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● (1150)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Jim Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone.

To our witnesses, our apologies for the delay. When the bells ring, members of Parliament pay attention. We've done our duty. We're now ready to go and I will call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 20 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

I'll start by acknowledging that we are meeting on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the House order of November 25, 2021. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application. Members and witnesses participating virtually may speak in the official language of their choice. At the bottom of the screen, you will find that choice of floor, English or French.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motions adopted by the committee on Thursday, February 17, 2022, the committee is resuming its study of the rise of ideologically motivated violent extremism in Canada.

With us today by video conference is Brandon Rigato, lead research assistant on hate and extremism in Canada, from Carleton University. We also have with us Dr. David Morin, from the Université de Sherbrooke, who is co-chair of the UNESCO Chair in Prevention of Radicalization and Violent Extremism.

Up to five minutes will be given to opening remarks, after which we will proceed with questions.

Mr. Rigato, I now invite you to make your opening remarks. The floor is yours, sir.

Mr. Brandon Rigato (Lead Research Assistant on Hate and Extremism in Canada, Carleton University, As an Individual): Dear committee members, thank you for the invitation to speak to you today. I'll use my time to briefly discuss my doctoral research, which is a study of right-wing extremism across Canada, undertaken in the school of journalism and communication in the faculty of public affairs at Carleton University.

While there's a lot I could say regarding the far-right spectrum across Canada, in this witness statement I will focus on one group I have studied as a way to show a range of behaviours, actions and risks that help us understand IMVE.

The group is the Three Percenters, which I have been tracking since 2018. They are now, as of June 25, 2021, a listed terrorist entity in Canada. In the past the Three Percenters, a group steeped in violent white supremacist ideology, openly called for and supported violent action, and while they have now been exposed and stopped, it is likely that current and future groups with a similar ideology have learned from the Three Percenters. However, while other extremist movements and groups may copy their organizational tactics, those same patterns can help us identify and overcome attempts at subterfuge from the next iteration of the Three Percenters and similar groups.

Today's brief discussion will trace what offline behaviours were encouraged by the Three Percenters' members, what values and beliefs they urged members to uphold and how their online discussions matched their various "About Us" sections on their websites and social media pages. These examples link to many of the issues the committee is examining. Whereas many researchers focus on what leads to individuals embracing or leaving extremist movements, my research tracks and identifies how right-wing extremist groups maintain the followers they have attracted. I trace the many ways right-wing extremist groups such as the Three Percenters cultivate digital and non-digital spaces for members to feel emboldened to express and potentially act on their most hateful and violent views.

The Three Percenters utilize several activities to form and sustain their members' resolve. The first is active and mandatory participation from "real" members, those who meet in person and take part in offline training in airsoft, where they simulate tactical military drills. The tactical training includes map reading, first aid and practical applications that benefit a military force. Accompanying such training is a code of conduct that leadership expects members to embrace and follow.

According to the Three Percenters Alberta chapter—and this is a direct quote—"Members shall use their training and capabilities to protect the public at all times, both on and off duty". Moreover, they say, "A prospective member must be a patriot and possess a sense of the concept of Judeo-Christian values in an ethical (rather than theological or liturgical) sense. These values have been emphasized primarily by political conservatives."

Here we get a sense of what Three Percenters expect physically, spiritually and ideologically of their recruits. Clearly the group appears to present as simply patriotic Canadians, yet by tracking their online dialogue, my data shows that their content is racist and grounded in white nationalism. The Three Percenters are radically opposed to Muslims, refugees and non-white immigration broadly. They are also engaged in the harassment of progressive politicians across Canada.

The discussions and content that transpired on the Three Percenters' social media pages are where I will focus my final remarks.

While the Three Percenters and other right-wing extremists attract a smaller number of individuals into offline activity, there is a hotbed of content that appears daily online and across platforms calling for and celebrating violence towards Canadian newcomers, non-Christian Canadians and Muslims. Their focus extends beyond domestic politics and concerns. All too often, the focus is on stories of refugees breaking laws anywhere in Europe and North America or a story of what they perceive to be a misogynistic attack anywhere in the Middle East. Any and all content they construe as socially progressive and friendly to Muslims is disparaged and fuels the hateful cycle that provides the life force for the Three Percenters and other right-wing extremists.

The Three Percenters are one example of many right-wing extremist groups across Canada that call for and celebrate violence. Rightly, the Three Percenters are a terrorist entity, given their active participation in military training to quell what they understand as a Muslim invasion. However, the digital platforms and social atmosphere that permit such hate and sustain their violent outlook will too easily morph into another threat in the form of new IMVE groups and individuals who will continue to foster and support violence targeting non-white and non-Christian Canadians.

With that, I will conclude my remarks. I would be pleased to take your questions or address other aspects of the committee's concerns.

Thank you for giving me the time to appear today.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would now invite Dr. David Morin to take the floor for up to five minutes.

Sir, whenever you're ready, the floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

Dr. David Morin (Co-Chair, Université de Sherbrooke, UNESCO Chair in Prevention of Radicalization and Violent Extremism): Thank you, Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen, honourable members, for this opportunity to have a discussion with you.

Mr. Chair, I'd like to keep track of my time because, as you know, professors are not nearly as disciplined as MPs in keeping to their speaking time. I'm counting on you to keep me in line.

My opening address has three parts. I'll get right to it.

What are we up against today in terms of violent ideological extremism? It is, of course, a complex reality with many different strands. Like my colleague who spoke earlier, I would like to draw your attention to the right-wing extremism ecosystem.

Our data show that this ecosystem is a form of cohabitation made up of convergences and divergences between the various leanings.

The first important point in part one of my presentations pertains to the extreme right, typified by the attacks in Quebec and in London, Ontario. There is also anti-government sentiment. There was also the attack in Moncton in 2014. And misogyny is what led to the two attacks in Toronto a few years back. There are also some relatively new movements, including conspiracy theories, which of course are nothing new. Added to this is religious fundamentalism, and sometimes even a branch of "alternative science".

A glance at the number of arrests since 2020 that have been linked to public safety and extremism—not to mention national security—shows a strong presence of these far right anti-government and conspiracy theory movements. The latter underpins all the others, to a certain extent. And of course—we can talk about it again later—this brings us to the recent events in Ottawa which, in the midst of the pandemic, found fertile ground, scapegoats and supporters.

I'd like to highlight two important points at this stage.

First of all, a distinction is often made between the radical right, which would like to be involved in institutions, and the violent extremist right. It's an important distinction, to some extent, but they are nevertheless interconnected, and are often objective allies. We'll return to this later, because it's a very important point. I would also like to talk about the growing number of violent protests. In the western world, there has been a 250% increase in such demonstrations over the past five years. This shows that there is no clear-cut distinction between extremist agendas and occasional violent flare-ups. Many ordinary citizens were at the attack on the Capitol. The second important point in part one is the widespread rise in violent ideological extremism in the western world. What is involved is a rise in right-wing extremism, whether in the power structure or in the streets, an increase in hate crimes, which increased by 25% in Canada in 2020 over the previous year, along with violent demonstrations and attacks. There was a 250% increase in extreme right terrorism incidents between 1970 and 2019. This means increased social polarization.

Why is this is a growing phenomenon? There are many reasons. I will mention three that affect you more directly. First, there was the loss of confidence in institutions, that is to say you the politicians, we the scientists, and also the media. The data demonstrate a very clear connection between this loss of confidence and the rise in extremism. Secondly, digital social networks and alternative media are like particle accelarators for extremism. We'll likely be returning to this issue. Thirdly, there are the global and local contexts of the day. There is the pandemic, the economic crisis—there was the 2008 financial crisis and now, inflation—along with various other related conflicts, like the migrant crisis at Roxham Road in Quebec, and the environmental crisis. In short, it's an outburst of anger that you have to know how to listen to.

The third and final part of this opening address is about the repercussions on Canada's democracy. I believe that there are two major pitfalls to be avoided. The first is underestimating the threat and the risk to democracy it represents. What we are dealing with is an enemy within. In matters of national security, the tendency is to be less mistrustful of what appears to be close to us. How long did it take for us to really show concern, and for the enforcement agencies to address the problem, even though it had been underscored by many researchers as early as the 2010s? We originally thought that Canada was immune. It's true that Canada probably has a more consensual political culture than other countries, starting with our American neighbour. I nevertheless believe that we can agree, and that there is consensus on the fact that Canada is not immune. The second major pitfall is overestimating the strength and capacity of resilience.

● (1155)

[*English*]

The Chair: You have 10 seconds left, please.

[*Translation*]

Dr. David Morin: We are taking democracy for granted, and in my view, doing nothing is not an option. As to what we should be doing, that's another problem.

I'll conclude by saying that history has taught us that it's the majorities, not the minorities, that overthrow democratic regimes.

Thank you.

● (1200)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now move into the first round of questions. The first block goes to Mr. Van Popta.

You have six minutes, sir, whenever you're ready.

Mr. Tako Van Popta (Langley—Aldergrove, CPC): Thank you very much.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here. I apologize once again for the delay. I know your time is important and your evidence is going to be important to us as well.

I'll start with Professor Morin.

You talked about the impact on Canadian democracy rising out of, I suppose, misinformation and disinformation. I wonder what comments you might have about the potential for foreign interference in our electoral systems and whether that's a real threat. Certainly the perception of it has proven to be damaging to us.

[*Translation*]

Dr. David Morin: Thank you for your question.

That is indeed an issue. I'll have to be careful here, because I'm also currently sitting on the committee that is examining the new regulations on harmful online content. I will therefore keep my comments fairly general.

It's clear, Mr. Van Popta, that disinformation is a major issue. It's true that people often view violent and hateful content, and that disinformation often falls into a grey zone; fake news, for example. What we're talking about here are the parameters for freedom of expression.

But for foreign interference, it's important to point out that countries that are not interested in being nice to us, to put things prosaically, play upon the divisions that already exist in the country, and they stick a knife into an existing wound, adding noise to the noise and increasing social polarization. I think that it's essential to provide for regulatory mechanisms with more teeth, and that can—as we have seen in the Ukrainian context—monitor certain media, as has been done in Europe, and here as well. Russia Today and Sputnik are examples of propaganda media used by the Russian government.

It's true that disinformation—which surfaced during the pandemic and had a marked impact on public health and public safety—and alternative media are part of the problem. The Government of Canada is currently looking at this very closely, with the approval of all members.

[*English*]

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Thank you for that.

I want to get into the studies that the government has been undertaking with the Communications Security Establishment and the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. It's enough of a concern for them to have undertaken the study on the impact of foreign interference in our electoral system. Those studies predated the 2021 election.

Do you have any comment about that? There have been some newspaper articles on how perhaps foreign interference had an impact on some of the ridings in my home province of British Columbia, for example.

[*Translation*]

Dr. David Morin: One important point I'd like to make is that interference in a democracy and the integrity of our democratic systems need to be taken into consideration in matters of violent extremism. That's unquestionable.

On the other hand, I think that it also has to be taken into account between election periods. We might have to do something to enhance the crisis management system. This would enable all of the stakeholders to cooperate when there are things like massive disinformation campaigns right before elections. It's a key issue.

Our intelligence agency, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, has for some time now been willing to identify certain countries that have been interfering in our systems and processes. That's something new in the Canadian intelligence landscape.

It's a major task, and one that people need to know about. I'm not yet convinced, Mr. Van Popta, that all of the members, or even Canadian society generally, are fully aware of these issues. I'd like to suggest that one option worth considering would be to give Canadians a better explanation of these matters, because while our front line is the law enforcement agencies, we may well ask who is in the second line?

So I believe that it's essential to make Canadians more aware of these issues so that they can be front-line responders, with the law enforcement agencies backing them up. Allow me to make a comparison. It's as if we entrusted teachers with the entire task of educating our children. It doesn't work. The front-line workers in children's education are the parents. I would say that the same is the case for national security as it relates to disinformation and foreign interference.

Thank you.

● (1205)

[*English*]

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Thank you very much.

The Chair: I will now move to Ms. Damoff.

You have a six-minute block. The floor is yours.

Ms. Pam Damoff (Oakville North—Burlington, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you to both of our witnesses for their patience in starting this meeting and for being here today.

Mr. Rigato, you've done extensive study on the Three Percenters. We know our security agencies see far-right extremism as the greatest threat to Canadian safety. We've heard testimony about these movements monetizing and selling t-shirts. When we list a group—like we did the Three Percenters and others, starting in 2019—we're cutting off finances to them. That's essentially what the listing does.

Could you speak about whether cutting off financing is effective, in the first place? Second, do you have any recommendations on anything else we could be doing with organizations like the Three Percenters?

Mr. Brandon Rigato: Although cutting off funding is highly effective for some of these more organized groups, unfortunately the groups that I followed are often individually backed by ardent supporters and ideologues. Cutting off the funding will stop some of the problems that stem from being able to financially bolster a movement. We can't overlook the fact that these are, often, ideologically motivated people who will do it free of cost. Some of the most vociferous posters have no funding, other than their own BitChute channels.

As far as other alternatives are concerned, I would be very tuned into how VPNs are utilized. We can crack down on what people are accessing here in Canada, but anyone with a Netflix account knows that you can jump onto an American account and then you get better films. It's the same thing with extremism, unfortunately. You can dodge these government checks and balances quite easily.

It doesn't answer your question or provide any useful help, unfortunately. It just raises more concerns for IT people.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Thank you.

Dr. Morin, you talked about these groups having an anti-government focus and, among other things, conspiracy theories.

One of the things that is troubling is the validation of these movements by people in authority, so elected officials. I would talk about Randy Hillier, for example, who was part of many of the conspiracy theories and part of the "freedom convoy" that found its way into Ottawa.

What impact does it have when elected officials validate these kinds of far-right movements?

[*Translation*]

Dr. David Morin: Is that question for me, Mr. Chair?

Ms. Pam Damoff: Yes.

Dr. David Morin: Okay.

We've done research, including a Canada-wide survey on belief in conspiracy theories. The survey will soon be presented to the Quebec government. The data are rather worrisome, showing that up to 25 % of Canadians believe more or less strongly in conspiracy theories. Needless to say, this 25% rate does not mean that all these people are diehard conspiracy theorists, but there is a hard core of 9% or 10%, and some of the remaining 15% could swing either way.

I'm telling you this because there's nothing new about conspiracy theories. I recall that in the early 2020s, CSIS, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, was still reluctant to treat them as an extremist threat. Now, I don't think there is any doubt about it. Our data also show that some conspiracy theorists are in favour of violence. We have psychometric scales to measure things like that. Now I'm not saying it applies to all of them, but only to some of them. It's an anti-democratic approach that is being used by other extremist movements, on the left and the right.

That was just a partial answer to your question, Ms. Damoff. As I was saying earlier in my opening remarks, we often tend to separate what is called radical thinking from violent extremism, and that's understandable. The police often say that they don't investigate ideologies, but crimes, and focus on the violence component.

Nevertheless, comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon has shown that there are connections. When a radical statement is made by a particular fringe of any political party, it contributes to some extent to the normalization of a form of extremist language. As my colleague Mr. Rigato was explaining just now, it may include xenophobic and anti-feminist comments. It also goes some way towards justifying the most extremist among them to make similar comments. Conversely, it can allow the generally pro-democracy radical fringes to say that they are not as bad as the extremists who promote violence.

● (1210)

[*English*]

The Chair: You have 10 seconds left, please.

[*Translation*]

Dr. David Morin: It's therefore extremely important to acknowledge that things are interconnected, and I could use Ottawa as an example. What we saw here were pro-democracy people alongside people who are anti-democracy, which caused the movement to veer towards violence.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Larouche, the floor is yours for six minutes of questioning. Whenever you're ready, proceed, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche (Shefford, BQ): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Morin, I'd like to begin by mentioning that my *alma mater* is the University of Sherbrooke and that my summer reading was *Le nouvel âge des extrêmes*, by Sami Aoun, someone we are both acquainted with, I believe, and who is also my former professor. It's a pleasure to have you here with us at the committee today.

Mr. Morin, you were recently appointed by the Department of Canadian Heritage to a group of experts whose task is to look into a legislative framework for online hate and harmful content. In addressing that issue, will it be possible to draw inspiration from what is happening elsewhere, and will the European legislative measure adopted for dealing with problematic content on major platforms like Facebook and Twitter be studied? You spoke at length about how alternative media and social media contribute to radicalization. Do you think that Canada should adopt that model?

Dr. David Morin: Thank you very much for your question.

I'm delighted to hear that we have the same *alma mater*. I also forgot to note that it is located on the traditional land of the Abenaki.

To answer your question about the expert group, it and the government are examining precisely what you referred to, which is the digital services legislation recently announced by the European Commission.

Several of its regulatory aspects are indeed very interesting. I won't say more about them, because the expert group's deliberations to date will be released in public notices. If I were to say any more, I'd be giving my own interpretation. It's difficult for me to predict what direction this will take.

However, there are some very interesting aspects with respect to the sorts of entities and the types of content that require regulation. There is much discussion about it, and that takes me back to the member's initial question, which was what we ought to be doing about disinformation. By this I mean information that falls within the freedom of speech criteria, but that may be very harmful. It's a problem. Many Canadians feel strongly about freedom of speech. The parameters are complex.

The final factor is what kinds of obligations can be applied to all these entities? There are large entities, which could ultimately be subject to many requirements, and smaller entities, on which it is sometimes more difficult to impose them, but which are nevertheless platforms that contain a lot of harmful content. These parameters are under discussion.

I will conclude by saying that digital social networks are obviously a key issue. However, I would remind you that the greatest crimes in history and the rise of various forms of extremism did not need to wait for social networks to come along in order to spread their propaganda. So we need to address the issue of social networks, but it's also important to have initiatives in the field, in the offline world. For example, there is growing extremism in some specific working environments. Our concerns are to determine how to reach these segments of the population that are at greater risk and more radicalized, to prevent them from preaching to the converted and influencing those who could be most problematic.

Thank you.

● (1215)

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you very much, Mr. Morin.

While it's clear that social media contributed to the problem, you're right to remind us that there is more to it than that.

In your book, *Le nouvel âge des extrêmes*, which I read in my final year of applied politics at the University of Sherbrooke, it can clearly be seen that you researched the growth of far-right movements, particularly over the past few decades. There was a rise in extremism on social networks, but also elsewhere in the field. You have often asked how we can reach out to these people. What I would like to hear about are the main features of these far-right groups

How do today's far-right groups differ from those of 10 years ago?

Can you explain how the far-right movement grew and what drove this growth?

Dr. David Morin: Thank you for the question.

The book provides an interesting perspective. Many western researchers examine the phenomenon from a western standpoint, including the growth of Jihadism and right-wing extremism.

To answer your question about the far right, I believe that one common mistake is to see the far right as if it were something that goes back only a few decades, as a form of neo-Nazism that advocates violence and the overthrow of institutions. But the far right has evolved. Today's far right includes people who wear a suit and a tie. Also relevant is the fact that the United States has managed to create an "alt-right" that has transformed its political discourse. For example, there has been a shift away from racism to culturalism. Rather than saying that one race is superior, it's now one culture that is better than another. My colleague put it very well earlier when he addressed the issue of white nationalism.

There is also a lot of victimization. The argument is that the white majority, in a reversal of history, is threatened by immigrant populations and other cultures. You are no doubt familiar with the conspiracy theory about the great replacement. What we're seeing is the same kind of argument in a more polished form, by which I mean more politically correct.

Another important factor is that the far right movement always claims to be defending people against the elites. These elites are you, us, the researchers, and, of course, the mainstream media. The tone of the far-right agenda is now much more populist.

[*English*]

The Chair: You have 10 more seconds.

[*Translation*]

Dr. David Morin: The final factor, about which not all of us agree, is the use of violence. Some people take it for granted, whereas for others it's much more subtle. The fact remains, however, that it often underpins anti-democratic arguments.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: I have a point of order, Mr. Chair.

The vote was delayed, so what I want to know is whether there will be a second round of questions and how things are going to go between now and the end of the meeting.

[*English*]

The Chair: We will cut the allocation of the second round in half. It will be in the same order but in half the time. We don't have the time available that we'd expected.

Mr. MacGregor, you have six minutes in this round. The floor is yours, sir.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor (Cowichan—Malahat—Langford, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much to our witnesses for helping our committee make its way through this study.

Mr. Rigato, I'd like to start with you. Thank you very much for sharing some of the research you've done on the Three Percenters. I'm sure that the way in which they maintain their membership through active and mandatory participation, tactical military training and enforcing a code of values amongst their members works for other groups as well.

I guess what I'm interested in is this. Has your research covered any former members of those groups, such as the Three Percenters and the Proud Boys, and have those former members said anything about what would have helped them during the time when they were active members? I mean, they're stuck in this closed ecosytem where their ideological beliefs are reinforced but also expanded upon. Have they ever mentioned what kinds of interventions may have helped them, during the time when they were active members, to get out of that lifestyle?

● (1220)

Mr. Brandon Rigato: Thank you very much for the question.

There's a whole host of literature on what it takes to get people in and out of extremism.

With regard to the Three Percenters and the Proud Boys within Canada, I don't have any data on that. I can't honestly answer on how the Canadian participants have engaged and then disengaged with it. I don't want to take up any more time unnecessarily.

Thank you.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you for that.

Dr. Morin, maybe I'll turn to you. I was looking at the UNESCO chair's website. One of the sections on the website for your organization says, "one of the priority issues is the development of evidence-based research and the exchange of knowledge and best practices at the national and international levels." I think a lot of that covers the role that social media has played in allowing extremist ideology to spread and find new members.

In our earlier meeting this week, we had representatives from Facebook and Twitter appear. Facebook in particular said that they have a lot of policies in their community standards that outline what is and is not allowed on their platforms. They said they were actively monitoring the Ottawa protests in the lead-up to the illegal occupation of Ottawa.

One thing that is quite evident is that Facebook allowed Pat King, one of the main organizers, to not only grow his online presence by tens of thousands during the convoy. He was also livestreaming himself and encouraging people to break the law. That strayed far beyond what I think is allowed on the platform.

Facebook has taken the time to try to explain that their policies do try to prevent this, but it's obviously not working. Do you have any thoughts on what kinds of government interventions we need? We've had suggestions about maybe setting up an ombudsperson. The main concern is that, if you clamp down too hard on the main platforms, you're going to spread it out to other alternative media sources. Do you have any thoughts on that?

[*Translation*]

Dr. David Morin: I'd like to thank the hon. member for his question.

You're absolutely right when you said that there are sometimes collateral impacts. The idea behind the current deliberations on regulating social networks is to create basic standards that would enable the platforms to determine what regulations they are required to comply with, and to contribute to a form of standardization that factors in the specific features of each of these platforms.

You gave some very clear examples of content that had not been withdrawn from platforms when it was problematic. I don't want to mention too many names, but Twitter and a number of platforms had recently placed restrictions in connection with documentaries about QAnon that were critical of QAnon. These platforms claimed to be placing restrictions on these documentaries based on their internal policies, which they could not talk about, and that they had to limit the dissemination of this type of content. That's definitely a problem.

Canada has decided that it now wants regulation, and I believe that's excellent. It will be important to measure how effective such regulation will be. One avenue open to us, as you were saying, is to create a digital security commissioner position in Canada. Other countries have done so, and the commissioner would be responsible for ensuring that platforms comply with these obligations.

A second key point that the chair is working on with the support of Canada's Department of Public Safety and the Community Resilience Fund is the matter of evaluation. This is somewhat related to the previous question you asked my colleague in terms of prevention programs. It's essential to have much more rigorous evaluation mechanisms—Canada is headed in that direction—to be able to determine what works and what doesn't, particularly upstream prevention programs. Primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention are all very important today if we are to rectify our practices and adapt how we are all working.

● (1225)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Dr. David Morin: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Colleagues, we will now move into the second round of questions, with half-time for every member of the committee.

We'll start with Mr. Lloyd.

Sir, you have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Dane Lloyd (Sturgeon River—Parkland, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My first question is for Dr. Morin.

In your expertise at the Chair of Prevention of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism, would you conclude that one of the root causes for people to be radicalized and to be susceptible to violent extremism would be things such as economic disruption?

Would you say that the prospect of unemployment or becoming unemployed and the negative outcomes that come out of unemployment are a significant contributing factor to radicalization?

[*Translation*]

Dr. David Morin: Yes and no. The data show that it depends on the context. Sometimes socioeconomic status is problematic, but most of the time, the cause is a feeling of economic hardship. So it's less tied to income as such than to having the impression of not having access to what we feel we are entitled to.

Let's take the United States as an example. I'm going to draw a very important parallel. Many of the people who attacked the Capitol appear to have been upper middle class and not in circumstances that involved a great deal of hardship.

However, most of them felt deprived—deprived of something they felt entitled to, or about to lose their middle-class or upper middle-class privileges.

[*English*]

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Dr. Morin.

I only have limited time, so I want to drill down.

I wouldn't want to suggest that we were suggesting that people with a lower socio-economic status or who have lower socio-economic privileges are more susceptible, but I like what you're talking about in terms of deprivation.

If somebody has a good middle-class lifestyle and has strong family and community bonds, but then loses those things through an event such as unemployment—let's say their industry gets put out of business by a recession or by a government policy—is that not an act of deprivation that could cause somebody to become radicalized?

[*Translation*]

Dr. David Morin: Definitely, Mr. Lloyd.

And it can be seen in how it is linked to an increase in conspiracy theories. There is a very clear correlation between a form of anxiety, caused among other things by socio-economic status or the loss of losing that status.

[*English*]

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

[*Translation*]

Dr. David Morin: So it may be a factor, but the radicalization process is mainly a combination of factors specific to each individual.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Dr. David Morin: That's why it's hard to identify very broad trends or factors that are systemically important.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chiang, you have the next block. You have two and a half minutes, whenever you're ready.

Mr. Paul Chiang (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses today for participating.

Dr. Morin, in your opening remarks you mentioned loss of trust and the potential for violence. Can you provide your thoughts on the role that celebrating cultural diversity can have in combatting hate and extremism?

What are some of the best ways the federal government can promote a more inclusive society that stands up against hate and extremism? What are your thoughts?

[*Translation*]

Dr. David Morin: I'd like to thank the hon. member for this question.

I myself, as co-chair, was involved in an initiative called Dialogue Plus, whose purpose was to prevent radicalization and discrimination in societies, particularly among young people and older people. So you've asked a very good question.

I believe that celebrating cultural diversity is essential. Unfortunately though, the message is not often received by the people who are not at all convinced of the benefits of cultural diversity. So I think that less talk and more action is needed. Opportunities for meetings on the ground between people from the diversity and others from the cultural majority—I always have a bit of trouble with all these terms. I think that the solution is to do things together, concretely, on projects, rather than systematically declare broad principles, even though it's important to reiterate these principles.

It's important to go out in the field and provide community organizations with the resources they need to facilitate meetings and dialogue. Generally speaking, that's what has worked best in terms of prevention.

I hope, hon. member, that this answers your question.

Thank you.

● (1230)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you, Dr. Morin.

My next question is for Mr. Rigato.

From your research, what are some ways that alt-right communities seek to undermine established knowledge and expertise? [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] could be taken to address this right-wing fight against established trusted media sources?

The Chair: You have 15 seconds to answer that.

Mr. Brandon Rigato: Discrediting the speakers is the prime way of doing that, by suggesting they are progressive or politically motivated.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Larouche, you have all of 90 seconds. Make the best of it.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: That's going to go by quickly.

Mr. Morin, to sum up, we discussed the growth of various movements over the past decade. More specifically, many experts have mentioned that the far right had used the pandemic as a way to connect with more people, get its messages across and become more popular.

If so, how can we benefit from this experience and build it into the impending legislation to combat online hate?

Dr. David Morin: Absolutely, Ms. Larouche. I agree.

There is consensus on that. The far-right and anti-government movements have managed to take over some of the monopoly that was protesting the health measures. The political opposition did not quite know what to do to avoid adding to the noise, and it's obvious that the movements benefited from this.

They succeeded in building a sort of movement, as was seen in Ottawa, moreover, and I think it's going to last. Among other things, they understood how to use their fundraising capacity to spectacular effect.

There is a final point I'd like to make in response once again to the previous question. There is a form of ambient confusion that needs to be investigated in greater detail. The concept is to create new analysis categories, in which the oppressors are trying to pass themselves off as the oppressed, and making an effort to blur everything. The debate over whether or not one is part of the far right is one such example. I believe, unfortunately, that this kind of confusion is not helping the situation.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

I apologize. We just never have enough time. That's the way it is. It's the world we live in.

Mr. MacGregor, you have your 90 seconds whenever you are ready.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Dr. Morin, I'll start with you.

The director of CSIS appeared for the special joint committee that is conducting a review of the Emergencies Act. He has now confirmed that the agency is devoting roughly 50% of its attention and resources to ideologically motivated extremist violence. We know from what happened in Ottawa in February that there was a complete and total failure because of what resulted and how this city was occupied for nearly three weeks.

We've had an acknowledgement that CSIS needs to do more. In the 60 seconds I have left, do you have any suggestions on what specifics they should be engaging in? Is it more human-level intelligence and trying to get more informants into these groups, etc.?

Can you suggest anything to our committee for recommendations?

[*Translation*]

Dr. David Morin: I'd like to thank the hon. member.

I want to be careful to avoid lecturing the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, but I'm convinced that we need to reinvest in efforts to infiltrate far right organizations. It's an important point, and I also think that it's important to try to be transparent about the information and intelligence obtained, within the limitations of national security, of course.

I think that the fact that a committee like yours is considering these matters is an excellent start in making Canadians aware of these issues.

[*English*]

The Chair: You have 10 seconds, please.

[*Translation*]

Dr. David Morin: I truly believe that the future lies in these questions and in this approach, by making Canadians more aware.

● (1235)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Shipley, you have two and a half minutes in this round. Start whenever you're ready, sir.

Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Thank you.

I'll start with Dr. Morin, please.

Dr. Morin, in your opening comments, you mentioned that there's been a loss of trust in institutions. Could you expand on that? More specifically, what institutions are you referring to, and what's created that loss?

[*Translation*]

Dr. David Morin: I'd like to thank the hon. member.

You'll see in the report that we are about to table, that there is a clear link between adherence to conspiracy theories and a loss of confidence in institutions, by which I mean mainly political and media institutions. It's obvious that what we have here is no longer just mistrust, but defiance.

I believe that there are many reasons for this, but in view of the time allotted to me, it it's difficult for me to go over all of them.

Lastly, dialogue and relations between citizens and elected representatives is a major issue. A form of distance has been created and I have the impression that some citizens no longer feel represented by their elected officials, which in my view is clearly a distortion that extremist groups can make use of. That's why the role of elected representatives is so important to preventing violent extremism. Rebuilding the relationship of trust and perhaps also having political representation, by changing the voting system for example, is an important aspect.

There is no silver bullet or miracle cure, but we might eventually be able to restore some of the connections that would make people feel they are better represented. However, I have an important warning for everyone. This discussion and this conversation about extremism cannot be partisan. It's essential for those in charge, and for elected representatives, to know that sometimes, trying to poach in dangerous areas is like playing with matches in a dynamite warehouse.

It's therefore essential for us to be able to debate complex and difficult subjects like immigration, because that is something being debated at the moment, but without ever descending into extremism. Otherwise, if we try to take advantage of the discussion for political purposes or to use debates as a means to an end, we will all become losers.

I believe that's one of the many things that we need to keep in mind.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. McKinnon, you will take us to the end of this round and to the break. You have two and a half minutes whenever you're ready.

Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Dr. Morin.

Dr. Morin, you mentioned in your remarks that it is essential that we have robust regulatory mechanisms to give teeth to our policies. You mentioned just recently the need to make evaluation mechanisms more robust. That kind of begs the question about where we draw those lines. I think we all have a sense of extremism. We'll know it when we see it, but that's a very subjective evaluation.

How do we recognize the essential DNA that we need to take note of in these kinds of regulations? Where do we draw those lines? How do we draw those lines?

[*Translation*]

Dr. David Morin: I'd like to thank the hon. member.

In my view, the first thing on which we all have to agree is that we need to ensure that whatever is illegal offline is illegal online. That's a major area in itself. As you know, this will not just happen on its own. Some unlawful acts are committed online and it takes a long time for the people committing them to be brought to justice. That's one of the first areas we can begin to work on right now.

In my view, the first thing upon which we must all agree is that we need to ensure that whatever is illegal offline is illegal online. That's a major area in itself. As you know, it will not just happen on its own. Some unlawful acts are committed online and it takes a long time for the people committing them to be brought to justice. That's one of the first areas we can begin to work on right now.

Confidence also requires transparency. No one is perfect and no one expects a regulatory framework to be perfect. The regulations will evolve as time goes by, but at the moment, the status quo is no longer tenable.

Those are the areas I would prioritize, hon. member.

Thank you.

● (1240)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Colleagues, we're at the end of the second round of questions and of the time allotted to this panel.

I want to apologize to the witnesses for a rushed little session. That's the world we live in. We also had a late start—also the world we live in.

You have brought all kinds of wisdom and an articulate way of expressing difficult issues. On behalf of the committee and all members of Parliament, thank you very much for being with us this morning.

Colleagues, we'll now take a very short break to do some sound checks for the next panel. We'll be back in no more than five minutes.

Thank you.

● (1240)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1245)

The Chair: Colleagues, we're ready to call the meeting back to order, so please take your seats.

Given the time constraints, colleagues, we'll ask our guests to take five minutes for their introductory remarks, and then we'll go one full round so every party has a chance for a full round. That will take us to the allotted time that has been given to us by the House of Commons, given the late start and the vote.

With us for this second hour, as an individual, is Dr. Carmen Celestini, post-doctoral fellow, the disinformation project, school of communications, Simon Fraser University. We have Dr. Diana Inkpen, professor, school of electrical engineering and computer science, University of Ottawa. She's here in person. We also have

Dr. Christian Leuprecht, professor, Royal Military College of Canada, Queen's University.

I now welcome Dr. Celestini to make her five-minute presentation.

The floor is yours.

Dr. Carmen Celestini (Post Doctoral Fellow, The Disinformation Project, School of Communication, Simon Fraser University, As an Individual): Thank you to the honourable chair and committee for this opportunity to discuss this important topic.

My area of research is the overlapping belief systems of apocalyptic religious thought and conspiracy theories and the influence these beliefs have on socio-political movements and within extremism. While much focus as of late has been on the role of disinformation and misinformation on the rise of extremism, the role of conspiracy theories and their adherents has been ignored, mocked and considered fringe beliefs, with no affect on society or politics. However, in fact, it plays an integral role in socio-political movements, as well as the spreading of extremism.

QAnon has leapt from the online world to violence in the real world and is at present a global phenomenon. The conspiracy is spread predominantly through social media platforms. Adherents of QAnon conspiracy are not limited to a geographic range, with adherents and supporters found globally, including Canada.

Current research on radicalization and violence shares many commonalities with those who are conspiracists and the theories in which they believe. Conspiracy theories may not have a mass radicalizing effect, but they are effective in leading to increased polarization in society. They also delineate who are the enemies and those who are unaware of the truth from the in-group, who prioritize their knowledge of the truth, their morality and, most importantly, their role as social heroes who will save the world. Conspiracy theory is effective when politics are interpreted through a conspiratorial lens by those individuals and groups for whom politics are inaccessible. This inaccessibility renders politics as something that is impenetrable or secret.

Although conspiracy theories can be wrong and appear simplistic in their presentation of answers, they may harbour a problem or issues that need to be discussed or addressed. Conspiracy theories, while often portrayed as being based in social and economic position and education, are used as a narrative for expressing injustice and are an articulation of fears, both real and imagined, which are then propagated as the basis for some social movements. The conspiracy could provide a response to these issues for the adherents when society as a whole or the social safety net does not.

Those who feel disenfranchised will seek out others who understand or feel the same and create a community or a social group of like-minded individuals. When the individuals begin to take conspiracy theories seriously, there is inherently less trust in the institutions of the nation. For the conspiracist, the conspiratorial plot is evident in the institutions: universities, governments, banks and the media. Due to these institutions not being trusted, the believer turns to the ideas and groups that are condemned by these very institutions.

Not all conspiracy theories lead to radicalization, nor do they spur political action or mobilization. These theories have provided a conduit for the expression and symbolic representation of the extreme right's fears. In defining the "extreme right" and the use of fear and conspiracy for mobilization, important commonalities need to be acknowledged. Commonly, there is a trope of making their nation more ethnically homogeneous and demanding a return to more traditional values. Descriptions of those in power and national institutions are seen as being under the control of elites who place internationalism before the nation. Elites or powerful individuals are described by the extreme right as putting their own self-interests ahead of those they represent.

This notion of fear and dread is an important component of the power of conspiracy theories and they can provide an answer or rationale as to why these fears manifest. Linked to politics, religion and racism, conspiracy theories have served as justification for political mobilization and activism and are usually connected in some cases to violence.

Political populism and conspiracy are usually connected. The most prevalent in the extreme right is improvisational conspiracism. This form can only exist when there are significant subcultures. Mainly rising or appearing during times of crisis, improvisational conspiracism is comprised of heterodox religion, esoteric and occult beliefs, fringe science and radical politics, and it has a potent power and influence on politics within the nation. What brings these various ideas like this together, like fringe science and heterodox religion, is stigmatized knowledge, which is the belief that secret hidden forces are controlling human destinies.

● (1250)

Conspiracy theories can delineate the attributes of a patriot or a social hero who can save the nation from the enemy, whether domestic or foreign. They also serve to formulate the components of the identity of the enemy, for example via religion, race, culture or political leaning. Their racist messages ensconced in the mainstream political allow them to create and produce fear.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds left, please.

Dr. Carmen Celestini: Thank you.

This fear is a cultural threat and can lead to hostility. Conspiracy theories are often—

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sorry, but we're out of time.

Dr. Carmen Celestini: All right.

The Chair: I'm sorry, but we have to strictly adhere to time limits. Otherwise, we lose control of what's available to us.

Dr. Inkpen, you're next. You have five minutes for an opening statement, please, whenever you're ready.

Dr. Diana Inkpen (Professor, School of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science, University of Ottawa, As an Individual): Thank you for the invitation.

My name is Diana Inkpen. I'm a professor of computer science at the University of Ottawa. My research area is artificial intelligence, natural language processing and machine learning with a focus on social media text processing. I'm going to offer a bit of what I know from a computer science perspective. I'm not sure if it will be that much use for this committee.

In our research we look at individual messages or groups of messages from certain users. For our methods, it's easier to have more than one message at a time. There is more information for text to be analyzed.

I looked at cyber-bullying messages to protect children while they are online, or at detecting signs of mental health or suicide ideation. There are some benchmarks of hate speech that we play with in some small projects. I didn't look particularly at extremist messages, but I think the same kinds of methods, AI tools, could be used.

Most of the time we need to, with classifiers and automatic methods, pick up on words and phrases associated with certain topics and certain very strong, negative emotions, for example. Most often they learn from data. Besides classifying a text, a set of messages or a user, we can also summarize texts. We can find similar things. We can identify bots and fake accounts, because the language they use is different and they have other behaviours.

I am more concerned about the accuracy of these kinds of tools. We work in computer science to improve accuracy with the latest deep learning methods.

Besides that, accuracy is what computer scientists try to provide. These tools are not perfect. In my opinion, there will always be a need for humans in the loop, not only to use these tools with a grain of salt but also to try to get an explanation of why the machine recommends such things. We work on explainable language classifiers and so on, even if it's a very...research area, so it's not easy to get an explanation.

Besides accuracy, of course, it's very important to use any AI tool in a very strong, ethical way. I know the government is putting in place regulations for how to use AI tools. That's what I'm more focused on increasing, the accuracy of these kinds of decisions and their explainability.

I think about the recent events—the protests, the trucker convoy. Maybe these users were known to relevant authorities. Their accounts could be automatically monitored to detect very specific extremist messages. If somebody, an unknown user, is preparing a hate crime, probably they will post relevant messages that could be detected, and warnings could be raised and so on.

To conclude, I want to say that AI tools could be useful for detecting extremism and dangerous ideologies, but only if they're customized properly in terms of accuracy and if they are used carefully in terms of ethics by relevant authorities.

Thank you.

● (1255)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now for an opening statement of up to five minutes, I invite Dr. Christian Leuprecht.

You now have the floor.

[*Translation*]

Dr. Christian Leuprecht (Professor, Royal Military College of Canada, Queen's University, As an Individual): Thank you for having invited me to appear here today.

I'll be happy to answer your questions in both official languages, but I'll be delivering my address in English.

[*English*]

While violent extremism in Canada is a marginal phenomenon, situations arising out of IMVE garner a lot of public attention, followed by political commitments and opportunities, such as these committee meetings, to move on certain policies. Detecting IMVE and disrupting it is costly, and those costs are disproportionate to the benefits.

Other areas, such as cyber-threats, foreign interference and foreign espionage, are far more consequential for Canada's security, prosperity and democracy, but are difficult to quantify publicly in the absence of human casualties. If done better and more systematically, rebalancing Canada's national security and policing posture with a greater emphasis on cyber, organized crime, money laundering and protecting Canadians from foreign malign actors, etc., would have a far greater benefit for public safety and depriving IMVE of resources and enablers than the current approach, whose track record seems neither particularly efficient nor effective.

Who is likely to sympathize with, provide material support for or engage in violent extremism and why have become two of the most pressing security questions of all time. Pragmatically, the question is made more difficult by the small numbers of those in this category, on the one hand, and the vast majority of people in comparable circumstances who exhibit a staunch resilience against radicalization, on the other hand.

We need to distinguish between ideologically motivated violent extremism and ideologically motivated extremist violence. The former concerns the narrative; the latter concerns action. We can sketch these in the form of two pyramids. At the apex are those who feel a sense of personal, moral obligation, followed by those who justify the narrative, and below them are those who sympathize with it. In the action pyramid, you have the terrorists at the apex, then the radicals who support them and below them are activist sympathizers.

During testimony before this committee on May 12, 2021, CSIS's Tim Hahlweg used a comparable analogy when he referred to three tiers: passive engagement, active engagement and mobilizing the violence. Chief Superintendent Duheme testified that he was gravely concerned with the extremist views that are first fostered, for instance, online, and can lead to actual physical violence. However, Mr. Hahlweg was much more nuanced in acknowledging that there is neither a conveyor belt nor a causal relationship.

In fact, the relationship between narrative and action is indeterminate. Few in the narrative pyramid ever move to action, and action is not necessarily motivated by a belief in the narrative. Ideology is only one of the 12 micro-, meso- and macro-mechanisms that drive radicalization. Ideology is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for radical action. That is, ideology does not cause extremist action, and many incidents of extremist violence are not necessarily motivated by ideology. When ideology is present, it turns out to be a rationale to justify extremist action and violence that people had already intended to engage with, in any event. In short, decades of evidence from psychology confirm that what people say is a poor predictor of what they will actually do.

For policy purposes, countering or changing a particular narrative, such as IMVE, is quite distinct from the problem of stopping people from perpetrating extremist violence or actions. The aforementioned numbers show that extremist violence in Canada, however problematic, remains rare and isolated. CSIS, CSE and the NSICOP acknowledge as much in their annual report, which highlights other issues, such as cyber. However, these issues are less politically appealing than IMVE.

Similarly, sympathy toward violence or breaking the law—that is, the problem of mass radicalization—is not widespread in Canada among any community, in contrast to select subgroups in some European countries, for instance, and, arguably, the United States. As Chief Superintendent Duheme confirmed during his testimony:

> The most common threat actors we see are individuals with no clear group affiliation, who are motivated by highly personalized and nuanced ideologies that lead individuals to incite and/or mobilize to violence.

He went on to refer to the "increasingly individualized and leaderless nature of this threat environment", while Mr. Hahlweg confirmed that "there's no common ideology that binds these groups."

● (1300)

In other words, both violent extremism and extremist violence and action are marginal phenomena in Canada that I think we can reasonably well contain.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Colleagues, we have just enough time for a full round of questions.

We'll begin with Mr. Lloyd with six minutes. Begin whenever you're ready, sir.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going to start with Dr. Leuprecht. It was really interesting testimony from you.

In a previous panel with Dr. Morin, I explored the concept of deprivation—he used the term—and the idea that a lot of IMVE or extremist root causes are related to people either being deprived or having the fear of being deprived. I used the example of unemployment.

Would you agree with Dr. Morin's assessment that this is one of the root causes of radicalization?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: Do you mean deprivation as in material deprivation? I just want to clarify what you mean by deprived.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Unemployment is an example I used.

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I think the challenge with deprivation is that it's the catch-all explanation for just about anything and everything that ails our society. I think that, yes, deprivation is a significant intervening variable, but of course there are many individuals who are materially or otherwise deprived in our society who do not harbour extremist thoughts and do not engage in extremist action.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Of course, Dr. Leuprecht.

Would you agree that when you're identifying the rare cases of people who are extremists, something related to deprivation related to a material loss could be a motivating factor?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: If we look at the January 6 storming of the U.S. Congress and analyze the people who were engaged in that, it turns out many were middle class. Many did not suffer deprivation. Yes, while it is one intervening variable that I think can drive extremism, it would be a mistake to chalk it up as a causal variable.

My concern is that this will cause us to have massive spending policies to somehow alleviate violent extremist thoughts. I'm not sure that taking people out of deprivation would necessarily remedy that, nor, as I say, for the lots of people in the middle class who hold objectionable or even extremist views.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I appreciate that explanation.

When we're talking about what Dr. Morin was saying, in the example I used about January 6, a lot of the people were middle class. He identified that a lot of these people feared deprivation or feared that their standard of living or their position in society would be impacted.

Would you agree that it was their fear of deprivation that could be a contributing variable as well?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: Certainly perception plays a huge role any time someone acquires or sympathizes with extremist views, let alone with extremist action. That is certainly one of the challenges of, I think, the last 20 years.

Many people in the middle class fear that they might be losing some of their privileges. I think it is important for government to reassure the public that our policies are equitable and are meant not just to preserve jobs and social standing for the people who have it but also to assure social mobility for people who are looking to rise up.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: You said the overwhelming number of people in Canada are very resilient to extremism and radicalization.

Would you agree that part of that resilience stems from such things as economic success, relative prosperity, strong community bonds and strong family bonds? Would you say that those factors contribute to a strong resilience to extremism?

● (1305)

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: Canada is an interesting outlier compared with countries such as France, the U.K. and even the U.S., in that we don't have a problem of mass radicalization per se among any particular identifiable community.

I think it is important for Canada to ask itself what we have done right. One thing that I think we have done right is making all Canadians feel part of our political communities with the policies and the social citizenship policies that we have in place, which give everybody an equitable stake in ownership in our societies.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: When we're talking about the phasing out of traditional industries, in my region we had the accelerated coal phase-out. Government had a just transition where they put money for it. You might not be familiar, but the Auditor General came out yesterday and said that the government absolutely failed to provide a just transition for coal workers who were put out of work due to the government's policies.

If they phase out these industries, cost people these jobs and all the impacts of that, and they fail to provide some sort of pathway for these people to become economically successful again, do you think this could contribute to some radicalization?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: I'm not sure it necessarily contributes to radicalization, but it certainly contributes to people holding, in some cases, more nationalistic views for economic protectionism. That is what the electoral data in continental Europe around such groups suggests. If we want to avoid a swing to the right amongst certain electoral groups, we're certainly well served by equitable economic policies under the circumstances that you described.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Sarai, welcome to the committee. It's always good to see you, and we're happy to see you around the table with us this morning.

You have a six-minute block of questioning whenever you're ready.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Chair. It's always a pleasure to be on. It's my first time under your chairmanship, so it's a delight.

This is a topic that is very interesting to me. I take it as very similar to what I've seen with South Asian gang violence in Vancouver, where there's prevention, intervention and then there's enforcement.

Dr. Leuprecht said very clearly, I think, on the enforcement side, it seems like our government is doing a decent job, especially CSIS, CSE and the RCMP, in making sure that it doesn't reach levels of violence. What concerns me is that even a small group can end up influencing a lot, and the differences happening are through algorithms.

My question is to Dr. Celestini from SFU. Welcome, from my neck of the woods.

How do you regulate algorithms by social media to prevent them from contributing to ideologically motivated violent extremism movements? What we're seeing is that people punch in once—they may have a question—and then they get bombarded with that theory or those extreme ideologies over and over again.

They may have initially just wondered if it was true, but then they get so much information that they start believing that it is true. I'm more concerned about that level of people who get influenced by it as opposed to those who are already hardened and extreme.

Is Dr. Celestini still on?

The Chair: I think we have a technical problem.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Maybe I'll go to Ms. Inkpen, based on her knowledge of the computer science background on it.

Dr. Diana Inkpen: You mean if somebody's searching for something, they will get more of the same? There is an algorithm that computes similarity between their search and the next one. This is usually useful because you are looking for information on *XY*, and you get that. They also use it for advertising to try to match the content with what you care about so that they don't give you totally irrelevant advertising.

You're right. If you look for some bad things, it could give you more bad things. It's hard to control. You could have some sort of measure of negativity, I guess.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: In the old days you would go to your librarian and ask them for help, and the librarian gives you all the books in a range on that topic: the good, the bad and the ugly. As you say, an algorithm is designed to make sure you stay engaged, and for longer.

We've seen, with what Facebook has stated in the U.S. when they appeared before Congress—or a former member—that even though they know it's causing harm, they want to keep you engaged longer so that they can pump out more ads to you, but they're not giving you a balanced perspective. They're not giving you, "This is the

conspiracy. This is what one view is. This is the other." They're not giving you everything on the topic. They're only giving you what's keeping you there longer.

Do you not think that needs to be revised and that some sorts of measures need to be in place?

● (1310)

Dr. Diana Inkpen: Facebook and others have their way of monitoring, but it doesn't work that well.

There could be a measure of diversity in retrieved results. Recommender systems could give you several things that are of interest, but they could ensure diversity. They could give you more perspectives and more different things, even if they're less related but have higher diversity, and not rank them very low. They can make this recommender in their systems have more diversity to not give you only one kind of thing, even if you are only interested in that. That might even increase engagement, because the user could find something else they didn't know they might find interesting.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Are you saying that this could be helpful but it could be harmful, too, or are you saying that it would be wiser to have that as opposed to just getting bombarded with the same content over and over?

Dr. Diana Inkpen: I'm just saying that they could design the systems better to retrieve similar things but with a wider perspective—a similarity in content, allowing things that are not fully similar but related, and having different points of view. There could be some way of determining points of view automatically and presenting them to the user.

But this is for research. The tools to do that are not readily available.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Thank you, Dr. Inkpen.

Dr. Leuprecht, you've seen and monitored in Europe and France and other places the rising extremism that happens. Can some of it be attributed to the algorithms and the way in which social media pushes out information to you, based on a search, to keep you engaged—not to give you all perspectives, but rather to keep you engaged so that they can pump out more ads and make more money?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: We can test that hypothesis. The *gilets jaunes* movement in France was directly driven by Facebook changing its algorithm after complaints that not enough voice was given to local views and local media. Facebook sort of cautioned about "be careful what you wish for", and what we got was an overemphasis of local views, which then drove some of the local grievances and what people ended up seeing.

All of that is to say that you're absolutely correct. The algorithm that you have can have very real political consequences for the stability of our societies.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Have you seen any countries or areas—

The Chair: You have only five seconds.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: —that have done good measures to control this or to regulate this social media space?

The Chair: Perhaps we'll get a written answer—

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: Germany has legislation that requires a significant amount of material to be removed proactively by social media companies.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I'll turn the floor over to Ms. Larouche for six minutes.

Whenever you're ready, please proceed.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: I would also like to thank the three witnesses for their very interesting comments.

My first question is for Mr. Leuprecht.

Mr. Leuprecht, following the "freedom convoy" demonstrations in Ottawa, did the authorities misunderstand the power of dissenting ideologies, and the ability of the protesters to organize themselves and work towards their goals?

Do you believe we were given an accurate picture of the import of these groups on Canadian society?

How important is it to have a better idea of the circumstances surrounding these movements to be able to prevent more violent demonstrations and a rise in extremism?

Do you feel that it's important to commit to memory the convoy and what happened during the demonstrations in Ottawa?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: That, hon. member, is an excellent question.

I believe that the testimony given by the CSIS director to some extent corroborated the fact that for 20 years, the focus has been entirely on aspects of terrorism, violence and religious extremism. We lost sight of the fact that there is a wide range of extremist ideologies that are a challenge to our society.

I believe that CSIS indicated that the focus on different groups has been recalibrated. In our national security apparatus, we underestimated the extremist ideology that was on the rise in Canada alongside violent religious extremism.

● (1315)

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: I'm trying to find concrete solutions to prepare for demonstrations of this kind. In your opening address, you also spoke of money laundering.

Can you briefly tell us a little more about this? To what extent does it provide such groups with the resources they need?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: The situation in Ottawa showed that our national security structure and apparatus are simply not aligned with the threats we are facing in the 21st century, ˣnot only in terms of issues surrounding extremist ideology, but also in terms of money laundering and other factors.

We need a more significant reform and critical overview of our national security apparatus. Rather than setting up a royal commission to conduct a broad investigation into what happened in Ot-

tawa, controversial discussions are being avoided. There does not appear to be any interest in reforming our system, even though what happened in Ottawa was one of the most serious challenges faced by our national security system in recent decades .

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: All right. Thank you very much, Mr. Leuprecht.

My next question is for Ms. Inkpen.

In connection with your comments about learning from what happened during the "freedom" trucker convoy events, you said that it would be essential to be more alert to obtain a better overview of the situation and to prevent future incidents. You mentioned monitoring accounts and possibly sending out warnings.

Can you tell us a little more about what might have been done and what we have learned in order to do a better job of preventing other similar events?

Dr. Diana Inkpen: We could separate out messages that could be described as extremist from other messages, while measuring the intensity of the emotions that appear to be contained in them. If certain messages appeared to be too extreme, they could be checked manually. Because a single person couldn't possibly read them all, it could be helpful to focus only on the most problematic of the messages.

Thank you.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: So having a better picture of who is writing the messages and of the type of radicalization could be helpful to us.

I want to return to an issue that was mentioned earlier about algorithms and social networks. I'd like to talk about something that was in the news recently, about the purchase of Twitter by Mr. Musk, who suggested making the Twitter algorithm public.

How, in your opinion, would having the Twitter algorithm in open source code affect the spread of hate content?

Is this something that you have investigated? Have you had an opportunity to look into it?

Dr. Diana Inkpen: I'll answer in English.

[*English*]

Open source is a good idea. It depends on what kind of algorithm. It's important to know what the algorithm is. If it's a machine-learning algorithm, it has training data. Training data won't be made open source, because it's huge and it's complicated.

It's a good idea to have it open source, but more than that, you need to have some idea of what the algorithms are doing to explain the decisions. You need to have more emphasis on explainable algorithms, not only how they work and what they are but also what is learned. The model itself could be inspected. Of course, only specialists would be able to understand it, but still, you need to be as transparent as possible about the kinds of algorithms used.

It's a tough question, open source. Companies don't always like that, because they want to make money off of those algorithms. There's a balance here.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacGregor, I will turn to you for the last block of questions for this panel.

Whenever you're ready, sir, the floor is yours.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Dr. Celestini, I'd like to start with you. Thank you for your testimony on conspiracy theories and all of your research on that. I can very much relate. I think every member of Parliament can.

To give you an example, in previous years I've tried to confront the conspiracy theory of chemtrails. You try your best to provide factual information to people who bring up these conspiracy theories. The problem is that we know that emotionally provocative content that reinforces what someone already believes almost always seems to win out against factual information. I was trying my best to provide all of the facts, even with links to scientific papers on what causes contrails and why they exist in certain atmospheric conditions, but that just would not convince people.

Do you have any thoughts on that? How do we get back to a place in Canada where factual information can have a hope of going over and winning when it's against emotionally provocative content? Do you have any thoughts on that and on what strategies might be able to work?

● (1320)

The Chair: Clerk, we were having technical difficulties before. Are we still?

Dr. Celestini is definitely frozen.

What other witnesses want to take a crack at that?

Go ahead, Mr. MacGregor.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: If she comes back on, maybe the clerk can give me a signal.

Dr. Inkpen, I'll go to you. It's sort of related to the same subject. When COVID-19 first appeared back in March 2020 and everything was starting to go into lockdown, that's when we started to see a lot misinformation spread about vaccines and what was happening. I did notice that large social media companies like Facebook and Twitter, whenever there was a subject or a posting on COVID-19, would put a disclaimer that would link you to the Public Health Agency of Canada. People weren't necessarily seeing a post censored, but they were also seeing a link to where you could go to get verifiable, factual and scientific-backed information.

Do you think it's possible for social media companies to do something similar when we're talking about ideologically motivated extremism? When it comes to anti-government conspiracy theory stuff, should social media companies be using the same thing? Is that quite easy for them to do?

Dr. Diana Inkpen: It's a good question.

I do think social media have research groups that can develop such tools, and they could have this warning. I think it's okay to show messages and warn people to pay attention.

It could be flagged with a certain degree of confidence, and maybe another thing they could add is whether people agree or not: "Thumbs-up or thumbs-down. Do you agree with this?" Maybe having people's opinions: "This seems like fake or disinformation." People agree or not. Maybe have users label that. Some of them might not be saying the truth, but still the number of users who vote that this is correct or not....

There are ways. It is difficult, but there are ways. I think they could do more.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you for that.

Dr. Leuprecht, I'll turn to you for my next question.

I appreciate your imploring our community to differentiate between ideologically motivated violent extremism and extremist violence.

We had testimony from the Ottawa Police Service. Before our committee, Interim Chief Bell said that there were documented hate crimes and there were many examples where residents of Ottawa, whether they were workers or owners of small businesses, were subjected to a lot of abuse. Of course, violence is a subjective term. What one person may not find violent, another person most definitely will.

You've been quite scathing in how all levels of government failed in their response to the illegal occupation of Ottawa, and I believe you called for a royal commission.

Could you maybe expand, related to the subject matter, on what we're dealing with? What would you like to see that royal commission cover in specific reference to what our subject matter before this committee is right now?

Dr. Christian Leuprecht: Mr. MacGregor, the fundamental failure in Ottawa during the illegal occupation was an absence of the rule of law in a democratic G7 country for the better part of three weeks. That is absolutely inexcusable. The state was absent. We were not able to enforce the legislation that we have on incitement, hate crimes, sedition, on whatever else you might want to include here. I think when we have that fundamental of a failure of the fundamental....

The first obligation of the modern state to its citizens is the safety and security of all citizens. When the state cannot provide for that, then we need to understand what happened. Police services acts have a clear measure of that: adequate and effective policing. Adequate and effective policing means meeting the needs, values and expectations of citizens.

Mr. MacGregor, you ask Canadians whether the policing that we saw in Ottawa, and the response by the state, was adequate and effective. If the answer to that by a majority of Canadians is no, then I think we have good grounds for a royal commission to understand what happened to make sure we never have a recurrence of that sort of situation.

● (1325)

The Chair: Thank you.

Colleagues, that takes us to the end of our allotted time. I want to thank the witnesses for their patience and for adjusting to the changing schedule of Parliament, and thank colleagues for doing the same thing.

It was a fascinating couple of hours. I'd like to thank everybody for their contributions.

I wish everybody a happy and pleasurable weekend. This meeting is adjourned.