

Right-Wing Extremism in Canada

By Barbara Perry and Ryan Scrivens

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A Book Review by

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Right-Wing Extremism in Canada (2019) is an in-depth analysis of the contemporary right-wing extremist (RWE) movement in Canada written by Barbara Perry and Ryan Scrivens. The book illustrates the history, characteristics, spread, strategies, and threats of RWE. Both Perry and Scrivens extensively researched and focused on hate crime and right-wing extremism and terrorism. The book sheds light on the importance of identifying and combating RWE in Canada through a detailed examination of the movement from different perspectives and by providing various examples.

Until recently, RWE and white supremacist groups were not considered legitimate terrorist threats to Canadian societies. The main focus, especially since the 9/11 attacks, was on Islamic fundamentalism. However, as we see eruptions of violent assaults in the country and the inclusion of RWE groups in the Canadian government's terrorist entities list, this book becomes an extremely valuable guide to understanding how such groups function and how to tackle them. The book also provides a record of every incident of RWE in Canada from 1980 to 2015, in addition to a detailed list describing noteworthy Canadian RWE ideologues, gurus, and lone actors.

Based on fieldwork conducted between 2012 and 2015, the book is organized into six chapters that explain what RWE is, its history in Canada, former and current Canadian RWE groups, and the conditions enabling such groups before describing ways to combat RWE. The final chapter of the book investigates the initial influence of former President Donald Trump on Canadian RWE groups. One of the important features of the book is that it explains the context that helps Canadian RWE execute or incite assaults on communities. The authors used primary and secondary data like website analysis, media scans, and interviews with different parties, leading them to estimate the presence of more than 100 RWE groups across the country. Such an effort to analyze RWE in Canada was rare, as only a few previous scholarly attempts focused on this topic despite its evident presence.

A valuable point Perry and Scrivens make is that Canadian RWE violence is not as organized and structured as similar groups in the United States and Europe. The authors write that in Canada "both the perpetrators and the intended targets are individuals, or small groups of 2-4 for the most part" (p. 47). Yet, the authors notably highlight that such unsystematic activities suggest more difficulty in predicting violent incidents. "It is difficult to assess precisely when an attack might occur, or what might motivate it. It is especially challenging, then, to anticipate or counter the violence" (p. 47). I agree with the points made by the authors and believe that while

so far Canadian RWE groups are less violent and organized than their counterparts in other countries, the similarities in ideologies and connections between local and global groups, as also highlighted by the authors, can be a starting point to further understanding RWE current and future violent acts in Canada.

On that note, while the book emphasized the value of connecting Canadian RWEs to the wider RWE movement outside Canada, I believe the authors needed to find further possible connections between Canadian RWE figures and RWE groups and figures in the United States and Europe. The book provides detailed information about various Canadian right-wing and alt-right figures who contributed directly or indirectly to the contemporary RWE movement, but more details regarding the connections and influence some Canadian figures have abroad can help explain the impact they have locally and globally. For example, while they touched on alt-right figures like Ezra Levant and Lauren Southern, other more popular Canadian figures like Stefan Molyneux and Proud Boys founder Gavin McInnes were important to discuss in detail, since their ideas were not limited to Canada but are presented in the United States as well. Moreover, I appreciate the authors' points in Chapter 4, Permission to Hate in Canada, which includes critical information to understand RWE in the country. These points in my view are crucial to help readers not overreact or underreact to the threat of RWE, and carefully review the environmental factors and conditions that support or obstruct the spread of the movement. The chapter describes historical connections to a culture of colonialism, nationalistic politics, and the effects of a weak security force as enabling factors, but also spotlights elements that hinder the development of RWE like stronger security measures in British Columbia and Alberta, anti-racism activism, and a case study of community-wide capacity building.

The evaluation that followed in Chapter 5 highlights several influential agencies combating RWE and emphasizes the value of a multi-sectoral and multifaceted approach to tackle this issue, which I believe is reasonable given the disarrangement of the movement and history of white supremacy and right-wing ideas. Finally, while there is a lot that can be highlighted in the closing chapter in which the authors described the effects of the election of Donald Trump in 2016, the authors managed to carefully connect the "Trump Effect" (p. 144) with the motivation Canada's RWE expressed after his election. Yet, they also made sure not to dismiss the comprehensive analysis they provided throughout the book. To put it differently, "the resurgence of the RWE in Canada that followed Trump's presidential victory was not caused by the shocking election or Canadian RWE alone, but rather, are symptomatic of the continuing legacy of white supremacy" (p. 144).

Overall, *Right-Wing Extremism in Canada* is a necessary book that examines the development of the RWE movement and aims to understand where it is heading. Within six chapters, the authors review definitions of RWE and the history of the movement in Canada as well as offer new insights founded on fieldwork that allow us to recognize the evolution of RWE. The three main goals the authors wanted to achieve through this book were to explain and bring attention to the presence of RWE in Canada and its random and unorganized structure, to draw a connection between the local and national RWE movement, and not to overvalue or belittle the threats of the movement. I believe the goals of the book were achieved successfully, though more could have been added for the second goal by expanding on high-profile Canadian RWE figures who have connections to the global movement. While much has changed since 2015, *Right-Wing Extremism in Canada* is without a doubt a valuable guide and starting point for researchers who want to understand RWE in Canada and evaluate the movement after the period of the study.

About the Reviewer

Abdelrahman Fakida is currently an independent researcher and former Research Assistant at Simon Fraser University's (SFU) Disinformation Project. He completed his MA in Global Communication from SFU in 2020. His research mainly focuses on the dissemination of fake news, disinformation, and misinformation in Canada and the Arab world, in addition to right-wing extremism and extremists' use of the internet in Canada.

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