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# ISD Research Briefing

Monitoring Online Hate

Speech in British Columbia



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## Summary

This briefing provides an overview of the findings from ISD's monitoring of hate speech targeting minority communities in Canada, namely Jewish people, Migrants, Muslims, Asian Canadians, Black people, First Nations communities and Arab Canadians, between 1 January and 31 August 2024. The focus of these findings is on both the national level in Canada, and on British Columbia in particular. The key objective of this paper is the assessment of the scale, nature and targets of hate produced by Canadian extremists online, and to complement efforts to record hate crime in the offline world.

Our findings suggest that digital anti-Muslim hate plays a more pronounced role among extremist and hate groups in B.C. than at the national level. The briefing concludes with a series of case studies of key anti-Muslim, antisemitic and anti-migrant narratives among B.C. accounts identified in our analysis, as these were the most prominent target groups of hate speech.

## Key findings

Based on an analysis of 341 accounts associated with domestic extremism in Canada nationally, and 46 accounts associated with domestic extremists in B.C. we found:

- **The targets of B.C. based extremists differ from their national counterparts:** Domestic extremists in B.C. are more likely to engage in anti-Muslim hate speech than their national counterparts.
- **Hate Speech by B.C. based accounts rose in reaction to offline events:** This included spikes in anti-Muslim and anti-migrant hate speech during pro-Palestine protests, following attacks against Synagogues and Jewish schools and the opening of a Police investigation into an advertising truck with anti-Muslim messages.
- **Hate speech is localised in B.C.:** Posts mentioned local politicians and officials, accusing them of supporting immigration policies which favour specific ethnic or religious groups (e.g. Sikhs) which have allegedly "taken over" local areas. Posts were directed at public policies promoting multiculturalism and diversity, with the implication that these initiatives challenge the "traditional" cultural fabric of B.C.

## Background

The ongoing conflict between Israel and Gaza has had far-reaching consequences around the world. The Hamas terrorist attacks on 7 October, 2023, and the deaths of over [43,000](#) people in Israel's subsequent military response have [deepened divisions](#) within communities, fuelled [large-scale protests](#), led to sharp increases in [hate crimes](#) targeting Jews, Muslims, Arabs, and migrants, [emboldened](#) terrorists and violent extremists, and triggered [state-backed disinformation campaigns](#).

These harms are closely linked to online activity. While much of the digital conversation around the conflict includes expressions of solidarity, fundraising, and the coordination of protests, there is also a significant amount of harmful and at times illegal activity, driven by interconnected global networks. ISD's prior research found a 50-fold spike in [antisemitic](#) comments and a 43-fold increase in [anti-Muslim](#) comments after October 7 compared to the period just before the Hamas attacks.

Canada has also felt these effects, as the October 7 Hamas attack and the ensuing Israel-Hamas war have coincided with a notable surge in [antisemitic](#) and [anti-Muslim](#) hate incidents. ISD research has showed how social media activity associated with the [Canadian far-right](#) reveals the conflict has triggered a rise in antisemitic, anti-Muslim, anti-Palestinian, and anti-migrant rhetoric, as well as the proliferation of harmful conspiracy theories.

Hate speech targeting Muslims and Jews in Canada [follows global patterns](#), with familiar harmful stereotypes, such as depicting Muslims as violent or portraying Jews as wielding disproportionate power. In Quebec, far-right groups seem to be more driven by [anti-Muslim sentiments](#). Meanwhile, the newly formed Jewish Defense League offshoot, Israel Now, has been [mobilising](#) to confront Palestinian protestors, activists, and Jewish individuals seen as insufficiently supportive of Israel. This group advocates for physical confrontations with pro-Palestinian supporters and promotes online and possibly offline harassment, alongside broader anti-Muslim rhetoric.

In the context of a chaotic online information environment around the conflict, [Meta's news ban](#) has also influenced the quality of information available to Canadian users. Analysis of Facebook pages and groups [showed](#) that 80% of high-quality sources are blocked in Canada compared to 36% of low-quality sources. In response, users have been sharing more photos and content from other platforms, with this material often containing more opinion, propaganda, and misinformation than traditional media or re-shared posts.

These trends reflect how Canadian extremist responses align with global patterns. However, the ways in which communities are targeted remain localised and reflective of domestic dynamics. Accordingly, it is important to conduct deeper data analysis to better understand the ways in which minority communities in Canada are impacted by global events.

To provide these key insights ISD conducted in-depth analysis of online hate speech both at a national level in Canada, and in British Columbia, using large language models to explore social media data at scale. The methodology which was used for this analysis is explored in detail below.

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# Hate Speech Monitoring – Approach and National Findings

## Data Collection

ISD and CASM used social media platform's official Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) to collect 945,845 posts from 341 domestic extremist accounts (see Annex for more detail) in Canada across X, Facebook, Telegram, YouTube and Instagram between 1 January and 31 August 2024.

## Keyword Filters

All messages went through a keyword list of words and phrases identifying different target groups of hate speech (Jewish people, migrants, Muslims, Asian Canadians, Black people, First Nations communities and Arab Canadians).

These keywords filtered each message: a message that did not have any keywords and phrases in was marked as not hateful, the rationale being that hate speech needs a recognisable target.

## Hate Classifier

All the messages were subsequently run through a version of Llama 3.1 8B parameters- 'grimjim/Llama-3.1-8B-Instruct-abliterated\_via\_adapter' using an LLM-based prompt.<sup>i</sup> This is a jailbroken version and can be found on [huggingface](#).

This gave every message a hateful classification and a confidence score. ISD then trained a classifier using a mix of labelled data and data from hateful datasets (evaluated on just ISD data) to give the final classification to any messages that made it through the filters.

## Results

Of the 945,845 posts by the domestic extremist accounts between 1 January and 31 August, 13,055 (1.4% of the total) were classified as hateful, using the approach outlined above. Key events leading to a spike in hateful posts targeting Jewish people, migrants and Muslims in particular included pro-Palestine protests in the city of Toronto on 27 May, as well as the 30<sup>th</sup> July, which marked the beginning of the Southport riots in the United Kingdom, and which led to a rise in online hate against migrants and Muslims in particular.

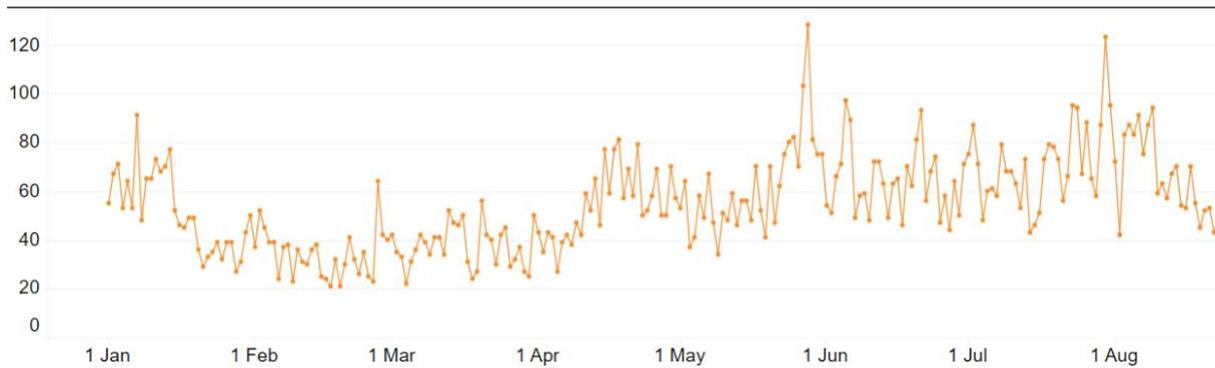


Figure 1: Hate Speech by Canadian Domestic Extremists over time

Of these, 4,577 were targeted against Jewish people, 4,382 against migrants, 2,656 against Muslims, 1,957 against Asian Canadians, 1,279 against Black people, 1,252 against First Nations communities and 218 against Arab Canadians. This highlights the prominence of antisemitic and anti-migrant hate among Canadian domestic extremists, rather than providing broader insights into hate across Canadian society. Despite this, these findings are nevertheless informative in highlighting the ways the most explicitly hateful groups in Canada target communities. These insights are useful as it is often these egregious extremist communities who produce hateful content which is consumed more broadly across society.

These findings show a relatively even spread between different target groups. In some cases, posts may target more than one group (see section on qualitative case studies below). Likewise, there may be overlap between different target groups even when it is not explicitly stated, as e.g. many (though not all) Arabs in Canada will also be Muslim. For example, 48% of anti-Arab posts were also classified as anti-Muslim. Other target groups with relatively high levels of overlap included migrants and Muslims, with 20% of anti-Muslim hate also being classified as anti-migrant.

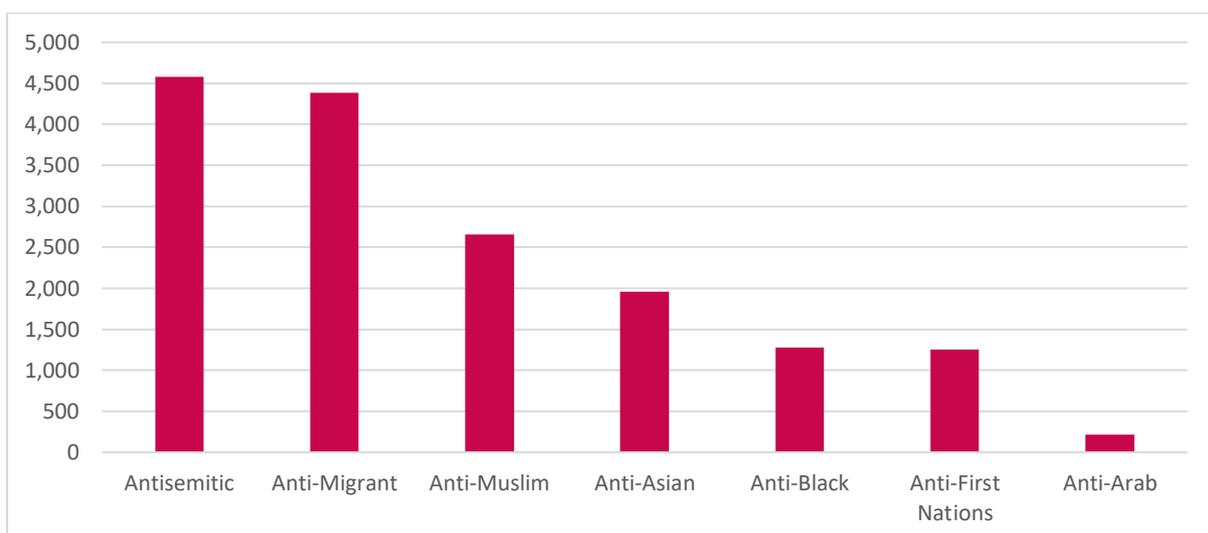


Figure 2: Hate Speech by Canadian Domestic Extremists by target group

Of the 13,055 hateful messages identified by ISD, 8,038 were posted on X, followed 4,547 on Telegram, 464 on Facebook, 4 on Instagram and 2 on YouTube. For most types of hate, X was the most common platforms, though anti-black and anti-Arab hate were in fact more common on Telegram.

	Antisemitic	Anti-Migrant	Anti-Muslim	Anti-Asian	Anti-Black	Anti-First Nations	Anti-Arab
X	2,392 (52%)	3,216 (73%)	1,512 (57%)	1,265 (65%)	825 (48%)	814 (65%)	81 (37%)
Telegram	2,007 (44%)	953 (22%)	943 (36%)	653 (33%)	851 (49%)	397 (32%)	111 (51%)
Facebook	176 (4%)	211 (5%)	201 (8%)	39 (2%)	50 (3%)	41 (3%)	26 (3%)
Instagram	1 (0%)	1 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
YouTube	1 (0%)	1 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
	<b>4,577</b>	<b>4,382</b>	<b>2,656</b>	<b>1,957</b>	<b>1,729</b>	<b>1,252</b>	<b>218</b>

Figure 3: Hate Speech by Canadian Domestic Extremists, breakdown by platform and target group. Percentages refer to the share of the total for each target group: for example, 52% of antisemitic messages were identified on X.

## Hate Speech in British Columbia – Prevalence and Targets

Based on the national-level results of ISD’s hate speech classification analysis outlined above, ISD’s research team aimed to assess the nature and prevalence of hate speech at the provincial level, focusing on the situation in British Columbia.

ISD followed three distinct streams of analysis to zoom in on the situation in British Columbia specifically:

- ISD broke down the data to **extremist and hate accounts which are known to be based in B.C.** to identify key influencers and groups spreading hateful narratives online.
- Using **keywords**, we filtered all mentions of British Columbia to identify hateful messages and narratives that directly refer to the province.
- To further illustrate key trends, the final section provides a selection of **qualitative case studies** focusing on important narratives and patterns of hateful online mobilisation affecting B.C.

### Account Filtering Approach – Hate Messages by Accounts from B.C.

ISD reviewed the 341 domestic extremist accounts (see above) identified in Canada across X, Facebook, Telegram, YouTube and Instagram to assess which ones were clearly based in B.C. Overall, most of the 341 accounts were nationally focussed Canadian accounts. Of the accounts for which a location was provided via platform functionalities or account name (e.g. “White Lives Matter BC”) or could be clearly inferred from the focus of the thematic output, accounts were more likely to be based in Ontario or Quebec. However, ISD identified 46 domestic extremist accounts that were clearly based in B.C.

The 46 accounts published a total of 972 comments that were classified as hate speech, using the LLM-based prompt approach outlined above. 943 of these were posts on X, followed by 17 on Facebook and 12 on Telegram. This indicates a much higher share of X posts but a lower share of hateful Telegram content in B.C., compared to our national results.

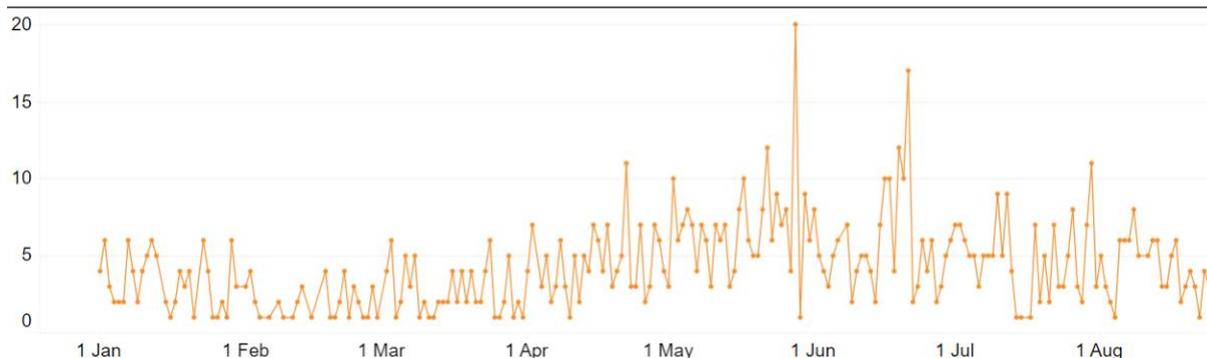


Figure 4: Hate Speech by B.C. based Domestic Extremists over time.

Hateful posts from B.C. based accounts saw several spikes. The biggest spikes occurred on 28 May, and 21 June. The spike on 28 May was driven by a rise in anti-Muslim hate speech during the “All Eyes on Rafah” pro-Palestine protest in Vancouver and in the context of multiple attacks against Synagogues and Jewish schools in [Vancouver](#), [Toronto](#) and [Montreal](#) (antisemitic hate speech peaked on 17 May, the week before these attacks). The 21 June spike was mainly driven by a rise in anti-Muslim and anti-migrant hate online, and coincided with [reporting](#) about Toronto police opening an investigation of Rebel News after an advertising truck with anti-Muslim messages had been identified driving through the city.

By comparing the results from B.C. based domestic extremists to the those of domestic extremists operating throughout Canada, several noticeable patterns can be discerned. First, the share of anti-Muslim hate was much higher among posts by B.C. based domestic extremist accounts, than their national counterparts. While 20% of hateful posts on the national level mentioned Muslims, this figure rose to 45% in B.C (a 25% gap). These findings suggest that digital anti-Muslim hate plays a particularly pronounced role among extremist and hate groups in B.C.

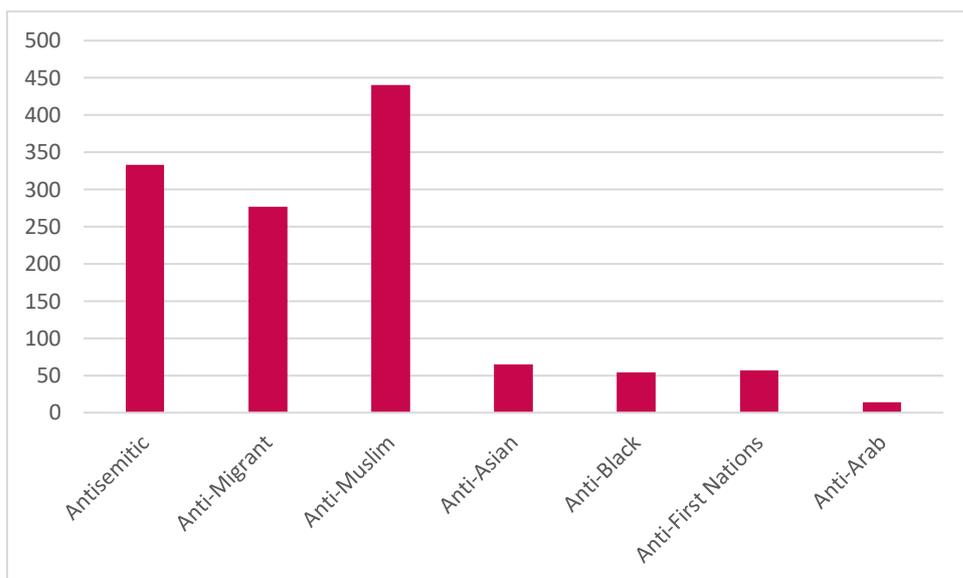


Figure 5: Hate Speech by B.C. based Domestic Extremists by target group

By comparison, anti-migrant, anti-Asian, anti-Black and anti-First Nations hate were less common among B.C. based domestic extremists compared with the national level (4-8%

gaps). Antisemitic and anti-Arab hate remained largely constant between B.C. and the national level (both with a -1% gap).

### **Keyword Filtering Approach - Hateful Messages that mention B.C.**

To identify messages about B.C., ISD created a list of keywords of places, people and organisations from the province.<sup>ii</sup> Using keywords, we filtered all mentions of British Columbia to identify hateful messages and narratives that directly refer to the province.

Only a very small number of posts (73) identified as hateful directly mentions B.C., or a place, organisation or person within it. 33 of these were published on X, 31 on Telegram and 9 Facebook. Among the hateful posts mentioning B.C., anti-migrant and antisemitic (both 26 posts) and anti-Muslim posts (23) were the most common. These findings suggest that hateful posts are unlikely to obviously reference very specific entities that are clearly based in B.C.

Among the 73 hateful posts identified, there were several specific references to particular neighbourhoods and cities, such as Vancouver, Surrey and Richmond, where immigrant communities are concentrated. Other posts mentioned local politicians and officials, accusing them of supporting immigration policies which favour specific ethnic or religious groups (e.g. Sikhs) which have allegedly “taken over” local areas. Posts were directed at public policies promoting multiculturalism and diversity, with the implication that these initiatives challenge the “traditional” cultural fabric of B.C.

### **Qualitative Case Studies – Key narratives and online mobilisation in B.C.**

The following section will outline case studies of key anti-Muslim, antisemitic and anti-migrant narratives identified in our analysis.

#### *Case Study 1 – Islamophobic Narratives justifying anti-Muslim policies*

In the comments identified as anti-Muslim, Islam was frequently portrayed as a dangerous and oppressive political movement. One comment labelled Islam as “disgusting” and equated it with evil, repeatedly accusing Muslims of being part of a demonic or violent agenda. For example, one post stated *“Islam: a religion so peaceful that if you don't submit to it, it's adherents want to chase you to the end of the world to take your life.”*

Others claim that Islam's goal is to infiltrate the West through self-victimization to establish dominance: *“There is no such thing as Islamophobia. It's the Muslims strategy to enter the West and self-victimize to advance their caliphate.”* Similar posts argued that schools in Surrey, B.C. should not spend money on “trans flags” and Muslim holidays.

These demonising narratives about Muslims in B.C. and Canada ultimately resulted in calls to deprive Muslims of their religious liberties, arguing that Islam is not a legitimate religion but rather a harmful ideology: *“God have mercy on Canada. We must shut down all manifestations of Islam. We have a right to defend our nation from this oppressive political movement that is posing as a religion in order to take over from within.”* Other posts proposed

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a “*a full moratorium on all Muslim Immigration*” to reduce the threat from Islamist extremist terrorism.

### *Case Study 2 – Modern references to age-old antisemitic conspiracy theories*

The antisemitic posts identified related to B.C. conveyed conspiratorial views about Jews and sometimes Zionism. Comments used the term “ZOG” (Zionist Occupied Government), a white supremacist phrase implying that Jews control global affairs and are involved in facilitating population exchange (a nod to the extreme right [“great replacement”](#) idea that has inspired a series of terrorist attacks over the past years): *“Canada is not a country but a refugee camp Your ZØG måstêrs are almost done replacing you.”*

A similar comment referenced the song “Gangsta Rap made me do it” by the US rapper Ice Cube (who has frequently been [criticised](#) for promoting antisemitic tropes), saying *“Ain't nothin to it, jewish matrix made me do it.”* This post also nods to the idea of a false reality held up through alleged Jewish control of the media and entertainment industry, symbolized as the Matrix (the 1999 science fiction film has also been popular among the alt-right, which popularised the expression “red-pilling” to signify the process of adopting extremist views, especially around race and gender).

Other posts connected anti-Zionist stances denying the legitimacy of the State of Israel and criticized its right to exist, arguing that Israel had been brought about by a global Jewish conspiracy, and the Rothschilds in particular (*“The Rothschilds had no right to establish an ethno-state”*). In some cases, references to an antisemitic application of a bible verse from Revelation 2:9 “I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan” were used to challenge the authenticity of modern Jews.

### *Case Study 3 – Mass deportations and locking up politicians to reverse mass migration*

Comments identified as anti-migrant hate by our model expressed xenophobic, racist, and conspiratorial views to target migrants and asylum seekers, particularly non-whites.

One comment claimed that immigration is part of a deliberate effort, orchestrated by political leaders like Justin Trudeau, to destabilize Western civilization and replace its native populations: *“They're not asylum seekers, they are Trudeau's brown migrant army meant to replace you! And what these (s)elected scumbag 'politicians want', and what we, the majority want, varies greatly.”* Similar posts instead blamed Zionists for facilitating immigration: *“Western civilization is being split down the middle due to the politics being subverted by wokism, it becomes clear the West is undergoing a controlled demolition when you see the migrants flooding in and the currencies hyperinflating. Our zj Øⁿj\$† overlords destroyed the West.”*

Many comments concluded with calls for the mass deportation of migrants: *“The ‘asylum seekers’ aka paid invaders, should be deported en masse.”* As the posts accuse politicians of betraying the majority, comments argue they should face consequences for their actions as well: *“Planned invasion. Traitor Trudeau facilitated it. Lock him up!”*

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## Concluding Remarks

This briefing paper demonstrates, that whilst hate speech in B.C. is aligned with broader trends at a national level in Canada it takes on a localised dimension, with extremist agitators seeking to exacerbate real or imagined tensions with minority communities in the province. We demonstrate that domestic extremists based in B.C. are more likely than their national counterparts to engage in anti-Muslim hate speech. Additionally, we find that B.C. based extremists also engage in well-trodden tropes when targeting marginalised communities, speaking to established antisemitic conspiracy theories, calling for mass deportations of minority groups (a trend which is also frequent both in Europe and the United States), and calling for anti-Muslim policies. This would suggest that responses to hate speech in B.C. should be contextualised both in international trends, national level discussions, as well as being cognizant of local tensions.

## Annex: Account Discovery Process

ISD identified a list of seed accounts belonging to Canadian domestic extremists. These were identified through a three-step process:

- ISD drew on existing lists of domestic extremists from [previous projects](#) analysing right-wing extremism in Canada, as well as an extensive review of existing research and reporting on extremist mobilisation in Canada.
- With its technology partner CASM, ISD conducted an automated account discovery analysis to identify accounts that were recommended by or engaged with known Canadian right-wing extremists.
- ISD analysts then reviewed these accounts against our definitional thresholds for domestic extremism.

These quarterly data briefings focus specifically on domestic extremism. ISD has developed a definition of **domestic extremism** that is rooted in our definition of extremism and informed by complementary work led by Professor Barbara Perry and right-wing extremism expert Cas Mudde.

*Domestic extremism is a belief system that is characterised by its reference to racial, ethnic, cultural supremacy which advocates a system of belief in inequality based on an alleged difference and the perceived threat posed by out-groups. This extremism is often framed in terms of white power and commonly exhibits nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democracy, misogyny, hate against minority communities, and strong state advocacy.*

## Defining Hate speech

As with extremism, there are a wide range of definitions of hate or hate crime offered by legislators, advocacy and community groups or social media companies. Usually, hate speech is differentiated from offensive speech, based on the understanding that in democracies offensive speech must be permitted. However, speech that threatens individual's rights or may cause violence against certain groups can be regulated and prevented—often through the frame of illegal hate speech.

Over the course of this project, ISD will track the weaponization of targeted hate (including illegal hate speech) as a tactic used by domestic extremists in Canada. Hate speech spread by non-extremists is beyond the scope of this project. ISD defines targeted hate is activity which seeks to dehumanise, demonize, harass, threaten, or incite violence against an individual or community based on religion, ethnicity, race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, national origin or migrant status. Targeted hate may be considered a key tool for extremists to target members of an out-group, they consider inferior or intimidate political opponents. It should be noted that our definition does not exclusively cover illegal hate speech.

This definition is generally aligned with the definition in the Canadian Criminal Code, which argues that hate crime “needs to be expressed in a public way or place, targets a group of people that have a protected characteristic (race, religion, sexual orientation); uses extreme language to express hatred against that person/group because of their protected characteristic.”

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<sup>i</sup> *“You are an AI language model trained to identify and classify comments that SPECIFICALLY contain egregious hate speech.*

*Egregious hate speech means CLEAR and EXPLICIT hate speech, if there is doubt then it is not egregious hate speech.*

*Comments are NOT egregious hate speech if they are merely rude, offensive or distasteful.*

*Respond with 1 if the comment contains egregious hate speech.*

*Respond with 0 if the messages do not meet the criteria of the 1 classification.*

*For each of the ^ comments in the provided text you will return a breakdown of your classification in a json format with the classification, followed by a confidence score ranging between 0 to 1 based on how likely you think the classification is correct, followed by an explanation for the classification:*

```
{ "Comment Number":;
"Classification":;
"Confidence score":;
"Explanation":
}
```

*You MUST respond to EXACTLY ^ comments only in this format and provide no additional text outside this format,*

*Please classify the following ^ comments:"*

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ii Abbotsford, Ambleside, Armstrong, B.C, BC, BC Green Party, BC Hydro, BC NDP, BC United Party, British Columbia, British Columbian, British Columbians, Burnaby, Campbell River, Canada Line, Capilano University, Castlegar, Caycuse, Chilliwack, Coast Salish, Colony Farm, Colwood, Coquitlam, Courtenay, Cranbrook, Cypress, David Eby, Dawson Creek, Deep Cove, Delta, Downtown Eastside, Duncan, Dunderave, Enderby, Fairy Creek, Fernie, Fort St. John, Fraser Port Authority, Fraser Valley, Gibsons, Grand Forks, Granville Street, Greenwood, Grouse Mountain, Gulf Islands, Haida, Hastings, Highway of Tears, John Rustad, Kamloops, Kelowna, Kerrisdale, Kimberley, Kitsilano, Kootenay, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Ladner, Langara, Langford, Langley, Lower mainland, Lynn Valley, Maple Ridge, Merritt, Mission, Musqueam, Nanaimo, Nelson, New West, New Westminster, Nisga'a, Okanagan, Pacheedaht, Parksville, Peace River, Penticton, Pigeon Park, Pitt Meadows, Port Alberni, Port Coquitlam, Port Moody, Powell River, Prince George, Prince Rupert, Quesnel, Raincity, Raincouver, Revelstoke, Revelstoke, Richmond, Riverview, Robson Street, Rossland, Royal City, Salmon Arm, Sea-to-Sky, Sechelt, səliwətaʔ, Seven Miledam, Seymour, SFU, Shuswap, Simon Fraser University, Skwxwú7mesh, Skytrain, Sonia Furstenu, Squamish, Stanely park, Surrey, Surrey Police Department, Tahltan, Terrace, The couv, Thompson-Nicola, TMX, Trans Mountain Pipeline, Translink, Tri-cities, Tsawassen, Tsleil-Waututh, UBC, Univeristy of Victoria, University of British Columbia, UVIC, Vancity, Vancouver, Vancouver Island, Vancouver Police Department, Vancouverite, Vancouverites, Vernon, Victoria, VPD, West Kelowna, Whistler, White Rock, Williams Lake, xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, YVR, Ken Sim



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