

Sovereignism and Anti-Authority Extremism in Germany and Canada

A Comparative Analysis for a Deeper
Understanding of the Fluid Movement



About the PreP-Ex Project

This research report was developed as part of the project PreP-Ex (*Preparing Practitioners for the Rising Threat of Anti-Authority Extremism*), which examined sovereignism and anti-authority extremism in Canada and Germany. The research involved interviews with experts from diverse backgrounds including psychosocial professionals, government authorities, law enforcement, as well as individuals who adhere to sovereignist or anti-authority beliefs. Moreover, a survey was conducted with family, friends and close contacts of those who espouse these beliefs. In addition to this research report, PreP-Ex yielded a manual with practical advice about managing communications with, and behaviours of, individuals who espouse sovereignist or anti-authority beliefs. It is specifically designed for psychosocial professionals, government authorities, and law enforcement, all of whom may encounter such individuals as part of their work. Furthermore, a policy brief is available to provide policy suggestions at a structural level.

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Disclaimer

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Executive Summary

This report presents an analysis of sovereignism and anti-authority extremism in two national contexts: Canada and Germany. Despite differing historical and legal frameworks, sovereignist and anti-authority groups and movements in both countries reflect a shared rejection of state legitimacy and authority structures. Through a comparative analysis, we identify common characteristics that contribute to a unified understanding of sovereignism and anti-authority extremism.

In this report, we map the landscape and dynamics of the groups and movements who espouse sovereignism and anti-authority extremism, outline their ideological foundations, and explore the intersecting narratives that shape them. The report also investigates possible motivations for individual involvement, and the obstacles and factors that influence distancing oneself from sovereignism and anti-authority extremism. In addition, we assess the risks and threats these movements pose, both to society and loved ones, and to the adherents themselves.

Our findings are based on a mixed-methods research approach that draws on insights from expert interviews, as well as the perspectives of individuals who hold these beliefs, an analysis of social media content, and a survey of individuals who have friends and family who espouse these beliefs.

Defining Characteristics of Sovereignism and Anti-Authority Extremism

Our comparative analysis identified several defining characteristics of this cross-contextual phenomenon:

- **Illegitimacy and Distrust in Government and Its Institutions:** A pervasive belief that governments and institutions are illegitimate, corrupt or oppressive, often grounded in personal grievances and reinforced through conspiracy narratives.
- **Ideological Flexibility:** These beliefs are not tied to any one political affiliation, which makes them adaptable and appealing across a wide range of contexts. These beliefs frequently intersect with far-right ideologies, conspiracy thinking, and spiritual or esoteric narratives.
- **Conspiracy Beliefs as a Cornerstone:** Conspiracy beliefs serve as both a foundation and a unifying framework, connecting various grievances and legitimizing opposition to current government and authorities.
- **Decentralization and Fragmentation of the Movement:** The movement is highly decentralized and ideologically fluid, yet increasingly networked online, particularly during periods of crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **Social Media as a Catalyst:** Digital platforms are central for spreading ideas, fostering connections, and organizing without the need for traditional groups or leadership structures.

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- **Instrumentalization of Events:** Actors exploit political and social events to validate their beliefs, spread misinformation, and recruit followers during crises and times of uncertainty.
- **Pseudolegal Tactics and Strategies:** Adherents often use pseudolegal strategies to challenge authority, presenting these concepts as legitimate legal interpretations, despite consistent rejection by the legal system.
- **Overlooked Personal Harm:** Involvement in the movement often leads to significant psychological, financial, and social harm to those involved, with adverse effects also extending to their families and communities.
- **Lack of Distancing:** There are few known instances of individuals who have distanced themselves from the ideology, as it often becomes a central part of their identity. Distancing is more likely when individuals face disillusionment or personal loss, and when support from close contacts or psychosocial professionals is available.

This report highlights the need for a broader understanding of sovereignist and anti-authority extremism as a fluid, transnational phenomenon with a set of shared characteristics. Future research should expand this comparative approach to include additional national contexts and support interdisciplinary efforts to mitigate both the societal and individual impacts of this growing movement.

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I Introduction

From German Citizens of the Reich (*Reichsbürger*innen*) and self-administrative groups (*Selbstverwalter*innen*), to Canada's Freeman-on-the-Land, the rejection of state legitimacy and authority structures has emerged across various national contexts. These and similar groups or movements fall under the broader categories of sovereignism and anti-authority extremism. While the phenomenon is increasingly recognized by governments and national security agencies, public and academic discourse often relies on broad generalizations, overlooking the complex motivations, internal diversity, and lived experiences of those directly involved. As a result, the nuances of these movements, as well as their appeal to different segments of the population, remain underexplored.

Although groups aligned with sovereignist and anti-authority ideologies have existed for decades, they have gained significant visibility in recent years and particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The public health crisis and associated government health mandates served as a catalyst for widespread distrust and resistance, igniting mass protests and fuelling hostilities toward a broad range of authority figures and institutions. Along with anti-government narratives, there has also been increasing resistance and hostility toward higher education institutions, elites, public health agencies, law enforcement, and scientists, to name a few. In many cases, these grievances were absorbed into pre-existing conspiratorial and anti-government narratives, which in turn expanded the reach and appeal of these ideologies.

At the same time, populist leaders and political parties across North America and Europe have further reflected and amplified broad anti-democratic sentiments, offering political validation for ideas once considered to be on the fringes. It is within this environment that sovereignist and anti-authority ideologies have moved from the margins to reach a broader audience. Despite their growing prominence and the harms they pose to adherents, their families, and to democratic institutions, research and cross-national collaboration to understand and counter these movements has remained limited.

The PreP-Ex Project (Preparing Practitioners for the Rising Threat of Anti-Authority Extremism), funded by Public Safety Canada, aims to fill this gap by examining sovereignism and anti-authority extremism in two national contexts: Canada and Germany. Between 2023 and 2025, the German organization *modus|zad* and the Canadian Organization for the Prevention of Violence (OPV) collaborated to analyze these movements. This report presents the project's findings and serves as a foundation for two practical outputs: a manual designed for psychosocial professionals, administrative authorities, and law enforcement, and a policy brief to support structural-level responses.

While German sovereignist and Canadian anti-authority groups and movements are shaped by their distinct historical and legal contexts, their core structures, beliefs, and behaviours align in important ways. Despite national differences in their origins, local expressions, and terminology, both represent the same underlying phenomenon and share a fundamental rejection of state legitimacy and authority structures.¹ Yet, they are often treated as separate phenomena, due in part to obscuring the common ideological foundations that unite them.

This report challenges that compartmentalized view by arguing that German sovereignism and Canadian anti-authority extremism fundamentally stem from a shared ideological core and are best understood as interconnected expressions of a broader transnational phenomenon. By identifying their shared characteristics, while still acknowledging their important national distinctions and differences, we seek to advance a more integrated, unified, and comparative understanding of sovereignism and anti-authority extremism.

The aim of this report is to establish a set of shared defining characteristics of the phenomenon based on cross-contextual commonalities, while also highlighting and exploring the diversity and complexity of how this phenomenon manifests within each national setting. These phenomena encompass a wide range of groups and movements, ideologies, and expressions, and are shaped by their distinct national, cultural, and political contexts, yet anchored by a shared ideological core which rejects the legitimacy of the state and authority institutions. To achieve this aim, we employ a mixed-methods research approach which draws on insights from interviews with experts on sovereignism and anti-authority extremism, as well as the perspectives of individuals who espouse these beliefs through interviews, an analysis of social media content, and a survey of individuals who have friends and family that espouse these beliefs.

The report is structured as follows: Firstly, in Chapter II, we describe the terminology used in this report and define key terms. Following this in Chapter III, we detail our mixed-methods approach to data collection, addressing ethical and security considerations as well as methodological limitations. Chapter IV provides an overview of the existing knowledge about sovereignism and anti-authority extremism in Germany and Canada. Next, we present our research findings in Chapter V, divided into two national contexts: (a) the findings within the German context and (b) those from the Canadian context. In both sections, the following topics are discussed: Section 1 analyzes the structure and evolution of current groups and movements. Section 2 explores the core narratives and tenets of sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs. Section 3 investigates pathways to involvement. Section 4 discusses factors and obstacles influencing distancing. Section 5 examines the dangers and risks posed to individuals, authorities, and democratic institutions and values. Following the separate analyses of Canada and Germany, Chapter VI compares insights across both national contexts. Chapter VII presents the key defining characteristics of the cross-contextual phenomenon and offers our description of the movement, based on findings of this report. Finally, we use these insights to provide research recommendations in Chapter VIII.

1 Walkenhorst and Ruf 2020.

II Terminology

There are various terms used to describe the phenomenon of sovereignism and anti-authority extremism. However, no single, widely recognized term successfully captures both its complexity and the country-specific context. Our research aims to establish a definition of the phenomenon based on common cross-contextual similarities by exploring the variations and unique characteristics of this phenomenon across Canada and Germany.

Our report uses two terms: *sovereignism* and *anti-authority extremism*. To describe the phenomenon in Germany, we use the term *sovereignism*, as it is most frequently used and preferred term in this context when aiming to include the broad spectrum of adherents.² We use *anti-authority extremism* specifically to describe the phenomenon in Canada, aligning with established scholarly work³ and the preferred terminology used by the Government of Canada.⁴ In some cases, within the Canadian context, we also use the term *anti-government extremism* to describe a specific subset of beliefs with a narrower scope of grievances. These terms, as well as their rationale, are defined in more detail below.

Anti-Authority Extremism

Anti-Authority-Extremism is a term commonly used in North America and across the English-speaking world, and has been increasingly adopted by governments, law enforcement, and intelligence agencies over the past 25 years to describe a diverse range of extremist groups and ideologies who fundamentally oppose or reject existing government authority. For example, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) defines anti-authority violence as “opposition to, or rejection of, the authority of the State” which includes anti-government, anti-law enforcement, and anarchist violence.⁵ Similarly, the U.S. Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI)’s 2021 threat assessment uses the umbrella term Anti-Government and Anti-Authority Extremism (AGAAVE) to refer to anarchic violence, violent militias and sovereign citizens, though it considers the latter two distinct from anarchic violence due to their alignment with the far-right.⁶

2 Rathje 2023.

3 Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2017; 2019; 2020.

4 CSIS Public Report 2020; 2023.

5 CSIS 2020, 13.

6 Program on Extremism & National Counterterrorism Innovation, Technology, and Education Center 2021, 6.

Research in Canada indicates that **anti-authority extremism** is a broad, ideologically fluid phenomenon which encompasses a vast array of grievances, beliefs, sentiments, conspiracies, and tactics, making it difficult to define.⁷ Rather than forming a unified ideology, individuals who hold extreme anti-authority ideologies adopt highly personalized worldviews influenced by their own experiences, grievances, conspiracies, and a deeply held distrust in an array of institutions and figures of authority. Despite this diversity, scholars identify a fundamental rejection of government legitimacy as the core element underlying differing manifestations of anti-authority extremism.⁸

Anti-Government Extremism

Anti-Government Extremism is another umbrella term used to describe ideologies that are hostile to, or outright reject, the legitimacy of the government. However, in the context of this report, it refers to a narrower subset of beliefs aimed at specific elements of government or authority, rather than authority as a whole (discussed in more detail in the next section). For example, the Anti-Defamation League defines anti-government extremism as “a specific set of right-wing extremist movements and groups that emerged beginning in the 1960s and that share a conviction that part or all of the U.S. government is not legitimate,” and collectively refers to these groups as the “Patriot movement.”⁹ Jackson also discusses the term anti-government extremism in an attempt to explain, define, and delineate its boundaries.¹⁰ Depending on the research context, it may be useful to incorporate various other elements into the definition as long as the core defining feature remains centered on extremist incidents, behaviours, and ideologies directed against the government. This means that the rejection or delegitimization of the government isn’t merely a proxy to achieve an overarching goal, but rather, it is the focal point of the ideology or intent.

7 Perry, Hofmann, and Scrivens 2017; 2019; Jackson 2022, 9.

8 Perry, Hofmann, and Scrivens 2017; 2019; Jackson 2022, 9.

9 Anti-Defamation League 2025.

10 Jackson 2022.

Anti-Authority vs. Anti-Government Extremism

According to our research, there are important differences between how experts in Canada understand and distinguish between **anti-government** and **anti-authority extremism**. The key difference, as noted earlier, lies in the scope and generalization of grievances. In this report's sections on Canada, **anti-government extremism** refers explicitly to opposition to specific elements or aspects of authority, such as political leaders, parties, branches or agencies of the government, or legislation like gun laws.¹¹ While anti-government extremists may challenge the legitimacy of these policies or institutions, they generally support some form of authority, often at local levels.¹² For example, many violent militia groups advocate for expanded individual liberties, such as firearm ownership, while cherishing a perceived traditional interpretation of foundational political documents like the U.S. Constitution and promoting the role of local government, while opposing what they perceive as federal government overreach.¹³

In contrast, this report utilizes **anti-authority extremism** as a broader term which encompasses a wider array of grievances.¹⁴ Rather than targeting specific leaders or policies, anti-authority extremism takes hold in broader public sentiments where there is increasing and widespread skepticism over politicians, governments, and figures or institutions of authority as a positive force in people's lives. As such, it rejects multiple (or in some cases all) systems of authority, including state institutions, scientific bodies, health agencies, law enforcement, financial systems, educational institutions, corporations, elites, and in many cases, cultural or societal norms.¹⁵ For example, many anti-authority adherents view foundational political documents like the Constitution as tools of control and oppression, while anti-government militia groups - such as the Three Percenters or the Proud Boys - view themselves as defenders of what they perceive as the "true" interpretation of the Constitution. Anti-authority extremism is often framed through various conspiracies, and many of its adherents use obscure, historical, and often concocted pseudolegal concepts.

Sovereignism

In Germany, the term **verschwörungsideologischer Souveränismus** (Eng: "conspiracy-ideological sovereignism") has gained increasing traction among experts in recent years. Emerging from academic discourse, the term is increasingly associated with anti-authority extremism, as described above, and serves as the preferred umbrella concept in the German context. In short, sovereignists seek:

11 Jackson 2022.

12 This is broadly consistent with academic interpretations of these differences, such as Jackson (2022, 10), who conceptualizes between "ideological" versus "issue-driven" anti-government extremism. However, unlike in this report where we distinguish between anti-government and anti-authority extremism, Jackson uses the term "anti-government" as the umbrella category.

13 Netolitzky 2023b, 800.

14 Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2017, 7; 2020.

15 Perry, Hofmann, and Scrivens, 2020.

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“to (re)establish the sovereignty of the individual or the people, as well as an associated order that is understood as natural, against the prevailing social and political order, which is identified as the means of a global conspiracy to destroy the in-group.”¹⁶

Importantly, this term highlights the crucial role of conspiracies in shaping sovereignist beliefs. Sovereignists do not reject the state or government in all forms. Instead, their rejection is triggered when these institutions are perceived as part of a broader conspiracy or a belief they are acting in accordance with hidden and illegitimate interests.¹⁷

In contrast, the terms **Reichsbürger*innen** (citizens of the Reich) and **Selbstverwalter*innen** (self-administrators) are well-established in German public discourse and media. However, these labels refer to specific beliefs and behaviours, and therefore do not fully reflect the diversity and complexity of the phenomenon. For example, Schönberger and Schönberger describe the boundaries between *Reichsbürger*innen* and *Selbstverwalter*innen* as fluid, with individuals often shifting between them.¹⁸ Hüllen and Homburg describe a broader environment made up of associations, personal networks, and individuals who, for various reasons and with differing justifications, reject the legitimacy and existence of the Federal Republic of Germany (*Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, BRD) and its legal system.¹⁹ Given this fluidity, distinguishing between the terms *Reichsbürger*innen* and *Selbstverwalter*innen* has limited analytical value. Moreover, the term *Reichsbürger*innen* is highly country-specific and does not translate easily across national settings. For these reasons, this analysis will rely on the broader term **sovereignism** to describe the phenomenon in the German context.

Although the term **anti-authority extremism** is preferred in North America and among many English-speaking contexts, it is not commonly used and is even considered unsuitable by many experts for the German context. In general, groups that can be associated with this phenomenon in Germany do not reject authority outright, but instead seek to establish alternative forms of governance, more closely aligned with the term anti-government extremism, defined above. Consequently, in the German context, the term anti-authority extremism is often considered too broad and insufficiently distinct from left-wing or anarchist groups, which fundamentally reject authority altogether. Similarly, Jackson argues against including anarchism as a left-wing extremist aspiration because it advocates for a radically inclusive societal form.²⁰ In contrast, a crucial element of far-right extremist ideology is excluding groups from the political community. Similarly, the term **anti-government extremism** is not suitable for this context as the phenomenon in Germany is not limited to extremism directed exclusively against the state.

16 Rathje 2023, 12. This quote has been translated to English from German. All future quotes from German experts or literature have also been translated to English.

17 Rathje 2023, 12.

18 Schönberger and Schönberger 2019, 12.

19 Hüllen and Homburg 2017, 16.

20 Jackson 2022.

Adherents as a “Movement”

When describing the broad range of adherents who subscribe to sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs, we use the term **movement**. As defined by Giddens, a social movement is a “collective attempt to further a common interest or secure a common goal through [structurally informal] collective action outside the sphere of established institutions.”²¹ Despite its heterogeneity and fluidity, the sovereignist and anti-authority movements are unified by a central goal: the pursuit of individual sovereignty and freedom through the rejection, denial, delegitimization, and active opposition to the current state system and its institution. As a result, these movements are best understood as “loosely organized collectivities acting together in a non-institutionalized manner in order to produce change in their society.”²²

In contrast, we use the term **groups** to describe more organized subsets within the movement. These collectives have established recognizable social structures, leadership or decision-making hierarchies, and their members interact with some degree of regularity. In Germany this includes groups like “*Vereinte Patrioten*” or “*der Ewige Bund*.” In the Canadian context, similar groups include “The Kingdom of Canada,” or “the “Canadian Church of the Ecumenical Redemption International” (CERI).

Distancing

Several terms describe the process of moving away from extremism, including deradicalization, disengagement, demobilization, and distancing. Their definitions often differ based on whether they emphasize cognitive change, behavioural withdrawal, or a combination of both.²³ In this report, we use the term “distancing” to describe the long-term, complex, and non-linear nature of the process, encompassing both behavioural distancing and the cognitive dismantling of extremist belief systems. It involves various reflective processes, acknowledges small successes, and does not assume a direct causal link to the radicalization process.²⁴

21 Giddens 1993, 642.

22 Sztompka 1993, 276.

23 Berg 2022, 39.

24 Harris et. al. 2023, 43.

III Methodology

Our research aimed to expand existing knowledge about the phenomenon by integrating various perspectives from two different national contexts: Canada and Germany. To date, the existing knowledge about sovereignism and anti-authority extremism is often derived from a security-related perspective, though academic research to understand this phenomenon has grown in recent years. Our research sought to complement and add to these efforts by including a range of perspectives. Therefore, in addition to interviewing researchers, legal experts, law enforcement officials, and psychosocial professionals who come across or provide direct support to these individuals and their families, we also spoke with individuals who hold sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs. Their insights provide first-hand experience regarding their situations, their beliefs, and motivations. We also included the perspectives of family, friends and close connections (i.e., social circles) of those who espouse sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs, because in many cases they are directly impacted by these beliefs and behaviours and may have even witnessed the individuals' ideological transformation.

These perspectives were combined using a mixed-method approach. First, we conducted interviews with experts and individuals who hold sovereignist and extreme anti-authority beliefs. Next, we analyzed social media accounts and channels associated with the phenomenon in both countries to further understand ideological beliefs and topics of discussion. Finally, we conducted a survey to capture the viewpoints of close associates (i.e., social circles) of individuals who hold these beliefs, as they are often the ones with first-hand knowledge about the needs, behaviours, and belief-systems of these individuals. For this report, all quotes originally in German have been translated to English.

Interviews with Experts and Adherents

To gain a comprehensive understanding of sovereignism and anti-authority extremism, interviews were conducted with experts, including frontline practitioners, as well as with individuals who currently or previously held sovereignist and anti-authority views or their families. These interviews were carried out between January and July 2024.

We conducted a total of 31 expert interviews across Germany and Canada. These experts were either part of our existing professional networks, or were widely known for their work with, or engagement in, matters related to sovereignism and anti-authority extremism. We prioritized engaging with a diverse group of experts from various professional backgrounds to ensure a broad range of perspectives on the subject, including researchers, legal professionals, and law enforcement officials. We also sought to engage with psychosocial professionals, which includes professionals from a range of fields such as psychology, mental health counselling, social work, mentors, or other professionals who have experience in casework or counselling

individuals who hold sovereignist or anti-authority beliefs.²⁵ In total, we conducted 18 interviews with experts in German-speaking contexts, including Germany (17) and Austria (1), while 13 were conducted in Canada. The German-speaking participants included 7 counsellors, 2 law enforcement professionals, 1 intelligence official, 3 individuals working in (administrative) authorities, 1 expert in civic education, 1 researcher, and 2 legal professionals. Additionally, 1 counsellor from Austria was interviewed. In Canada, participants comprised 3 social worker/caseworkers, 3 law enforcement officials, 5 researchers, and 2 legal professionals.

The professions encompass individuals with diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise who are employed by various institutions, both government and non-government.²⁶ During the informed consent process, experts were given the option to choose how their quotes would be attributed in this report – whether by name, or anonymously by profession or expertise. While some expert interviewees in the German context chose to be identified by name or organization, the remaining participants in both German and Canadian contexts opted for attribution only by professional category. Quotes in the remainder of this report have been attributed accordingly based on these preferences.

Expert interviews were guided by a semi-structured questionnaire designed to explore a broad range of issues related to sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs in each country, including the terminology used, people involved, factors for involvement and disengagement, behaviours and strategies, associated risks and threats, existing interventions and challenges, and suggestions for future prevention and research efforts. The interview questions were topical, but open-ended with the aim of allowing the experts themselves to identify topics, themes, and issues they believed were particularly important.

In addition to the expert interviews, 8 individuals who were either current or former adherents of sovereignist or anti-authority beliefs, or their family members, were interviewed to gain personal perspectives and insights into these ideologies and their lived experiences.²⁷ These interviewees were identified and selected through a convenience sampling method via relevant social media platforms, or within the researchers' own networks. Four interviews were conducted in Germany, all with male participants, who were identified through social media platforms such as Telegram and TikTok. In Canada, four interviews included two current adherents (one male participant and one female participant) and one female participant who had distanced herself from the movement. An additional interview was conducted with a family member of an individual who holds anti-authority views.

25 A mentor is an individual who has lived experiences which are relevant to support those involved in extremism or hate-motivated violence.

26 A list of the expert interviewees is provided in Appendix I.

27 A list of interviewees who are current and former adherents and their family member is provided in Appendix II.

The interviews were conducted using a narrative-biographical approach, encouraging participants to share their life stories and experiences within the ideology and movement. While the format allowed for free narration, occasional prompts or questions were used to guide the conversation.²⁸

The interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using MAXQDA. The coding process followed both inductive and deductive approaches: some codes were derived directly from the interview guidelines, while others were newly developed during the analysis. Summaries were created for each code, and the findings were systematically analyzed by the research team during four code comparison sessions to identify similarities and differences between national contexts.

Survey of Family, Friends and Close Contacts

To further examine the broader social dynamics of sovereignism and anti-authority extremism, we designed and administered a survey targeting the social circles of individuals who hold sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs. While our interviews primarily focused on the individuals involved in sovereignist and anti-authority movements, previous research on conspiracy-driven groups like QAnon highlights that the repercussions of these beliefs often extend beyond the individuals themselves.²⁹ In a survey targeting individuals who have loved ones involved in QAnon, St-Amant et al. found that close family and friends frequently experience significant social, emotional, and relational challenges, including strained family dynamics and self-reported mental health struggles.³⁰ To broaden our understanding of the impacts of sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs beyond the individual-level, we designed a survey which similarly targeted close social contacts of individuals who hold sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs to understand the emotional and social impacts.

Survey Design

The survey included a mix of 38 closed and open-ended questions to gather a range of insights from close social contacts of individuals who hold sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs. Survey questions were adapted from a similar survey conducted by St-Amant et al. to adhere to the unique dynamics of sovereignism and anti-authority extremism.³¹ The survey underwent 3 rounds of review by multiple members of the research team before reaching final approval.

28 Rosenthal 2002.

29 Moskalenko et al. 2022.

30 St-Amant et al. 2023.

31 St-Amant et. al. 2023.

The survey was distributed through several outlets, including social media platforms, described in more detail in the following section. Before accessing the survey questions, potential participants were required to answer a qualifying question to indicate whether they had a close contact, defined as an immediate or extended family member, spouse, romantic partner, friend, colleague, or any other close contact who currently or previously held any of the following beliefs:

- The government is illegitimate or illegal
- The legitimate government has been infiltrated/replaced by bad actors
- Individual obligations to the government (e.g. taxes, utility bills) are illegal
- Government authorities, including the police, have no legal authority
- The illegitimate government is trying to brainwash/manipulate or exploit ordinary people to advance a secret plan or conspiracy

If the participant indicated “Yes,” they were prompted to complete the survey. If they indicated “No,” the survey ended. Qualified participants were then asked to answer a series of questions on the following topics:

- Relationship with their close social contact
- How their close contact became involved with these beliefs
- The impact of these beliefs on different aspects of their life
- The likelihood of physical violence
- Whether the individual has accessed support services

The full list of survey questions (English-language version) can be found in the Appendix III.

The survey was offered to participants in three languages: English, French, and German. Additionally, the German-language survey questions were adapted to encompass the unique movements and belief-systems there, whereas the English and French surveys were adapted to the unique movements and belief-systems common in North America, specifically Canada. The survey answers were stored in a double-encrypted drive to protect participant confidentiality. Survey answers were not shared with anyone outside of the research team.

Distribution and Recruitment

The research team identified several avenues for survey distribution. First, several Reddit forums which acted as interest groups focused on the topic of anti-authority narratives, extreme right sentiments, and conspiracies, as well as peer-support groups for individuals impacted by someone's beliefs in various conspiracies and anti-authority beliefs were identified. Prior approval from subreddit moderators was obtained before posting the link to the survey. The authors contacted 8 English-language subreddits in total but only received a response and approval from 5. Although some of these subreddits are not specific to anti-authority extremism, the authors conducted a search of key-terms within each subreddit and identified previous posts relating to the topic of sovereignism or anti-authority beliefs which met our survey criteria.

Additionally, the authors contacted prominent researchers specializing in anti-authority extremism, each with substantial followings of over 10,000 on X (formerly Twitter). These researchers were invited to share the survey link on their social media platforms to help broaden the reach and attract a diverse range of respondents.

Finally, the German-language survey was distributed through a variety of channels. It was shared within local messenger groups, such as university student groups and neighbourhood communities, to reach individuals with varying demographic characteristics and different experiences related to the phenomenon. Additionally, the survey was disseminated through academic newsletters and professional networks, targeting specialized groups like practitioners. By leveraging these different avenues, we aimed to capture a broad spectrum of responses, enhancing the robustness of our findings and ensuring that the survey reached a wide and relevant audience.

In the interest of maintaining transparency, the research team provided information about the goals of this research project, as well as the respective organizations conducting it (modus and OPV), on each survey recruitment advertisement. Links to each organization's website, as well as the official press release about the research project by the Government of Canada, were also included. The image below is an example of one of the survey advertisements posted on Reddit. No compensation was offered to survey participants.

Research Request: We need your help for a Survey!

Misc

Hello everyone,

I am a researcher with a Canadian non-profit organization called the [Organization for the Prevention of Violence](#) (OPV). We, along with our German partners at [modus|zad](#), are conducting a survey to better understand the impacts of having a loved one involved in conspiracies related to anti-government or anti-authority beliefs. This can include beliefs related to QAnon, Sovereign Citizens, and other far-right conspiracies. We aim to create a guide for front-line practitioners, like social workers and mental health counsellors, to better understand and address the unique needs of these individuals and their loved ones. This research is funded by the Government of Canada. You can read more about the project in the [official press release](#).

For this survey, we are seeking individuals whose loved one(s) believe in any or all of the following:

- The government is illegitimate or illegal
- The 'legitimate' government has been infiltrated or replaced by bad actors
- Individual obligations to the government (such as taxes or utility bills) are illegal
- Government authorities, including the police, have no legal authority
- The government is trying to brainwash, manipulate, or exploit ordinary people to advance a secret plan or conspiracy

If any of the above statements apply, you can access our survey in 3 languages (English, French, and German) below:

For English-language survey, please click [here](#).

For French-language survey, please click [here](#).

For German-language survey, please click [here](#).

The survey will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete and all responses will remain confidential.

A sincere thank you to everyone on this forum, and to the moderators for approving this request!

Image 1: Example of a survey recruitment advertisement on Reddit

Demographics of Survey Respondents

The survey was accessible to participants between the start of August 2024 and the end of September 2024. In total, 222 people accessed the survey and answered the qualifying question, but only 141 of those qualified to complete the survey. Of the 141 qualified respondents, most completed the German-language survey (108), followed by the English-language survey (31) and the French-language survey (2). The majority (104) reported residing in Germany, with smaller numbers from the United States (23), Canada (4), Austria (3), Switzerland and France (2 each), and 1 each from Finland, Italy, and Portugal.

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Nearly half (49%, or 69) of all respondents identified as male, 42% (59) as female, 7% (10) as non-binary, and 2% (3) as another gender identity. Figure 1 shows the age and gender of respondents in the European sample. Respondents residing in Germany were slightly overrepresented by those who identify as male (57, or 54%) compared to those who identify as female (36, or 35%). Most respondents (71%) were between the ages of 18 and 40 at the time of the survey. As shown in figure 2, the North American sample was overrepresented by respondents who identify as a female between the ages of 31 and 40, whereas the European sample respondents were mostly under the age of 40 and identified as male.

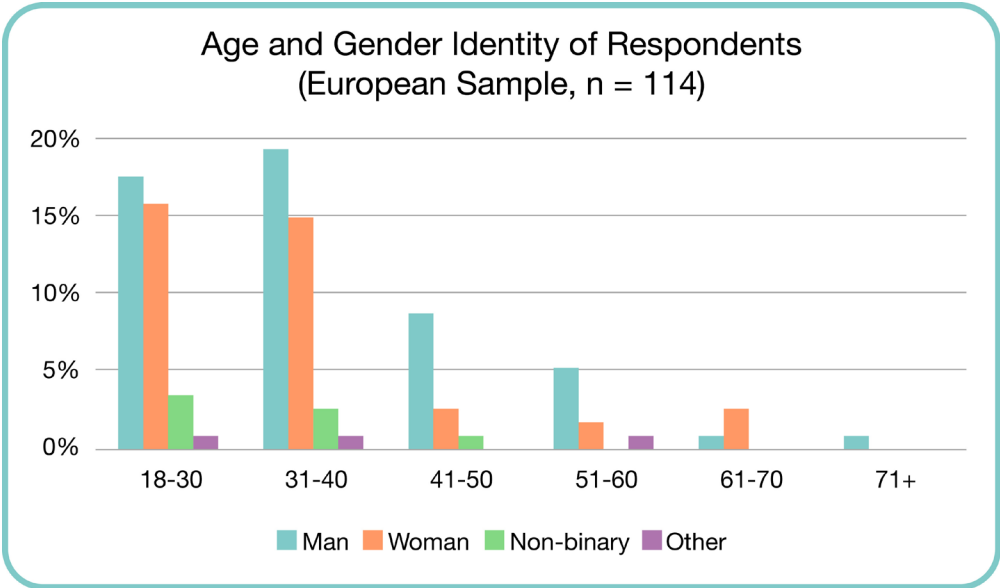


Figure 1: Age and gender identity of respondents in the European sample

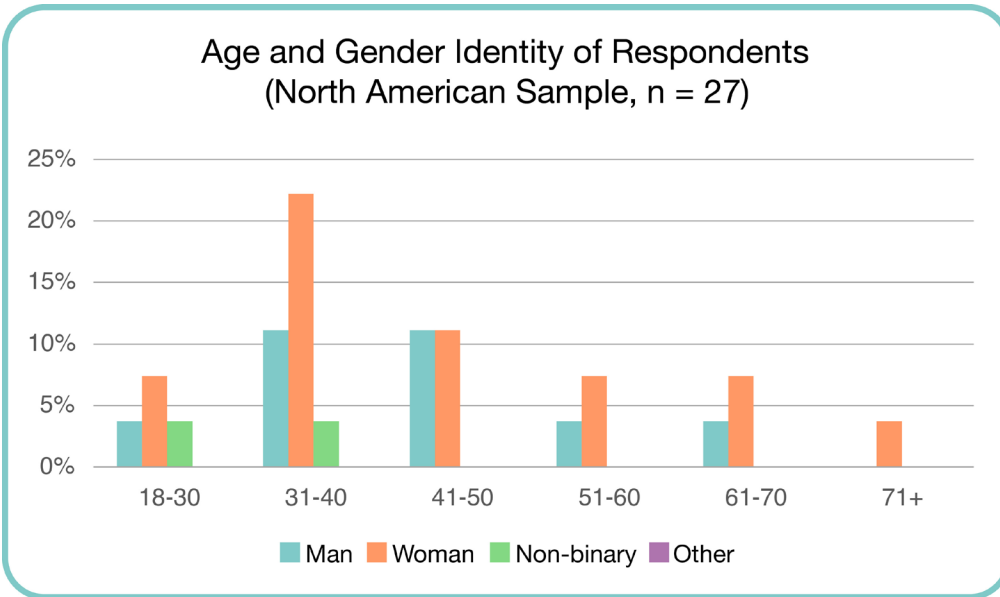


Figure 2: Age and gender identity of respondents in the North American sample

Regarding individuals who espouse sovereignist or anti-authority beliefs, respondents reported that 62% (87) identified as male, 38% (53) as female, and 1% (1) as another gender identity. Unlike the respondents themselves, individuals involved in these beliefs tend to be older. A majority (62%) were reported to be between the ages of 51 and 70 (87 respondents), whereas only 18% (26 respondents) were reported to be between 18 and 40.

Among the European sample, 24% (roughly 27) of respondents reported their close contact identified as a male between the ages of 51 and 60 (figure 3). When European respondents reported their close contact identified as female, they were more likely to be in the subsequent age group between 61 and 70. In the North American sample (figure 4), close contacts under the age of 50 were reported to be exclusively male; whereas close contacts over the age of 51 were overwhelmingly female.

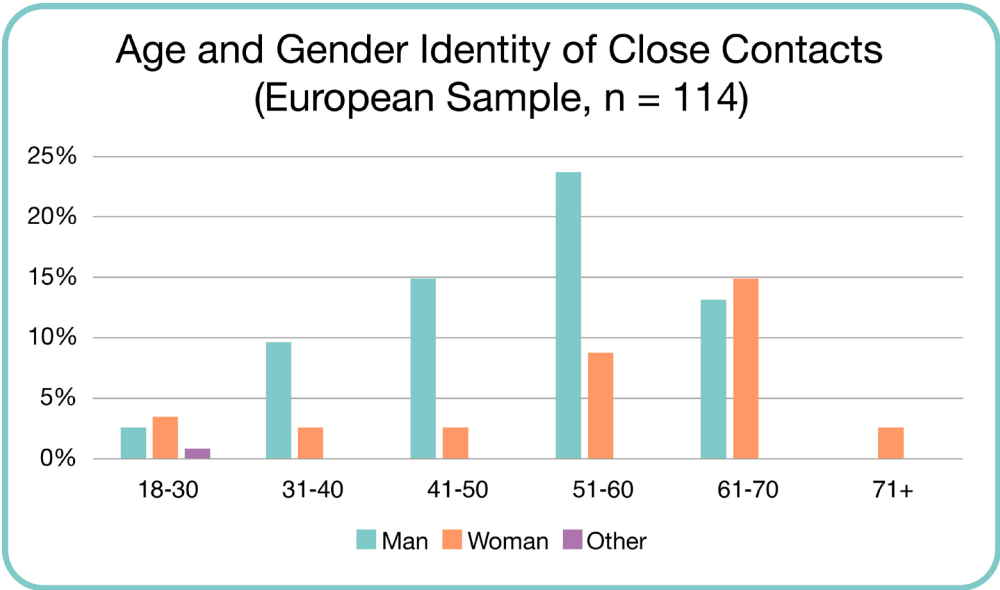


Figure 3: Age and gender identity of close contacts in the European sample

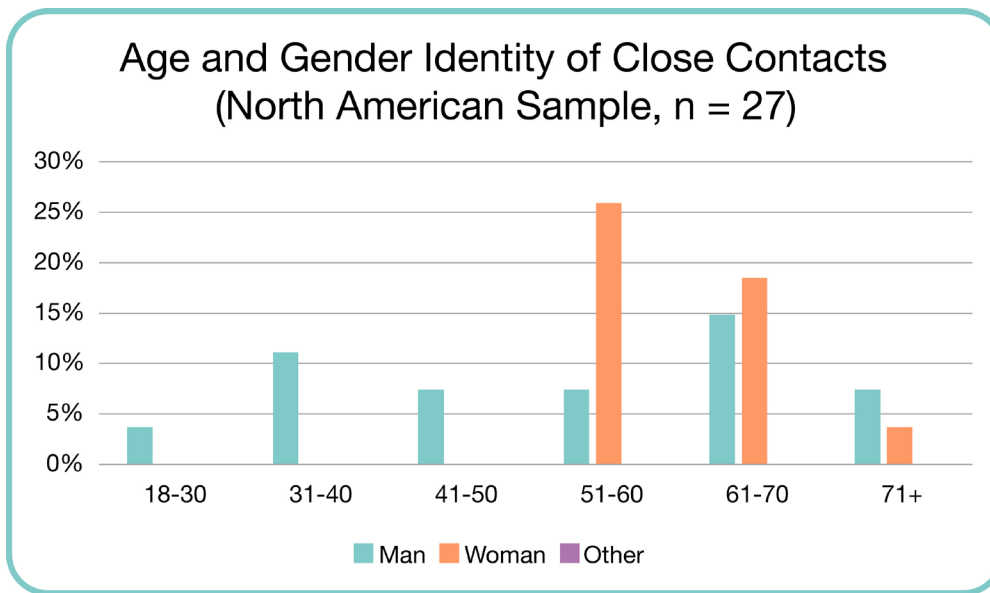


Figure 4: Age and gender identity of close contacts in the North American sample

Differences in the age and gender of respondents and their close contacts from each region are likely the result of sampling sources. In the North American context, most respondents were drawn from online peer support groups on Reddit, which tend to have more participants who identify as female.³² In the European context, the survey respondents were drawn from a wider range of venues, including university or local neighborhood groups.

Finally, among all 141 respondents, 72 (51%) reported their close social contact was a member of their immediate family, followed by 27 (19%) who said this person was a member of their extended family, 17 (12%) who said they were current or former friends, 13 (9%) who were current or former co-workers, 7 (6%) who were current or former spouses or romantic partners, and 4 (3%) who said the person was someone else in their life. 64 (45%) respondents said they never lived with the person involved in sovereignist or anti-authority beliefs, 57 (40%) said they previously lived with this person, and 20 (14%) said they currently live with this person.

Social Media Analysis on Telegram and TikTok

Social media plays a significant role in organizing and connecting individuals within the sovereignist and anti-authority movement.³³ To include this element of the movement, we analyzed public channels on Telegram and TikTok to gain insights into the topics discussed and the ideologies promoted. Our primary goal was to develop a broader understanding of the ideological beliefs and topics discussed among individuals associated with this movement.

³² St-Amant et al. 2023.

³³ Rathje 2023, 25.

During our social media selection process, potential channels were identified through a seed selection methodology. First, relevant keywords, search terms, links, influential actors or comments were identified as a starting point, which then allowed the researchers to expand and identify other relevant accounts and channels through different entry-points such as hashtags, shared links, and user comments. A key qualifying criterion was that the Telegram channels or TikTok accounts were public. This ensures ethical research standards by avoiding closed or private groups, while allowing for accessible data collection.

The final selection of social media accounts and channels were made based on a weighted score of relevant factors, including the size of each account or channel measured by subscriber count, user engagement (views or likes on posts), as well as the presence, intensity, or explicitness of sovereignist and anti-authority topics. The higher the overall score, the higher the relevance of that specific channel. The last criterion – the sovereignist or anti-authority ideology – was weighed twice. All public data from the selected TikTok pages or Telegram channels were downloaded and stored in a double-encrypted drive. This was important because posts, users, channels, and accounts can be deleted during social media moderation efforts.

A total of 900 posts from 9 channels (100 each), 6 on Telegram (3 channels across Germany and 3 across Canada) and 3 TikTok accounts (three across Germany) were collected. The data collection period occurred between May 1 and May 31, 2024, inclusive of start- and end-dates. In total, 300 posts were collected and analyzed from Canadian social media channels on Telegram, and 600 from German TikTok and Telegram channels.

The analysis focused on the content and topics of the posts. The researchers developed a thematic coding scheme to capture and record the content of each post. There were 12 main themes, most of which contained several sub-themes to increase the accuracy and details available:

- News and politics
- COVID-19
- Conspiracies
- Pseudolaw and sovereignism
- Prepping and survivalism
- Wisdoms and inspirations
- Extreme-right sentiments
- Antisemitism
- Anti-elitism
- Health
- Esoterics³⁴ and spiritualism

The code system, including sub-themes, can be found in Appendix IV.

34 Esotericism is a broad term for various worldviews and practices focused on self-discovery. Often harmless, it can be a lifestyle or belief system. However, it may also foster conspiracy thinking and anti-democratic views, and often includes skepticism toward institutions like politics, media, medicine, and science. (Zentrum Liberale Moderne 2023, 4).

The results of the social media analysis are used to support and exemplify the insights from other research methods like the interviews and survey. Specifically, the social media analysis is an important component of our exploration of the ideology of sovereignist and anti-authority movements in both national contexts. Images from social media channels and accounts are provided throughout this report to contextualize and offer real-world examples of our findings.

Ethical and Secure Data Collection

Research within the field of extremism requires a well-developed research plan that considers both the safety of researchers and research participants.³⁵ In most cases, it is recommended to provide as much information as possible to research participants about the process, goals, and intended outcomes of the study. However, in the case of research on extremism, there is often tension between transparency and the need to protect the personal information of researchers. Balancing both security and transparency presents inherent challenges that led the research team to design a set of security guidelines to ensure the protection of all involved, while upholding ethical integrity. This played a particularly important role in the planning, design, recruitment, and execution of biographical narrative interviews with individuals who hold sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs. Specifically, to enhance online security for all researchers, research activities were conducted using virtual private networks (VPNs) and virtual machines to prevent traceability and enhance anonymity.

There were also some important differences in the transparency approaches applied by the organizations involved in this report. Researchers from the OPV and modus undertook different levels of researcher security measures, which stem from differences in the organizational research protocols regarding participant transparency and researcher safety. For the OPV, maintaining transparency with research participants was a key priority. During their communications with individuals involved in the anti-authority movement, OPV researchers used their real names, conducted interviews through official OPV email addresses and video conferencing tools, and ensured all participants received detailed information about the study, the organization, and its website.

To ensure researcher safety, the modus research team used pseudonyms rather than legal names during the interview process to minimize personal risks. Social media and email accounts used for contacting participants and signing up for social media accounts were also registered under pseudonyms.

35 Conway 2021.

Data protection measures were implemented to safeguard the confidentiality and security of interview participants' information. At the start of each interview, verbal consent was obtained to ensure participants were fully informed about the recording process and the study's purpose, and only audio was recorded to further enhance participant confidentiality. All data was anonymized and de-identified to prevent any identifiable information from being included in this report. Additionally, participants were advised not to disclose any information that could incriminate them during the interview. Likewise, any names, accounts, user photos, identifying information, or links from the social media analysis have been blurred throughout this report to ensure user anonymity.

Limitations of Methodology and Data Collection

While this report provides a comprehensive approach to understanding and comparing the phenomenon of sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs across two national contexts, there are also several limitations in our methodology and data collection which must be discussed. Specifically, the empirical data we gathered is based on a limited set of sources which met specific criteria and therefore should be interpreted accordingly. Given the diversity of sovereignism and anti-authority extremism, this report thus cannot be taken as generally representative or as a reflection of the whole range of the phenomenon. However, it provides valuable insights within the scope of this research. This section describes these limitations, as well as the efforts taken to minimize their impact on our findings.

Limitations of Interviews

Our interviews provide important context about the phenomenon of sovereignist and anti-authority extremism by incorporating the perspectives of both experts and individuals currently or formerly involved. However, there are some limitations.

First, the expert interviews relied on a combination of convenience and snowball recruitment methods of individuals both within our existing professional networks, and notable experts in the field. While this recruitment method ensures that knowledgeable participants are included, it also limits the inclusion of experts outside the researcher organization's professional networks, as well as lesser-known, less visible experts, or early-career and emerging experts.

Similarly, sovereignist and anti-authority interviewees were also identified through a combination of convenience and snowball recruitment methods, which cannot fully represent or capture the full complexities of the broader movement. Instead, our reliance on recruiting from social media likely favoured individuals which are more visible and active on these platforms, compared to others who might prefer to keep a low-profile. In addition, many individuals we contacted who espoused both sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs at that time were hesitant to speak with us, were suspicious of our intentions, or declined to be interviewed altogether. This introduces a

degree of selection bias, as the sample of individuals who ultimately agreed to participate in the interviews are those who self-selected into the process as a result of their comfortability to speak freely about their beliefs, compared to others who may – for one reason or another – feel less comfortable doing so. To maintain comparability of the within-country results, researchers from both organizations maintained consistent communication practices and interview structures according to their organizational priorities discussed earlier.

Another limitation of interviews with individuals who currently or formerly held sovereignist or anti-authority beliefs is self-reporting and self-censorship biases. For example, participants may, consciously or unconsciously, alter or censor their responses based on their perceptions of the interviewer's expectations. However, by allowing for free narration from these interviewees and avoiding questions which might indicate pre-conceived notions or biases, the research team attempted to mitigate the impact of these factors.

Limitations of Survey Design

The survey, while providing valuable insights into the experiences and perspectives of the social circle of individuals who hold sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs, is subject to several limitations regarding its data collection, sampling, and the generalizability of results.

First, the survey relied on a convenience sampling method through online discussion forums, academic networks, and social media outreach. This method, while effective in reaching a broad array of individuals, also introduces potential sampling biases. Most significant is the reliance on peer support forums on Reddit among the North American sample, which likely resulted in an overrepresentation of a specific subgroup of individuals more likely to seek help from these types of venues. Additionally, because only five of the eight identified subreddits approved the survey's distribution, this further limited potential respondent diversity. In contrast, the German-language survey was disseminated through a different range of channels, including university or local community groups, likely contributing to the difference in sample size and demographics.

Additionally, although the survey was available in three languages (English, French, and German), most responses (108, or 77%) came from the German-language version, with significantly fewer responses from English- and French-speaking participants. Due to the convenience sampling method, we could not pre-select participants based on their country of residence to ensure an equal or representative sample from each. As a result, there were few respondents from Canada in the North American context, and an overrepresentation from the United States, limiting the generalizability of findings specifically to Canada.

Despite these limitations, this survey still provides a useful illustration of the impacts of sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs on social circles across various national contexts. More specifically, it deepens our understanding of the broad effects of these beliefs and how they manifest across North American and European contexts.

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Limitations of Social Media Analysis

Finally, our social media analysis provides important illustrative evidence of our broader findings but is also subject to several limitations. First, our analysis focused on 900 posts from nine public channels or accounts across TikTok and Telegram. Although the research team made efforts to ensure the channels and accounts were relevant selections, this sample remains only a fraction of the broader online ecosystem. Therefore, the results can only provide exploratory insights into the topics discussed, rather than a representative sample of the entire movement. Moreover, because our data is exclusively sourced from TikTok and Telegram this limits our ability to capture the full spectrum of discourse across other platforms with different moderation and content rules such as X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, YouTube, Reddit, Discord, or others. Since our analysis is limited to public channels, we may have missed perspectives and dynamics that occur in more restricted spaces. For example, it is possible that the content of discussions in closed channels differ, as privacy may lead some users to feel more comfortable discussing violent or sensitive topics.

This data also represents a small snapshot in time, as it was mostly collected during a single month (May 2024), unless fewer than a hundred posts were shared within the month. Given that social media discourse is often dynamic and reflective of current events, our sample is likely biased by the discussion of current events at that time. For instance, a popular topic among Canadian users in May 2024 were the wildfires in Alberta, British Columbia, and Manitoba, many of which began early in the month.

Second, only public accounts and channels were collected, while private or invite-only spaces were excluded due to ethical considerations. This limits the type of content available, as many open-source spaces may moderate or remove content, whereas private spaces may include more extreme discussions. This means that the study likely captures the more publicly, visible, and moderated aspects of these movements while potentially missing more radical content shared in private networks.

Finally, our thematic coding scheme also introduces potential biases and limitations. While it was designed to capture a broad range of topics, the process remains inherently subjective, relying on researcher interpretations of often esoteric content. To mitigate this, the researchers conducted multiple testing sessions to refine the coding framework, discuss challenges, and make necessary adjustments.

Despite these limitations, the social media analysis provides crucial illustrative examples of the findings in this report. It also allows the researchers to corroborate main themes and topics of discussion indicated by other data collection methods, such as interviews.

IV Existing Knowledge

In both Germany and Canada, a considerable body of literature has emerged in recent years examining sovereignism and anti-authority extremism. The following section provides an overview of the existing knowledge in both national contexts, which serves as the foundation for our research. This section begins with a discussion of the existing literature in Germany, before discussing the existing literature in the Canadian context.

a) Germany

Current research on sovereignism in Germany, commonly referred to under the broad label as “*Reichsbürger*,” remains fragmented despite recent efforts. Since the murder of a police officer in Bavaria by a so-called *Reichsbürger* in 2016, German domestic intelligence services at both the federal and state level have distinguished between “self-administrators” (Ger: *Selbstverwalter*innen*) and “Reich citizens” (Ger: *Reichsbürger*innen*), both of which share a fundamental rejection of the Federal Republic of Germany and its legal system.³⁶

Beyond this distinction, comprehensive typologies and definitions in the German context remain scarce.³⁷ Most publications consist of journalistic accounts,³⁸ anecdotal reports of individual experiences,³⁹ brief exploratory studies,⁴⁰ or manuals for public officials that offer practical guidance.⁴¹ As noted by Schönberger and Schönberger, this remains true today, especially regarding in-depth analyses of individuals within this movement.⁴²

In recent years, likely due to increased attention to conspiratorial movements following the COVID-19 pandemic, international academic and expert exchange on this topic has grown. In 2022, the scholarly journal *Perspectives on Terrorism* dedicated a Special Issue to the phenomenon, featuring insights from experts around the world. Jan Rathje, a leading German expert, contributed an analysis about how German sovereignists justify the use of violence, offering key insights into the phenomenon in Germany to international audiences.⁴³

36 Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz 2025.

37 See: Hermann 2018.

38 Such as Speit 2018.

39 See for example Ginsburg 2021.

40 Such as the edited volume by Schönberger and Schönberger 2019.

41 See for example: Wilking 2017; Speit 2018; Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz 2023.

42 Schönberger and Schönberger 2019, 13.

43 Rathje 2022.

In addition to this increased scholarly attention, a major incident that raised public awareness both in Germany and around the world was a December 2022 German counterterrorism raid which targeted the *Patriotische Union* (Eng: “Patriotic Union”), a group which planned to overthrow the government and establish its own system of governance.⁴⁴ The group’s ideology consists of a combination of sovereign beliefs, QAnon and other conspiracy-inspired ideas, and esotericism; it also included former and current members of the German military and police. As a result, some experts have called for further research to examine the complexity and dynamics of the broader phenomenon.⁴⁵

Furthermore, the rising political influence of the far-right political party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) in Germany from 2023-2024 has resulted in increasing popularity of sovereignist beliefs. For example, Rathje explores the connection between the sovereignist movement and the AfD, and has identified various linkages, including overlaps between sovereignist beliefs and the political party’s program.⁴⁶ While sovereignism does not constitute a core element of the AfD’s ideology, there are notable points of ideological intersection aimed at dismantling Germany’s existing democratic framework.⁴⁷ Additionally, a survey by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Foundation found that among AfD supporters, approval of statements that can be categorized as conspiratorial sovereignism is disproportionately high. For example, 16% of AfD supporters “fully agree” with the statement “Germany is still ruled by the occupying powers,” more than three times the average among supporters of all six parties analyzed, which stands at 5%.⁴⁸

Categorisations, Definitions and Historical Developments

Much of the existing literature on sovereignism in Germany has focused on its historical development and belief system. Sovereignism is not a new phenomenon, but rather, has been part of German history since the end of World War II in 1945, with its origins linked closely to political parties and ideologies throughout Germany’s postwar history.⁴⁹

German sovereignist groups can trace their roots to post-World War II far-right movements that sought to restore the German Reich as it was in 1937, while rejecting the new democratic order established after 1945. While the German empire (or Reich) effectively ceased to exist following the war, certain groups continued to question the rightful successor of the German Third Reich. For example, although mainstream politics in Germany at the time aimed for reunification within a new European framework, groups like the Socialist Reich Party (SRP) upheld national-chauvinist ideals tied to Nazi ideology. German legal scholars have dismissed these ideas, yet they continued to persist and gain traction among extremists who blended historical revisionism with modern conspiracy beliefs, even after the reunification of Germany in October 1990.

44 Ritzmann 2023.

45 Ruf 2022.

46 Rathje 2024.

47 Wierzioch and Kendzia 2022.

48 Hirndorf 2023.

49 Hermann 2018.

The complex legal and historical context in Germany provided fertile ground for the development of various conspiratorial pseudolaw interpretations over time.⁵⁰ As a result, scholars have sought to categorize these ideological groups according to their distinct periods of development. For instance, in 2018 Hermann proposed the overarching term *Reichs*-ideologists and identified four sub-milieus: (1) **Far-right extremists** strive to re-establish Nazism and the so-called Third Reich. (2) **Reichsbürger** (citizens of the Reich) believe that a form of the Reich still exists today, perpetuated by a conspiracy suggesting WWI and II never truly ended. As a result of this belief, they view modern Germany as an illegitimate and illegal construct. (3) **Self-administrators** believe that the Federal Republic of Germany is an illegitimate state and therefore feel entitled to declare their own in the form of imagined princely states or kingdoms. (4) **Sovereignists** believe that the current German state is illegitimate. Sovereignists do not claim the continuation of a previous Reich, nor do they seek to create a completely new state. Instead, they aim to restore Germany's perceived lack of sovereignty within its current form.⁵¹

Scope and Reach of the Movement

Many experts believe the phenomenon is growing in Germany, though there remains some uncertainty, as rising numbers reported by security agencies may simply reflect increased attention to the movement in recent years. In any case, the German Federal Domestic Intelligence Agency (*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz* – BfV) estimates around 25,000 people are part of the movement as of 2023, an 8.7% increase compared to the previous year,⁵² and a 19% increase compared to 2021.⁵³ However, a study which examined Telegram subscriptions to popular sovereignist channels identified more than 60,000 accounts as of June 2021,⁵⁴ and a representative study published in 2023 concluded one-fifth of the German population shows affinity to sovereignist attitudes.⁵⁵ This conflicting body of evidence suggests that while the real number of sovereignists and sympathizers might be difficult to ascertain, it is likely higher than the assessments made by intelligence services.

Furthermore, this movement also includes individuals who have gained significant public recognition, amplifying its reach and influence both within these ideological circles themselves, but also among the broader public. A detailed list and description of individuals and groups active within the movement can be found on the activist-run wiki “*Sonnenstaatland*.”⁵⁶

50 Hermann 2018.

51 Hermann 2018, 8.

52 Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz 2025.

53 Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz 2022, 103.

54 Rathje 2021.

55 Hirndorf 2023, 8.

56 *Sonnenstaatland* is an internet project that satirically addresses the followers and topics of various conspiracy theories in different forms. See: <https://wiki.sonnenstaatland.com/wiki/Hauptseite>.

Sovereignism and Radicalization

Research on radicalization has produced a vast knowledge about the processes and factors contributing to individual and group-level radicalization during the last two decades. However, most of this research has been conducted in the realm of either jihadist radicalization, or far-right extremist radicalization. Phenomena that do not fit either of those categories have not been studied to a similar extent. In the German context to date, no research has been published which focuses on the specific cases of sovereignist radicalization. The existing literature does, however, provide several insights broadly regarding demographic factors, organizational dynamics, social integration, and mental health factors, which could potentially influence the radicalization processes among sovereignists as well.

Demographic Factors

In contrast to radicalization processes within jihadist and far-right extremism, which have been found to primarily occur during early adulthood, sovereignism tends to attract people later in life.⁵⁷ According to the German federal domestic intelligence agency, people involved in the sovereignist movement generally range in age from 40 to 60 years,⁵⁸ an assessment that corresponds with insights from the Brandenburg state police, which found the average age of adherents in the state to be 50 years old.⁵⁹ However, in recent years, the movement has not only become younger, but has also increasingly attracted women, as data from Germany's domestic intelligence service shows.⁶⁰ For example, the estimated proportion of women in the movement has increased from 23% in 2017 to 43% in 2023.⁶¹ A comparison with far-right extremist groups in Germany shows that the proportion of women in the sovereignist movement is “noticeably higher.”⁶²

Organizational Dynamics

The German sovereignist landscape is very heterogenous. In terms of organizational structure, the movement is characterized by highly individualized fragmentation, whereas closely organized groups that foster strong social ties and mutual commitment are rare. Loose connections, irregular meetings, and anonymous digital networking dominate the forms of social interaction among German sovereignists.⁶³ Anecdotal evidence published by Ginsburg in 2021 support the notion that this lack of structure forms the ideal ecosystem for individual self-aggrandizement.⁶⁴ By connecting to the overarching belief structure while still maintaining a sense of anonymity and individuality, adherents can construct their own idiosyncratic ideologies and, in some cases, may proclaim themselves as representatives of the empire.

57 Beelmann 2019, 201; Borum 2014.

58 Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz 2021, 113.

59 Keil 2017, 60.

60 Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz 2024, 133.

61 Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz 2024, 133.

62 Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz 2021, 113.

63 See for example Ginsburg 2018, Walkenhorst and Ruf 2021.

64 Ginsburg 2021.

(Lack of) Social Integration

A common assumption about the German sovereignist movement is the idea that most adherents are isolated loners. While there is not enough reliable data to answer this question definitively, there is emerging evidence to suggest support for this hypothesis. For instance, data on the criminal behaviours and characteristics of sovereignists in the German state of Brandenburg shows that many of the individuals investigated live in social isolation, maintaining few social contacts apart from their immediate families. In addition, some sovereignists have reportedly accumulated large debts. As a result of this dynamic, many of these individuals' social interactions take place with creditors, local authorities, the judicial system or the police – institutions that their own worldview denies the legitimacy of.⁶⁵

b) Canada

To understand Canada's current landscape of anti-authority extremism, it is essential to examine the key historical actors, groups, and movements that laid its foundational groundwork. This section draws on scholarly literature to trace the evolution of these dynamics and highlight their significance in shaping the contemporary landscape of anti-authority extremism.

The Pseudolaw Phenomenon in Canada

The term “anti-authority extremism” is used in Canada to refer to a wide range of actors, groups and movements with an antipathy towards multiple forms of authority, and in some cases, opposition to the idea of government itself. Opposition to authority is often framed through various conspiracies, as well as using obscure, historical and often concocted concepts and theories known collectively as “pseudolaw.” Pseudolaw, a key unifying thread among many manifestations of anti-authority extremism in Canada, refers to “a collection of legal-sounding arguments” that mimic the structure and language of legitimate legal principles, yet lack any basis in actual Canadian law.⁶⁶ Though a wide and diverse range of actors, groups and movements adopt pseudolaw to varying degrees, their core premise is often rooted in the belief of an alternative legal system that claims to be the “true” law of the land.⁶⁷

Pseudolaw has no legal validity and Canadian courts have universally rejected these arguments and tactics.⁶⁸ Yet, despite its repeated failures in court, pseudolaw continues to be utilized by various anti-authority actors today, indicating its continued appeal amongst adherents. In Canada, pseudolaw has been adopted as a tactic by several historical groups and movements, such as the Freeman-on-the-Land or the sovereign citizens, to establish their perceived rights and address legal proceedings against them. These concepts are commonly interpreted and

65 Keil 2017, 61, 62, 100.

66 Netolitzky and Warman 2020, 715.

67 Netolitzky 2023a.

68 Netolitzky 2023b; Netolitzky and Warman 2020.

modified based on highly specific or personalized grievances, or the identities of adherents themselves. For example, pseudolaw interpretations have been adapted and applied to Indigenous issues and to establish the perceived rights of visible minority communities in Canada, such as the so-called “Moorish movement.” More frequently, though, most pseudolaw litigation in court is used to avoid paying taxes, or to evade criminal prosecution for failing to pay taxes.⁶⁹ These actors, groups, and movements, as well as their origins in an American group called the Posse Comitatus, are described in more detail below.

Posse Comitatus

The Posse Comitatus, Latin for “*power of the county*,” was a loosely organized far-right populist group that emerged in the U.S. during the late 1960s, embedding various religious and conspiratorial beliefs into its ideology.⁷⁰ Members promoted white supremacy, antisemitism, and anti-tax views, and vehemently rejected the authority of the U.S. federal government, particularly banking and tax institutions.⁷¹ Many Posse Comitatus members believed the U.S. Federal Reserve and the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) were tools of a grand conspiracy to subvert white citizens. Though this group was based in the United States, a central ideological tenet, which is now foundational to many anti-authority narratives, is the conviction that a grand conspiracy is deliberately concealing a “hidden history” from the masses.⁷² Individuals who discover this hidden conspiracy consider themselves to be “enlightened,” and view the masses as “blind sheep.” As a result, the Posse Comitatus serve as an important antecedent to several subsequent anti-authority extremist movements that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, including the Christian Identity movement, the American and Canadian militia movements, the sovereign citizens, the anti-tax movement, and the Canadian Freemen-on-the-Land.

Anti-Tax Movements

In Canada, a distinct anti-tax movement known as the “detaxers” emerged during the 1990s as part of a broader wave of anti-government financial resistance.⁷³ Detaxers can reasonably be considered within Jackson’s framing of an “issue-driven” group, because their grievances are highly specific to one aspect of authority: taxation.⁷⁴ While the main anti-tax movement in Canada became popularized during the 1990s and 2000s, some scholars trace the movement’s intellectual roots to the 1950s, when a man from Winnipeg used pseudolegal argumentation to

69 Netolitzky 2023b, 812.

70 Levitas 2002.

71 Levitas 2002.

72 Pitcavage, 1997.

73 Kent 2015, 2.

74 Jackson 2022.

challenge the need to file taxes for his business.⁷⁵ It was these early pseudolegal strategies, along with a mélange of fiscal conspiracies adopted from the American anti-tax movement, which Canadian anti-tax protesters later used throughout the 1990s.⁷⁶

Many Canadian detaxers held libertarian views and employed pseudolegal tactics to challenge or evade government authority, which strongly influenced later movements like the Freeman-on-the-Land.⁷⁷ Early detaxer ideologues, known colloquially as “gurus,” profited from marketing pseudolegal strategies to others seeking to avoid taxes, and most held a core set of beliefs and conspiracies that rejected the legitimacy of tax and financial agencies like the Canadian Revenue Agency (CRA).⁷⁸ Many of these conspiracies were also rooted in antisemitic beliefs about the origins of banking.⁷⁹

Though the movement was largely non-violent, rare instances of violence did occur. One of the most high-profile of these was the 2007 murders of former Tax Court Chief Justice Alban Garon, his wife, and their neighbour by an individual who held strong anti-tax views and employed pseudolegal tactics.⁸⁰ By 2010, the “detaxer” movement in Canada had largely dissipated due to consistent failure of its tactics in court, and because many gurus who profited from selling these tax schemes were incarcerated on criminal charges.⁸¹

Freemen-on-the-Land and Sovereign Citizens

The Freeman-on-the-Land (FOTL) and sovereign citizens are two movements which both challenge the legitimacy of government authority, with a particular focus on the legal system, but have distinct origins and practices rooted in their national contexts. Despite this, in their most basic form, the ideology of both the FOTL and sovereign citizens assert that the federal government is a corrupt fiction, whose sole purpose is to dispossess individuals of their rights, freedoms, and property. These beliefs are embedded within a series of conspiracies and pseudolegal principles that claim to describe the “true” nature of modern government and legal systems.

The sovereign citizens are a loosely affiliated movement which originated in the U.S., stemming from the earlier far-right Posse Comitatus. This U.S.-based sovereign citizens movement has influenced adherents in Canada, the United Kingdom, Europe, and Australia of the same name. Adherents blend anti-authority beliefs with conspiracies about banking, taxation, and a secret cabal of elites, often with strong antisemitic and extreme-right themes.⁸² They reject the legitimacy of government as a “fiction” and claim they are above, or not subject to, the law. Their

75 Netolitzky 2016.

76 Netolitzky 2016.

77 Netolitzky 2023b, 800.

78 Kent 2015; Netolitzky 2016; Perry, Hofmann, and Scrivens 2017; Netolitzky 2023b, 800.

79 Netolitzky 2023b, 800.

80 Nease, 2017.

81 Netolitzky 2023b, 814.

82 Sarteschi 2021; Taplin, Holland, and Billing 2023.

strategies range from survivalism and non-violent pseudolegal tactics to violent confrontations, particularly with law enforcement or government employees.⁸³

The Freeman-on-the-Land (FOTL) emerged in the early 2000s as a “Canadianized” offshoot of the sovereign citizens movement after Robert A. Menard adapted its ideology for Canadian anti-authority circles. While both the U.S.-based sovereign citizen movement and the Canadian FOTL reject the legitimacy of the government,⁸⁴ scholars argue that many FOTL adherents originated from extreme elements of Canada’s leftist, anti-globalist, and libertarian movements, rather than the far-right.⁸⁵

Despite their lack of hierarchy and centralization, many FOTL nonetheless share an identifiable set of beliefs.⁸⁶ A prominent one is the belief they are only subject to the laws they personally consent to, and that they can “opt out” of government authority.⁸⁷ Specifically, many FOTL believe that the “social contract” between a government and its citizens requires individual consent. Thus, by limiting interaction with the state, FOTL believe they are refraining from giving consent and are thus not required to abide by the law. Many of these beliefs are rooted in the *Magna Carta*, a historical document signed by the English King John in 1215, which has no legal validity today.

As part of their beliefs, many FOTL claim they can navigate around their legal obligations by citing obscure laws, most frequently their own narrow interpretation of common law or maritime law, and interpret legal language in unconventional or incorrect ways, or by deploying pseudolegal documents. FOTL believe that by doing so, they can separate their “physical entity” from their “legal entity,” which they claim is what the state uses to exert control through contract. For example, FOTL refuse to use government-issued identification like driver’s licenses and automobile registration on the grounds they constitute a “contract” with the government. As a result, many will intentionally destroy government paperwork, documents, or identifications, leading to frequent run-ins with law enforcement. At its height in the early 2010s, an estimated 30,000 Canadians considered themselves Freeman.⁸⁸

Among both the Canadian FOTL and the sovereign citizens, there are far more “opportunists” who use pseudolegal language and tactics to respond to criminal charges, tax issues, or financial and government commitments (e.g., debt repayments, child support) as compared to committed ideologues. Specifically, most adherents will use largely non-violent tactics, such as letter and email writing campaigns to flood courts, law enforcement, or other government agencies. Many also employ legitimate legal tactics such as lawsuits or liens to intimidate individuals, businesses, police, judges, or government employees.

Though violence committed by FOTL is rare, several notable incidents have occurred by

83 Sarteschi 2021.

84 Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2017, 14.

85 Netolitzky 2016, 624; 2023b, 818; Hofmann 2019, 79.

86 Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2017.

87 Pytyck and Chaimowitz 2013, 149.

88 The Canadian Press 2013.

individuals associated with or inspired by FOTL ideologies.⁸⁹ In June 2014, Justin Bourque, a then 24-year-old resident of Moncton, New Brunswick (N.B.), shot and killed three RCMP officers and injured two others in a rampage lasting 28 hours.⁹⁰ Bourque had a documented history of extreme anti-authority rants on his Facebook page, and showed a strong interest in firearms, survivalism, anti-law enforcement narratives, and was allegedly a far-right libertarian.⁹¹ Another notable incident occurred in 2015 when Norman Walter Raddatz shot two police officers, killing one, after they attempted to execute an arrest warrant at his home in Edmonton. While Raddatz had no official ties to the FOTL, his online posts reflected common tropes associated with the movement, such as conspiracies about the meaning of capitalized names on government documents.⁹²

Scholars note that by the mid-2010s, the FOTL had significantly declined in large part due to key legal defeats in Canadian courts.⁹³ A landmark case and the first significant attempt to develop a coherent classification system of groups and movements which use pseudolaw was *Meads v. Meads* in 2012, where Alberta Associate Chief Justice John D. Rooke categorized FOTL and others as part of the “Organized Pseudolegal Commercial Argument” (OPCA) litigant group.⁹⁴ More on the status of the FOTL in Canada today will be discussed in Chapter V Section 1b: Dynamics of Groups and Movements in Canada.

There are several features of both the sovereign citizen and FOTL movements that distinguish them from other forms of extremism, like far-right extremism, justifying the use of a distinct term to describe them (i.e., anti-authority extremism). The most notable difference is the degree of ethnic and racial diversity among both sovereign citizen and FOTL movements, as well as their offshoots, which is largely absent among far-right extremists. This diversity is described in more detail in the next section.

89 Perry, Hofmann, and Scrivens 2019, 1781.

90 Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2019, 9.

91 Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2019, 9.

92 Pruden 2015.

93 Netolitzky 2019; Netolitzky and Warman 2020.

94 Meads vs Meads 2012; Hamilton and Woolley 2013; Netolitzky 2016, 624; Netolitzky 2019.

Other Groups and Movements That Use Pseudolaw

There are several other groups and movements in Canada which also employ pseudolaw, though they are relatively small.⁹⁵ Notably, some of these groups and movements have an even higher degree of ethnic and racial diversity than the sovereign citizen and FOTL, indicating the appeal and adaptability of pseudolaw among a wide range of adherents with diverse political goals. For example, the Moorish movement emerged in the 1990s and follows a distinct Afro-centric “Moorish law” adopted from a religious sect called the Moorish Science Temple (MST).⁹⁶ Adherents claim Afro-communities were North America’s original inhabitants and use pseudolegal tactics to assert what they believe are the special privileges or exemptions owed to them from governments, including tax evasion and fraudulent property schemes.⁹⁷ While research indicates the U.S.-based Moorish movement is much larger, some scholars discuss its presence, albeit small, in Canada.⁹⁸

Other groups in Canada make claims of Indigenous identity and use pseudolegal concepts and tactics to justify sovereignty from the government.⁹⁹ An example of one which makes in-authentic claims to Indigenous identity is the Sovereign Squamish Nation Government (SSNG), which is distinct from the genuine Squamish Nation in British Columbia. According to Perry, Hofmann, and Scrivens, this group has “attempted to usurp the legitimate band council of the Squamish Nation using pseudolegal tactics...”¹⁰⁰

In addition to the diversity among ethnic and racial minority communities who adopt pseudolaw, there are some religious groups, including the Canadian Church of the Ecumenical Redemption International (CERI), that blend religious narratives, anti-authority ideologies, and pseudolaw to justify exemption from the Canadian government. Though CERI is a small portion of the Canadian pseudolaw community, Netolitzky argues it has outlasted others like the FOTL, despite comparable failures in court.¹⁰¹

95 For a list, see Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2020, 1780.

96 Anti-Defamation League 2012, 11; Dew 2016; Kent 2015, 4.

97 Kent 2015, 4-5; Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2019, 2; Sarteschi 2020, 2.

98 See Kent 2015; Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2019.

99 Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2019, 3.

100 Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2019, 3.

101 Netolitzky 2023a.

Finally, in the east of Canada since the early 2000s, there exists a German *Reichsbürger* “colony” in Cape Breton Island, N.S.¹⁰² This makeshift “colony” was covered extensively by a 2020 article in the German news magazine *Der Spiegel*, which claimed that over the years, “hundreds” of German citizens associated with the Reichsbürger and the extreme-right have purchased land in Cape Breton.¹⁰³ The ideologue allegedly at the center of this scheme is a German *Reichsbürger* by the name of Frank Eckhardt, who hosts seminars on the island along with two other German extremists – Andreas Popp and Eva Herman – about Nazism and the alleged impending collapse of European social, political, and economic systems. According to proponents of this “colony,” Canada is viewed as a haven which will largely be shielded from the fallout of the prophesized European collapse.¹⁰⁴ Recently in 2024, Eckhardt pled guilty to multiple firearms charges on violations which were discovered during an investigation into allegations that Eckhardt had extorted several German citizens into buying properties.¹⁰⁵

Beyond these named groups and movements, there are many unaffiliated individuals who hold extreme anti-authority beliefs and employ pseudolegal tactics in Canada. These individuals draw from a mixture of conspiracies, personal grievances and experiences, and a general mistrust and opposition to institutional authorities and government. The diversity, fluidity and diffusion of this phenomenon make it difficult to assess the size of the anti-authority movement in Canada. However, there are several commonalities and strains among adherents which can be identified based on the existing literature, discussed in the next section.

Commonalities and Varieties Among Adherents

The consistencies between beliefs among otherwise disparate individuals who use pseudolaw has much to do with the ways in which these concepts and tactics are shared. For example, detaxers, FOTL, sovereign citizens, and the Moorish movement share ideas through loosely organized networks that include both online and in-person seminars, courses, self-published or pay-to-download materials, templates, and resources. These materials are usually created and distributed by influential figures, referred to as “gurus,” for a fee. For instance, influential FOTL founder and guru Robert A. Menard leveraged the rise of early video-sharing platforms like YouTube in the 2000s by posting instructional videos to reach a wider audience.¹⁰⁶ This created a community that operated independently but held a shared set of beliefs and tactics. However, many gurus do not attempt to operationalize their practices in their own lives and exist almost exclusively within the movement to defraud others, which Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens call “entrepreneurs” of the milieu.¹⁰⁷

102 Evans et al. 2023, 514.

103 Evans et al. 2023, 528-529.

104 Baxter 2020.

105 Ayers 2024.

106 Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2017, 15.

107 Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2019, 9.

For example, Menard is one of the most prominent Canadian examples of a guru who operationalized pseudolegal teachings to defraud adherents. Menard was very active during the movement's peak between 2008 and 2014, and had become a self-appointed spokesperson for the group, giving several media interviews to Canadian news outlets.¹⁰⁸ His fall from grace came after court documents posted to the online activist "Quatloos" community revealed his tactics in court to be largely ineffective, and that he continued to hold a valid driver's license which directly contradicted his own teachings.¹⁰⁹ Both these actions violate the core principles of what he claimed to be as a "Freemen," suggesting his involvement was primarily motivated by financial gain, as opposed to true belief in the tactics and strategies he sold others.

Another important similarity among actors, groups, and movements who employ pseudolaw is abstention from violence. While some may be truly committed to the ideology, for the most part they are also unwilling to cross the line from non-violent activism to violence.¹¹⁰ Instead, their behaviours manifest in other ways, including survivalism and prepping, verbal confrontations or non-compliance with law enforcement, and the deployment of pseudolegal tactics, including so-called "paper terrorism." However, there are a few isolated individuals which Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens classify as "violent anti-authority extremists" which have committed violence over the years.¹¹¹ For example, in 2005, James Roszko shot and killed four RCMP officers near Mayerthorpe Alberta, after they were dispatched to Roszko's property to execute a search warrant. According to the investigation which followed, Roszko had a long criminal record and held extreme anti-authority sentiments against law enforcement.¹¹²

Despite their shared rejection of government authority and legitimacy, not all who employ pseudolaw share the same political origins. For example, whereas prominent FOTL gurus like Menard emerged from far-left and libertarian circles, others like Dean Clifford – who challenged Menard's style of leadership in the early 2010s – emerged from extreme far-right circles, specifically from white supremacy and skinhead movements.¹¹³ Unlike Menard, Clifford promoted a more confrontational style of Freemanism based around personal and physical resistance,¹¹⁴ ultimately leading to his arrest on a series of charges, including assaulting a police officer, resisting arrest, and obstructing police during a traffic stop.¹¹⁵ This diversity demonstrates yet another advantage of describing the Canadian phenomenon with the broader and more politically inclusive term "anti-authority extremism."

108 Zerbisias 2013; Kivanc 2016.

109 Netolitzky 2023b.

110 Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2019, 8.

111 Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2019, 8-9.

112 Alberta Justice and Solicitor General 2011.

113 Netolitzky 2016, 626.

114 Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2017, 17.

115 Carter 2013.

Likewise, as noted earlier, not all adherents demonstrate the same level of commitment. For example, while those committed to anti-authority activism may do so out of a deeply held belief in the ideology's core tenets (and may be the most likely to cross the line into violence once their non-violent strategies have failed), others, which some scholars call “dabblers,” “opportunists” and “sympathizers,” are the least likely to engage in violence, making up the largest proportion of anti-authority adherents in Canada.¹¹⁶ Dabblers and opportunists are adherents who adopt the community's tactics for a short period of time, usually due to an acute or dire personal, legal, or financial situation, such as a divorce or bankruptcy.¹¹⁷ Their engagement is driven by a desire to find a quick solution to their problems. These adherents often cherry-pick specific beliefs or tactics they believe will alleviate their situation and usually abandon them when proven ineffective. Sympathizers, on the other hand, do genuinely embrace the movement's core ideologies, but do not employ them in full or adopt the lifestyle, such as destroying government-issued identification, for a variety of reasons. Instead, these adherents often act as avid online supporters and contributors to online communities, providing support, morale, and advice to those seeking to implement these strategies in real life.¹¹⁸

Militia Movements

During the past three decades, militia movements like the Three Percenters (III%, or “Threepers”), the Proud Boys, or the Soldiers of Odin, have also played an important role in Canada's landscape of anti-authority extremism.¹¹⁹ Many trace their origins to groups with similar or identical names in the United States and Europe but have adapted their messaging to fit the Canadian political and social context. Barkun defines militias as “paramilitary organizations” that justify violence by citing the presence of “clandestine political and economic forces” undermining constitutional government and individual freedoms.¹²⁰

A key distinction between militias and others like the FOTL is that the former can more often be described as anti-government rather than broadly anti-authority according to the definitions provided earlier in this report, because they tend to oppose specific political leaders, parties, branches of government, or policies like immigration.¹²¹ Most militia movements, especially those in the U.S., are staunchly pro-firearm, though this translates less fervently into the Canadian context due to Canada's more restrictive laws around firearm ownership.¹²² Many militias frame themselves as “true patriots” defending individual rights and liberties and view themselves as the vanguard against unlawful overreach of federal government.¹²³ Many engage in paramilitary training such as shooting or combat practice, survivalism, and prepping.

116 Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2019; Netolitzky 2023b.

117 Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2019, 7.

118 Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2019, 8.

119 Perry, Hofmann, and Scrivens 2017; 2019, 1789.

120 Barkun 1996, 50.

121 Netolitzky 2023b, 800.

122 Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2017, 59.

123 Barkun 1996, 50.

While some militias may share beliefs with movements like the Posse Comitatus, sovereign citizens, or FOTL, such as the idea of “constitutional sheriffs,” an incorrect historical interpretation of the U.S. Constitution and old English shire law which claims county sheriffs are the supreme level of law enforcement, most militias tend to focus on specific government actions rather than rejecting authority entirely.¹²⁴ Militias also tend not to rely on pseudolegal tactics, further distinguishing their behaviours. Where FOTL and other pseudolegal adherents come from a broad spectrum of political backgrounds, members of militias tend to be more closely aligned with far-right sentiments such as white supremacist, anti-immigrant, anti-diversity, and white ethnonationalist views. Though beliefs within the FOTL and similar movements are not devoid of these elements, they are often less central to their ideology. For example, in Canada many militia groups have focused their efforts on protesting or intimidating minority racial, ethnic, or religious communities, such as Canada’s Muslim community.¹²⁵

Militias have largely declined in Canada during the past decade due to internal disputes, increased law enforcement attention, and the listing of some groups like the Three Percenters as terrorist entities by the Government of Canada.¹²⁶ However, prior to this decline there were a variety of groups scattered across Canada, including multiple chapters of the Three Percenters, the Soldiers of Odin (and their many offshoots and splinter groups, including the Wolves of Odin), and the Quebec-based Milice Patriotique Quebecoise (Eng: “Quebec Patriotic Militia”), many of which engaged in survivalism, prepping, and paramilitary training.¹²⁷

Scholarly Understanding of Canadian Anti-Authority Landscape Today

Canada’s anti-authority landscape today has expanded beyond these historical dimensions and has become more fluid and amorphous in recent years.¹²⁸ As a result, scholars argue that anti-authority extremism is difficult to define due to the sheer ideological and tactical diversity of its adherents.¹²⁹ Although there have been significant previous efforts to define or typologize the phenomenon based on the structural-ideological characteristics of its factions, or by the reasons for involvement of its adherents, such as work by Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens, the fluidity of the phenomenon continues to defy these categories, requiring alterations or additional specifications.¹³⁰ Despite this diversity, the persistent commonality among this group of adherents continues to be a shared opposition to government and authority, usually centred around a set of conspiracies, pseudolegal concepts and tactics, and personal resistance.

124 The “constitutional sheriff” idea dates to the Posse Comitatus. It relies on an incorrect historical interpretation of several legal documents, including the U.S. Constitution and old English shire law, and claims that the high sheriffs of the English shires had authority within the early American colony, and thus the authority of sheriffs supersedes that of the federal government. This belief has subsequently been adapted by some adherents of the U.S.-based sovereign citizens movement. See: Fleishman 2004, 7; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2015; Tsai 2017.

125 Mosleh 2019; Parsons 2019.

126 Perry, Hofmann, and Scrivens 2019.

127 Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2017, 59; 2019, 1790.

128 Berger 2016; Perry, Hofmann, and Scrivens 2017; Hofmann 2019.

129 Berger 2016; Jackson 2022, 9; Netolitzky 2023b.

130 Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2017; 2019; 2020.

Sovereignism And Anti-Authority Extremism in Germany and Canada

A Comparative Analysis for a Deeper Understanding of the Fluid Movement

Several important trends have continued uninterrupted to the present day. For example, recent research in Canada indicates that anti-authority actors today, like their predecessors, operate as loosely connected networks driven by a mix of personal grievances, conspiracies, and a fundamental distrust of government actors, institutions, and broader symbols of authority.¹³¹ Scholars have called this phenomenon, whereby actors blend different ideologies, beliefs, grievances, sentiments, or prejudices, many names, including “salad bar” extremism, mixed, composite, or idiosyncratic violent extremism.¹³² Although there is great diversity in today’s anti-authority landscape, scholars note the core element remains a fundamental rejection of government legitimacy and authority.¹³³

The activities and tactics of these individuals, groups, and movements are also equally diverse, and can range from non-violent criticisms of the government, peaceful activism, social protests, pseudolegal tactics, paramilitary training, prepping and survivalism, and in rare cases, acts of violence that target or seek to overturn the structures, symbols, or agents of authority.¹³⁴ However, many scholars note that anti-authority actors in Canada today, like their predecessors, are largely non-violent.¹³⁵

One commonly used tactic is known colloquially as “paper terrorism.”¹³⁶ This tactic of intimidation relies on pseudolegal concepts and documents to file frivolous paperwork such as lawsuits, liens, and litigation against a variety of actors, including government or law enforcement officials, agencies, businesses, and individuals.¹³⁷ Historically, movements such as the detaxers and FOTL have employed this tactic, and many contemporary actors, groups, and movements have continued to do so despite its continued failure in courts. Though this tactic in-and-of-itself is non-violent, incidents such as the 2007 murder of a Tax Court Chief Justice indicate violence can sometimes occur if demands are not met.

An emerging trend, which differentiates many actors today from their historical predecessors, is the increasingly broad rejection of a range of symbols of authority like health authorities, academics, educational institutions, celebrities or other public figures, scientists, banking institutions, and more. Because of this deep distrust, many also embrace a mélange of conspiracies that claim to implicate a vast array of systems or symbols of authority in broad, nefarious plots.¹³⁸ The most common form of conspiracy among these actors are those which allege that a hidden “deep state” is conspiring to subvert individual rights, manipulate the public, and control the masses to institute a “New World Order.”¹³⁹

131 Perry, Hofmann, and Scrivens 2017; 2019; 2020.

132 Norris 2020; Gartenstein-Ross et al., 2023.

133 Perry, Hofmann, and Scrivens, 2017; 2019; 2020.

134 Kent 2015, 1; Fiebig and Koehler 2022; Robinson, Malone, and Crenshaw 2023.

135 Hofmann 2019.

136 Kent 2015; Perry, Hofmann, and Scrivens 2017; Sarteschi 2021; Fiebig and Koehler 2022; Robinson, Malone, and Crenshaw 2023.

137 Kent 2015; Perry, Hofmann, and Scrivens 2017; Sarteschi 2021; Fiebig and Koehler 2022; Robinson, Malone, and Crenshaw 2023.

138 Hofmann 2019; Bjørge & Braddock 2022.

139 Robinson et al. 2021.

Reasons for Involvement and Distancing

Scholars have proposed several possible reasons why individuals are attracted to anti-authority ideologies. One of the most frequently cited motivations are deeply held grievances (whether legitimate or not) directed at governments or institutions of authority.¹⁴⁰ Grievances can be motivated by material factors, such as real or perceived social or economic inequalities, status, or feelings of inferiority, which can draw individuals toward narratives and tactics which promise financial, social, or political relief from burdens like taxes, debts, or legal proceedings like divorce and child support.¹⁴¹

On the other hand, individuals can feel compelled toward anti-authority narratives due to psychological or emotional factors, such as feelings of alienation, exclusion, or real or perceived injustices and mistreatment.¹⁴² For instance, in their interviews with anti-authority adherents in Canada, Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens noted that most had “some form of direct or ongoing conflict with the government, the court system, or law enforcement.”¹⁴³ Meanwhile, others noted a “watershed event,” such as geopolitical events or personal crises, which precipitated their involvement.¹⁴⁴ The role of political and economic crises has also been identified by other scholars,¹⁴⁵ and can help to explain the current expansion and appeal of anti-authority narratives during and after public health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁴⁶

As part of these grievances, individuals can also develop a sense of paranoia and may be more susceptible to the adoption of various conspiracies.¹⁴⁷ This can occur because conspiracies offer a simple framework for understanding complex issues, often by assigning blame to identifiable groups.¹⁴⁸ Many of these conspiracies also point to shadowy and corrupt figures who seek to enact a “New World Order,” and several draw from long-standing antisemitic beliefs about the origins of banking and government.¹⁴⁹ These conspiracies can often make individuals feel powerless, which make anti-authority narratives attractive as they promise to shift the balance of power from the “corrupt” authorities back to the individual.¹⁵⁰ For instance, pseudolegal tactics promise to free individuals from state authority and offer financial or legal freedom from the “corrupt” control of the government.¹⁵¹

140 Van Stekelenburg, Klandermans, and van Dijk 2011; Perry, Hofmann, and Scrivens 2017; Baldino and Lucas 2019; Cubitt et al. 2024.

141 Neckel and van Krieken 1996; Pitcavage 2012; Hodge 2019.

142 Cubitt 2024.

143 Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2017, 41.

144 Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2017, 41-42.

145 Hodge 2019.

146 Hofmann 2019; Cubitt 2024.

147 van Prooijen and Douglas 2017; Douglas et al. 2019; Mao et al. 2021.

148 Cubitt 2024.

149 Sarteschi 2020.

150 Netolitzky 2023a.

151 Netolitzky 2018.

Finally, some scholars have proposed that neither grievances nor conspiracies alone are enough to justify anti-authority extremism. Instead, it is the combination of conspiracies, coupled with personality types, which may influence support for anti-government violence. For instance, Gill, Rottweiler, and Clemmow find that individuals who agree with common COVID-19 conspiracies (e.g., that the government and scientists deliberately exaggerated the severity of the virus to justify repressive measures) are more likely to support anti-government violence when they also have high levels of narcissism, sadism, and Machiavellianism.¹⁵² On the other hand, among individuals with lower levels of these three personality types, belief in COVID-19 conspiracies alone does not predict support for violence. This research highlights the complexity of radicalization to violence among anti-authority actors.

While much of the scholarly literature offers reasons why individuals might engage with anti-authority narratives, few offer direct reasons why individuals might distance themselves from these beliefs. As noted in the terminology section earlier, in our report, we use the term “distancing” to refer to the long-term, complex, and often non-linear process which encompasses both behavioural distancing and cognitive distancing from extremist belief systems, groups, and activities.¹⁵³ Though the literature on this phenomenon is not as expansive as the literature on radicalization processes, especially for the case of anti-authority extremism, some scholars provide possible insights.

First, a subset of adherents may at some point realize that anti-authority strategies, and particularly pseudolegal tactics, are largely ineffective, leading individuals to distance themselves or abandon them.¹⁵⁴ Others have proposed that some adherents may be deterred by the movement’s association with violence and seek to disassociate themselves from it.¹⁵⁵ It is also possible that leaders who have been discredited, such as Menard, may lead some individuals to distance themselves from anti-authority narratives and movements. Finally, some point to protective factors, such as high altruism and honesty-humility personality traits, which reduce the likelihood of supporting anti-government violence even in the presence of pull factors like exposure to and belief in conspiracies.¹⁵⁶

152 Gill et. al. 2024.

153 Harris et. al. 2023.

154 Netolitzky 2023b.

155 Hofmann 2019; Perry, Hofmann and Scrivens 2020.

156 Cherney, Putra, Putera, Erikha and Magrie 2021; Gill, Rottweiler, and Clemmow 2024.

c) Comparison

The body of literature and knowledge on sovereignism and anti-authority extremism in Germany and Canada has grown over the past decade. However, there remains a lack of in-depth research that compares these phenomena across national contexts.

The historical background of the movement in both countries reveal significant differences. In Germany, sovereignist ideology found its roots in established political structures during the early post-World War II period. In contrast, much of the Canadian anti-authority landscape has been comprised of small, fragmented, and disorganized movements which emerged much later, during the 1980s and 1990s, and many were a distinct Canadianized adaptation of U.S.-based far-right movements.

While the origins of sovereignist ideologies in Germany can clearly be attributed to far-right extremism, this is less the case in Canada. Instead, many anti-authority movements in Canada emerged from extreme left anti-authority communities, though some, like militias, do originate in far-right circles.

Despite existing definitions and categorizations, the phenomenon in both countries remains difficult to fully define and categorize due to its ideological fragmentation and diversity. In both Germany and Canada, COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the movement's structure, leading to an even more diverse, varied, and amorphous structure. Not only did the diversity of actors involved increase, but the connections and collaborations with far-right groups also became more visible. The role of conspiracies has also been an important component of anti-authority movements in both national contexts both in its historical and contemporary iterations.

In both Canada and Germany, some scholars have explored the reasons for radicalization or engagement with anti-authority narratives; however, compared to the wealth of knowledge on far-right extremism or jihadism, it remains underdeveloped. Moreover, to date, there is little systematic research available on distancing behaviours specifically among sovereignist and anti-authority adherents.

V Country-Specific Findings

In this section, we present our country-specific findings which draw from the results of our interviews with experts and adherents, as well as the survey conducted with families, friends, and close contacts of individuals who espouse sovereignist or anti-authority beliefs. The results of the social media analysis, as well as examples from social media posts, are used to support and exemplify these insights. We begin with an examination of the German context in Section A before turning to the Canadian context in Section B.

a) Germany

In this section, we analyze and present the findings from our research in the German context. First, we examine the dynamics of groups and movements (Section 1a). Then, we dive into their ideological beliefs (Section 2a), covering both the core elements and other belief systems that go hand in hand with them. After that, we outline the reasons for involvement (Section 3a), as well as the obstacles and factors that lead to distancing (Section 4a). Finally, we explore the risks, threats, and dangers associated with sovereignism (Section 5a).

1a Dynamics of Groups and Movements in Germany

A Fluid and Diverse Movement

Insights from expert interviews, conversations with self-identified sovereignists, and social media analysis all point to the landscape of the German sovereignist movement being both fluid and fragmented. Experts we spoke to highlight a shift in the movement's dynamics, which they attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. Previously, individual groups and associations within the German sovereignist movement were more clearly defined, with members aligning themselves with specific sovereignist ideas. According to one expert:

"In the beginning, they were all individual groups that were mainly organized locally. So, you could say, okay, in this federal state there are such-and-such... But the groups are getting bigger and bigger, better and better networked, and now this division no longer exists." - (Jörn Beckmann)¹⁵⁷

Recent trends suggest a shift toward an even more individualistic approach. In addition to the lack of a unifying ideological framework across the broader German sovereignist spectrum, adherents themselves increasingly avoid committing to a single ideological strand. Social media platforms are viewed as a key facilitator for sustaining the current dynamics of the movement, as it allows individuals to exchange ideas and selectively adopt beliefs from various orientations.

¹⁵⁷ Jörn Beckmann, Activist/Legal Expert.

This development has resulted in shifting and loose connections within the movement, as beliefs and narratives have become increasingly interchangeable across different factions. This illustrates that the German sovereignist landscape is characterized by a dual process: on the one hand it has fragmented into highly individualized splinter groups; and on the other hand, it also led to increased blending and overlap of ideological strands into more interconnected (though loosely defined) sovereignist spheres.

This is further supported by the accounts of adherents, who were interviewed as part of this project. They spoke about the fact that they themselves have found it increasingly challenging to clearly assign themselves to a single group within the movement:

“But I somehow found out that there are still differences, because some people say, ‘hey, you have to refer to RuStAG law from 1914,’ and then there is law according to the SHAEF laws from 1800, or whatever. But you still don’t really know where you belong.” - (Sovereignist Interviewee 4)

Experts we interviewed described the movement in Germany as fragmented and lacking in a unifying structure. Some groups enter short-term collaborations with one another in an attempt to achieve their goals. However, these collaborations usually end either in competition between the groups for dominance, or in internal fractionalization among the group members themselves:

“If you want to pursue goals together, there are purpose-driven alliances. [...] Which usually don’t last long. It’s really only bound to a specific purpose, short-term and then you’re just as divided as before. So, you try to get closer more often, but then you realize that only one can be emperor. ”
- (Law Enforcement ID 11)¹⁵⁸

“We also see internal disputes in groups time and time again. Once again, someone takes themselves too seriously, deviates slightly ideologically and is no longer wanted. So can you really expect a real community?” - (Felix Blum)¹⁵⁹

Blum, a domestic intelligence official with the State Office for the Protection of the Constitution, further explains that to form underground terrorist structures, this usually requires a shared ideological foundation and strong organizational cohesion, two factors that German sovereignist groups struggle to achieve. This observation aligns with earlier analyses of German sovereignists and mirrors findings on the structure of American sovereign citizens, as well.¹⁶⁰ This lack of cohesion helps to explain why most groups remain relatively small. For instance, during our interview with Jörn Beckmann, a political advocate and legal expert, he notes that these groups typically consist of no more than 20 members.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸ Law enforcement ID 11, State Criminal Police Office.

¹⁵⁹ Felix Blum, Domestic Intelligence Official, State Office for the Protection of the Constitution.

¹⁶⁰ Walkenhorst and Ruf 2021, 230; Berger 2016, 3.

¹⁶¹ Jörn Beckmann, Activist/Legal Expert.

The movement's heterogeneity is also reflected in the wide range of self-designated names used by its adherents. These labels often reference their rejection of state authority, such as *Die Staatenlosen* (Eng: "the stateless"); but can also invoke ethnic identities (Ger: "*indigenes Volk*," Eng: "indigeneous people"). Others reference historical laws (Ger: "*RustAG Deutsche*," which refers to a citizenship law from 1913), values such as humanity ("Ger: "*Mensch*," Eng: "human"), freedom, or resistance. Some groups, however, avoid using any label altogether.

A notable characteristic across many of these groups is their frequent use of official-sounding terminology associated with state institutions in their names, designed to convey an appearance of legitimacy and authority. Experts highlight examples, such as *Freistaat Preußen* (Eng: "Free State of Prussia"), *Amt für Menschenrechte* (Eng: "Office for Human Rights"), or *Königreich Deutschland* (Eng: "Kingdom of Germany").

Counselling experts we interviewed describe that sovereignists generally reject the widely used term *Reichsbürger*innen* because of its stigmatization.¹⁶² For instance, one of the self-identified sovereignists we interviewed expressed his frustration with how the term is used to threaten or discredit those who, in his view, are "awakened" and unafraid to "speak the truth":

"Today, if you say anything, you're a Reichsbürger, a conspiracy theorist, a left-wing party member, a Querdenker [Eng: "lateral thinker," refers to a German far-right anti-COVID-19 protest movement] or whatever. It doesn't work like that. It doesn't work at all." - (Sovereignist Interviewee 2)

Intersections and Linkages

Experts we interviewed confirmed that the sovereignist movement in Germany is characterized by its diverse forms of organization and ideological networks. They also mention groups with formal political structures, such as *Freie Sachsen*, and demonstrate links to established political parties, including AfD and Heimat.¹⁶³

In addition to these intersections, experts indicate that the movement overlaps with broader conspiracy and protest movements such as QAnon and *Querdenken* (Eng: "lateral thinker," which refers to a German far-right anti-COVID-19 protest movement), which provide additional points of connection for individuals involved in the sovereignist movement to network with like-minded individuals. This highly diverse movement brings together a wide range of actors, including those who deny Germany's sovereignty, vexatious litigants, *Wutbürger* (Eng: "angry citizen," a term used to describe individuals who express intense frustration or outrage directed at political decisions or societal changes), participants in protest movements such as the farmers' protest or COVID-19 demonstrations, far-right extremists, esotericists, and other conspiracists. Several experts also highlight links to Anastasianism, a self-proclaimed new religious movement that is closely aligned with far-right extremists and holds various conspiracy narratives and esoteric beliefs.

162 Councillor ID 4 and ID 5, veritas Berlin.

163 Rathje 2024.

These blurred boundaries indicate not only associations between the German sovereignist movement and far-right extremism, but also with broader social groups which may, in some cases, propagate destructive ideologies while remaining largely unstructured, making the German sovereignist movement even more elusive and difficult to analyze systematically.

2a Ideological Beliefs in Germany

The ideological beliefs of sovereignism in Germany cover a broad spectrum that, in addition to its core elements, include other belief systems. These encompass conspiracy and far-right narratives, as well as esoteric and spiritual elements. An expert in law enforcement describes this ideological mix as a modular system.¹⁶⁴ Similarly, the term “salad bar extremism” has also been used to characterize this phenomenon. Both terms describe the selective adoption of various ideological elements, which allows adherents to borrow aspects from other forms of extremism and adapt them based on specific contexts or current events. In some cases, even seemingly contradictory ideological beliefs can be adopted together.

“It doesn’t even have to be coherent in itself, but the main thing is, again, the smallest common denominator, [they are] against the Federal Republic of Germany or against the state as such.” - (Law Enforcement ID 10)¹⁶⁵

Core Elements and Beliefs

The ideological flexibility of sovereignism and its overlap with various other political positions and beliefs suggests a broadening appeal that enables sovereignist movements to draw supporters from diverse backgrounds and beliefs. However, this broad array of adherents is nonetheless united in a core and fundamental belief, according to experts we spoke to:

“What I can still see is how people disagree with each other. In other words, completely different references, how you argue. But then they all come to a certain realization [that] the smallest common denominator [...] is the non-existence of the Federal Republic of Germany, i.e., that the BRD construct is either illegal or illegitimate. And this results in a fundamental opposition to the state and its institutions and its representatives.” - (Law Enforcement ID 10)¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Law enforcement ID 10, State Criminal Police Office.

¹⁶⁵ Law enforcement ID 10, State Criminal Police Office.

¹⁶⁶ Law enforcement ID 10, State Criminal Police Office.

Adherents across the movement share a fundamental rejection of the legitimacy of the state. However, they differ in the references and arguments used to justify this worldview, many of which involve historical or geographical revisionism. These justifications range from invoking the authority of the German Reich (1871-1918), to claiming the Two Plus Four Agreement (which allowed the reunification of Germany in 1990) is invalid, or to asserting that a formal peace treaty to end World War II was never signed and thus Germany remains in a state of war. Others argue that the Allied forces still occupy Germany.



Image 2: Example of a typical narrative used within the movement to justify the illegitimacy of the government [Eng: “The Two Plus Four Agreement was never ratified. So that no one can say, they didn’t know about it”] (Source: Telegram, May 2024)

When researching the movement, criminal psychologist Jan-Gerrit Keil cautions against the impracticality of trying to examine every belief within the milieu, given its diversity and tendency to change, but rather, encourages a focus on the common ideological core.¹⁶⁷ For example, during interviews with individuals involved in the sovereignist movement, many referred to common terms or concepts indicating a shared ideological core, such as referring to the state or the system as “destructive” (Sovereignist 1), “unjust”, “evil” (Sovereignist 3) or “unconstitutional” (Sovereignist 2). Experts suggest this shared belief is often accompanied by a sense of being “lied to” or betrayed. One sovereignist interviewee describes it as an intuition:

¹⁶⁷ Jan-Gerrit Keil, criminal psychologist, State Security Division of the Criminal Police of Brandenburg.

“It’s always a feeling... the feeling we’re experiencing in Germany right now [that] people are dissatisfied and simply say: something is no longer right here. This feeling is usually enough to activate certain trigger points.” - (Sovereignist Interviewee 2)

For many, intuition refers to the belief that there is a “hidden” truth. Sovereignist Interviewee 2 describes the process of becoming aware of this so-called “truth,” and compares it to escaping the “matrix” and being set on an entirely new path in life.



Image 3: An example of rejection of the current government and politics in combination with nostalgia for the “old days” [Eng: “We miss the Germany we grew up in. For so many people, it has become unbearable to endure this government. Many are suffering due to the disastrous behaviour of this political leadership. It is a disgrace.”] (Source: TikTok, May 2024)

While sovereignists reject the legitimacy of the current state and its institutions, they are not fundamentally opposed to the concept of governance itself. Their opposition is directed specifically at what they perceive as an illegitimate or unlawful state authority, and it is this delegitimization which constitutes the core of the belief system. Common elements include the notion that the state has no lawful authority to impose taxes, that elections are manipulated, corrupt, or invalid, and that individuals have the right to establish their own sovereign entities outside of the existing state system. This worldview does not necessarily reject the idea of order or leadership outright but instead proposes the right to establish one’s own sovereign entity centered around individual autonomy or self-declared structures of rule.

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Another unifying element within this ideology is the presence of group-based hate, such as antisemitism, anti-feminism, anti-2SLGBTQIA+, and racism.¹⁶⁸ The movement is commonly defined by regressive and anti-modernist thinking, characterized by the glorification of the past and a rejection of contemporary social progress such as gender equality, women's emancipation, or efforts to promote more inclusive language.



Image 4: The image illustrates an example of anti-2SLGBTQIA+ sentiments, whereby 2SLGBTQIA+ artists at the 2024 Eurovision song contest are labelled as a “freak show.” [Eng: “#Freakshow. The European Song Contest has nothing to do with culture or music anymore. It is a freakshow!”] (Source: Telegram, May 2024)

168 2SLGBTQIA+ is the acronym used by the Public Service Alliance of Canada to refer to the Canadian community. 2S: recognizes Two-Spirit people as the first 2SLGBTQI+ communities; L: Lesbian; G: Gay; B: Bisexual; T: Transgender; Q: Queer; I: Intersex, considers sex characteristics beyond sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression; A: Asexual, which represents individuals who do not experience sexual attraction to others; +: is inclusive of people who identify as part of sexual and gender diverse communities, who use additional terminologies.

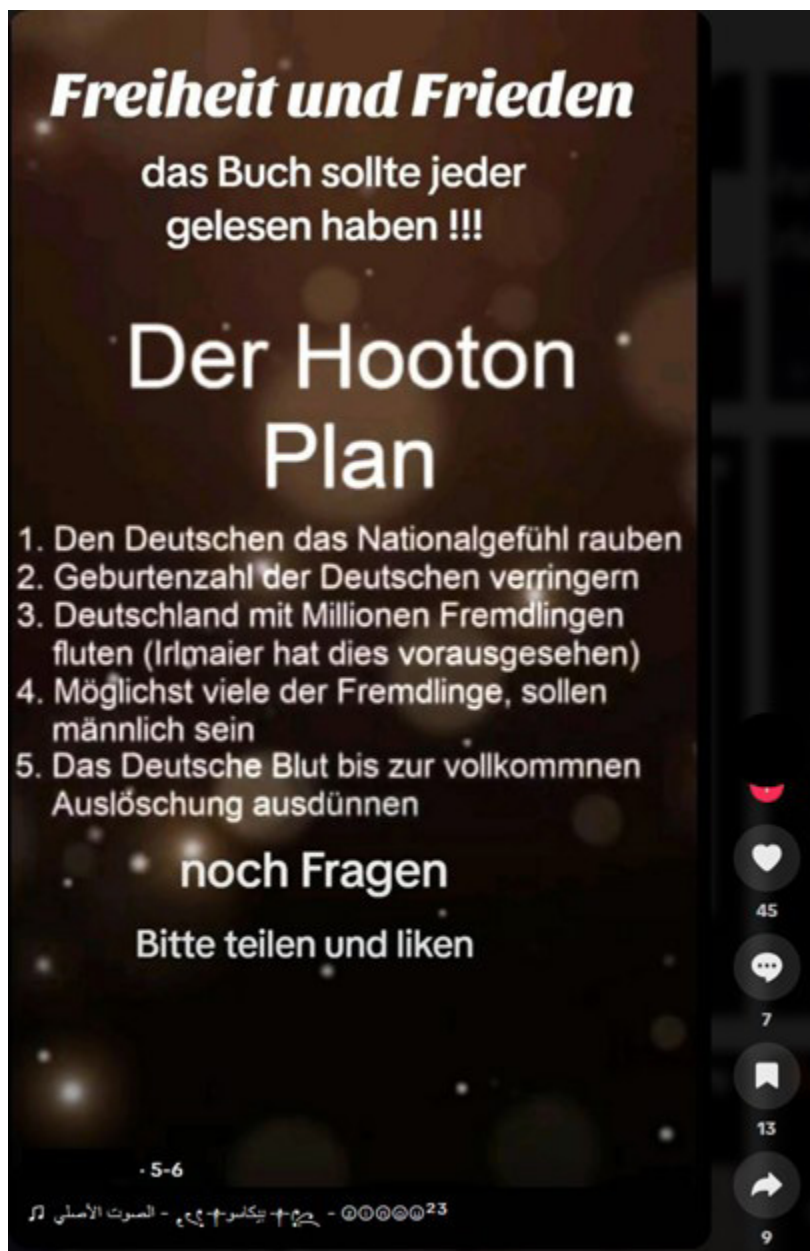


Image 5: This image illustrates how sovereignism often combines elements of nationalism, conspiratorial thinking, and racism. The reference to the so-called “Hooton Plan,” a conspiracy about the alleged destruction of the German people, which frames the sovereignist movement as fighting for “freedom and peace,” downplaying its exclusionary undertones. [Eng: “Freedom and peace. Everyone should read this book!!! The Hooton Plan. 1. robs the Germans of their sense of national identity. 2. reduces the German birthrate. 3. floods Germany with millions of foreigners. 4. Specifies that as many of the foreigners as possible should be male. 5. Thins out the German blood to the point of complete extinction. Any more questions. Please share and like.”] (Source: TikTok, May 2024)

Like in other forms of extremism, sovereignists adhere to a dualistic worldview of “good versus evil,” or “us versus them.” For example, Sovereignist Interviewee 3 highlights the important role that this perceived battle between good and evil plays in shaping their worldview:

“I’ve always felt that I don’t fit into this world. But this world is evil, and I am the light. That is the point.” - (Sovereignist Interviewee 3)

Similar thinking can result in a narrative of self-defence whereby adherents believe they have the right to resist, revolt or take revenge in cases of conflict or interaction with state representatives. Some may use legitimate government documents to justify their own beliefs, as Sovereignist Interviewee 2 did when referring to his right to resist as being part of the German constitution (*Grundgesetz*). In some extreme cases, this may lead adherents to use violence during a perceived threat by the state or its representatives. For example, in certain cases, sovereignists will reinforce their property lines with physical barriers like fencing, or hoard weapons in preparation for a confrontation. Individual freedom (from the state), alongside a desire for sovereignty, self-determination, and self-governance act as a central value among adherents. As a result, aspirations of this ideological viewpoint can include desires to overthrow and withdraw from the current governance or state system, and/or build a new system that, they believe, better supports their political preferences. Felix Blum, a domestic intelligence official, describes how these beliefs can become overwhelmingly all-consuming, leading to the development of what he calls an *Ein-Sparten-Identität* (Eng: “single-issue identity”), whereby a person’s entire sense of self becomes defined by the ideology.¹⁶⁹ In these cases, a person’s life may revolve almost entirely around their identity as a *Reichsbürger*, leaving little room for other social connections, hobbies, or activities outside the movement.

Conspiracies and Antisemitism

While the core of sovereignist ideology can be described as a conspiracy itself, sovereignist ideologies often include various other conspiracies, which are frequently rooted in antisemitic beliefs.¹⁷⁰ Conspiracy beliefs are a deeply rooted part of the ideology of sovereignism, though their content can vary depending on the context and the specific subgroup. Of little surprise, conspiracy narratives that promote the delegitimization of the Federal Republic of Germany are the most commonly held because they reinforce and align with existing sentiments. For example, one law enforcement official views conspiracies as foundational within the movement:

“For me, being a Reichsbürger and conspiracy theories are axiomatically linked. You can’t be a Reichsbürger without believing in conspiracy theories.” - (Law Enforcement ID 10)¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Felix Blum, Domestic Intelligence Official, State Office for the Protection of the Constitution.

¹⁷⁰ Ginsburg 2021.

¹⁷¹ Law enforcement ID 10, State Criminal Police Office.

Our interviews with individuals involved in the sovereignist movement suggest that conspiracy beliefs are not uniform across all adherents, nor do they always play the same role within their broader worldview. While Sovereignist Interviewee 1 only mentioned the conspiracy narrative of being awakened to a “hidden” truth, Sovereignist Interviewee 4 described a belief system that includes conspiracies about Chemtrails, the “Great Reset,” and a belief that the COVID-19 pandemic was planned, among others.

Several counsellors we interviewed explained that many of these conspiracies are rooted in a desire to protect an abstract German people under threat, a narrative commonly promoted by the far-right.¹⁷² The implied solutions, according to sovereignist worldviews, are to revert to a past empire or withdraw from the current state or system, uniting as a community of Germans.

However, not everyone is welcome in this imagined community of Germans. Many of these beliefs include antisemitic ideas about a nefarious Jewish “shadow government” or other clandestine forces controlling politics. As a result, antisemitic conspiracies provide a scapegoat and an explanation for perceived public crises, such as economic downturns, public health crises, or natural disasters. In the German context, QAnon was prominent during COVID-19, but has since declined, explains Sarah Pohl, a counsellor.¹⁷³ This shows how international influences can have effects on sovereignist thinking in Germany.



Image 6: This image demonstrates how antisemitic tropes intersect with conspiracies about political figures. (Source: Telegram, May 2024)

¹⁷² Counsellors ID 4 and ID 5, veritas Berlin.

¹⁷³ Sarah Pohl, Counsellor, Zebra | BW.



Image 7: This image combines antisemitic tropes with anti-government rhetoric, portraying Israel and the United States as puppet masters controlling other nations. Such imagery exemplifies how conspiracies are often used to delegitimize Western governments. It refers to Turkey's policy under President Erdoğan, who often emphasizes emancipating the country from Western influence. [Eng: "We've known this for 40 years... we were only able to free ourselves 10 years ago. Let's see how long it takes you to even understand it."] (Source: TikTok, May 2024)

Esoteric and Spiritual Elements

Sovereignists are described as having strong spiritual and esoteric elements embedded within their worldviews. For example, some sovereignist factions incorporate beliefs of being "one with the creator" or "activating a divine potential." The belief in having discovered the "truth" about the system and being "awakened" is often reinforced through esoteric narratives:

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“I was always like that... I always saw the right way. I was already shown it. You know, the ‘inner eye,’ the feeling... something inside me always showed me.” - (Sovereignist Interviewee 3)

According to Sovereignist Interviewee 1, the movement is a venue to develop and strengthen a perceived positive sense of spirituality. This can reinforce the narratives that there exists a hidden “higher truth” about the intentions of government. In some cases, the leaders of sovereignist groups are worshipped as metaphysical beings. These esoteric beliefs are commonly intertwined with far-right ideologies, particularly the notion that individuals have been reincarnated to fulfill a special “mission” on behalf of the German people, a theme that appears frequently in far-right esoteric circles.

Overall, esoteric beliefs are described by criminal psychologist Keil as a potential gateway to radicalization.¹⁷⁴ This was particularly evident during the pandemic, when health-related concerns led many people to explore “alternative” healing methods rooted in esotericism. These spaces frequently served as entry-points for anti-government narratives to take hold, gradually building acceptance to such beliefs.

The term “conspirituallity” refers to the intersection of conspiracies and “alternative spiritual” worldviews. This rapidly growing phenomenon, which is particularly prevalent in online conspiracy circles, is often accompanied by a sense of political disillusionment and has proven to be highly compatible with the narratives promoted by the sovereignist movement, as shown in the image below.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Jan-Gerrit Keil, criminal psychologist, State Security Division of the Criminal Police.

¹⁷⁵ Ward and Voas 2011.



Die 4 indianischen Gesetze der Spiritualität

- 1 – „Der Mensch der Dir begegnet ist der Richtige.“
Dh, Niemand tritt zufällig in Dein Leben. Alle Menschen die uns umgeben sind da um uns zu lehren, oder in unserer Situation voran zu bringen.
- 2 – „Das was passiert, ist das Einzige, was Dir passieren konnte.“
Kurz formuliert, Zufälle existieren nicht, alles was Dir widerfährt, ist exakt so geplant.
- 3 – „Jeder Moment, in dem etwas beginnt, ist der richtige Moment.“
Dh, alles geschieht, wann es geschehen soll, nicht früher und nicht später.
- 4 – „Was zu Ende ist, ist zu Ende.“
So einfach ist das. Wird etwas beendet, beginnt immer etwas Neues, also loslassen und weitergehen.

Image 8: Spirituality plays a prominent role in parts of the German sovereignist movement, often blending eclectic practices with nationalist and anti-modern ideologies. It reflects how the movement uses mystical and esoteric ideas to legitimize their worldview and attract followers seeking meaning beyond conventional systems. [Eng: “The 4 Indigenous laws of spirituality. 1 - ‘The person you meet is the right one.’ This means that nobody comes into your life by coincidence. All the people who surround us are there to teach us or to help us in our situation. 2 - ‘What happens is the only thing that could happen to you.’ In short, coincidences do not exist, everything that happens to you is exactly planned. 3 - ‘Every moment in which something begins is the right moment.’ This means that everything happens when it is supposed to happen, not earlier and not later. 4 - ‘What is finished is finished.’ It’s as simple as that. When something ends, something new always begins, so let go and move on.”] (Source: Telegram, May 2024)

Political Spectrum

Experts we interviewed identified the sovereignist movement as spanning a wide political spectrum. Several noted that the movement as a whole defies clear political classification, as its adherents come from a wide variety of political backgrounds.

However, the movement's overlap with far-right extremism is especially clear. The rise of the movement, along with the widespread BRD GmbH narrative, which claims that the Federal Republic of Germany is a corporate entity, is tightly intertwined with far-right ideological narratives, as shown in the image below.



Image 9: This post adopts the “BRD GmbH” narrative, which claims that Germany is a corporate entity, and its citizens are merely employees. In this example, this narrative is reversed: portraying the government officials as employees of “the people” who have been served a termination notice. This rhetoric seeks to delegitimize democratic governance and assert a false narrative of legal and political sovereignty [Eng: “To the government. Termination. We hereby terminate your employment contract with the federal government with immediate effect. Please resign immediately and vacate your seat. All allowances for your entire term of office must be repaid to us. Your employer, the people. This letter is valid without signature. Not right, not left, but realist. Sharing costs nothing.”] (Source: TikTok, May 2024)

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Many of the movement's core ideological narratives are clearly rooted in far-right beliefs, as they often seek not to eliminate social inequalities but to preserve or reinstate them. For example, some call for a return to the constitution of *Kaiserreich* (Eng: "German Empire," the German Federal monarchy founded in 1871) or by defining "true" Germans as those with ancestral ties to Germany before a certain date (e.g., 1913). During our interview with counsellor Pohl, she suggested that people who join the movement are not necessarily far-right extremists to begin with, but rather, they come to adopt these beliefs through sovereignist narratives.¹⁷⁶



Image 10: An example of a sovereignist channel supporting the German partially far-right political party AfD (Alternative für Deutschland). It implies that there is currently no sovereignty in Europe, and that the AfD can re-establish it. [Eng: "For a Europe in which freedom, sovereignty and democracy are no longer foreign words. Rally in Oranienburg. Rethinking Europe - a future for Germany. Dr. Christoph Berndt, member of the state parliament, top candidate for the state parliament. Tino Chrupalla, member of the Bundestag, Federal Chairman. Mary Khan, EU candidate. René Aust, member of the state parliament, EU candidate. Wednesday, 05 June 2024, 06:30 pm. Schlossplatz, 16515 Oranienburg. AfD Brandenburg state association. Election campaign dates."] (Source: TikTok, May 2024)

¹⁷⁶ Sarah Pohl, Counsellor, Zebra | BW.

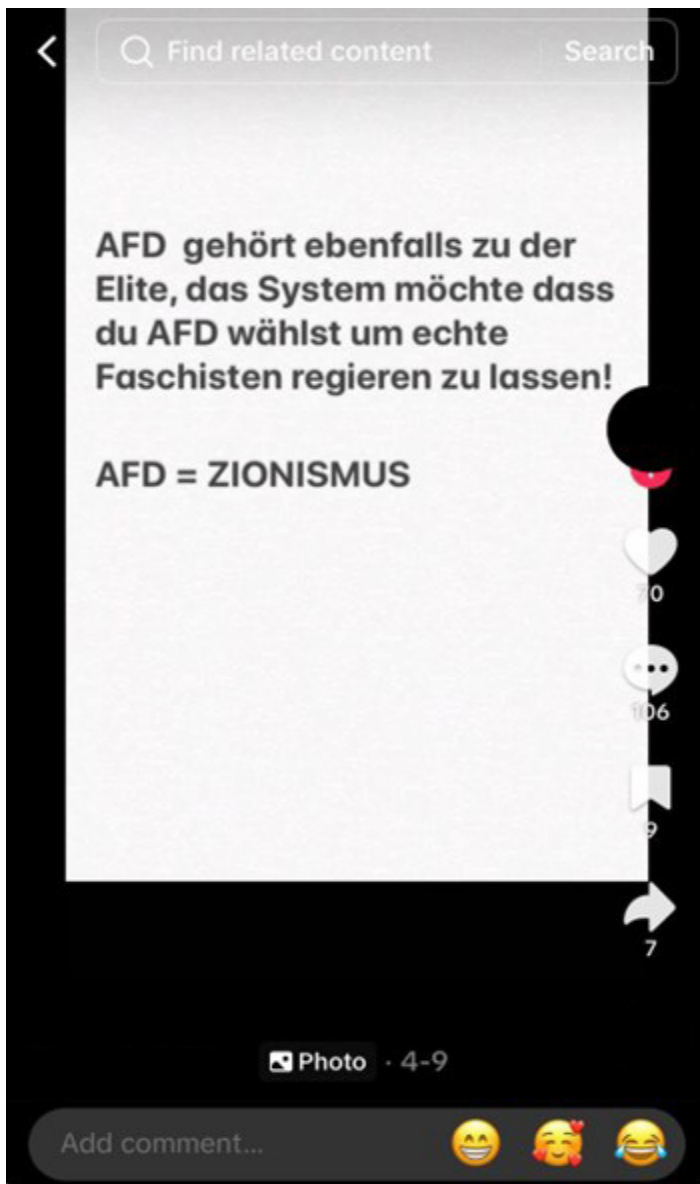


Image 11: An example of a sovereignist group rejecting the AfD party, due to the perceived alignment of the AfD with antisemitic conspiracies. In this example, the AfD is criticized as being part of a so-called “elite” under the control of a clandestine Jewish conspiracy [Eng: “AfD is also part of the elite, the system wants you to vote AfD to let real fascists rule! AfD = Zionism.”] (Source: TikTok, April 2024)

Despite evident alignment with some far-right ideas, experts note that some sovereignists also adopt politically leftist ideals, such as sustainability and ecological farming; both of which align with self-governance, self-reliance, and the promotion of a perceived common good.

Still, some individuals within the movement view themselves as apolitical, expressing frustration with a perceived lack of representation by the existing political parties. Some may view societal conflicts and divisions, such as those related to political polarization, East-West tensions, or gender equality, as artificially created injustices imposed by the system itself. Sovereignist Interviewee 4, for example, describes a reluctance to categorize himself politically, claiming he will only do so when political circumstances lead him to make a clear decision:

“I somehow never try to categorize myself, neither right, nor left, nor up, nor down. I don't have any religious beliefs, either. I want to keep it open for myself, so when the time comes, maybe when the circumstances are right, I'll say, 'ok, yes, I'm really starting to believe now,' or 'yes, I'll really start being right-wing' when the time really comes. But at the moment I don't have this feeling that I'm somehow right-wing. Quite the opposite. Because I would rather like that humans are one, we understand each other.” - (Sovereignist Interviewee 4)

At the same time, several sovereignist interviewees expressed a contradictory belief in the unity of all humankind, while paradoxically promoting exclusionary ideas such as denying equality to those who cannot prove their ancestral German heritage.



Image 12: This image illustrates an example of a conspiracy-driven worldview, portraying a hidden “system” that controls all political sides, rendering elections meaningless. Such beliefs reject democratic processes and the political spectrum as a whole and fuel distrust in government institutions. [Eng: “I am the system. I gave you politics and called them left and right! What you want will never matter, because I control everything!”] (Source: TikTok, May 2024)



Die Parlamentarische Demokratie hat fertig.

Demokratie = Demon = Satan

Image 13: An example of the sovereignist movement employing far-right extremist ideas to justify the rejection of democracy. [Eng: "I won't give my vote to a politician who considers foreign people and cultures more important than his own people! Democracy is over. Democracy = Demon = Satan"] (Source: Telegram, May 2024)

3a Reasons for Involvement in Germany

Experts consistently highlight that a combination of social, psychological, and economic factors shape both the profiles of individuals drawn to these beliefs and their reasons for involvement. Rather than a single determining factor, the adoption of these beliefs is typically shaped by a complex interplay of multiple factors. While many experts describe the prototypical adherent as a middle-aged male, they also make clear the diversity of the movement. Our research highlights that adherents are not a monolithic group, but rather, a diverse cross-section of individuals from a range of backgrounds. However, most experts agree that radicalization within the sovereignist movement occurs later in life, though exceptions exist. Additionally, experts also note there has been an increase in the proportion of women involved in the sovereignist movement. Age and gender are important factors that require further consideration regarding their influence on the following reasons for involvement.

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Personal Hardships and Experiences

Individuals drawn to sovereignist ideologies often express deep frustration, whether with their personal circumstances, societal conditions, or broader political dissatisfaction. Experts we interviewed agreed that personal crises, such as unemployment, financial hardships, health challenges, or bereavement, can serve as catalysts for adopting these beliefs. While some of these challenges may be linked to an individual's own choices, others are the result of life events beyond a person's control. Sovereignist ideologies provide a clear and often simplified narrative that assigns blame to external systems, institutions, groups, or elites, which can provide a sense of meaning and control in the face of overwhelming or unexplained hardships. These beliefs shift the focus away from uncertainty or personal failures, and toward an identifiable source of blame. Additionally, sovereignist beliefs can offer some cognitive relief by externalizing decision-making: individuals no longer must make difficult decisions themselves since they perceive external forces are in control of determining their fate. This reduces the psychological burden of personal responsibility, uncertainty, or difficult life choices.

Some sovereignist interviewees and survey participants can trace their beliefs back to personal experiences under the previous state systems in Germany. In the survey, two participants referenced their loved one's experience in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the former socialist state in East Germany that existed from 1949 to 1990 under Soviet administration. More specifically, one survey participant attributed their loved one's current views to a pre-existing disdain toward the political system during that era. The other said their loved one expressed a sense of nostalgia and idealization of the GDR, noting that its dissolution fostered a deep sense of mistrust in politics and the current government, which they perceive as foreign imposed. Our interviewees expressed similar sentiments. For instance, Sovereignist Interviewee 2 traces his initial sovereignist thoughts to his experience living in the GDR. He recalled questioning how individuals who no longer wished to live under the system could be effectively confined within such a construct.

Another reoccurring theme among those involved in the movement is emotional vulnerability. Traits like social reclusiveness and frustration with life are commonly observed, alongside expressions of mental health concerns. According to our interviews with experts, some individuals reportedly display symptoms of delusion or other psychological conditions, often paired with a deep mistrust of mainstream mental health services. Criminal psychologist Keil notes that the belief system and the individual's personal crisis may be mutually reinforcing – each deepening the other as time goes on.¹⁷⁷

177 Jan-Gerrit Keil, criminal psychologist, State Security Division of the Criminal Police.

Financial hardships, particularly for the self-employed or those burdened by debt, are another common factor for involvement. Economic distress, such as struggles to pay taxes, fees, rent or mortgages, can push people to seek out groups that promise relief or validation. The ideology provides an accessible and simple explanation as to why it is unnecessary to pay certain debts or taxes. Often the individuals may have already experienced conflict with authorities due to their financial situation, and the belief system and the pseudolaw tactics provide a sense of self-empowerment and agency against authorities.

“For me, it’s like this: I live out of charity. But nothing more. And I’ll do my damndest to not pay another cent in taxes for this system as long as it works the way it does.”

- (Sovereignist Interviewee 2)

It is important to recognize that experiences of both perceived and actual injustice can contribute to radicalization. Giulia Silberberger, a political advocate, describes how individuals who have been the victim of judicial error may lose trust in the state and experience a deep sense of injustice.¹⁷⁸ For example, Sovereignist Interviewee 2 described a negative experience with a former business partner and subsequent legal prosecution, which contributed to his distrust of the system.

The movement attracts individuals from a wide range of educational and professional backgrounds, from unemployed persons to highly educated professionals. Notably, however, experts have highlighted a particularly high proportion of self-employed individuals within the movement. Ulrike Schiesser, a counsellor in Austria, attributes this trend to the strong desire for personal freedom and individualism, which may be more prevalent among self-employed or entrepreneurial individuals, as well as their potentially heightened tolerance of financial instability.¹⁷⁹

Adherents also include other professionals such as lawyers, government officials, police officers, or members of the armed forces, who bring legal or political expertise and, in some cases, tactical and combat experience to the movement. Experts also emphasize that many individuals are motivated to join the movement by a desire for status and authority. For example, joining a self-declared “nation” or sovereign community can come with symbolic titles or roles that offer a sense of recognition and power to individuals lacking these in their personal or professional lives.

¹⁷⁸ Giulia Silberberger, Political Advocate, Der Goldene Aluhut.

¹⁷⁹ Ulrike Schiesser, Counsellor, Federal Office for Questions on Cults (Austria).

Experts highlight that, historically, individuals involved in sovereignist movements tend to radicalize later in life, particularly during periods of acute personal challenge or change. Dieter Rohmann, a counsellor, observes that transitions or changes during life can spark the desire to reassess or reevaluate one's circumstances leading to the adoption of radical new beliefs.¹⁸⁰ These periods may also frequently be accompanied by bouts of loneliness, uncertainty, and fear of the future, making people more likely to seek out new meaning and a sense of agency. For example, retirement or periods of unemployment may be life changes that can lead to a loss of identity or purpose, while sovereignist movements can readily provide a new or stable identity and a clear worldview. These movements are also self-guided, meaning that individuals can invest a significant portion time and energy engaging with the ideology, filling their free time and giving them a sense of meaning or purpose. For example, Sovereignist Interviewee 2 describes his involvement with the group as his "profession."

Among survey respondents, they too highlighted the paradoxical role of education and conspiratorial thinking among their loved ones and close contacts involved in the sovereignist movement. For example, some respondents described their close contacts as having a tendency to see patterns or connections that do not exist or struggling to critically evaluate information. In contrast, others described their close contacts as highly intelligent but socially alienated, leading them to seek membership and self-perceived importance in the sovereignist movement. Another described their loved one as feeling intellectually underchallenged in their workplace, leading them to channel their intellectual energies into the sovereignist movement.

Social Needs and Dynamics

Experts often highlight the role of loneliness in contributing to involvement in sovereignist groups. For instance, experts describe many adherents as socially isolated, lacking in close or quality social relationships. While most adherents' families are not directly involved in the movement, Beckmann, an activist and legal expert, observes that some adherents are able to maintain stable family relationships during their involvement.¹⁸¹ For example, Sovereignist Interviewee 4 appears to lead a seemingly typical life with his wife and two children. Schiesser and other counsellors we interviewed propose that many individuals likely did not have large social circles to begin with, or that they quickly lose their close contacts.¹⁸²

180 Dieter Rohmann, counsellor, KULTE – Einstieg in den Ausstieg.

181 Jörn Beckmann, Activist/legal expert.

182 Ulrike Schiesser, Counsellor, Federal Office for Questions on Cults (Austria).

Alternatively, two sovereignists we interviewed claim they have managed to maintain their social circle by keeping them at bay from their sovereignist beliefs. This is done on the one hand to protect them from the “harsh reality” (Sovereignist Interviewee 4), and on the other, because they claim their social circles would not understand it (Sovereignist Interviewee 2). Sovereignist Interviewee 3 strongly emphasized the feeling of not being taken seriously, being dismissed, mocked, and having few social bonds outside of sovereignist groups. In this context, the desire for community can be a powerful driver that deepens involvement. Individuals often find companionship and a sense of belonging within these groups, where their beliefs are reinforced, their values are shared, and they feel understood. Experts also indicate that individuals craving recognition may seek validation and social status in these groups. One of the sovereignist interviewees describes a sense of loneliness and resignation and feels as though there are no like-minded people in his life. He also describes his search to find an ideological community:

“I say, a bit of a let-down, even if you end up thinking: Where are you going? Who knows about it? You have to find out first. Are there even people who know the same thing as you? Of course you investigate in that direction.” - (Sovereignist Interviewee 4)

Although it is relatively rare for entire families to become involved in sovereignist movements, it does occur in some cases. Family members and social dynamics can play a role in the radicalization process. For instance, spouses, parents, or children can adopt these beliefs and subsequently share them within their household, potentially contributing to the radicalization of family members. Sovereignist Interviewee 1, for example, was introduced to sovereignist beliefs by his father.

Distrust in Institutions and Democratic Systems

General mistrust of institutions is a contributing factor for involvement in the sovereignist movement, as well as a consequence of it. Researcher Rathje highlights that a lack of trust in democratic systems, the media, and science is particularly common, especially amongst older generations of sovereignists.¹⁸³ Criminal psychologist Keil adds that many individuals experience a sense of powerlessness, particularly when they feel that elections do nothing to spark meaningful change.¹⁸⁴ Others report feeling a sense of exclusion from the political decision-making processes, feeling as though no mainstream political parties represent their interests. This distrust is often fuelled by a feeling, whether perceived or genuine, of injustice or betrayal by the state. For example, one German-language survey participant wrote that those involved in the sovereignist movement are simply seeking to be heard:

183 Jar, Rathje, Reseracher, CeMAS.

184 Jan-Gerrit Keil, criminal psychologist, State Security Division of the Criminal Police.

“People just want to be heard, want to feel like they belong, want to (be able to) change something - want to actively influence their lives and [yet] feel ignored by politics (migration politics, COVID-19 decisions, waste of taxpayers’ money...)” - (Survey Respondent ID 113, Germany)

Health concerns became a prominent entry-point to broader sovereignist beliefs during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Sovereignist Interviewee 4 spoke about his suspicions regarding government-imposed health mandates and measures, and how he lost his job because he refused to get vaccinated. After his termination, he found videos on TikTok which confirmed his suspicions. One survey respondent similarly emphasized how COVID-19 exacerbated her mother’s pre-existing suspicions about the government:

“She was already difficult before COVID-19, but when it arrived, everything escalated. She absorbed everything that was being spread on Facebook and YouTube. The wave of hate and the many protesting people validated her; suddenly, she wasn’t alone anymore – they kept encouraging each other.” - (Survey Respondent ID 36, Germany)

Blum, a domestic intelligence official, notes the striking increase in the number of women in the sovereignist movement during the COVID-19 protests compared to previous years.¹⁸⁵ While there is likely no singular answer to explain this shift, it is plausible that many women involved in the COVID-19 protests were initially active in spiritual, esoteric, and “alternative medicine” circles, and thus found their way into the sovereignist scene.

185 Felix Blum, Domestic intelligence official, State Office for the Protection of the Constitution.



Die Geimpften haben keine Chance.
Sie werden gehen.

Image 14: The COVID-19 pandemic became a breeding ground for conspiratorial and sovereignist thinking by exploiting fears about the role of the government. [Eng: “The vaccinated stand no chance. They will go.”] (Source: Telegram, May 2024)

Simplicity, Alternative Lifestyles and Closeness to Nature

The desire for simplification of complex issues can be found in other forms of extremism, including jihadism or far-right extremism.¹⁸⁶ Counsellors we interviewed explained that ideological commitments are often reinforced by a desire for simplicity and a low tolerance for ambiguity, especially in today’s increasingly complex world.¹⁸⁷ In the face of rapid technological advancement, some individuals feel that humanity is moving in the wrong direction. To combat this, they turn toward what they view as a simpler life, which can consist of ways of life promoted and promised by sovereignist movements. As one sovereignist interviewee put it:

“We have to get away from all this material nonsense. It’s just junk. That’s exactly what makes you dependent. This idea that you always need another phone, another iPhone, another watch, another handbag.” - (Sovereignist Interviewee 3)

¹⁸⁶ El-Mafaalani 2014, 356; Srowig et. al. 2018, 4.

¹⁸⁷ Counsellor ID 8 and ID 9, demos - Brandenburgisches Institut für Gemeinwesenberatung.

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The sovereignist interviewees we spoke to fantasized about establishing their own villages, growing their own food, and living a self-sustainable life free from external societal pressures. Sovereignist Interviewee 4 described it as a life in which “humans can finally be human.” These visions are deeply rooted in a strong connection to nature and a desire for self-sufficiency:

“I know what life is about. People have forgotten everything. Nature is our greatest friend, not our enemy. That’s what I’ve learned: to love nature, and that has made me truly happy. Because it gives me everything I need.” - (Sovereignist Interviewee 3)

Counsellors note that, in some cases, the desire for personal freedom, which is believed to be achievable through alternative lifestyles or a new societal model, is more important to adherents than fully agreeing with all ideological aspects of the movement.¹⁸⁸ Sovereignist Interviewee 3 emphasized:

“We are fighting for freedom, not against this system, but for the freedom that we only have to pay our 10 percent tax and that everyone can do as they please.” - (Sovereignist Interviewee 3)

Alternative lifestyles and a strong connection to nature are also often accompanied by esoteric or spiritual practices. Criminal psychologist Keil identifies “alternative medicine” (Ger: *Heilpraktiker*innen-Milieu*), which largely lacks scientific evidence, as a potential gateway into sovereignist ideologies. Our survey results confirm that some individuals were drawn into these movements through their engagement with esoteric and spiritual beliefs:

“[He has] increasing difficulties in various areas of his life and the inability to talk about them clearly with anyone, [which has] led him to look for ‘alternative solutions’. From there on, he was receptive to the most stupid crap. It just had to sound plausible and give him the feeling that he could discover new, better ways himself. His wife is severely depressed, which he can’t deal with, and he kept taking refuge in esotericism and conspiracy stories.” - (Survey Respondent ID 56, Germany)

Idealism, Utopian Visions and “Critical Thinking”

Individuals involved in sovereignist movements often express a strong sense of idealism stemming from a desire to create or belong to a world that aligns with their personal values. This idealism appears to be a key part of their own self-perception among adherents. A reoccurring theme is the belief that they are fighting for what is right, or for a better world. As Sovereignist Interviewee 3 put it:

¹⁸⁸ Counsellor ID 8 and ID 9, demos - Brandenburgisches Institut für Gemeinwesenberatung.

"We're not against something. But for something, for something beautiful"
- (Sovereignist Interviewee 3)

For example, similarly, Sovereignist Interviewee 4 envisions a self-sufficient village defined by positive values: freedom from prejudice, acceptance of others, living in harmony, and a life without violence or competition. Many adherents share similar utopian visions, such as living in harmony with nature or forming self-sufficient communities outside of state control. However, not all these visions are built on true equality. For example, political advocate Silberberger highlights that many sovereignist adherents envision what is known as a *völkisches Leben* (Eng: "ethno-nationalist rural life") to return to a perceived existence which is "purer" and simpler.¹⁸⁹



Image 15: The hashtag #selbstversorger refers to someone who lives a self-sufficient lifestyle [Eng: "Imagine you were a free human. #free #self-sufficient #viral #future"] (Source: TikTok, June 2023)

¹⁸⁹ Guilia Silberberger, Political Advocate, Der Goldene Aluhut.

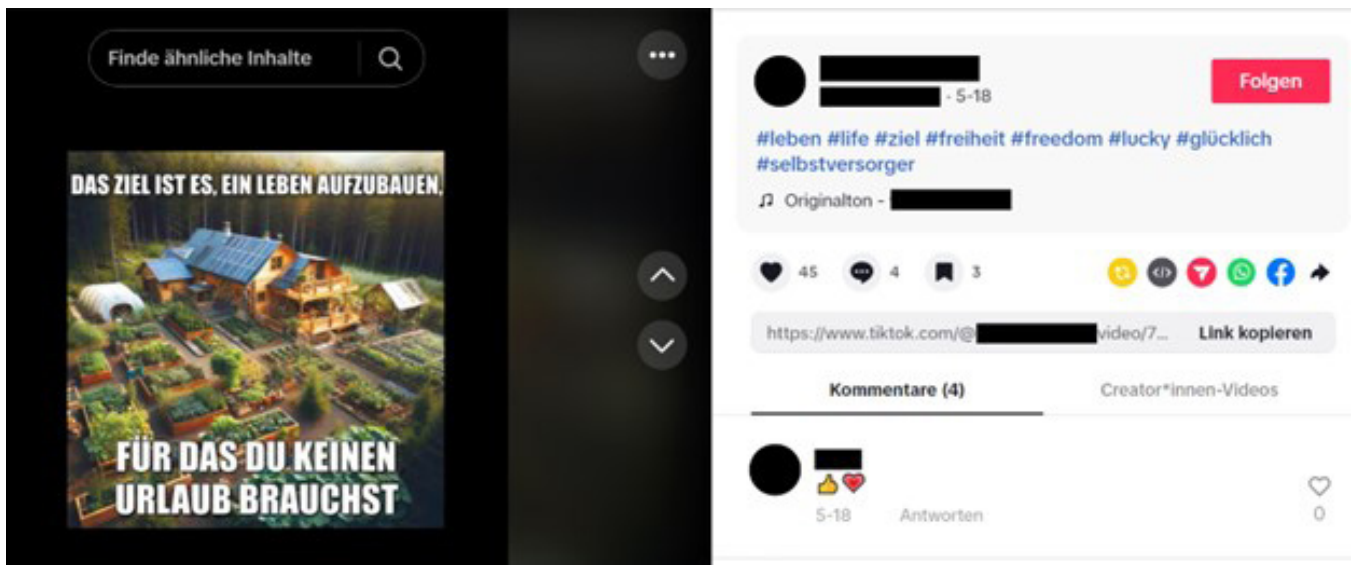


Image 16: The idealization of a self-sufficient lifestyle [Eng: “The goal is to build a live you don’t need a holiday from #life #goal #happy #self-sufficient”] (Source: TikTok, May 2024)

As counsellor Rohmann observes, adherents of the sovereignist movement commonly desire clear rules and strong leaders.¹⁹⁰ For instance, many are drawn to the promise of a more structured, predictable, and morally “just” society because they perceive the current system as unfair and corrupt. Sovereignist Interviewee 1 describes his hopes for an alternative system:

“Anyway, I’m just fed up with fighting just to survive, instead of just enjoying my life. So that you can simply live without money, that you can work together with others in a self-sufficient way and that you can have fun and enjoy it. So. Yes, there is definitely a difference between this [specific sovereignist group] feeling and this BRD feeling [referring to the feeling of living under the current government of the Federal Republic of Germany].” - (Sovereignist Interviewee 1)

Most sovereignists perceive themselves as being “chosen” or “awakened” to a hidden truth, and as a result, many develop a sense of superiority over others who are not involved in the movement. A reoccurring topic in all our interviews with sovereignists is the belief they have “woken up” and have chosen to face reality and see past manipulation. Many described themselves as being “enlightened.”

¹⁹⁰ Dieter Rohmann, Counsellor, KULTE – Einstieg in den Ausstieg.

Despite the strong self-confidence expressed by many adherents, experts observe that individuals within the sovereignist movement can be highly impressionable. This is partly due to a set of contrasting traits: while many view themselves as critical thinkers, they may also be drawn toward conspiracy narratives and lack a consistent approach to critically evaluating information. Rather than relying on evidence-based sources, they tend to place greater trust in so-called “alternative” or non-mainstream sources and narratives which have few accountability or fact-checking measures in place, especially narratives which fit their pre-existing beliefs. As noted by counsellors interviewed, this idealism can make some individuals particularly susceptible to charismatic figures who appear to align with their values, but who may instead exploit their trust for personal or financial gain.¹⁹¹



Image 17: This post uses metaphoric language and visuals to refer to seeing the truth, joining forces as a “pack of wolves,” and initiating resistance [Eng: “It is no longer our job to wake sleeping sheep. Let’s wake other wolves!”] (Source: Telegram, May 2024)

¹⁹¹ Counsellor ID 8 and ID 9, demos - Brandenburgisches Institut für Gemeinwesenberatung.

Media Literacy and Online Radicalization

Many experts expressed the view that a lack of media literacy likely plays a role in a person's involvement in sovereignist movements, especially among older generations:

"I believe that media literacy is also a really important factor. Various studies have also shown that media literacy is significantly weaker in the generations aged 60+, meaning that the ability to recognize fake news is decreasing. And I would say that many [of these] worldviews are actually based on a lack of media literacy and that a lot is taken as truth." - (Sarah Pohl)¹⁹²

Survey participants also express similar experiences:

"I would say that internet access has contributed a lot to this, as the person has not grown up with the internet and is therefore less able to evaluate it." - (Survey Respondent ID 76, Germany)

Many online conspiracies offer validation of their frustrations and an explanation for their perceived alienation from mainstream society. Experts also highlight the role of social media platforms with little content moderation like Telegram in spreading harmful narratives, which allow individuals to deepen their beliefs and connect with like-minded individuals.

4a Obstacles and Factors in Distancing in Germany

According to experts we interviewed for this project, in contrast to far-right extremism or jihadism, there are few known individuals in the sovereignist movement who have successfully distanced themselves from the ideology. However, experts did identify several reasons which may contribute to distancing, described in the following sections.

Lack of Motivation or Perceived Need for Distancing

For many individuals involved in the sovereignist movement, there is little motivation or perceived need to distance themselves from the ideology. According to experts we interviewed, this is evident, among other things, in the fact that counselling rarely involves sovereignists themselves; instead, it is typically sought by concerned individuals from their social circles. This pattern is further reflected in three of the sovereignist interviewees, who expressed no doubts or concerns about their beliefs. Sovereignist Interviewee 1 did not necessarily express doubts about his beliefs, but voiced concerns about joining a specific sovereignist group as it would require a complete change in lifestyle including giving up his current occupation.

¹⁹² Sarah Pohl, Counsellor, ZEBRA | BW.

When counselling does occur, it is often mandated within non-voluntary contexts, such as during legal proceedings, rather than resulting from a genuine desire to change. Nevertheless, these interactions can provide opportunities for critical discussions and may prompt individuals to reflect on their views. At the same time, this dynamic can have negative impacts on loved ones, as one survey participant expressed a sense of hopelessness: *“Some people are simply lost.”* (Survey Respondent ID 32, Germany).

Criminal psychologist Keil identifies rigid thinking as a distinct challenge for distancing, and links it to the process of aging. Adherents often find ways to reduce inconsistencies in their thinking (cognitive dissonance) by finding convincing reasons to hold onto their ideology.¹⁹³ Additionally, sovereignist beliefs are structured in ways that are resistant to challenge, much like other conspiracies, which instruct adherents to be skeptical of all information that contradicts their worldview.¹⁹⁴

Moreover, distancing oneself from sovereignist ideologies can often involve experiencing significant shame. For example, individuals must question their personal choices and, in some cases, may have to mourn the years of time and money invested into these beliefs, which may have also damaged personal or professional relationships. As a result, remaining in the movement can appear like the easier path, leading some to maintain involvement to avoid confronting difficult emotions.

The Impact of Relationships

Despite the many challenges and obstacles, experts we interviewed did indicate there are some factors that might help foster distancing. For instance, maintaining personal relationships with those outside of the sovereignist movement can help encourage reflection during crucial moments of doubt or questioning. A sovereignist interviewee describes how he listens to his father’s concerns about his plans to join a sovereignist group:

“Well, my father is happy when I talk to him, and he’s also aware of my problems in everyday life. And, of course, he also said that it doesn’t make sense for me to continue as I am now. That I definitely need to change something. He also said that I should be cautious with [specific sovereignist group], because he thinks there are some people there who are just in it for the money.”
- (Sovereignist Interviewee 1)

193 Jan-Gerrit Keil, criminal psychologist, State Security Division of the Criminal Police.

194 Butter 2018.

In counselling settings, members of an adherent's social circle are often advised to set clear boundaries and express their beliefs against the ideology, while still maintaining contact with the person if the situation allows it. This may prove helpful, as practitioners note there are moments when individuals may become more willing to engage in open dialogue and can be meaningfully reached:

"What we still see is that there are moments when the escape from reality fails. These are the well-known points of cognitive openness. And we have to identify these moments with the help of the close individuals, because then we have an opportunity to reach the person for upward development and distancing processes." - (Counsellor ID 4)¹⁹⁵

Another strategy discussed by counsellors we interviewed is the importance not to reduce individuals solely to their sovereignist beliefs, but to recognize and highlight other characteristics, strengths, and skills. Doing so can help reinforce other aspects of their identity, which can potentially support a shift away from their ideological views.

One effective strategy may involve reconnecting individuals with shared past values. For example, a former voter of the Green Party who joined the anti-COVID-19 protest movement and subsequently adopted conspiratorial and sovereignist ideologies might still be engaged in meaningful conversations about climate action. In these cases, reminding them of past commitments, interests, or values can help bridge and re-establish dialogue, potentially preventing further radicalization.

Disillusionment

Disillusionment can also serve as a powerful turning point for some adherents, particularly when they come to recognize the personal costs resulting from their involvement, such as strained family relationships, social isolation, financial challenges, or passing up professional opportunities. However, this process of realization usually requires the individual to have meaningful relationships or goals to lose in the first place, which may be absent in the case of highly isolated individuals. For example, in the survey, some respondents noted a deterioration or breakdown of relationships as the primary catalyst for critical reflection. Disillusionment can also manifest as a desire to hold ideologues within the movement accountable, particularly when adherents realize the harm these beliefs have caused in their personal lives or the failure of promises.

¹⁹⁵ Counsellor ID 4, veritas Berlin.

Professional Support and Counselling

Exit programs and counselling are considered important tools for those looking to distance themselves from extremist groups and beliefs. However, these programs are often not the factor that initiates distancing. Rather, counsellor Schiesser reports that once individuals have sought the support of exit or counselling programs, they have usually already begun the process of distancing themselves.¹⁹⁶

This underscores the important role that social circles have in recognizing when someone is not only beginning to engage with the sovereignist ideology, but also when they start to question it. In the case of the former, early detection may make it possible to support individuals in their decision-making processes and, ideally, prevent them from joining the movement in the first place. On the other hand, those already involved and who begin to question these beliefs may benefit from support as early as possible in the process. For example, sovereignist interviewee 1 expresses his hesitations regarding formal entry into a sovereignist group, as he claims this would constitute a new level of involvement. For him, joining a sovereignist group requires leaving the Federal Republic of Germany which, in his view, is associated with courage and strength, and thus holds some people back from fully committing:

“The people there [sovereignist group] just can’t picture me doing it because, somehow, I’m not ready from their perspective. That’s because it involves a lot of courage, and you also need a lot of strength to fully make the switch... there are people who are capable of doing that, and others who analyze their fears in connection with it.” - (Sovereignist interviewee 1)

This demonstrates that even after an individual has adopted sovereignist beliefs, there still exist windows of opportunity where hesitation and doubt can prevent some sovereigntists from fully committing to their worldviews, offering the possibility of intervention leading to distancing. Therefore, it is essential that people in the social environment receive professional counselling as early as possible to recognize and utilize opportunities for change and distancing.

5a Risks, Threats and Dangers in Germany

Sovereignism poses risks and threats on multiple levels. It not only harms the individuals involved but also has significant effects on those close to them. In addition, the ideology presents dangers to authorities and law enforcement, and, on a broader scale, endangers the foundations of democratic societies.

¹⁹⁶ Ulrike Schiesser, counselor, Federal Office for Questions on Cults (Austria).

Risks to Adherents of Sovereignist Beliefs

Experts state that the risks associated with involvement in sovereignist beliefs and groups are often not fully recognized or readily visible, particularly for the individuals themselves. Instead, public attention tends to focus on the risks and dangers the movement poses to society. However, the ideology can be especially destructive on the individual level.

One of the most significant risks among adherents is the potential for psychological or emotional decline. Experts highlight that sustained involvement can lead to feelings of powerlessness or fear, which could increase vulnerability to other mental health issues like depression. A survey respondent from Germany describes how decades of consuming sovereignist content led to a complete erosion of their loved one's personality. Similarly, a sovereignist interviewee told us the following:

"Well, I found that I was happier in the time before [joining the movement]. When you were actually carefree, easier. You didn't even think about the problems. You didn't notice anything, you were focused on yourself. You lived in your bubble. I don't know, it was as if someone had come along with a needle and, bam, pricked your bubble like that." - (Sovereignist Interviewee 4)

Political advocate Silberberger describes the ideology as being addictive, where adherents are driven by a constant need to prove conspiracies and reinforce their beliefs and ultimately leading to further detachment from reality.¹⁹⁷ In addition, many adherents experience social isolation and loneliness, which can compound this impact. In extreme cases, this can lead to extended suicide (also known as murder-suicide), in which the adherent attempts (or succeeds) in killing either targets of their ideology (e.g., police) or members of their social circle (e.g., family), before taking their own life. High-risk situations arise when individuals feel trapped in their own beliefs or perceive threats, for instance, through forced seizures or evictions.

In addition to the emotional and psychological toll that involvement may cause for the individual, it may also result in financial or legal difficulties due to the ideology's rejection of the state. The risks are especially high because many typical sovereignist behaviours often do not result in any immediate consequences. In fact, many adherents may interpret their initial abilities to evade legal or financial compliance with the state as a sign of success, further validating their worldview. By the time the legal system responds (e.g., through fines, asset seizures, eviction, loss of employment, or even imprisonment), the individual may find it difficult to reverse their ideological commitments.

¹⁹⁷ Guilia Silberberger, Political Advocate, Der Goldene Aluhut.

Risks to Family, Friends and Close Contacts

The social circles of sovereignists often face risks as well, particularly in the form of strained relationships, emotional distress, and potentially even financial hardships.

Sovereignist beliefs frequently disrupt relationships with people who do not share these worldviews, leading to conflicts, estrangement, and in some cases, separation or a complete end to communication. Family members and friends may also experience social isolation themselves, either due to co-dependency on the individual involved or because of stigmatization from others. These dynamics can result in conflicts of loyalty, particularly for children, and can be a cause of separation between romantic partners or spouses due to differing beliefs. For example, many survey participants reported a breakdown of communication with the sovereignist individual, either initiated by the adherent themselves or as a protective step taken by the survey participant.

In family units, the behaviour of sovereignist individuals can also directly harm their spouses or children beyond emotional or relational tensions, such as by cancelling insurance policies or from asset seizures. Families may also face financial instability due to unpaid debts, unemployment, or legal challenges.

Despite these harms, many sovereignists claim they are trying to protect their loved ones from the nefarious intentions of the government. For example, Sovereignist Interviewee 4 spoke about sparing his wife the “hard truth,” while still caring for her by engaging in typical sovereignist tactics.

According to counsellors we interviewed, children are a particularly vulnerable group because of their dependence – emotionally, financially, and legally – to their parents and caregivers. For instance, the parents’ mistrust in institutions could result in preventing their children from attending school or from seeking necessary medical care. One counsellor also described how children may go on to internalize and adopt their caregiver’s worldview, which can result in a sense of powerlessness and fear.¹⁹⁸ This dynamic was highlighted by one survey participant who is the child of sovereignist parents:

“As a child, I was taught this view of the world, and I was very scared. I later realized that a lot of things weren’t right and that made my relationship with my parents more difficult - I lost trust.” -
(Survey Respondent ID 129, Germany)

¹⁹⁸ Counsellor ID 4, veritas Berlin.

Risks to Authorities and Law Enforcement

Authorities and law enforcement face risks from individuals involved in the sovereignist movement, who often view them as adversaries due to their connection to the state. Many experts we spoke to highlight the increasing incidence of threats and violence against authorities and police.

Acts of aggression are frequently framed by sovereignists as acts of “self-defence” against the perceived overreach of the state. Given the fact that many adherents engage in weapons stockpiling, these confrontations have the potential to escalate. Reported incidents include verbal threats, physical resistance, and even cases of property sabotage (e.g. deliberately loosening wheel nuts on police vehicles). One intelligence official we spoke to highlights these concerns:

“What we have realized over the years is that the chance of violence emanating from sovereignists is greatest when there is an existential intervention by the state. [...]. If the sovereignists feels threatened by a forced seizure, forced eviction or even the seizure of weapons, because weapons are very important to sovereignists as a defence, if they feel threatened in this respect, the chance of violence is greatest.” - (Felix Blum, Domestic Intelligence Official)¹⁹⁹

Torsten Barthel, a legal profession, emphasizes that many law enforcement officials or state employees who are confronted by violent sovereignists may experience significant psychological stress because of threats, such as death threats, or from physical intimidation, often leaving them feeling overwhelmed or helpless. While these threats may not always constitute crimes, their cumulative impact is considerable – especially if institutions and organizations do not have mental health support systems in place for their employees. Violence or threats by sovereignists also pose significant operational challenges. For example, the administrative burdens posed by sovereignists, who inundate authorities with frivolous legal challenges or refuse to pay fines and taxes, consumes government resources and creates processing delays.

Risks to Society and Undermining Democratic Values

Sovereignism has harmful effects on society as its belief system fosters mistrust in the democratic state and the system as a whole. This undermines the concept of a civic community, from which sovereignists often benefit themselves.

¹⁹⁹ Felix Blum, Domestic intelligence official, State Office for the Protection of the Constitution.



Image 18: This image demonstrates the central role of delegitimization of democratic processes in the sovereignist belief system [Eng: “The likelihood of being fooled: 1st of April versus election day.”] (Source: Telegram, April 2024)



Image 19: In this image, sovereignists mock democratic processes [Eng: “When you hear the word democracy”] (Source: Telegram, May 2024)

Experts warn that the legitimization of violence within these movements pose a direct threat not only to democratic values, but also more broadly to public safety.²⁰⁰ Apart from violence against authorities, violence can also be directed against those groups identified by racist or antisemitic sentiments. A domestic intelligence official we interviewed highlights a growing willingness among some sovereignist groups to commit acts of terror, such as targeting politicians or attempting coups. While coup plans often fail, such as the failed attempt by a group within the *Reichsbürger* movement in 2022, these attempts nonetheless pose significant risks to public safety. It is also important not to underestimate the role that media attention of these incidents can generate by amplifying these beliefs on a public platform.

Undermining public, social, and professional spaces can also be identified as a risk. Political advocate Silberberger notes how individuals deeply immersed in these beliefs can create hostile work environments, schools, and community groups, as individuals immersed in the ideology often disrupt these environments by spreading the narratives and beliefs to their colleagues or trying to argue with them.²⁰¹ A particular risk to society comes from adherents who also hold positions within public authorities, as these individuals not only possess legitimate institutional knowledge, but seek to undermine trust in these institutions by discrediting them through sovereignist arguments.

Finally, experts note that the sovereignist ideology has a so-called “gravitational pull,” which poses its own risks. For example, sovereignist beliefs can have multiplier effects by attracting individuals or groups who hold similar yet adjacent sentiments, such as anti-health mandate protesters during the COVID-19 pandemic. These individuals may be drawn into the movement because it offers simple explanations that validate their pre-existing suspicions of the government, resulting in the spread of the ideology.

200 Counsellor ID 5, veritas; Dieter Rohmann, Counsellor, KULTE – Einstieg in den Ausstieg.

201 Guilia Silberberger, Political Advocate, der Goldene Aluhut.

b) Canada

This section examines the key findings of our research on anti-authority extremism in Canada. First, in section 1b, we discuss the contemporary landscape and dynamics of anti-authority groups and movements in Canada, including how it differs from historical manifestations. We then discuss the key components of the phenomenon's ideology in section 2b: Ideological Beliefs, followed by a discussion of both the Reasons for Involvement (section 3b) and Obstacles and Factors for Disengagement (section 4b). Finally, we explore the various Risks, Threats, and Dangers stemming from this phenomenon in Canada in section 5b.

1b Dynamics of Groups and Movements in Canada

In this section, we build on the findings of the literature review, adding our own research results, to describe the current landscape of anti-authority extremism in Canada. Through our interviews with experts and individuals with lived experience in anti-authority ideologies, we discuss how today's landscape of anti-authority extremism in Canada is similar to, and differs from, the groups and movements that preceded it.

Despite broad agreement among both the literature review and experts interviewed that **anti-authority extremism** is the preferred term to describe the phenomenon in Canada today, the movement is nevertheless difficult to define due to the sheer ideological and tactical diversity of its adherents.²⁰² There is also an equally large range of activities that individuals, groups, and movements engage in, from non-violent criticisms or protests, individual resistance training, prepping and survivalism, pseudolegal tactics, and in rare cases, acts of violence that target or seek to overturn the structures, symbols, or agents of authority.²⁰³

Moreover, these individuals, groups and movements rarely fit neatly into political “far-left” or “far-right” categories. Instead, experts we spoke with, as well as those who espoused these beliefs, confirm that the adherents within the anti-authority movement span the entire political spectrum. This section discusses the current landscape of anti-authority extremism in Canada based on our interview findings.

Freemen-on-the-Land in Canada Today

One of the most notable examples of anti-authority extremism in Canada is the Freemen-on-the-Land (FOTL). As discussed in the literature review, the FOTL borrow extensively from “detaxer” teachings and emerged as a Canadianized offshoot of the U.S.-based sovereign citizens movement. They were considered the most prominent feature of the Canadian anti-authority landscape from the mid-2000s to the mid-2010s.

²⁰² Jackson 2022, 9.

²⁰³ Kent 2015, 1.

By the mid-to-late 2010s, however, many scholars note the influence of the FOTL movement began to wane.²⁰⁴ This was in large part due to failures of pseudolegal arguments in court, particularly in *Meads v. Meads* in 2012, whereby Associate Chief Justice Rooke categorized FOTL as part of the “Organized Pseudolegal Commercial Argument” (OPCA) litigant group, along with other similar groups that utilize pseudolaw in court. In this landmark case, Associate Chief Justice Rooke described the OPCA litigant group as those who “employ a collection of techniques and arguments promoted and sold by ‘gurus’... to disrupt court operations” and “frustrate the legal rights of governments, corporations, and individuals.”²⁰⁵ Following the decisions made in *Meads v. Meads*, many FOTL leaders and strategies lost much of their credibility. As one researcher noted:

“There’s only so much failure, obviously, because the system won’t tolerate it. There’s only so much failure these movements and the leaders can take before they lose credibility and essentially that’s what happened.” - (Researcher ID 22)

While it is true that the prevalence of FOTL leaders and their tactics became less popular overall, the existing narrative of decline may oversimplify the movement’s persistence today. For instance, specific leaders like Robert A. Menard have lost much of their credibility, yet a newer generation of ideologues have recycled many of the same teachings and strategies, continuing to profit from them. Additionally, many of the original Freeman ideologues have not abandoned their beliefs, either. Instead, many have evolved in their anti-authority beliefs as social events and issues develop. For example, Dean Clifford – once a figurehead in the FOTL movement – no longer touts original Freeman tactics but has instead adapted his beliefs in conjunction with modern far-right anti-government movements, like Diagonoln, which will be discussed later.

In support of this, our interviews with law enforcement reveal that encounters with self-identified Freeman, or those who utilize Freeman-style language or strategies, continue to occur regularly, particularly for local police officers. One law enforcement official estimated:

“On average, [encounters with individual’s claiming to be Freeman occurs] probably about the same amount as before [the COVID-19 pandemic] and [the] same amount of people, same general ideas same level of distrust with the police. [But] we haven’t seen any kind of increase in violence or threats from that group.” - (Law Enforcement ID 27)

204 Netolitzky 2019; 2023b.
205 Hamilton and Woolley 2013.

Unlike large-scale anti-authority movements that attract national attention, such as the U.S. Capitol Hill riots in January 2021, interactions with individuals claiming to be Freemen often go unreported beyond the local level. For example, many interactions occur during routine traffic stops where individuals seek to challenge police authority and the legitimacy of traffic laws using pseudolegal arguments and tropes typical of groups like the FOTL. While most encounters are described as peaceful, they are frequently time-consuming and, in some cases, confrontational, creating ongoing challenges for local police:

“The Freemen-on-the-Land, they’ve always been out there. And the reason [we] know about that is because it’s not a typical traffic stop. For the most part it’s non-violent, but it’s extremely frustrating and it ends up turning a simple traffic stop into something more complicated.”
- (Law Enforcement ID 28)

The Fluidity of Anti-Authority Extremism Today

According to our research and interviews with subject-matter experts, the COVID-19 pandemic ushered in a new era of fluidity within the anti-authority extremist movement in Canada, extending beyond identifiable groups like the FOTL. As a result, the landscape of anti-authority extremism today incorporates elements of various conspiracies, including pseudolaw, anti-government, anti-tax, anti-health or anti-vaccine, anti-corporate, anti-mainstream media, anti-elite, anti-police, anti-immigrant, anti-2SLGBTQIA+, and anti-science sentiments, to name a few.

Notably, many of the original ideologues, “gurus,” and adherents from the 1990s and 2000s have not simply disappeared. Instead, several have managed to adapt their messaging by capitalizing on contemporary societal issues and grievances. This has resulted in a fusion of older anti-authority ideas and tactics with newer grievances, bridging the legacy of anti-authority extremism to a new generation of adherents.

For instance, COVID-19 restrictions, lockdowns, and health mandates brought together individuals with diverse grievances against the government, sparking protests and creating connections between previously unconnected communities both online and in-person. In Canada, a frequently noted “meeting point” among anti-authority actors were a series of anti-COVID-19 vaccine mandate protests which occurred during 2022 known colloquially as the “Freedom Convoy,” which brought together a wide range of individuals across the political spectrum. While these protests were largely peaceful and attended by a wide variety of individuals and groups unconnected to any extremist groups, movements, or ideologies, a small number of extremist actors, including both far-right and anti-authority extremists, used these protests to disseminate their own narratives and further their agendas.

The Canadian anti-authority landscape has always incorporated a diverse range of sentiments like anti-immigrant and anti-science beliefs to a certain extent, as noted in the literature review. However, according to our research and interviews with experts, they highlighted that the movement is even more diverse and accepting of a wider array of beliefs than ever before, which is what sets the modern landscape apart. This diversity has made the phenomenon increasingly more difficult to identify and categorize, as people with vastly different motivations and political backgrounds now converge under a broader anti-authority sentiment, while holding an array of largely inconsistent and even contradictory beliefs and grievances.²⁰⁶ Specifically, one legal expert we spoke to described the role of Canadian COVID-19 protests in bringing these diverse individuals together:

"It's important to keep the duality of the pseudolaw phenomenon in mind. On one side [we have] this set of strange concepts about law. On the other side we have host communities who adopt these concepts. If you go back to the old Freeman population, they're still the same people. They have not changed their ideology.... They're just not using pseudolaw anymore because they've learned it doesn't work [in court]. Fast forward to the early pandemic where many who would have never been exposed to pseudolaw became activated. They [participated in] marches, they held rallies, and now that population has contracted. There aren't as many active, but there still are some, and they have networked through the experience of the [COVID-19] pandemic and being part of mass resistance. This is the latest wave of pseudolaw adherence. It's different from anything we've seen before because[...] this new population is even more accepting of the diversity of ideas than any previous wave of pseudolaw populations I've seen before." - (Legal Expert ID 30)

One example of the fusion of early era “gurus” with contemporary anti-authority grievances is the case of David Kevin Lindsay, a former detaxer and pseudolaw ideologue from the early 2000s who has managed to outlive the broader decline of the detaxer movement.²⁰⁷ During the early 2000s, Lindsay was an active litigator and in-court layperson representative for individuals seeking to avoid their taxes, earning him a reputation in the courts as an aggressive OPCA litigant. After a period of inactivity following the *Meads v. Meads* decision in 2012, Lindsay reemerged during the COVID-19 pandemic as an ardent anti-government and anti-COVID-19 activist.²⁰⁸ In British Columbia (B.C.), he held weekly demonstrations violating COVID-19 health mandates, while justifying this using pseudolegal arguments and tactics. He capitalized on growing anti-COVID-19 mandate sentiments by re-activating his website “Common Law Education and Rights,” which he used as a hub to post various COVID-19 conspiracies, protest information, pseudolaw templates, and host paid seminars where he instructed individuals how to initiate criminal charges against others using the *Criminal Code*, amongst other things.²⁰⁹

206 Gartenstein-Ross et al. 2023.

207 Netolitzky 2023b, 815.

208 Netolitzky 2023b, 816.

209 Netolitzky 2023b, 816-817.

Lindsay’s activities escalated in 2021 when he became involved in an altercation with security guards outside the Kelowna, B.C., Interior Health building, from which he had been banned.²¹⁰ After a lengthy trial where Lindsay represented himself and attempted to use a myriad of pseudolegal tactics and arguments, he was found guilty of assault and sentenced to house arrest in 2024.²¹¹

This diffusion of actors and ideas has been facilitated by online encrypted communications applications, like Telegram, which make it possible for individuals to gather, share, and engage with a myriad of conspiracies, grievances, sentiments, beliefs, and ideologies from multiple sources at once.²¹² While they might hold a diverse set of beliefs or grievances, the common thread among them is a general distrust of the state, of governmental authority, and a belief that the state is overreaching in nefarious and corrupt ways. As one researcher told us, *“They’re acting independent, but they are connected by those grievances and the need to find scripts and [advice] from one another that they can use.”*²¹³

Frontline psychosocial professionals in Canada, such as caseworkers who provide services directly to individuals that hold these beliefs, also agree there has been increased decentralization and diffusion among the broader movement. In fact, one caseworker argued that, as part of this diffusion, many adherents consider their ideas to be part of the mainstream, especially since 2020:

“They believe that their thinking is so common that they don’t see them[selves] as part of any fringe movement or extremist movement because it’s a pretty common sentiment in the people that they’re surrounded by. I think [anti-authority beliefs] are less and less attached to [identifiable] movements.”
- (Caseworker ID 25)

Some experts also suggest this amorphous structure enables these movements to adapt better as contexts or political, social, and economic issues change over time. This fluidity allows anti-authority extremists to remain dynamic, relevant, and resilient against law enforcement or legal measures that might have been effective against the more easily identifiable groups of the past, like FOTL. As one law enforcement official told us:

“We have definitely seen a rise in [anti-authority extremism since] 2019. When COVID-19 hit, it’s gone up quite a bit. Some people are just [out for] any cause, they’re there to protest it. Whether it’s convoys, masks, gender pronouns, schools, anything, there’s groups of people that just want to complain about the government [and] anything that they do.” - (Law Enforcement ID 27)

210 Gelineau 2023.
211 Gelineau and Barnes 2024.
212 Brace, Baele, and Ging 2024.
213 Researcher ID 19.

In addition to aiding in the diversity and cross-pollination of ideas, social media has allowed individuals to cherry-pick the beliefs, behaviours, and tactics which best fit their personal worldview, without having to rely on the teachings of a single “guru” as some movements did in the past. One researcher told us, *“there’s a lot of information online that people can access and independently decide that they’re going to take [those] ideas.”*²¹⁴

As a result, this diversity has led to the establishment of loose networks between individuals and groups that have little in common beyond their mutual distrust of authority. For instance, the image below shows how esoteric, anti-science, and anti-vaccine groups which promote unsubstantiated health advice on Telegram blend with more traditional pseudolegal tactics and beliefs, such as the idea that one can declare themselves “sovereign” from the state.²¹⁵ The result has been the fusion of ideologies and belief-systems which promote anti-authority sentiments and tactics in all aspects of one’s life, including in health decisions:

“Now, anti-authority [...] includes resistance to knowledge, to science, to medicine, to health expertise, to any form of authority... The conspiracy theory element has exploded [as well] ... This movement remains incoherent and loosely organized... They’re consuming narratives online primarily and weaving them into their own [reality].” - (Researcher ID 19)

214 Researcher ID 21.

215 Prominent anti-health gurus have been on interviews jointly with Dean Clifford, a popular FOTL-era guru, to discuss pseudolegal concepts and tactics.

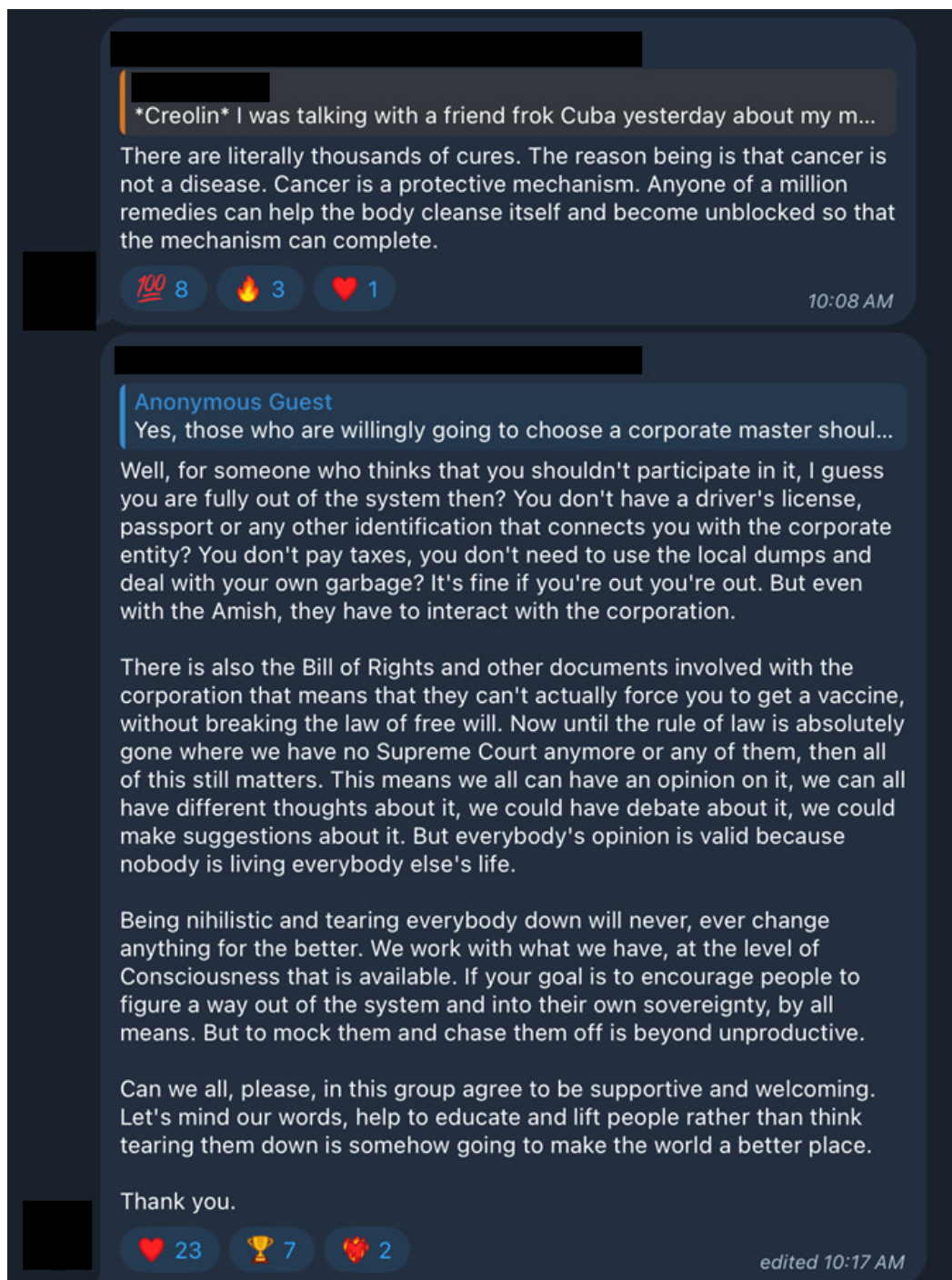


Image 20: An example of the intersection and overlap of anti-science health advice groups and the promotion of individual sovereignty from a so-called “corporate master” (Source: Telegram, November 2024)

To be sure, although many anti-authority actors are not “affiliated” with any named groups or movements, some do still exist. For example, a movement known as “Diagolon” – a decentralized far-right anti-government network that gained notoriety during anti-health mandate protests throughout Canada in 2021 – has become an important part of Canada’s anti-authority landscape today. Founded initially as a satirical online joke by several prominent online podcasters, Diagolon is primarily an online community united by an array of anti-government, anti-immigrant, and conspiratorial beliefs. Diagolon “influencers” and its followers often promote narratives of government overreach, corruption, tyranny, and civil unrest due to the perception that immigration policies have led to Canada’s decay. The name “Diagolon” originates from a fictional nation that spans several American states and Canadian provinces from Alaska to Florida, allegedly symbolizing regions perceived to have similar anti-government sentiments. Like other similar movements in the current anti-authority landscape, Diagolon lacks formal membership but operates mostly through loosely connected supporters in online forums, livestreams, and encrypted messaging platforms like Telegram.

More recently, however, many of Diagolon’s “influencers” have deactivated or abandoned their once-popular Telegram pages and begun channelling their efforts into in-person nationalist clubs. One example is the so-called “Second Sons of Canada,” a decentralized collection of clubs that purport to engage in physical fitness, survivalism, prepping, and “political activism.” While the ideology of these clubs incorporates strong anti-government narratives, such as “preparing” for an acute event of government overreach or societal collapse, their structure, activities, and goals are more akin to far-right active clubs, a decentralized network of white nationalists and neo-Nazi cells across North America, Europe, and Australia who engage in mixed martial arts, physical fitness, and weapons training.²¹⁶ This overlap emphasizes the degree to which anti-government extremist sentiments co-mingle with far-right ideologies and groups, further blurring the distinct bounds between them.

216 O’Connor et al. 2023.

Another recognizable group in today's landscape is the so-called "Kingdom of Canada," (KoC) an anti-authority conspiracy movement led by Romana Didulo, who has proclaimed herself to be many things, including the "Queen of Canada" and an extraterrestrial being with special powers.²¹⁷ Didulo has cultivated a devoted following of people both in-person at the group's headquarters in Richmond, Saskatchewan, and on her Telegram channels. Didulo routinely issues KoC "decrees" which purport to have legal authority, like abolishing utility bills, debts, taxes, and elections, among other things. KoC followers are encouraged to use pseudolegal documents and tactics to avoid these and other legal obligations, and in 2024, an Alberta Justice noted an increasing number of cases involving individuals attempting to invoke KoC decrees as legal defence.²¹⁸ In at least one documented case, a Yukon-based clinical social worker was temporarily stripped of their professional registration after invoking KoC decrees and claiming Canada was now governed by "HRH [Her Royal Highness] Queen Romana Didulo" during the legal defence of a client in family court.²¹⁹

Other groups which persist today include those categorized by Justice Rooke in 2012 as part of the OPCA litigants' group, such as the Church of the Ecumenical Redemption International (CERI), which utilizes a religious variant of pseudolaw to justify their exemption from state authority. Specifically, according to Netolitzky, CERI claims to be a community of strict "King James Bible" literalists, led by the Church's minister Edward Jay Robin Belanger.²²⁰ Unlike other pseudolaw groups which have largely learned to avoid court litigation due to their consistent failure, CERI is unique in that it has one of the most aggressive, extensive, and long-lasting court litigation records of all Canadian pseudolaw groups.²²¹ For instance, rather than using pseudolaw as a defensive tactic in court, as many FOTL did in the past, CERI uses it as an offensive tactic to intimidate and harass the group's perceived opponents.

As noted earlier, while there are certainly a handful of recognizable named groups, most anti-authority adherents today do not organize themselves into recognizable social structures that can reasonably be considered groups. Instead, many adherents operate alone or congregate in loosely organized online forums such as on Telegram, where they gather to share ideas, tactics, advice, and content.

217 Sarteschi 2023b.

218 Black 2024.

219 Kawaja 2024.

220 Netolitzky 2023a.

221 Netolitzky 2023a.

While the landscape of anti-authority extremism today appears more diverse and fluid than ever before, not all experts we interviewed described it as entirely novel. For example, one law enforcement official described the ebb and flow of anti-authority movements as cyclical and linked to broader societal trends and economic conditions. Instead of viewing the landscape of anti-authority extremism today as something distinct from the past, this interviewee argues we should conceptualize it as being reflective of modern-day topics, issues, and events:

“[Today], people have an issue-base [like the COVID-19 pandemic] to jump off. Whereas in the past, like in the 2000s, it was the anti-globalization concept that was on the forefront of everybody’s minds. It seems to be more aggressive when economies and [especially] personal economies are challenging. When people are ‘feeling the pinch,’ so-to-speak. Whereas when things are stable and people are feeling comfortable, they tend to fall away from [these ideologies] and go a bit quieter. And then they resurface again. It’s cyclical. But the message isn’t necessarily new, it just has a new flavour.” - (Law Enforcement ID 29)

2b Ideological Beliefs in Canada

Core Elements & Beliefs

As described in earlier sections, anti-authority extremism in Canada today is a complex, fluid, and multifaceted phenomenon. Our research highlights the breadth of beliefs and grievances among individuals involved in these movements whose worldviews are constructed from a variety of distal sources, including from social media, social circles, conspiracies, as well as individualized grievances derived from personal experiences and prejudices.²²²

Despite the diversity of narratives and ideological orientations, adherents are unified by a central belief: a deep distrust of, and opposition to the legitimacy of government institutions, politicians, and other symbols of authority. As one researcher observed, the only consistent feature among adherents *“is distrust of government and distrust of authority.”*²²³ This foundational distrust serves as the common thread that links otherwise disparate actors and ideas.

At the core of this shared ideological conviction is the belief that government authorities and institutions are illegitimate, corrupt, nefarious, and seeking to control the masses. Many adherents subscribe to “deep state” conspiracies, which purport that a clandestine network of actors within the government, corporations, and other powerful unelected individuals are manipulating the government to serve their own interests. As one caseworker explained, individuals who hold anti-authority beliefs are *“especially focused on corruption or any theories around nefarious*

²²² Perry, Hofmann, and Scrivens 2017; Norris 2020; Gartenstein-Ross et al. 2023.
²²³ Researcher ID 22.

groups that are intentionally trying to harm us.”²²⁴

The centrality of the belief in shadowy, nefarious actors pulling the strings of government was also corroborated during our interviews with individuals who currently or formerly held anti-authority beliefs. For example, a woman who had since distanced herself from anti-authority beliefs described how most of her beliefs were centralized around a version of this “deep state” conspiracy:

“[I believed] the government [was behind] 9/11 and were in on it, and the government [was] staging these [mass] shootings because they want to take our guns. [Government] surveillance [was important to my beliefs] because that’s the big one that’s attached to 9/11. That comes from all the policies that [resulted from] 9/11, which increased with the NSA [National Security Agency], the Patriot Act. It’s the idea of a surveillance state and government overreach, trying to take guns.”
- (Former Anti-Authority Interviewee 1)

For some, this distrust is so deeply internalized that it can also extend to their peers as well. For example, one woman involved in the anti-authority movement explained that she believed other anti-COVID-19 mandate protesters were actors paid by the government:

“I wasn’t gonna’ go to the Trucker’s Convoy [in Ottawa]. I stopped going to protest[s] because I could see that the politicians took it over. It was never organic. Everyone that was an activist [and] had a microphone was paid, [they were] hired to do that job to control the opposition.” - (Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 1)

224 Caseworker ID 26.

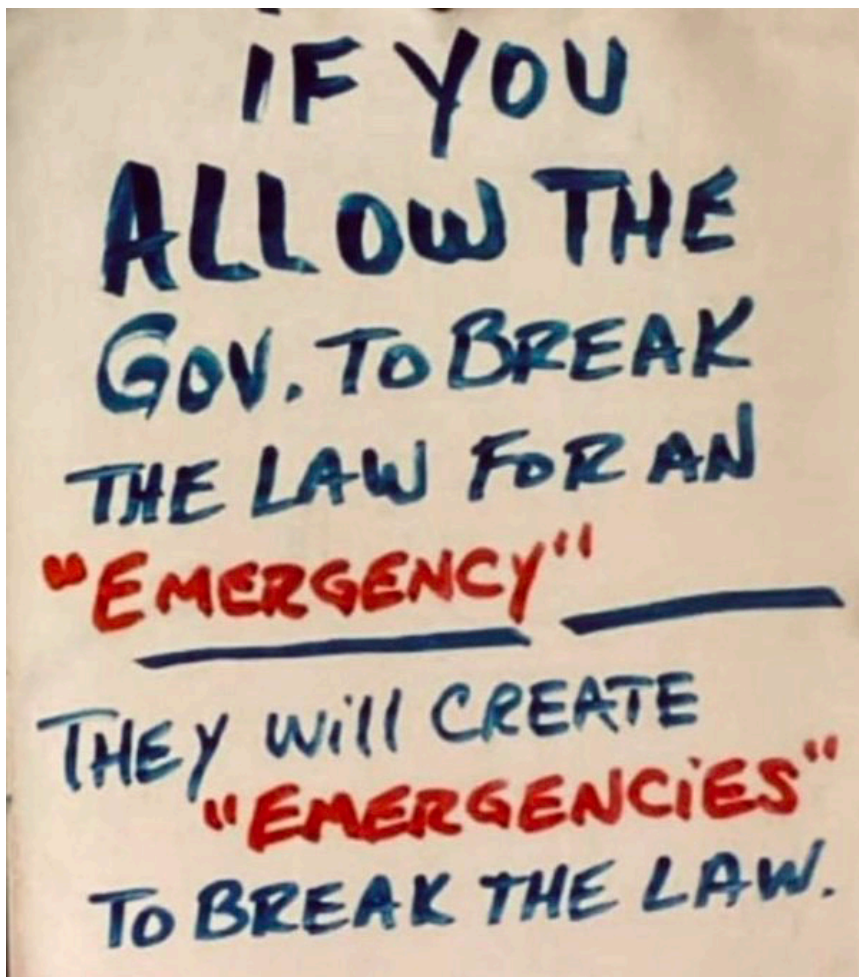


Image 21: Image posted to popular Canadian anti-authority Telegram channel (Source: Telegram, May 2024)

While the movement is unified by a deep distrust in the legitimacy of government actors and institutions, adherents often hold a wide range of additional, and sometimes contradictory, beliefs, grievances, sentiments, and prejudices. This ideological diversity makes the movement highly adaptable and fluid, whereby individuals can subscribe to, discard, or modify various beliefs to construct their own unique and personalized worldview. This phenomenon has been given several names by experts and scholars, such as “salad bar extremism,” “idiosyncratic terrorism,” or “Composite Violent Extremism” (CoVE), and has become increasingly common across all forms of violent extremism.²²⁵ Despite these surface-level variations, because the core unifying conviction is a fundamental distrust in authority, adherents can readily adapt their focus based on emerging crises, societal changes, or narratives. In effect, any global event or policy decision can be readily reframed as evidence of government overreach, corruption, or nefarious intent, while still leaving room for the individual to incorporate their own personal beliefs, experiences, grievances, or prejudices.

225 Norris 2020; Gartenstein-Ross et al. 2023.

Sovereignism And Anti-Authority Extremism in Germany and Canada

A Comparative Analysis for a Deeper Understanding of the Fluid Movement



Image 22: This post highlights the concern among many anti-authority adherents about the dangers of government overreach and the perceived reduction of individual freedoms over time (Source: Telegram, May 2024)

Political Spectrum

Although most individuals, groups, and movements within this milieu share a core underlying rejection of state legitimacy and authority, our experts noted that, much like the personalized set of beliefs and grievances they bring to the movement itself, these actors also often come from diverse political backgrounds. For instance, one researcher who examined earlier iterations of the FOTL noted that individuals often came from across the political spectrum, and that this trend likely continues today:

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“Most either had no political affiliation [and] weren’t very hard right. [I was] surprised... I was expecting more of a hard-right ideology. Some of them were leftists, [but] most of them were politically apathetic.” - (Researcher ID 22)

Likewise, this expert explained how Dean Clifford, once a prominent FOTL guru in the early 2010s, originated in far-right and racist skinhead circles before embracing the largely left-leaning FOTL ideas promoted by Robert Menard. Following Clifford’s arrest in 2013 and the waning influence of FOTL narratives, he *“went from a leftist [to extreme] right within the space of five years,”* and has recently aligned himself again with far-right and anti-government movements like Diagon. ²²⁶ These ideological shifts illustrate the flexibility and range of beliefs which exist within the anti-authority landscape, demonstrating how individuals may adopt narratives that align with their political identities as they evolve over time.

However, researchers also noted a shift around 2016, when many adherents began to exhibit political attitudes more closely aligned with the far-right. One expert attributed this change in part to disillusionment stemming from the movement’s earlier failures with pseudolaw in court, explaining that *“[the] early incarnations of [FOTL] and sovereign citizens promised all these techniques and magical solutions to their problems with the government... and they failed. And there’s only so much failure [the] system can tolerate.”*²²⁷ Another expert stated, *“there’s a lot of overlap between anti-authority and [far]-right...”*²²⁸

It is possible that frustrations with continued failures in court, coupled with burgeoning far-right narratives stemming from political developments in the United States, may have driven these individuals to adopt more extreme far-right ideologies and blend them along with their existing anti-authority beliefs. Despite this increasing overlap with the far-right, however, experts we spoke to explained that Canadian anti-authority extremism nevertheless continues to defy traditional violent extremist categories used by many governments and intelligence agencies – such as right-wing, left-wing, religious, or single-issue extremism – because anti-authority actors borrow heavily from all these ideological streams. As noted in the literature review, unlike the U.S.-based sovereign citizens, the Canadian FOTL were overwhelmingly drawn from extreme leftist, anti-globalist communities, and yet held clearly recognizable beliefs central to many far-right ideologies, such as antisemitic conspiracies about the origins of banking. Today, Canadian anti-authority actors continue to cross-pollinate and draw from a diverse set of political communities, leading to a convergence of personalized worldviews.

226 Researcher ID 22.

227 Researcher ID 22.

228 Researcher ID 23.

Pseudolaw

Another key element commonly observed among many manifestations of anti-authority extremism today is pseudolaw.²²⁹ As described in the literature review, pseudolaw refers to “a collection of legal-sounding but false rules that purport to be law.”²³⁰ Though these concepts can be adopted by a vast array of actors, their “underlying conceptual skeleton... is startlingly consistent and conserved world-wide.”²³¹ Adherents often present pseudolaw in ways that appear authoritative and technical, and argue they possess privileged knowledge about the “true” law which has been covered up with a grand conspiracy.²³² By practicing this “true” law, adherents argue they can usurp and effectively challenge the state to achieve personal freedom from their legal obligations. However, many of these concepts are rooted in conspiracies and misinterpretations (whether purposeful or accidental) of legitimate or defunct legal systems and documents.

The literature review described the historic use of pseudolaw among several groups and movements, including the “detaxers,” the Freeman-on-the-Land, and the sovereign citizens. Despite the decline of the former two groups, today, pseudolaw continues to be used among a variety of Canadian anti-authority actors. For instance, Romana Didulo – the leader of an anti-authority conspiracy group called the “Kingdom of Canada” – regularly issues “decrees” rooted in pseudolaw that claim Canadian taxes, utility bills, or debts are invalid, among other things.²³³

Broadly, many pseudolegal tactics and schemes focus on the perceived role of contracts and consent, and the ways in which individuals believe they can “opt out” of certain legal obligations.²³⁴ These tactics and the individuals that use them are commonly referred to in the Canadian court system as Organized Pseudolegal Commercial Argument (OPCA) litigants, from Associate Chief Justice John D. Rooke’s 2012 decision in *Meads v. Meads*.²³⁵

According to Netolitzky, most pseudolaw narratives are constructed around the belief that, at some point in history, the law was “good and just,” but has now been suppressed and replaced with “bad or evil” law by nefarious actors.²³⁶ For example, many pseudolaw adherents argue that certain words have a hidden meaning designed to trick individuals into giving consent, such as the word “understand” in contracts meaning the individual gives consent to “stand under” the government’s authority.²³⁷ However, pseudolaw narratives claim that these so-called “bad” laws are in fact not binding, and that by tapping into the hidden mechanisms of “good” law, the individual can access true liberation and freedom.

229 Kent 2015, 2.

230 Netolitzky and Warman 2020, 715.

231 Netolitzky 2023b.

232 Netolitzky 2023b.

233 Sarteschi 2023b.

234 Netolitzky 2016; 2019; 2023b.

235 Netolitzky 2023b.

236 Netolitzky 2025, 14.

237 Netolitzky 2025, 16.

While the origin story of pseudolaw remains relatively consistent across national and political contexts, the specific tactics, schemes, and legal concepts are often tailored to the political and legal environment in which it is applied. For instance, many pseudolaw narratives in the U.S. focus on interpretations of foundational legal documents like the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution and their supposed “true” meaning. In Canada, adherents may fixate on false or misleading interpretations of the Canadian *Criminal Code* or the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, or the perceived role of the British monarchy in Canadian politics.

Regardless of the national context, however, common pseudolaw tactics include the use of illegitimate documents or arguments to evade taxes, avoid debt repayments (or pay them down in illegitimate ways), to avoid criminal or civil charges, or to levy baseless lawsuits against other parties.²³⁸ Many of these tactics are promoted by “gurus” who claim to possess privileged or enlightened knowledge of the law. These “gurus” generate profits by selling illegitimate legal templates and documents, hosting paid seminars, or from followers willing to pay subscriptions and fees for courses that claim to disseminate “insider” legal strategies.

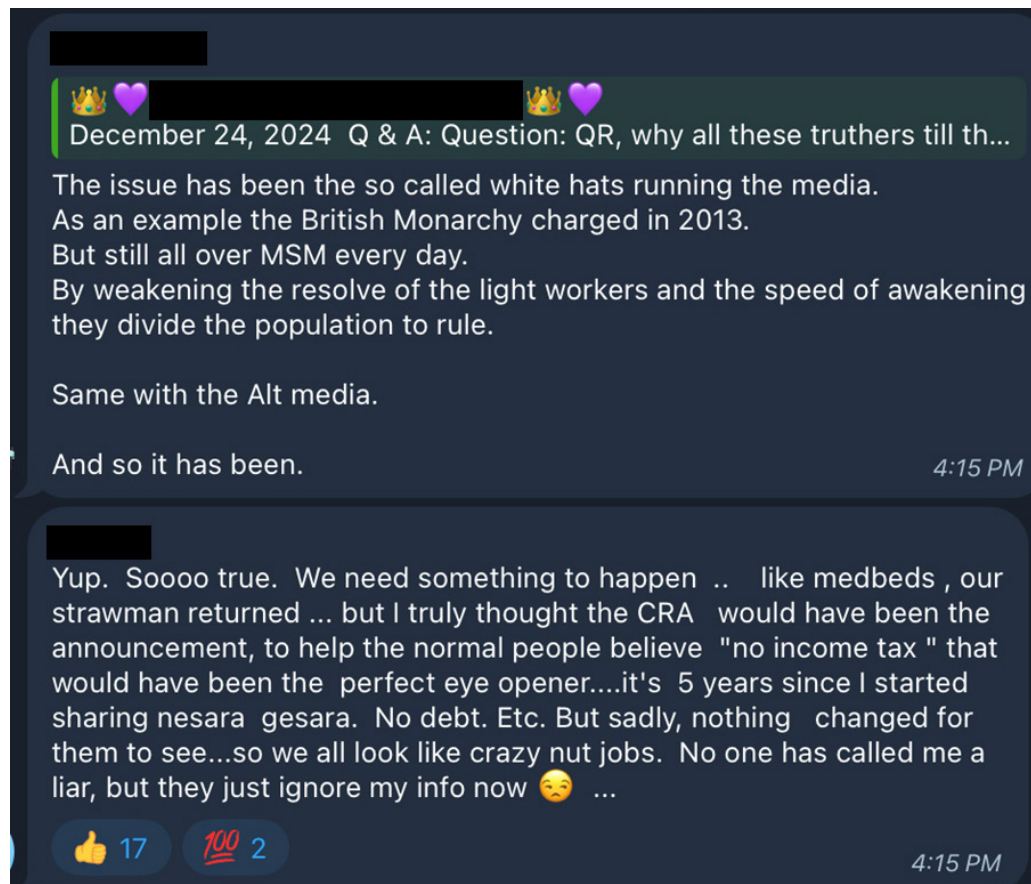


Image 23: Example of a series of posts discussing pseudolegal tactics and conspiracies regarding income taxes (Source: Telegram, December 2024)

²³⁸ Netolitzky 2018, 1048.

According to Netolitzky, there are also several pseudolaw concepts and schemes which are not embedded in any misinterpretation of existing legal systems, but rather, stem from conspiracies about the nefarious role of the government.²³⁹ A particularly prominent one is known as the “strawman theory,” which claims the government creates two separate legal entities for each person at birth: a “true” physical human, and a non-corporeal “legal” person (or legal fiction), known as the “strawman,” which can be identified by an all-uppercase name on official documentation like birth certificates.²⁴⁰ Adherents believe this strawman is contractually bound to the government, usually as a corporation or an estate, whereas the physical human is bound to a different set of laws, in many cases, an incorrect or irrelevant interpretation of “common law” or “natural law.”²⁴¹ Proponents argue that by negating this strawman contract through a variety of pseudolegal steps and rituals, the physical person can free themselves from their corresponding “legal” entity, and thus their contract with the state ceases to exist. Some also believe that by separating their physical human form from their strawman, they can access a secret bank account or trust created by the government under their legal name.

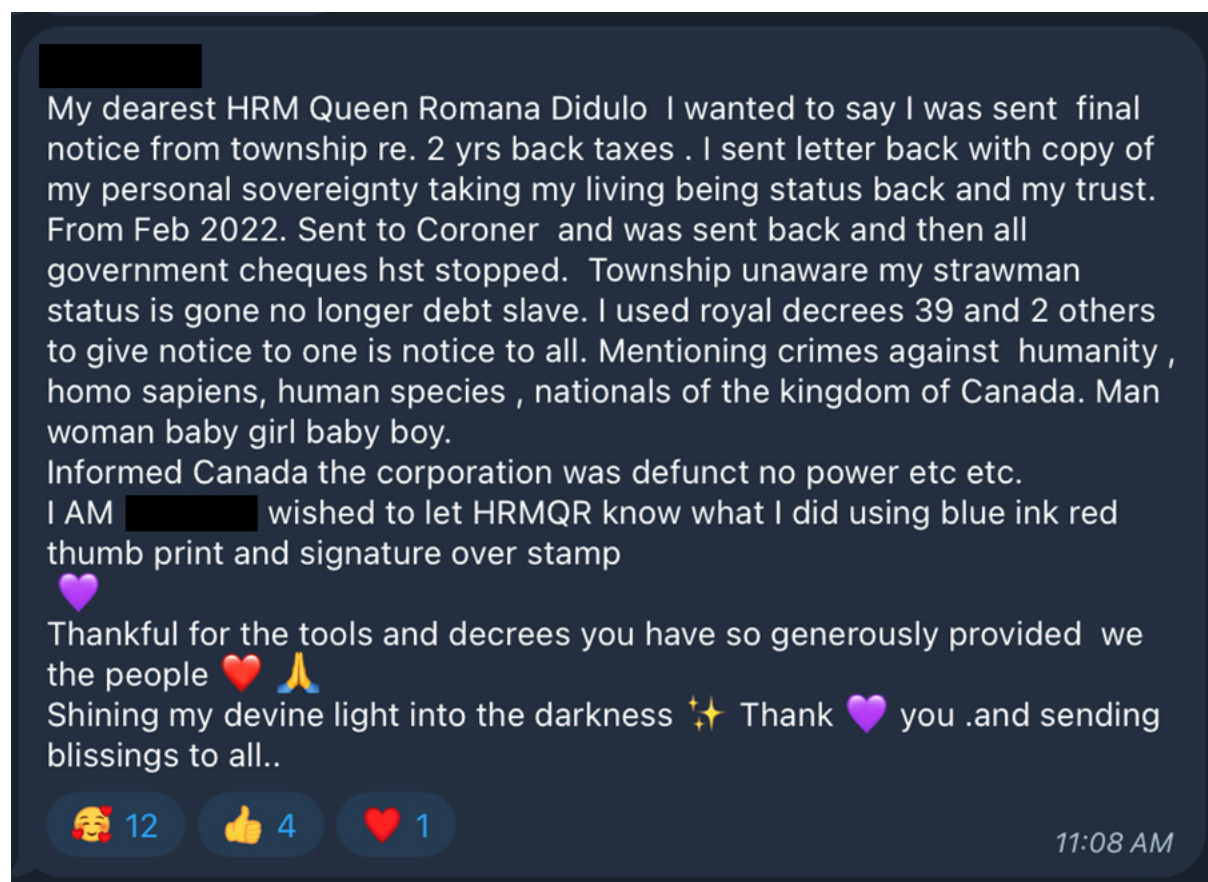


Image 24: Example of the strawman theory (Source: Telegram, January 2025)

²³⁹ Netolitzky 2018.

²⁴⁰ Netolitzky 2018, 1069; Netolitzky 2025, 16.

²⁴¹ Netolitzky 2018, 1069; Netolitzky 2025, 16.

I filed zero returns for the first several years, then checked the box that stated the TAXPAYER was deceased and never filled another one. My STRAWMAN's last year of paying CRA was 2002. I am the Founder and Controller of a REGISTERED COMPANY that pays tax where necessary. I am not an employee or self employed. Those are CRA terms I do not use or agree with.

← 6 11:48 AM

Image 25: Example of the strawman theory (Source: Telegram, August 2024)

Experts we spoke to acknowledge the persistent role of pseudolaw and pseudolegal tactics by many anti-authority actors today. Despite their repeated failure in courts across the country, many anti-authority communities today have yet to abandon them:

“As is always the case, [the failures in court] didn’t make the ideas go away. A couple years later we had this resurgence... These are people that are looking for reasons to not fall under the auspices of the government. Many of them were like ‘oh, here is an ideology, here is a conceptual framework that allows me to make that claim in a scientific, or academic, or a legal kind of way.’ And so, they gravitate towards that.” - (Researcher ID 23)

Instead, communities and individuals have adopted and repurposed old pseudolegal concepts and tactics to fit new contexts and purposes, based on their individualized grievances and goals. For instance, a legal expert we spoke with described the cyclical nature of pseudolaw, and explained that while the tactics themselves remain largely unchanged from the past, the communities that adopt them shift over time:

“[During the COVID-19] pandemic, many who would have never been exposed to pseudolaw became activated [...] and now that population has contracted [...] This is the latest wave of pseudolaw adherence. It’s] different from anything we’ve seen before because they are so diverse in their beliefs.... [However] their [core] ideologies almost never shift. They’re all still trying to use the same pseudolaw tools [and] there’s been no innovation. They repackage [old] concepts... Or they’ll find some new way of claiming that state authority is defective. They’re coming up with a new hook as to why the government doesn’t have [authority], but it doesn’t change the overall structure and story of what’s going on.” - (Legal Expert ID 30)

Despite shared use of pseudolegal tactics among many anti-authority adherents today, the broader movement itself remains amorphous, diverse, and disparate. This legal expert explained:

“When I track these individuals to the degree I can, there doesn’t seem to be any link [to any organized group or movement] aside from the [fact that they] almost always will be exhibiting one of the ideologies which is part of this loose collective. Maybe it’s gun-[advocates], maybe it’s magic crystals, maybe it’s classic QAnon.... It’s more like different versions of the same story.”

- (Legal Expert ID 30)

During our interviews with individuals who currently or previously espoused anti-authority beliefs, several described employing various pseudolegal tactics in their everyday life. For example, Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 1 describes how she has not filed a tax return for several years and refrained from registering her vehicle or obtaining proper insurance. Meanwhile, during our interview with a family member of an individual involved in an anti-authority group, he described how his loved one had refused to obtain birth certificates for his children or enroll them in school.

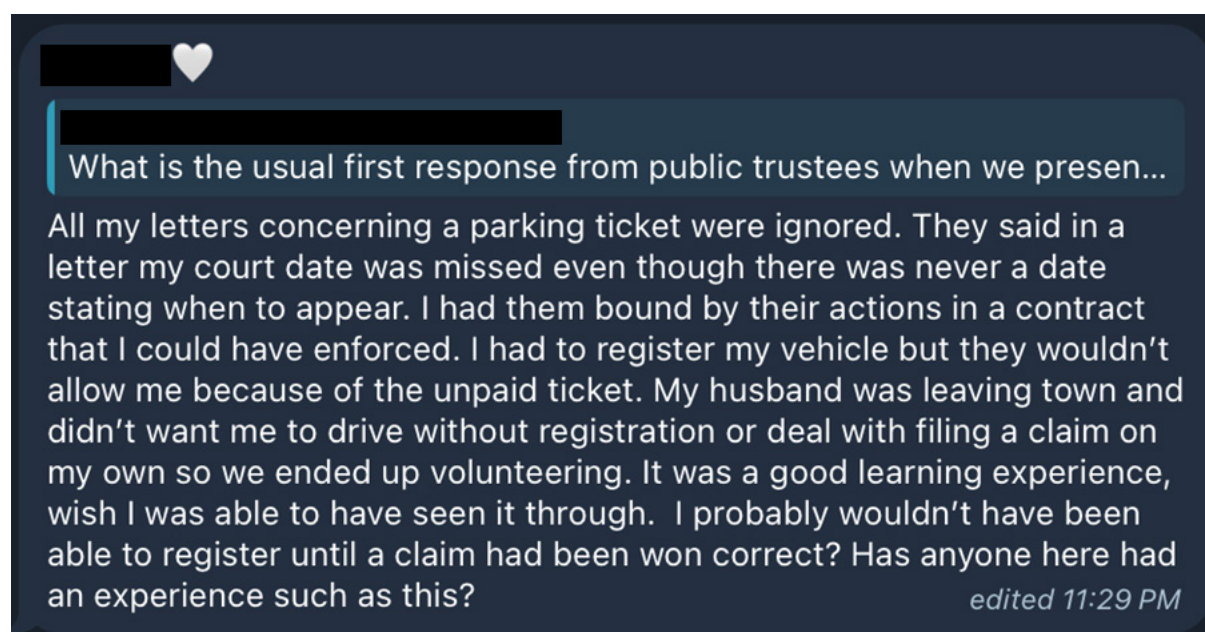


Image 26: Example of a pseudolegal tactic to avoid registering a vehicle (Source: Telegram, July 2024)

Just as pseudolegal concepts and tactics are diverse, so are individual motivations to employ them. Some individuals employ pseudolaw purely for the financial or legal benefits they claim to impart, but do not genuinely buy into (or understand) the underlying conspiracies or narratives behind them. According to Netolitzky, this constitutes most individuals who employ these tactics, which he calls “mercenary” pseudolaw users.²⁴² Once these individuals discover the ineffectiveness of their tactics, they usually abandon them. In corroboration, one legal expert told us:

²⁴² Netolitzky 2025, 19.

“One of the tools that we use is an order which instructs our clerks that if they get a document with standard pseudolaw motifs, they [immediately] reject those filings. And in the process, they hand over a copy of the master order for document rejection which says, ‘these are the errors, fix them and we’ll refile it.’ The weird thing is, [once people receive this master order], they don’t correct [it]... They walk off with their rejected document and we never see them again. That is unexpected because these people are supposed to be die hard [believers]. I’m in contact with another law firm that specializes in dealing with these people and they also observe that the sooner they present these individuals with a rejection, especially if it’s backed up by law, a lot of these individuals fold.” - (Legal Expert ID 30)

The proportion of individuals who truly believe and understand the underlying conspiracies or narratives of pseudolaw is likely small, but these individuals will also be less likely to be dissuaded by legal failings in court. For these “true” believers, the legal experts we spoke with emphasized that early intervention is crucial:

“Why does early intervention make such a big difference? The answer I have is that, [for the true believers], it’s part of their beliefs. They believe that silence [from the courts or government] means agreement. So, when they file some document with the court that claims to be imposing a [pseudolegal order], they believe if [the court] doesn’t positively reject [their] claims, they’re winning. The more time goes by with no response, they think ‘I’m winning.’ Early intervention is key. The second part to answering them is to do so with legal authority. They are interacting with the government and courts on the belief they are using the ‘true’ law. So, if the government or courts send them a legal document saying otherwise, it’s hard for them to ignore, especially if [this person] is early in the process of [radicalizing] and not particularly invested yet. They want to fight a war in the courts and have a battle of paperwork. The solution is to show them they’re going to lose early on.” - (Legal Expert ID 30)

The Role of Conspiracies

Conspiracies have always been a cornerstone of all forms of extremism, and anti-authority extremism is no exception. These conspiracies can range widely, from government control of the weather, hidden microchips and surveillance to more fantastical beliefs about political leaders as shapeshifting lizards who sexually exploit and cannibalize human children. They can also incorporate various prejudices, such as antisemitic conspiracies about the origins of banking and international financial systems, or the belief that politicians are purposefully bringing in non-white migrants to alter population demographics. Experts we interviewed noted the important role conspiracies play in anti-authority ideologies. They also explained that different conspiracies likely have differential impacts on behaviours. As one caseworker explained:

“If you’re someone who thinks the government’s controlling the weather and surveilling everyone and trying to install microchips in people, you might be tending toward going off the grid... Whereas if you have beliefs that there’s a corrupt elite, then you might more likely endorse a counter-hero or some figure that would defeat the Cabal.” - (Caseworker ID 26)

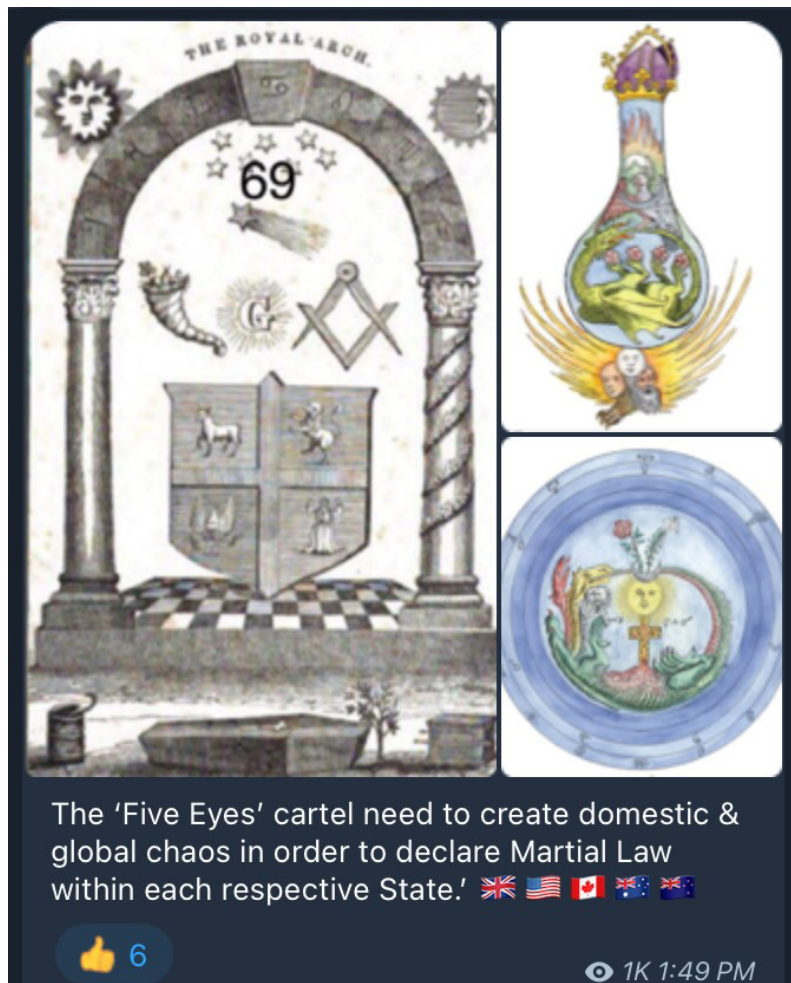


Image 27: A post about the “Five Eyes” conspiracy and Martial Law using esoteric and Masonic imagery (Source: Telegram, May 2024)

Although conspiracies have always played a role in anti-authority ideologies, experts we interviewed described that there has been an unprecedented expansion of conspiracies within recent years. This expansion, fuelled in part by their accessibility in un- or poorly moderated social media apps like Telegram, has had important effects. One of the most crucial of these has been the ability of conspiratorial narratives to bridge a broader audience to anti-authority ideologies. This bridge naturally occurs because many conspiracies are built around a central belief that world events or crises are orchestrated by a secret group of people who seek to further their own agendas at the expense of the masses. As a result, individuals who are attracted to these types of conspiracies will also likely be drawn to anti-authority ideologies which purport the government and other institutions of authority are illegitimate, illegal, and corrupt.

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In turn, this influx of individuals has introduced new or previously peripheral conspiracies into existing anti-authority narratives, creating a cycle of self-reinforcement, growth, adaptation, and proliferation. As one researcher observed:

“We’re seeing far more people being attracted, especially [to] the conspiracy theory elements of the movement... conspiracy theories have always been a part [of the ideology], [but] the conspiracy theory element has [now] exploded beyond the anti-authority movement... and [that’s how they] expand their audiences.” - (Researcher ID 19)

Despite the range of conspiracies, they are often united in some core elements. A common unifying element identified by experts we interviewed, and one which runs through many conspiracies, is the use of antisemitic tropes. A legal expert explained: *“[Most hold] a conspiratorial worldview where the government is illegitimate. Some of those people blame the Vatican, some of those people blamed the monarchy... But at the base of most of the people that I was dealing with always [believed there was a] hidden hand and that was usually the Jewish community.”*²⁴³ Likewise, a caseworker we spoke to agreed: *“[Many believe a part] of the Jewish conspiracy. That is, [they believe they’re] taking away the rights of ‘freedom fighters’ and [of] white people.”*²⁴⁴

Experts also highlighted that many anti-authority extremists conceal and repackage overt expressions of hatred embedded within different conspiracies to appeal to a broader audience:

“They’re not going to a rock concert in the basement of a bar [and] scream[ing] about how they want to kill the Jews. They’re going to mix it in covertly and say ‘there’s a group of people that you’re not allowed to talk about who are responsible for the international banking system’ [...] If you want to gain a broader audience, then you’re going to [have to] soft pedal your hate mongering.”
- (Legal Expert ID 31)

Conspiracies also often play on deeply held moral themes, such as the fight between “good” and “evil,” which complements anti-authority narratives about a tyrannical government. One common theme in many of the more recent anti-authority conspiracies is *“a pattern [of theories about] sexual molestation [of children],”* which one legal expert explained fits *“well into [anti-authority narratives] and predisposes people to think that there are nefarious actors out there trying to do bad things to kids.”*²⁴⁵ These emotional and morally charged narratives tap into pre-existing fears about the nefarious role of government actors and public figures, which make them highly palatable among individuals with existing suspicions of authority.

243 Legal Expert ID 31.

244 Caseworker ID 24.

245 Legal Expert ID 30.

This focus on moral themes and fears of government-led child sexual abuse and exploitation was also corroborated by our interviews with individuals who espoused anti-authority beliefs. For example, Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 1 describes how she was introduced to these beliefs through her interest as a teenager in stories of missing children and child exploitation:

“When I was about 15, I got obsessed with [figuring out] who’s taking all these children? Who’s taking them? I got obsessed with it. I started looking at lost children websites and I noticed that since they had been recording missing children there was a relatively consistent number through the years [that went missing]. Between 60 to 65 thousand children missing every year. [I believe] that’s inventory - that’s how much [the government] needs. It was the elites, the government [doing it].”

- (Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 1)



Image 28: Post about child sex trafficking (Source: Telegram, May 2024)

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Other experts we interviewed, such as a caseworker, noted the role of conspiracies linked to far-right narratives, like the Great Replacement Theory or the Great Reset, among many anti-authority actors.²⁴⁶ The Great Replacement conspiracy links anti-authority narratives to broader fears about social and demographic changes by claiming politicians are deliberately orchestrating the replacement of white populations through mass migration from non-white countries. The Great Reset conspiracy similarly purports that a nefarious group of global elites uses events like the COVID-19 pandemic to forcibly impose radical social change on the masses, and to justify increased surveillance and control of the population. For instance, anti-authority actors on social media frequently share sentiments aligned with the Great Replacement Theory to describe Canada’s immigration policies.

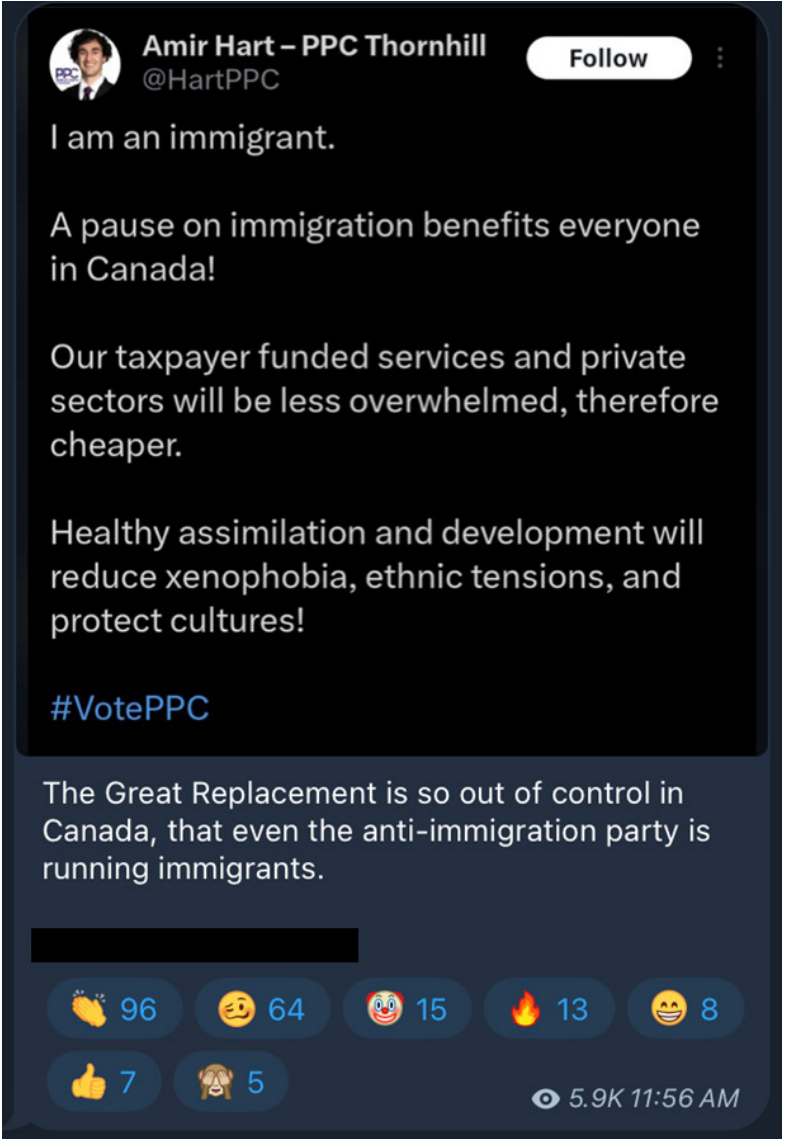


Image 29: An example of Great Replacement Theory being used to discredit and delegitimize non-white political candidates in Canada (Source: Telegram, November 2024)

246 Caseworker ID 26.

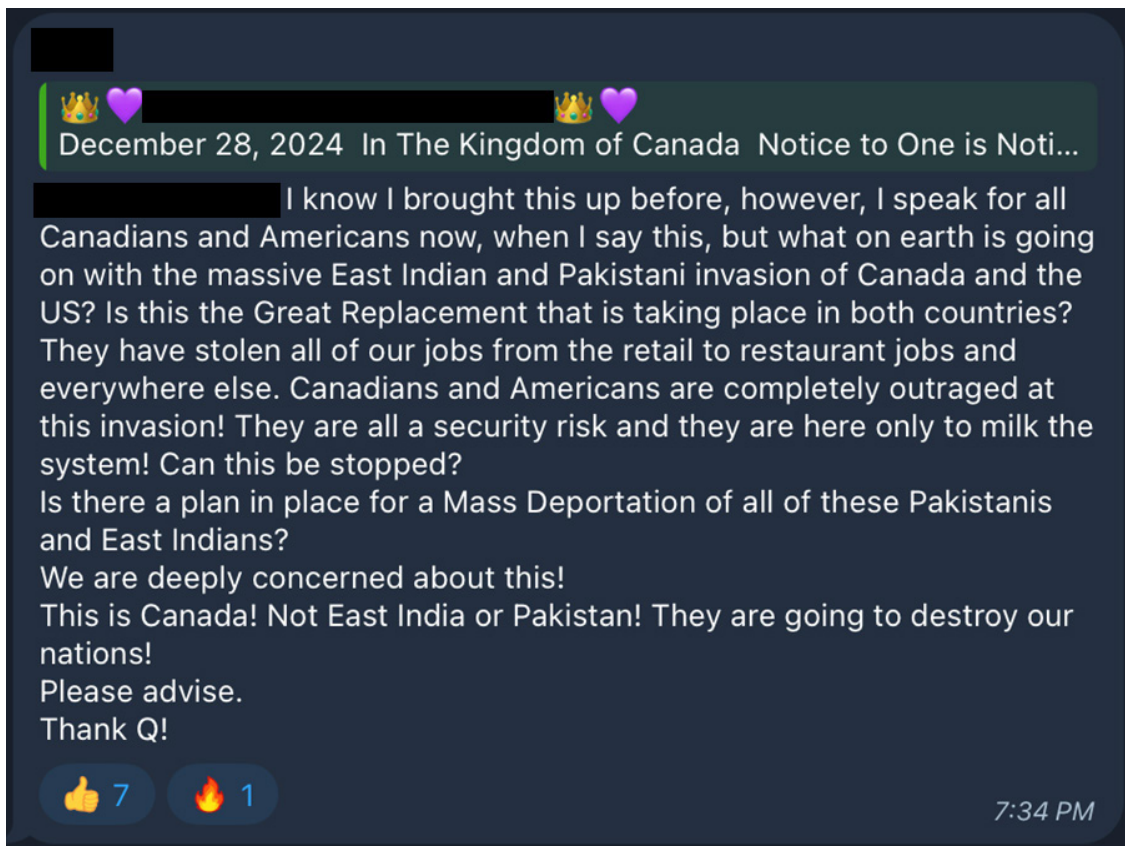


Image 30: An example of Great Replacement Theory being used to label migration from certain countries as an “invasion” and argue for mass deportations (Source: Telegram, December 2024)

Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 1 also described beliefs aligned with the Great Reset conspiracy. For instance, she claims she always knew that the government would attempt to “enslave” people, and the COVID-19 pandemic confirmed her suspicions:

“I [had information] on CD discs that [the government] was going to imprison every person on this planet, [and] that there was a plan in action. I was sending out this information to everybody because if people knew it was coming, then they would not consent, and the [government’s] plan would fail. So, when COVID-19 happened, I’m like, ‘this is it. This is how [the government is] gonna’ do it.’ Because no one really knew how [the government could] enslave these people. Well, by promoting the vaccine, that’s how they do it.” – (Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 2)

Finally, conspiracies also serve as a flexible and adaptable tool that continues to attract and mobilize followers as social and political issues change over time. A legal expert we interviewed described the individualized process as creating a “*conspiracy salad*,” where individuals “*pick and choose and mix it all up*” to design narratives which resonate with their personal experiences, histories, grievances, and worldviews.²⁴⁷ This adaptability allows adherents to continuously adjust their messaging based on current events and issues, by “*run[ning] with what works and abandon[ing] what doesn’t*.”²⁴⁸ More on the role of combining different beliefs will be discussed in the next section.

Notably, a legal expert further explained that conspiracies need not rely on logical consistency to be adopted. In this way, even the most fantastical claims, such as those about shapeshifting lizards cannibalizing children, can gain acceptance “*as long as you find a population that needs an answer to whatever it is that ails them*.”²⁴⁹ By appealing to deeply held moral values, personal fears or anxieties, conspiracies offer simple explanations and solutions to complex societal problems, often by externalizing blame to identifiable groups of people.

The role of conspiracies in attracting a wide array of people to anti-authority ideologies was also highlighted by our interviewees who were currently or formerly involved. For instance, Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 1 said that conspiracies she “*found very intriguing and entertaining*,” such as theories about “*off planet technology, aliens, 5D, the 5th dimension all this type of off-the-beaten-path theories and ideas*,” were what drew her into the anti-authority group she joined. As she described, the anti-authority group’s “*content was perfect for somebody like me*.”²⁵⁰ While fantastical conspiracies were what initially sparked her interest in the group, what ultimately led her to join was a belief that a “dark” force was looming, and this group would provide protection:

*“[This was the only group] in Canada that I felt was standing up for us. There was nobody standing up for us. There’s something very dark going on, and I think every single one of us is going to have to make a decision. I think we’re just in the beginnings of this war.”*²⁵¹
- (Current Anti-Authority Individual 1)

Similarly, an interviewee whose family member is involved with anti-authority beliefs recalls that an interest in conspiracies was the first sign of his loved one’s involvement: “*during the decline of the Obama administration and the rise of the Trump administration, [they were especially interested in] conspiracies concerning Hillary Clinton that were espoused by Alex Jones*,” an American conspiracy theorist who operated a popular alternative news website called “Infowars.”²⁵² This interest in conspiracies led his loved one to ultimately adopt anti-authority beliefs, and later, to deploy pseudolegal tactics in court.

247 Legal Expert ID 31.

248 Legal Expert ID 31.

249 Legal Expert ID 31.

250 Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 1.

251 Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 1.

252 Family Member of Anti-Authority Individual 1.

Idiosyncrasy and Overlap with Other Beliefs

As discussed in earlier sections, anti-authority extremism today is characterized by its ideological fluidity, where individuals borrow from a wide array of beliefs, grievances, conspiracies, and ideologies to construct a highly idiosyncratic worldview. Rather than adhering to a single rigid ideological framework, adherents construct their own personalized narratives around a core belief: that government and authority institutions are illegitimate, illegal, or corrupt. From there, they incorporate their own pre-existing personal grievances, prejudices, conspiracies, and beliefs. As one researcher put it, “[they blend] a little bit of QAnon, a little bit of conspiracy theories, a little bit of aliens, [and so on].”²⁵³

Importantly, however, the combination of beliefs is not a random process. Instead, as one expert explained, it is highly dependent on the individual’s pre-existing values, ideas, prejudices, grievances, and experiences: “[People] interpret the news and what’s happening in the world [through their own lens]. [So], we might have people who [are] gun supporters here in Canada and those [pro-] gun groups interpret what’s happening in the world. And then, you know, [some] Christian[s] [might be] in a moral panic [about 2SLGBTQIA+ issues] ... And then throw in a conspiracy theory or two and you’ve created something.”²⁵⁴ Importantly, this unique combination of ideas usually “conforms with their worldview.”²⁵⁵

This concept has been given several names by experts and scholars, such as “salad bar extremism,” “idiosyncratic terrorism,” or “Composite Violent Extremism” (CoVE), and has become increasingly common across all forms of violent extremism.²⁵⁶ For example, one researcher told us “I see a lot of salad bar extremism [among anti-authority adherents], which is not my favourite term but it’s [one that] some people use.”²⁵⁷ This expert explained that despite the apparent diversity of ideas, all anti-authority adherents nevertheless “reject authority in some kind of way.”²⁵⁸ Other experts we spoke to agree with this, adding:

“It’s become an issue of individual preference. So, somebody doesn’t necessarily have to be part of a group to want to engage in or be sympathetic to the cause. What we’re seeing [are] lone actors with very mixed ideologies. People are essentially creating very idiosyncratic [belief-systems in anti-authority movements] at the individual level. People are [just] looking for reasons to not fall under the auspices of the government.” -(Researcher ID 23)

253 Researcher ID 22.
254 Researcher ID 20.
255 Researcher ID 22.
256 Norris 2020; Gartenstein-Ross et al. 2023.
257 Researcher ID 21.
258 Researcher ID 21.

"No matter if it's about [opposing] 'woke' society, yelling about Drag Queens, praising Russia, whatever it's about... [The anti-authority movement] has been excellent at co-opting these [narratives] and talking points. They're amorphous, they pick up ideas and behaviours based on what's in vogue."
 - (Researcher ID 22)



Image 31: Example of the overlap of extreme misogynistic sentiments with anti-authority beliefs (Source: Telegram, November 2024)

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This phenomenon can be seen among many prominent anti-authority figures in Canada today, including Romana Didulo, the leader of the anti-authority conspiracy group called the “Kingdom of Canada” (KoC). For example, Didulo’s ideology blends QAnon and other conspiracies, pseudolegal tactics, fantastical claims about aliens, historical revisionism, the 5th dimension, and traditional anti-authority sentiments, to name a few. One expert we interviewed explained that the appeal of the KoC and Didulo’s unique belief-system lies in its ability to *“resonate with her followers... she’s able to cobble together an ideology that makes sense to them. She’s using talking points and ideas that they’ve read about elsewhere, typically online. She’s using tactics that have been floating around for a while, such as [pseudolegal] tactics. You know, you don’t have to pay your taxes.”*²⁵⁹ Ultimately, this strategy is successful because it makes “grandiose promises,” especially to people experiencing personal or financial hardships and are looking for simple solutions to their problems.²⁶⁰

Much like the grandiose promises made to KoC followers, other anti-authority groups and movements make similar claims to have identified the “source” of all societal ills. For instance, many of Diagon’s followers blame Canada’s immigration policies, and immigrants themselves, as the source of Canada’s problem. Meanwhile, others point to globalist elites, the banking system, vaccines, the media, the Jewish community, “woke” society, or the 2SLGBTQIA+ community as the root of all society’s problems. Though these narratives identify various sources of the perceived problem, they all offer simplistic solutions by blaming an identifiable group. For example, according to many in Diagon, one such solution is the mass deportation of non-white immigrants from Canada.

According to some experts, the expanding ideological scope of the Canadian anti-authority movement has made it increasingly difficult to define as a distinct category. For instance, one researcher explained that *“anti-authority is much more of an umbrella term, because now it includes resistance to knowledge, to science, to medicine, to health expertise, to any forms of authority.”*²⁶¹ Another legal expert discussed the juxtaposition between anti-authority adherents who coexist with one another in the same online spaces despite holding disparate and even contradictory beliefs:

“[We have] the anti-germ [or anti-vaccine] theory people living beside individuals who [believe] classic antisemitic banking theory, [we have] the QAnon [believers] claiming that there’s underground tunnels and adrenochrome extraction going on versus individuals who are claiming that they are Metis because they were born in Canada.” - (Legal Expert ID 30)

259 Researcher ID 22.

260 Researcher ID 22.

261 Researcher ID 19.

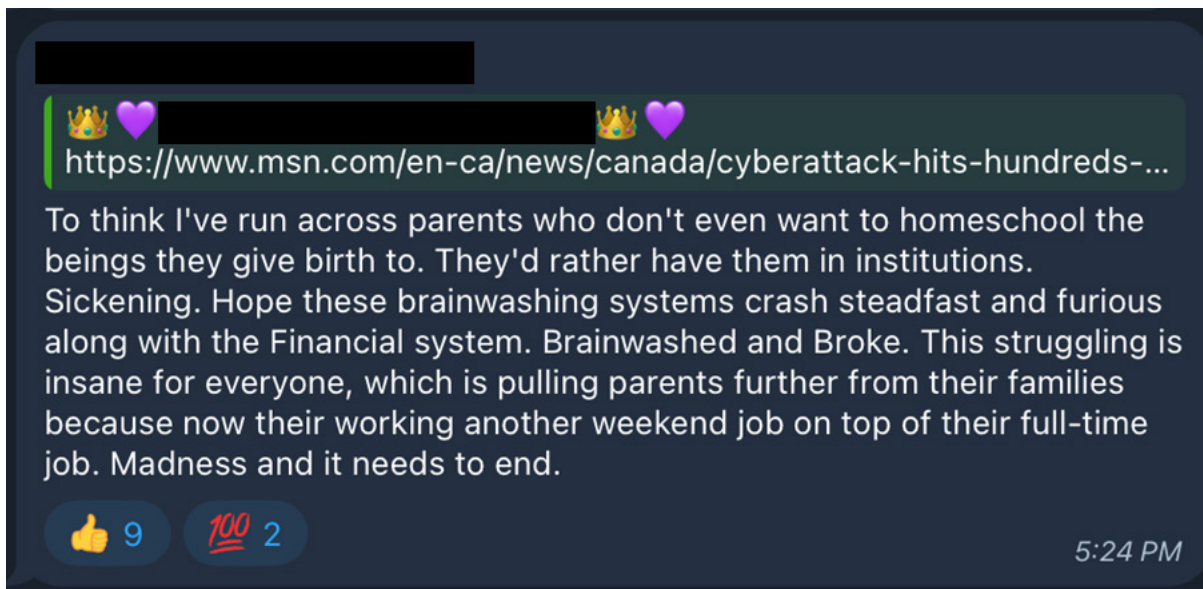


Image 32: Example of conspiracies regarding indoctrination and brainwashing in schools (Source: Telegram, January 2025)

This ideological phenomenon has also been identified by frontline psychosocial professionals. For example, one caseworker explained: *"A lot of the folks that we're encountering these days [fall along the lines of that] salad bar extremism stuff... The[se] people are just presenting with lots of ideologies rather than just saying 'I hate Jews.'"*²⁶² Despite this amalgamation of beliefs, this caseworker confirmed that the core belief which underpins them is still a fundamental rejection of authority: *"[Their rhetoric is always] that the system is [forcing] them to follow certain rules and regulations they don't agree with [and] they believe they should be able to operate freely under their own laws and rules."*²⁶³

3b Reasons for Involvement in Canada

In Canada, like in Germany, there is no single reason why individuals are drawn to, or adopt, anti-authority extremist beliefs. Rather, our research finds that individual involvement reflects a complex interplay of personal, social, psychological, economic, political, and ideological factors. Additionally, involvement or attraction to anti-authority beliefs can be influenced or shaped by broader social or political trends and events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite an acknowledgement from most experts that there exists no uniform profile, some general patterns of "experiences" or "factors" that influence involvement became evident during our research. These are described in more detail in the following sections.

²⁶² Caseworker ID 24.

²⁶³ Caseworker ID 24.

Personal Hardships, Grievances, and Experiences

Involvement in anti-authority extremism in Canada is often tied to personal hardships, grievances, or life experiences. According to our research, these personal challenges are unique and deeply individualized, and can range from personal or family financial strain, family disputes or tragedies, substance use or abuse, and feelings of marginalization or social exclusion, to name a few. However, experts emphasized that although personal hardships are a recurrent theme in many cases, no single type of hardship or personal experience universally predicts an individual's attraction to anti-authority beliefs. Moreover, this explanatory factor is undermined by the reality that most people who experience hardships do not embrace anti-authority extremism.

Researchers we spoke with describe how negative experiences with government or authorities can foster a sense of perceived injustice, which can in turn make extreme anti-authority beliefs more appealing. As one expert noted, *“Most people who came to the movement were experiencing a family custody issue or a tax issue or something like that. That just seemed to be something that couldn’t be untangled. The most consistent trend was that they had not just a grievance, but [also] some personal experience that brought them to it.”*²⁶⁴ These personal experiences can lead individuals to develop deep-seated grievances, particularly when they perceive – rightly or wrongly – that traditional institutions have failed or wronged them in some way. As a result, anti-authority beliefs, and pseudolegal tactics in particular, may be seen as *“a way out of those [challenges]... [or] a last resort for them.”*²⁶⁵

Our interviews with frontline psychosocial practitioners further corroborate how personal experiences shape involvement. One caseworker explained: *“[Involvement] tends to come [down to] their personal situation. So, if they’re employed, if they need government benefits, they pick and choose [grievances] depending on what’s going on in their lives.”*²⁶⁶ Additionally, this caseworker noted that although specific beliefs vary based on personal circumstances, they are often underpinned by *“a general tone of anger and frustration and [a belief] that somebody needs to pay for that.”*²⁶⁷

Other frontline practitioners described how legitimate “real-world grievances” can propel individuals to adopt and agree with anti-authority narratives.²⁶⁸ For instance, one caseworker described how legitimate experiences of exclusion and disenfranchisement – whether due to legal troubles, immigration issues, or other systemic barriers such as racism and discrimination – can leave individuals feeling targeted or abandoned by the state, making them more susceptible to the appeal of ideologies promising a “quick fix” to their problems:

264 Researcher ID 19.
265 Researcher ID 19.
266 Caseworker ID 25.
267 Caseworker ID 25.
268 Caseworker ID 24.

“It’s motivated because of real experiences or oppression. Basically, they’ve been disenfranchised. They can’t be part of the current system because of real experience, either criminally or immigration, or there’s just something that’s happened where they’re ostracized or lose some of their rights. Then they [become] quite anti-government because they feel as if the government is working directly against them, and they have some real experience that would validate that belief.”

- (Caseworker ID 26)

These personal experiences can not only make anti-authority narratives more appealing, but once adopted, these experiences can also make distancing oneself from the ideology more challenging. Legal experts emphasized how personal experiences can complicate this process:

“The toughest part [is that most have experienced] some sort of hardship, and this is what [they’ve] grasped onto as the solution... until you see these [tactics] fail on your own, then it’s something [very] hard to get people [out of].” - (Legal Expert ID 31)

Interviews with individuals who currently or formerly held anti-authority beliefs also support this finding and further highlight the role that trauma stemming from these experiences can play. For example, one interview participant who had distanced herself from her anti-authority beliefs noted that she experienced several personal tragedies and traumas which contributed to her involvement, including child sexual abuse, a divorce, substance abuse, and the death of a parent. All these experiences led her to spend more time on her own researching anti-authority conspiracies:

“I think one of the factors that you’re going to find with most people that are sucked into this, [including] for me, [is that] there was some kind of neglect or abuse... [But] there’s no set scale for measuring trauma. You know, someone might come across a dead cat on the side of the road and that traumatizes them. Meanwhile, [another person] might see the same thing and they’re sad but not traumatized. Different people have different ways of measuring their own trauma, but [there is usually] going to [be] some kind of trauma. [For example], I would get flashbacks to my [parent’s death] if I would hear the beeping noise for a fax machine, because that reminded me of all the machines in the intensive care unit. [When I first started getting into these beliefs], my [parent] had just died and I left my [spouse] at the time, and I was drinking a lot. My head was not in a good place.”

- (Former Anti-Authority Interviewee 1)

The various ways people respond to and are impacted by trauma adds to the difficulty in predicting who will become drawn to anti-authority narratives and why. Caseworkers echoed similar conclusions about the role of trauma in adopting these beliefs: *“Most of the people we’ve encountered [during our line of work have] experienced trauma in their lives. That feeds into looking for black and white answers [to] very complex problems and making sense of their world, which is very chaotic or has been very chaotic.”*²⁶⁹

²⁶⁹ Caseworker ID 25.

Deleted Account

Forwarded from: Deleted Account

Is there anyone here familiar with family law. ie child support/ maintenance enforcement and such. No I'm not looking to rid my responsibilities. They put a lien on my home/tax lien/ suspended my drivers licence and now taking 40% of my wage for \$10,000 arrears that her and her lawyer dug from 3-4 years ago. It was silent. I've always payed but got smacked with this. I can't work extra because I get re re Assessment every year. Make more pay more. I have a family and it's ripping us apart. Currently I have no money for food or gas. I kid you not. And no I am not a deadbeat. I already gave \$500,000 in divorce and continue to pay \$1750 month. Her lawyer or her will not come up with a plan. They say go to court. Also i have not seen my daughter since 2019. She was taken out of province without my consent. Lawyer negligence which is being dealt with. He disbarred and I'm dealing with lawyer insurance. I just need help with not seeing my daughter despite there being an order that's states 5 days every second month. And shared holidays. It doesn't get followed. I'm not kidding and removing any pride when I say I need help. Thank you to all fighting this corrupt system

3 1:44 PM

Image 33: Post from a user seeking legal advice from a pseudolegal group, detailing personal hardships such as divorce, financial strain, and family-related stress (Source: Telegram, April 2021)

While trauma may be a common factor shared by many adherents, it is important to note that not all anti-authority adherents have experienced personal traumas or tragedies which precipitated their beliefs. For example, Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 2 indicated having a relatively “normal” childhood and a good relationship with his family. Meanwhile, a family member of an individual involved in an anti-authority group similarly noted a relatively uneventful upbringing and could not identify any other personal hardships or tragedies – other than debt and poor personal financial decisions – which led his loved one to adopt these beliefs.

These findings demonstrate the sheer diversity of experiences within this population. Personal hardships are a prominent trend among many adherents, but they are neither necessary nor sufficient to explain involvement in all cases. For some, personal tragedies and experiences can lead to grievances which make anti-authority narratives more appealing as they search for answers and solutions to their problems. For others, no such experiences or tragedies occur, meaning that attraction to these beliefs is likely influenced by other factors.

Current Events and Social Issues

Another commonly identified factor contributing to involvement in extreme anti-authority beliefs is as a reaction to current events, crises, or social issues perceived to infringe on individual freedoms, or which threaten “traditional” values and ways of life. These can include reactions to broad government policies such as health mandates during the COVID-19 pandemic, economic crises, or a rejection of the expansion of rights to certain communities such as 2SLGBTQIA+ rights. Our expert interviews indicated that many individuals attracted to anti-authority beliefs are drawn to them due to feelings of marginalization, fear, or alienation because of perceived changes to the social and political environment around them.

For example, one researcher described that individuals who feel unheard may seek out alternative belief systems that empower or validate these feelings:

“I think [a lot of people who join] feel voiceless, disenfranchised [and] they don’t recognize the world around them. And I think they get frightened by that... Not being heard and feeling like you’re not part of the equation anymore, being pushed aside is really what [drives] a lot of people into these [movements].” - (Researcher ID 21)

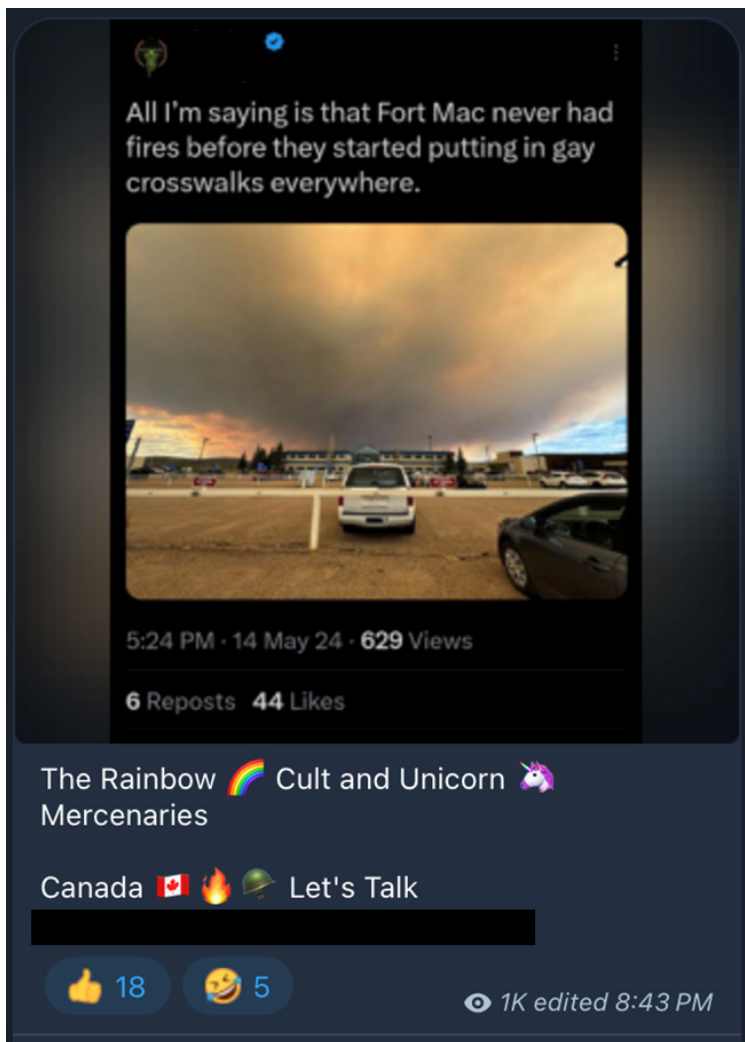


Image 34: Post blaming the 2SLGBTQIA+ community for wildfires in Alberta (Source: Telegram, May 2024)

This is reinforced by the results of the survey from North American respondents. For example, several identified a connection between their close contacts' involvement in anti-authority ideologies and changes in social and political policies at the time. One participant noted a significant shift in their close contact's views during the 2013-2015 period under Barack Obama's presidency, particularly following the U.S. Supreme Court's legalization of gay marriage.

On the other hand, other respondents indicated their close contacts were drawn into anti-authority beliefs during the COVID-19 pandemic due to their pre-existing interests in wellness and new age spirituality, which predisposed them to be suspicious of government institutions associated with so-called "Big Pharma." On the other hand, several other respondents identified pre-existing racist beliefs as a significant factor in their close contact's introduction to anti-authority ideologies, including one who was a member of a neo-Nazi prison gang in the United States known as the Aryan Brotherhood.

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Image 35: Post speculating that the Alberta wildfires are a conspiracy to further restrict individual freedoms (Source: Telegram, May 2024)

Other experts indicated that many anti-authority adherents today do not perceive of themselves as part of a “fringe” minority, due to how widespread these beliefs are among the broader public discourse:

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"I think [they] see themselves as part of the mainstream. They believe that their thinking is so common that they don't see them[selves] as part of any fringe movement or extremist movement because it's a pretty common sentiment by the people they're surrounded by." - (Caseworker ID 25)

Researchers and other experts indicated that the prevalence of anti-authority narratives is likely amplified, at least in part, by social media. Humour, viral "memes," and conspiracies disguised as legitimate news content can be shared millions of times on social media, reaching a wide audience who can mistake mis- and disinformation for factual evidence. This content not only serves to subtly introduce a wide array of people to anti-authority narratives, but it also in turn normalizes and minimizes the extremist narratives embedded within them:

"I think [anti-authority sentiments are] more mainstream, more prevalent. So, extremists can use memes to push anti-immigration, misogynistic, [or anti-government] ideas that people just think are like, 'oh, this is a cute meme and it's against Trudeau and I don't like Trudeau.'" - (Researcher ID 20)

"Social media [offers a way to spread their message]. The vast number of applications and platforms where people can express th[ose beliefs]... and a feeling that there is anonymity in that space without really [worrying about the repercussions]." - (Law Enforcement ID 29)

Other experts highlighted the role of nostalgia among many anti-authority adherents, especially as it relates to their perceptions of current events and crises. Many adherents argue that the "way of life" in the past was superior and simpler, and the social changes resulting from pivotal events or crises are a threat to that idealistic way of life. As one legal expert told us,

"There is [this] resentment [toward] the government, the perception that somebody is pulling the strings, that you are losing out, your rights have been taken away from you, and things were better in the past. The nostalgic component, [the idea that] we are losing [or] stepping away from a better place that we used to be... That seems to be universal." - (Legal Expert ID 30)

This nostalgic idealism was also echoed among some of the current and former anti-authority individuals we interviewed, who noted a belief that fundamental rights or ways of life were under threat. One interviewee who espoused anti-authority beliefs reported that the COVID-19 pandemic and perceived inconsistencies in the government's response, including health mandates, were what propelled him to adopt anti-authority beliefs:

“COVID-19 changed everything for me. Previously, I just thought that this is the way the [political] cycle goes when you have two main parties. Conservatives are in power for a while, [then] people get tired of that, [and] Liberals get voted in for a while. I never ever thought I would see something like we did with COVID-19 that really infringed on people’s civil liberties and Charter rights. [At first], I wasn’t really paying attention to what was happening... [but I had started] listening to podcasts [that are] part of that ‘intellectual Dark Web,’ [people like] Jordan Peterson [who] got cancelled from their jobs. I was listening to them [as] my go-to source of information... They were saying, like, [going] outside, getting fresh air, vitamin D, things like that are [what] you need to stay healthy and mitigate your risk of getting severe COVID-19... [I was] starting to see things that just didn’t make sense, like walking into a restaurant with a mask on, but then taking it off when you sit down. It doesn’t make sense. And then it was my [spouse] who started asking me and bringing concerns, like, ‘why would they use a brand-new technology [in vaccines] that’s never been used in the human population before when we have other vaccines that have been used for years?’ And so that kind of started the journey for me.”

- (Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 2)

Of note, this interviewee said he attempted to consult government authorities from the start of the COVID-19 vaccine campaign, but found the information lacking:

“I went looking for information from our government, from Health Canada, [but] there really wasn’t anything of substance... I read through the website, and they had graphs, [but] that really didn’t mean anything to me. I didn’t know how to interpret that. All I kept finding on public health websites in Canada, like the CDC [or the American] FDA (Food and Drug Administration) was just the same three things: the vaccines are safe, effective, [and the] benefits outweigh the risks. It’s like putting on a seatbelt or something. A lot of the diagrams were cartoonish, which bothered me. This is a serious issue and [the government is] just dumbing it down for us as if we can’t make decisions for ourselves.”

- (Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 2)

Another interviewee, who held pre-existing conspiratorial beliefs about the government prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, noted that the government’s health mandates were what further cemented her anti-authority beliefs:

“I got involved in the ‘movement of information,’ and this was before computers. I [had information] on CD discs that [the government] was going to imprison every person on this planet, [and] that there was a plan in action. I was sending out this information to everybody because if people knew it was coming, then they would not consent, and the [government’s] plan would fail. So, when COVID-19 happened, I’m like, this is it. This is how [the government is] gonna’ do it. Because no one really knew how [the government could] enslave these people. Well, by promoting the vaccine, that’s how they do it.”

- (Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 1)

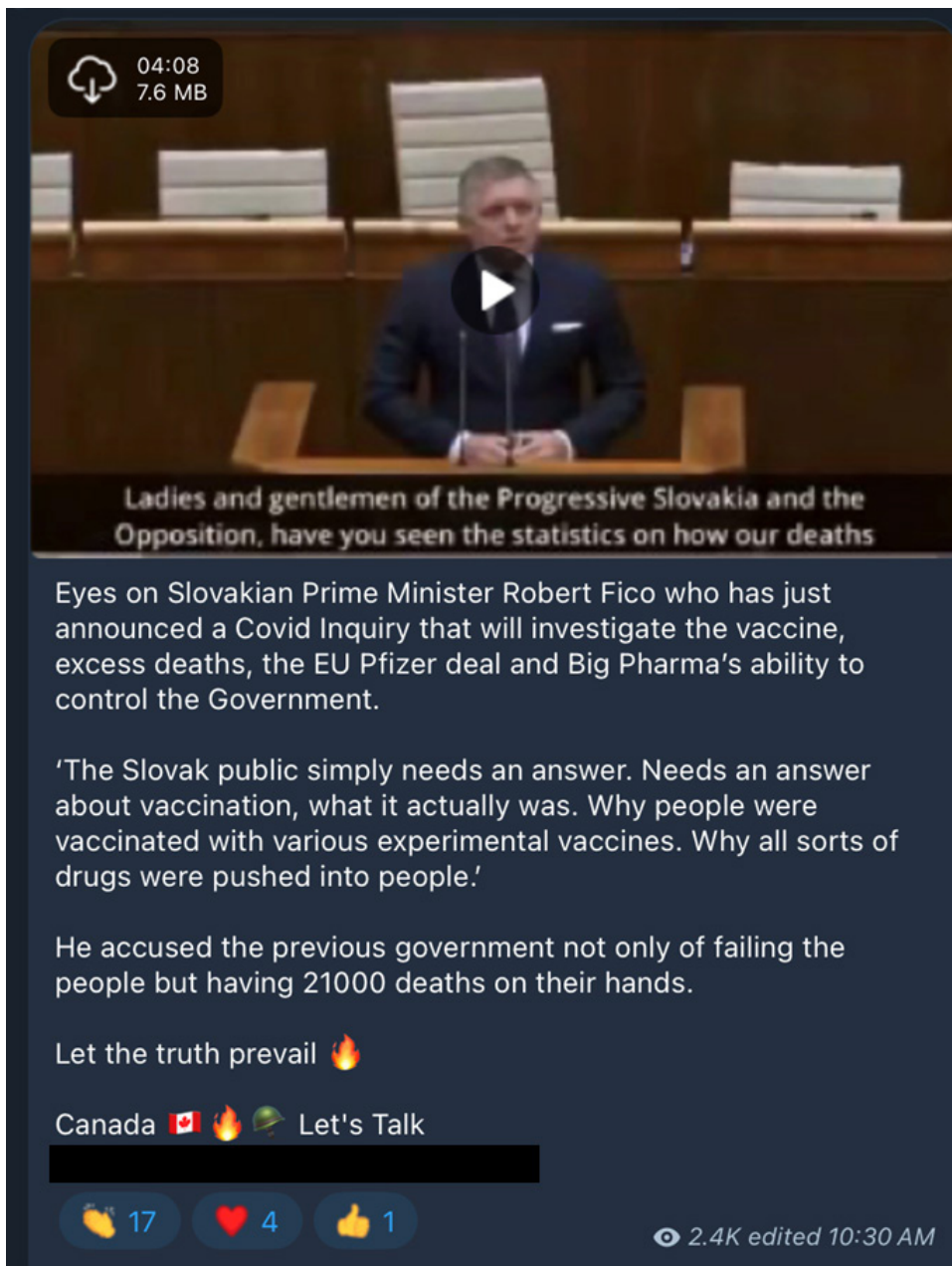


Image 36: Post sharing news about investigations regarding COVID-19 vaccine death conspiracy (Source: Telegram, May 2024)

In sum, current events and social issues play an important role in fuelling anti-authority narratives in Canada. These events can both create new sentiments, as well as exacerbate pre-existing feelings of disenfranchisement, fear, and alienation, especially among individuals who perceive social changes to be in direct conflict with their own values or freedoms. By seeking out alternative narratives which claim to offer definitive explanations and solutions to perceived problems, anti-authority narratives can further deepen this distrust.

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Financial Gain and Personal Economies

Economic factors and the pursuit of financial gain are additional factors which our interviewees noted as important to understand the adoption and proliferation of anti-authority narratives in Canada. The ideas, tactics, and perceived payoffs of adopting anti-authority beliefs, such as those promised with the use of pseudolegal tactics, often appeal to individuals who feel the financial pressures of rising costs, unstable personal financial situations such as the loss of employment, or regional and national economic downturns.

For some individuals, financial stress can serve as a key motivator to adopt anti-authority beliefs. Among these individuals, their personal financial motivations often intersect with broader ideological narratives about the perceived government overreach, leading them to seek out and employ tactics that promise financial relief, like avoiding taxes, skipping bills, or accessing fictional benefits, such as those promised by the “strawman” theory:

“I always say there is both ‘need and greed.’ They want something for nothing. They want to not pay their bills and want free fuel and all these [other] free things. So, in that respect it’s not fair to the rest of people in society who must pay [for these things]. That’s the greed part. But, to some degree, there’s [also] need involved, where they don’t have a lot of money [or] they have financial issues. They might think it’s a strategy that could potentially work, so why not try it?” - (Researcher ID 21)

Of note, financial hardships can be closely tied with broader political, social, and regional dynamics, as discussed earlier. For instance, environmental policies regarding the extraction of oil and gas can lead to large layoffs in these sectors, potentially creating anti-authority sentiments in the process. Experts we spoke to emphasized how anti-authority beliefs can become more appealing during times of economic downturn or increasing costs of living. This creates a cyclical pattern, whereby anti-authority sentiments are both created and sustained by a variety of financial and economic conditions. However, our experts note that although the economic or political conditions may differ as time goes on, the underlying sentiment remains the same:

“[Today], people have an issue-base [like the COVID-19 pandemic] to latch onto. Whereas in the past, like in the 2000s, it was the anti-globalization movement that was on the forefront of everybody’s minds. It seems to be more aggressive when economies and personal economies are challenged. When people are ‘feeling the pinch,’ so-to-speak. Whereas when things are stable and people are feeling comfortable, they tend to fall away from [these ideologies] and go a bit quieter. And then they resurface again. It’s cyclical. But the message isn’t necessarily new, it just has a new flavour.” - (Law Enforcement ID 29)

Other frontline experts in policing highlighted important regional economic distinctions within Canada which can contribute to the adoption of anti-authority beliefs. For example, the unique social, economic, and political differences between Canada's Prairie provinces and the Eastern provinces can contribute to a broader acceptance, or rejection of, extreme anti-authority narratives. As one law enforcement official told us:

"I think [some of] the government['s] policies [are interpreted by] people [who] have [developed] the perception that [they're] anti-West. They have the perception that the Western provinces are being picked on [by the federal government]. Some of this is within the government's control, but some of it may not be. When you look at interest rates rising and the cost of living rising and shutting down [or trying to shut down] the oil industry in Alberta and Saskatchewan, some people have been more affected than others. Some of the true victims [can start] to latch onto more extremist views."
- (Law Enforcement ID 28)

The role of financial distress was also discussed by an interviewee whose family member adopted anti-authority beliefs due to personal financial challenges. According to this interviewee, their family member had been in debt for several years, but it was only after being pursued by debt collectors that they turned to anti-authority ideologies and tactics to escape these financial obligations:

"During the COVID-19 pandemic, [my family member] was being paid well, but was still in debt. Around the end of 2020, [they] were sued by a debt collector, and [began to] draft motions against this debt collector. [They] eventually devolved into this theory that we don't need to pay bank debts because of various [conspiracies]." - (Family Member of Anti-Authority Individual 1)

On the other hand, some of our anti-authority interviewees described how their financial situations took a negative turn as a result of their beliefs, rather than the other way around. Both Current Anti-Authority Interviewees 1 and 2 reported being forced to leave their jobs because of their beliefs. For example, Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 1 describes:

"When I was posting on my [professional social media] page, I said 'I don't know what the media is talking about folks, there's nobody lining up to get tested [for COVID-19] - the hospitals are empty.' And my manager called me shortly after I posted all those pictures and told me to take [them] down... [My manager is saying their] phone is ringing off the hook [because of my] severe distrust for the media. So, I called my Director and I said, 'my manager wants me to take down my posts.' My Director said, 'you must take it down. I can't get behind that. I cannot be attached to your material.' So, I walked away from my job. I was devastated." - (Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 1)

Though some individuals may be drawn to anti-authority beliefs and tactics to escape financial distress, others may be motivated by the possibility of profiting from selling pseudolegal solutions to individuals in financial stress. Experts we interviewed described the dichotomy as one of “greed versus need” among adherents.²⁷⁰ Though “only a small portion of them [get involved because of] greed,” well-known “gurus,” or charismatic leaders, exploit the financial desperation of their followers by selling schemes based in pseudolaw which claim to allow the end-user to avoid taxes, cancel debts, or access hidden government benefits.²⁷¹ As one legal expert explained:

“I find quite often that a lot of these ‘guru’ people, if there was no money in it, they probably would have less of a fervent belief... The interest to get involved or stay involved, or adopt a ‘guru’-style position, would be far less if there wasn’t a way to make a buck out of it. It’s the idea that they can line their pockets at the same time as they’re promoting their conspiratorial worldview. But the target community are often people who are in financial hardship and are looking for a lifesaver. One of these gurus comes along and says, ‘hey did you know you don’t have to pay the bank back for your mortgage or your home, your car loan, [etc.]? You can just send them this notice three times and if they don’t answer in the appropriate manner then you don’t have to pay [it] back... [or] you can write to the government and ask to redeem your birth certificate and get your secret bank account opened.’”
- (Legal Expert ID 31)

While economic distress can make some individuals more susceptible to the appeal of anti-authority narratives and tactics, experts and individuals who currently or formerly espoused these beliefs emphasized that financial motivations (whether they be greed or need) cannot completely explain involvement. Instead, the role of economic distress and financial gain are complex factors which must be understood in relation to others, like personal grievances or trauma. In some cases, anti-authority beliefs precede and may even contribute to financial distress, while others may be drawn toward anti-authority tactics as a way to escape their financial woes. Meanwhile, a small group of people known as “gurus” may be drawn toward creating and disseminating anti-authority tactics for profit, though experts emphasized that this is a small group of people.

Social Circles and Isolation

Our research indicates that social circles and social isolation also play an important role in the adoption of anti-authority beliefs. However, the role played by both tends to be different for each individual case. For instance, some people are introduced to anti-authority beliefs by someone in their own social circle, such as a friend or family member; while others may experience social isolation from close contacts because of their beliefs.

²⁷⁰ Researcher 21.

²⁷¹ Researcher ID 24.

In three out of four interviews with individuals who currently or previously espoused anti-authority beliefs, or their family members, participants indicated someone in their social circle played a role in introducing them to anti-authority beliefs, or adjacent conspiracies. Our expert interviews also highlighted the importance of social circles in guiding individuals to these ideologies:

“There’ll be some interpersonal element, whether it’s a friend, family, or someone they meet, who introduced them to this idea and who brought them in. And whatever this idea is, it answer[s] all their questions, or it answered their questions sufficiently enough for them to embrace it.”
- (Researcher ID 22)

Social circles likely play a multifaceted and multi-directional role. As noted above, social circles can be important for introducing individuals to anti-authority beliefs. On the other hand, attraction to anti-authority beliefs can be propelled by social stressors, such as family distress or a breakdown of social or romantic relationships. For instance, a legal expert emphasized the following:

“People [become attracted to these beliefs] who are in distress, whether that’s family [distress] or a result of a family breakdown...” - (Legal Expert ID 31)

Our interviews with individuals who currently or previously held anti-authority beliefs also corroborate the dual role that social circles and social isolation can play. For example, Anti-Authority Interviewee 1 describes how her beliefs led to the breakdown of her marriage and social isolation from her family:

“[After I] walked away from my job, my [spouse] wanted to separate. I’m like, ‘Oh my God, I would never leave you! This is crazy.’ My spouse says, ‘No... you’re over the top. I can’t deal with this... I don’t even know who you are [anymore].’ Like even my [sibling], I said to [them], ‘you can’t see this [is] child abuse? This is systemic [government-led] child abuse! How can you think it’s okay to put a mask on a two or five-year-old and say if you hug your friend or your grandmother, they could potentially die?’ And so, my [sibling] says to me, ‘we’re all complying, we’re all wearing a mask, we’re all social distancing. What do you think of us?’ And I said, ‘I think you’re all mentally ill. You can’t see what’s going on!’... [Later on], my [sibling] says ‘I don’t want you [on our family vacation] this year if you’re not going to be vaccinated.’ And that was the last time I spoke with [my sibling], actually. I said, ‘I love you very much, I’m sorry that you feel that way and I’ll see you later.’ That was the last conversation I had with [my sibling].” - (Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 1)

Adopting anti-authority beliefs can not only intensify family or relationship ruptures, leading to social distress and isolation, but it can also offer a sense of belonging and fill the void left by estranged family and friends. For example, at the time of interview, Anti-Authority Interviewee 1 describes how finding others who shared her beliefs gave her a sense of community and a sense of support during times of isolation from her family. However, she also described a pattern of joining and leaving multiple anti-authority groups over time, each of which contributed to a cycle of social isolation as she repeatedly gained and lost friends:

“When I lost my family, my friends, everything, I finally [got] new friends [among supporters of the anti-authority movement I joined]. And then I [lost] a lot of [those] friends [when I left the movement]...”
- (Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 1)

Another interviewee who has since distanced herself from her anti-authority beliefs discussed the role of social isolation, which, combined with a move across the country and the trauma she experienced because of a death in the family, led her to deepen her commitment to anti-authority beliefs:

“I always tried to be social. But [where I was living at the time,] there were no places for me to go to meet [people with similar interests]. I was into punk, goth and industrial music, [I was also] fascinated by serial killers and the occult. There were no clubs in the area that played that music. I was very isolated out there... I think being socially isolated helped lead me to [anti-authority beliefs].”
- (Former Anti-Authority Interviewee 1)

Despite struggling to find others who shared her interests after moving across the country, this interviewee noted that this ultimately worked to her advantage when she began questioning her anti-authority beliefs. She explained that many of her remaining friends were in fact those who did not share her views, and it was those relationships who provided an important source of connection and support. The contrast between having few friends who shared her anti-authority beliefs and the enduring friendships with those who did not were instrumental in her journey to distance herself from these ideologies. More on this will be discussed in the Section 4b: Obstacles and Factors in Distancing.

However, not all current or former anti-authority interviewees indicated that their beliefs were the result of, or led to, social isolation. In some cases, individuals appeared resilient to adopting these beliefs, even when close family or friends espoused them. For instance, during our interview with a family member of an individual who holds anti-authority beliefs, he explained the tensions between recognizing that his loved one's beliefs were irrational and his reluctance to distance himself from the relationship:

"[My family member] has gained some online friends and it's kind of helped [their] social circle in that regard, but it's had a very negative impact on my family... I was initially very much supportive, not of the sovereign citizen movement, but of the fight against the debt collectors... But once [my family member] started getting into sovereign citizen ideology, I started fighting back which has created a strain [in] our relationship... It's hard for me to push [my family member] away when [they are] obviously in dire need of help legally and financially... It tears families apart... I want to help [my family member] because [they] helped me when I was younger. But the lunacy of the arguments makes me not want to talk to [them] or work with [them]." - (Family Member of Anti-Authority Individual 1)

On the other hand, Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 2 noted that he was first introduced to these beliefs by his spouse, and that over time his relationship with his family improved:

"It was my [spouse] who started bringing concerns about vaccines... Initially, when I first started speaking out, there was silence from my family. I think it was because they were worried about what was going to happen to me, like me losing my job... My oldest [sibling] and [their] family thought I was crazy for a while. But we've agreed [to disagree] ... My other [sibling] is on the same page as me. My parents weren't initially on board, but they came to [COVID-19 protests] and saw what it was like in real life on the ground versus what the media was saying about it. That was a huge wake up call for them... The majority of my family is very supportive, even if they made different choices than I did. My spouse's family is almost entirely on board. [I'm] quite fortunate."

- (Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 2)

However, this interviewee also described how many others he knew in the movement were not as fortunate as he was, resulting in isolation from their families and long-term emotional struggles:

"I know a lot of people who've been completely isolated from their families over their beliefs. That is probably the thing that people are having the hardest time moving on from – the feeling of betrayal."

Yes, people lost jobs and their businesses because of lockdowns. But I think the biggest hurt for people and why they can't let go, move on and start over, is because their relationships were taken away from them. I know lots of people whose whole family basically alienated them, until they started to find a community within [the anti-authority movement]. But not everybody is healthy about it... I've gone through a lot of anger and resentment... I'm constantly trying to figure out how do I get past this? How do I heal from this so that I can enjoy what's left of my life with my family? There's a lot of people that are just stuck in the division and the outrage." - (Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 2)

The findings in this section highlight the complex role that social circles and social isolation can play in an individual's attraction to, adoption, reinforcement, or resistance to anti-authority beliefs. As noted in other research, social circles and isolation can act both as a catalyst and gateway to introduce individuals to these ideas; however, social circles do not always successfully spread these beliefs. Meanwhile, having healthy social relationships can potentially act as a safeguard depending on the individual's experiences and relationships, as noted by our interviewees and corroborated in existing research.²⁷² For others, belief in anti-authority ideologies can contribute to social distress and family tensions, pushing them further toward their beliefs. For instance, some individuals described how the adoption of anti-authority beliefs helped to improve their family relationships, while others described how it led to their breakdown.

Likewise, social isolation emerges as both a catalyst and a consequence of anti-authority beliefs. For some individuals, social isolation precedes the adoption of anti-authority beliefs, while for others, social isolation follows because of it.

4b Obstacles and Factors in Distancing in Canada

Like in the German context, individuals who espouse anti-authority beliefs often have few reasons to distance from these ideologies, including the belief that their sentiments are widely held among the public. As noted in the literature review, there is also a dearth of literature which theorizes about the distancing process specifically among individuals who hold extreme anti-authority beliefs. Indeed, many of the individuals who seek out and participate in counselling or other psychosocial services are often friends, family or close associates, rather than the individuals who espouse these beliefs. However, our interviews with experts and individuals who currently or formerly held anti-authority beliefs reveal some factors which might support distancing from these beliefs.

The Role of Social Support Systems and Isolation

Social support systems may play a role in facilitating an individual's distancing process from anti-authority beliefs. Just as social circles can introduce an individual to these beliefs, as discussed in the previous section, they can also function as a pillar of support once an individual decides to distance themselves. Former Anti-Authority Interviewee 1, who had distanced herself from her anti-authority beliefs, describes the contrasting role of social support systems in her process:

272 Ellis et al. 2021; Zych and Nasaescu 2021; Pfundmair et al. 2022.

"I think being socially isolated helped lead me to [anti-authority beliefs]. But I think that's also why it was easier for me to leave. There's a cultic element to conspiracy theories when someone gets into it. The normal friends are like, 'I don't want anything to do with you.' So, then the only friends you have are like-minded people. And then when you're ready to leave, when you're hearing the doubt in your head, you don't have anyone to support that. I think even though [social isolation] contributed towards me being attracted to these things in the first place, the isolation also helped me leave because I didn't have that conundrum, and I did still have a few 'normal' friends who were still talking to me."
- (Former Anti-Authority Interviewee 1)

Experts we interviewed also highlighted the contrasting role of social support systems and social isolation in the distancing process. One caseworker described how some individuals who have experienced severe trauma, loneliness, and social isolation can be receptive to counselling, because it offers an opportunity for social connection which they lack in their everyday lives. Ultimately, this caseworker explains that some adherents are simply *"looking for connection and will engage with [us]."*²⁷³ As a result of this, the caseworker emphasized the importance for psychosocial professionals to engage with participants in a *"non-partisan, non-judgmental"* way, and *"understand why they're angry [and] things haven't gone well for them"* without *"legitimizing their belief system."*²⁷⁴

On the other hand, this caseworker also described that the role of social circles and isolation is highly context-dependent, and some individuals – particularly those that have been mandated to participate in psychosocial services – may in fact reject the opportunity for social connection because of their beliefs:

"We'll also see people that [act] very self-righteous and [believe] they're the 'enlightened' ones. They've now tuned into what's 'real' and everybody else has been duped. So, there's a blend. They're mandated because they wouldn't voluntarily work with us [and] how far we get with them is very challenging. We can focus on family, on friend[s], [on how they're] very isolated. You know, [if you] could you change some things in your life. But ultimately it can be very challenging to develop that trust." - (Caseworker ID 25)

The role of social circles and isolation described above are important components to consider during an individual's distancing process. However, experts we spoke to also emphasized that these factors will often do little if the individual has not displayed or indicated a readiness or willingness to distance. For example, this caseworker discussed how a participant's readiness to distance from these beliefs has a significant impact on their progress in psychosocial services:

273 Caseworker ID 25.

274 Caseworker ID 25.

"We get [people from] all over the map – those with anti-authority views readily wanting to engage and others just going through the motions because they have to... We don't always get deep down because some of the service participants will stay on a more superficial level, especially the mandated ones."
- (Caseworker ID 25)

Former Anti-Authority Interviewee 1 also emphasized the importance of non-judgmental conversations in her journey toward distancing. She described how open and supportive conversations with several friends planted seeds of doubt about her beliefs, allowing her to reflect and question them at her own pace without feeling pressured to distance before she was ready:

"I was watching a Sandy Hook conspiracy documentary with [a friend] who was from Connecticut. She wasn't nasty, she wasn't mocking me. She just kind of looked at me with real concern. She was like, 'Are you sure about this?' So, there were tiny seeds of [doubt planted along the way]. [Then later on], I visited some [friends] and I mentioned 'well, I don't know about Sandy Hook. It looks kind of fake to me.' One of my friends just stopped and dropped their hands, and their body slumps. And they're like 'stop, I work with a parent who lost their kid there.' And I started questioning, 'would my friend lie to me? No, they would not lie to me.' So that really started the ball rolling, and I just started Googling things and reading." - (Former Anti-Authority Interviewee 1)

Although some social connections can contribute in some cases to the spread of anti-authority beliefs, as discussed earlier, this interviewee suggests that social connections can also be a crucial support system for individuals as they begin to question and distance themselves from their beliefs. These enduring friendships and non-judgmental conversations with those who held opposing views ultimately sparked efforts to distance voluntarily.

However, as noted, the role of social circles and isolation is highly context dependent. Some individuals who feel prepared to distance may seek out psychosocial support services and genuinely engage with them. Others, especially those mandated to participate, may show more resistance and less progress. Both experts and former anti-authority interview participants agree that distancing often hinges on an individual's willingness and readiness to do so. While social connections can help to facilitate this process of distancing, it is unlikely to succeed without an internal willingness to change.

Failed Tactics and Prophecies

Another factor for distancing highlighted in our research is the role of failed tactics, unfulfilled prophecies, and discredited leaders. This is especially the case for individuals that employ pseudolegal tactics, who will often find that these strategies are ineffective, and in many cases counter-productive, for achieving their goals. When adherents attempt to employ pseudolegal strategies to achieve their goals, such as evading taxes, mortgages, and utilities payments, adherents may find themselves steeped with fines from the Canadian Revenue Agency, facing eviction and foreclosure, or without power and water. Legal experts observed that *“until you see these tactics fail on your own then, it’s hard to get people to divest themselves from it...”*²⁷⁵

However, failed tactics and prophecies are not always a catalyst for distancing. In cases where individuals are very entrenched in their beliefs, they may rationalize the failure of these tactics by blaming external factors, like the government, which only serves to deepen their beliefs. For instance, some of the early detaxer pseudolaw “gurus,” such as David Kevin Lindsay, have yet to abandon their pseudolaw tactics despite their repeated failures in court, and have continued not only to blame the government for their failure, but to profit from spreading these tactics. As one researcher described, many devoted followers of Romana Didulo continue to support the “Kingdom of Canada” despite continued failure of her tactics and prophecies:

“At its peak, [the Kingdom of Canada] had close to 80,000 followers on Telegram. That number has certainly dropped a lot. I think there’s a few people who have tried her methods and who come back to the group and talk about their failure, they don’t blame Didulo. They [continue to] blame the government or they blame somebody else... they rationalize why her methods didn’t work. I suspect that people who really tried her methods and realized they didn’t work just don’t come back to the group. That might be why her numbers are dropping. We don’t hear from many of them.”

- (Researcher ID 21)

For some devoted adherents, when one set of tactics fail, rather than abandoning them they simply adopt adjacent extremist ideologies which conform to their worldviews. For example, other experts describe how disillusioned FOTL adherents sought out other extremist ideologies when their existing anti-authority views failed to provide results:

“When the FOTL lost credibility, people who [were] disillusioned [but] still had these underlying anti-authority feelings... [they] basically latched onto far-right ideologies instead.” - (Researcher ID 22)

²⁷⁵ Legal Expert ID 31.

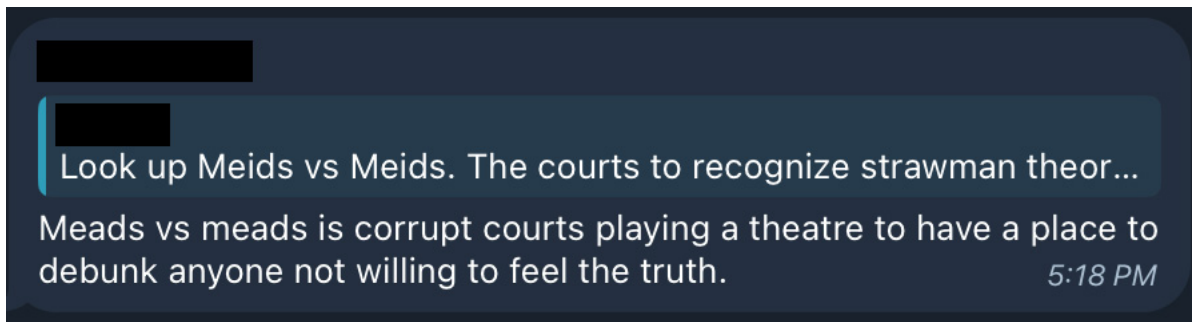


Image 37: Example of rationalizing the failure of pseudolegal tactics by claiming Meads v. Meads was the result of corruption in the courts (Telegram, February 2021)

These findings illustrate the need to better understand not only the importance of addressing the practical consequences of anti-authority beliefs, such as financial or legal repercussions, but also the need to further understand the underlying psychological or cognitive mechanisms which allow individuals to rationalize these failures.

5b Risks, Threats and Dangers in Canada

As with other forms of extremism, the risk of violence stemming from the anti-authority sphere in Canada exists on a spectrum. While many individuals harbour grievances to varying degrees, only a small fraction of them are willing to escalate to violence. Both the literature reviewed and the experts we interviewed emphasized that escalation to violence remains relatively rare among anti-authority adherents in Canada. One law enforcement official described it as “*an inverted pyramid*,” contrasting violence with harmful yet non-violent acts like hate speech.²⁷⁶ This law enforcement official further described:

“There are many things that are said that might be ‘awful but lawful,’ but the actual [number of] those individuals that are encouraging violence is a much smaller component of it... There’s a lot of bluster in that space without the seriousness of conviction to violence... I don’t think [there’s been] a large increase in those that are willing to go to the violent extremism side of things. But still, they feel emboldened, they feel like they can say anything they want, but they usually back down quick when confronted.” - (Law Enforcement ID 29)

²⁷⁶ Law Enforcement Official ID 29.

Anti-authority movements like Diagonol provide an illustrative example of this. As described earlier, Diagonol is a decentralized online community united by an array of anti-government, anti-immigrant, and conspiratorial beliefs. Initially founded as a satirical online joke by several far-right podcasters, these “influencers” promote narratives of government overreach, corruption, tyranny, and civil unrest fundamentally rooted in xenophobic and anti-immigrant beliefs. Much of this rhetoric centers on the perception that the government’s policies on immigration are damaging to the social, political, and economic fabric of Canada, and should be reversed.

Diagonol’s online spaces, where many self-proclaimed “Diags” interact with one another, feature rhetoric which over time has become increasingly hostile and xenophobic. In the summer of 2024, Diagonol “influencers” organized a series of in-person events across Canada called the “Road Rage Terror Tour,” where supporters gathered in person to watch a live show hosted by prominent Diagonol podcasters.²⁷⁷ Law enforcement officials told us that, like other anti-authority adherents, much of this rhetoric – while abhorrent and harmful – appears to stem more from frustration than from a serious intent to commit violence:

“Diagonol [is mostly] just a lot of people conversing. A lot of it was some horrible comments, and some violent comments, but it just got people riled up and echoing each other about the government doing the wrong things... [A few] people [might] step over [the line]... But a lot of them weren’t serious in their intent...” - (Law Enforcement ID 29)

Even though Diagonol’s “influencers” have reiterated that their rhetoric is simply satirical, there remains a potential risk that this rhetoric can be misinterpreted by individuals who then mobilize toward offline action and violence. For example, in January 2025, prominent online podcasters Jeremy MacKenzie and Alex Vriend abandoned their once-popular Telegram channels, which together had over 15,000 followers. The final message left to followers simply said, “Tribe and Train,” a reference to active clubs, an international network of neo-fascist groups which promote physical fitness, combat and firearms training to prepare for a perceived race war.

Additionally, several prominent members of Diagonol appear to have started their own nationalist club called the “Second Sons of Canada,” indicating that at least some members are beginning to channel their efforts toward offline activities. The “Second Sons of Canada” is a decentralized collection of clubs across Canada that purport to engage in physical fitness, survivalism, prepping, and “political activism.” As noted earlier, the group advocates for “preparing” for an acute event of government overreach or societal collapse, which aligns with the activities of far-right active clubs.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁷ Hristova and Fung 2024.

²⁷⁸ O’Connor et al. 2023.



Image 38: Map of alleged “Second Sons of Canada” club locations across Canada (Source: website of group)

Further to this point, one law enforcement official warned:

“Diagolon itself, and the conversations around Diagolon, may have started in a satirical space. It may still be in that space where they’re not serious, they’re just speaking their minds. But there’s a great danger when it’s picked up by individuals who don’t quite understand that it is [a] meme... The issue is that while [the so-called leaders of Diagolon] may not step over the line, they are putting those ideas out there that others latch onto. They may take it past the frustration level and move into the violent extremism level. It can be a dangerous space.” - (Law Enforcement ID 29)

A legal expert we spoke with further described the ways that anti-authority narratives can compel individuals to mobilize to violence, even when most of the movement remains non-violent:

“When [people] believe that authority figures or government figures are the source of all ills, you want to be a part of the fight. These people are telling you to be part of the fight. They’re using standard hate propaganda techniques, such as [saying the government or Jews] are coming for our children. They’re coming for the weakest members of society. They’re preying on us; they’re taking away our freedoms, and we need to fight back. Well then, guess what? Somebody eventually breaks and says, ‘yeah, you’re absolutely right. I’m going to go let off a car bomb or, you know, fill a rental truck with nitrogen fertilizer and gasoline and kill people.’ That’s the danger – these people can snap and believe it’s time to take action. There are any number of incidents down in the United States where a traffic stop turns into gunfire directed at police officers.” - (Legal Expert ID 31)

While rare, violence from anti-authority extremists can be some of the most brutal acts. For example, the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, carried out by an anti-government extremist named Timothy McVeigh – a veteran of the Gulf War – and an accomplice, killed 168 people and injured 684 others. In Canada, the deadliest mass shooting occurred in Nova Scotia during 2020 by Gabriel Wortman, a man with an extensive criminal history and who, among other things, had become increasingly fearful of the government’s control of money during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading him to withdraw half a million dollars from the bank, liquidate his assets, and begin stockpiling food, fuel, and weapons.²⁷⁹ The rampage, which spanned the course of two days, ended in 23 deaths, including Wortman himself.

This risk, though rare, can be observed among other anti-authority movements and groups in Canada, such as that the “Kingdom of Canada.” The group’s de-facto leader, Romana Didulo, has never committed violence herself, but has called upon her followers on multiple occasions to do so. For example, in December of 2021, a “Kingdom of Canada” follower was arrested in Laval, Quebec, for making online threats toward a school offering COVID-19 vaccinations to students. This threat came after Didulo had issued a series of instructions to her followers, including one which encouraged them to “shoot to kill” anyone facilitating COVID-19 vaccinations for children.²⁸⁰ Later in the summer of 2022, roughly 30 “Kingdom of Canada” adherents staged a protest outside the Peterborough Ontario police station and attempted to arrest local officers on instruction from Didulo, who observed from inside a vehicle parked nearby.²⁸¹ Six people were arrested and charged in connection with the event.²⁸² As one researcher told us:

279 McMillan 2020.
280 Lamoureux 2021.
281 Fraser 2022.
282 Davis 2022.

"I think the biggest threat may not be Romana Didulo herself, but her followers. She puts out lots of 'decrees' where she will say things that are on the edge of violence or covertly directing violence."
- (Researcher ID 21)

On the other hand, not all individuals involved in anti-authority movements have the same potential to mobilize to violence, according to our expert interviews. As one researcher explained, "gurus" are *"largely focused on profit, clout and getting a following online,"* and likely have a smaller propensity to violence compared to their followers.²⁸³ More broadly, though, experts cautioned that the overall threat of violence from anti-authority actors in Canada is lower than in other national contexts, such as the United States:

"I haven't seen, for example, any discussions about organized violence in Canada. Whereas down in the United States, they will clearly talk about, you know, 'if you invade my sovereign area, I'm going to defend myself.' I haven't seen that kind of rhetoric as much here in Canada." - (Researcher ID 23)

However, mobilization to violence need not exclusively be interpreted as physical violence in the pursuit of ideological goals, such as targeting law enforcement or government employees. Rather, anti-authority ideologies can also be used to defend or justify other forms of violence, such as sexual violence. For instance, in 2015 a man from Edmonton and self-proclaimed sovereign citizen sexually assaulted a woman at knifepoint outside a shopping mall. During his trial, the man presented various pseudolegal documents and arguments, including hand-drawn images of Masonic symbols, and claimed he was outside of the court's jurisdiction. The man also invoked religious pseudolegal arguments used by another Canadian group called the Church of Ecumenical Redemption International (CERI), such as the notion he is a "Minister of Christ" and therefore respecting other humans could be considered "necrophilia."²⁸⁴

While there are examples of anti-authority adherents utilizing violence in various forms, among the individuals we interviewed who currently or previously espoused anti-authority beliefs, or their close contacts, there emerged a stark contrast: all disagreed, at least on principle, with the use of violence. For example, despite her deep-seated anti-authority beliefs, Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 1 reported holding equally strong non-violent principles. In fact, one of the reasons she decided to leave the anti-authority group she joined was because its leader began calling for violence:

"When I first left [the group], I didn't know what I was dealing with because I didn't know if [the leader's threats were] just an empty threat because the [leader] does talk violent, you know? [But now] I think they're empty. Because the people [involved] that I know personally, they're very loving, they're good people. I know the supporters, [they] could never hurt anybody."
- (Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 1)

283 Researcher ID 22.

284 Wakefield 2019.

However, while Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 1 firmly rejected the use of violence and was convinced of the peaceful nature of the group's followers, her lingering distrust of authority and government institutions reveals a deeper layer of fear which could potentially result in violence committed for the perceived purpose of self-defence:

"[The reason I joined the movement] was because the 'Trudeau cult' was scaring me. I was terrified of the 'Trudeau cult'... [But] I'm not afraid of being challenged or even being shot by them. Because I think that's how it's going to come to an end, the government is going to shoot me. Not now, but there's going to come a time when you will have to take the [COVID-19 vaccine] or get shot. I don't see it being any other way. But I'll take the shot in the head before I take it in the arm."

- (Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 1)

This underscores the complex interplay of fear, distrust, and the perceived personal risk that comes with these deeply ingrained anti-authority beliefs, even in the absence of a personal inclination toward violence. At the time the interview was conducted, Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 1 was living in an undisclosed location in Canada and engaged in what she described as "prepping" activities:

"I'm setting myself up to be able to live in very extreme conditions. I have to go without food for 10 days. [I have my] clean water system, [I] grow my own food, I'm detoxing all the time from technology." - (Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 1)

Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 2 also indicated a strong position against violence, claiming instead that he believed the government's messaging about COVID-19 was inciting violence toward him and his family:

"Telling people that I was a threat to them and their children. Like that is inciting hatred [and] the potential for violence. Because if you're a dad who believes that to be [true], and you see me in the same place and you think that I'm a threat to your child because I'm unvaccinated, you know, that breeds the potential for violence." - (Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 2)

This interviewee had also networked extensively with other like-minded individuals, and concluded most people he met were decidedly non-violent as well: *"I haven't really met anyone that I would say is super serious about [violence]. I think it's just out of fear."*²⁸⁵

285 Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 2.

Finally, our interview with a close contact of an anti-authority individual reiterated that, despite engaging in activities which would be considered vexatious litigation, his family member was not violent:

“It’s hard for me to push [my loved one] away when they are obviously in dire need of help, legally and financially. I suppose if [they] were doing illegal activity, that would be the final straw for me. But so far, [they] have not. [They] are not violent, and [they] are not the kind of person that would use sovereign citizen ideology to commit violence. [They] are not that sort of person. Most people who are sovereign citizens are not violent, okay? Most of these people are working-class people who are down on their luck, and they’re looking for a way to improve their financial standing.”

- (Family Member of Anti-Authority Individual 1)

While interviewees universally rejected the use of violence, there are documented cases of violence occurring specifically during confrontations with law enforcement or government officials. For instance, in Florida during 2024, two police deputies were shot and injured by a Moorish sovereign citizen who, when confronted, refused to leave a public park after closing.²⁸⁶ In Canada during 2015, Norman Walter Raddatz shot two police officers, killing one, after they attempted to execute an arrest warrant at his home in Edmonton Alberta. Raddatz’s social media was rife with posts about conspiracies linked to movements like the FOTL, despite having no official ties to the group itself.²⁸⁷

Risks to Adherents of Anti-Authority Beliefs

Adherents of anti-authority beliefs can not only pose risks of violence to those around them but may also face significant personal risks. For instance, their actions may result in financial or legal consequences that frequently cause more harm to themselves than the systems they seek to undermine or oppose. As described by a legal expert, many of the people who are drawn to anti-authority beliefs are already marginalized, in financial distress, socially isolated, or have other vulnerabilities such as mental health issues. These factors not only make individuals more susceptible to these ideologies in the first place, but also make them more likely to suffer the consequences of their actions as well:

286 Putman 2024.

287 Pruden 2015.

“These are marginal individuals who are most often harming themselves, very badly. Just to be clear, I don’t think they are not only harming themselves, but they are also causing an awful lot of friction and expense to things like banks. They waste court resources in large amounts. But if you balance things out in a societal sense, they are the primary victims of themselves, often because they’re just so marginal. If you’ve got somebody who managed to buy a house, which is paid off, they’re on disability, they can survive at some threshold maybe for decades. You then spin pseudolaw into the equation and they stop paying their credit card bills. The cascade that follows means these individuals very often end up homeless on the street, which is a much bigger social consequence than just simply on a dollar basis.” - (Legal Expert ID 30)

Another researcher we spoke with described how anti-authority “gurus,” groups, and movements often prey on people who are already in financial distress and looking for a “quick fix.” For example, Romana Didulo’s “Kingdom of Canada” consistently requests donations from online followers who frequently have financial troubles of their own:

*“Every night, Romana Didulo and her team are begging for money on their livestreams... [But] I also think that to a degree, at least with Romana [Didulo’s] group, [her followers] may be financially in need... [They] don’t have a lot of money and they have financial issues [of their own].”
- (Researcher ID 21)*

Many followers of the “Kingdom of Canada” have contributed significant amounts of money to sustain the group. Meanwhile, these same individuals follow Didulo’s decrees, which promise to help them evade taxes and other financial obligations and have resulted in several adherents losing their homes or having their utilities shut off. In at least one documented case, a woman from Alberta and her family faced eviction after they stopped paying their mortgage, following a “Kingdom of Canada” decree claiming the banking system and all debts would be erased.²⁸⁸ Previously, the family’s water and gas were shut off for failure to pay, and the woman had allegedly been donating \$200 every month to Didulo’s group.

The harms to individual adherents of anti-authority beliefs are also corroborated among our interviews with current and former adherents. For example, both Current Anti-Authority Interviewees 1 and 2 were forced to resign from their jobs because of their beliefs, leading to financial difficulties. For Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 1, her job resignation also preceded a separation from her spouse and isolation from her family. Despite these hardships, Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 1 describes sending \$3,000 to the group she joined, which caused her significant financial setbacks at the time.

288 Lamoureux 2023.

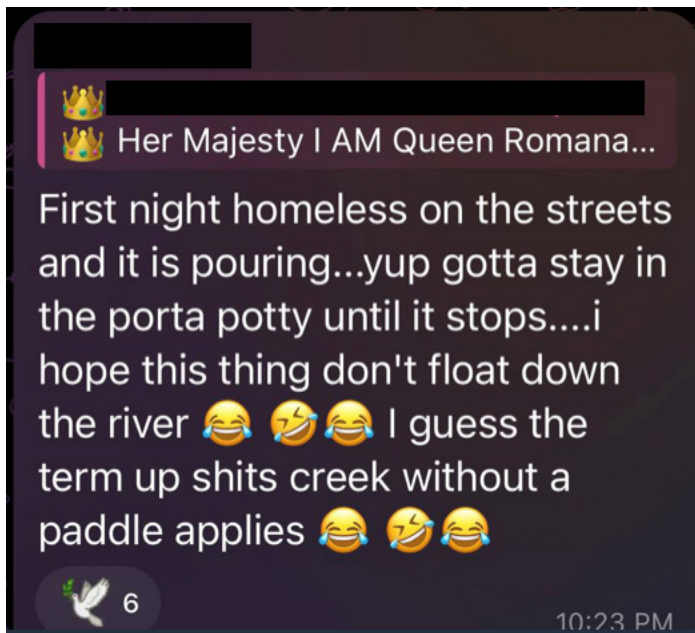


Image 39: Example of a “Kingdom of Canada” adherent who was evicted from their home after employing pseudolegal tactics (Source: Telegram, May 2024)

Likewise, Former Anti-Authority Interviewee 1 describes how she struggled to maintain permanent employment while espousing anti-authority beliefs, leading her to work several temporary or low-paying positions during that time. Our interview with a family member of an individual who espouses anti-authority beliefs also revealed that their loved one made poor financial decisions contributing to significant debt, which has been further exacerbated by pseudolegal tactics:

“[My family member is] heavily involved in those courses [on pseudolaw] and does them regularly when they have the money to purchase them.” - (Family Member of Anti-Authority Individual 1)

In summary, our research indicates that individuals who espouse anti-authority beliefs often experience significant personal harm as a direct consequence of their ideological commitments and behaviours. As noted by our experts, this personal harm is often far worse than the retribution they seek towards the institutions they oppose. In addition to this, these individuals frequently belong to marginalized groups and are actively experiencing financial distress, social isolation, and other vulnerabilities, which make them particularly susceptible to anti-authority ideologies which promise fast solutions. Once engaged, their involvement and the tactics they adopt exacerbate these circumstances, creating a cycle of further self-victimization that can end up reinforcing their beliefs.

Risks to Family, Friends and Close Contacts

In addition to the personal harm these beliefs can cause, our research indicates they also have significant effects on an individual's family and broader social circle. The first and most immediate harm is the spread of these beliefs within close relationships, which creates a contagion effect. In essence, individuals adopt and further disseminate these harmful beliefs within their own networks which creates a self-sustaining cycle. For instance, as discussed earlier, of our 4 interviews with individuals who currently or formerly espoused anti-authority beliefs, or their close contact, all but one indicated someone in their social circle introduced them to these beliefs. For instance, our interview with a family member of someone who espouses anti-authority beliefs describes how his family member attempted to influence a parent:

"[My family member] basically recommended that my [parent] do certain things in line with the sovereign citizen movement. And my [parent is] very confused and does not want to do it all. And so [my parent] now approaches [this family member] with a six-foot stick, very cautiously."
- (Family Member of Anti-Authority Individual 1)

This contagion effect may not always be effective, though. This interviewee describes that he does not believe the anti-authority narratives his family member espoused, but nonetheless, their beliefs and behaviours were enough to cause significant emotional stress in his life. As he describes, he has sought mental health counselling in part to help him cope:

"I'm currently in counselling. Not specifically [because of my family member], the overall reason was because of stress management. But, I will admit, [my family member] is a significant stressor in my life because they espouse sovereign citizen ideologies and want me to espouse the same things."
- (Family Member of Anti-Authority Individual 1)

On the other hand, Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 2 describes how his spouse initially introduced him to anti-authority beliefs, which he then shared with his own family:

"It was my [spouse] who started asking me and bringing concerns about like, 'why would they use a brand-new technology in vaccines that's never been used in the human population before?'... Initially, when I first started speaking out, there were crickets from my family. I think it was because they were worried about what was going to happen, like me losing my job... My oldest sibling and [their] family thought I was crazy for a while. But we've agreed to disagree... My other sibling is on the same page [as me]. My parents weren't initially [on board], but they came to [COVID-19 protests] and saw what it was like in real life on the ground versus what the media was saying about it. That was a huge wakeup call for them... The majority of my family is very supportive [and] my spouse's family is almost entirely on board."
- (Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 2)

Social circles play a dual role. Individuals are often introduced to these beliefs by someone within their social network, likely because these personal connections offer a sense of trust and familiarity. Once individuals are engaged with anti-authority beliefs, they will often attempt to persuade others in their own social circle, creating contagion effects. However, these efforts to disseminate the ideology will vary in their effectiveness. Some interviewees note that their close contact's attempts to convince them of these beliefs, although highly distressing, largely failed. Others described how they were able to convince many of their family and friends to adopt similar or identical beliefs. These variations point to the crucial role that social circles can play in both the adoption and perpetuation of anti-authority beliefs when conditions are right. Personal connections can act both as a gateway and as a tool to disseminate these ideologies. For those close contacts who do not share these beliefs, this can cause relationship ruptures and family conflicts, as many of our interviewees described.

Finally, these beliefs can also cause physical, developmental, or educational harm to close contacts, particularly family and dependents. For instance, many anti-authority adherents are highly suspicious of health institutions and authorities, leading them to avoid or delay medical treatments not only for themselves, but for their families. This can extend to children, whose parents may refuse medical treatments or may administer "alternative" treatments that can cause harm or further exacerbate medical conditions. Additionally, parents who espouse anti-authority beliefs may distrust educational institutions, leading them to withhold their children from school or administer homeschooling curriculum focused on anti-authority worldviews. Parents may also refuse to obtain government-issued identification for their children, including birth certificates, which can lead to legal challenges later in life.

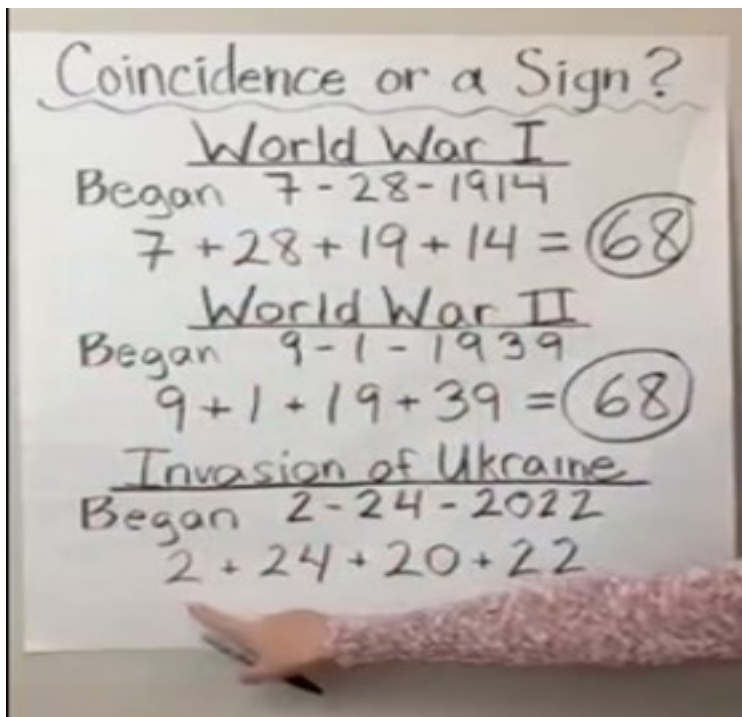


Image 40: This is a still from a video recommended for homeschooling children, which combines mathematics with conspiracies about the dates of major world events (Source: Telegram, May 2024)

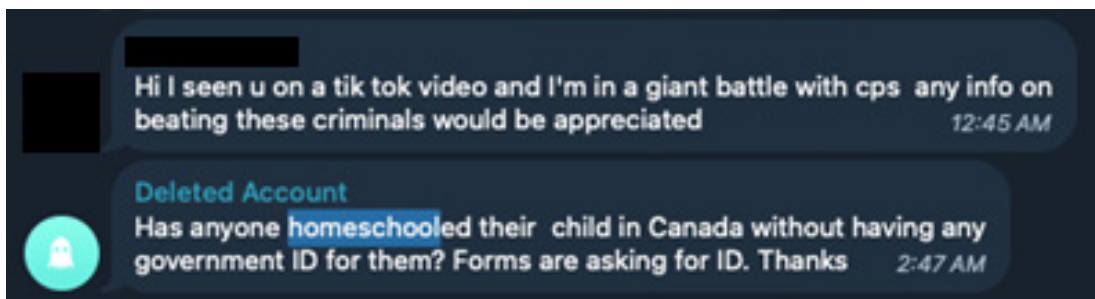


Image 41: Post asking for recommendations about homeschooling in Canada without government identification for the children (Source: Telegram, 2024)

In other cases, individuals who espouse anti-authority beliefs and participate within new age, spiritual, or “alternative” medicine communities may offer unsubstantiated medical advice to their followers. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, several individuals claiming to be Naturopathic Doctors, a regulated title in Canada, were served cease-and-desist orders by professional regulatory bodies after making unsubstantiated claims that the COVID-19 pandemic was a government “hoax.”²⁸⁹

²⁸⁹ O’Shea 2020.

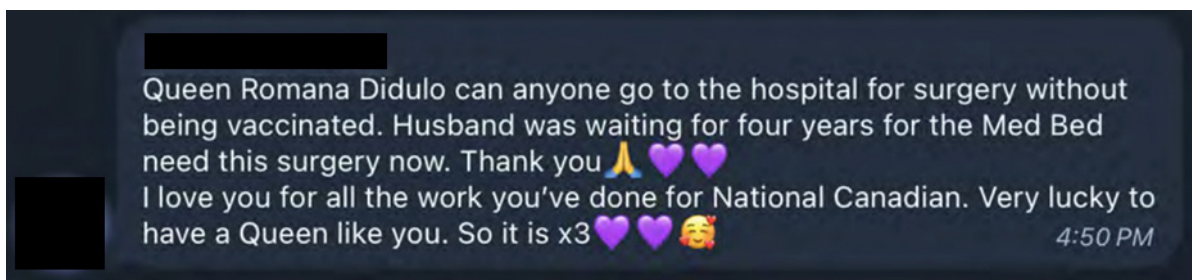


Image 42: Post about an individual delaying surgery for their husband due to the promise of “Med Beds” becoming available, a pseudoscientific conspiracy claiming there are beds that can cure diseases and extend human life (Source: Telegram, May 2024)

Risks to Authorities and Law Enforcement

In 2022, senior national security and policing officials testified before Canadian members of Parliament, warning of an unprecedented “increase in extreme anti-authority and anti-government rhetoric” since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, which had resulted in a rise in violent threats against elected and public officials.²⁹⁰ This trend was corroborated during our interviews with experts, who also expressed growing concerns about threats to public officials, including healthcare workers, politicians, and law enforcement officials in Canada.

Elected or public officials are often the representatives of authority which adherents seek to oppose. Moreover, frontline representatives, such as law enforcement, healthcare workers, or individuals employed with child welfare and protective services, are often the first to come into direct contact with individuals who espouse these beliefs. Law enforcement officials we spoke with described the increase in threats to public figures, attributing it to dissatisfaction with government policies:

“I think there is an increase in the threats to politicians, whether it’s at a provincial or a federal level. People are looking at some of the policies and procedures that get handed down to us as unfair and they’re desperate.” - (Law Enforcement ID 28)

Despite this increase in violent rhetoric and threats, law enforcement officials we interviewed noted that overtly planned acts of violence against police and public officials remained rare. In most cases, altercations between law enforcement and individuals with anti-authority beliefs have been minor:

“I know our patrol [officers] have got into minor little dustups with people when they refuse to give licence and registration or things like that, but nothing like outwardly planned violence.” - (Law Enforcement ID 27)

²⁹⁰ Thompson 2022.

Researchers we spoke with highlighted differences between offensive and defensive, or reactionary, violence. According to one expert, offensive violence in Canada is rare, but there have been several notable cases of defensive or reactive violence:

“If we look at the forms of violence that the movement was engaged in, we could identify offensive and defensive violence. We really haven’t seen a great deal of [offensive violence], but we have seen a couple cases of defensive violence. Instead, the key things I observe are the harassment and the intimidation of law enforcement and public servants, which has expanded to [include] healthcare workers and health professionals. The level of threat and violence directed towards politicians during COVID-19 is unprecedented. The fact that our MPs [Members of Parliament] were carrying alarm buttons is a sign of that.” (Researcher ID 19)

There are, however, a few rare exceptions of offensive violence directed toward law enforcement in Canada. In June 2022, twin brothers in Saanich, B.C., entered a local Bank of Montreal ostensibly to commit a bank robbery. The incident ended in a lethal shootout with the police, leaving both suspects dead and injuring six officers. Findings released from the investigation reveal the brothers were in fact not trying to rob the bank, but rather, used it as a ruse to lure police on-site to engage in an armed confrontation. The investigation concluded that the brothers were likely motivated by anti-government and anti-police sentiments centralized around the belief that the government had become tyrannical.²⁹¹ They had been planning an attack on law enforcement since at least 2019, which they did not anticipate surviving, and had been stockpiling an arsenal of weapons and explosives.

291 Matassa-Fung 2023.

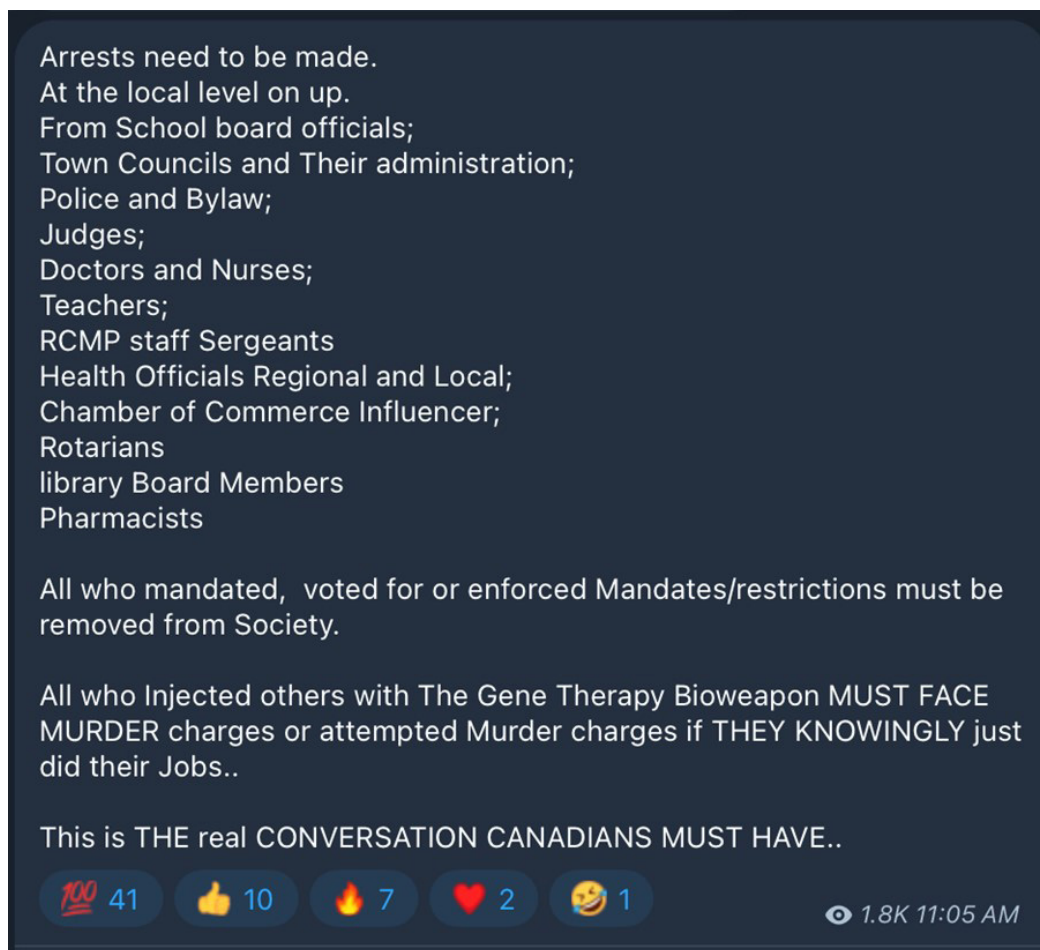


Image 43: Post calling for the arrest and removal of all officials who enforced COVID-19 mandates and vaccines (Source: Telegram, May 2024)

Experts we interviewed also highlighted a broader shift in anti-authority beliefs in Canada throughout the past decade. Some researchers warned that these beliefs have intensified alongside other forms of extremism in Canada:

“I think that the general milieu in the Western countries, including Canada since about 2015 and 2016 has been an increase in varieties of types of extremism... The anti-authority crowd has amped up their activities. In the United States, [there has been] obvious attacks on police officers. We tend not to have those kinds of attacks generally in Canada. But, in [observing] various online forum chats, there has been greater assertiveness lately. Not that long ago, anti-authority was more about the individual themselves. Like, ‘I’m not beholden to the government [and don’t need to pay taxes].’ But now, there is a feeling that they need to expand this movement... [that they] need more of this [anti-authority sentiment], and they need more people engaged in this.” - (Researcher ID 23)

This shift has also been accompanied by a broader normalization of anti-authority rhetoric and conspiracies, which has been discussed in other sections of this report. However, not all experts we interviewed believe there has been an exponential increase in anti-authority sentiments. For instance, one caseworker explained that these sentiments likely already existed for some time under the surface, but until recently, were not as socially acceptable as they are now:

“[In the past] there was probably a lot of that [anti-authority] sentiment already there, but I think there was a change in social norms... Previously, you didn’t sit in a coffee shop and talk about assassinating the Prime Minister or undermining the government, right? What was previously fringe or extreme has now drifted into the mainstream...” - (Caseworker ID 25)

Although most individuals who currently or formerly espoused these beliefs did not speak about threats to public officials, Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 2 noted he also agreed the threat specifically to former Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had increased during the COVID-19 pandemic:

“When you see videos of the Prime Minister walking around in public now, like, he’s swarmed by people everywhere he goes. His security has had to be beefed up. There’s definitely a higher threat towards him now than there ever was before in my mind.” - (Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 2)

Another risk stems from the increasing prevalence of the conspiracy about child sexual abuse and exploitation by government employees among anti-authority actors.²⁹² This conspiracy, which has been discussed in previous sections of this report, can manifest as hostility, harassment, intimidation, or threats directed at government workers or representatives who are employed by child welfare and protection services. These employees are often framed by those who espouse anti-authority rhetoric as “child abductors” or “child molesters,” and part of a grand conspiracy of politicians and public figures who prey on vulnerable children. In some cases, child welfare and protection workers – who must often conduct on-site visits at private residences – can face violence from anti-authority adherents who believe they, as part of normal work and procedure, are in fact trying to abduct or harm their children.

A popular figure in the anti-authority and conspiracy community is David Straight, an American from Texas, who profits from holding online and in-person seminars to Americans and Canadians touting his own brand of American sovereign citizen ideology, which he calls the American State National (ASN). In ASN seminars, Straight claims to have “forensic proof” that the U.S.-based Child Protective Services (CPS) performs satanic rituals on children and trafficks them through secret underground tunnels.²⁹³ Straight’s spouse, Bonnie Straight, also lectures at these seminars, and recommends using pseudolegal language, terms, and tactics, usually based around the idea that an individual can withdraw their consent to interact with CPS or the courts.

292 Sarteschi 2023a.

293 Sarteschi 2023a.

Anti-authority adherents in Canada have tried to use these tactics. For example, in Alberta in 2022, a couple claimed online in an anti-authority Telegram channel that their child was being sexually abused by a school principal, leading them to remove the rest of their children from the school.²⁹⁴ The couple claims that police then arrested them and alleged the government abused their children with electroshock therapy and genetic testing while they were in custody, consistent with many conspiracies within these communities. The couple's claims, however, do not match court records, which reveal the children were in fact removed in 2019 due to concerns about their wellbeing. During their subsequent interactions with child welfare and protection workers, as well as with law enforcement officers, the couple repeatedly refused to cooperate and became hostile and violent, including assaults with a weapon, leading to criminal charges. Allegedly, some of the tactics used by the couple were taught during ASN seminars, and the couple continues to claim their children are being held in an underground facility for the purpose of sex trafficking.²⁹⁵

The following image, shared in a popular anti-authority Telegram group, is a tactic used by some in the anti-authority and conspiracy communities to “expose” and warn others. It features a personal selfie of an alleged child welfare and protection services worker with the label “child abductor” and other defamatory text superimposed. This image highlights the significant risks that public service professionals face when interacting directly with these individuals, especially those agencies or civil servants who are directly featured in popular conspiracies.

294 Sarteschi 2023a.

295 Sarteschi 2023a.

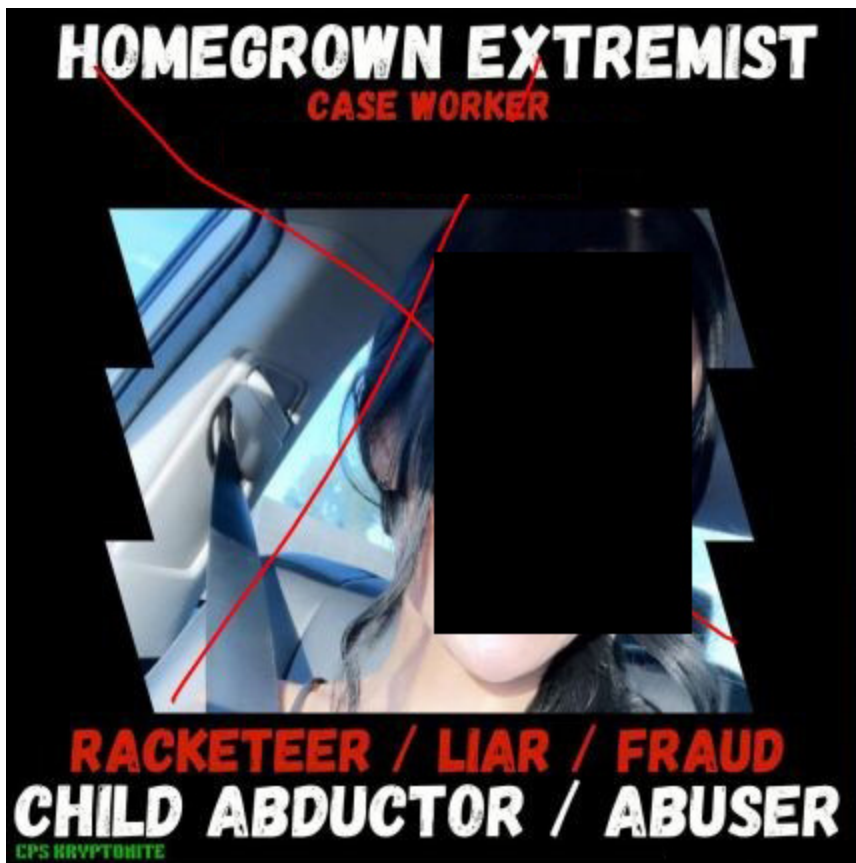


Image 44: This personal selfie of an alleged child welfare and protection services worker was used without consent by an anti-authority conspiracy group, who superimposed the words “Child Abductor/Abuser,” among other things, as a warning to others in the group (Source: Christine Sarteschi, LinkedIn post from May 22, 2025; image taken from Telegram, date unknown)

This particular risk was also discussed by experts we interviewed. For instance, one expert described a common type of interaction that some child welfare and protection workers can face:

“[When] child welfare and protection service workers are involved in a case where they must remove a child, or investigate child abuse, they might come upon a sovereign citizen [or anti-authority extremist] who gives them paperwork. I’ve seen them hand over paperwork which says something like ‘child welfare and protection services is just a front for child trafficking,’ and that they do not have any authority to come into the house. For child welfare workers, hearing that should be alerting you to the fact that you’re dealing with an anti-authority-oriented person.” - (Researcher ID 21)

Another legal expert we spoke with also described the increasing prevalence of the child sexual exploitation conspiracy among anti-authority adherents, citing it as one of the few occasions that could lead to violence:

“There are two likely scenarios for triggering violence in Canada. One is law enforcement or other authorities entering a space that has been claimed sovereign. The other one is government actors like child welfare and protection services are forced to seize children [due to unsafe conditions]. We’re seeing that more and more. A lot of instances [requiring seizure] occur when [parents fail to provide] medical treatments. They have [alternative] medical beliefs and often it’s enough to trigger state intervention. I’ve seen that a fair number of times. Another one we see is where the parents are absolutely sure that their children are being sexually molested by administrators at their school, or by other authorities. That’s a pattern, the sexual molestation.” - (Legal Expert ID 30)

This fixation on conspiracies involving the sexual exploitation or abuse of children by the government was also discussed by one of our interviewees who espoused anti-authority beliefs. Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 1 describes how she became interested as a teenager in stories of missing and exploited children, which ultimately led her to adopt her broader anti-authority worldview:

“When I was about 15, I got obsessed with [figuring out] who’s taking all these children? Who’s taking them? I got obsessed with it. I started looking at lost children websites and I noticed that since they had been recording missing children there was a relatively consistent number through the years [that went missing]. Between 60 to 65 thousand children missing every year. [I believe] that’s inventory - that’s how much [the government] needs. It was the elites, the government [doing it].”
- (Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 1)

Risks to Society and Undermining Democratic Values

Finally, many of our interviewees described a range of broader risks and threats to society and democratic values stemming from the adoption and dissemination of extreme anti-authority beliefs. This is corroborated by recent intelligence reports in Canada, which warn that anti-authority narratives have the potential to tear the “fabric of society.”²⁹⁶ For example, one researcher described how the mainstreaming and dissemination of anti-authority narratives has, and will continue to, contribute to the declining trust in government institutions and officials, ultimately damaging the democratic process:

296 Bronskill 2024.

"The messaging has become so loud now, there really is an erosion of trust in government, in media, in medicine, and in academia... The risk [to] civil dialogue, civil discourse, political awareness and being informed and therefore being able to effectively participate in democratic processes, those are the greatest challenges that I see. This risk wasn't something that we saw with the movement previously. It had the potential and the narratives, but because it was such a small movement, it wasn't really a threat in this way. Now, the playing field has changed quite dramatically." (Researcher ID 19)

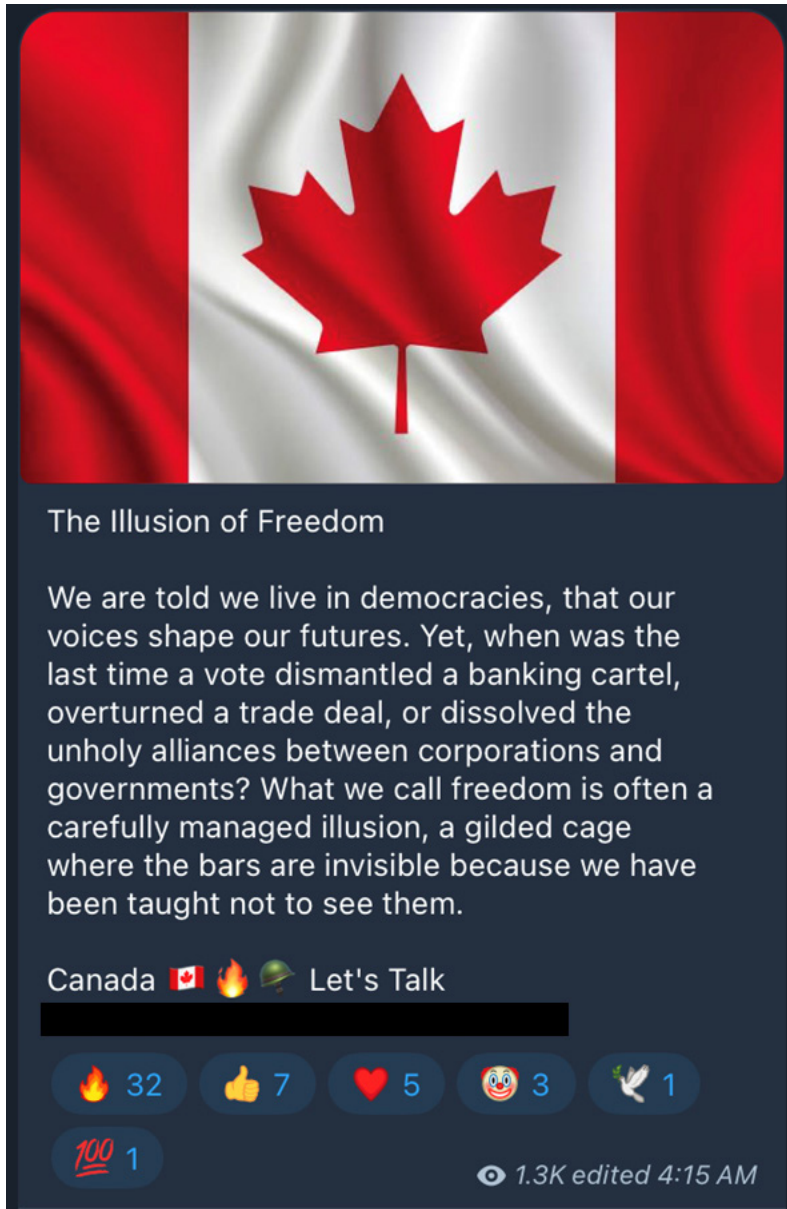


Image 45: Example of a post claiming that democracy and the right to vote in Canada is part of a “banking cartel” (Source: Telegram, November 2024)

Other experts we spoke to described how the increase in anti-authority narratives contributes broadly to political polarization and increased social divisions. This is especially true among individuals who aim to spread the claim that they are above, or outside the jurisdiction of, the law:

“People espousing the idea that the government is illegitimate is a threat to democracy. The idea that we don’t have to follow laws, that’s lawlessness. We can’t live in a lawless society, it wouldn’t function... It would be dangerous for people.” - (Researcher ID 21)

“The dangers of living in this polarized society are genuine and problematic. It’s part-and-parcel of the view of people that don’t want to live within accepted boundaries and structures of what we’re supposed to do. So therefore, they want to create their own ways of doing this. If we think about what the ‘paper terrorists’ want in terms of not being beholden to the law, we can’t live in that society. We can’t live in a society where there is no structure. The danger to me is not those movements in and of themselves. It’s [that] those movements are part of a larger syndrome of [people] who are essentially fighting to disintegrate the fundamental order of society. They’re ripping out the foundations of societies being able to function together.” - (Researcher ID 23)



Image 46: Example of a post rejecting democracy as a Jewish conspiracy (Source: Telegram, November 2024)

However, experts note that the solution to this problem is going to require a whole-of-society approach by confronting these ideas rather than isolating the individuals who espouse them. According to experts, this is especially crucial when these beliefs are within one's own families and social circles:

"A lot of us don't want to recognize that it's a problem. If you're at the Thanksgiving table and your aunt says something about the Great Reset, you would laugh at it. But underneath that is a belief that taking down Canada's government and other governments is the only way to stop this new world order [from coming true]. Our response so far has been to say we're not going to talk to these people anymore, because they don't share our worldviews – they're racist, or misogynistic, or anti-2SLGBTQIA+. What happens is they end up in this bubble and never hear anybody else's opinion. By all of us pushing them aside, we're making this problem much worse. It's not just everyday people; it's academics as well. If I approach someone who's [against the COVID-19 vaccine] and I start calling them things like 'racist' or saying they want to kill people because they don't want to take a vaccine, they're on the defence. We've lost the ability to have a conversation with each other."

- (Researcher ID 20)

This opinion also mirrors what we learned from our interviews with individuals who currently or formerly held anti-authority beliefs. As described, many felt isolated and judged because of their beliefs, and all reported feeling as though they were made out to be a danger and a threat to others. For example, Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 2 describes how, in his view, this divisiveness has created potential risks to the personal safety of him and his family:

"[When the government and society was] telling people that I was a threat to them and their children [because I didn't take the COVID-19 vaccine]... if you're a parent who believes that is true, and you see me in the same place and you think that I'm a threat to your child because I'm unvaccinated, that breeds the potential for violence." - (Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 2)

The increasing prevalence and pervasiveness of anti-authority narratives and beliefs poses risks to democratic values and cohesion. As noted in this section, experts warn that these narratives can erode trust in democratic institutions, which in turn can weaken the democratic process itself. Moreover, this problem is likely made worse by the fact that many who espouse anti-authority beliefs are often isolated from their friends and families or only operate within social echo chambers with others who have similar worldviews. Rather than dismissing or alienating these individuals, both experts and adherents themselves suggest the importance of engaging in open and non-judgmental conversations, where possible.

VI Comparison of the Phenomenon in Germany and Canada

The country-specific analysis reveals many similarities but also some differences, which are summarized in the following sections.

1c Comparison of Groups and Movements

The landscape of sovereignism and anti-authority extremism in Germany and Canada shares several important similarities, particularly regarding the structure of groups and movements. In both contexts, the movements tend to be decentralized, fragmented, and defined by their ideological fluidity. Sovereignist and anti-authority actors borrow from multiple ideological sources, leading to individualized and personalized worldviews.

While some sovereignist groups in Germany, such as *Freie Sachsen* and *Königreich Deutschland*, have more formalized structures, the broader movement in both countries lack overarching leadership and ideological coherence. In Canada, the Freeman-on-the-Land (FOTL) movement was once prominent but has declined in recent years, largely due to repeated failures in court. However, the prevailing narrative of its decline overlooks individual accounts from law enforcement, who report that individuals who identify as Freeman, or who use common Freeman tropes, continue to engage in local confrontations with police. In contrast, other movements like Diagonal primarily operate online, though this dynamic may be changing based on recent developments.

In addition to the larger and well-known groups, numerous smaller, lesser-known entities exist and share ideological commonalities, adopting specific tactics and strategies from one another. In Germany, these groups often compete with one another, preventing them from collaborating to pursue common goals.

In both contexts the COVID-19 pandemic was an important catalyst within the broader sovereignist and anti-authority landscape. As ideological narratives about government overreach expanded and became more accessible and relatable, the movement grew even more heterogeneous and fluid. A crucial linkage between previously disparate actors was the use of social media, which allowed individuals to organize, network, and share ideas on a larger scale. For instance, during mass protests of government health mandates, various individuals and groups found common ground, including individuals who believe in conspiracies, far-right extremist views, or those who adhere to esoteric and spiritual worldviews. In Canada, however, many in the anti-authority movement no longer view themselves as a fringe minority, and instead believe their sentiments are reflective of mainstream criticisms of the government; whereas in Germany, it is a common narrative within the groups that they are anti-mainstream, resisting, and fighting for freedom.

Overall, individuals, groups, and movements that espouse these beliefs demonstrate an ability to organize on a broader scale in the short-term, while still maintaining a high degree of fluidity and fragmentation. This prevents them from achieving organizational coherence or shared ideological goals. However, this adaptability poses challenges for collectively defining and categorizing this phenomenon, while enabling these actors to selectively adopt and modify their beliefs in response to evolving political, social, and economic trends.

2c Comparison of Ideology and Beliefs

The core ideological element shared by movements in both countries is a fundamental rejection of the current state as illegitimate, illegal, or corrupt. Both also share a profound distrust of various government and non-government institutions, such as health authorities and academic institutions.

Another key characteristic of the ideology in both Germany and Canada is its flexibility and fragmentation. Various terms are used to describe this growing trend, such as salad bar extremism, modular system, or composite violent extremism. This idiosyncratic belief system not only allows for easy adaptation to specific political, legal, or social circumstances, but it also attracts a broader range of individuals who then bring their own personalized grievances, experiences, and worldviews.

Conspiracies also play a significant role in both countries as they have always been a cornerstone of sovereignist and anti-authority narratives. However, sovereignist and anti-authority actors in both countries have increasingly incorporated a broader range of conspiracies, such as The Great Replacement, Great Reset, or QAnon. This aligns with existing empirical studies which have shown that belief in at least one conspiracy, regardless of its content, is positively correlated with belief in others, even if they contradict each other.²⁹⁷

In figure 5 below, we outline the results of our social media analysis of popular sovereignist and anti-authority Telegram and TikTok channels and accounts in Germany and Canada. The graph illustrates the distribution of social media posts by ideological topic. The results broadly demonstrate that the general topics of discussion in both Germany and Canada follow a similar trend, but the popularity of some topics differs by country.

297 Imhoff 2021.

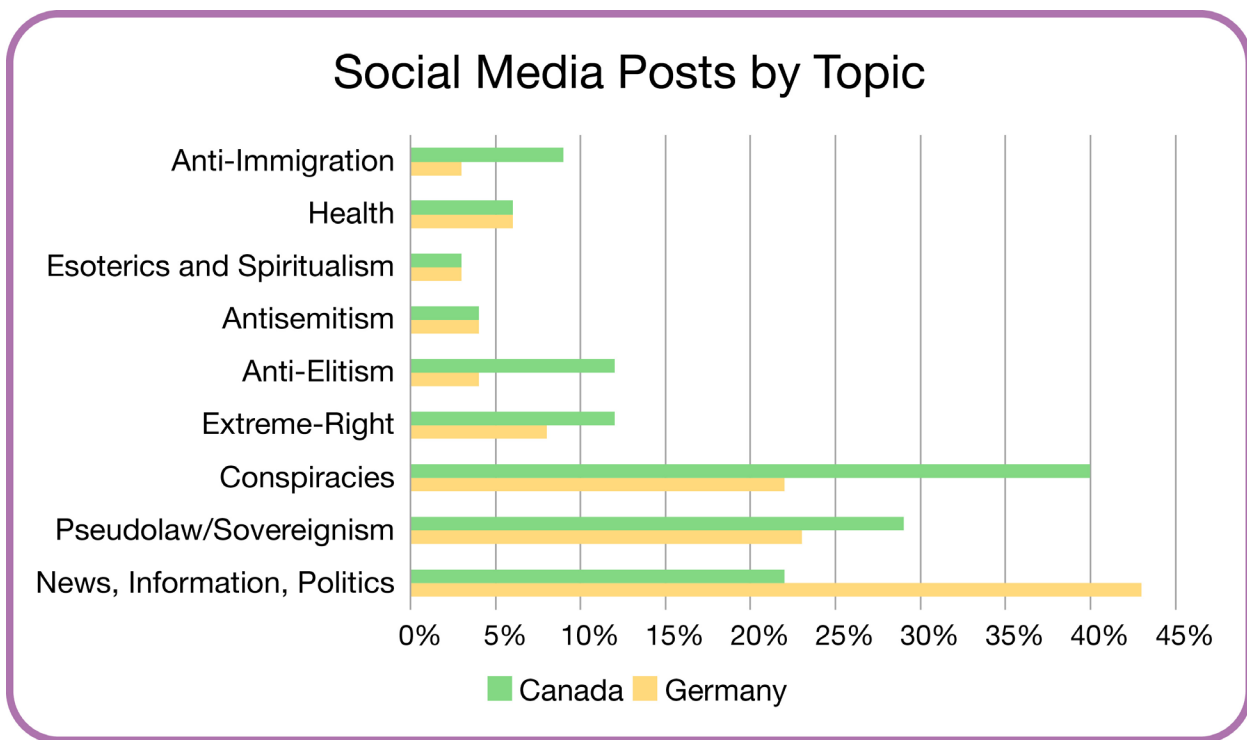


Figure 5: Social media posts by topic (Ideology)

For instance, only 22% of posts in German social media pages and channels referred to conspiracies, while 40% did in the Canadian context. These posts included a wide range, such as conspiracies about 5G technology, flat earth, the Illuminati/Freemasons, the “plandemic”, the World Economic Forum, reptilians, media manipulation, the New World Order, weather manipulation, 9/11 being a hoax, public figures and politicians as pedophiles, HIV denialism and many more. Many also centered on local or national issues. For example, in the German context, this included conspiracies about Germany’s far-right populist party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), while in the Canadian context, many focused on wildfires in Alberta or Canadian military exercises.

According to our interviews with experts, esoteric and spiritual elements were more deeply intertwined within certain sovereignist factions in Germany. As discussed, these beliefs can often serve as a gateway to sovereignism, particularly when linked to health concerns. Furthermore, these beliefs can facilitate a transition to far-right ideologies, as some esoteric worldviews are rooted in these beliefs. However, according to the results of our social media analysis, esoterics and spirituality were discussed on social media at the same rate in both the Canadian and German contexts.

Another important element discussed by many expert interviews were the intersections of the sovereignist and anti-authority movement with far-right extremism. However, while it is evident that German sovereignist narratives frequently include highly racist, antisemitic, and anti-2SLGBTQIA+ sentiments which align with far-right ideologies, the results of our social media analysis indicate that far-right topics were discussed nearly twice as much in Canadian social media posts compared to German posts.

Our interviews also reveal that pseudolaw plays an important role in Canada, where its concepts and tactics are deeply embedded with anti-authority ideologies. In Germany, pseudolaw is primarily used as a strategy to challenge the state rather than being a core component of the ideology itself. However, German expert Beckmann describes that the German sovereignist movement has been influenced by pseudolegal ideas originating in the Anglo-American sphere, particularly from the FOTL and sovereign citizens.²⁹⁸ As he explained, pseudolegal beliefs and conspiracies – such as the concept of birth certificates as a trust, or the differentiation between capitalized and uncapitalized names – stem from these sources. However, their adaptation into the German political and legal context is often done poorly, leading to the indiscriminate application of U.S. and Canadian-centric pseudolegal tactics without regard for differences in historic legacies or the legal system in Germany. Additionally, while many ideas like pseudolegal concepts flow from Anglo-American sources into the German sphere, Beckmann states that the reciprocal influences remain underexplored.

The results of our social media analysis demonstrate the importance of pseudolaw in both contexts. Specifically, topics related to pseudolaw encompass 23% of the content analyzed in the German context, and 29% in the Canadian context. Topics of discussion included debates about the philosophy of pseudolaw, references to specific laws and documents like birth certificates, as well as users asking for, or sharing, advice, or calls to action.

In our survey with close contacts of individuals who espouse sovereignist or anti-authority beliefs, we asked how important these ideologies were to the individual's overall worldview. Figure 6 below presents the survey responses from respondents who reported residing in Europe and in North America.²⁹⁹ Notably, most respondents ranked the importance of their close contact's beliefs as either "extremely important" or "very important" to their worldviews. This aligns with insights from our expert interviews, which emphasize the pervasive influence of this ideology on various aspects of one's life.

298 Jörn Beckmann, activist/legal expert.

299 Europe includes responses from Germany (104), Austria (3), France (2) and Switzerland (2). North America includes responses from the United States (23) and Canada (4).

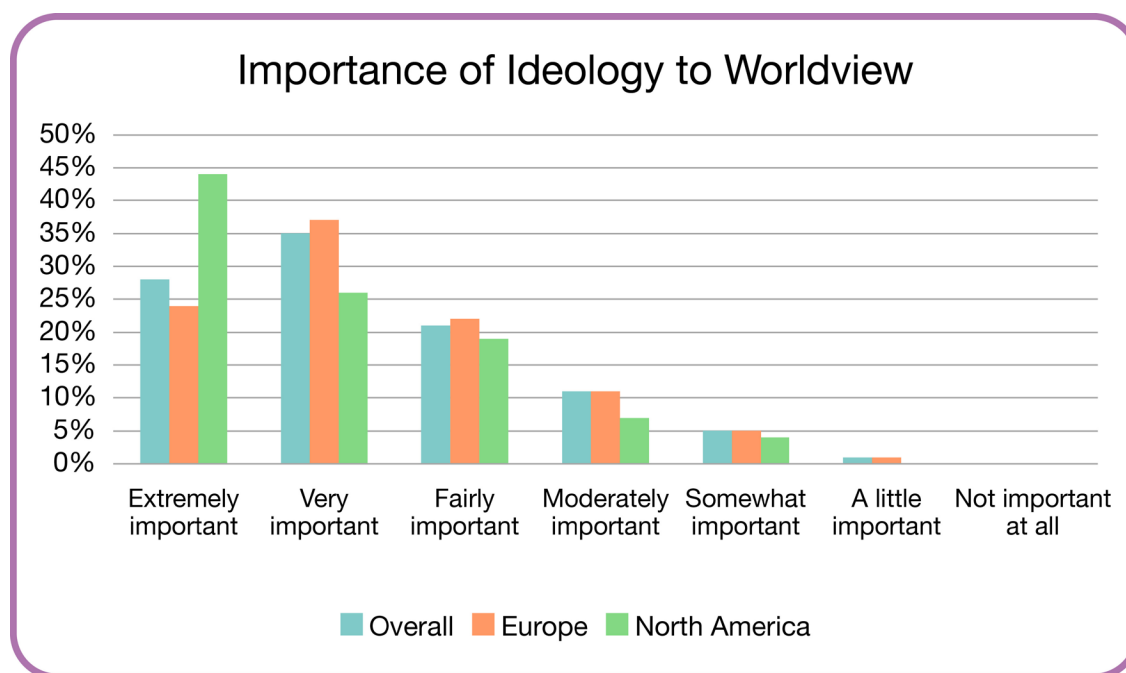


Figure 6: How close contacts rate the importance of ideology to the worldview of their loved ones

3c Comparison of Reasons for Involvement

Existing research on radicalization discusses various theoretical assumptions and highlights the interplay of different factors, ranging from personality traits to cognitive aspects such as insecurity or the search for meaning.³⁰⁰ Additionally, affective components like fear, anger, and aggression play a role. Beyond these individual factors, this research has also found that social circles, socialization, and environmental influences can also contribute to the process. Conspiracy thinking is also widespread within the movement and is frequently linked to psychological needs related to the need to understand, personal insecurities, and the desire for social identity and belonging.³⁰¹ This existing knowledge broadly supports the findings of our analysis in both contexts.

Our research found that the main factors driving involvement in sovereignty and anti-authority extremism in both Germany and Canada are largely the same. In both contexts, a combination of personal, social, and economic grievances was identified as central motivators, alongside the role of social circles, isolation, and the use of social media. Additionally, negative personal experiences with government and distrust in government institutions remain central to both contexts.

300 Srowig et al. 2018.

301 Bowes et al. 2023.

For many adherents, the appeal lies in the ability to shift the blame for personal, legal, or economic hardships onto external forces. Existing research suggests that personal insecurities, intolerance for ambiguity, and suspicions of institutions and public figures increase the tendency to endorse conspiratorial beliefs.³⁰² Because conspiratorial thinking plays a crucial role in sovereignist and anti-authority ideologies, this creates a self-reinforcing dynamic: individuals facing personal, legal, or economic insecurities are drawn toward these ideologies which can further deepen their hardships.

Another factor influencing involvement is the advanced age of adherents in Germany, relative to other forms of extremism like the far-right.³⁰³ With regard to the relationship between radicalization and age, qualitative differences play a particularly important role, such as reasons for involvement and the ways in which the ideology and its tactics are expressed.³⁰⁴ However, the age of adherents was mostly emphasized by experts in Germany, whereas in Canada, experts noted that the movement draws from a diverse range of ages and demographic backgrounds. Likewise, the stereotypical image of the middle-aged man in Germany is shifting toward a younger and more diverse representation. Our survey, however, still indicates a tendency toward an older age group among adherents in both Germany and Canada, though it is a not representative sample and is likely reflective of the sources participants were drawn from (e.g., online peer support groups).

There are also variations in the ways adherents conceptualize the past and present in both contexts. In Germany, adherents tend to focus more heavily on utopian visions of the future, and it is these positive promises for the future which likely attract some people. Conversely, in Canada, the ideological framing among many adherents is often rooted in the past through nostalgic idealism, with individuals lamenting the perceived loss of long-held values, or an idealized way of life. In this way, individuals who feel fearful or alienated by contemporary social and political changes may be more attracted to ideologies which advocate for a return to the past.

Likewise, in the Canadian context, current events and social issues – such as immigration policies and the expansion of 2SLGBTQIA+ rights – play an important role in the attraction of some individuals to anti-authority ideologies. In Germany, however, experts explain that apart from the COVID-19-pandemic, specific political decisions are usually not associated with individual motivations to adopt these ideologies. However, our social media analysis shows that hateful opinions on political decisions or politicians are discussed on both German and Canadian platforms. Figure 7, for example, shows the percentage of posts on sovereignist and anti-authority channels by country that can be classified as discussions of current events, politics and news:

302 Adam-Troian et al. 2023.

303 Copeland and Marsden 2020.

304 Müller and Hebbelmann 2024.

Social Media Posts by Topic (Current Events, Politics & News)

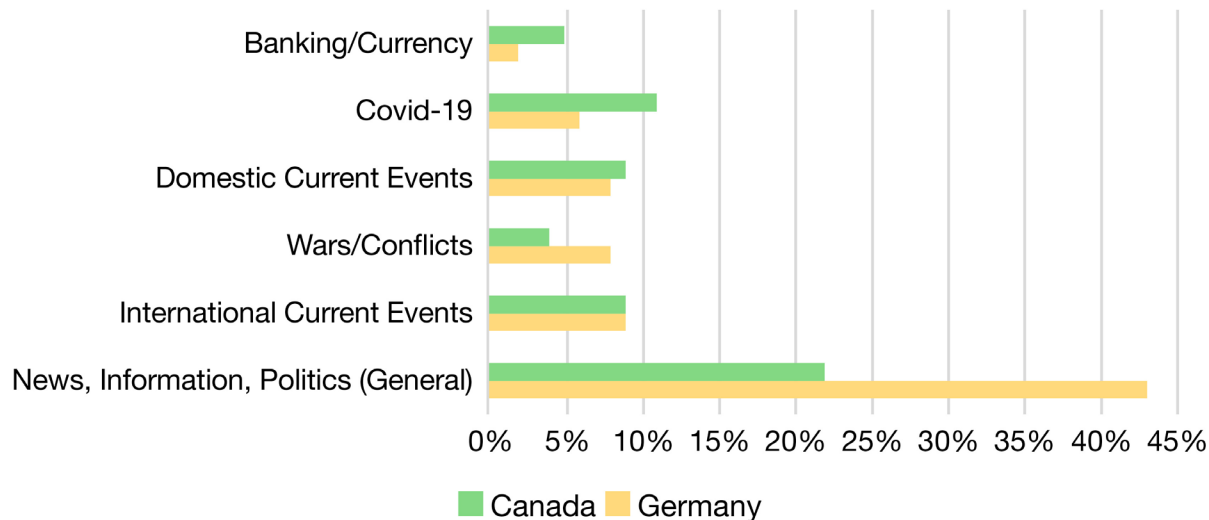


Figure 7: Social media posts by topics (Current Events, Politics and News)

These findings indicate that political and societal events are indeed actively discussed within online German sovereignist communities, and in some cases, are discussed more frequently than among Canadian anti-authority communities (e.g., Wars/Conflicts, or News, Information, Politics). The topics in these posts ranged from events at the national level (e.g. upcoming elections or current political decisions) to the international level, such as conflicts or natural disasters.

The survey responses from close contacts also provide similar insights. In our survey we asked about the factors that contributed to the individuals' beliefs. Figure 8 shows the responses for European and North American contexts. The results indicate that COVID-19 was the primary factor driving individuals toward sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs, closely followed by "frustration with politics" and an "interest in conspiracies":

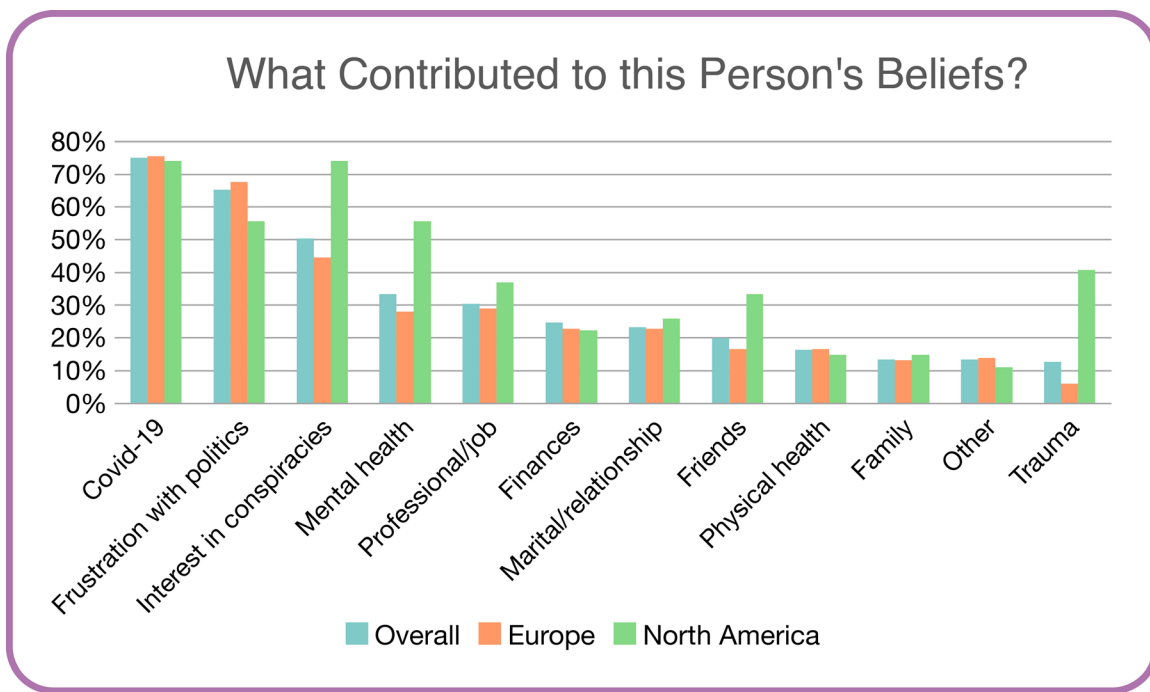


Figure 8: Factors contributing to adoption of sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs, according to their close contacts

In addition to this, figure 8 also indicates that there are important regional differences. For example, North American respondents indicate an “interest in conspiracies,” “mental health problems,” “friends,” and “trauma” were factors more frequently associated with an individual’s adoption of anti-authority beliefs compared to European respondents. Furthermore, a few respondents in both contexts mention a connection to past negative experiences related to state and government structures. In Germany, experiences within the GDR influenced sovereignist, while in North America, the Vietnam War played a role for two respondents.

Social media and technology also serve as a critical influence in both contexts, though in distinct ways. In Germany, experts focused on user-related issues, such as a lack of media literacy. In Canada, however, experts focused more on the nature of the content itself: extremist ideologies are often concealed or disguised through humorous memes, which are shared widely and serve to normalize these narratives.

The survey responses also support this and reveal that online activities are perceived as a major factor for involvement. In our survey, we asked how individuals were introduced to these beliefs, and figure 9 illustrates those results. In both European and North American respondents, the primary avenue of exposure is through online activities, including social media (Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok, etc.), messaging platforms (Telegram, Signal, Facebook messenger etc.) and video sharing platforms (Rumble, YouTube, BitChute, etc.). Additionally, alternative media outlets, including PI-News, Compact Magazine, AUF1, Truth Social, Parler, and Rebel News, play a significant role.

Sovereignism And Anti-Authority Extremism in Germany and Canada

A Comparative Analysis for a Deeper Understanding of the Fluid Movement

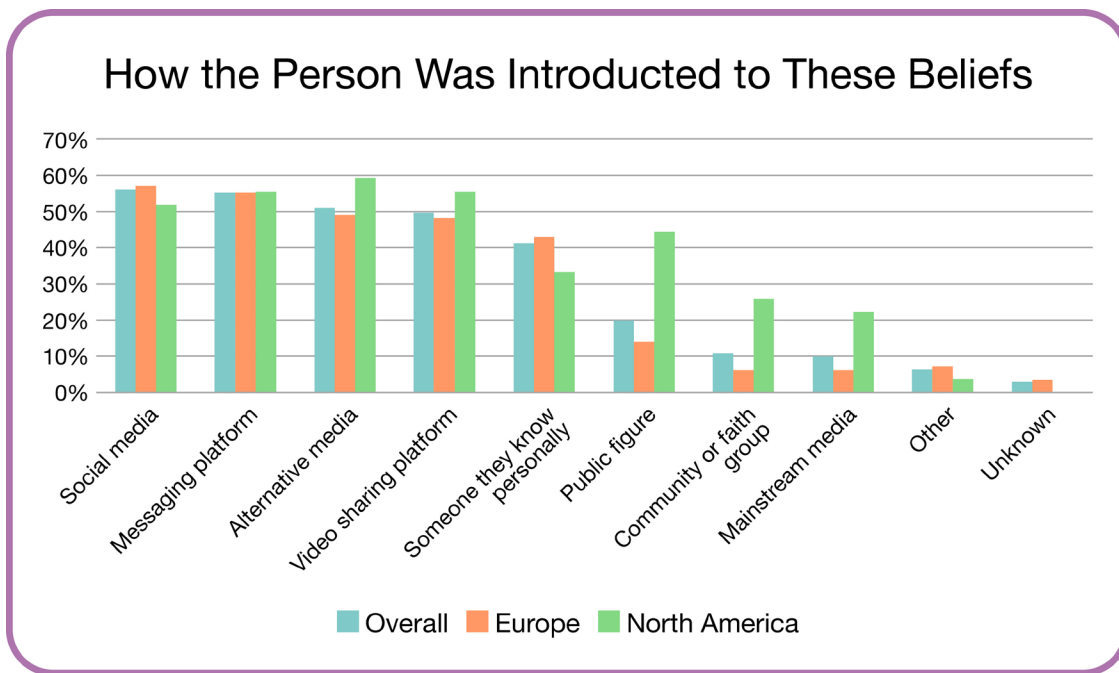


Figure 9: How adherents were introduced to sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs, according to their close contacts

A notable difference is observed among North American respondents, where public figures are perceived as playing a much greater role in guiding individuals toward anti-authority beliefs compared to European respondents. For example, several political leaders in the United States and Canada, including members of Parliament, the U.S. Congress and the Senate, promote a myriad of anti-authority conspiracies on their social media page, such as those linked to QAnon. However, German politicians of the AfD also repeatedly express sovereignist statements and positions, for example that Germany is allegedly not sovereign, though this did not appear to be reflected in the results of the survey.³⁰⁵

4c Comparison of Obstacles and Factors in Distancing

Research about distancing processes offers various approaches, including push- and pull models, factor- or phase-based approaches, and processes that are primarily derived from studies on far-right extremism or jihadism.³⁰⁶ Up to this point, there is little knowledge about distancing processes specifically within sovereignism and anti-authority extremism, primarily because there are few known cases of individuals who have distanced themselves.

305 Rathje 2024.
306 von Berg 2022, 56.

Experts have identified several challenges that prevent or hinder distancing processes, including a lack of willingness and the perceived need to distance oneself. In the German context, the older age of adherents was also emphasized, which may influence factors for distancing such as feelings of shame, family pressures, or financial status.

Nevertheless, some factors have been identified that overlap with other forms of extremism. For example, the role of close contacts, such as family or friends, is repeatedly emphasized by experts as external pressures which can influence an individual's willingness to access counselling services or being prompted to question one's own world view.³⁰⁷ Disillusionment also appears to be an important factor in sparking intrinsic motivation, and it is one identified by Bjørge as a main reason for disengaging from violent extremism.³⁰⁸

Experts from both countries cite outcomes like financial challenges, the breakdown of relationships, and disillusionment from failed tactics or broken promises as potential reasons for distancing. In both contexts, however, actions will often lack immediate consequences due to the limited (time) resources of authorities and the judicial system, leading to delays in prosecution and response, causing pseudolegal tactics to initially feel like a success. It is also important to note the failure of these strategies does not inevitably lead to disillusionment: it can, in some cases, cause a loss of trust in a leader that is associated with the tactics, but in most cases, adherents rationalize these failures by blaming systems of authority.

As mentioned above, one way to examine distancing is through the push and pull model. Push factors drive individuals away from extremist groups or ideologies due to negative experiences or consequences, such as the loss of social relationships or disillusionment with leaders and tactics. In contrast, pull factors attract individuals toward an alternative path by offering positive prospects or experiences outside the movement or ideology.³⁰⁹ Our research indicates that, in the case of individuals involved in sovereignist or anti-authority extremism, distancing is primarily provoked by push factors, such as disillusionment, shame, family pressure, financial hardship, or failed tactics. Notably, we found a lack of pull factors that might inspire a more hopeful future outside these ideologies. This absence highlights a critical gap that should be addressed in future prevention and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) efforts. Broader societal structures can be utilized to create and promote positive alternatives and opportunities, such as offering long-term employment search support for individuals seeking opportunities to re-enter the labour market.

However, our data is not representative of the entire movement and ideology, so more research is needed to identify examples of these positive alternatives. Regardless, experts in both contexts highlighted the importance of psychosocial support, which is especially promising when a person is in the early stages of their involvement or is voluntarily seeking psychosocial support.

307 Logvinov 2021, 19.

308 Bjørge 2022, 277.

309 Von Berg 2022, 54.

5c Comparison of Risks, Threats, and Dangers

Sovereignist and anti-authority movements in both countries pose several risks, such as harm to the adherents themselves, their families, authorities, and society. In both contexts, individuals suffer severe personal harm, including psychological distress, financial challenges, and social isolation. The ideology and the involvement of an individual also eventually has an impact on their social circle. In both contexts, this harm can manifest in many ways, including relationship ruptures and distress, preventing or delaying children and family members from obtaining medical treatments, or withholding children from school.

On a broader societal level, the ideology in Canada and Germany contributes to political polarization and erodes trust in democratic values and institutions. Violence committed by adherents is also discussed among experts from both countries, and the movements' perception of authorities as enemies is a common theme across both Germany and Canada. In Canada, threats to authorities have increased since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, experts in Canada also indicate that the likelihood of violence is lower from anti-authority adherents relative to other neighbouring countries, like the United States.

Our survey of close contacts reveals differing perceptions of this threat. For example, we asked respondents to rate the likelihood that their close contact would engage in violence because of their beliefs, measured on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 signifies “not at all” and 7 signifies “absolutely.” North American respondents are more likely to believe that their close contact will commit violence, with an average likelihood rating of 3.8, compared to an average of 2.4 among European respondents. The perceived likelihood of violence among North American respondents may be due, in part, to the overrepresentation of respondents from the United States where gun ownership is more widespread compared to Canada.

Respondents were also asked to indicate what would be the most likely target of that violence. Figure 10 illustrates the distribution of results across both European and North American respondents. In general, most respondents identified the government as the primary target of violence (~40%). However, there are some important differences between the two samples. Most notably, nearly 35% of North American respondents indicate family members would be a likely target, followed by educational institutions, which is comparatively lower among European respondents. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that over 10% of respondents in Europe identified family members as potential targets of physical violence – a factor not explicitly emphasized by experts during our interviews, who tend to focus more on psychological, social, or financial harms. Both regions show similar levels of concern for law enforcement and civilians.

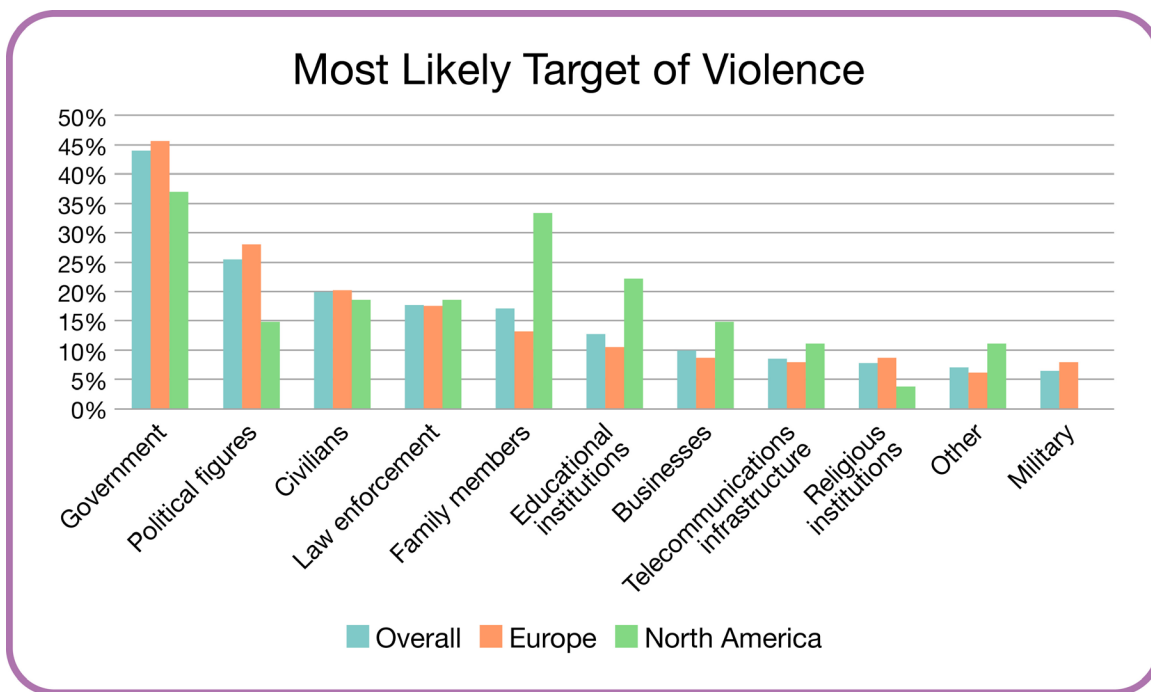


Figure 10: Most likely target of violence by people who espouse sovereignist and anti-authority views, according to close contacts

VII Defining Characteristics of the Cross-Contextual Phenomenon

Our research and comparative analysis reveal that sovereignism in Germany and anti-authority extremism in Canada are two contextual manifestations of the same phenomenon. Beyond these specific national, political and cultural contexts, we have identified several key defining characteristics of the cross-contextual phenomenon, which we outline here.

Illegitimacy and Distrust in Government and Its Institutions

First, a pervasive and underlying distrust of government and its institutions is evident, often accompanied by a belief that these institutions are fundamentally illegitimate or corrupt. This distrust is often fuelled by deep-seated grievances and perceptions of systemic failure, as well as a belief that government actors have nefarious intentions, serve elite interests, or infringe on individual freedoms. This distrust can manifest in various ways, such as rejecting public health mandates, refusing to comply with taxation laws, or adopting pseudolegal tactics. Moreover, this distrust is not merely a byproduct of these beliefs, but rather, it is a key driver of involvement in anti-authority and sovereignist movements. For example, many individuals who embrace these ideologies share negative personal experiences with the government or its institutions, whether perceived or genuine, including feelings of exclusion, discrimination, or marginalization.

Ideological Flexibility

A defining feature of sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs is their ideological flexibility. Rather than being confined to a single political orientation or demographic group, these beliefs are instead shaped, adapted, and reinterpreted to fit a wide range of actors with highly personalized worldviews and experiences. The malleability of these beliefs is also a key contributor to the broad appeal and diffusion of these beliefs across diverse socio-political, cultural, and national contexts. Sovereignist and anti-authority narratives have been increasingly co-opted by the far-right, accompanied by antisemitic tropes, conspiracy beliefs, and anti-immigrant sentiments. Additionally, these beliefs are frequently intertwined with narratives of spirituality, wellness, and esotericism, framing them not just as a form of political resistance, but also as a path to individual and spiritual freedom and enlightenment.

Conspiracy Beliefs as a Cornerstone

While sovereignism and anti-authority extremism in Germany and Canada have distinct historical, legal, and political foundations, they both are deeply intertwined with a range of conspiracies. On the one hand, they rely heavily on conspiracy narratives to explain and justify suspicions of government authorities and institutions. On the other hand, adherents will often adopt a range of conspiracy narratives unrelated to this core ideological tenet, usually based on personal experiences. This demonstrates how conspiracies act not only as a pillar of the ideology but also the glue linking disparate grievances under a common framework of distrust and suspicion. This offers a unifying lens through which sovereignist and anti-authority actors interpret the world, reinforcing their opposition to structures or symbols of authority. Further, conspiracy beliefs also function as entry points into sovereignist and anti-authority ideologies.

A Decentralized and Fragmented Movement

The sovereignist and anti-authority movement is decentralized, fragmented, and ideologically fluid. The COVID-19 pandemic further amplified this fluidity, making it even more diverse and fragmented than it was before. However, it also enabled individuals and groups to organize on a larger scale, at least in the short term. As a result, the movement exhibits a growing cohesion through broader online interconnectedness and ideological cross-pollination. This dual process has made the movement more adaptable and receptive to various influences, enhancing its capacity for engagement and expansion.

Social Media as a Catalyst

Social media plays a central role in the dynamics of the sovereignist and anti-authority movement, serving as the primary avenue for exposure, discussion, and organization. Messaging and video-sharing platforms facilitate the exchange of diverse ideological beliefs, enabling individuals to selectively adopt ideas that align with their worldview and discard others. This fluid and decentralized structure allows users to deepen their convictions, connect with like-minded individuals online, and shape their perspectives without relying on a single leader, “guru,” or distinct group.

Picking Up and Instrumentalizing (Political) Events

Sovereignist and anti-authority actors strategically exploit and capitalize on current events and crises to validate their beliefs and promote their own narratives. These actors frame events like political scandals, public health mandates, or incidents of real or perceived government overreach, as proof of systematic corruption and oppression, which further reinforces their beliefs that the government and its institutions are illegitimate. In doing so, sovereignist and anti-authority actors often employ mis- and disinformation and conspiratorial rhetoric to create a narrative that aligns with their worldview. Additionally, adherents usually portray themselves as “freedom fighters” defending against an encroaching, nefarious state. The strategy of instrumentalizing current events also serves to recruit new followers by exploiting moments of uncertainty, feelings of alienation, or disillusionment with politics.

Pseudolegal Tactics and Strategies

The use of pseudolaw concepts and tactics is common, reflecting a shared set of strategies among disparate actors. These tactics often involve the deliberate misuse, misinterpretation, or fabrication of legal terminology, principles, and practices designed to sound like true law. These practices are not only used as a tactic to assert individual autonomy and freedom from state obligations, but they can also be deployed as a form of personal resistance against various authority actors perceived as illegitimate, oppressive, corrupt, or tyrannical. Despite their consistent failure in courts, these tactics are often framed as legally sophisticated, or as the “true” interpretation of the law which has been suppressed by the government. This perceived legitimacy ultimately leads many adherents to invest their personal time and money in pseudolegal courses, seminars, and templates, and to engage in self-defeating behaviours that waste the resources of authorities. The widespread use and adoption of these tactics across various national contexts underscores their importance as a tool within sovereignist and anti-authority resistance.

Overlooked Personal Harm

Involvement in sovereignism and anti-authority extremism is accompanied by harmful impacts on the adherents themselves. While much of the public and academic discourse focuses on the potential for violence, the most pervasive consequences of these beliefs manifest at the individual level. Adherents who adopt these beliefs or engage in sovereignist or pseudolegal tactics can experience significant harm, including psychological distress, financial setbacks, and social isolation. Moreover, these effects also extend to the adherent’s social circle, especially families struggling to cope with the financial, legal, and social consequences of these beliefs. This shared pattern of individual harm underscores the need to move beyond the focus on violence and to address the broader harms that sovereignist and anti-authority worldviews inflict within families and social networks.

Lack of Distancing

Various challenges hinder the process of distancing, including a lack of willingness or perceived necessity to abandon their beliefs. Distancing is particularly difficult because these beliefs often serve as a source of justification, identity, and self-assurance. Disillusionment and the realization of personal financial, legal, or social losses are considered key factors in prompting distancing. Furthermore, family and friends can play a significant role in the distancing process by encouraging their loved ones to seek counselling or other forms of psychosocial support, which can support individuals as they navigate their way out of the movement and ideology.

Description of Sovereignism and Anti-Authority-Extremism

While our findings indicate that sovereignism and anti-authority extremism are essentially manifestations of the same phenomenon, we do not propose introducing a new overarching term. Given the numerous labels and terms which already exist, each with its own legitimacy and established use in research and practice, a new label would offer little added value and may even dilute the discourse. Before seeking terminological consolidation, future efforts should foster a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon which encompasses additional country-specific dynamics beyond Canada and Germany. We offer the following description resulting from our research, which lays the groundwork for future efforts:

Sovereignist and anti-authoritarian extremism is a phenomenon marked by a fundamental distrust in, and perceived illegitimacy of, governments and public institutions of authority. At its core, the ideology is shaped by a rejection of authority, but it is also notably fluid, allowing for the incorporation of various beliefs, including far-right narratives, antisemitic conspiracies, and spiritual or esoteric elements. Various pseudolegal concepts, tactics and pseudohistorical interpretations are often used as a tool to challenge state or legal authority, and act as a basis to legitimize these beliefs. Conspiracies are deeply embedded within this movement and function as a central pillar, while attracting a range of other individuals with diverse personal grievances. The movement is decentralized and fragmented, yet interconnected through shared narratives and ideological cross-pollination, which can enable large-scale mobilization in the form of mass protests or resistance. Social media plays a central role as the primary platform for exposure, discourse, and coordination. Sovereignist and anti-authority actors instrumentalize current events and societal crises to legitimize their worldview and disseminate their narratives. The involvement in this ideology poses significant risks, not only to democratic institutions and social cohesion, but also to the individual adherents themselves, as well as their families and social circles, while distancing from these beliefs remains difficult for many adherents who do not view their beliefs as problematic.

VIII Key Research Recommendations

Expanding Insights from Adherents and Their Social Circles

One important avenue for further research involves expanding the scope of perspectives from adherents and their social circles. While our study incorporated these viewpoints to a limited extent through our survey and interviews, they provided valuable insights into adherents' thought processes, motivations for engagement, and the appeal of sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs from an external perspective. Additionally, these perspectives can serve as counterpoint to professionals working in the field of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE), offering opportunities to confirm, challenge, or refine existing approaches. Contacting adherents through social media platforms proved relatively straightforward, highlighting the feasibility of conducting further research with a larger sample of individuals who espouse these beliefs. A more extensive examination of adherents and their social networks could contribute significantly to developing more effective strategies and interventions for distancing among P/CVE professionals.

Understanding and Supporting Adherents in Distancing

Our research indicates that there are relatively few documented cases of individuals who have actively distanced themselves from sovereignist and anti-authority ideologies. However, this does not mean that such cases do not exist; rather, it may suggest that these individuals have not been effectively reached through current prevention measures. Further research is needed to explore and refine strategies for engaging with adherents, while ensuring that interventions are tailored to their specific life circumstances.

The Influence of Age and Gender on Involvement

In general, adherents of sovereignist and anti-authority beliefs tend to be slightly older compared to those who espouse other forms of extremism, such as jihadism or far-right extremism. However, through our research, we have found that these movements have recently begun attracting a younger and more diverse cohort of adherents who do not align with the stereotypical demographics of previous years. Additionally, the proportion of women within these movements has increased. We see significant value in examining these changing dynamics through an expanded and more inclusive lens of both age and gender, as this could provide deeper insights into both the motivations for involvement and potential pathways for distancing that may be missed otherwise. Adapting prevention measures accordingly could enhance their effectiveness and better address the needs of those at risk.

Contextualizing the Phenomenon Within Political Developments

Understanding sovereignism and anti-authority extremism requires viewing it within broader political and societal structures, such as economic crises and social events and changes. The concept known as “libertarian authoritarianism” can be considered as a relevant framework, as it shares significant parallels with the sovereignist and anti-authority movement.³¹⁰ For instance, both express a deep mistrust of the state, its experts, and authorities, while promoting individual freedom as the highest value. Libertarian authoritarianism’s opposition is particularly directed at the modern state’s role in regulating personal liberties, as evident in the backlash against government measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Exploring these connections can provide insights into the rise, appeal, and spread of these movements on a broader societal level, complementing the individual factors that drive involvement.

Monitoring Social Media Platforms

As part of our research, we analyzed nine channels on TikTok and Telegram to assess the content and topics under discussion. A significant proportion of posts fell under the categories of current events, politics, and news, which demonstrates how sovereignist and anti-authority actors strategically exploit and capitalize on these events to reinforce and justify their own beliefs and narratives. Based on this, we recognize the importance of applied research to further understand social media channels that propagate sovereignist and anti-authority extremist ideologies. Such research can provide insights that help different stakeholders identify key trigger points, track the evolution of narratives and framing, and pinpoint potential targets of these movements.

Spread and Appeal to Other Groups and Movements

Our research indicates that this phenomenon is characterized by significant ideological fluidity. As a result, sovereignist and anti-authority narratives can appeal to a diverse range of individuals, creating potential for growth and broadened influence. Our research suggests that these ideologies also intersect with other forms of social and political discontent, including far-right extremism. Future research could focus on the ability of these narratives to funnel individuals from other movements, such as the “*Querdenken*” protests in Germany, the agrarian protest movements in Europe, survivalist communities, militia movements, and esoteric or alternative health communities. Identifying those most likely to sympathize with these narratives could support the development of early prevention measures, helping to mitigate the risks associated with their spread.

310 Amlinger, Nachtwey and Hermann 2024.

Wider International Perspective

In this section, we identified a set of key characteristics that define the phenomenon beyond these national contexts. In future research, we propose comparing these characteristics with additional national contexts and continuously refining their scope. This iterative approach would help establish a clearer definition and terminology to describe the global phenomenon we categorize up to this point under sovereignism and anti-authority extremism.

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Appendix

I List of Experts

ID	Name	Country	Professional category	Profession	Organisation/Institution
1	Jan Rathje	Germany	Researcher	Researcher	CeMAS
2		Germany	Counsellor	Counsellor	
3	Sarah Pohl	Germany	Counsellor	Counsellor	ZEBRA BW
4		Germany	Counsellor	Counsellor	veritas Berlin
5		Germany		Counsellor	veritas Berlin
6	Ulrike Schiesser	Austria	Counsellor	Counsellor	Federal Office for Questions on Cults (Austria) Bundesstelle für Sektenfragen (Österreich),
7	Dieter Rohmann	Germany	Counsellor	Counsellor	KULTE – Einstieg in den Ausstieg
8		Germany	Counsellor	Counsellor	demos - Brandenburgisches Institut für Gemeinwesenberatung
9		Germany	Counsellor	Counsellor	demos - Brandenburgisches Institut für Gemeinwesenberatung
10		Germany	Law enforcement	Law enforcement	State Criminal Police Office
11		Germany	Law enforcement	Law enforcement	State Criminal Police Office
12	Jan-Gerrit Keil	Germany	Law enforcement	Criminal psychologist	State Security Division of the Criminal Police
13	Felix Blum	Germany	Intelligence	Domestic intelligence official	State Office for the Protection of the Constitution
14		Germany	Authority	Director	Public Order Department
15	Jörn Beckmann	Germany	Activism	Activist/legal expert	Sonnenstaatland
16	Torsten Barthel	Germany	Legal professional	Legal professional	
17	Friedrich Wilhelm Heumann	Germany	Legal professional	Legal professional	
18	Giulia Silberberger	Germany	Political Advocate	Political Advocate	Der goldene Aluhut

19		Canada	Researcher	Expert in anti-authority extremism	
20		Canada	Researcher	Expert in anti-authority extremism	
21		Canada	Researcher	Expert in anti-authority extremism	
22		Canada	Researcher	Expert in anti-authority extremism	
23		Canada	Researcher	Expert in anti-authority extremism	
24		Canada	Counsellor	Caseworker	
25		Canada	Counsellor	Caseworker	
26		Canada	Counsellor	Caseworker	
27		Canada	Law enforcement	Law enforcement official	
28		Canada	Law enforcement	Law enforcement official	
29		Canada	Law enforcement	Law enforcement official	
30		Canada	Legal expert	Legal expert	
31		Canada	Legal expert	Legal expert	

II List of Current or Former Adherents and Their Family Members

ID	Country
Sovereignist Interviewee 1	Germany
Sovereignist Interviewee 2	Germany
Sovereignist Interviewee 3	Germany
Sovereignist Interviewee 4	Germany
Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 1	Canada
Current Anti-Authority Interviewee 2	Canada
Former Anti-Authority Interviewee 1	United States
Family Member of Anti-Authority Individual 1	United States

III Survey Questions

English Version

1. How old are you?
2. What is your gender identity?
3. In which country do you currently live?
4. How do you know the person with anti-authority beliefs?
5. Do you currently, or formerly, live with the person you identified?
6. How would you rate the level of importance anti-authority or anti-government beliefs have in this person's worldview?
7. How old is this person?
8. What is this person's gender identity?
9. How would you rate your level about this person's belief system?
10. To the best of your knowledge, how was this person introduced to anti-authority/anti-government beliefs? (select all that apply)
11. Do you believe any of the following contributed to this person's anti-government or anti-authority beliefs? (select all that apply)
12. If you would like to provide additional details about the person's experiences that you believe contributed to their anti-authority/anti-government beliefs, please do so here:
13. What activities describe the person's involvement in anti-authority/anti-government beliefs? (select all that apply)
14. What impact have these anti-authority/anti-government beliefs had on your relationship with this person?
15. If you would like to provide additional details about the impact of anti-authority/anti-government beliefs on your relationship with this person, please do so here:
16. To the best of your knowledge, what impact do these anti-authority/anti-government beliefs have on this person's relationship with other people in their life?
17. Have any of these aspects of your life been negatively impacted by this person's anti-authority/anti-government beliefs?
18. Have any of these aspects of your life been positively impacted by this person's anti-authority/anti-government beliefs?
19. Have any of these life aspects of the person you identified been negatively impacted by their anti-authority/anti-government beliefs?

20. Have any of these life aspects of the person you identified been positively impacted by their anti-authority/anti-government beliefs?
21. Do you believe the person's anti-authority/anti-government beliefs could lead them to engage in physical violence?
22. What would be the most likely target of that violence?
23. Have you ever accessed any services (e.g., mental health counsellor) to deal with the impacts of this person's anti-authority/anti-government beliefs on your life?
24. What type of services were they? (select all that apply)
25. What aspects of the services were helpful?
26. What aspects of the services were not helpful?
27. Are there services you have not accessed that could help you deal with the impacts of this person's anti-authority/anti-government beliefs on your life?
28. Which services would be helpful?
29. If you have not accessed services, do you feel you could benefit from accessing a support service?
30. If you would like to further explain your answer to the previous question, please do so here:
31. If yes, which of the following services do you think would be helpful?
32. What would you find helpful from the services you identified in the previous question?
33. Which of the following services do you think would be helpful for the person you identified?
34. If you would like to comment about the services you think the person with anti-authority/anti-government beliefs would benefit from, please do so here:
35. If you ever tried to access services for yourself, did you face any barriers or problems? (select all that apply)
36. What barriers might prevent the person you identified from accessing services?
37. If you could say one thing to professionals (such as social workers, psychologists, doctors, and other support workers) that work with people who hold anti-authority/anti-government beliefs what would it be?
38. Are you interested in telling us more about your experience? We are looking for individuals willing to participate in one-on-one virtual interviews with a member of our team. If you are interested...

IV Codes System – Social Media Analysis

News	Domestic/Current Events
	International current events
	War/conflict
	Government, governance and Political Actors
	Banking/currency
	Economics
	Media
	Other
	Domestic/Current Events
	International current events
	War/conflict
	Government, governance and Political Actors
	Banking/currency
	Economics
	Media
	Other
COVID-19	
Conspiracy	
Pseudolaw	Sharing advice/tips
	Requesting advice/tips
	Philosophy
	Discussing specific laws/obligation/documents
	Banking/currency
	Action
	Other
Prepping/Surviving	
Wisdom/Inspirations	
Far-right	Anti-immigration
	Anti LGBTQI+
	Historical revisionism
	Other
Antisemitism	
Anti-Elitism	
Health	Health advice/tips
	Medicine is ineffective
	other
Esoteric and Spirituality	
Other	