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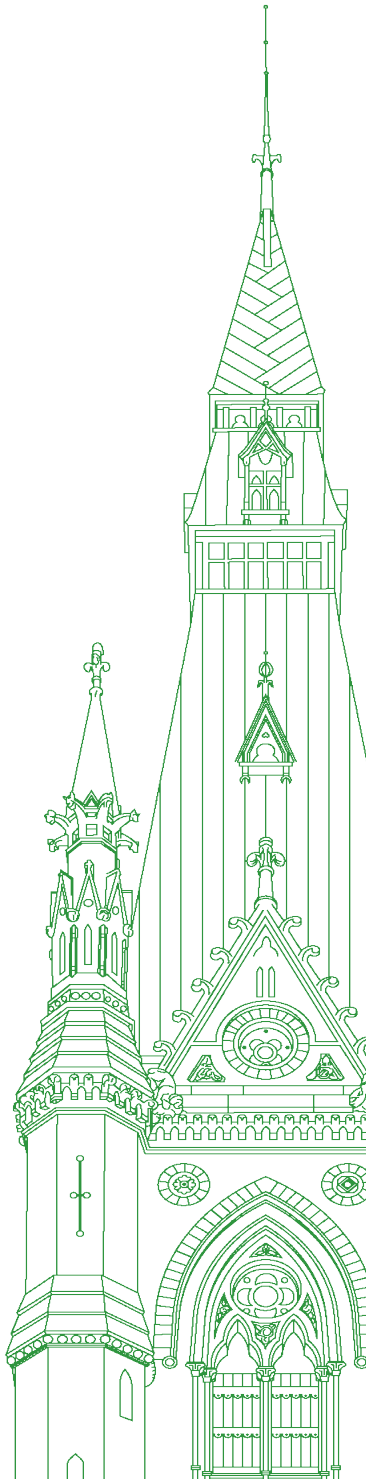

Chair: The Honourable Jim Carr

Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security

Thursday, March 31, 2022

● (1105)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Jim Carr (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.)): Good morning, everyone. I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 16 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. 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. Per the directive of the Board of Internal Economy on March 10, 2022, all those attending the meeting in person must wear a mask, except for members who are at their place during proceedings.

Members and witnesses participating virtually may speak in the official language of their choice. You have the choice at the bottom of your screen of the floor, English or French. With regard to a speaking list, the committee clerk will advise the chair on whose hands are up to the best of his ability, and we will do the best that we can to maintain a consolidated order of speaking for all members, whether they are participating virtually or in person.

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 we have, as an individual, Aurélie Campana, full professor; Mubin Shaikh, counter extremism specialist; and from Insight Threat Intelligence, Jessica Davis, president and principal consultant.

We allow up to five minutes for each of our witnesses to proceed with opening remarks and then rounds of questions. Given the technologies at the moment, I'm going to start with Mr. Shaikh.

You have five minutes for an opening comment, sir. The floor is yours. Please proceed.

Mr. Mubin Shaikh (Counter Extremism Specialist, As an Individual): Thank you. Good afternoon, honourable Chair and members of the committee. It is in gratitude and service that I respectfully accepted the invite to appear before you today.

My name is Mubin Shaikh. I'm a former undercover human source for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and later with RCMP INSET, responsible for the Toronto 18 terrorism case of 2006. I had worked several other investigations prior to that, which cannot be made public, but today I conduct direct interventions with radicalized individuals from across the ideological spectrum under the U.S.-based organization Parents For Peace, and I'm currently a professor of public safety at Seneca College in Toronto.

Just to go off-script for a moment, in an incredible moment of coincidence or kismet, fellow members of Parents For Peace are currently, right now as we speak, giving testimony in the U.S. House Committee on Veterans' Affairs to discuss the topic of radicalization in the military, so I submit that today's discussion is very timely.

Back to my script: I have had the unique experience of having viewed threats to Canadian public safety and national security from direct participation in covert activities, and also from four years of public prosecution of such offences in our courts between 2006 and 2010 inclusive. Afterwards, between 2014 and 2018, we went through the *khawarij* of the ISIS crisis. We saw social media platforms become force multipliers for violent actors, and conversations around preventing and countering radicalization, extremism and terrorism grew into important areas of study and practice for good reason.

Today I appear before you to address the issue of IMVE, or ideologically motivated violent extremism, and what can be done about it.

I submit to you that we have come somewhat full circle in Canada regarding a threat that some may erroneously take to be “new”, which it is most certainly not. The Canadian Security Intelligence Service, only five years after its formation, was already working to infiltrate the neo-Nazi group called the Heritage Front, established in 1989. Using tried, tested and true TTPs—tactics, techniques and procedures—CSIS was able to foil the ability of the front to become what it had envisioned for itself, and the organization ultimately collapsed.

It is thus unsurprising to me today that security agencies have once again turned their sights onto such organizations and associations, loosely knit or otherwise, while also keeping a watchful eye on the usual suspects, state-based or not. One of the biggest lessons learned from this is not just how much is being supported and agitated by outside actors, but worse, how much is being generated organically right here at home with Canadians highly active in online hate networks.

I have read the submission of various representatives of Canadian security agencies on how they see the threat and their response to it. I am more than confident that they are up to the task and support fully strengthening their staffing and operational ability to do what works in this context. I respectfully submit that it is for government agencies and departments to do their part in conducting covert investigations and public prosecutions and for civil society to do its part as well.

The latter will require educational institutions and places of employment, places of businesses and others to invest the energy to try to prevent trajectories of violent extremism where possible. When it comes to ideas, however, no amount of government legislation or criminal designation is going to suffice. It is here that we will require a collective effort by professionals and practitioners in all areas to bring to bear their concern and attention in pushing back against absolutist, superficial, supremacist thinking as unwelcome, unsustainable, and, frankly, impractical for life in this cosmopolitan future we live in here in Canada and the world at large.

I thank the honourable Chair and members of the committee for allowing me this time, and my co-panellists as well, and I look forward to any questions, concerns and/or comments you may have. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would now like to call on Aurélie Campana, full professor, for five minutes of opening remarks.

The floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Aurélie Campana (Full Professor, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, members of the committee, I want to sincerely thank you for inviting me to appear before you. My name is Aurélie Campana. I am a political science professor at Université Laval, and for the past 20 years, my research focus has been violent extremism. First, I studied jihadism, specifically in Russia and the Sahel, and then, I examined Canada's network of far-right small groups. My field investigation, which I conducted with two colleagues, Samuel Tanner from the Université de Montréal and Stéphane Leman-Langlois from Université Laval, began when Canada's far right hadn't really attracted much publicity. We were able to follow how the movement evolved as groups gained more and more public exposure.

I would like to share some of our findings from our scientific research in relation to two overlapping factors: the international dimension and the role of social media. Before I do that, though, I want to make two points.

First, it's important to distinguish between two trends in what is commonly referred to as Canada's far right: one, the groups and individuals that belong to the radical right; and two, the groups and individuals that make up the far right.

The radical right seeks the extensive reform of the government and society rooted in political ideologies. Highly heterogeneous, the groups and individuals that make up the radical right tend to adhere to the rules of the political process, motivated by a desire to change them from the inside. Most of them defend democracy as an organizing principle but reject liberal democracy and its values, including pluralism and egalitarianism.

Extremist parties reject the democratic system, clearly challenging its legitimacy and that of the government. They call for the, sometimes violent, overthrow of existing institutions. These fringe groups occupy the public space in ways that can be unscrupulous.

My understanding is that the committee is mainly interested in extremist groups and individuals. Those I would categorize as radical are nevertheless worthy of attention, because they help normalize Islamophobic, anti-establishment or other such views, while providing an indirect vehicle for recruitment.

Second, the far-right ecosystem has fluid boundaries. The movement is made up of groups, academics, alternative media of varying sizes, as well as individuals who in some cases emerge as influencers. I refer to the boundaries as fluid because the groups and individuals in the movement can expand their discursive repertoire by absorbing fringe movements whose theories align with their own ideological motives—masculinism in the case of the incel community.

Issues that may have been prominent at one point can become less important periodically or permanently. In the 2010s, numerous groups and individuals in the radical right and far right emerged around identity issues. Although the racist, Islamophobic and anti-Semitic views they promote have far from disappeared, they have taken a backseat to anti-public health measure discourse and, especially, anti-elite and anti-establishment messages.

Both radical right and far-right groups and individuals have joined networks with international reach. Social media has led to a convergence of discourse and views, one that does not necessarily require formal contact but that is shared through certain ideological references. Although the current discourses of Canada's radical right and far right take diverse forms, they converge around four central themes found in the U.S., French and British movements and expressed in very similar language at times. Those four themes are nativism, victimization of the “silent white majority”, white supremacy and conspiracy theories.

A convergence like this can have a significant impact. One or more transnational belief communities tend to emerge, leading to more formal connections and helping individuals, expertise, discourse, theories and money to circulate. Social media are the arena in which much of the movement's transnational dimension takes shape.

Digital platforms make it easier for supporters to coordinate, organize, recruit and fund-raise, not just share theories. Basically, digital platforms make it easier for organizational convergence and political activism to take place. Canadian society is nowhere near as polarized as American society. However, the groups and individuals who belong to Canada's radical right and far right help accentuate certain divides and perpetuate a growing distrust of elites.

● (1110)

In these uncertain times, our trust mechanisms have been seriously shaken, and digital platforms are becoming tools of mass disruption, skilfully manipulated by more or less visible groups, polarizing political figures and some governments.

[*English*]

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

● (1115)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Aurélie Campana: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would now like to ask Jessica Davis, president and principal consultant of the Insight Threat Intelligence group for a five-minute introduction.

Please, the floor is yours.

Ms. Jessica Davis (President and Principal Consultant, Insight Threat Intelligence): Thank you very much for the opportunity to be here today. I'm glad the committee is undertaking this important study.

I'd like to take a few minutes to outline how I see the IMVE threat in Canada, with a focus on the financial component.

Terrorist and extremist financing use similar methods and mechanisms across ideologies.

The Chair: I'm sorry. On a point of order, there's no interpretation.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Davis, you can continue.

[*English*]

Ms. Jessica Davis: Thank you.

Over the last 20 years, we've seen a shift away from large-scale financing in the west for terrorist activity. Instead, attacks are primarily self-financed and for very small sums of money. Despite these small sums, money remains a key enabler of terrorist activity. Efforts to constrain terrorist and extremist access to funds constrain their capabilities.

We see evidence of this in the adoption of low-complexity, lone-actor attacks, from the October 2014 attacks to the Quebec mosque attack and to the more recent incel-motivated van and stabbing attacks that took place in Toronto. All of these were self-financed attacks that involved no international transfer of funds and likely raised little in the way of suspicion with banks and other financial institutions charged with efforts to detect terrorist financing. However, they all required some financial resources, small though they might have been.

The one aspect of financing that is different in the IMVE space from other forms of terrorism and extremism is the issue of propaganda. IMVE actors produce propaganda, including in Canada, that serves to recruit people into their movements. Propaganda also inspires lone actors and creates a sense of community for those who would go on to commit ideologically inspired attacks.

The propaganda produced by these actors has an important financial component. Extremist influencers can generate significant revenue from this activity. This is important because many of them, particularly those who are successful at generating audiences and particularly hateful propaganda, are often financially excluded from society. They tend to lose their jobs when their views become public knowledge. That propaganda production sustains them economically.

At the moment, we have few tools at our disposal to prevent people from profiting from hate. Deplatforming, whether it's from a social media platform or a financial tool, usually leads to the propagandist or influencer finding another platform.

Many financial service providers, including payment processors and financial technology companies, rarely restrict the use of their services for hateful content. Most only take action when faced with significant public backlash—if at all. In some cases, Canadian companies appear to provide financial services to sites selling propaganda and goods for listed terrorist entities, like the Proud Boys.

Compounding this problem is the fact that we have no laws against extremist financing and few laws that can be used to prevent individuals from profiting from that hateful content. An influencer activity rarely rises to the level of terrorism as defined in our Criminal Code.

Between the self-financing of most IMVE attacks and the financing of IMVE propaganda, we have some challenges ahead of us. Our terrorist financing tools were adopted following 9/11 with an eye to combatting structured terrorist organizations involved in international financing, not lone actors drawing inspiration from extremist influencers.

That’s not to say that those tools are powerless. Financial intelligence, for example, remains an important tool for law enforcement and security services. We also need new tools, regulatory flexibility and investigative expertise to fully tackle the threat of ideologically motivated violent extremism. We’ll need to work with our partners in other countries and with the private sector to do that, since both the threat and its financing—as we saw recently with the convoy—are international in scope.

Thank you very much. I look forward to answering your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much. You won't have long to wait for that.

We'll go right into our first round of questions. It's a six-minute round and I'll start with Ms. Dancho.

The floor is yours, Madam.

Ms. Raquel Dancho (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for giving us their time today. I'm very much looking forward to hearing their expertise. I thank them for their hard work on this important issue.

I'd like to talk a little bit about the demographics we're seeing in some of the extremist movements. Often on the news it seems to me to be mostly young men. I rarely seem to see women.

I would like to have your comments on why that might be. Is my assessment accurate? Is it mostly young men or is that just sort of what we hear most about for whatever reason?

I would like to get individual feedback on that from each of our witnesses. Perhaps Ms. Davis can go first.

● (1120)

Ms. Jessica Davis: That's great. Thank you very much.

On the issue of gender distribution in ideologically motivated violent extremism, I would say that women's roles are under-represented in the media. We tend to see them less in reporting, but I would estimate that their participation is on par with that in other forms of terrorism and extremism, so somewhere in the 15% to 30% range.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Would the other two witnesses agree with that assessment? I'm seeing some nodding.

Madame Campana, okay. Thank you.

Okay, that's news. Is there any reason in particular that you think we don't hear more about that? Why is that not more common knowledge or portrayed in the media?

Ms. Jessica Davis: I think there are a couple of reasons. I think primarily it's because women do tend to take on a lot of the non-kinetic roles, so the things like attacks tend to be perpetrated more by men, although that is not exclusively the case. We see plenty of examples in many different contexts. Their roles in things like being financiers or in logistics do not tend to get the splashy media coverage.

I also think there is still some bias in media reporting and perhaps in law enforcement and security services with respect to seeing women as a threat.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Do you see a socio-economic influence in terms of background, perhaps in childhood, or otherwise? Is there anything demographically in the background of folks who are drawn to extremism or pulled in or whatever word we'd like to use? Are there any commonalities you are seeing?

I'll stay with you. Go ahead, and if others have something to add, they can.

Ms. Jessica Davis: That sounds good.

I would say that in all terrorism and extremism, there is a wide variety of demographic backgrounds, large variation in terms of socio-economic backgrounds. In the IMVE space, I think it is correct to point a little bit of this towards younger men, but that's not exclusive and I don't think that it's a good place from which to make policy or to direct investigation. We really need to be open to the wide variety of backgrounds we see in this space.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Thank you very much.

I think we're seeing quite a bit of extremism. I think Mr. Shaikh made the point that extremism in this form has been around for quite some time, but perhaps due to the advent of social media, we're becoming much more aware of it.

Would you say that's accurate, Mr. Shaikh?

Mr. Mubin Shaikh: Yes, I would definitely agree with that. Certainly, as I mentioned in my comments, social media has become a force multiplier for these extremist groups.

I remember back in the mid-1990s when the war in Chechnya had kicked off and there were the first real Wahhabi-Salafi jihadist manifestations there. Beheading videos were available on CDs. Then in the early 2000s those video clips were uploaded onto the just-emerging social media and Internet. Then there were password-protected chat forums, and then just open public forums. Certainly social media has given things a very different spin.

Very quickly on the last question on commonalities in backgrounds, really the two most common things are ideology and grievances. Ideology without grievances doesn't resonate, and grievances without ideology are not acted upon. Those do tend to be common elements when we talk about this space.

Thank you.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Can you elaborate a little bit on that?

Mr. Mubin Shaikh: You mean on the ideology and grievances?

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Yes, I mean on that last piece you mentioned.

Mr. Mubin Shaikh: I'm going to cite quote from Peter Neumann. He is the former director for the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation. He said that "without grievance, ideology does not resonate"—it doesn't appeal to the mind; it doesn't make sense—"while without ideology, grievances are not acted upon" because here ideology means action-enabling ideas.

One can look at both of those somewhat equally or at least not favouring one over the other. There's a limit to ideology sometimes. For example, when we hear about jihadist groups in the Middle East, if the U.S. were to suddenly pack up and leave, I don't believe, especially for those who believe the U.S. military occupation is a grievance in this regard, that the jihadists would suddenly start playing nicely with everybody, so there's a limit to the grievances.

When it comes to the ideology, again, sometimes ideology is a driver of violent extremism, but at other times, it's just a passenger with other psychosocial factors at the wheel.

It's important for us to look at the multiplicity of factors and not to just try to do that one-size-fits-all attribution.

● (1125)

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I appreciate that. I think it was mentioned, I'm not sure by which witness, that we're seeing in Canada sometimes lone actors who are driven perhaps by the influence of social media. You mentioned jihadis in the Middle East.

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Are they lone actors? Would you distinguish them as lone actors in the Middle East, or is that more of a....? I'm not even sure how to describe it.

The Chair: Could you answer, please?

Mr. Mubin Shaikh: The whole point on lone actors is somewhat tricky, because even the lone wolf is born in a den. You can have inspired actors, but then you can also have people who are directed attackers, where an organization specifically funds and directs an individual to commit acts.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We now move to Mr. Chiang, who has six minutes in this round.

Sir, the floor is yours.

Mr. Paul Chiang (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair; and thank you to all the witnesses who are participating today for giving their time to this valuable committee.

My question is directed to Mr. Shaikh. It is clear from your opening statement that you have a very high level of experience combatting extremism in Canada. From your perspective, how have the threats of extremism in Canada changed and evolved over the years you have been working in this field?

Mr. Mubin Shaikh: Thank you, sir.

The main change [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] social media that has really amplified the messaging of threat actors, as well as given them the opportunity to recruit out in the open in many cases. I understand there's a whole other topic on what to do with "big tech" and holding them responsible, really, when it comes to allowing them to use their platforms in the way they've been used. Really, the media space is the biggest change.

Because of COVID, of course, and unforeseen circumstances such as COVID, it has thrown us into a situation where we almost don't know where the threat is going to come from tomorrow. Also, you have individuals who are basically picking and choosing from the salad bar of extremist ideologies.

Some of them may be far right, but they may also have anti-vaxxer views and all far-right members have anti-Semitic views. You have Islamophobic views. Very often you have people who are just picking and choosing and ultimately are just upset at whatever is happening in the world or just frustrated. Of course, COVID exacerbated and made that even worse.

These are some of the things that have made things different for us today from yesterday.

Mr. Paul Chiang: Thank you, Mr. Shaikh, for your answer.

Our time is very valuable and short here, so I'm going to share my time with Mr. Noormohamed.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chiang, and thanks to all the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Shaikh, it's good to see you again, as always.

Can you perhaps elaborate a bit on one of the things you talked about in your opening statement? In particular, in your view, having seen the space of ideologically motivated violent extremism as you have, what would you say is the number one threat or set of groups that Canadians should be concerned about when we think about IMVE in today's context?

Mr. Mubin Shaikh: Sure. In Canada, we have a number of groups that pose a risk to us, and I don't mean the groups that were designated on the terrorist watch-list: Proud Boys, for example. Proud Boys Canada were not really involved in violent acts, but it's th other groups that we might not be aware of as well as we should be.

Some years ago, I think it was VICE News that did a piece on an anti-Muslim militia out in Alberta. They were openly posing with firearms. They made very clear their statements of hating Muslims and being ready to take up arms against what they saw as the invasion of Muslims in Canada.

There were a lot of questions at the time on why these people weren't being arrested, and I'm pretty sure that there are active investigations ongoing in that regard. However, these are the kinds of groups that worry me and are real threats to public safety.

More recently we saw the emergence of supposedly a group that started out as a joke, Diagolon. It's made up of former members of the Canadian Forces, individuals with real combat training, with real capabilities and who have grown increasingly radicalized, especially because of COVID. These are people with weapons. There is an alleged connection between this group and the group that was arrested at the Coutts border crossing, who were ready to engage police in a firefight, in a shootout.

These are the kinds of groups that I consider to be a real and significant threat to Canadian public safety at large.

● (1130)

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you, Mr. Shaikh.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Campana, I'll ask you the same question. Which groups should we be most concerned about?

Ms. Aurélie Campana: I completely agree with my colleague Mubin Shaikh.

The most visible groups aren't necessarily the ones we should worry about most. The most concerning ones are the semi-clandestine and fully clandestine groups whose methods and messages are largely borrowed from groups in the United States.

As a researcher, I can't necessarily name the groups, because I haven't met with them; the ethical considerations were much too significant. However, these groups are active on social media, and in other forums, and are known to be organizing in a number of provinces.

[*English*]

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you.

With the last 30 seconds, I'll go to Ms. Davis. You talked about influencers and the fact that people are now profiting from hate and creating this type of ideologically motivated, pretty awful stuff. How do we stop it? How do we stop that funding?

The Chair: You have 10 seconds.

Ms. Jessica Davis: It's a really difficult question and one that I think needs a public-private partnership. That means talking to the tech companies and the financial service companies, and also rethinking how we think about extremism in this country.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I will now turn to Ms. Larouche. Welcome to our committee. You're very welcome to be a part of this discussion. The floor is now yours for the next six minutes. Take it away.

[*Translation*]

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

I listened carefully to what the witnesses had to say during the first round about the important issue of violent extremism.

My first question is for Ms. Campana.

You mentioned your work on conspiracy theory groups in Quebec and their online messaging at the beginning of the pandemic. You worked with Professor Tanner on that research. It's clear that you are well versed in these types of movements.

What can you tell us about the unity between the groups that have emerged or reappeared since the pandemic began?

We all hope that the pandemic will end soon or, at least, that we will come out of this public health emergency. Do you think most of these groups will end up disbanding or disappearing? What is likely to happen afterwards, when the number of cases decreases or the pandemic is over?

Ms. Aurélie Campana: I don't think the groups are going to disappear. They may restructure and convert to something else.

I say convert because some of the individuals and groups who were against the public health measures have now become international relations experts endeavouring to explain the war between Ukraine and Russia. We are seeing some opportunism.

You mentioned the unity between these groups at the beginning of the pandemic. What we've seen is not necessarily unity, per se, but rather a convergence, which can be very time-specific, around a particular assessment of the situation. What is COVID-19? Is it as deadly as governments would have us believe? Do the measures in place reflect the identified risks? What do the measures mean? A wide range of responses and views have been shared, going from the most outrageous conspiracy theories to more [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] theories. Finding the thread that unites these groups and individuals is very difficult.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: What have you learned from your research about the social, family and individual factors behind the emergence of extremist groups in Canada?

The other witnesses talked a bit about this, but I'd like to hear what you have to say. What are the root causes of the emergence of these groups in Canada? What are your theories on that? What has your research shown?

● (1135)

Ms. Aurélie Campana: It's not easy to answer that question, because there isn't a single answer.

As my colleagues said earlier, far-right groups encompass a variety of sociodemographic profiles.

I've also done research on jihadist movements, and I can say most of their members are young men. Although there are some women, they tend to be in the background; they take care of logistics and communications. In other words, they have a supporting role.

When it comes to far-right groups, however, the profiles are a bit different. The groups are made up of older men and some women, who are taking on more visible roles although they account for a small proportion of group membership.

Oftentimes, upbringing is behind people's participation in these groups. Their parents may have had anti-establishment or racist views, and the children naturally tend towards those same views. Conversely, teenagers may try to move away from prevailing perceptions in society by joining fringe groups and sometimes skinhead groups. Little by little, they take on extremist beliefs that lead them towards violence. Others succumb to certain theories, within the confines of what we call echo chambers. That's where the responsibility of the web giants comes in. The technology behind social media makes it easy for beliefs to take hold, be reinforced and grow stronger.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: It's fascinating to hear what you have to say. I know the committee has examined this type of extremism in the past. As the critic for the status of women, I am especially interested in the role of women in these movements, and you talked a bit about that.

In your opening statement, you mentioned four central themes, including nativism and white supremacy. Could you tell us more about the role of women in these groups? Could you also comment on the themes you touched on in your opening statement?

Ms. Aurélie Campana: In our field research, we interviewed approximately 50 people who had been involved in far-right groups and, in some cases, who had left. We found that women were involved, but they always refused to speak with us for fear of being recognized.

Nevertheless, they are present in these groups, in a family support role vis-à-vis a spouse, husband, brother or father who has a much more active role. In some groups, women serve as the ideologues. You don't see them in forefront, but they are there. We began our research in 2013, and between then and now, what we've observed is that women are increasingly coming out into the public arena; although their views may appear to have a more moderate thrust, they actually help to promote certain messages.

Now I'll talk about the four themes. White supremacy refers to the preference given to white men and women. Nativism is a national phenomenon whereby a certain number of social and employment opportunities are granted.

A wide variety of conspiracy theories are also going around. The QAnon ideology has heavily permeated far-right groups over the past two or three years.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: In your view, then, these are the themes that distinguish these groups and influence their social media choices right now. You also brought up fundraising and the taking up of arms, so these groups' activities go much further.

Ms. Aurélie Campana: Yes, absolutely.

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry there is only 10 seconds left for this answer, please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Aurélie Campana: The themes are quite malleable. The various groups wield them to their advantage but definitely use social media for recruitment and fundraising.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacGregor, the last slot of the opening round is yours. You have six minutes, sir.

Take it away.

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

Mr. Shaikh, I would like to start with you and continue on the remarks that you've made about grievances amongst individuals and some of these groups. In your opening statement you did say in the final paragraph that no amount of government legislation or criminal designation is going to suffice.

In your view if we are going to effectively tackle these grievances what kinds of recommendations would you like to see this committee make to the federal government that are outside the area of legislation or criminal designation? In what ways can the federal government effectively partner to tackle those grievances?

● (1140)

Mr. Mubin Shaikh: Thank you, sir.

I think the Canadian government has been doing a relatively good job on this front, especially with the Canada centre For Community Engagement, through which a lot of engagement with communities and social service organizations is being done. We in Canada actually avoided a major pitfall of some other projects along these lines in other countries where there were top-down, government-driven, prescriptive approaches to countering extremism and to dealing with these grievances. We instead went with a more collaborative approach. The Canadian government understood who were the social service organizations—activist groups included—that were doing the work on the ground with at-risk communities. It really generated organically an ability for these participants, whether in pre-existing social service agencies and organizations or, I'll call them, “community groups” or “activist groups” to actually begin to work together and off-load some of the challenges when it came to very young people, like children, young teenagers—even adults—to be able to deal with those grievances on a one-on-one basis.

Really, the recommendation I would just [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] for the government in general is just to keep working together with organizations that are already there on the ground doing this work and that have been doing this work for some time. We don't need to reinvent the wheel; we just need to get on the bike and ride.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: You mentioned that your organization, Parents for Peace, is testifying right now before the United States Congress on the subject of radicalization within, I think, the United States' armed forces.

We've had examples here in Canada, not only withing our military, but with our police. It's been revealed that some members of various Canadian police forces were donating to the illegal occupation of Ottawa, despite their role in society to serve and protect the communities in which they live.

In your view, how concerned should we currently be about radicalization in our military and police forces? What effective measures can we take to counter that radicalization?

Mr. Mubin Shaikh: That's an excellent question. Thank you for asking that.

I have my phone here on the side, watching the House of Representatives committee testimony happening at the same time.

It is definitely a real concern, especially when it comes to military members who have specialist information and capabilities. PTSD or other issues that develop as a result of their service could—for the very small number who could go on to become violent actors—make them very effective at what they're doing.

You will see as well.... Again, I don't want to say that I don't believe it is as pervasive a threat in the military, but you can see from the individuals whom we've been seeing speaking up from the military, very few of them actually come from the regular forces; most of them come from the reserve forces. I don't know if there's a cultural issue with that, but, again, I want to say that it is a real threat.

As for what we can do about it, there need to be internal discipline mechanisms not only for the Canadian forces to use, but also for police services to be using. I've been reading different articles that have been coming out in the media about police officers who were making video statements in support of the so-called convoy and have rightfully been reprimanded professionally because of their participation. We should strengthen the ability of police and military managers and supervisors to implement a disciplinary system in which they can hold individuals accountable.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Very quickly to Ms. Davis, you've talked about some of the gaps that we have in countering the financial aspect of this.

I'd like to hear your views on social media algorithms and how social media companies can sometimes monetize the hate on their platforms through advertising. They know that extremist content drives up viewership, which allows advertisers to reach more audiences.

Do you have any thoughts on the monetization of hate on social media platforms?

Ms. Jessica Davis: That's an excellent point.

It's not just the propagandists who are profiting from this; it's really the companies. We need to create some disincentives for them to not be able to make the kind of money that they're making from hateful and extremist content.

It's not a simple solution, but I think that this is where the conversation needs to go.

● (1145)

The Chair: Thank you very much. We owe you five seconds, Mr. MacGregor.

Let's move now to the second round of questioning. We'll start with Mr. Lloyd, who has five minutes. Sir, the floor is yours.

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

Thank you to the witnesses for coming today. We're seeing a definite theme in the testimony that extremism is on the rise—and this is not an exhaustive list—by way of anti-Semitic, Islamophobic and some anti-establishment rhetoric.

However, what I haven't heard about is two cases that are also concerning to me. The first is a rise in environmental extremism. One case in point is the recent attack at the Coastal GasLink site, where extensive damage was done to property and traumatizing workers on that site.

The other case was in my own community. It was one of many communities last summer that endured attacks against places of worship, including the iconic St. Jean Baptiste church in Morinville, which was burned to the ground shortly after Canada Day.

I'm wondering if you could comment, Ms. Davis, on these extremists trends and what are you seeing in relation to them.

Ms. Jessica Davis: The Coastal GasLink example, in particular, is troubling, mostly because it rose to quite a bit of property destruction and, potentially, some injuries to individuals involved.

One of the issues that we face in Canada writ large across the terrorist and extremist landscape is a lack of application of our laws evenly across the ideological spectrum. This in the IMVE space has led to a certain sense of impunity for some of those actors.

In terms of a resolution to this issue, we need to encourage resources, particularly investigative resources, to apply our laws across that political spectrum.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you.

You raise a really important point about a sense of impunity. Can you elaborate on that?

In the Coastal GasLink example and the church burning example, a lot of the suspects or the perpetrators still haven't been caught or tried. I did some research and a couple of perpetrators have been placed under house arrest. Their charges and trials are ongoing.

Can you elaborate on the idea of the sense of impunity that you raised?

Ms. Jessica Davis: To a certain extent this relates to Mr. MacGregor's question about police officers, particularly, who were donating to the convoy.

In the IMVE space, there's been a real sense that a lot of these actors can get away with it, particularly because there is, to a certain extent, some radicalization in police and the military. It creates a sense that they're not going to face any consequences. I think this is true for those police officers who donated to the convoy. It might be true in some other aspects of political violence in Canada.

We've been very focused on the jihadist threat for a very long time. I think we're starting to see some broadening out amongst our law enforcement security services to address other types of threats, but I'm not sure we're where we need to be yet.

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I appreciate that.

Something that really struck me about your and Mr. Shaikh's testimony is that while we're not there yet, we seem as a country to have become very adept at disrupting organized groups. I think that's why we're seeing more of these sort of lone wolf attacks.

I'm not sure if, in the church-burning cases, this was an organized thing. I haven't seen any evidence to suggest that.

When we're seeing these lone wolf attacks, these people aren't just coming out of nowhere. They're being developed in an environment.

Can you comment on the political environment they're rising out of?

Thank you.

Ms. Jessica Davis: This relates very much to the way I see an IMVE threat in Canada and globally. I don't see it as focused on groups. I see it much more as loose movements and a set of ideologies. I think this actually applies across that political spectrum for IMVE actors depending on whatever it is they're attacking. We tend to not see those organizational structures.

This impacts our ability to investigate those actors. I prefer the term “lone actor” because “lone wolf” tends to glorify the actors themselves a little bit.

Without that structure it makes it more difficult to combat the threat. It's not impossible. There's been really important work done, particularly by CSIS, my former organization, on indicators and mobilization to violence, but it is an ongoing challenge.

● (1150)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll now move to Ms. Damoff, who will have a five-minute block.

The floor is yours.

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

My first question is for Mr. Shaikh.

You mentioned the Canada Centre and the good work they were doing. I know they do the good work they do on a shoestring budget.

I'm wondering if you think the federal government should be providing more funding to it.

Mr. Mubin Shaikh: Yes, absolutely.

Ms. Pam Damoff: Awesome. That was the response I thought I would get.

My second question is for Ms. Campana.

You mentioned algorithms in your opening remarks. We hear a lot from the social media companies about the proprietary nature of algorithms.

I wonder if you believe the federal government should have additional regulations so social media companies are more accountable and transparent when it comes to algorithms.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Aurélie Campana: Definitely.

The emergence of echo chambers has given rise to a problem: digital platforms overall make it easier for individuals to adhere to beliefs, even causes. In fact, platforms do more than just allow for a message to be shared; they dictate that the message be shared, using recommendation algorithms—which are purported to know what users like—to edit, select and customize the message.

You may have noticed that, when you shop online for a pair of shoes, when you open your browser a few hours or days later, Google shows you ads with different pairs of shoes. It's exactly the same thing for extremist ideologies. If you start visiting certain sites on Twitter, Facebook and other social media, going forward, you will always see similar beliefs promoted and that will help crystallize those beliefs.

Digital platforms contribute to something else: they fuel rumours that are sometimes, but not always, based on conspiracy theories. Those rumours are especially appealing to people who have certain questions, sometimes legitimate ones—in connection with the COVID-19 health measures, for instance. After repeated exposure to much more sophisticated conspiracy theories that are explained in simple, but understandable, terms, people can get drawn in by groups and individuals who are promoting extremist ideologies online.

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Damoff: I appreciate the explanation. You do feel that we should be bringing in further regulations of this, then?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Aurélie Campana: Yes, absolutely.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I see. Thank you.

[*English*]

Ms. Davis, thank you so much for being here today. The "CSIS Public Report 2020" talked about how the pandemic had exacerbated xenophobic and anti-authority narratives, many directly and indirectly impacting national security.

I'm wondering if you have seen the pandemic influencing how IMVE is funded?

Ms. Jessica Davis: That's an interesting one.

The broader trend of the pandemic pushing people more online has very likely increased the funding of those influencers. They're spending more time on line. People are spending more time donating money to different causes across the different political spectrums and for different ideas, so I think that's part of what's been happening and why we've seen so many influencers achieve such incredible amounts of wealth.

For the actual attacks by IMVE actors, a lot of that is the same, so they're still doing a lot of self-financing, low-level, low-cost attacks, and this is very likely in part because our counterterrorist financing policies have been somewhat effective at driving actors to those types of low-cost attacks.

Ms. Pam Damoff: I only have a minute left, Ms. Davis.

What changes should the government make when it comes to funding, whether it be crowdfunding or other issues? What kinds of changes should we be making to restrict funding for IMVE?

● (1155)

Ms. Jessica Davis: This gets into a tricky situation in terms of freedom of expression and allowing people to say what they will online. I think we might be on firmer ground if we look to restrict the ability of individuals to raise funds from hateful content, ensuring that financial technology companies, social media platforms, enforce their own terms of service and that they don't let people create these giant platforms where they're making hundreds of thousands of dollars by basically spreading hate.

The Chair: I'll have to do a little bit of surgical snipping in the next four turns. They will be surgical and only snips, which means that, Ms. Larouche, you have two minutes and the floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Campana, I don't have much time in this last round.

After the 2019 attacks in New Zealand, you said that, although people had already gained awareness of the threat posed by the far right, it became more evident. You also said something along these lines:

> These ideologies are penetrating the transnational arena in a very big way because of how quickly a number of conspiracy theories are being shared, not to mention graphic references with a neo-Nazi slant, on many websites that are very popular with the far right.

Three years later, would you say those ideas are spreading more quickly and finding a larger audience than before? If so, what can we do?

Ms. Aurélie Campana: Yes, I think those ideas are spreading more quickly. Other ideas have latched on to them, largely because of the public health emergency we are still living with.

What can we do? It comes down to what my colleague Jessica Davis said about regulating social media. As I see it, the question we have to ask revolves around the spreading of these views beyond the far right and other extremist movements.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Do you think it's important to adopt tougher policies to address more hateful content? Would that keep these ideas from finding a broader audience?

As you pointed out, there is a link with the emergence of the extremist movement.

Ms. Aurélie Campana: It's possible, but it would be necessary to find the right mechanisms to prevent hateful content from spreading to a broader audience. I have to tell you that I haven't thought about what those mechanisms should look like, in concrete terms.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Thank you, Ms. Campana.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacGregor, you have two minutes. The floor is yours, sir.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you, Chair.

To Professor Campana, in your view, how much of a threat do misinformation and disinformation present to our democracy?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Aurélie Campana: That's a highly complex question.

Today, we are seeing parallel communication spaces, what we generally call dominant media or alternative media. They are fuelled by far-right, far-left and jihadist groups, which rely heavily on conspiracy theories.

Some governments play a role, as well. Russia is often mentioned. It helped to bring these alternative communication spaces to life. As I said in my opening statement, Canadian society is not as polarized as society in the U.S., but there are divides [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] fuel those divides and could eventually become [*Technical difficulty—Editor*].

[*English*]

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Quickly, for my final minute, you have recommended that we do regulate social media platforms.

Following on the question I asked Ms. Davis on how social media is able to monetize hate through getting multiple viewers and getting that advertising revenue, do you have any specific recommendations on how we can regulate the ability to monetize hate on social media platforms?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Aurélie Campana: Again, I have to tell you that I haven't thought, in concrete terms, about those mechanisms. Fundamentally, my focus is research, not practical implementation. We are seeing certain individuals emerge as influencers. Jessica Davis mentioned that a number of times, as did Mubin Shaikh. These individuals use their positions of influence to fund-raise for themselves, but also for other movements.

I think special attention should be paid to those individuals, who have the ability to move from one social media platform to another.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We have two more short interventions.

First, Mr. Van Popta, you have three minutes. The floor is yours.

● (1200)

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

My question will be for Mr. Shaikh. Thank you for being here, sir.

In your opening address you talked about the role of community in preventing trajectories of violence to extremism. You highlighted that people with these extreme views should be felt to be unwelcome and that their views were unsustainable and impractical in what you called the “cosmopolitan future” we live here in Canada. We see some young people having been perhaps born and raised here in Canada with western values becoming radicalized and travelling overseas to join terrorist groups.

What do you say about that? What's the solution there?

Mr. Mubin Shaikh: Thank you for your question.

My comment was really on how we can treat the proliferation of these views in a public context, such as for teachers to deal with trying to prevent a student from becoming radicalized.

Very recently, there were some instructions or a training course for teachers to identify students who might be becoming radicalized and on how to deal with that. I think it was funded or supported by the ministry of public safety. There was a whole discourse how on teachers should just be teachers. Teachers are not spies. Teachers are not police. Of course there are duties to report if a teacher comes across information that is of a serious nature. Just like doctors and other professionals have a duty to report, in this case they would have to do the same thing.

The message I gave to the teachers was that a student is greatly influenced by their teachers, especially depending on what period of development they're in, as children or teenagers or so on. They can bring to bear their expertise as teachers or as pastors or whatever their particular context is in which they engage with these individuals.

My statement was about making people understand that these supremacist, absolutist views that people take are unsustainable and impractical for life in Canada.

As for those people who have grown up in the west and went over there, at the end of the day we will not be able to prevent all radicalization. A certain amount of people will just go down that radicalization rabbit hole.

Unfortunately, at some point it's past the prevention stage and will fall into the intervention stage. That's really where the authorities will have to bring to bear their capabilities.

Mr. Tako Van Popta: Thank you very much.

I believe that's my time.

The Chair: For the last round, Mr. Noormohamed, you have three minutes. The floor is yours.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thanks very much.

Mr. Shaikh, one of the themes through all of this is what I would term the issue of prevention and how you understand where you are today. There is a politicization in terms of how we think about these issues.

Can you share with us your thoughts or your concerns about the ways in which some of these things have become political, both here and in the United States? What are some things we might want to be aware of, as elected officials, in the way we speak about these things, to ensure we are not helping to fan the flames?

Mr. Mubin Shaikh: It's a very good question. Thank you for that.

I used to joke sometimes, whenever I gave a presentation on radicalization, and I used to say that radicalization is not a condition that only affects brown people. For a long time the discourse around radicalization was centred on the Muslim community, obviously because of the post-9/11 environment, and then it also accelerated with this ISIS crisis we went through. But as researchers know very well, radicalization is a condition that affects anybody if the conditions are right, if the ingredients are there. I like to make a lot of jokes sometimes with the cupcake theory of radicalization: If the ingredients are there and the temperature is right, you've going to get cupcakes. One thing we need to understand is that this is a human process. This is something that any human being, any group, any nationality, political or otherwise, can go through if the ingredients are there.

Number one is to understand that this is a human psychological process that anybody can go through. Number two, I would say that we need to be equal in the way in which we prosecute individuals. My fellow panellist, Jessica Davis, was talking about applying the laws equally across the board. We have terrorism laws. Why are we only applying them to brown people? We have individuals who are not brown—sorry to be simplistic like that—who are really engaging in serious offences. They should be investigated and prosecuted accordingly. Sometimes, however, you get cases—and these are legal issues that, obviously, I'm not qualified to speak on—where you might have a terrorist incident, but there might not be a terrorist charge. For example, in the London family attack there was a terrorist charge with that. The individual murdered several members of a family during Ramadan last year—and Ramadan is about to start in a few more days. You have other cases, for example the Bissonnette mass murder at the Quebec mosque, where there were no terrorism charges. Of course, there were first-degree murder charges, which are easier to prove and carry a life sentence.

This just shows you—

● (1205)

The Chair: You have 10 seconds, please.

Mr. Mubin Shaikh: —that we should be more equal in the way in which we apply these laws.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

On behalf of all members of the committee, I want to thank the witnesses for some very compelling testimony on some deeply disturbing issues. Thank you very much for sharing your insights with us this morning.

Colleagues, we will now take a five-minute break and suspend the meeting for a change in panellists.

We'll see you in five minutes.

● (1205)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1210)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order. Thank you very much, everybody, witnesses, members.

I just want to start by acknowledging that we are meeting on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people.

There will be five minutes of introductory remarks by our witnesses. They are, Martin Geoffroy from the Centre d'expertise et de formation sur les intégrismes religieux, les idéologies politiques et la radicalisation; Louis Audet Gosselin from the Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence; and Daniel J. Rogers from The Global Disinformation Index.

Maybe I would ask Mr. Rogers to begin, if you wouldn't mind, sir. You have five minutes and the floor is yours.

Dr. Daniel J. Rogers (Executive Director, The Global Disinformation Index): Thank you, Mr. Chair, members of the committee. Hello, and thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss the funding mechanisms of ideologically motivated violent extremist groups.

I am the co-founder and executive director of The Global Disinformation Index, a non-profit focused on catalyzing change in the technology industry to disrupt the business model of online disinformation.

In 2020, my colleague, Ben Decker, and our team at the GDI collaborated with the Institute for Strategic Dialogue to conduct a series of studies entitled “Bankrolling Bigotry” to examine the funding mechanisms of a selection of hate groups in North America and Europe. Many of these groups are the same ones associated with recent acts of ideologically motivated violent extremism in recent years.

I appear before you today to discuss what we learned about how the technology and payments companies enable groups like those that participate in these events to operate.

These groups leverage the Internet as a primary means of disseminating their toxic ideologies and soliciting funds. One only needs to search Amazon or Etsy or Teespring or Redbubble to uncover shirts, hats, mugs, books and other paraphernalia that both monetize and further popularize the ideologically motivated violent extremist threat.

Last year, at least 24 individuals indicted for their role in the January 6 insurrection in the United States, including eight members of the Proud Boys, a group the Canadian government has designated as a terrorist entity, used crowdfunding site GiveSendGo to raise nearly a quarter of a million dollars in donations. It's not just about the money. Merchandise like t-shirts, which I just mentioned, act as team jerseys to help these groups recruit new members and foment further hatred towards their targets.

In North America we analyzed the digital footprints of 73 groups across 60 websites and 225 social media accounts, and their use of 54 different online fundraising mechanisms, including 47 payment platforms, five different cryptocurrencies, and we ultimately found a 191 instances of hate groups using online fundraising services to support their activities. The funding mechanisms included both primary platforms like Amazon, intermediary platforms such as Stripe or Shopify, crowdfunding sites like GoFundMe, payment facilitators like PayPal, monetized content streaming services like YouTube, Super Chats, and cryptocurrency such as Bitcoin.

All of these payment mechanisms were linked to websites or social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Telegram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Gab, BitChute, and others.

The sheer number of companies I just mentioned is the first clue to the scale and scope of the problem. This is not an issue of any one individual company, but rather a systemic problem of hate and bigotry exploiting an entire industry, and even sometimes government policy, to raise funds, peddle extremist ideologies and commit acts of violence.

We did a similar analysis of hate crimes groups in Europe with a specific focus on Germany, ahead of their recent federal elections, and found similar results.

A number of our conclusions stood out in performing this work. For starters, over half of the platforms we identified already had policies to explicitly prohibit hate and extremism, but those policies simply went unenforced. In the United States we found a large fraction of the groups we studied had approved tax-exempt status. In fact, a full 100% of anti-Muslim groups, 75% of anti-immigrant groups, 70% of anti-LGBTQ groups, and a third of the militias that we identified, including the Oath Keepers, had U.S. 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(4) tax-exempt status, giving them access to a whole spectrum of charity fundraising tools from Facebook donations to AmazonSmile, to the point that the most common fundraising platform we identified across all of our data was actually Charity Navigator's The Giving Basket function.

Simply put, private industry must step up and do more. Since the publication of our first report last October, we've documented at least 17 actions taken by platforms against the North American groups we enumerated. For example, four of the six payment mechanisms routing funds to the Oath Keepers have been blocked. Amazon has even removed them from AmazonSmile. However, 17 actions out of the nearly 200 instances we observed speaks to the rampant way the problem has been allowed to persist.

In fact, after most platforms were removed, the Oath Keepers payment facilitator, RallyPay, continued to service the group's fundraising needs, even as the group's leader was indicted in the United States for seditious conspiracy.

More must be done. Industry-wide standards must be set, and enforcement across both public and private sectors must be stepped up. Platforms must be held to measurable commitments, and transparency regimens, and subjected to third-party scrutiny, to keep them accountable.

Members of the committee, I thank you for your time today, and I welcome your questions.

● (1215)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Rogers.

Now I will turn to Mr. Gosselin.

I invite you to give us a five-minute opening statement. The floor is yours, sir.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Audet Gosselin (Scientific and Strategic Director, Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Members of the committee, it's a pleasure to be with you today to discuss the rise and evolution of ideologically motivated violent extremism.

For the past two years, this type of extremism has obviously been heavily influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, as evidenced by the anti-health measure movement here, in Canada.

As mentioned by other witnesses, what sets these movements apart is that they are highly decentralized and globalized, making crowdfunding a natural avenue for fundraising. These movements are not made up of very large groups that can rally a large number of people. They also do not have a hierarchical structure, as was the case in previous decades in relation to extremism and counterterrorism.

Fundraising aside, ideas travel around the world with ease, resonating with people. The influence of the U.S. on far-right movements in Quebec and Canada has often been cited, but the opposite is also true. The so-called freedom convoy in Ottawa illustrated that events in Canada were having an impact all over the world. Ideas spread very quickly, finding an echo.

It's not surprising that ideologically motivated extremism grew or became more defined during the pandemic. Periods of crises are always conducive to radicalization and the emergence of extremism because they exacerbate certain vulnerability factors. Consequently, the pool of people willing to pay attention to extremist views or ideologies expands. Some of the main vulnerability factors that came into play were social isolation, fear of the unknown and anxiety stemming from the pandemic, which can drive people to adopt preconceived and extreme views, as well as extreme solutions.

The polarization of public debate is another consideration. Not only do elected officials play a role, but so do the media and all public figures. Politicizing public health measures has led to deep polarization and great uncertainty throughout the population. When issues become polarized, it tends to bring about vulnerability factors and radicalization more quickly, and exacerbate them.

The Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence has solutions. Based in Montreal, the centre promotes prevention through education, outreach and support for individuals in the process of being radicalized and their friends and family. We take a prevention-based approach.

Thus far, the vast majority of anti-health measure activists have not engaged in violence. Most of the violence observed revolves around online threats, which are serious and should be treated accordingly. Prevention can play a tremendous role, since great anxiety and a heightened sense of insecurity and marginalization are factors. I encourage you to think about that.

Thank you. I would be pleased to answer your questions.

● (1220)

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I would now invite Mr. Geoffroy to give us five minutes—

A voice: He's not here.

The Chair: Well, believe me, we will not have any difficulty filling up the vacuum. Let's go right to a round of questions. We're going to get through the full first round, and then we'll see how much time is left over.

We'll start with Mr. Shipley.

Sir, you have six minutes. The floor is yours.

● (1225)

Mr. Doug Shipley (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

Just as we're going on the fly a little bit, I did have a full list of questions for Mr. Geoffroy, so if I do run a little short, maybe one of my colleagues will fill in for me, just in the last couple of minutes.

I would like to start off with Mr. Gosselin.

Mr. Gosselin, your community-led organization, as you said, seeks to prevent radical violence and hateful behaviours by mobilizing members and resources of the community. Could you please tell us about some of the success stories you've had?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Audet Gosselin: Thank you for your question, Mr. Shipley.

Most of the cases are confidential, so we can't make them public. It is very difficult to evaluate the success of a prevention program like this, as we cannot compare this situation to a situation where there is no program. If a program works, it should be implemented.

That said, we have collected testimony from people who have been militants or sympathizers within jihadist movements, in this case people who wanted to go to Syria. They were accompanied by the centre, reintegrated into society and wanted to share their experience. We published their testimony anonymously as part of the "MY STORY" project. In some cases, this took the form of comic strips. There was also the "What if I was wrong?" campaign, which shows how our guidance of former neo-Nazi activists encouraged them to move on, to reintegrate into society, to tell their stories and to move beyond hatred.

We really work on a case-by-case basis. It gives rise to many such testimonies. However, we would need a broader evaluation program to get a clearer picture of which projects work best.

[*English*]

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you for that, and for the good work you're doing in that area.

Knowing that you are a hands on group, Mr. Gosselin, could you tell me a little bit about your research and what you're seeing—the background research you are doing into the social, familial and individual factors that are associated with the emergence of these extremist groups in Canada? More simply put, what is the root cause?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Audet Gosselin: It is very difficult to point to a single cause. In general, studies on counterterrorism have previously blamed disadvantaged and marginalized groups. However, it is the sense of marginalization, real or perceived, that is the main factor that makes people vulnerable to radicalization. At the time, we saw in the jihadist movements a lot of second-generation youth who were born in Canada and who, as they came of age, realized as practising Muslims that things were very difficult for them because of the hatred that they were experiencing. That was a big part of pushing them towards radicalization.

The same is true of immigration and far-right movements. Many people feel that immigration will take something away from them, make them lose something. This is not borne out by research, but it is this feeling of marginalization that is important. There are also a lot of other vulnerability factors, including family ties, which are very important. What we see is that when people who have good family ties embrace extremism, they are less likely to turn to violence. The general polarization of societal debates is another very important factor.

I think these are the main factors behind the trends we are seeing in Canada right now.

[*English*]

Mr. Doug Shipley: Thank you for that, sir.

Now I'd like to jump to Dr. Rogers if I could, just for a couple quick questions.

Mr. Rogers, how do you determine something to be disinformation?

Dr. Daniel J. Rogers: Thank you for the question. It's a great question.

We spend a lot of time at the GDI thinking through how we define the problem. I think so many of the mainstream or common definitions of disinformation lie in a sort of false dichotomy of true and false. People say that disinformation is intentionally lying on the Internet, but I always say that this sort of simplistic definition doesn't pass what I like to call "the Santa Claus test", meaning that if it were really just about someone intentionally lying on the Internet, we would be clamouring to deplatform every mention of Santa Claus, and we're clearly not doing that.

We look at disinformation through the lens of what we call "adversarial narrative conflict". This is anytime someone is peddling an intentionally misleading narrative, either implicitly or explicitly, often using combinations of cherry-picked elements of the truth combined with falsehoods. Quoting someone who said something, and saying, "Well, that was just quoting them accurately," without presenting a fuller picture is an example of cherry-picking an element of the truth to craft a potentially misleading narrative.

Any time someone is intentionally peddling one of those misleading narratives that, in our view, is adversarial against an at risk group or individual, an institution like science or medicine, or a democratically elected government and that, most importantly, carries with it a risk of harm, that to us is disinformation.

● (1230)

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Daniel J. Rogers: We tend to identify disinformation by a specific narrative rather than just a—

The Chair: Thank you.

Now I'll move to Mr. Noormohamed.

Sir, you have a six-minute slot. The floor is yours.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. And thanks to all of our witnesses.

Mr. Rogers, while you were talking, there was so much you said that actually was very troubling. The issue related to the ways in which there are 501(c)(3) designations for charitable organizations that are clearly anti-Muslim, and so on and so forth, and the fact that it is so easy for people to profit off the sale of hate-filled items.

I did a quick Google search while you were talking. It was uncomfortably easy to buy symbols of hate, whether they be swastikas or t-shirts supporting the KKK, and so on and so forth. What tools do we have available, and what tools should we have available to ensure that people are not profiting off the sale of these symbols that promote hate and, by extension, help to build this populous narrative around the symbols as being something special rather than what they are, which is truly hateful symbols?

Dr. Daniel J. Rogers: Thank you. That's a fantastic question.

I feel like all of these phenomena are the result of these larger issues with the modern tech business model, one of audience attention capture and monetization. When you look at the sale of these goods, it's all about different strategies for monetizing audiences and capturing that audience attention. They use the increasingly extremist content because it tends to also drive higher engagement.

To me, one of the most important interventions lies around platform liability, and unfortunately probably all of the sites that you look for this merchandise are American companies. They have this relatively ahistoric and blanket liability waiver in the United States around the things that are carried on those platforms. Looking at platform liability for the kinds of things that these platforms carry, even if they're not explicitly selling them themselves, is to me one of the most important aspects of this. Platforms have policies sometimes, but when those policies either go unenforced or don't exist, they are generally shielded from liability for that, and I think that's what really needs to change.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Moving forward and following on that, seeing what happened in the United States—you mentioned January 6—we've obviously seen some very concerning trend lines in Canada around conspiracy theories and around misinformation that then leads to action. One of the things that I'm very curious about, which I know many of my colleagues may be, is the role of political leaders in ensuring that they are not helping to feed these movements. What in your view should be the responsibility of elected officials in ensuring that they are not feeding these narratives, which then lead to pretty dangerous action?

Dr. Daniel J. Rogers: That's a very interesting question. I haven't spent a lot of time thinking about that, only because our organization tends to focus on the business model side of things, the tech industry change that we advocate for. As a general statement, I would say that politicians, like others in prominent places, have an outsized voice and thus an outsized reach and presence in our modern information environment. I guess it would just suffice to say that with great power comes great responsibility, especially when there's an obvious kind of path from whatever is being said towards an expectation or risk of harm.

● (1235)

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Let's go back to the business model piece. I'm a tech guy. I used to run marketplaces. I know this model well. In the companies that I worked in, we always made a commitment to make sure we weren't selling those types of products.

How do we, as elected officials, work with these platforms to make sure they understand the consequences—whether it is the carrot or it's the carrot-and-stick combination—to ensure that there is this sense that you can't get away with letting this stuff happen and pretending it doesn't have a long-term consequence on the way in which people behave? What should we be doing? How should we be acting? What are some of the tools we should be using, whether it's carrot or stick, in making that conversation something platforms that are selling products need to be engaged in?

Dr. Daniel J. Rogers: It's an excellent question. Thank you.

You said “carrot and stick”, and I think there are two elements that can help industry tackle this better.

One is for better definitions. That's a place where industry has a lot of trouble. In the U.S., a lot of these groups, unfortunately, have charity designations, so now you're asking commercial companies to go against their official government designation. Having better definitions and stronger enforcement around those definitions is one area that I think would really help industry.

The other area is around, as I said, liability. Platforms currently enjoy this blanket and ahistoric liability waiver, at least in the United States. If that could change, that would be the stick side of things, to actually enforce real product liability for these platforms, their algorithms, their marketplaces, etc., that they currently don't have.

Mr. Taleeb Noormohamed: Thank you very much.

I'll give the time back to the chair.

The Chair: I'll take it. Thank you.

We'll move right to Ms. Larouche.

You have a full six-minute slot. Whenever you're ready, the floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

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

I would also like to thank the two witnesses who are part of the second group of witnesses that we are welcoming.

My first question will be to Mr. Gosselin.

I would like to hear from you on the issue of the carrot and stick that my colleague mentioned. It is interesting, because we sometimes tend to believe that it is difficult to get individuals out of radicalization, whereas the work done by your centre seems to show that certain things can be done. It's more about the carrot than the stick, because your centre works to educate people.

I would like to hear from you also about the difficulties around evaluation. You talked about the importance of having a much broader evaluation program.

What exactly do you mean by that? I'll come back to the stick next.

Mr. Louis Audet Gosselin: Thank you, Ms. Larouche.

We do not pretend that it is easy to help people move away from extremism or re-engage in a sociable way. On the contrary, it is extremely difficult and must be done on a voluntary basis. However, it is always possible, as there are always moments when an individual doubts their commitment and ideas and questions themselves. There must be organizations present to support this reflection and journey.

You talk about the carrot. Indeed, we work first to help people. We know that these are people who sometimes decide to act in a despicable, anti-social or violent way, but they are also people who have gone there because some of their needs were not being met. So that is what we work towards.

With regard to evaluation, there are issues relating to confidentiality. In addition, having to work in a hurry also creates problems, and it is always very difficult to have very effective measurement tools. This is a problem for radicalization prevention organizations around the world. It's very difficult to show beyond a shadow of a doubt that a program has led to a person disengaging. There are some good indicators that can point to this, but the agencies that do this work often have very limited resources and spend most of those resources on the programs themselves and spend far less on evaluation.

It is in this sense that more global support is needed.

● (1240)

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Several centres in Quebec have developed expertise. Some of these centres focus on the study of radicalization.

I would now like to hear a little more about the carrot and stick principle, because the issue has been discussed at the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security, as well as the Standing Committee on the Status of Women.

In your presentation, you slipped in a quick word about the importance of legislating in the area of online hate. So obviously, we're a little bit more on the "stick" side when it comes to penalizing individuals who indulge in hate speech. As I said, it could be important to do that. There's also the whole issue of the platforms that allow all these extremist groups to be funded.

On the legislative front, what kind of action in particular would your organization like to see at the federal level?

Mr. Louis Audet Gosselin: Our organization is not really in a position to recommend any particular type of measure, but it is clear that the issue of online hate and violent speech is very important. We see that it causes really significant damage. We did a study that showed that hateful acts experienced online were generally, at least in our sample, seen as more serious and more damaging than those experienced in person, which is a bit counterintuitive.

It is very clear that an assault, a punch or any form of physical violence will have to be criminalized and punished, but it is not necessarily this form of violence that causes the most harm when we talk about hateful acts. The consequences of such acts are an often permanent damage to the sense of security, which can affect an entire community. The real issues are the damage to self-confidence, to one's place in society and to the social fabric.

While we cannot necessarily recommend any particular measure, we obviously support the idea that online hate should be treated seriously by legislators.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: You said you were working more on rehabilitation and prevention, but you've probably heard stories about extremely difficult online language. We know that legislation is expected on the subject and we hope that it can still succeed in changing things.

In my second round, we may have the opportunity to revisit the most important factors underlying radicalization that have been observed since the beginning of the pandemic as well as to hear what you have to say on the subject.

Mr. Louis Audet Gosselin: Yes, quickly...

[*English*]

The Chair: I'm sorry, but we're out of time on this round. We have to keep moving.

I will go directly to Mr. MacGregor.

Sir, you have a six-minute slot. The floor is yours.

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

Thank you to all of our witnesses.

Mr. Rogers, your opening statement certainly gave us a lot to think about.

About the platforms that have policies against hate but are not enforcing it, we as a committee have had Stripe, GoFundMe and GiveSendGo appear as witnesses.

When GoFundMe was before our committee, they did state in their opening statement that “fundraising campaigns relating to misinformation, hate speech, violence and more are prohibited by [their] terms of service”. I pointed out to GoFundMe that there was a lot of misinformation associated with the convoy that came to Ottawa. It was quite evident that misinformation was surrounding the whole convoy as early as mid-January leading up to the illegal occupation of Ottawa, but they did not stop the fundraising for the convoy until, I believe, February 4.

Similarly, Stripe had an integral role, particularly with GiveSendGo, who took up the slack in fundraising for the illegal occupation after GoFundMe stopped it. GiveSendGo just simply didn't seem to really care about what they were fundraising for.

My question to you is this: What is it about companies and why are they not self-policing? Is it just that there is an obscene amount of money to be made? Are you getting any positive reaction from them when your organization points out what's going on with their platforms?

Can you illuminate a little bit more for us what's going on there?

● (1245)

Dr. Daniel J. Rogers: Yes, absolutely, and I don't think it's a monolithic answer. Certainly financial considerations are part of it, although one of the lessons I've learned in the last few years of doing this work is that it's only a part of it.

If you imagine the amount of money that GoFundMe was making off that convoy fundraiser itself, it was probably not very much. I would say that this probably goes more deeply to the culture of the tech industry, of being relatively anti-regulation and relatively pro-free speech, and there's sort of a cultural headwind to taking action.

Our experience has been that the response from different private companies really depends on the company and on the culture of that company. Some companies are adamantly opposed, some are very proactive partners of ours that are eager to work more proactively in enforcing and implementing policies and some fall in the middle. I think a lot of what you see is driven by public perception more than anything else.

The reason that GoFundMe didn't take action initially was probably that there wasn't a lot of public scrutiny, and thus not a lot of attention being paid. I think that is certainly a default position of most platforms. Unless there's public or journalistic interest in a particular problematic event happening on their platform, it tends to get ignored.

I'll also say as a more general rule that where we've seen more proactivity is where there's healthier competition. In the parts of the market—whether it's ad tech or other parts of the tech industry—where there's less competition and more of a monopolistic market structure, there tends to less interest in implementing a solution. Where there's more competition and more interest in running a cleaner platform, so to speak, relative to your competitors, there tends to be more proactive action. To us, that's also why antitrust actions are actually an important lever to pull in the tech reform conversation as it relates to disinformation, extremism and hate speech, in addition to the other ones that I've been talking about as well.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you very much for clearly outlining the challenges we have before us.

You mentioned that for a lot of these large tech companies—and you really listed the who's who of major tech companies— that have problems in carrying propaganda and selling some of this merchandise, the fact is that they're based in the United States and have U.S. laws applying to how they govern themselves. You mentioned their platform liability waiver.

What kind of challenge does that present to a country such as Canada, where the companies are not based in our country? How does the Canadian government face this challenge when it's dealing with foreign-based companies? To what extent is the global community of nations confronting this problem? What more should our country be doing to put this on the international spotlight to really get international partners to effectively deal with it?

Dr. Daniel J. Rogers: Yes, it's a fantastic question.

I will be honest: I'm not a lawyer so I don't know that I can give you a perfect answer. I don't know the details of how liability laws in Canada, say, would apply to platforms that are headquartered in the United States.

I would say that Canada can certainly join the EU and the rest of the world in leading the regulatory conversation with, in the EU, for example, the Digital Markets Act, the digital safety act, or, in the U.K., the online safety bill. These are examples of leading conversations. Also, then, there is providing international pressure to the United States to follow along and take legislative action as well. These are two things that can certainly help.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Colleagues, I'm looking at the clock and the division of time. If I cut everybody's time in half in this coming round, we'll end within five minutes of being on time.

With that stricture, let me turn to Mr. Lloyd for two and a half minutes.

Go ahead.

● (1250)

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for my two and a half minutes.

My question is for Mr. Gosselin.

Something you said really struck me: that one of the root causes is that people feel they no longer have a place in society. As an expert in the prevention of radicalization leading to violence, have you ever found that calling people names or labelling people has been an effective tool to prevent radicalization?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Audet Gosselin: Indeed, the polarization of debates and discussions and labels or insults are often factors that will accentuate feelings of marginalization and exclusion. Of course, in citizen debates, the level of aggression can sometimes increase, and we recognize that some tense discussions must take place. However, in general, we call on people to distinguish between debates about ideas and attacks on individuals, so that people do not feel that their identity is under attack.

[*English*]

Mr. Dane Lloyd: Absolutely. It is important to denounce hate, but for people in positions of authority, you would say it would be very irresponsible of them and contribute to radicalization by labelling people as “racist” or “misogynist”. You don't think that would do anything to help prevent radicalization, do you?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Audet Gosselin: A balance needs to be found in political debates. On the one hand, we need to be able to say things as they are. There are racist or misogynistic people, for example, and it is necessary to name these things. On the other hand, we must do it in a relatively factual way. It's up to each person and each politician to determine their limits.

[*English*]

Mr. Dane Lloyd: I absolutely agree. It's very important not to try to label entire groups. There are definitely individuals who do things that are heinous and that should be pointed out, but you would also agree that we need to reach out to these people to try to bring them back into the fold. Would you agree with bringing them back into society?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Audet Gosselin: Yes, dialogue is always important.

[*English*]

The Chair: It's going to have to be a yes or no.

The Chair: I heard a yes. Thank you.

We will move to Mr. Zuberi.

Mr. Zuberi, you have two and a half minutes. The floor is yours.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sameer Zuberi (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to address Mr. Audet Gosselin first.

Mr. Audet Gosselin, I've attended some of your briefings in the past as a stakeholder, so I have a lot of respect for the work that you do. On your website, you say that there are four types of radicalization: right-wing extremism, politico-religious extremism, left-wing extremism and single-cause extremism.

Can you tell us what percentage of your centre's resources are devoted to each of these categories?

Mr. Louis Audet Gosselin: Thank you, Mr. Zuberi.

It's quite difficult to answer that, as I don't have access to the information gathered in the course of supporting the callers. It is confidential. We try to deal with all forms of extremism fairly, so to speak, taking the realities into account.

When our centre was set up, a lot of the concerns of the public and the people who were calling were related to jihadist movements. With the rise or affirmation of the far right, it has become more and more present in the last couple of years. There is a lot of talk about movements linked to conspiracy theories, which would be classified as single-issue extremism. We also know that, in the past, there have been very important extreme left-wing movements in Canada and elsewhere in the world, and that tomorrow there will be other movements. So we try to have a prevention framework that works for all ideologies. Radicalization is not just about one colour or one idea.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Thank you.

[*English*]

For context, I'd like to point out that your centre started in the context of a very robust conversation around jihadi “extremism”, for lack of a better term. Is that correct? Therefore initially your work was focused around that, but I do believe you made a sincere and concerted effort to broaden and not to be pigeonholed in that way. Is that correct?

● (1255)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Audet Gosselin: The centre was created in the context of young people wanting to leave the country to go to Syria. This was instrumental in convincing the authorities to create the centre. From the beginning, the centre wanted to make it clear that radicalization was not limited to jihadism or political Islam and that it extended to any ideology.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Larouche, you have 1.25 minutes. Make the best of it you can.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Mr. Audet Gosselin, in conclusion, I will return to the question I asked you before.

In your opinion, what are the most important factors that we should remember, as a committee, in relation to the radicalization that has been observed since the beginning of the pandemic?

Mr. Louis Audet Gosselin: It has been mainly the anxiety related to the crisis. This has been exploited by certain ideological groups, who have pushed certain conspiracy theories and certain alternative ideas from a populist or anti-elite angle. This was the biggest factor, in addition to social isolation, that led many people to embrace extremist ideas during the pandemic.

Ms. Andréanne Larouche: Was there also some media disinformation that contributed to all this?

Mr. Louis Audet Gosselin: Indeed, disinformation adds to the radicalization or circulation of these ideas, but this is a much broader problem.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. MacGregor, you also have 1.25 minutes. Good luck.

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

Mr. Rogers, on your organization's website, there is a blog post from January 10 of this this year entitled “Happy 2022. Or is it? If you worried democracy itself was under attack in 2021, you may want to sit 2022 out.”

I don't have a lot of time, but could you maybe expand on that blog post relating to disinformation and its threat to democracy.

Dr. Daniel J. Rogers: Sure. There was also a question earlier about what is at stake here.

I would say exactly what my co-founder and I outlined in that blog post. What we're seeing is the convergence of all of the different specific narratives that we've been tracking into this larger anti-democratic and, frankly, anti-Enlightenment narrative, whether it's anti-science, anti-government. I think that's been apparent in the recent Ukraine conflict, for example, where we really see these anti-democratic narratives coming to the forefront.

Mr. Alistair MacGregor: Thank you very much. I'll end there.

The Chair: Ms. Dancho, we move now to you for two and a half minutes whenever you're ready.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Mr. Chair, were you talking to me?

The Chair: Yes. You have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Raquel Dancho: Sorry. Thank you very much.

I really appreciated a lot of the testimony.

Mr. Gosselin, I found that much of of your testimony was quite compelling. In particular, you mentioned that—quoting the English translation of what you said—feelings of being marginalized influence extremism; for people who feel they no longer have a place in society, that can lead to radicalization. You mentioned that this needs to be dealt with seriously by legislators.

Is that a correct assessment of your position?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Audet Gosselin: Yes, absolutely.

[*English*]

Ms. Raquel Dancho: I was thinking about that in the context.... The convoy has been mentioned a number of times in terms of this study.

I'm wondering how that applies to how we've treated the unvaccinated. We've effectively cut them out of public life in many ways. Do you feel that is marginalizing those individuals? Does that fit the bill, and could that lead to the more extremist views we may be seeing?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Audet Gosselin: This is a rather delicate issue, obviously, because there are public health issues at stake. Since it is an infectious disease, the personal choice of whether or not to be vaccinated, in these circumstances, has a significant effect on those around you and on society as a whole.

Indeed, in some of the debates, there was a sense that those who refused to be vaccinated, especially initially, were demonized and ridiculed. This contributed to radicalization in some cases. Since then, the public discourse has been adapted somewhat by talking about vaccine hesitancy and by trying to convince people to get vaccinated rather than repressing them.

Generally speaking, here in Canada, as elsewhere, this has been done pretty much everywhere. There have been times when the polarization has been a bit too much, it has contributed to radicalization in some cases.

● (1300)

[*English*]

Ms. Raquel Dancho: What are the best steps forward to bringing marginalized, and I don't want to get [*Technical difficulty—Editor*]. However, if we continue to marginalize a group of people—and this can apply to anything, not just the pandemic—and we continue to keep them out of society, would that not feed into the idea that you put forward about further radicalizing people?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Audet Gosselin: Probably. We really recommend dialogue at all levels; in politics, but also at the community level.

So we recommend methods to continue to keep the dialogue open, even in the case of very strong disagreements about ideas.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Zuberi, I'll ask you to finish off this round.

You have two and a half minutes. The floor is yours, sir.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: I'd like to go to Mr. Rogers.

You spoke about 250 social media accounts, if I'm correct, 73 sites, and many other aspects of the Internet that deal with radicalization and hate.

Do you think that social media companies have a role to play in this? If so, at this point in time, the algorithms are not manifest to legislators. Do you think it would be helpful if those algorithms did become manifest to legislators?

Could you comment on those two points, please?

Dr. Daniel J. Rogers: Yes. I think certainly they have a huge role to play.

In fact, if you think about why we are talking about this now when we weren't talking about this 20 years ago, it's not that radical people didn't exist, but that social media companies and their algorithmic amplification engines didn't exist. These are algorithms that can individually warp the realities—between Facebook, YouTube and TikTok—of well over half the world's population at this point, and I emphasize both the words “individually” and “warp”.

There's a lot of talk about algorithmic transparency, and I certainly think having more light shone on these algorithms would help the conversation along as to what we do about them. I also don't think it's particularly opaque what these algorithms are supposed to do, which is to drive engagement on these platforms at the cost of everything else. We don't need to look under the hood to know that's the goal.

These...as products, as I said, at the cost of everything else, is the key point. These companies have made historic amounts of money, achieved unprecedented market capitalization on these algorithms—these secret weapons of theirs—and have had to put no consideration into the negative consequences, the harms caused by these algorithms, due to these liability waivers. That's really where the focus is. Transparency will certainly help the conversation, but ultimately we need action.

Mr. Sameer Zuberi: Thank you.

As a very quick follow-up, you described basically the wild west of the Internet with respect to online hate. Do you think there needs to be some guidance from legislators around that?

Dr. Daniel J. Rogers: Do you mean do legislators have a role to play in this? Absolutely. I think that's where the most important levers are, frankly. It's become crystal clear that these companies aren't going to act of their own volition, and the role of legislators around the world is what's going to force a change.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

On behalf of members of the committee, I would like to thank the witnesses for some fascinating testimony over the last hour.

We appreciate your sacrifice of your time for the good of this committee. On behalf of all parliamentarians, thank you so much for your testimony today.

Colleagues, we will take a very short break to move in camera, where we will have most of an hour to finish some very important work. We will reconvene in two minutes.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]