

Title: The Process of Radicalization: Right-Wing Skinheads in Quebec

Author(s): Samuel Tanner, School of Criminology, Université de Montreal

Aurélie Campana, Department of Political Science, Université Laval

Contact: samuel.tanner@umontreal.ca, Aurelie.campana@pol.ulaval.ca

WP Number: 14-07

Research Question:

This research studies the radicalization process of right-wing skinheads in the province of Quebec by identifying the mechanisms that shape pathways toward extremism and violence. We look at the role and prevalence of violence in such right-wing groups and how it is used by members. We then consider whether these groups constitute a potential threat and whether it is realistic to fear that a “lone-wolf” scenario event might occur in Quebec.

Importance:

In the United States and Europe, right-wing extremist groups have been on the rise for a decade or so. Although this phenomenon is somewhat less visible in Canada, right-wing extremist groups have existed there for decades and have been extremely resilient, appealing to many generations of those who identify with right-wing and hate ideologies. Even though right-wing extremist groups, including right-wing skinheads, are included on the Canadian Anti-terrorist Strategy list of threat to national security, very little empirical and theoretical knowledge is available about such groups in either political science or criminology.

Research Findings:

Our first contribution is using the concept of oppositional groups to analyze the right-wing movement. Oppositional groups adopt a marginalized position within society, following and defending alternative rules and norms. The groups categorized as skinheads, as it appeared, are extremely heterogeneous and promote different ideologies and values, making it clear that one-size-fits-all categorization must be avoided. This oppositional movement is extremely fragmented and no formal links exist between the different groups that comprise it. Such fragmentation may be attributed to the personality of the members and leader – when there is one. Our second contribution concerns the radicalization process. We suggest that radicalization results from the interplay of environmental, cognitive, and relational mechanisms. We also distinguish between pathways towards extremism and pathways to acceptance of extremism, as the interplay between the three mechanisms can result in different outcomes depending on many different factors, such as primary and secondary contexts of socialization, the dynamics of intra-group interactions, relationships to the “outside world”, and the role of beliefs.

Implications:

Our research tends to conclude that a “lone-wolf” scenario is unlikely to occur in Quebec due to an absence of politically motivated violence; a high level of individualism according to which skinheads are believed to be unwilling to serve a cause and to make sacrifices for it, and finally; the fear of stigmatization and marginalization by respondents who might be unable to find a job due to their engagement in prejudicial activities.