



Universiteit
Leiden

The Netherlands

Putting Canada's hate crime data in context

Veilleux-Lepage, Y.; Leidig, E.

Citation

Veilleux-Lepage, Y. (2020). Putting Canada's hate crime data in context. In E. Leidig (Ed.), *Tracking the rise of the radical right globally* (pp. 193-196). Columbia University Press. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3249855>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licensed under Article 25fa Copyright Act/Law \(Amendment Taverne\)](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3249855>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Putting Canada's Hate Crime Data in Context

Yannick Veilleux-Lepage

On 22 July 2019, Statistics Canada, the agency tasked with producing statistics to help better understand all aspects of Canadian life ranging from population growth to resources to culture, released the new national crime data for 2018. The study, which looks at all types of crime, noted an overall decrease in the number of police-reported hate crimes last year compared to 2017. A total of 1,798 incidents were reported in 2018, including 780 race or ethnicity-related hate crimes, 639 related to religion and 173 targeting sexual orientation, in comparison to 2,073 hate crimes reported in 2017—the highest annual total since 2014.¹ Statistics Canada is expected to release a full report on hate crimes in Canada in January 2020.

The release of the study has engendered a diverse reaction. The mayor of Hamilton, an Ontario town with the highest rate of police-reported hate crimes in the country,² urged residents to “stand up against prejudice, exclusion and discrimination”³—a plea which seems to have, at least partly, fallen upon deaf ears as a violent altercation broke out when members of radical right groups attempted to disrupt the Hamilton Pride soon after the statement.⁴ Public advocacy groups have hit out against the data, arguing that its methodology is severely flawed,⁵ whilst academics have warned that the reduction in reported hate crimes hides a wider concern related to a 30% increase in active hate groups in Canada since 2015.⁶

-
- 1 Statistics Canada, “Crime Severity Index and Weighted Clearance Rates, Canada, Provinces, Territories and Census Metropolitan Areas,” July 22, 2019, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3510002601>.
 - 2 Statistics Canada, “Police-Reported Hate Crime, Number of Incidents and Rate per 100,000 Population, Census Metropolitan Areas,” July 22, 2019, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3510019101>.
 - 3 Bensadoun, Emerald, “Steeltown or Hatetown? Hamilton Tops Country in Hate Crime Reports,” *City Town*, July 25, 2019, <https://toronto.citynews.ca/2019/07/25/steeltown-or-hatetown-hamilton-tops-country-in-hate-crime-reports-2/>.
 - 4 McNeil, Mark, “Mayor Fred Eisenberger Wants to Make Sure Violence at Hamilton Pride Festival Never Happens Again,” *The Hamilton Spectator*, June 17, 2019, <https://www.thespec.com/news-story/9438770-mayor-fred-eisenberger-wants-to-make-sure-violence-at-hamilton-pride-festival-never-happens-again/>.
 - 5 Canadian Anti-Hate Network “We Need Better Hate Crime Statistics,” July 18, 2019, https://www.antihate.ca/we_need_better_hate_crime_statistics.
 - 6 Jaffe-Hoffman, Maayan, “Hate Crimes Down in Canada, But Majority Motivated by Religion—Report,” *The Jerusalem Post*, July 23, 2019, <https://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/Hate-crimes-down-in-Canada-but-majority-motivated-by-religion-report-596527>.

Conversely, the *Toronto Sun*, a daily tabloid, citing Wilfred Reilly's highly controversial "Hate Crime Hoax: How the Left is Selling a Fake Race War", published an article claiming that the Statistics Canada numbers are inflated and that 'alleged victims can and do lie'.⁷ With this in mind, some context is in order.

One of the problems with these statistics is that they are little more than a highly educated guess, built largely on incomplete data. In fact, Statistics Canada warns that 'Police data on hate-motivated crimes include only those incidents that come to the attention of police services. These data also depend on police services' level of expertise in identifying crimes motivated by hate'. Indeed, not all police forces across the country follow the same standards of recording information. Variation in the reporting of hate crimes is often based on police services' ability (or willingness) to identify crimes motivated by hate, which leads to a lack of consistency in the collection of hate crime statistics.

However, there is also the very real and understandable fear experienced by the victims, which makes underreporting a troublesome reality in terms of understanding the nature of hate crimes and, perhaps most importantly, the needs of the victims of such crimes. Victims of hate crime face the same obstacles that all other victims face in accessing victim services.⁸ However, victims of hate crimes, owing to the nature of these crimes, can also face unique problems.

Firstly, the impact of a hate crime can be particularly significant because the act is directed at an individual because of a characteristic pertaining to identity—often a trait over which they have little control. Second, unlike other types of crime, when a hate attack occurs, whole segments of society can be victimized. Support and remediation programs need to consider both the individual and the wider community in this regard. In fact, while there is little research in Canada on victims of hate crimes, literature focusing on the United States has repeatedly highlighted that victimization of hate crimes is much more extensive than individual

7 Furey, Anthony, "What They're Not Telling You About Canada's Hate Crime Stats," *Toronto Sun*, July 22, 2019, <https://torontosun.com/opinion/columnists/furey-what-theyre-not-telling-you-about-canadas-hate-crime-stats>.

8 Turkewitz, Julie, "Language Barrier Continues to Thwart Victims of Crimes," *The New York Times*, May 11, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/12/nyregion/language-barrier-continues-to-thwart-victims-of-crimes.html>.

victims. Hate crimes victimization has been shown to have a profound impact on affected communities.⁹ Ultimately, hate crimes are often symbolic acts, and so the crime's character may imperfectly correlate with the degree of effect and harm to the victim and the community.

While the data released by Statistics Canada is at best imperfect, it does allow us to make some general observations. First, there appears to be some correlation between the areas with the highest reported incident of hate crimes—Hamilton, Ontario, with 17.1 incidents per 100,000 people, and Quebec City, with 11 incidents per 100,000, while the national average is 4.9 incidents per 100,000 people—and the presence of well-organized and often public facing radical right groups such as the Yellow Vests (a group vastly different from the French gilets jaunes movement), La Meute, and the Soldiers of Odin Quebec and its splinter groups.¹⁰

However, it is unclear whether the greater numbers of hate crimes in these towns are a reflection of individuals being emboldened to act violently by the presence of these groups. A similar effect has been demonstrated by the authors of a study that argued that countries that hosted a 2016 Trump rally saw a 226% increase in hate crimes.¹¹ Or is it evidence to the fact that law enforcement has a better understanding of the threat and more likely to report incidents as hate crimes?

Second, hate incidents targeting places of worship—dubbed ‘mischief to religious property motivated by hate’—have gone up 41% since 2017. This increase is particularly troublesome in the wake of murderous attacks against synagogues and mosques in New Zealand, Norway and the United States. In fact, Canada has not been immune to such violence: In 2017, Alexandre Bissonnette, a man fixated on President Donald Trump, the radical right and anti-Muslim conspiracies, killed six worshippers shortly after the end of evening prayers at the Islamic Cultural Centre of Quebec City.¹²

9 Perry, Barbara, “Defending the Color Line: Racially and Ethnically Motivated Hate Crime,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 46, no. 1 (2002): 72–92.

10 Veilleux-Lepage, Yannick and Emil Archambault, “La CAQ, La Meute and Bill 21,” *OpenDemocracy*, May 02, 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/la-caq-la-meute-and-bill-21/>; Craggs, “City Looks at How to Ban Yellow Vests from ‘a Public Space like No Other’”; Abedi, “Here’s What to Know about ‘Yellow Vest’ Protests Happening across Canada.”

11 Feinberg, Ayal, Regina Branton, and Valerie Martinez-Ebers, “Counties That Hosted a 2016 Trump Rally Saw a 226 Percent Increase in Hate Crimes,” *The Washington Post*, March 22, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/03/22/trumps-rhetoric-does-inspire-more-hate-crimes/>.

12 Bilefsky, Dan, “Alexandre Bissonnette Sentenced to 40 Years Without Parole for Quebec Mosque Killings,” *The New York Times*, February 08, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/08/world/canada/alexandre-bissonnette-sentence.html>.

In this climate, the government of Canada, through the Communities at Risk: Security Infrastructure Program, began providing funds to subsidize the purchase of surveillance cameras, alarms, access controls and vehicle barriers to protect religious institutions deemed at risk of hate crimes.¹³ According to national security journalist Stewart Bell, ‘of the more than 200 groups that have received funding through the program shows that 90 per cent of the grant money went to the Jewish and Muslim communities—the top targets of religious hate crimes, but not the only ones’.¹⁴

Perhaps the most interesting recent development is that Statistics Canada appears to be taking notice of the growing discourse surrounding online hate. In April 2019, they also released, for the first time, data on hate crimes committed online. Unsurprisingly, the study seems to echo the results published last month: The same groups and communities are victimized online. Muslims experienced 17% of internet hatred, followed by 15% of hatred targeted towards sexual minorities, 14% of the cyber hate crime reports were aimed at the Jewish population and 10% were targeted black Canadians. The most prevalent form of recorded cyber hate crime was threats (35%), followed by public hate incitement (18%) and criminal harassment (15%).¹⁵

While the national crime data is by no means a perfect instrument, it nonetheless serves as an important warning against complacency and a reminder that hate crimes are not only an assault on individuals but on communities and the very fabric of Canadian society.

Dr Yannick Veilleux-Lepage is a Senior Fellow at CARR, and is an Assistant Professor in the Institute of Security and Global Affairs at Leiden University.

-
- 13 Public Safety Canada, “Communities at Risk: Security Infrastructure Program (SIP),” December 21, 2018, <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/cntrng-crm/crm-prvntn/finng-prgrms/scrt-nfrstrctr-prgrm-en.aspx>.
 - 14 Bell, Stewart, “‘We’re a Target’: Canada’s Places of Worship Are Fortifying, and the Government Is Helping Pay for It,” *Global News*, May 09, 2019, <https://globalnews.ca/news/5233159/canadas-places-of-worship-fortifying/>.
 - 15 Statistic Canada, “Police-Reported Hate Crime in Canada, 2017,” April 30, 2019, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2019001/article/00008-eng.htm>.