

**CONGRUITY OF THE FREEDOM CONVOY AND RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM
THROUGH SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY**

by

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

Right-Wing Extremism (RWE) is continually growing its influence in Canada and around the world. RWE's expansion can be attributed to the internet and its ability to spread extremist messages and ideologies in a form of misinformation and conspiracies. Consequently, individuals who are experiencing negative emotions and various grievances become susceptible to extremist beliefs and behaviour. Unfortunately, COVID-19 became an optimal event when internet usage, misinformation, and negative emotions became rampant in Canada. Canada's federal government implemented restrictions to mitigate the spread of the virus, and as a result, the "Freedom Convoy" (FC) protest was organised to oppose these public health restrictions. Within days of its establishment, the FC movement quickly became a coalition of dissent against the federal government itself. Between January 22 and February 23, 2022, when the FC occupied downtown Ottawa, far-right groups and voices became notable among the protesters as various right-wing groups joined the FC in support of the protest. This thesis investigates the relationship and similarities between RWE and the FC. Its aim is to contribute to the academic discourse regarding RWE in hopes to identifying possible countermeasures that can be used to dissuade RWE violence. Furthermore, this thesis attempts to explain the group behaviours of the FC and RWE through social identity theory by explaining how the formation of groups with shared identities can create hostile and hateful actions towards other groups. Central to this thesis is the examination of anti-governmental and grievance attitudes, the power of misinformation and conspiracies, the idea of settler-colonialism and freedom, along with an analysis of the FC organisers' links to far-right groups.

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"If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants"

— Isaac Newton

GLOSSARY ACRONYMS

CTA	Canadian Trucking Alliance
CSIS	Canadian Security Intelligence Service
IMVE	Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremism
FC	Freedom Convoy
RWE	Right-Wing Extremism / Right-Wing Extremist

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

“Those who can make people believe absurdities, can make people commit atrocities.”

— Voltaire

Chapter Overview

The key aim of this thesis is to examine the relationship between the freedom convoy (hereafter FC) and right-wing extremism; especially the inclination of some protesters towards far-right extremist ideologies and attitudes. During the FC protest, there is no question that right-wing extremist groups and supporters were present. This thesis uses a qualitative research method to collect and analyse information while integrating a semi-systematic review using the Social Identity Theory framework to explain how factions are formed when their members share a perceived identity, and how this organisation affects their behaviour towards other groups. This chapter starts with the background that contains contextual information regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, the FC, and right-wing extremism in Canada. Following is the research question for this thesis. Next is the rationale which identifies the purpose of this study, and the significance of this thesis which shows the importance of this inquiry. The last sections of this chapter include a description of the scope and structure for the thesis. The scope identifies the groups, locations, and institutions involved, while the structure explains the reasoning of how the thesis is structured.

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic arguably is one of the most momentous global phenomena during the 21st century, which for over a year caused the near total shut-down of near all social, commercial, industrial, and educational activities around the globe, not to mention resulting in illness among hundreds of millions of people around the world and killing over a million. Aside from the sickness, the pandemic brought forth social isolation, confusion, and loneliness (Bavel

et al., 2020; Lin, 2023). To prevent and mitigate the spread of the virus, various governments around the world (including Canada) introduced health guidelines and restrictions (Lin, 2023).

Two years into the pandemic, the Government of Canada declared that all Canadian commercial truck drivers needed to be vaccinated upon re-entering Canada's borders (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2022). As a response to the government's announcement, the FC protest was organised. The freedom convoy (FC) protest was formed to reject the government's restriction and to show support for commercial truck drivers (Huang et al., 2022; Somos et al., 2022; Vieira, 2022). However, the demonstration evolved into an exercise of dissent against the federal Liberal government (Sabin, 2022). Notably during the protest, far-right extremist (RWE) groups and affiliations participated in the protest and proclaimed their support both in person and online. For example, Nazi and Confederate flags were present during the protests (Dysart, 2022; McLaren, 2022), while various fundraiser pages were used to collect donations from the protests' supporters (Huang et al., 2022). Furthermore, misinformation and anti-governmental attitudes were evident during the movement. To investigate the event and its participants' connections with RWE, I attempt to answer the following research question.

Research Question

Why did the Freedom Convoy protest appeal to Right-Wing Extremists and Far-right groups?

Rationale and Significance

Rationale

The objective of this thesis is to investigate the dynamics of misinformation, anti-governmental attitudes, FC protesters, and right-wing extremism through the lens of Social Identity Theory to contribute to the ongoing scholarly inquiry of extremism. As Scrivens and Perry (2017) note, there is not enough academic understanding of Canadian RWE to develop

counteractions for it. By incorporating Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) into the analysis of research texts and news headline surrounding the topics mentioned, this thesis contributes to the knowledge gap regarding the nature of far-right extremism in Canada. Social Identity Theory provides a useful lens to examine how individuals' sharing a sense of identity and shared experience can form communities that developed into the organisation such as the FC and helps conceptualise how RWE ideologies can quickly become dominate within the social environment of such groups. Furthermore, this thesis explores how minor dissent, such as protesting health restrictions, can subscribe into far-right extremist values, ultimately becoming a serious risk to national security. Nevertheless, it is important to note that not everyone who supported the FC were associated with extremist values. While the extremist element within the FC was highly visible and vocal, it would be erroneous to suggest it was an all-encompassing element.

Significance

While the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted numerous studies regarding misinformation, social wellbeing, and extremism, research examining why groups like the FC became so susceptible to far-right ideologies and extremism is limited. Equally, though academic discourse regarding RWE is still new (Hofmann et al., 2021), recent events have elevated the spotlight on RWE. Some such events include the presidential election of Donald Trump in 2016 (Scrivens & Perry, 2017); the incel van attacker in Toronto (Hofmann et al., 2021); the Moncton shooting of RCMP officers (Hofmann et al, 2021); the January 6, 2021's Capitol riots in Washington, DC (Crosby, 2021); the Christchurch shooting of Muslims in New Zealand (Davey et al., 2020); and the most recent and relevant to this thesis, the freedom convoy protest where far-right supporters have contributed and sympathised to the movement (Farokhi, 2022).

In addition to the extremist ideologies and groups that emerged among those protesting the mandatory vaccination and public health restriction, online RWE also became widespread on virtually every social media platform and other digital platforms in the form of conspiracy theory peddling aimed at the recruitment of susceptible people into RWE groups (Davey et al., 2020; Hofmann et al., 2021). Considering the pervasive nature of RWE during times of crisis, it is imperative that more scholarship specific to RWE be introduced, which in turn can aid in combating the related rising in hate and violence. Equally important, since the freedom convoy and the issue of RWE have become so evident because of the global pandemic, this thesis strives to offer new insight on how COVID-19 pandemic influenced both the FC and RWE.

Scope and Structure

Scope of the FC

Between January 22 and February 23, 2022, over 3,000 vehicles and approximately 15,000 people descended on and occupied Ottawa to protest the COVID-19 pandemic health restrictions mandated by Canada's federal government (Huang et al., 2022; Sabin, 2022; Somos et al., 2022). Most of the FC protesters drove from across Canada to protest on Parliament Hill, while smaller groups converged on ports-of-entry between Canada and the United States to disrupt border crossings and bring attention to their cause (Farokhi, 2022). Online activities regarding the movement were heavy as both supporters and critics talked about the movement digitally (Farokhi, 2022). The considerable amount of online activity regarding the movement and discussions relating to the COVID-19 pandemic go hand-in-hand with the emergence and global amplification of misinformation, disinformation, and conspiracies regarding the origins of the virus. The rapid spread of false and misleading information during the pandemic provided an opportunity for RWE groups to expand their memberships and spread their hateful ideology, which in turn helped increase the level of frustration among FC protesters, and

resulted in many either formally joining or at least sympathising with extremist groups. As has since been discovered, strong connections between some FC leaders, participants, and far-right groups existed prior to the January-February 2022 FC occupation of Ottawa (Anti-Defamation League, 2022; Dysart, 2022; Farokhi, 2022; Huang et al., 2022; McLaren, 2022; Somos et al., 2022).

Structure

First, the introduction chapter shows the context and background of the thesis topic, why it is essential to delve into this area of research, and its implications for national security. Second, the literature review chapter investigates and reports the key focus of the thesis that includes the discourse and analysis about the COVID-19 pandemic, the freedom convoy, and far-right extremism and how they are all interconnected. Third, the theoretical approach chapter describes the background of Social Identity Theory and why it is relevant for this inquiry. This chapter also illustrates how a theoretical framework can be incorporated to explain the relationship between people's experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and their involvement with the FC movement. Fourth is the methodology and research design chapter that explains the research methods used. Fifth is the discussion chapter that readdresses the research question, the literature reviews' insights, theoretical relevancy of this thesis, and other discourse about this topic. Lastly, the conclusion summarises the key take-aways of the thesis, highlighting how it can support efforts to curtail RWE in the future.

Chapter Summary

The introductory chapter provides the context of the thesis topic including the COVID-19 pandemic, the freedom convoy, and far-right extremism. Moreover, this chapter clarifies the rationale, significance, and scope behind this topic as it relates to real world operations. Simply, a core aim of this chapter is to identify why this thesis was written. The

research question that this thesis is based on is also indicated and lastly, the structure of this thesis is expressed to show how this thesis is organized.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

“People do not seem to realise that their opinion of the world is also a confession of their character.”

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

Chapter Overview

The literature review chapter explores the key focuses of the thesis, as well as the research and news about relevant topics. This chapter assesses and analyses current studies and perceptions about the COVID-19 pandemic, the freedom convoy protest, and far-right extremism particularly on how they are all interrelated. This chapter initially presents the background of each topic mentioned. To set up the main key points in this thesis, this chapter starts with an introduction to the COVID-19 pandemic and how it relates to the emergence of the Freedom Convoy and its connection to right-wing extremism in Canada. The chapter continues by providing a background to RWE and explains the left-right political spectrum to explore why the word ‘right’ is used. Then, the chapter presents a historic account of RWE in Canada from the early 1900s to present. Next, the role of the internet, misinformation, and conspiracies are addressed. Lastly, the interplay between the pandemic, the Freedom Convoy, and RWE are examined to reveal how the themes of anti-governmental sentiments and grievances, misinformation and conspiracies, settler colonialism and freedom, and the FC organisers all operate to establish the relationship between the FC protesters and RWE.

Introduction to the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Freedom Convoy

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented global contagion that stimulated the inception of the FC movement, therefore addressing the outbreak and its implications on well-being of Canadians. Though not exclusively, the emotional strains caused by the COVID-19 pandemic is an influential spark to the protests. Social isolation, loneliness, distress, and confusion are some of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic for Canadians. The negative

feelings associated with the pandemic is then incentivised by the organisers and supporters of the FC to urge Canadians to help with movement to protest the pandemic related regulations by the government.

It was not long until the FC attracted criticisms based on the disruptions to businesses and residents of Ottawa during the illegal protests and blockades set up by FC supporters. Furthermore, the FC had associations with far-right groups both in Canada and United states that contributed to added condemnation from non-supporters. The following subsections explore the background of the COVID-19 pandemic, the FC, and how both events are linked.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The establishment of the FC would never have happened if it were not for the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent implementation of related public health measures and restrictions. The highly infectious COVID-19 first emerged in Wuhan, China in late 2019 and rapidly spread around the world, causing millions to experience serious respiratory sickness and death (Zhou et al., 2020; Li et al., 2020). In February 2020, weeks after its initial outbreak, the World Health Organization (2020) declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic. The risk of the virus caused many nations to lockdown their borders (Allen, 2021) while health sectors urged their citizens to minimise the likelihood of viral transmission by practicing social distancing, isolation, wearing masks, cleaning hands, and closing businesses, schools, and other public spaces — ultimately perpetuating loneliness for most (Lin, 2023).

Viral infections and loneliness were not the only consequences of COVID-19. Accompanied by loneliness is the feeling of anxiety, stress, depression, fear, uncertainty, confusion, distrust, and especially social life deficiency where one's social connectivity is lacking. Feeling that people do not have a sense of control in their lives were also evident (De Coninck et al., 2021; Srol et al., 2021). In Canada, social distancing and wearing masks were

two of the leading measures taken to thwart the spread of COVID-19 (Detsky & Bogoch, 2020). Social distancing affected how people socialised by diminishing the way they engaged in social interactions, ultimately disrupting the normal daily routines of millions. Nitschke et al. (2021) emphasises the importance of having a social life and relationships as both provide optimum health when experiencing stressful ambiguities, especially the negative feelings such as confusion and frustration associated with the COVID-19 restrictions. Nitschke et al.'s (2021) study revealed that people's resiliency in a stressful event like the pandemic and restriction policies is correlated with the health of social relationships. The more people feel connected to others, the better their psychological health is. Alternatively, imposing more social restrictions on people can increase their negative emotions such as frustration, anger, fatigue, and pain.

Another rampant challenge that Canadian society faced is the 'infodemic'. Antonio Guterres, the Secretary-General of the United Nations announces the spread of infodemic along with the spread of COVID-19 (as cited in The United Nations Department of Global Communications, 2020) which interprets as the spread of false information during the pandemic (Evanega et al., 2020; Moffitt et al., 2021). False information during COVID-19 mostly came in the form of misinformation and conspiracy theories. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, misinformation simply means "incorrect or misleading information" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) while conspiracy theory means "a theory that explains an event or set of circumstances as the result of a secret plot by usually powerful conspirators" but also "a theory asserting that a secret of great importance is being kept from the public" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

During this pandemic in the United States, some popular false information includes "magic" treatments for the virus, that COVID-19 was as a bioweapon aimed at controlling global populations, and even that it did not in fact exist (Evanega et al., 2020; Moffitt et al., 2021). In Canada, the COVID-19 outbreak was believed to be facilitated by pharmaceutical

companies or the result of 5G cellular phone infrastructure somehow causing the virus to spread (Bellemare & Nicholson, 2020). Other prominent unfounded information during the pandemic included that the vaccines could cause autism, that the virus was the same as the common flu, and that taking some alternative medications such as horse de-worming drugs were effective treatments. Regardless of what people thought about the pandemic, the transmission of the virus had to be immobilised by the government.

On January 13, 2022, the Public Health Agency of Canada (2022) imposed a mandatory vaccination requirement for commercial truck drivers as part of the federal government's attempt to continue minimising the transfer of virus when drivers enter Canada from the United States. This new policy for truck drivers is a continuation of the constant tightening and loosening of restrictions in Canada. The constant revisions of COVID-19 mandates further inflated frustration and confusion among people (Huang et al., 2022). Consequently, the mandate propelled the organisation of the FC social movement.

Freedom Convoy

After the announcement of the new health regulation for truck drivers on January 13, 2022, the FC organisers immediately set up a fundraising campaign to support their protest (Somos et al., 2022). A convoy of truck drivers and supporters from different parts of the country started arriving on January 22, 2022, in Ottawa (Public Safety Canada, 2022; Somos et al., 2022), with the protest lasted for just over a month (Sabin, 2022). According to Sabin (2022), activities such as partying and parking of trucks of FC caused a disturbance in the streets of Ottawa, and other forms of vandalism and disruptions were present (Public Safety Canada, 2022; Vieira, 2022). Aside from Ottawa, FC demonstrations occurred in various border crossings such as in Coutts, Alberta; Pacific Highway, British Columbia; Ambassador Bridge, Ontario; and Emerson, Manitoba, while other municipalities also had protests (Public

Safety Canada, 2022). Many blockades were also positioned by the protesters throughout various ports of entry between Canada and the US (Public Safety Canada, 2022). However, the main protest was concentrated in Ottawa where the governing body of Parliament Hill and the federal authorities are situated.

The significance of Ottawa being the target or destination of the convoy was purposeful. While provincial authorities had more power with health policies within their jurisdiction, the federal government oversaw border protection and restrictions (Detsky & Bogoch, 2020). As such, the vaccination requirements of truck drivers that cross the US-Canada border became more of a federal government issue and less of a provincial matter. What started as a public health policy disapproval quickly evolved into a protest of all COVID-19 related regulations (Farokhi, 2022), then the expression of dissent against the government (Public Safety Canada, 2022; Sabin, 2022). One of the organisers of the FC protest named Lisa Tamara released a statement that can be found on the Freedom Convoy 2022 Facebook page saying that “the Government of Canada has crossed a line with implementing COVID-19 vaccine passports and vaccine mandates” and “Our goal remains the same, to encourage the Government of Canada to repeal its cross border COVID tracking passport / phone app and ALL COVID-19 vaccine mandates” (Freedom Convoy 2022, 2022).

Influence of COVID-19 on the Freedom Convoy

It is important to affirm that the FC movement did not have public support for solely expressing discord towards the government. As mentioned, COVID-19 brought not only sickness but also negative emotions like loneliness, uncertainties, hesitations, fear, and stress — in part because of government actions to combat the spread of the virus, but also the fear of getting COVID itself. COVID-19 compelled the Canadian government to impose restrictions such as lockdowns, social distancing, and isolation to minimise transmission which

consequently proliferated the loss of social connections between people. Bavel et al. (2020) highlights the health benefits of having relationships and interactions with other people. In times of crisis, fellowship socialisation eases feeling strained in life, and aids in maintaining mental and emotional fortitude (Bavel et al., 2020; Jetten et al., 2012; Jetten et al., 2017; Rime, 2009; Williams et al., 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic is unique in a way that it is a global crisis, but people were obligated to lessen or completely avoid social interactions in the angst of being sick or sanctioned. Furthermore, the prohibitions to socially interact with others caused people to lose a sense of control and therefore lose the feeling of freedom.

The FC movement then became a platform for people to have a sense of unity; a sense of control; voice out the hardship that they experienced during the pandemic; and especially demand the freedom that they felt was lost. Srol et al. (2021) indicated the effect of COVID-19 on individuals experiencing loss of control in their lives. Hence the name “Freedom” convoy was used and emphasised by one of the organisers Tamara Lich in her statement about the movement, claiming that they are advocating for the freedom of all Canadians (Freedom Convoy 2022, 2022). Putting aside the far-right associations and anti-governmental attitudes during the movement, some participants found the FC as a way to feel connected to others who share the same sentiments towards the restrictions and social loneliness caused by the pandemic. Even with disapproval, some people shared advocacies towards the movement.

A survey conducted by Leger (2022) reveals that 62% of Canadians disapproved of the FC while 32% approved. Boosted by another disapproval of the movement is the condemnatory statement posted by the Canadian Trucking Alliance (CTA). CTA is “a federation of provincial trucking associations” that “represent a broad cross-section of the trucking industry – some 4,500 carriers, owner-operators and industry suppliers” (CTA, n.d.). According to their web statement, the CTA “does not support and strongly disapproves of any protests on public roadways, highways, and bridges. CTA believes such actions – especially those that interfere

with public safety – are not how disagreements with government policies should be expressed. Members of the trucking industry who want to publicly express displeasure over government policies can choose to hold an organised, lawful event on Parliament Hill or contact their local MP. What is not acceptable is disrupting the motoring public on highways and commerce at the border.” (CTA, 2022).

Even if there was opposition to the movement, a survey by IPSOS’ Bricker (2022) reveals the shared sentiments of those who disapprove of the movement with those who participated in it. The author of the IPSOS survey reports that 46% of Canadians “may not agree with everything the people who have taken part in the truck protests in Ottawa have said, but their frustration is legitimate and worthy of our sympathy” (Bricker, 2022). Prime Minister Justin Trudeau also recently admitted that the FC members were “a small subset of people who were just hurting and worried, and wanting to be heard” (Delaire, 2023; Tumilty & Nardi, 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic and the FC movement are unprecedented in that the creation of the FC is an ancillary effect of the pandemic and the government's response to combat the pandemic. The FC was founded on a small population’s outcry towards the pandemic health policies which expanded to the expression of dissent towards the entirety of the federal government. The engrossing aspect of the FC was how it tends to attract conservative people, especially the involvement of far-right groups and right-wing extremist affiliations during the protests that were physically and digitally present in support of the movement.

Understanding the Right-Wing Extremism

Various articles report that there was a small but noteworthy amount of underpinning from far-right groups and right-wing extremists that contributed to and attended the FC movement (Dysart, 2022; Farokhi, 2022; Huang et al., 2022; Scott, 2022; Somos et al., 2022).

However, before delving into the right-wing/far-right/RWE ideology, the principal meaning of the term needs to be conveyed by briefly explaining the political ideology of left-wing vs. right-wing first, and where the right stands on the political spectrum in relation to their ideologies and beliefs. Furthermore, the definition of RWE to fit the context of this thesis will be addressed.

Left Wing vs. Right Wing

The political ideology of left-wing vs. right-wing presents the dichotomy of two political systems that have different and sometimes opposite beliefs. This dichotomy is especially found in western democratic systems like Canada and the United States (Guy, 2015). Left and right are portrayed as a spectrum to show how one side compares to the other (Maclean et al., 2020, p. 57). Though not exclusively, on one hand, the left's principles lean more towards the importance of "equality, justice, and rights" for all individuals (Maclean et al., 2020, p. 57). Canada's left is most associated with the Liberals who emphasise having more government involvement; equal social well-being for all; and equal resource allocation to all including those lacking the economic means in society, which is similar to the United States Democrats who value reciprocity between people and the government (Guy, 2010, p. 286). Additionally, Heywood (2015) states that the left emphasises "freedom, equality, fraternity, rights, progress, reform, and internationalism" (p. 119). In essence, the left side of the dichotomous political spectrum embraces government regulations, inclusion, and equality as this is seen as beneficial to society.

On the other hand, the right-wing leans more towards "law, order, security, and stability" (Maclean et al., 2020, p. 57), but also "authority, hierarchy, order, duty, tradition, reaction, and nationalism" (Heywood, 2015, p. 119). The right side is more associated with conservatism in Canada and the United States (Maclean et al., 2020, p. 57), but United States'

conservatives are mainly represented by the Republicans. Modern conservatives reject as much government power in their lives as possible (e.g., less taxation on individuals) (Guy, 2015, p. 290). They also oppose social change and progress believing that holding onto tradition is best for society's well-being (Guy, 2015, p. 290). Plus, conservatives believe that the natural advancement of society occurs when governments are less involved, and if individual freedom is not impeded (Guy, 2015, p. 290). Conservatives "stress social and legal order based on fundamental principles of conservation and preservation to protect the national interest" (Guy, 2015, p. 290).

The political spectrum of left and right differentiates the values of people in a democratic system and how they contrast with each other. However, it is crucial to note that one side's principles can overlap, reflect, and/or borrow the attitude of the other. As such, a liberal person can value tradition, authority, duty, law, order, stability, security, and so on. Alternatively, a conservative person can value equality, progress, freedom, rights, social well-being, and so on. The issue is then settled on the strength and devotion of a person's left or right ideology is, and its tendency to become harmful or violent. Maclean et al. (2020) express how the spectrum of both right and left ideologies can extend further into extremist ideals and violent acts. Extremist violence of both left and right is regarded as Ideologically Motivated Violent Extremism that is arising in Canada (Public Safety Canada, 2021).

Reflecting back on the FC, right-leaning and conservative groups have been the most noticeable voices within the movement. Since the Liberal Government represents the left, its mandatory vaccination policy is easily opposed by the Conservative opposition, its supporters, and other right-wingers who traditionally value lesser government control. One revelatory evidence of the far-right's involvement is the FC's organisers who are far-right activists, which this chapter will explore more later. Another piece of evidence is that during the FC movement, there is a large engagement and support from mostly American right-leaning celebrities,

politicians, and groups. Dysart (2022) reports of visibility of Trump supporters and flags during the Ottawa protest, and Fox News' interview of an FC organiser named BJ Dichter. The FC movement itself was applauded by former President Donald Trump as well saying that "We want those great Canadian truckers to know that we are with them all the way" (Yun, 2022). Also, far-right supporters from the United States have financially donated to the movement (McLaren, 2022).

Moreover, conservative politicians like Pierre Poilievre were seen associating with James Topp who had been a guest on a far-right podcast (Gilmore, 2022), with another 20 or so conservative politicians reportedly meeting with various FC leaders and notable far-right Americans to hear their grievances and offer support (Fraser, 2022). Equally important to mention is that even if there is outstanding support for FC from the Conservatives, there are still differing perspectives within the Conservative Party on whether the FC is an appropriate protest or not (Lévesque, 2023). Additionally, the IPSOS survey presented that almost half of Canadians understand how the protesters felt regardless of if they support the convoy approach (Bricker, 2022). The implication is that the FC may not be purely a politically conservative movement, but the strain on people caused by the restrictions and COVID-19 gravitated the protesters towards a side that inherently and consistently opposes the Liberal Government. Simultaneously, Conservatives saw the opportunity for the movement to enhance its baseline and further discredit the Liberal Government. The ideology that the FC attracted is not just conservatism, but also the further end of the right spectrum that often is regarded as the far right or right-wing extremism.

The focus of this thesis revolves around right-wing extremist ideologies, groups, individuals, and their influence especially during the FC. Nonetheless, the left-right political spectrum is fundamental to understanding RWE as to give an insight into why far-right and

right-wing extremism has the word ‘right’ in it. To investigate more of the RWE, defining is important to narrow down the ideology to the context of this thesis.

Defining RWE

There is no universal description for RWE (Davies et al., 2021; Parent & Ellis, 2014). On top of that, right-wing extremism is a dynamic and complicated issue, and undergoes constant change (Canadian Security Intelligence Service, 2022; Perry & Scrivens, 2019, p. 3). RWE is also culturally and geographically contextual (Hofmann et al., 2021), meaning that RWE ideologies in Canada, the United States, and Germany, will be different from each other but some values are more significant than others while some beliefs also overlap. For example, gun rights in the United States are more pronounced than in Canada. The thesis will contain various degrees of right-wing attitudes and ideologies that extend to the extremist end. Parent and Ellis (2014) noted that violent extremism can be an umbrella term that covers varying magnitude from hateful threats, to vandalism, to assaults, to killing, and to chaos rooted from extremism ideologies. In other words, this thesis explores from a broad degree of non-violent right attitudes to extremist violence like terrorism. Furthermore, various pieces of literature have different definitions and categorisations for right-wing extremism. Public Safety of Canada (2019) released their terrorist threat to Canada report and included what constitutes right-wing extremism:

Right-wing extremism (RWE) is traditionally driven by hatred and fear and includes a range of individuals, and groups, often in online communities, that back a wide range of issues and grievances, including, but not limited to anti-government and anti-law enforcement sentiment, advocacy of white nationalism and racial separation, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, anti-immigration, male supremacy (misogyny) and homophobia. The threat of violence from any individuals, including those holding

extreme right-wing views, may manifest in terrorist activity or other forms of criminal violence. However, while racism, bigotry, and misogyny may undermine the fabric of Canadian society, ultimately they do not usually result in criminal behavior or threats to national security. (p. 8)

Adamczyk et al.'s (2014) contribution to the definition of RWE comes from an American perspective:

We define the American far-right as individuals or groups that subscribe to aspects of the following ideals: They are fiercely nationalistic (as opposed to universal and international in orientation), anti-global, suspicious of centralised federal authority, and reverent of individual liberty (especially their right to own guns, be free of taxes), and they believe in conspiracy theories that involve a grave threat to national sovereignty and/or personal liberty, that one's personal and/or national "way of life" is under attack and is either already lost or that the threat is imminent (sometimes such beliefs are amorphous and vague, but for some the threat is from a specific ethnic, racial, or religious group), and in the need to be prepared for an attack by participating in paramilitary preparations and training, and survivalism. (p. 327)

Adamczyk et al.'s (2014) RWE is especially relevant to this thesis and the FC because their definition includes suspiciousness of the federal government, the way of life, liberty, and survivalism all of which are factors of the FC's protest. Hofmann et al.'s (2021) categorisation of RWE entails individuals who are engaged in conspiracy theories, hate speeches and hate crimes, extreme racism and sexism, plus political and social advocacies relating to far-right views. Miller-Idriss (2022) also presents a more concise categorisation of RWE which she codes into four prominent components which are "antigovernment and antidemocratic practices and ideals"; "exclusionary and dehumanising ideologies"; "existential demographic threats and dystopian conspiracy theories"; and "acceleration, destabilisation, and apocalyptic

fantasies” (pp. 4-13). Furthermore, right-wing ideology revolves around the belief of others being inferior (Pfitzenmaier, 2019), which in essence implies their superiority over others.

There is no all-inclusive definition for RWE, and it is also contextually, historically, and geographically dependent. However, the overlaps between various interpretations of RWE can be understandable enough to present the ideology through academia or national security. The thesis’ broad explanation of RWE covers both far-right ideas and extremist violence. McCauley and Moskalenko’s (2008) article on terrorism introduces an idea that is appropriately transferable to RWE. Terrorists’ social structure can be conceptualised as a pyramid where the terrorists themselves are at the tip of the pyramid that represents a highly focused, extreme, violent, but very low in numbers while the bottom of the pyramid is wide but can represent many supporters who may not engage in violence or extremism (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008).

Just like in RWE, there are only a very minute number of extremists who engage in violence that represent the tip of a pyramid. However, the shape of the pyramid is such that the tip is still positioned on the foundational support of members who are not active in extreme violence or terrorism. The larger mass represented at the bottom of the pyramid can then be represented by those who hold far-right values of racism, misogyny, anarchy, white supremacy, a high degree of liberty, nationalism, bigotry, and more. The FC movement then becomes a space where people who hold some of these values (e.g. nationalism, liberty, anti-authoritative, individuality, traditionalism, etc) were present, which made RWE supportive of the movement so that the base of the RWE pyramid can be further reinforced. In other words, the greater the base of the RWE pyramid is, the bigger the entire pyramid of shared ideologies will be, and the extremist tip of the pyramid will turn out to be more threatening to national security.

As the name suggests, the ‘right’ signifies ideologies that reflect the more conservative side of the left-right political spectrum that value lesser government involvement in their lives

which in turn elevates their individualism as opposed to collectivism. The word ‘extreme’ is then characterised when right-wing values become hateful and strictly exclusionary, to the point where it stimulates activism or violence against others. Returning to the event of the FC where RWE has shown activity and support, the context and the history of Canadian RWE will highlight some of the violence that occurred in recent years. Reporting the background and the violence of RWE in Canada further upholds the aim that RWE is a public safety and national security risk.

RWE in Canada

The academic knowledge about Canadian RWE is understudied (Hofmann et al., 2021; Kinsella, 2001; Parent & Ellis, 2014; Scrivens & Perry, 2017), and how to suppress it (Scrivens & Perry, 2017, p. 535). RWE is not new in Canada as it goes back to the early 1900s and some even before that (Parent & Ellis, 2014; Perry & Scrivens, 2019, Chapter 2). During the 1900s, ideological extremism was not very active but RWE’s operationality, notoriety, and violence heightened lately (Crosby, 2021; Hofmann et al., 2021; Scrivens & Perry, 2017). The contemporary increased activity of RWE in comparison to the 1900s can be attributed to cyberspace (Scrivens & Perry, 2017) where communication is easier. Unsurprisingly, Canadian security agencies and the government has shown initiatives to regard extremism and terrorism as societal risks (Crosby, 2021; Millet & Swiften, 2021; Parent & Ellis, 2014; Public Safety Canada, 2021). Recently for example, Canada’s government declared the RWE groups Proud Boys, Russian Imperial Movement, The Base, Atomwaffen Division, Combat 18, and Blood & Honour as part of the country’s official terrorism list (Public Safety Canada, 2021). The Canadian government’s counteractions towards RWE groups occurred following RWE’s increased activity (Millet & Swiften, 2021); the American insurrection on January 6, 2021, in Washington, DC, United States (Crosby, 2021); but also because there are reports of growing

hate crimes (Crosby, 2021; Moreau, 2021), xenophobia (Crosby, 2021; Parent & Ellis, 2014), and internet racism (Crosby, 2021; Davey et al., 2020). Former U.S. President Donald Trump's presidential win in 2016 also brought a spotlight to RWE (Scrivens & Perry, 2017) due to his right-leaning advocacy and far-right sentiments (Perry & Scrivens, 2019, Chapter 6).

Canada's RWE in 1900s

Perry and Scrivens (2019, p. 23) reported the existence of the Ku Klux Klan in the early 1900s that expressed racist, xenophobic, and anti-Catholic sentiments and was more active in the Western side of Canada such as Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia, but also in Ontario. The peak of the KKK's numbers in Saskatchewan reached about 40,000 members and allied themselves with the Conservatives to weaken the Liberal's influence (Kinsella, 2001; Perry and Scrivens, 2019, p. 23). The circumstance is intriguingly similar to the FC and how conservatives and RWE convened (whether on purpose or not) to challenge the Liberal Government. The KKK however dissolved quickly during the 1930s (Perry & Scrivens, 2019, p. 24). Soon after, Nazism and fascism grew before WWII and groups such as Deutsche Bund, Canadian Union of Fascists, National Social Christian Party, Toronto Swastika Club, Swastika and Association of Canada, were founded (Perry & Scrivens, 2019, p. 24; Lauder, 2002). RWE extremism, specifically fascism, died down after WWII because of its association with the defeated Nazis. Barrett (1987) claimed that this era is called "the sanitary decades" because RWE in Canada steadily and slightly diminished but continued to be present with minimal activity (Perry & Scrivens, 2019, p.24). Decades later, the tough economy and widespread joblessness combined with expansive immigration policies were prominent during the 1970s and 80s (Barrett, 1987), which resulted in "pent-up frustration and anxiety" (Perry & Scrivens, 2019, p. 25).

Subsequently, neo-Nazis began to emerge in North America because of the weak economy and large migration (Kinsella, 2001; Perry & Scrivens, 2019, p. 25). Some prominent RWE groups that appeared in this era include Citizens for Foreign Aid Reform, Aryan Nations, Western Guard, Nationalist Party, KKK, Alternative Forum, Campus Alternative, and Concerned Parents of German Descent (Barrett, 1987). Another group that emerged is Combat 18 (C-18) which utilised online operations to employ and engage with people (Perry & Scrivens, 2019, p. 26). According to Davies et al. (2021), “Right-wing extremists were among the first groups to fully embrace the potential for online radicalisation and recruitment. More generally in a climate of fear and distrust, the far-right is in the best position to harness anti-government resentment.” (p. 6).

In 1995, an RWE website called Stormfront was developed as an online forum (Perry & Scrivens, p. 26). The website www.stormfront.org still exists and contains white nationalism, white supremacist, racism, and much right-wing extremist content. The front page proclaims “The truth is ‘hate’ to those who hate the truth!” and “We are a community of racial realists and idealists. Black, Hispanic, Asian and Jewish Nationalists openly support their racial interests, with American taxpayers even required to support the Jewish ethnostate of Israel. We are White Nationalists who support true diversity and a homeland for all peoples, including ours. We are the voice of the new, embattled White minority!” (Stormfront, n.d.). The existence of RWE groups persists in 21st century (Perry & Scrivens, 2019) as the 21st century established the founding of neo-Nazi entities in Alberta called the Blood & Honour and the Western European Bloodline (Perry & Scrivens, 2019, p. 27). Blood & Honour is one of the entities that was listed as a terrorist organisation by the Government of Canada a few years ago. Furthermore, their online presence in Canada has been vigorously active in recent years (Davey et al., 2020).

Online Activity of RWE

Davey et al's. (2020) report on their online scan of RWE engagements reveal that Canadians represent a large number of cyber participants and audiences in recent years, noticeably in 2019. In accordance, 6,600 internet mediums, profiles, pages, and groups were found to be engaged in RWE and is dominated by white nationalistic and ethnonationalist posts (Davey et al., 2020, p. 5). Though overt postings about RWE values are rarely conveyed by associated far-right followers, anti-Trudeau and Islamophobic subjects were common (Davey et al., 2020, p. 5). Online posting and engagements in hate are incredibly difficult to remove from online under Canadian law and tracking private accounts is equally challenging for Canadian law enforcement. Far-right groups would argue that they are exercising their freedom of speech. Challenging as it may be to address online activity of RWE actors, the risks and threats to the public safety perseveres. Especially the online public discourse of RWE which may attract hateful individuals who do not officially belong in a right-wing organisation can commit in a random violent act. Most of substantial extremist acts in Canada have been committed by solo extremist actors (Davey et al., 2020), or a small cell of people (Perry & Scrivens, 2016).

Hate Crimes: Violence Against Individuals by RWE Groups

Perry and Scrivens' (2016) report on RWE's violent nature in Canada reveals that RWE assaults are commonly unpremeditated and random which is contrasting to American RWE assaults that are more organised (p.34). The scale of attacks is also usually small. "It tends to be individualistic rather than collective. Both the perpetrators and the intended targets are individuals, or small groups of 2-4 for the most part" (Perry & Scrivens, 2016, p. 34).

One example of violence committed by a Blood and Honour leading member named Kyle McKee and his members is the attack on 2 Sikh men in Edmonton, Alberta in 2012 where

the victims were verbally harassed with racial slurs before being struck with a bottle and bitten by Blood and Honour members (Humphreys, 2012). After, McKee, who poses for pictures with guns and Nazi flags and has been arrested for the attacks and the guns found in his home (Humphreys, 2012). McKee reportedly had a rough childhood as well (Humphreys, 2012). The assault was committed by four members on two victims.

The second example of a neo-Nazi attack involves McKee's former associate who belongs to another group called the Western European Bloodline. The members Robert Reitmeier and Tyler Sturup randomly murdered a 47-year-old victim in Calgary, Alberta in 2010 (Grant, 2016). Robert has a Nazi SS tattoo and also poses for a picture with Nazi flags along with Tyler (Grant, 2016).

Lastly, another example of an unprovoked assault by Blood Honour members is the 2009 arson attack by Robertson de Chazal and Shawn Macdonald on a Filipino man who was sleeping on an abandoned couch in Vancouver (Hutchinson, 2011). Both perpetrators have been reported to be responsible for other chains of violent hate crimes towards non-white individuals in previous years (Hutchinson, 2011). Perry and Scrivens' (2016) report on extremist hate crimes is usually isolated to attacks that involve a small number of attackers and victims and are random. However, the next subsection will exhibit RWE attacks that are larger in scale in a way that is more devastating, impactful, and harmed communities.

Lone Wolf Terrorism: Violence Against Groups by RWE Individuals

RWE attacks are not limited to random attacks by hate groups on individuals. Some attacks are conducted by individuals against groups which are more devastating in terms of the damage done, the scale of victims affected, and the impact on a community. However, some of these attacks may be larger in scale but are not legally considered terrorism as the offenders of RWE violence are often not charged with terrorism. Some RWE violence is committed by

“lone” actors and can be more dangerous (Parent & Ellis, 2014). Moreover, these attacks are motivated by various ideologies that coincides with RWE. According to Public Safety Canada (2019), “It is the evolution from hate to serious acts of politically-motivated violence to intimidate the public, or a segment of the public, concerning its sense of security, that could be considered a terrorism offence.” (p. 5), insinuating how hatred can develop into violence and terrorism. In the Criminal Code of Canada, terrorist activity is:

An act or omission, in or outside Canada, that is committed in whole or in part for a political, religious or ideological purpose, objective or cause and; in whole or in part with the intention of intimidating the public, or a segment of the public, with regard to its security, including its economic security, or compelling a person, a government or a domestic or an international organisation to do or to refrain from doing any act, whether the public or the person, government or organisation is inside or outside Canada, and; that intentionally causes death or serious bodily harm to a person by the use of violence, endangers a person’s life, causes a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or any segment of the public, causes substantial property damage, whether to public or private property, if causing such damage is likely to result in the conduct or harm referred to in any of clauses (A) to (C); and includes a conspiracy, attempt or threat to commit any such act or omission, or being an accessory after the fact or counselling in relation to any such act or omission, but, for greater certainty, does not include an act or omission that is committed during an armed conflict and that, at the time and in the place of its commission, is in accordance with customary international law or conventional international law applicable to the conflict, or the activities undertaken by military forces of a state in the exercise of their official duties, to the extent that those activities are governed by other rules of international law. (*Criminal Code*, RSC 1985, c, C-46, s 83.01 (1), b).

In other words, terrorism involves religiously, ideologically, or politically hurting and/or killing people to induce widespread fear in society while at the same time publicising the terrorist's motives, purpose, ideals, and recognition.

The Government of Canada's decision to include the Proud Boys and other RWE groups in the terrorism list (Public Safety 2021) is partially resultant of the government's expansion of terrorism classification that also includes extreme sexism (misogyny) and extreme racism (white supremacy). The following cases show RWE violence that does not legally fall under terrorism but still reflected terrorist acts. The Moncton shooting in 2014 and the Quebec Mosque shooting in 2017 not only exemplify RWE violence in Canada, but these cases also help validate that RWE is not a narrow definition and that there can be overlapping beliefs between different right-wing extremists. For example, the Moncton shooter features anti-governmental, pro-gun, freedom, militia, and racist ideologies. Meanwhile, The Islamic Cultural Center shooter in Quebec a few years ago features Islamophobia, anti-immigration sentiments, misogyny, and white supremacy ideologies. These cases represent how individuals who do not officially belong to an RWE group can commit extremist fuelled violence.

On June 4, 2014, Justin Bourque killed three RCMP officers and injured two others in a shooting rampage in Moncton, New Brunswick while dressed in a military-style outfit (Arsenault, 2014). Before the incident, Bourque was found to be paranoid, was becoming psychologically unstable, and troubled (Arsenault, 2014). The shooting came as a result of Bourque's growing anarchical sentiment who sees the police as agents of the government that needed to be toppled (Arsenault, 2014). His online accounts showed his libertarian, anti-police, anti-government, and pro-gun posts containing messages like "Free Men Do Not Ask Permission to Bear Arms" (Arsenault, 2014). After the event, his phone was found to store images of the confederate flag and military themes (Arsenault, 2014). Though Bourque does not officially belong to an RWE, terrorist, or hate crime group, his ideologies reflect those who

hold far-right views that lead to violence against the government and policing community. Though there is no direct evidence of how he was influenced by right-wing extremism, his online presence showed his activism of right-wing ideologies.

On January 29, 2017, another lone actor committed a terrorist act involving another shooting spree toward a community. A psychologically distressed Alexandre Bissonnette's xenophobia and islamophobia motivated an assault in an Islamic Cultural Center in Quebec where he shot and killed 6 people and wounded several more (Bilefsky, 2018). According to reports and his trial, Bissonnette's radicalisation was heavily influenced by absorbing online content from white supremacy, far-right, and Donald Trump who was very vocal about his anti-immigration views and policies (Bilefsky, 2018). In a police interview, Bissonnette claimed that he was protecting his family from Muslim terrorists (Bilefsky, 2018). Aside from islamophobia and xenophobia, his online account revealed anti-feminist sentiments (Bilefsky, 2018). There are no known RWE groups that Bissonnette is formally part of but his online presence and advocacy for far-right ideologies led to violence and terrorism. His fear and confusion filled by conspiracies became an opportunity for radicalisation towards the extremities of the right.

A rather slight contrasting case related to violent RWE is the case of a past Canadian Armed Forces reservist Patrick Mathews who was arrested along with two other suspects after being found conspiring to commit a mass shooting in an upcoming protest against gun rights activism in the U.S. (Orr, 2020). Mathews belonged to a neo-Nazi group called The Base which are accelerationists and white supremacists believing in the urgency to radically change the nation through race war (Orr, 2020). The Base is most active online but has shown efforts to hire supporters in person while at the same time conducting firearm training in the States (Orr, 2020). So far, only very few are engaged in violence, but they represent the tip of the extremist pyramid where their community belongs in a larger scope that comprises non-violent believers.

The Base is one of the aforementioned entities that were listed as a terrorist organisation by Canada. Though their plan to cause chaos was prevented in this case, the risks of violent RWE continue.

Canada's academic and national security understanding of RWE and violence is limited but has grown extensively in recent years because of the magnitude of events that involved violence towards groups and individuals by those who are faithful to RWE ideologies. Historically, Canada's far-right and hate crime factions have been present but did not have the same clout and influence as modern far-righters. The advancement of how people communicate and spread their message in the form of the internet has been monumental to the growth of RWE where misinformation and hate can spread faster and people who share similar thinking can commune and validate each other. Not only that but speculations and conspiracies can also spread faster and more efficiently.

According to Douglas et al. (2019), transmission of conspiracy theories is far more rapid online. Some examples of non-RWE related conspiracies include believing that the earth is flat or that the pyramids were built by extra-terrestrial beings. When it comes to far-right ideologies, some conspiracy theorists believe that Caucasian people's population in the western world are "under attack" (Davies et al., 2021), and that the need to preserve the white race is through a race war against others to create a new society where the white race is dominant (Davies et al., 2021; Intelbrief, 2020; Orr, 2020). Some misinformation can be more direct such as believing that all Muslims are terrorists or Jewish people are working behind the scenes to control society. Regardless of what the content is, the reasoning behind one's beliefs on false information is as vast as the amount of false information themselves (Davies et al., 2021). However, democratic societies impart with it the democratic principles of free speech and opinions regardless of whether it is accurate, genuine, absurd, impolite, and offensive. The problematical matters emerge if credences are imbued with criminality, terrorism, or, if

credences are to incite any harmful offense against innocent people. Therefore, misinformation and conspiracy led by RWE can pose a risk to public safety and even national security.

Evident in the cases presented (Neo-Nazi attacks and lone actor terrorists) are the emotional and mental states of people feeling threatened that another group is responsible for their grievances, causing them to act violently to protect something they value. Furthermore, the emotions of threat, fear, distress, anxiety, and frustration have been apparent in RWE violence. For example, Neo-Nazis feel threatened and frustrated by non-whites and other groups; while distressed and mentally unstable lone actors feel threatened by other groups like the Muslim community or government personnel. There is no evidence that the injustice they feel is fabricated or generated by other people's ethnicities, institutions, gender, skin colour, or religion. However, what is apparent with their violence is their association, advocacy, and engagement with far-right information on the internet. I argue that their hatred towards others is rooted somewhere else and not in their victims' identities. Specifically, their hatred and violence are deep-rooted in their personal grievances and issues that were highly exacerbated by online misinformation and conspiracies by far-right ideologies that scapegoat other people.

Misinformation and Conspiracy in RWE

Extremists' personal social and mental hardship becomes directed towards other people as targets to blame for their own distress. People who engage in hate-motivated violence like the individuals I talked about may wilfully or unwilfully absorb information that eases their grievances. Misinformation and conspiracies provided and facilitated by right-wing extremists on the internet are easily accessible. Together, they are false or inaccurate information utilised to advance various ideologies including extremism that propels individuals to act violently for a variety of reasons.

Some examples of non-RWE-related conspiracies believe that the earth is flat or that the pyramids were built by extra-terrestrial beings. When it comes to far-right ideologies, some conspiracy theorists believe that Caucasian populations throughout the western world are “under attack” (Davies et al., 2021) and that there is a desperate need to preserve the white race through a race war against others — the ultimate aim being to create a new society where Caucasians are dominant (Davies et al., 2021; Intelbrief, 2020; Orr, 2020). Some misinformation can be believing that all Muslims are terrorists or that Jewish people are conspiring to take over society. Regardless of what the content is, the reasoning behind one’s beliefs about false information is as vast as the amount of false information themselves (Davies et al., 2021). However, democratic societies come with free speeches and opinions regardless of whether they are accurate, genuine, absurd, impolite, controversial, or offensive. The problematical matters emerge if beliefs are mixed with criminality and terrorism; or if credences are to incite any harmful offense against others. Therefore, misinformation and conspiracy led by RWE can pose a risk to public safety and even national security.

Individuals are usually prompted to absorb conspiracies to improve self and group esteem; gain information; and feel dominant (Moffitt et al., 2021). Additionally, absorbing conspiratorial info can be a “radicalisation multiplier” that leads to extremist violence (Bartlett & Miller, 2010; Douglas et al., 2019). Douglas et al., (2019) argue that those who are susceptible to conspiracies tend to have lower levels of education, lower rational thinking skills, lesser social connections, and weak socio-political influence (Bruder et al., 2013). Also, they have some sort of identity crisis (Newheiser et al., 2011). Conspiracy believers are also more inclined to criminality (Jolley et al., 2019) and see violence as appropriate response in certain situations (Douglas et al., 2019; Uscinski & Parent, 2014). All of these in conjunction with the idea of a radicalisation multiplier can push someone further into extremism. As we know, far-

right believers and groups engage in conspiracies and false information extensively, so it is easier to attract individuals who are curious and who have less self-esteem.

Furthermore, false information online gives a space where people feel interconnectedness. As such, misinformation is enhanced when people group up (Roozenbeek et al., 2020). Overall, people who struggle to explain anything due to their lack of rational thinking skills become engaged with groups and ideas that can provide an answer to their ambiguities and frustrations, therefore, they experience a community through the transaction of information despite its degree or lack of accuracy or truths. Hoschild claims that information just has to feel true even if it is not (as cited in Humphreys, 2020).

In other words, individuals who are experiencing anxieties, uncertainties, problems, anger, fear, confusion, lack of social life, lack of critical thinking skills, and powerlessness are more inclined to descend into far-right ideologies that tend to provide answers and community that contain hate-filled outlook towards other groups (e.g. other ethnic, race, religious, gender, etc.). Right-wing extremism tends to feed off of people's personal negative feelings and thoughts, which have been magnified by online radicalisation and false information sharing.

Altogether, the COVID-19 pandemic caused societal dilemmas in Canada where people who value individualism, low government intervention, and freedom, are now suddenly pressured to go into lockdowns, restrictions, social distancing, practice new health guidelines, and get mandatory immunisation. Inevitably, the nation's unforeseen massive changes in their ways of life have generated ubiquitous emotional distress, confusion, uncertainty, fear, depression, anxiety, longing, and more. On top of that, the unintended ramification of the pandemic is the surge of internet and social media usage since people are stuck inside their homes. The increased online activity and connectivity, coupled with people's negative sentiments about government actions for COVID-19, were commodified into the assembly of the FC. Consequently, all these elements together are tremendously paramount to the

radicalisation and growing sympathy towards right-wing extremism, which has been evidently and increasingly conspicuous in taking advantage of people's hardships and outrage by ways of false information, hatred, violence, disruptions, and scapegoating.

Interplays Between the Pandemic, the Freedom Convoy, and Right-Wing Extremism

The commonalities of both misinformation and grievances relate to how both components are prominent in the pandemic, the FC movement, and right-wing extremism. Hence, this section seeks to explain how it all comes together. Many participants of the FC were people who wanted to express their fatigue and exhaustion about the changing health policies, changing economy, and COVID-19 itself. Reasonably, their voices deserved to be heard regardless of their political affiliations. However, the FC provided a domain for right-wing extremist ideologies and actions to arise. This thesis is specifically about Canada, however the United States and its matters are inscribed to further consolidate the studies about the topics. Furthermore, the United States had its far-rights involved in the FC as well.

RWE exists in both countries but there are differences in ideologies due to contrasting histories and cultures, however, some ideologies imbricate because both countries were founded on settler-colonialism (Crosby, 2021; McLaren, 2022; Millet & Swiften, 2021). Not only that but both countries are adjacent to each other, making it easier to relate and socialise (Hofmann, 2019). Nowadays, right-wingers have this idea that their society in the past was better and valued freedom and rights more so there is a need to go back to that era (Farokhi, 2022). The last component that tethers all this together is the fact that FC organisers are also far-right activists.

Anti-Governmental Attitudes and Personal Grievances

As we know, far-right ideologies tend to captivate individuals who may be feeling inequity, untrusting, and dispirited. Feeding hatred toward distressed citizens gives them a sense of understanding that there are people responsible for their demise, whether those groups are racially, religiously, or sexually different than them; or are representatives of the government. What the pandemic did was amplify people's grievances in a societal scale, and what the FC did was publicise who those people are. RWE thrived during the social climate of the COVID-19 pandemic because of the rise of public anarchical demeanour since anarchy is a core principle of right extremists (Davies et al., 2021). For instance, far-rights modified their anti-authoritative propaganda to fit the context of the outbreak by claiming that the government uses the virus to take away their freedoms (Comerford & Davey, 2020; Marone, 2022; McNeil-Wilson 2020). For example, extremist rights believed that lockdowns were suspicious government power abuse imposed to control the nation (Davies et al., 2021)

A specific example of RW affiliates taking advantage of people's grievances during the FC was the arrest of 13 people in Coutts, Alberta who were found with weapons in an attempt to cause chaos and to attack the government, specifically RCMP officers (Kaufmann, 2022; Alberta RCMP arrest 13 people, 2022). These people had connections with white supremacists as shown through their patches that had a diagolon symbol and some had the Arabic word 'infidel' symbols, both of which are known as Islamophobic, white supremacist, and accelerationists (Kaufmann, 2022). They were present in Coutts when blockades were set up as a protest by the FC supporters. In contrast, they would not be there if there was no freedom movement or COVID-19.

The implications of COVID-19 led to more pessimistic and oppressive feelings that may carry extremist values (Marone, 2022) and the FC was predominantly conservatives who value individuality and freedom (Davies et al., 2021). A lot of anti-Trudeau sentiments became

one of the central glues that linked the conservatives who constantly oppose the Liberal's, the people who were disheartened by the restrictions, and the extremists who are simply just against the governing body. Just like how the personal troubles of the RWE criminals and terrorists make them susceptible to far-right ideals, frustrated and troubled citizens during COVID-19 make them susceptible to far-right messages.

Online Misinformation and Conspiracies

As mentioned, the inception of the internet has been effectively used to garner support and accumulate members of far-right devotees (Davies et al., 2022; Scrivens & Perry, 2017), while globalisation and closeness of the US and Canada facilitated the ease of information sharing (Hofmann, 2019). When the COVID-19 pandemic happened, people spent more time at home because of the stay-at-home government orders. Consequently, increased time at home means that people spent more time online and on social media (Marone, 2022). Moonshot's (2020) report unveiled there was a surge in online searches for RWE content throughout Canada. For instance, Calgary saw an increase in internet traffic regarding far-right content searches (Moonshot, 2020). When social distancing was introduced, there was an 82% increase in online searching in Calgary for weapon-making (Moonshot, 2020). High-risk browsing showed a surplus of 70% that included phrases such as "how to join Ku Klux Klan" and "kill all jews" (Moonshot, 2020).

When the pandemic first started, there were not many definite answers about the virus and health responses (Combden et al., 2022). The lack of concrete answers for people who are confused and angst-ridden during the early stages of the pandemic gave way for them to welcome whatever news or information was available. As a result, conspiracies then became enticing (Douglas et al., 2017; Moffitt et al., 2021). Motta et al.'s (2020) research found that far-right news sources disseminated misinformation more than non-right-leaning outlets. Plus,

Evanega et al. (2020) argue that Donald Trump is a prominent misinformation spreader. Roozenbeek et al.'s (2020) study reveal that there is a high correlation between vaccine scepticism plus defying health orders, and misinformation vulnerability. Simply, people who are easily believing false information are less likely to rely on vaccination and follow health regulations. COVID-19 related misinformation then becomes a public health issue (Evanega et al., 2020; Roozenbeek et al., 2020).

False information plays a crucial role in understanding how misinformation relates to the FC. According to Douglas et al. (2017), conspiratorial beliefs also arise when people feel that their security is at risk. Additionally, conspiracies help activism to surface when the commonwealth is at risk (Moffitt et al., 2021). The likelihood to dissent goes up the more sceptical people are (Carnegie Endowment, 2021; Kupperts & Reiser, 2022). Kupperts and Reiser (2022) recognise that right-wingers around the world are generally identified to hold suspicious and mistrustful beliefs about the COVID-19 pandemic. Similar to right-leaning mistrust in government and health safety, there are common supporters of the FC that hold anti-vaccination beliefs (Farokhi, 2022; McLaren, 2022). Often some of these beliefs are based on conspiracies that the vaccines were designed to eradicate people, or even specifically white people (Farokhi, 2022). The widespread distrust, misinformation, and conspiracies surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic and the government are common themes with the FC and RWE. As such, it was easy for the movement and far-right to congregate and push back against the federal government.

Settler Colonialism and Freedom

Returning to the left-right political spectrum, those who are right-leaning tend to be more devoted to the idea of traditions, staying true to the roots, nationalism, and opposing societal change. Hence the Canada flags everywhere throughout the movement. This can be

linked to the idea of settler colonialism. Just like the United States, Canada “is a settler-colonial state built upon the foundational pillars of white supremacy, racial capitalism, territorial acquisitiveness, and the attempted elimination of Indigenous peoples (culture, political/legal authorities, and claims to land)” (Crosby, 2021, p. 362). If the establishment of Canada dwells on the idea that its founding success was due to white-European-Christian men whose colonial actions required no oversight, then those who value tradition and nationalism likely refer to the idea that Canada was historically subjugated by the said type of men. Therefore, the idea of growing non-Christian, non-white, and non-men, all coupled with government regulations goes against the integral right-wing beliefs that want to keep the ‘tradition’ of racial and cultural homogeneity along with the least government interference.

It is then unavoidable in a settler-colonial founded country like Canada and the United States to breed hateful groups and ideologies who want to keep their tradition. Perry and Scrivens (2019) state that extremists become aggressive and protective of their ancestry and territory. Furthermore, Perry and Scrivens (2019) say that nationalism’s foundation is exclusionary in the way that their tenet involves the superiority of whites and anti-immigration views. In summary, settler-colonialism fabricated the idea of tradition in a far-right context as having a homogenous racial (white) society dominated by Christian men who have the freedom to do whatever they want without being managed by the government. Thus, the idea of freedom means being entitled to do what one desire without the obstruction of the government.

Regarding the FC, McLaren (2022) indicates that settler-colonialism is mirrored in the FC protesters’ perception of freedom. That is why RWE was supportive of the movement because they can relate to FC’s idea of freedom that champions individuality and dissent towards the government, particularly how the mandatory vaccine impedes their freedom to be autonomous (Dysart, 2022; McLaren, 2022). McLaren (2022) also brings up the idea that truck drivers have more severe social and economic issues that need to be addressed and mandatory

vaccination is not a big deal. Further, most of the truck drivers are also vaccinated as announced by CTA (CTA, 2022). Dysart (2022) and McLaren (2022) remark that the FC protest signifies freedom the same way white supremacy sees freedom as a prerogative or entitlement because they do not consider the well-being of other groups or the overall health safety of society.

Organisers of the FC

Apart from the public's defiance towards the government; the wave of conspiracies and misinformation; and the subtle settler colonial mentality, another notable aspect that connects it all together is the organisers of the freedom convoy. As it turns out, the movement's organisers and representatives are either far-right activists or have RWE affiliates.

1.) Chris Barber – A truck driver from Saskatchewan was one of the first organisers and voices of the FC and was responsible for social media engagements about the FC (Parkhill, 2022). He claims that mandatory COVID-19 vaccinations are tyrannical that reflect an authoritarian government like North Korea (Parkhill, 2022). He also admitted to having confederate flags in his house which he downplayed as just fabrics (Parkhill, 2022).

2.) James Bauder – A truck driver from Alberta (Radio-Canada, 2022) and a founder of a group called Canada Unity who proclaimed their opposition to the health policies (Smith, 2022) was another FC organiser who has been explicit in far-right messages (Ling, 2022). Bauder aligns with QAnon and believes in conspiracies (Ling, 2022). He has been associated with groups who believe that Bill Gates facilitated COVID-19 so people would be inclined to inject 5G tech inside them (Ling, 2022). Bauder even pushed his audience to focus on the “freedom” message and “stop talking about the vaccine” (Ling, 2022).

3.) Pat King – Pat King is not a truck driver but a far-right advocate (Ballinal, 2022) who has been a prominent activist in a demonstration known as the United We Roll protest that mobilised a convoy in 2019 to Ottawa from Red Deer, Alberta as a way to challenge the federal

government with its pipeline and immigration decisions (Osman, 2019). Additionally, King has been a leading advocate in a movement called WExit that calls for Alberta's separation from Canada, and he was active in a counter-anti-racist demonstration to protest against anti-racism (Mosleh, 2020). He also believes that white people are under threat of extermination (Gilmore, 2019). When talking about the mandatory health mandates, he claimed on social media that "The only way this is going to be solved is with bullets" (Helwig, 2022), and he has implicitly stated Prime Minister Justin Trudeau would "catch a bullet" (Tumilty & Nardi, 2022). It has been revealed that King and other organisers such as Barber have had disagreements and infighting between them that resulted in the disorganisation and mess in the FC movement (Parkhill, 2022).

4.) Tamara Lich – Lich and another organiser named BJ Dichter have been responsible for setting up online funding pages and the release of the movement's statement about the convoy. Just like Pat King, she played a big role in the United We Roll, Canadian Yellow Vest, and WExit movements (Crawford, 2022). The Canadian Yellow Vest protest had members who held antisemitic, xenophobic, and anti-authoritative (specifically the Liberal Government and Justin Trudeau) sentiments (Orr, 2019). Far-right groups such as Soldiers of Odin which has associations with neo-Nazis, and Proud Boys Canada were both present in the yellow vest protest to amplify their base and incorporate their rhetoric with the movement (Orr, 2019).

5.) BJ Dichter – Dichter was another organiser who openly conveyed anti-Muslim messages. He once claimed in a speech that the Liberal Government is "infested with Islamists" and that the government is imbued with Islam (Gilmore, 2022; Walcott, 2022). Dichter has been known to disregard and downplay the presence of confederate flags during the FC protest and has been a guest in a far-right show in the US (Parkhill, 2022).

Chapter Summary

The works of literature presented in this chapter exhibits the relationship between the FC and RWE by investigating the interplays between anti-governmental attitudes and personal grievances, misinformation and conspiracies, settler colonialism and its idea of freedom, and the roles of the FC organisers and their affiliations with far-right groups. Moreover, a comprehensive amalgamation of different studies and pieces of literature about RWE in Canada enhances the viability of the connections that were presented. The gaps in the literature are evident in the lack of academic studies on the connection between the FC and RWE. Due to a lack of scholarship specific to the FC, many sources used in this chapter came from news reports and web pages. Moreover, there is a limited academic discourse that uses theoretical frameworks to explain the group behaviours of those involved in the FC and RWE. That being said, the next chapter integrates Social Identity Theory with group organisational behaviours. The theory undertakes the explanation of how groups are formed and behave based on their identity to address how RWE groups arrange themselves and treat other groups.

CHAPTER III: SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY

"The golden way is to be friends with the world and to regard the whole human family as one."

— Mahatma Gandhi

Chapter Overview

Social Identity Theory is a theoretical approach used to explain how groups assemble and act toward other groups or people based on their identities (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). This chapter delves into the theory's background as well as its key functions. The theory's framework is then integrated into FC and RWE elements to explain why networks and memberships form, but also why discrimination towards other groups can occur. The next section explores the rationale behind this theory and its applicability.

Social Identity Theory

In this theory, memberships are classified as in-groups and out-groups where in-groups are the focal subjects while the out-groups are the 'others' (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). According to Tajfel and Turner (2004), the studies about social ethnocentrism are mostly about in-group favouritism and their perception of the out-group (p. 56). Additionally, they claim that different principles are not enough to build intergroup discords, as strife and intolerance can arise without disagreeable values (Tajfel & Turner, 2004, p. 56). Furthermore, in-group favouritism is predominant in intergroup ecology (Tajfel & Turner, 2004, p. 56). Many studies have shown that membership classification biased towards the in-group is adequate to instigate hostility towards out-groups (Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Doise et al., 1972; Tajfel & Billig, 1974; Tajfel et al., 1971; Tajfel & Turner, 2004; Turner, 1975), especially that recognising out-groups' existence sufficiently elicits strife and hostile behaviours by the in-group (Tajfel & Turner, 2004, p. 56). Putting it differently, the values, interests, and beliefs are not needed to create intergroup conflict because in some instances, acknowledging that there are other groups can be provocative enough for in-groups to compete.

In this context, Tajfel and Turner (2004) consider the term ‘group’ as a social clique where people see themselves as part of that circle, where people have the same sentiments about that social circle, and where people have some common understanding of that group’s social status and their role in it (p. 59). Intergroup manners then revolve around how a group or groups treat another group or groups based on how they distinguish their group in relation to other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Intergroup behaviour is dependent on how in-groups identify themselves and how they identify out-groups which then affects their collective behaviour. The process by which groups are formed and behave is conceptualised into social categorisation, social identity, and social comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 2004, Chapter 4).

Social categorisation is related to the previous paragraph about how groups discern their memberships from other groups, specifically on what makes an in-group and an out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Categorising is what creates the narrative of an ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ mentality and formulating that ‘us’ and ‘them’ belief is enough to motivate strife against others. By doing this, individuals are not identified as individuals but as a person who belongs to a group (whether in-group or out-group) (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). This not just creates a perception of what the societal status of groups appears to be, but categorising also aligns one’s positionality in society thus constructing a social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). An individual’s social identity is dictated by their group affiliation as it corresponds to other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Based on this collective identity, Tajfel and Turner (2004) suggest that one, members are motivated to uphold favourable social identity, two, favourable social identity is affected by how it corresponds to out-groups as long as the in-group is seen as special compared to out-groups, and three, social identity must satisfy the individual or else they might advocate to enhance the group’s social identity (p. 60). Once social identity is established after categorising what constitutes an in-group and out-group, the collective obligation to strive for or uphold a favourable social identity is conducted through social comparison. Social

comparison requires three factors before it can be conducted in society (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). First, members must embrace their membership as part of the group's identity and consider that group as an entity, second, there must be a social context that permits the comparison between groups to occur where groups can be triaged in a social hierarchy, and third, in-group and out-group differences must be appropriately comparable within the social context (Tajfel & Turner, 2004, p. 60). According to Tajfel and Turner (2004), social comparison has its purpose which is that "the aim of differentiation is to maintain or achieve superiority over an out-group on some dimensions. Any such act, therefore, is essentially competitive" (p. 60).

Integration of Social Identity Theory with the Freedom Convoy

During the FC, the red-white Canadian flag was the omnipresent symbol of the movement (D'Souza, 2022; Vieira, 2022). The Canadian flag symbolism during the FC has been scrutinised by some because it has now been heavily associated with the protest which does not reflect the overall identity or representation of Canadians. On one hand, the flag has been tied to the idea of freedom, rights, and patriotism by the FC supporters, on the other hand, it's been tied to disruptive anti-vaccine and government opposition attitudes (D'Souza, 2022). Forrest Pass who is an expert in flags claims that the Americans have greatly inspired the flaunting of Canadian flags since protests in the US usually involve flags to signify patriotism (D'Souza, 2022). Not only that but flags can also be used "to legitimise extreme beliefs" (D'Souza, 2022). The FC protesters identify themselves as 'Canadians' that represent Canada's principles, and this becomes my example of a large in-group.

The implication of having a large in-group as represented by FC protesters is an exclusionary frame of thinking that those who do not believe in their cause are not true Canadians. Simply, individuals who are against their cause are the out-groups. Intergroup

behaviour is then magnified and exemplified by how the in-group (FC) treats the out-group (non-FC/liberals/government).

Social Categorisation

As mentioned, social categorisation is what creates the sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’. Through this, groups are formed depending on where individuals are categorised so their identity, conformity, and esteem become attached to that group. Referring to the FC, various groups with diverse ideologies were present but their overall shared sentiment is that they all have been wronged by the government. The shared feeling against the government and the mandates commenced the mergence of a large-scale in-group who share their identity through grievances. That large-scale in-group is then represented by the idea of being ‘Canadian’ as represented by their endorsement of Canadian flags while simultaneously proclaiming that they are fighting for all Canadians’ freedom, liberty, and rights. This is an example of social categorisation as the FC categorised themselves as Canadians (in-group), which inevitably inferred that individuals who are not part of that movement were non-Canadians (out-group). Because the FC addressed the in-group’s positionality in society during the COVID-19 pandemic, the FC becomes an epicenter where people embraced a collective identity.

Social Identification

The collaboration to demonstrate against the restrictions and the federal government produced a coalition where people who have similar negative emotions utilised and embraced the Canadian identity to legitimise their protest. Having a social identity means that positive group esteem must be upheld or thrived for, positive group esteem is influenced by intergroup interactions, and that the group’s identity must gratify the member or else they might push for the social identity’s improvement (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). With respect to the FC, the

movement gave people the unified esteem that perished beforehand because of the COVID-19 pandemic and restrictions. As a result, people supported the FC, formed a social identity, and thrived to maintain and uphold their collective esteem through social movements and activism. Through social identification, they have created a Canadian identity that was disconnected from the overall Canadian population. In order to continue maintaining the positive social identity, the in-group differentiates their social identity from out-groups to understand whether they need to enhance their social identity or uphold it.

Social Comparison

The aim of socially comparing in-groups from out-groups is to get a reference of the where the in-group stands in society so they can decide if they need social actions to improve the in-group's esteem. In FC, the principal tenet of the movement is to gain back their freedom that they believed were taken away during the pandemic. By comparing their in-group to out-groups who seemingly accepted and sometimes welcomed the restrictions and health policies, they felt that their social identity was repressed therefore social measures must be taken to boost their social identity. The comparison and the desire for positive social identity incites competition that becomes intertwined with discrimination and hate. Consequently, the disruptive, hostile, and competitive actions by the FC (in-group) are justifiable under the pretence that they are the true Canadians who are fighting for freedom.

Since FC also accommodated individuals and groups with far-right ideologies who belong in that large-scale in-group, the far-right's out-groups (e.g. Non-whites, Muslims, Jews, Immigrants, LGBT, etc.) unavoidably became ingrained with the FC's large-scale out-group (the Federal-Liberal Government and their supporters). In this context, being Canadian means protesting against 'others', which resultantly made it compatible for RWE to incorporate

themselves to the FC who designate themselves as Canadians fighting for freedom, autonomy, and the ways of the past (pre-covid times).

RWE Undertone

Social Identity Theory is a socio-psychological theory that applies to how groups form or unify an identity, how they behave towards other groups outside their own, and how their actions to achieve or keep a positive social identity stimulate intergroup conflicts. That being said, the social identity framework is equally pertinent to the RWE context.

With social categorisation, far-rights categorise themselves with other groups. On one hand, far-rights as an in-group are the traditional white, Christian, male-dominated, and conservative identity. On the other hand, the out-groups are the others (non-white, Jewish, Muslim, sexually diverse, progressive/liberal, etc). By classifying individuals, the in-group sees an individual as defined by an out-group instead of just a person with no affiliation to anything. Categorising the in-group and out-groups solidifies the in-group's identity, thus reinforcing the idea of 'us vs. them'.

Social identification is especially relevant to RWE because this is where they internalise their membership and understand the conformities to their group's ideals. By doing so, they contribute to the improvement of their social esteem which in return also satisfies their personal esteem. An in-group may see that their group is under threat by an out-group. In response, they feel that they must act aggressively or violently to uphold their group's social status. For example, Pat King and his affiliates' opposition to anti-racist rallies and his belief that the white population is under threat showcase how an individual's social activism and competitive behaviour are related to their social identification and their hostility with out-groups. In essence, the far-right's actions depend on how they socially identify and how they identify others.

Social comparison is orchestrated to determine whether an in-group has a positive or negative social identity. Positive social identity classifies the in-group as better than out-groups while negative social identity is valued as worse than out-groups (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). As mentioned, the prime purpose of the comparison is to attain or preserve supremacy over others. Interestingly, far-right ideologies employ both positive and negative social identities to advance their ideologies. For positive social identity (believers of in-group as better than out-groups), racist and fascist groups (neo-Nazis) believe in white and Aryan supremacy dogmas that other people are inferior or subhuman, therefore they must commit violence to maintain their social status and prevent out-groups from rising.

Alternatively, negative social identity (believers of in-group as worse than out-groups) enforces the idea that the white population is under threat by immigrants and non-Christians, or that the apocalypse is coming so they must take arms and ascend to improve their social esteem. Another example is the incel van attacker in Toronto whose involuntary celibacy and alignment with other right-wing extremist values became the motivation to terrorise the public (Hoffman et al., 2020). The incel in-group can be considered a negative social identity who are unsuccessful in securing romantic relationships therefore they must boost their social confidence. However, their in-group attempts to upgrade their esteem often comprises sexist and degrading attitude toward women.

Rationale for Using the Chosen Theoretical Approach

Right-wing extremism and the FC are suitable with the social identity framework as they can explain how individuals build memberships that they share identities with, which depends on how they also distinguish other groups. As Tajfel and Turner (2004) stated, simply belonging to a discernible group while recognising that there are other groups is sufficient to encourage hostility towards others. Not only that, but people will become socially engaged to

supplement their groups' esteem. In-groups identifying themselves as an entity become socially active to keep or improve their desired social identity by contending with out-groups that they deem impactful to their own identity. Intergroup conflicts and intolerance arise when people generalise others into a social group instead of seeing them as individuals with their own identities. Generalisations can then start as discrimination and intolerance that convert into fear and hatred.

Chapter Summary

The freedom convoy and right-wing extremism are harmonious and similar because their functions are highly dependent on their groups' identity and values. Furthermore, the need to uphold or strengthen their groups' positive social identity are essential to their comprehension and treatment of other groups, regardless of if other groups are the government or individuals with different background. This chapter explores Tajfel and Turner's (2004) Social Identity Theory as an approach to explain group organisation and intergroup behaviour. Conforming to this theory are the three important components such social categorisation, social identification, and social comparison, which are then implemented as the sub-frameworks to explain FC and RWE.

CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis follows a qualitative approach by investigating case studies about the Freedom Convoy and Right-Wing Extremism in Canada through a semi-systematic literature review. A case study is a relevant research design for investigating phenomena such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the FC, and RWE topics in Canada. Additionally, this thesis uses case study to showcase its applicability with theoretical frameworks such as the social identity theory. Case studies also explore relationships and contextual background on said phenomena.

On top of case study, semi-systematic literature review is the methodology by which this thesis is conforming to by synthesising mostly secondary sources and some primary sources. Primary sources included social media and webpage posts by subjects, while secondary sources are an amalgam of media reports, government reports, webpages, dictionaries, social media, peer-reviewed articles, books, and book-chapters. Semi-systematic literature allows for the collection and coalescence of various studies and reports about the topics. Data collection was administered through the MRU's digital and physical library collection, google scholar, as well as data bases such as JSTOR, MRU library, Taylor and Francis Online, ProQuest, and Sage Journals. Key words that were used to search for articles include "right wing extremism", "far right", "COVID-19 pandemic", "misinformation", "conspiracy theory", and "freedom convoy".

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

“We may have all come on different ships, but we’re in the same boat now.”

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

Disclaimer

Disclaimers about the study are equally crucial to address within this thesis to present how this project minimally contributed to the vast discourse of the topics presented. First, it is paramount to note that not everyone who participated and/or supported the FC are far-right enthusiasts, right-wing extremists, criminals, or ideologically violent. Some were genuinely wearied by the pandemic and the FC was a good way to express negative emotions during this time. Plus, social activism is a principal value of democracy, therefore the movement had its merits. Second, this study is limited because there is no quantitative numbers of the total FC protesters or supporters, there is no exact numbers of people who fall under the categories of conservatism or politically right, there is no exact number of people who were in Ottawa’s convoy, and there is no quantitative value of how many far-right groups were involved. Generalisations were implemented in this study, however, the demographic of people involved is highly incontestable that this movement was majorly associated with certain groups.

Research, Results, and Theory

RWE violence is both a public safety and national security matter as demonstrated by cases of attack and terrorisms in Canada but also around the world. Misinformation, conspiracies, hatred, and the public’s emotional troubles are all characteristics of RWE. Its growth is concerning because of how accessible and easy it is to spread far-right ideologies. Not only that but the concern is more grievous when hateful sentiments become normalised in communities, which can then drive individuals into violent thinking and atrocities. Based on findings, the FC phenomenon is not just similar to RWE in terms of its political beliefs and

affiliations, but they also blend easily together. In addition to their attitudes and characteristics, how they formalise their groups into a shared identity becomes a revealing factor in a way that their sensitivity and behaviour towards others are also based on their social identity. The utilisation of Social Identity Theory further underlines the congruity between the FC and RWE.

Addressing the Research Question

To respond to the research question “*Why did the Freedom Convoy protest appeal to Right-Wing Extremists and Far-right groups?*”, several coinciding thematic points were found and addressed.

1.) The FC was a space for anti-governmental activism that greatly challenges authoritative ordinances equally reflect far-right values of least government say in their lives. Additionally, the FC was a medium for people to demonstrate their anger and grievances, which are the main emotional elements to be susceptible to RWE ideologies.

2.) Online misinformation and conspiracies were great tools to stimulate movements and ideologies. RWE spread false information frequently to advance their beliefs, garner attention, and gain new recruits. During FCs, false information were used to discredit the pandemic, health sciences, and government’s actions. These tools benefit both RWE and the FCs as false information are easily absorbed and internalised by people who are emotionally afflicted.

3.) The idea of freedom by protesters and RWE is influenced by settler-colonialism mentality that one should have the full entitlement to be free of government reach regardless of if other people are adversely affected. The nation of Canada was founded by white, European, and Christian men whose achievements and freedoms were possible through superiority over other groups (Indigenous, immigrants, etc). FC and RWE advocate for that idea of freedom where they must be fully free of government restrain regardless of its negative

consequences to other people outside their group. In this context, example of freedom could be: the freedom to have a slave, freedom to carry guns, freedom for hate-motivated crime, freedom to not wear a mask, etc.

4.) Straightforward enough, the significant actors during the FC are far-right affiliates and activists. Their popularity and associations made it easier to attract far-right groups in Canada, the States, and around the world.

5.) Through Social Identity Theory, the concept of identity heavily accentuates and internalises the idea of having a collective identity. By organising into in-groups, it is enough to stimulate hostile and demeaning behaviour towards out-groups (others). The formation of the FC also formed a new identity ‘Canadian’ that fit and unite their movement. By doing so, others who are not part of the movement are outsiders. Just like the FC, RWE is cohesive because of the existence of other groups outside their social identity.

Implications

The research results in this thesis can advance contemporary studies about the topics in this thesis. One, the FC and RWE can contribute to Social Identity Theory’s viability in group organisation and intergroup behaviours especially in the context of public safety and national security. Two, there are some articles and research about the relationship between the FC and RWE but not to this extent and not in the context of this thesis’ purpose. Three, this thesis can add to public safety and national security measures through the collection of scholastic reviews that are present in this thesis. Generally, the connections found by news reports and peer-reviewed articles are narrower and more focused, however, this thesis attempts to broaden those connections and find the interplays between those connections.

During the development of this thesis, the persistence of the far-right’s publicity remained relevant and influential. On December 2022, Germany’s authorities and law

enforcement arrested several RWE members for conniving to overthrow the government and install a Russian-backed leader (Germany arrests 25 people, 2022). Oddly enough, right-wing extremism detests governments unless it is Donald Trump, as shown by the January 6, 2021 riot in the United States where far-right presence was heavily immense to show their support for him.

In 2022, a group named Take Back Alberta was launched by a person named David Parker (Take Back Alberta, n.d.). The founder is known as a far-right advocate, and both the group and the founder express its growing influence and dominion within the United Conservative Party in Alberta (Bruch, 2023; Fawcett, 2023). The group emphasises ‘freedom’, takes credit for ousting former Alberta Premier Jason Kenney from his position, and actively slanders NDP’s Rachel Notley (Bruch, 2023; Take Back Alberta, n.d.). The group’s operation and activity are high during the last stages of this thesis because an election is coming up. Just like the United States’ “Make America Great Again”, “Take Back Alberta” also insinuates that far-rights fight for the need to return to something or go back to something. Future research should address a more comprehensive study about why right-wing extremists proclaim the need to go back to the past as a way to attract supporters.

Conclusion

The relevance of this thesis is high as right-wing extremism gains popularity in Canada, and particularly in Alberta. Moreover, the assessments about the FC and RWE shows the collateral effects of pandemics in the 21st century. One, society disseminates information (accurate or not) through the internet and social media, and two, people become lonely, uncertain, and stressed, causing them to be vulnerable with coping strategies such as protesting or absorbing false information.

There is an abundance of information indicative of far-right involvement with the Freedom Convoy. At the same time, there is a growing trend of right-wing extremism in Canada whose ideologies can extend to hatred and/or violence. To some, the connection between the two was obvious at the time of the convoy, however, this thesis highlights and emphasises those connections in a broad and comprehensive manner by integrating scholarly studies about the subject matters. Additionally, the relationship between both phenomena is explained by using a theoretical framework that addresses collective social identity and intergroup functions. Grasping the notion of ‘*us*’ and ‘*them*’ can generate further exclusion and division in Canada because it suggests that people’s individual identities are categorised into groups which can result in discriminatory and prejudicial behaviour. Embracing diversity, inclusionary efforts, and respect for differences in 21st-century Canada becomes more incredibly important than ever to alleviate extremist ideologies.

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