-identifying incels who participate in the online community and those on the fringes who believe their real or perceived injustices justify violence. Although violence from these fringe incels remains low and sporadic in numbers, the nature of involuntarily celibate online community and the rhetoric used to depict women are incredibly toxic.

Gender-based violence is a potential threat posed when this rhetoric is adopted by individuals on the fringe of the community with the propensity to be mobilized toward violence. This includes harassment and other forms of interpersonal violence, such as stalking and assault, which may not be flagged or identified as extremist. However, as emphasized in OPV's 2020 report about incels, many within the broader incel community also report higher rates of mental health issues. They are much more likely to inflict harm on themselves than others, indicating a need to provide support for these individuals.¹³⁹

Status of Incel-Linked Violent Trends

In Alberta and Canada

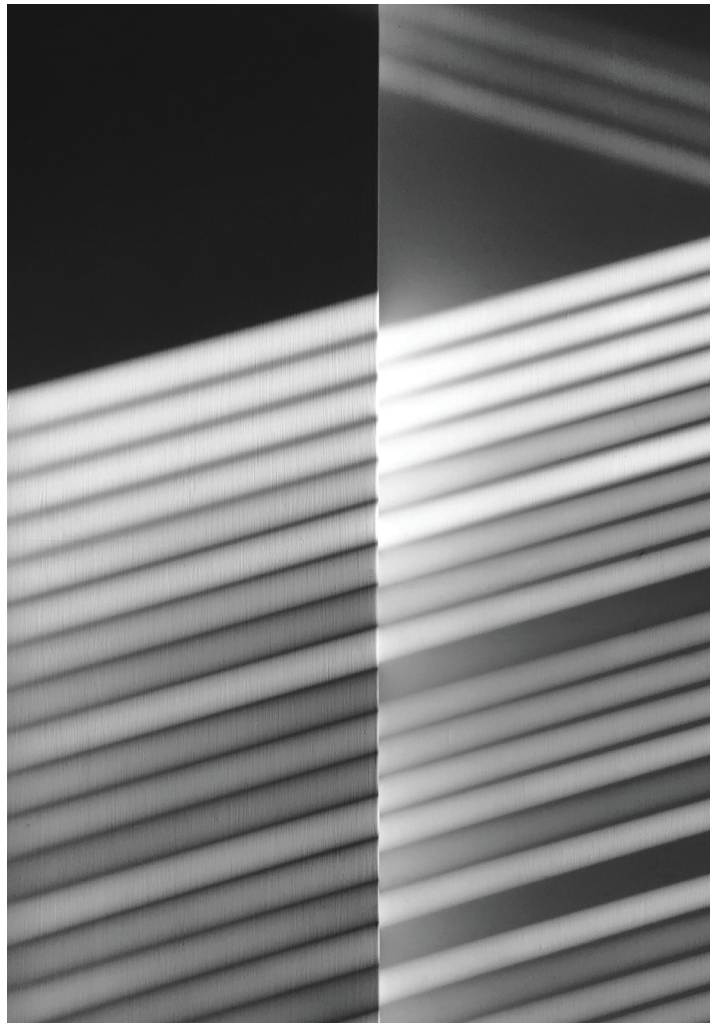
In Canada, the deadliest incel-linked attack remains the 2018 vehicle ramming in Toronto, which killed 10 and injured 16. Like many American incel attackers, the perpetrator claimed to view Elliot Rodger -- the first incel-linked attacker who killed 6 and injured 14 in an attack in Isla Vista, California, in 2014 -- as a martyr for the cause. On the day of the attack, Alek Minassian wrote on his Facebook, "All hail the Supreme Gentleman Elliot Rodger".¹⁴⁰

While many consider this a clear example of incel-motivated violence, evidence from the court has muddled these conclusions. For example, in explaining her judgment, the judge noted that although it is difficult to pin down the precise motivations for the attack, she accepted multiple expert witness conclusions that Minassian had lied to police about many of his incel-related claims, including that he had communicated online with Elliot Rodger and Chris Harper-Mercer, another incel-linked attacker.¹⁴¹

Instead, she noted that Minassian was likely seeking to attach the incel label to draw notoriety. However, Minassian did have many hallmark incel traits, such as never having had a romantic relationship with a woman. Regardless of his true motivations, some incels consider Minassian to be a 'martyr' for the cause, as evidenced by recent polls of online incel forums.¹⁴²

Although there have been fewer attacks in Canada than in the U.S., since the OPV's last report in 2019, several more recent incidents have occurred. For example, in June 2019, a man stabbed a pregnant woman in Sudbury, Ontario, citing his frustration with not being able to find a romantic partner as the cause for his violence.¹⁴³ Additionally, the assailant cited Minassian as inspiration for his attack. This individual was recently sentenced in December 2021 to two life sentences for the crime.¹⁴⁴

Another occurred in February 2020 when a youth stabbed a woman to death and injured another at an erotic massage parlor in Toronto. Three months later, Toronto Police declared the attack was being investigated and treated as a terrorist incident motivated by incel ideology, which marks the first time an attack motivated by incels has been charged as an act of terrorism in Canada.¹⁴⁵ As noted above, the CSIS Public Report from 2019 recognized incel attacks as a form of IMVE terrorism known as gender and identity-driven violence and likely contributed to the escalation of charges from murder to terrorist-murder.¹⁴⁶



In Alberta, there have been fewer incel attacks, though this does not mean the threat is entirely absent. According to members of law enforcement who we interviewed, although the threat is generally very low, the isolated nature of incels makes them more difficult to track and intercept:

“For [the] gender or sexually motivated violent extremism, again, there’s an appetite. I think the appetite for this is quite a bit smaller [than for other forms of violent extremism], it’s kind of niche... We know they’re around, [and] we know that there’s an appetite. It’s a fairly small appetite, but there’s a lot of very effective narratives that are almost entirely spread online. The solitary nature of incels... drives that mostly online. All that to say, as far incels up here and any of the gender-driven stuff goes, [we are] not seeing a huge movement. But, we know they’re there [and] we know there’s a scattering of them. But they’re so isolated it’s difficult to pick up.”

– Law enforcement official

Additionally, while most incels in the province of Alberta have not been motivated to violence, law enforcement has attempted to monitor those with a cause for concern:

“Another group we’ve followed [which has] a strong presence online is incel. It’s a whole different world. And we’ve got a couple here [locally] that we watch. They’re concerning, for sure... At what point does it turn into violence? But, when they’re online and they’re chirping, is it arrest-able? [That] depends if it’s a threat, or if it’s just a lot of rhetoric and talk that’s concerning.”

– Law enforcement official

The Involuntary Celibate Belief System

Incels are part of the “manosphere,” which includes a myriad of misogynistic ideologies like Men’s Rights Advocates (MRA), Pick-Up Artists (PUAs), and Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW). Individuals who ascribe to these ideologies tend to congregate online on social media sites like 4chan and Reddit, and promote traditional forms of masculinity, hostility toward women, and anti-feminism.¹⁴⁷

Like others in the manosphere, incels share a belief about the dualistic reality of men vis-à-vis women in society presented in a rigid, hierarchical fashion. However, whereas others in the manosphere tend to promote hypermasculinity and sexual prowess, incels promote defeatism and languish in self-deprecation about their perceived lack of conventional masculine traits and their inability to have sex or any other romantic interactions with women. In general, incels place themselves in the category of “beta” males (as opposed to “alpha” males that attract women), who are sexually disenfranchised individuals that make claims to “victimhood and aggrieved entitlement.”¹⁴⁸

While the incel belief ecosystem is diverse and constantly changing, it can be summarized as a collection of “pills”, each encapsulating a worldview. The “pill” most frequently linked to incels is the “blackpill,” a philosophy which, amongst other things, purports that one’s place in society is determined solely by his or her genetically pre-determined physical characteristics alone.¹⁴⁹

The blackpill is an extension of the larger extreme right-wing community's notion of being "red-pilled," a reference to the movie *The Matrix* whereby taking the red pill (as opposed to the blue pill) awakens a person to the previously hidden nature of reality. In the manosphere, members refer to themselves and others as being "redpilled" to describe their 'realization' that men are disadvantaged by the unfair desires and disproportionate power of feminists and women in general. They also allege that men never held the systemic or structural power that feminists allege.¹⁵⁰

The blackpill accepts many of the redpill's core tenets, particularly about society's hierarchy and the 80/20 rule (also known as hypergamy -- the act of "marrying up" in society, or having very high standards), which purports that 80% of women want only 20% of men (i.e., stereo-typical alpha males, known in the incel community as 'Chads').¹⁵¹ However, unlike "blackpilled" incels, those who are "redpilled" tend to believe that there is something they can do to correct these perceived injustices.

For example, many "redpilled" incels engage in 'looksmaxxing,' a colloquial term for improving one's physical appearance to become more attractive. While some forms of looksmaxxing can be harmless, and even beneficial to the individual, such as exercising and eating more healthily; some incels take looksmaxxing to the extreme by seeking plastic surgery and other permanent ways to alter their appearances. Looksmaxxing also includes internalization of racist beauty standards, such as the act of bleaching one's skin to appear whiter.

Others have tried to learn 'game,' a term borrowed from the Pick-Up Artist community, which aims to improve one's social skills with women in order to become more sexually successful. While these tactics may appear innocuous at first glance, they are rooted in the misogynistic belief that women are only passively aware of their attractions and can be easily manipulated for pleasure by men.

While the locus of control purported by the redpill is mostly *internal*, the blackpill is a nihilistic, defeatist, and fatalist worldview which purports that wealth in modern society, the absence of ecological pressures, and changing social dynamics afford women the ability to be "choosy" with their mates.

As a result, the locus of control amongst "blackpilled" incels is external, meaning that both the source and the solution to the problem are not within the individual's control. This results from the blackpill's focus on the biological determinants of sexual attraction, which incels argue can only be changed through thousands of years of evolution. Therefore, "blackpilled" incels believe that no amount of 'looksmaxxing' will change their lot. The result is a society where idealized men and women, known as "Chads" and "Stacys", are at the top of the social hierarchy. Chads (or the stereotypical alpha male) usually get their pick of women.

In the middle of the hierarchy are what incels call "normies," who can vary in their level of attractiveness. However, according to incels, most normies aspire to be with either Chads or Stacys. Incels place themselves at the bottom of the hierarchy as the least attractive. However, they believe they hold privileged insights about the world – namely, that they are destined to languish in isolation and misery because of the inescapable consequences of the unfair social hierarchy despite the mainstream narrative that everyone can find love.¹⁵²

Incels, like others in the manosphere, harken back to the "golden age" of patriarchal society, where traditional gender roles were not only followed but accepted as socially correct.¹⁵³ Many incels argue that the sexual and feminist revolution in the 1960s/70s led to the destruction of this idealized society. However, some argue that the incel category always existed to some extent but was accelerated after this point.

As a result of this revolution, incels argue that the intrinsically shallow nature of women's intentions has been revealed in that they base their decisions almost entirely on physical and sexual appeal. This effectively eliminates most normies and all incels from the potential dating pool and signals the exclusion of their genes from the larger pool. For this reason, incels blame women for their unjust situations, and therefore, some incels conceive of violence against women as a way to punish or take revenge against this perceived injustice.

In 2014, the first attack perpetrated by a member of the then-nascent online incel community in Isla Vista, California, resulted in a more distinct coalescence of incels as a separate online community from the broader manosphere.¹⁵⁴ In 2016, incel forums began to shift from red pill terminology to the black pill, accepting core tenets of the redpill but rejecting the notion that the state of men vis-à-vis women can change.¹⁵⁵

Since then, several high-profile attacks by individuals claiming to be incel have occurred across the world, including in Canada in 2018 when Alek Minassian rammed a van onto a busy sidewalk in Toronto. The online incel ecosystem has also undergone various transformations, largely due to repeated de-platforming due to violent or unlawful content. Many of the most popular incel subreddits have now been banned, forcing many to seek out incel-specific forums online, which often have little or no content moderation.

Incel Violence Around the World

Since OPV's last report, several violent attacks have been carried out by individuals linked to incels, most of which occurred in the United States. What is notable about a number of these cases, like in the cases perpetrated in Canada, is the assailants' references and admiration of Elliot Rodger. Although research on the violent tactics of incels remains sparse, some researchers indicate that the culture of martyrdom exhibited amongst incels is similar to RMVE groups and indicates that murder-suicides are preferred to other types of attacks.¹⁵⁶

For example, in November 2018, a man shot and killed two women at a yoga studio in Tallahassee, Florida. An investigation of his online presence later revealed that he identified as and engaged with incel material. He also mentioned Elliot Rodger in a self-recorded video that he posted online.¹⁵⁷

In April 2020, the FBI arrested a California man and self-proclaimed incel after he conducted a 4-year online harassment against two teenage girls. He expressed sympathy for Elliot Rodger and allegedly made hundreds of threats to use both sexual and physical violence against the teenagers if they continued to reject his sexual advances.¹⁵⁸

In June 2020, a man in Virginia attended a local emergency room after he sustained significant injuries to his hand and body. Although he initially told authorities he had suffered from a lawnmower accident, an investigation later found he was attempting to build a bomb to target "hot cheerleaders," and found a partially-destroyed letter that referenced Elliot Rodger.¹⁵⁹

Finally, in September 2020, a New York man was arrested after he made threats and stalked a couple from Long Island for a year. He allegedly idolized Elliot Rodger and sent the male victim a photo of the woman that Elliot Rodger stabbed, writing, "This is what happened when a woman said 'no' to Elliot Rodger."¹⁶⁰

Other incel attacks or incidents that occurred in the U.S. without explicit reference to Rodger include a man arrested two blocks away from a 2019 Utah women's rights rally after he posted to Facebook that he wanted to kill women in a public space and be the next mass shooter.¹⁶¹

Later in June 2019, a discharged army veteran who intended to shoot up a Dallas federal courthouse was intercepted and killed by officers before he could injure anyone. The man had allegedly shared incel memes on his social media accounts.¹⁶² As a result, the Maryland Air Force base began instructing its personnel on identifying the warning signs of incels, and the spokesman for the base called incels "a very real threat to military members and civilians."¹⁶³

In May 2020, a man opened fire in an entertainment district in Glendale, Arizona, critically injuring a man and leaving a woman and a teenage girl injured. The man allegedly was looking to target couples and identified as an incel.¹⁶⁴ More recently, in July 2021, an Ohio man's plot to conduct a mass shooting of sororities at an undisclosed university was foiled when he was arrested and charged by police.¹⁶⁵ According to prosecutors, the man had been a frequent visitor of a popular incel forum.

A month later in August 2021, Jake Davison carried out a mass shooting in Plymouth, U.K. which claimed five lives, including his mother, before taking his own life. Initial media reports linked Davison to incel beliefs. However, Davison's connection to incels sparked public debate as to whether the attack was, in fact, motivated by the incel belief system.

For example, while Davison had recorded himself in video blogs discussing the blackpill, he was a frequent poster on a subreddit called r/IncelExit, a popular forum for those looking for support to exit the online incel community. In his posts online, Davison was critical not only of the blackpill but of incels generally and in some cases, wrote that he did not identify as an incel.¹⁶⁶ Ultimately, after investigating, U.K. Counter Terrorism Policing concluded that the attack was not a terrorist attack and was not motivated to further an ideological cause.¹⁶⁷

THE FUTURE OF INCEL VIOLENCE

Since 2014, there have been roughly 10 fatal attacks, resulting in 54 deaths, across North America by self-identified incels or individuals who appeared to be inspired partly by the incel ideology.ⁱⁱ However, there is likely an unknown number of interpersonal violent incidents stemming from self-identified incels in the form of stalking, harassment, assault and other misogynistic behaviors. Because these acts do not always get flagged as extremism, they can go under or unreported.

ii In order, this includes the 2014 Isla Vista, California attack perpetrated by Elliot Rodger which resulted in 7 fatalities, including Rodger himself; a 2015 attack in Oregon, which resulted in 10 fatalities including the assailant; a 2016 attack in Edmonton, which resulted in 1 fatality; a 2017 attack in New Mexico, which resulted in 3 fatalities including the assailant; a 2018 attack in Tallahassee, Florida, which resulted in 3 fatalities including the assailant; a 2018 attack in Toronto, which resulted in 10 fatalities; a 2018 attack in Parkland, Florida, which resulted in 17 fatalities; a 2019 attack in Dallas, Texas, where the only fatality was the assailant; a 2019 attack in New York, which resulted in 1 fatality; and a 2020 attack in Toronto, which resulted in 1 fatality. This does not include Jake Davison's attack in 2021, which resulted in 6 fatalities (including Davison himself).

Law enforcement officials we interviewed noted that tracking and intercepting incels who mobilize to violence can be difficult because most violence coming from the fringes of the incel community tends to be perpetrated by lone actors. This makes detection, intervention, and disruption more challenging.¹⁶⁸

However, on average, incels are more likely to represent a threat to themselves than to others. This is indicated by a poll conducted on a popular incel forum, where only 17 of the 272 respondents agreed with the statement that incels are “willing to endorse violence.”¹⁶⁹ Conversely, the survey indicated that incels are more likely to suffer from suicidal thoughts and other mental health issues, underscoring the risk of self-harm and low levels of mental health endemic within this community.

For example, 84.6% of respondents indicated they experienced depressive symptoms; 80.1% indicated they experienced anxiety symptoms; and nearly 70% indicated they have suicidal ideations.¹⁷⁰ Nearly 45% also self-reported that they have symptoms of autism spectrum disorder, though this was not confirmed with official diagnoses.

The intersection between many individuals who identify as incel and mental health has also been raised by law enforcement officials we interviewed in the province. For example, one official noted that determining whether or not an individual poses a threat when they have mental illness is a difficult line to walk:

“It’s hard to judge, it’s hard to know who is the real threat sometimes. Is this person just blowing off steam? Are they just venting? Is it a mental health issue? Or is this person really [serious], are they intending on carrying through with some of the stuff that they’re talking about? It really can be difficult to decipher a lot of the time and, of course, you hear about plenty of cases where actual violence does occur and the person was suffering from mental health issues. It’s not as easy to just say, “Ah, this [person] has a mental health issue, we don’t need to worry... [they’re] never going to do anything.”

Well, [they] might, you don’t know. It might escalate. It’s very difficult.... We just went through this with [an incel] guy – we’ve got a guy [here] who goes online every now and then and just goes off and is extremely graphic and violent in his ideation. But, there’s no imminent, specific threat to any specific person or group. So, what can we do about it, ultimately? We’d like to get a Peace Bond or something, or a charge on a person like this, but if there’s nothing in the law that facilitates that, then we’re kind of left to, “Well, we can have a knock on his door and have a chat with him again and try to make our own assessment on where we think his head is at right now,” but ultimately, we’ve just got to sit back and wait.”

– Law enforcement official

The prevalence of mental health issues suggests that many incels could benefit from psycho-social interventions and support.¹⁷¹

Unfortunately, many among the incel community consider psycho-social support useless, likely deterring incels from seeking support. For example, according to the poll of incels, participants reported that only 51.5% had ever tried therapy; further, only 15% of those who had tried therapy felt it had been helpful.¹⁷²



For those who had not tried therapy, they reported they believed it was “a scam” or “a waste of money,” mostly because therapy fails to address the perceived physical, rather than mental, attributes which contribute to their incelism. However, this does not mean that therapeutic support is ineffective. Some incels use the term ‘taking the purple pill,’ which encourages seeking peer support and may be used as a gateway to introduce individuals to further support services.¹⁷³ Policy and practitioner recommendations about interventions for individuals who identify as incels can be found in OPV’s report “Incels: Background for Practitioners”.¹⁷⁴

Finally, with most of the attention focused on incels, it is important to consider the threat posed by other actors within the manosphere. For example, some law enforcement officials we interviewed voiced concern over individuals linked to the manosphere, but not incels in particular:

“We have had investigations into anti-women [ideologies]. I don’t want to say the name because it’ll just bring attention to the site... But we have had investigations into people that are [in] anti-women, groups, you know, just some investigating to see their ideology... No violence, just intelligence that we know people with those ideologies are here. So, of course, when we assess those individuals and interview them, they’re like “no, I’d never act out, I just have some of these beliefs...” We obviously still investigate.... [but] we’ve not investigated anybody connected to incel. So, maybe [the manosphere] is a gateway group? Maybe it will lead [someone] to incel. I don’t want to ignore the variants because that is a potential.”

– Law enforcement official

ECO EXTREMISM

As a result of controversial pipeline expansion projects in British Columbia and Alberta, some individuals and groups have mobilized to make their opposition known. For example, in 2020, there were 41 incidents of shunts placed on the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) railway tracks near Bellingham, Washington. Shunts are meant to disrupt the electrical current on railway tracks which mimic the electrical signal of another train on a track, preventing other trains from entering the area. However, depending on where they are placed on the tracks, shunts can also cause train decoupling, collision, and even derailment. Shortly after the first shunts were discovered, an anarchist group claimed responsibility online, stating that the goal was to prevent supplies from reaching the Coastal GasLink project in B.C.¹⁷⁵

Although most of the shunts have been discovered by authorities before they could cause any damage, in October 2020, several shunts caused a train carrying hazardous and combustible materials to decouple near a residential area.¹⁷⁶ Although no one was injured, any explosion or leak could have caused significant environmental or property damage or bodily harm. A month later, in November 2020, two women were arrested and charged with terrorism after placing several shunts on the tracks of the BNSF railway.¹⁷⁷ According to authorities, the two women were motivated by opposition to the Coastal GasLink pipeline expansion project. However, they were only charged with the single incident and not the other 41 reported.

A more recent attack occurred in February 2022. Police responded to a call from a Coastal GasLink pipeline worksite near Houston B.C., after 20 masked individuals allegedly attacked security guards and employees with axes, flares, and other incendiary devices.¹⁷⁸ The attackers used on-site equipment to damage other machinery, causing millions of dollars in damage. By the time the police arrived, the attackers had fled. On their way to the site, however, the police were confronted by several blockades allegedly laid by the attackers, including a board with exposed spikes that injured an officer. So far, the RCMP have not named the individuals or group responsible for the attack, but the investigation is ongoing.¹⁷⁹

Although attacks against railways and pipelines have been rare and successfully mitigated by authorities for the most part, the potential for continued attacks both in the U.S. and Canada as pipeline expansions continue remains possible.

PATRIOT & MILITIA GROUPS

Background

Patriot and militia groups blend several ideologies and conspiracy theories and do not necessarily fit neatly into ideological categories. For example, some groups embrace xenophobic or accelerationist views, while others eschew them. Some groups adopt a variety of general anti-government or anti-authority views, while others are more specific about which parts or components of government they view as their enemy.

The bridging commonality between different patriot and militia groups is their overarching emphasis of nationalist sentiments. Additionally, most patriot and militia groups emphasize pro-gun opinions, firearms/paramilitary training, and survivalism. Generally, these groups view themselves as allies of the state military and law enforcement. Many groups consider the past 'better' times and view themselves as 'guardians' of a more traditional, nationalistic way of life. Their views usually center around anti-immigrant and racist sentiments, enhanced individual freedoms, and the enforcement of law and order.

Patriot and militia groups have been actively targeting a variety of rallies and protests that have occurred both as a result of Covid-19-related restrictions, as well as civil rights and police reform protests. Because many patriot and militia groups espouse some form of anti-government sentiment, pandemic restriction protests have been a popular way for the groups to mobilize, increase visibility and express their opinions about government overreach. Additionally, due to many patriot and militia groups' xenophobic sentiments, civil rights and police reform protests were high-visibility targets for these groups.

Finally, due to many civil rights and police reform protester sentiments toward law enforcement's treatment of communities of colour, some patriot and militia groups like the Three Percenters in the U.S. have shown up to 'enforce' their view of law and order.¹⁸⁰ Patriot and militia groups – by virtue of their categorization – tend to show up to public events heavily armed. Many of the most active groups in the U.S. during this time also have a presence (albeit smaller) within Canada, including the Proud Boys and the Three Percenters. Canadian mainstays like the Soldiers of Odin (SOO) have also taken advantage of the ongoing civil rights and pandemic-related protests to increase their visibility.

Status of Patriot & Militia Groups in Alberta

Patriot and militia groups have significantly declined in the province since the OPV's last report. As a result of infighting, splintering, and the listing of several groups as official terrorist entities, many groups no longer operate in an organized way. Where they do operate, it is mostly to do charity work. However, as discussed above, some of the SOO and Urban Infidels members have allegedly been present at recent anti-lockdown protests in the province such as the February 2021 torch rally.¹⁸¹

These trends were echoed by many law enforcement interviewees, who noticed a precipitous decline in the physical presence of these groups in the last several years:

“Yeah, it's largely collapsed. There are remnants, like individuals who spent the money on a vest patch and kind of want to get the max out of their investment. But, for the most part, as far as organized activity goes, we haven't seen anything. Social media activity, we haven't seen anything, probably for, pretty easily, over a year and a half.”

– Law enforcement official

When asked what has contributed the most to the decline in patriot and militia groups in their area, one law enforcement official provided further insight:

“That’s a good question. I would say it’s a combination of everything. I wouldn’t put all the eggs in one basket. I would think it is – [the] government saying zero-tolerance, naming some of these groups [as terrorist entities]. You [also] have social media lashing out, community standing up, [and] the increase in reporting. So, I would say it’s across the board. It’s the education we’re seeing, people being called out on social media for their beliefs and being held more accountable.

Us as law enforcement, as well, keeping track of these individuals, doing enforcement where we can, and showing zero-tolerance for that kind of behavior. I think it’s a combination of everything. You know, to me, it was everything happening basically in that same time frame. And maybe [the ideologies weren’t] that appealing, or maybe it lost appeal. I think it was also a lot of conflict within these groups, among leadership and ideologies, and so, you were seeing that disarray as well, lack of leadership. And, I think after a while, that combined with society’s pressures... I think it lost its appeal. Hard to say. I’m theorizing.”

– Law enforcement official

THREE PERCENTERS

Founded in 2008, the Three Percenters are a collection of loosely associated groups across North America that focus on the right to bear arms, the defense of traditional liberties, and their pledge of armed resistance against those who try to restrict these rights. The name refers to the alleged percentage of American colonists who engaged in armed resistance against the British during the Revolutionary War.

The Three Percenters ideology is similar to other groups like the Oath Keepers – which has a significant presence in the U.S. but less so in Canada – in that they view themselves as upholders and defenders of the U.S. Constitution in the face of a tyrannical federal government. The Three Percenters also believe in a variety of conspiracies: most prominent is the notion that the U.S. government is composed of malevolent socialists intent on violating individual liberties and disarming Americans to conduct a government takeover.

The Three Percenters formed as part of a wave of new patriot and militia groups in response to the 2008 and 2012 elections of President Barack Obama and increased tensions over race and gun rights.¹⁸² Since then, members of the Three Percenters have been involved in a variety of public events and rallies, as well as several violent incidents.

For example, members of the Three Percenters attended the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, where one woman was killed.¹⁸³ In 2017, a Three Percenter was arrested after he attempted to detonate a bomb-filled van next to an Oklahoma City bank.¹⁸⁴ In 2018, three men were arrested in connection to a non-fatal bombing of a Minnesota mosque, and it was later found that one of them ran a local Three Percenter group in Illinois.¹⁸⁵

Like other patriot and militia groups who view themselves as upstanding members of their communities, many local Three Percenter chapters have organized food banks and other charitable events to help address community needs.¹⁸⁶ Groups like the Three Percenters lever their charitable activities to present a positive public image and garner interest and membership. Some known Three Percenters have even gone on to run for public office in Oregon, Idaho, and Washington.¹⁸⁷

Despite their attempts to create a positive public image, Three Percenters have also been involved in several recent instances of violence. For example, throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, Three Percenter forums on Facebook have been riddled with members threatening Covid-19 contact tracers.¹⁸⁸

In May of 2020, during a Second Amendment rally in Kentucky protesting public health measures, several Three Percenters were among a group of protesters who breached barriers to access the front porch of the Governor's Mansion and began harassing the occupants.

The hecklers later hung an effigy of the Kentucky governor from a tree.¹⁸⁹ In Michigan in October 2020, one of the leaders who was arrested in a foiled plot to kidnap the Michigan Governor was a member of the Wisconsin branch of Three Percenters.¹⁹⁰ Finally, on January 6th, protesters breached and entered the U.S. Capitol building in Washington, D.C.. After this event, at least one individual linked to the Three Percenters was arrested and charged for his involvement.¹⁹¹

The Three Percenters also have adherents in Canada, yet here their grievances take on a more distinctly anti-Islamic tone. It is suspected that Canadian Three Percenters groups formed sometime in 2015, shortly after Justin Trudeau became Prime Minister, and local chapters began popping up around the country. In 2018, CBC News reported that the group was growing in membership, including a new chapter in Ontario formed in 2017.¹⁹²

Like their American counterparts, Canadian Three Percenters (III%, or "Threepers,") have participated in public rallies and protests, often assuming what they term 'security' positions. This has prompted some Canadian cities like Hamilton in Ontario to ban any unlicensed security guards on city property.¹⁹³ For example, during a 2017 anti-Islam rally in Toronto, Vice News alleges that three men connected with the III%ers appeared and allegedly assaulted a journalist, resulting in one man being charged with assault and another wanted for arrest.¹⁹⁴

Status of Three Percenters in Alberta

Since OPV's last report, the Three Percenters in Alberta have undergone a variety of sporadic fits-and-starts. Adding to their rocky existence, the Three Percenters were added to the Canadian list of terrorist entities in 2021.¹⁹⁵

For example, in early 2019, there was evidence that the Albertan III%ers began regimented training with firearms and live ammunition, similar to their American counterparts who emphasize paramilitary training.¹⁹⁶ Despite this, no violent actions or threats are known to have happened in Canada. However, the group claims to have several mosques in Alberta under surveillance.¹⁹⁷ It is also worth noting that recent evidence suggests some members of the Canadian Armed Forces are linked to the Three Percenters, as well as other militia groups like Proud Boys, the Soldiers of Odin, and La Meute.¹⁹⁸

According to law enforcement officials interviewed for this report, despite a spurt of activity in 2019 and early 2020, Alberta Three Percenters have since suffered from organizational issues:

“We do have a Three Percenter chapter here. It’s kind of dissolved into a whole bunch of nothing... But I know that recently they’ve been brought forward because they’re starting up again, and there’s a few different people that are starting that group again and things are kind of changing. We haven’t seen any people prepping or doing anything like that or firearms training... I think they’re just trying to reorganize and they don’t really know what they’re going to look like at this point, but I know they’re trying to create [something].

And the one group we had here was not a threat to the community. They were more like prepping, firearms training, that kind of thing, getting ready for a war. We did surveillance on them, we did a probe on them, we never saw them doing anything that would create concern for our community or for national security issues. They were fairly disorganized here and there wasn’t a huge group of them.”

– Law enforcement official

Other law enforcement officials interviewed credited the naming of the Three Percenters as a terrorist entity for their dissolution:

“Three Percenters – same thing, they had a group here, a leader, and a couple followers, and with their listing as a terrorist entity it’s pretty much silenced them.”

– Law enforcement official

Others argued that the group’s organizational issues faced in 2019 prevented it from ever getting off the ground in the first place:

“We hadn’t really seen any organized in-person activity from the Three Percenters since late 2019, maybe early 2020, but that wasn’t... actual organized activity, that was attempts to organize that failed. So, their group had essentially fizzled out by then.”

– Law enforcement official

After the Three Percenters were designated as a terrorist entity in 2021, some reports allege that the group was rebranded and reformed with different names. However, to date, there is little information about how successful this rebranding has been, and there is no current evidence to indicate a substantial growth or threat.

THE SOLDIERS OF ODIN

The Soldiers of Odin (SOO) are an anti-immigrant vigilante group that share similar ideological threads with xenophobic extremists. Initially founded in Finland in 2015 amid the European migrant crisis, the Canadian SOO are an offshoot of similar European groups of the same name. Despite the potential, the Canadian SOO have largely failed to establish transnational ties or cooperation with their parent organizations in Europe.¹⁹⁹

Like the Three Percenters, Canadian SOO are highly anti-immigrant and particularly anti-Muslim, engaging in community patrols as a show of force.²⁰⁰ Like the Three Percenters, SOO members also regularly attend public protests and rallies. The SOO have several chapters across Canada, notably in Alberta, British Columbia, and Quebec. Recent reports also suggest that some members of the Canadian Armed Forces have been affiliated with the SOO.²⁰¹

Although there are conflicting reports about whether or not the group is now entirely defunct,²⁰² local news outlets have indicated that individuals linked to the SOO have attended several recent events.

For example, in March 2020, during an indigenous demonstration outside of the B.C. Legislature opposing the construction of a pipeline, demonstrators claim they received threats from the SOO to tear down their encampments and incite violence.²⁰³

In September 2020, an Albertan was arrested and charged after a year and a half investigation revealed he was printing firearm parts with a 3D printer, known colloquially as “ghost guns” due to the absence of serial numbers. A media investigation later found that he was an online supporter of SOO and other similar extremist groups. However, the RCMP has made no such statements regarding his potential affiliations.²⁰⁴

Significantly, this represents the first time such charges have been laid for 3D printing parts of weaponry in Alberta, and charges of intent to traffic the homemade weapons to circumvent firearms laws.²⁰⁵ Also, in Alberta in September 2020, an anti-racism rally in Red Deer turned violent after counter-protestors – which included SOO members – confronted and shoved the demonstrators.²⁰⁶

In February 2021 in Edmonton, anti-lockdown protesters gathered in what became known as the Edmonton torch rally. Held in front of an Alberta legislature, protesters gathered and displayed torch imagery, an image incorporated from the 2017 Charlottesville Unite the Right protests and used by older groups like the Ku Klux Klan.

Though not all protesters apparently understood the symbolism behind the torch imagery, Alberta Premier Jason Kenney condemned the extremist elements among them, including members of the SOO and Urban Infidels, a related patriot group.²⁰⁷

More recently, during the 2022 Trucker Convoy protests in Canada, one of the protest’s Toronto leader’s made media headlines after he posted a video in December 2021 which featured the SOO logo, encouraging other Canadians to stand up for their rights.²⁰⁸ Although it remains unclear if he had any affiliation (past or present) to the group, many used this to question the degree of links that some protesters had to extremist groups.

Status of Soldiers of Odin in Alberta

The SOO have undergone significant organizational changes and splintering within Alberta, resulting in a complex matrix of new interrelated groups. In 2018 the Edmonton SOO splintered into three groups – the Canadian Infidels, the Wolves of Odin and The Clann – after a controversy where politicians unknowingly took photos with local SOO members.²⁰⁹ Although their names differ, their anti-Muslim and nationalistic ideologies remain virtually the same. After the split, Wolves of Odin and Canadian Infidels members were reported working together and scouting an Edmonton mosque premise in 2019.²¹⁰

Two weeks later, a hate letter was delivered to another mosque bearing the logo of the Alberta Clann, which included members of the SOO, the Wolves of Odin, and the Canadian Infidels.²¹¹ Although the links between these groups are difficult to ascertain, at least some members are conversing with one another, though rifts and disagreements are common.

Since the OPV's last report, the SOO have taken a hard hit both on and offline. As of April 2019, Facebook began banning pages and groups associated with SOO, and pages linked to its splinter group the Wolves of Odin.²¹² Politicians have also sought to distance themselves from the group after unknowingly taking photos with SOO members wearing the group's insignia.²¹³ Further, after the Grande Prairie chapter of the SOO organized an Easter dinner at the local branch of the Royal Canadian Legion, the Legion condemned the event and distanced itself from the group.²¹⁴ These setbacks have made it more difficult for the group to organize online, though the dissolution and formation of new groups with new names likely circumvents this issue to some extent.

According to law enforcement officials we interviewed in the province, the SOO have either largely reverted to charitable work or have become defunct entirely:

“There is a Soldiers of Odin Chapter here. They do mostly charity work but one of them has been individually suspected of non-SOO criminality in the past. The SOO [here] mostly help to raise money for different things, [like veterans groups].”

– Law enforcement official

However, the extent to which this means that members no longer individually espouse the group's ideological beliefs is debatable. On the other hand, members could simply be biding their time and avoiding further investigation from law enforcement for the time being.

NORTHERN GUARD

Recent splinters within SOO chapters have resulted in several new offshoots outside Alberta. One of these is the Northern Guard, an all-male, anti-immigrant militant group active mostly in Eastern Canada. It was formed by members of the former Quebec branch of the SOO, and as of 2019, it had opened a new chapter in Halifax.²¹⁵ Like the SOO, the Northern Guard engages in regular patrols of the community and sometimes undertakes initiatives to 'soften' their image. For example, shortly after the chapter opened, members of the Halifax Northern Guard were spotted handing out pizza slices to the homeless across the city.²¹⁶

However, their rhetoric and members' occasional propensity for violence betray the organization's true nature. For example, in June of 2019, a Northern Guard member assaulted several people at the Hamilton Pride event.²¹⁷ A few months later, in October 2019, the reopening of a popular Syrian restaurant was disrupted after a Northern Guard member and several others heckled the owner and made false accusations that he was a refugee linked to Daesh.²¹⁸ After the hecklers published these false accusations online, the restaurant owner faced a barrage of death threats.

In a recent case in 2020, SOO and Northern Guard members attended a demonstration in Collingwood, Ontario, organized by Mankind Against Pedophiles and Predators (MAPP) and hosted by Ontario's Northern Guard president.²¹⁹ While the demonstration was small and non-violent, the Northern Guard's Facebook group moderator contributed a diatribe that condemned the LGBTQ community as an attack on the traditional family unit and added the letter 'P' at the end of the acronym to indicate 'pedophile.'²²⁰ The Sergeant at Arms of the Northern Guard's Alberta chapter added "The LGBTQ community will not be finished until they can fuck children."²²¹

Status of Northern Guard in Alberta

According to the Canadian Anti-Hate Network, many patriot groups, including the Northern Guard, are either stagnant or declining.²²² This is also true of more recent splinters like the Urban Infidels. This is echoed by some of our interviews with law enforcement officials in the province who mentioned that the presence of these groups had declined precipitously in the province:

“The people that we have seen have shown up as individuals at anti-Public Health Order events. The last group that we really saw active was the Urban Infidels. They were the last organized [post-SOO] group.”

– Law enforcement official

This stagnation is likely due to the infighting and splintering which characterized these groups for the last several years. For example, despite its short-lived existence, the Calgary-based chapter of the Northern Guard has already splintered twice, resulting in new and rebranded groups.²²³ These groups will likely continue to rebrand themselves — mostly due to de-platforming efforts by social media companies — although their mission tends to remain relatively unchanged regardless of their name. A law enforcement official echoed this in an interview, noting that the groups were not as public as before, which could signal they are moving deeper online:

“It’s really hard to measure this. Because... you’re not seeing the visual presence as much anymore. In 2018, I think you would have [seen] more of the groups wearing the vests, being out in the community, more vocal. So, you would see your groups like Soldiers of Odin, Northern Guard, out doing community interactions, feeding the poor, that kind of thing. Trying to gain legitimacy. And they would show up to rallies and protests and march.

Those groups... you don’t see them as much. It seems like they’ve dissolved. We don’t see them wearing the colors, the brands, the patches as much. Having said that, though, we do recognize... a lot of [those] people have kept their communications not on open social media. Their ideologies are not expressed in the public forum as much anymore. Which makes it really hard to track. Having said that, though, my concern is — and there’s always glimpses of intelligence that show these militia groups still exist — [that] they’re still, there’s a presence... We see those ideologies still exist.

The other thing that concerns me is groups that showed up in the days when they wore the vest, have now changed — to me — changed their dialect, and they’re now trying to present more legitimate. So, even though they’ve potentially rebranded, or, taken a different approach, I still think the concern is there... But, no evidence to show an escalation at this stage.”

– Law enforcement official

PROUD BOYS

Proud Boys are a traditionalist, neo-fascist chauvinist organization loosely tied to white power domains with a considerable following in the U.S., a smaller following in Canada, and a marginal presence in the U.K. and Australia. While the group tends to be openly misogynistic and homophobic at times, it is mostly nationalistic like many other patriot and militia groups, displaying Western ideals that are somewhat dissociated from other transnational neo-Nazi movements. Overall, though, the group advocates for racial purity and is anti-immigration. In Canada, however, the Proud Boys took on a more explicitly neo-Nazi tone than their American counterparts.²²⁴ It is also another recent addition to Canada's list of terrorist entities.

The group is perhaps most notorious for its support of former President Donald Trump and some of its members' roles in the U.S. Capitol building riots on January 6th, 2021. Here, a mob of supporters for then-President Trump, who had lost his 2020 re-election bid, stormed and violently breached the U.S. Capitol building in an attempt to overturn the electoral results. As a result, five people died, including a Capitol police officer, and around 60 other Capitol police were injured.²²⁵

Many riot participants have since been arrested and charged criminally, including 11 Proud Boys members.²²⁶ Notably, a new indictment alleges that two Proud Boys members conspired, planned, and fundraised for the January 6th riots ahead of time.²²⁷

The future of the group in the U.S. is at an inflection point and undergoing significant changes due to the arrest and outing of its leadership as a former FBI informant, as well as the 2021 Capitol riots. The latter has opened up the group to increased scrutiny from U.S. law enforcement, and many of its members have since been arrested and charged with federal crimes. Additionally, the news that a Proud Boys leader was once an FBI informant has led to questions about his and the group's legitimacy.²²⁸

In Canada, though the group has tended to be far less violent than in the U.S., there nonetheless have been several high-profile events that brought the group significant media attention. Perhaps the most notable was in 2017 when five self-identified Proud Boys members were involved in a confrontation with participants of an Indigenous ceremony in Halifax.²²⁹ Four of those men were members of the Canadian Armed Forces.

More recently, in the summer of 2020, in Sahali, a neighborhood in Kamloops, B.C., RCMP were notified of posters promoting the Proud Boys.²³⁰ In August 2020 in Calgary, counter-protesters, including a small group of Proud Boys, attended a civil rights and police reform protest, though no clashes between the protesters occurred.²³¹

Although the group in name is largely defunct now in Canada, partly due to the fallout from the 2021 Capitol riots, some researchers warn that members have simply rebranded themselves but carry the same ideology. For example, a Proud Boys chapter in Hamilton, Ontario, began using the name "Canada First" shortly after the Canadian government listed the group as an official terrorist entity.²³² It remains to be seen if rebranding has the effect of reinvigorating the movement or if it will continue to fizzle out.

Status of Proud Boys in Alberta

The Canadian Proud Boys chapters have been significantly affected by the fallout of the Capitol riots in the U.S. Indeed, many Canadian Proud Boys chapters have since folded or been dissolved. Additionally, Canada's subsequent official labelling of the group as a terrorist organization has also dealt a blow to Proud Boys groups across the province.²³³ According to law enforcement officials we interviewed in Alberta, this has largely been the case in the province. For example,

"In the last few years we've had a number of additional groups added to the terrorist entity list in Canada. So, that has affected the groups that we had – actually a few groups that we had – here [locally].

Three of them specifically – Combat-18, Blood and Honour, they had a small group here. They don't [now], they've been wiped out. Proud Boys – same thing, once they got listed as a terrorist entity, they've really been silenced. We haven't seen them. [One individual] actually turned in his actual jacket. We've got it hanging here in our office. A Proud Boy jacket. Because when they [came] on the Canadian entities list, he turned it over."

– Law enforcement official

Like other patriot and militia groups, the danger now is that former Proud Boys members will splinter, rename, rebrand, and re-emerge, making it more difficult for law enforcement to track. From the interviews with law enforcement officials in Alberta, this would indeed be in line with their previous group activity, though there is currently no evidence to demonstrate this is currently ongoing with former Proud Boys members:

"The Proud Boys are difficult because they were still technically active, like they were present in the province, they stopped activity but the history of the Proud Boys in the province has been stop-start. So, they have brief periods of frenetic activity where they recruit a bunch of people, they're very public, they do public protests, they wear their shirts, all that stuff. And then, usually due to personality conflicts, the group falls apart for a while. So, it could have been part of that natural cycle. The timing [of the Canadian terrorist entities listing] was probably right, just to prevent them from reorganizing again."

– Law enforcement official

LA MEUTE

Founded in 2015 in Quebec by two former Canadian Armed Forces members and a third person whose identity has never been revealed, La Meute is a Québécois nationalist, anti-immigrant and anti-Islam group. By 2016, the group had more than 40,000 members on its private Facebook page, though it is unclear how many are active due to the secretive nature of the page.²³⁴

Roughly translated as The Animal Pack, La Meute is primarily concerned with immigration (particularly anti-Muslim immigration) and preserving Québécois culture. Unlike other patriot and militia groups, La Meute has mostly kept its presence restricted to the online sphere and is very organized in maintaining its secrecy. However, La Meute has not been immune to infiltrators who have published 'tell-all' blogs from their time in the group.²³⁵

According to ex-members interviewed by Vice News, the group is organized hierarchically and has several cells distributed across the administrative regions of the province; meanwhile, the group's senior leadership is mostly composed of ex-military members.²³⁶ La Meute is also a well-oiled machine when it comes to campaigning. Printable flyers are provided for members to distribute, and the group even offers a 10% discount to get a tattoo of the group's logo from select tattoo artists.²³⁷

Despite the group's relatively low-key existence, La Meute shot to the fore of the public's attention in 2017 after several widely covered events. First, in July 2017, several members of La Meute were associated with a committee effort to reject a Muslim cemetery project in Saint-Apollinaire, Q.C.²³⁸

A month later, in August, a member of La Meute was spotted by Vice News reporters covering the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, VA, where one woman was killed.²³⁹ This member was later excluded from the group. A few days after this, La Meute staged an anti-immigration protest in Quebec City.²⁴⁰ The protest quickly turned violent after counter-protesters showed up to confront them, and the Quebec City police then deemed the protest illegal.²⁴¹

In 2019 the group became embroiled in internal fighting, and two senior leaders left the group. Although the details of their departure are unclear, a former co-founder, who was ousted from the group in 2017 along with several other leaders after allegedly mishandling the group's funds, publicly declared that "the ship is sinking."²⁴²

The departures occurred shortly after the passage of Bill 21 in Quebec, which prohibited individuals from working in positions of coercive authority (such as judges, teachers, and public employees) to wear religious symbols, including hijabs, burqas, or turbans. La Meute members considered the bill's passage a victory, and according to the group's spokesperson, the "wear and tear" from fighting and winning this battle is likely the reason for the departures.²⁴³

As a result of the persistent infighting, the group has lost much of its popularity. However, according to some experts, resistance to Covid-19 lockdowns in Quebec somewhat revived the group. For example, in September of 2020, the main event at a large anti-lockdown demonstration in Montreal was a speech by one of the former leaders of La Meute, who was ousted in 2019.²⁴⁴

In 2022, during the Freedom Convoy in Ottawa, a spokesperson for La Meute spoke to La Presse stating they were using the current political climate to organize their clans to protest the vaccine passport, but noted they are not anti-vaccine.²⁴⁵ Although there is currently no evidence of a significant La Meute revival, the potential for the group to capitalize on the current political atmosphere remains possible.

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