



# Feminist Responses to the Global Rise in Right-Wing Extremism: A Summary

## Introduction

This summary document is based on key findings from “Feminist Responses to the Global Rise in Right-Wing Extremism” participatory parallel event, hosted by the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women / L’Institut canadien de recherches sur les femmes (CRIAW-ICREF) as part of the NGO CSW66 Forum, on March 22, 2022. Every year in March, the NGO CSW/NY organizes the civil society side of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). The NGO CSW Forum runs parallel to the official session taking place at the UN Headquarters in New York. This event was held online, over Zoom.

The growing visibility and resurgence of right-wing ideology and its impacts on women’s rights in Canada is a concern of CRIAW-ICREF. Whether it is described as the ‘alt-right,’ ‘far-right,’ ‘extreme right,’ or ‘right-wing extremism,’ we know from our work that, broadly speaking, the right-wing ideology in Canada has led to decades of austerity measures, and other regressive measures aimed at dismantling, or stalling, progressive change.

We know such forces are not new and are part of Canada’s foundation – what is new is there seems to be a resurgence and mainstreaming of right-wing extremism, and it is better connected and more effectively reorganizing itself. Since we held this parallel event, the attacks on women’s rights, and reproductive rights, LGBTQIA2S rights, and white supremacist violence have only increased in Canada and globally.

The ‘right-wing ideology’ is not unique to Canada or North America, nor is it bound by borders and countries. **We know as feminists that learning and sharing experiences with each other strengthens our intersectional analyses and actions.** The NGO CSW66 Forum’s international platform provided an opportunity for feminists from different regions to convene and share their perspectives on the rising right in their context, its impacts on diverse women and women’s rights, and strategies to counter this movement.

This participatory parallel event opened with presentations from two speakers, Kavita Krishnan and Miriam Edelson. Kavita Krishnan is a Marxist feminist activist living in Delhi and working with the All India Progressive Women’s Association and the Communist Party of India (Marxist Leninist). Miriam Edelson is a social activist, settler, writer, and mother living in Toronto. She is a member of CRIAW-ICREF’s Board of Directors and coauthor of CRIAW-ICREF’s [“The Rise of the Alt-Right in Canada: A feminist analysis.”](#)

Presenters spoke to the impacts of right-wing extremism in their context and effective strategies to counter it. After the presentations, participants were invited into break out rooms for small group discussions. Participants then reconvened and the discussion group facilitators presented what was discussed.

**The following report outlines the key findings from the small group discussions.**

**Feminist Intersectional Solidarity** is essential to creating and growing meaningful, equitable, and supportive networks of feminists, feminist organizations, and feminist movements.

To learn more about feminist intersectional solidarity, check out [“A Guide to Building Feminist Intersectional Solidarity”](#) (2021), on CRIAW-ICREF’s website.

## Participants

Forty-two people attended the event, mainly from North American and European regions. Sixty-six percent of participants identified that they were affiliated with social justice organizations – women’s groups, international organizations, labour unions. The remaining participants were affiliated with a university (10%), the private sector (5%), and religious organizations (5%). Fourteen percent of participants did not specify their affiliation, and some had more than one affiliation.

## Small Group Discussions

Following the presentations, participants were divided into five groups of five to seven participants for a 25-minute discussion on the topic. Of the 42 people who attended the event, 29 stayed on to participate in the breakout rooms. Each group had a designated facilitator who reported back to the main group.

### *Who is the extreme right in your country or region?*

The alt-right’s link to racism and misogyny was a clear focus in all of the discussion groups. Each discussion group drew linkages between **the alt-right and many aspects of religious extremism, and white supremacy** (e.g., the KKK, neo-Nazi movements, Incels, and the Proud Boys). All groups also identified structural and institutional racism as foundational to the alt-right, pointed to its links to the police and military.

The alt-right’s **prevalence in Canada’s political parties at the local, provincial, and federal levels** was mentioned in two discussion groups. One participant noted how, “even at the local level, there are very right-wing people infiltrating local city parties and running people.” Another participant noted that many elected officials attended the month long 2022 convoy protest in Ottawa and “took their places among them”. While the 2022 convoy protest was broadly organized around COVID-19 vaccines and mandates its leadership consisted of known white supremacists and other far-right activists.

All groups noted that many individuals involved in the alt-right were friends, family, and neighbours, that participants interacted with on an everyday basis. Individuals who “do not have a sense of belonging and are disfranchised look for a place and start identifying with these right-wing groups to get heard,” or are drawn in by opportunistic alt-right leaders. **The alt-right’s members blame others** – particularly women and Black, Indigenous, and racialized groups – for issues such as the high cost of living, unemployment, and crime when, in reality, these are systemic problems, driven by structural inequalities. Overall, the alt-right perceive progressive policies, activism, and equity-seeking measures for marginalized communities as a threat. One contributor, considering acts of gendered and racialized violence perpetuated by the alt-right, wondered, “is this just backlash?”

Even though all agreed the alt-right was concerning, **there was a stark distinction among the discussion groups about the alt-right’s size and scope**. Three discussion groups identified it as a large and growing movement, while the remaining two identified it as a “vocal minority” and as a “minority...being discriminatory towards other minorities.” The discussion groups that viewed the alt-right as a large growing movement described it as taking many forms, spreading across the country in increasing anti-immigrant sentiments and online violence against women.

### All groups were invited to discuss the following questions:

1. Who is the extreme right in your country or region?
2. What are the impacts on women and women’s rights?
3. What strategies have you used to counter this movement?

## ***What are the impacts on women and women's rights?***

In addressing the impact of the alt-right on women and women's rights, all but one discussion group identified increasing violence against women and other marginalized groups – such as East Asian populations, members of the LGBTQIA2S community – as a key area of concern, particularly during the pandemic. One contributor identified the alt-right's use of social media: “We know that there is also a connection between anonymity and the rise of violence – the more anonymous the person is, the more okay they feel being a troll, and they don't have a problem being violent and harassing people online.”

## ***What strategies have you used to counter this movement?***

There was consensus that **one-on-one conversations are crucial to combatting the rise of the alt-right**. One contributor stated organizers should “go back to the basics” by “creating communities which include everyone and create a deeper sense of belonging, addressing fears [and] building a movement of resistance” to prevent individuals from adopting extremist ideology. Participants also recognized the “fatigue associated with marginalized populations having to take on the burden of education,” and underscored the importance of self-education and allyship.

Common across most groups was a desire and willingness to **build a collaborative, grassroots movement of resistance against the alt-right**. A contributor noted that “[the] alt right is very organized, so we need to build an organized movement across borders and countries.” Another discussion group participant echoed this sentiment, also acknowledging: “they have a lot of money, they have a lot of power, and our organizations need to really support the Indigenous Land Defenders, we need to support the fight against racism and fascism – they are not separate. We need to speak up against anti-Asian racism, islamophobia, [and] anti-Semitism. We have to build our movement and strengthen our movements based on those values.”

Many groups also indicated that **political organizing and campaigning for feminist women in electoral politics**, and against alt-right candidates, is necessary. One discussion group agreed that “if women aren't going to be running for elected office, [we] must engage and inform [the] electorate on how platforms impact women and others.” In addition to engaging and informing the electorate, another participant noted, “we have to consult grassroot women and organizations and try to push key priorities with an intersectional, gendered lens on all city policies and practices.”

Another contributor emphasized the importance of “keeping resources public, and increasing public services.” To **minimize the number of disenfranchised people who turn to alt-right ideology** and communities, one participant suggested addressing the issue at its source: “we have to aggressively advocate for social protections. If we advocate for communities of care, better care, better social protection, when it happens, we consequently create communities that feel safer, more empowered, and less isolated and disenfranchised.”

## **Conclusion**

As was evident, feminists around the world are encountering different and similar manifestations of right-wing extremism in their regions, and the impacts on diverse women and girls, based on intersecting aspects of identity and social location, are dire and pressing. Discussions were deep and the feminists present were very concerned and eager to address this issue, but one 90-minute event was not sufficient to delve exhaustively into this complex and multi-faceted movement.

In the short time since this event, more right-wing attacks have taken place all over the world— from overt attacks on reproductive rights, to ongoing efforts to limit and roll back LGBTQIA2S rights, to white supremacist violence. Across the globe, there has also been a noticeable increase in the electoral success of right-wing parties and candidates.

