

# **Soldiers of Odin: The Global Diffusion of Vigilante Movements**

## **Yannick Veilleux-Lepage<sup>1</sup>**

The Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and  
Political Violence  
Arts Faculty Building, Library Park, The Scores,  
St Andrews, KY16 9AX  
E: yvl@st-andrews.ac.uk  
T: +44 (0)7454 096477

## **Emil Archambault<sup>2</sup>**

School of Government and International Affairs  
University of Durham  
Al-Qasimi Building, Elvet Hill Road,  
Durham, DH1 3TU  
E: emil.archambault@durham.ac.uk  
T: +44 (0)7583 889902

## **Introduction**

Founded in 2015 in the Northern Finnish town of Kemi, the Soldiers of Odin (SOO) quickly spread to the rest of the Western world, first to Sweden and Denmark, and later to Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, and Ireland among others. In 2016, the movement crossed the Atlantic and established chapters in the United States and in Canada. In the latter, they now possess an almost pan-Canadian presence, with chapters in every province, save for the Maritime provinces.<sup>3</sup> Grounded in an ideology drawing on Odinist religious symbolism, neo-Nazism, white supremacism, and Europeanist ethno-nationalism, the SOO have coalesced around a largely anti-immigrant agenda, particularly targeting Muslim migrants and conducting street patrols as well as participating in anti-immigrant protests and other forms of public activism.

This paper focuses largely on the Canadian chapters of the group, with an aim of tracing the relationship of this national movement to the larger community of the SOO worldwide. In particular, this research analyses the links between Canadian SOO chapters and the Finnish leadership of the movement, with a view to discovering how much of the Canadian group's discourse and ideology is derived from global sources, in contrast to local concerns. On a more pragmatic level, we seek to uncover whether transnational links between SOO members extend beyond the immediate leadership of these groups, or whether they are restricted to the very top of each national chapter. Ultimately, the objective is to elaborate on the relationship between

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<sup>3</sup> In March 2017, the movement announced attempts to expand into Nova Scotia and the Maritimes.

local and global dynamics in right-wing anti-immigration movements and the influence of the globalisation of right-wing extremism on ideology and tactics.

One further, more general objective of this paper is to suggest that there is an increased need to investigate global right-wing anti-immigrant organisations as part of the wider field of political violence, and to consider anti-immigrant hate ideology as a subset of political violence. This paper highlights several reasons for doing so. First, while the SOO have not been directly linked to any large-scale public violence,<sup>4</sup> the combination of anti-immigrant rhetoric (itself often violent in content) and vigilante street patrols creates a risk for targeted violence against immigrants and non-white citizens, particularly Muslims. Furthermore, the presence of clear links to organised criminal groups such as the Hells Angels may lead to ideologically-motivated violence. Finally, several members of the SOO openly support fire-arm de-regulation in Canada which, combined again with a *modus operandi* based on street patrols and overt rhetoric targeting specific groups of people, implies a significant potential for violence.

Following a contextual section providing a brief history of the Soldiers of Odin's presence in Canada and abroad and highlighting key conceptual issues, this paper employs a Social Network Analysis of Facebook friendship links to map the group's networks. This method is combined with a qualitative content analysis to elaborate our research findings, namely that the SOO seems to be a highly integrated group at all levels, both within Canada and globally, suggesting a preference for adopting a global brand rather than local nationalism. Finally, this paper concludes by offering thoughts on key characteristics of the SOO movement, particularly concerning its links to the Hells Angels and support for fire-arm de-regulation.

## The Soldiers of Odin: Conceptual Issues

The first chapter of the Soldiers of Odin was created by the self-avowed white supremacist Mika Ranta in October 2015, in what is generally taken to be a response to the

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<sup>4</sup> The one exception to this is a large street fight that occurred in Jönköping, in Sweden, between members of the Soldiers of Odin and of the violent anti-fascist group AFA.

The Local, "Swedish Soldiers of Odin group involved in 'extremist' clashes," *The Local Sweden*, (January 8, 2017), <https://www.thelocal.se/20170108/twelve-arrested-after-swedish-extremist-groups-clash>.

Additionally, a short brawl erupted on March 26 in Vancouver, Canada, as members of the Soldiers of Odin attempted to disrupt an anti-racist protest.

Mack Lamoureux, "Soldiers of Odin Tangled with Anti-Racism Protesters in Vancouver," *VICE Media*, (March 27, 2017), [https://www.vice.com/en\\_ca/article/soldiers-of-odin-tangled-with-anti-racism-protesters-in-vancouver](https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/soldiers-of-odin-tangled-with-anti-racism-protesters-in-vancouver).

influx of refugees settling in Finland or transiting through Finland to reach Sweden.<sup>5</sup> From the little Northern town of Kemi, the group quickly spread across Finland, as well as throughout Scandinavia. By December 2016, the SOO claimed 20 national chapters all around the world,<sup>6</sup> including Australia, the United States, Canada, and throughout Europe, from France to Estonia.

The Finnish founding chapters quickly faced accusations of racism, neo-Nazism, and white supremacism, due both to the group's anti-immigrant, anti-Islam stances, and the composition of its membership. While the group claims to be overtly non-racist and open to all, the organisation's founder, Mika Ranta, self-identifies as a "National Socialist" and has known ties to the white supremacist Finnish Resistance Movement, in addition to sporting Swastika and other neo-Nazi tattoos.<sup>7</sup> Ranta has presented the defence that "White Supremacists are welcome to join the Odins, but only five percent of Odins hold these views,"<sup>8</sup> suggesting that members' beliefs and group principles ought to be kept separate. However, links to neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups run far and deep; until May 2016, the leader of Finland's prime far-right party, Oli Mäenpää, was a member of the SOO,<sup>9</sup> and several reports have discussed the use of Nazi symbolism in official Soldiers of Odin Facebook groups and club houses.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Mack Lamoureux, "Soldiers of Odin, dubbed 'extreme anti-refugee group,' patrol Edmonton streets," *CBC News*, (September 6, 2016), <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/soldiers-of-odin-dubbed-extreme-anti-refugee-group-patrol-edmonton-streets-1.3745493>.

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Montpetit, "Inside Quebec's far right: Soldiers of Odin leadership shake-up signals return to extremist roots", *CBC News*, (December 14, 2016), <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/quebec-far-right-soldiers-of-odin-1.3896175>

<sup>7</sup> Sara Rigatelli, "Personporträtt: Hur det kom sig att Mika Ranta grundade Soldiers of Odin," *YLE Nyheter*, (May 7, 2016), <https://svenska.yle.fi/artikel/2016/05/07/personportratt-hur-det-kom-sig-att-mika-ranta-grundade-soldiers-odin>

<sup>8</sup> Mack Lamoureux, "Soldiers of Odin, Europe's Notorious, Anti-Immigration Group, Beginning to Form Cells in Canada," *VICE Media*, (April 18, 2016), [https://www.vice.com/en\\_au/article/soldiers-of-odin-europes-notorious-anti-immigration-group-beginning-to-form-cells-in-canada](https://www.vice.com/en_au/article/soldiers-of-odin-europes-notorious-anti-immigration-group-beginning-to-form-cells-in-canada)

<sup>9</sup> Niclas Lundqvist, "Åbopolitikern Olavi Mäenpää sparkas från Soldiers of Odin," *YLE Nyheter*, (May 11, 2016), <https://svenska.yle.fi/artikel/2016/05/11/abopolitikern-olavi-maenpaa-sparkas-fran-soldiers-odin>

<sup>10</sup> Sara Rigatelli, "Soldiers of Odins hemliga Facebookgrupp: Vapen och nazihälsningar," *YLE Nyheter*, (March 16, 2016), <https://svenska.yle.fi/artikel/2016/03/16/soldiers-odins-hemliga-facebookgrupp-vapen-och-nazihalsningar>

Jake Wallis Simons, "EXCLUSIVE - Nazi daggers, SS hats and a hangman's noose: On night patrol with the 'Soldiers of Odin', neo-Nazi led vigilantes vowing to 'keep Europe's women safe from migrant sex attacks'," *The Daily Mail*, (February 4, 2016), <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3426685/Nazi-daggers-SS-hats-hangman-s-noose-night-patrol-Soldiers-Odin-neo-Nazi-led-vigilantes-vowing-Europe-s-women-safe-migrant-sex-attacks.html>

The group spread to Canada as early as March 2016,<sup>11</sup> with its initial chapter reportedly established in Gimli, Manitoba, a town with significant Icelandic heritage.<sup>12</sup> The group quickly spread across the country, with chapters being established over the summer in Québec, British Columbia, Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and even Yukon. Unlike in Finland, the official emphasis in Canada seems to have been put on community building efforts, such as shoveling snow,<sup>13</sup> organizing food drives for local charities and shelters,<sup>14</sup> and cleaning up parks,<sup>15</sup> etc. Nevertheless, like its Finnish counterparts, the group's focus still engage in street patrols at night,<sup>16</sup> which has raised concerns among local communities and law enforcement. Similarly to the Finnish groups, the group's Facebook pages and public groups are rife with anti-Muslim and anti-migrant propaganda, and dubious news stories about crimes supposedly committed by migrants abound.<sup>17</sup>

### Right-wing Extremism in Canada

Prior to the emergence of the SOO in Canada, Canada had seen no shortage of right-wing extremism, with on average 3.3 violent attacks committed every year since 2001 by white supremacist movements.<sup>18</sup> While right-wing extremism has been far less lethal<sup>19</sup> and generally less well organized than in the United States or in Europe,<sup>20</sup> there has been a steady presence of a large number of groups with white supremacist, and/or Islamophobic and anti-migrant

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<sup>11</sup> The founder and national president, Joel Angott, put up a cover picture of the SOO logo with a Canadian flag on March 22, 2016. The Soldiers of Odin Canada public Facebook page, however, was founded on January 15. Joel Angott, "SOO Canada Cover Photo," *Facebook*, (March 22, 2016), <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10153601547208022&set=a.10150826305578022.395398.680618021&type=3&theater>

SOO Canada, "Soldiers of Odin Canada," *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/soocanada/>.

<sup>12</sup> François Biber, "Soldiers of Odin Canada says group not the same as what's going on overseas," *CBC News*, (September 14, 2016), <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/soldiers-of-odin-canada-community-group-watch-1.3761178>

<sup>13</sup> CBC News, "Concerns raised after Soldiers of Odin offer free snow shovelling," *CBC News*, (December 22, 2016), <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/soldiers-of-odin-shoveling-snow-1.3909599>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/soldiers-of-odin-yukon-james-albert-1.3920049>

<sup>15</sup> Lamoureux, "Soldiers of Odin, dubbed 'extreme anti-refugee group,' patrol Edmonton streets."

<sup>16</sup> Lamoureux, "Soldiers of Odin, dubbed 'extreme anti-refugee group,' patrol Edmonton streets."

Montpetit, "Inside Quebec's far right: Soldiers of Odin leadership shake-up signals return to extremist roots."

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, <https://www.facebook.com/soocanada/>; Ben Makuch and Rachel Browne, "Members of Far Right Quebec Group Cheered on the Quebec City Mosque Terror Attack," *VICE Media*, (February 4, 2017), <https://news.vice.com/story/members-of-far-right-quebec-group-cheered-on-the-quebec-city-mosque-terror-attack>

<sup>18</sup> Richard B. Parent and James O. Ellis III, "The Future of Right-Wing Terrorism in Canada," *TSAS Working Paper Series*, No. 16-12 (July 2016): 19-20.

<sup>19</sup> Parent and Ellis, "Future of Right-Wing Terrorism in Canada," 20.

<sup>20</sup> Barbara Parry and Ryan Scrivens, "Uneasy Alliances: A Look at the Right-Wing Extremist Movement in Canada," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 39, No. 9 (2016): 823.

orientations throughout the country. Furthermore, as Parry and Scrivens note, there has been – in recent years – a mainstreaming of right-wing extremism in Canadian politics, as known neo-Nazi activists have sought to enter political processes and influence political discourse.<sup>21</sup>

The right-wing extremist environment in Canada into which the Soldiers of Odin entered, was therefore one which was extremely fragmented and diverse. Tanner and Campana, studying the Skinhead movement in Quebec, noted that in particular its segmentation and division lead to high volatility,<sup>22</sup> and ideological diversity, from Quebec nationalism to the promotion of supremacist violence.<sup>23</sup> In many respects, the SOO were no exception to these general tendencies of right-wing extremism in Canada. In fact, as noted by Parry and Scrivens as well as Parent and Ellis,<sup>24</sup> there is significant overlap between the SOO and biker gangs and other organized criminal groups.<sup>25</sup> This may fragmentation of the membership of the SOO Canada has been tumultuous, has been recently illustrated in the manner in which groups have splintered and divided. Late last year, the Canadian Sentinels, followed by the Guardians of Alberta, left the SOO.<sup>26</sup> In December 2016, the former Québec president and national vice-president Dave Tregget left to found another splinter group, Storm Alliance.<sup>27</sup> In February this year, the Saskatchewan chapters, led by David Tierney and Ryan Ward, also quit the SOO to constitute the Patriots of Unity, borrowing almost verbatim the SOO bylaws<sup>28</sup> (which in turn apparently were borrowed from the Finnish chapters of the SOO).<sup>29</sup> The main innovations of the Soldiers of Odin, therefore, seem to be twofold. First, their attempt – and, so far, apparent initial success, as our research will show – to explicitly coordinate a nationwide movement under a unified leadership is different from the previous Canadian splintered movements.

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<sup>21</sup> Parry and Scrivens, "Uneasy Alliances," 826.

<sup>22</sup> Samuel Tanner and Aurélie Campana, "The Process of Radicalization: Right-Wing Skinheads in Quebec," *TSAS Working Papers Series*, No. 14-07 (August 2014): 1.

<sup>23</sup> Tanner and Campana, "The Process of Radicalization," 15.

<sup>24</sup> Parry and Scrivens, "Uneasy Alliances," 829; Parent and Ellis, "Future of Right-Wing Terrorism in Canada," 20.

<sup>25</sup> We return to this in the conclusion. The SOO official bylaws state that they are not "a gang" or a "motorcycle club"; individual members, however, have clear links to motorcycle clubs.

<sup>26</sup> Doug Johnson, "Guardians of Alberta's split from Soldiers of Odin shows a lack of cohesion on the alt-right front," *Edmonton Examiner*, (February 9, 2017), <http://www.edmontonexaminer.com/2017/02/08/guardians-of-albertas-split-from-soldiers-of-odin-shows-a-lack-of-cohesion-on-the-alt-right-front>

<sup>27</sup> Montpetit, "Inside Quebec's far right: Soldiers of Odin leadership shake-up signals return to extremist roots."

<sup>28</sup> Ryan Ward, "Patriots of Unity Bylaws," *Patriots of Unity – Regina Support Facebook Page*, (February 25, 2017), <https://www.facebook.com/groups/544191002419317/permalink/688429444662138/>.

<sup>29</sup> Lamoureux, "Soldiers of Odin, dubbed 'extreme anti-refugee group,' patrol Edmonton streets."

Second, it would seem that the Soldiers of Odin, more than previous groups, seek to explicitly tie themselves to a global movement, in this case through allegiance to the Finnish leadership.<sup>30</sup>

### Canada and Sweden

The question of the links between the Canadian chapters of the Soldiers of Odin and the Finnish movement have dogged the Canadian groups since the inception of the movement. As mentioned above, the Finnish movement was very quickly and obviously connected to neo-Nazi and white supremacist movements, if only through the person of the founder, Mika Ranta. The Canadian chapters have forcefully affirmed their opposition to any form of racism or discrimination,<sup>31</sup> and therefore have had a tumultuous relationship with their Finnish counterparts, which can be summarized in three rough phases: distancing, ideological division and struggle, and finally consolidation of member's ties to Finnish leadership.

When the group first emerged in Canada, it was very quickly identified by law enforcement and community groups as right-wing extremism, on the basis of its shared name and iconography with the Finnish group. The Canadian founder and President, Joel Angott, sought to dispel this conception, claiming that "What they do over in Finland and in Europe, they have all sorts of different issues altogether. That's not really what we are. We're an independent charter of Soldiers of Odin; we're a community watch group."<sup>32</sup> In Canadian chapters, there was (and still is) a constant effort to control the public image of the group, restricting discussion with the media and ensuring that public Facebook pages be devoid of white supremacist or otherwise inflammatory rhetoric.<sup>33</sup> Angott even went as far as to claim that the group's name was a tribute to its foundation in Gimli, Manitoba, a town with Icelandic heritage, and not a sign of adherence to the values of the Finnish branch.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Parry and Scrivens note the prior arrival in Quebec of a PEGIDA offshoot, but we are not aware of any explicit organizational link between the Canadian group and the German movement.

Parry and Scrivens, "Uneasy Alliances," 819-841.

<sup>31</sup> The SOO bylaws state "No Racism, this is a non-racist group. We do not care what your religion, race, or creed is. Once you put on the Odin's Head you leave it all at the door and can pick it up when you take off the Odin's Head." That being said, the same bylaws open by claiming the Canadian government has "allow[ed] illegal aliens into this country [...] accept[ed] refugees from countries that hate us [...] and demoniz[ed] anything that has to do with European Culture to try and create racial tensions to turn citizens on one another."

SOO Canada, "Soldiers of Odin Bylaws," <https://fr.scribd.com/doc/308890496/Soldiers-Of-Odin-Canada-Bylaws-docx> (Accessed March 17, 2017).

<sup>32</sup> Biber, "Soldiers of Odin Canada says group not the same as what's going on overseas."

<sup>33</sup> Lamoureux, "Soldiers of Odin, Europe's Notorious, Anti-Immigration Group, Beginning to Form Cells in Canada."

<sup>34</sup> Biber, "Soldiers of Odin Canada says group not the same as what's going on overseas."

Throughout the autumn of 2016, there seems to have been a struggle between competing factions within the Soldiers of Odin leadership concerning the relationship of SOO Canada to Finland. Québec president and National vice-president Dave Tregget, among others, were keen to separate the SOO from the Finnish supremacist image, notably by toning down the anti-immigration rhetoric and focusing on community service.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, the Guardians of Alberta, and later the Patriots of Unity, claimed to break with the SOO movement over the racist overtones of the movement and its links to neo-Nazism, notably in Scandinavia.<sup>36</sup> As evidence mounted of links between Canadian members and white supremacy, the group was divided between whether to strengthen ties with Finland or emphasise its Canadian nationalism. On December 14, 2016, these tensions were by and large resolved, as Dave Tregget was removed (or resigned – versions differ) as Québec leader and replaced with Katy Latulippe, who has sought to emphasise the Finnish connections and return to a more overtly anti-immigrant agenda.<sup>37</sup>

Around the time of the secession of the Saskatchewan chapters in February 2017 (to form the Patriots of Unity), there seems to have been a move to emphasise the connection of Finnish and Canadian Soldiers of Odin.<sup>38</sup> In the announcement of the foundation of the Patriots of Unity, Ryan Ward specifically mentioned an end of the affiliation to "the Soldiers of Odin Canada, or Finland," seemingly making the separation from Finnish leadership a key issue. Possibly in response to this statement, Canadian SOO have strengthened the rhetoric relating to the Finnish-Canadian connection, as well as to the global network of Soldiers of Odin. The slogan "United we Stand, Divided we Fall" has become more prominent; profile or cover pictures showing the "Soldiers of Odin Worldwide", or lapel pins of Canadian and Finnish flags started appearing, in conjunction with or replacing the standard SOO images. It seems therefore the Soldiers of Odin have now resolutely embraced the Finnish association, embracing simultaneously the associations to racism and white supremacy it entails.

The question of the relationship between Canadian and Finnish Soldiers of Odin seems therefore to have been resolved. The remaining question, therefore, would be one of ideological and operational collaboration and consistency. Some points of contact are rather obvious: like their Finnish counterparts, the SOO Canada claim a resolutely anti-immigration and anti-refugee agenda. Similarly, both chapters target most of their hatred towards Muslims, with the

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<sup>35</sup> Montpetit, "Inside Quebec's far right: Soldiers of Odin leadership shake-up signals return to extremist roots."

<sup>36</sup> Johnson, "Guardians of Alberta's split from Soldiers of Odin shows a lack of cohesion on the alt-right front."

<sup>37</sup> Montpetit, "Inside Quebec's far right: Soldiers of Odin leadership shake-up signals return to extremist roots."

<sup>38</sup> It is not clear that the two events are linked, but timings coincide.

perception that Islamic or Arab immigration is more violent and dangerous than other immigration. There are also obvious similarities in tactics, as Canadian SOO have adopted the Finnish *modus operandi* of vigilante street patrols, in both cases claiming to help the police by reporting crimes rather than enforcing the law directly.<sup>39</sup>

However, there are also significant differences between the groups, which perhaps helps explain some of the troubles of the Canadian group. First, much of the rhetoric of the SOO in Finland has been focused on the need to defend Europe against the arrival of waves of migration in 2015-2016. A central discursive focus seems to be this notion of a shared European homeland to be defended. On February 1<sup>st</sup>, for instance, Mika Ranta posted an image to his Facebook page with the slogan "Build the European Homeland."<sup>40</sup> It is unclear how much Canadian groups can identify with the European space, or whether "European homeland" ought rather to be taken to be a white supremacist euphemism.<sup>41</sup> What is clear, however, is that Canadian groups have sought to combine this global outlook with a much more nationalist orientation, emphasising 'Canadian' values (as opposed to Western values), as well as seeking to entrench themselves in local communities through food drives, neighbourhood cleaning operations, and snow shovelling. Canadian SOO groups have routinely used the slogan "We stand on guard for Thee," which is taken from Canada's national anthem, emphasising this element of Canadian nationalism. In the Canadian SOO, there seems to be a tension between (1) a global orientation centred on the idea of "Europe" – broadly construed to be identical with the 'West' along ethnic lines and thereby encompassing (white) North America, and (2) an ethno-nationalist orientation based on emphasising an idea of authentic Canadian-ness – with non-white immigrants therefore perceived as a threat to the ethno-national body.

An associated question lies in the extent to which the ideology of the Canadian Soldiers of Odin is influenced by their Finnish counterparts. While Canada has increased its intake of refugees from Muslim-majority countries in the last few years, the increase has been somewhat negligible in proportion to the size of the Canadian population as a whole. Facebook groups for the SOO are remarkably devoid of accounts of direct contact between members and Muslim

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<sup>39</sup> The Finnish SOO claim to be the police's "eyes and ears," while the Canadian SOO purport to limit themselves to calling the police and using violence in self-defence.

Rigatelli, "Personporträtt: Hur det kom sig att Mika Ranta grundade Soldiers of Odin," <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/soldiers-of-odin-canada-community-group-watch-1.3761178>

<sup>40</sup> Mika Ranta, "Build the European Homeland," *Facebook*, (February 1, 2017), <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=615272278662160&set=a.101327646723295.1073741827.100005381791161&type=3&theater>

<sup>41</sup> As mentioned earlier, the SOO Canada Bylaws mention attacks on "European Culture" as a justification for the group's existence.

immigrants. In contrast, the perception of threat on the right wing was much more acute in Finland, where the number of asylum seekers went from 3600 in 2014 to 32 400 in 2015.<sup>42</sup> It would seem, therefore, that the Canadian Soldiers of Odin imported part of their perception of threat from Finland; indeed, one Edmonton leader cited in a *VICE Media* article stated that "The guys in Europe, they're dealing with some real shit, we might not see that here for ten or so years. When that happens we want to look as good as possible."<sup>43</sup> A similar case occurred in Estonia, where the lack of asylum seekers has not prevented the emergence of Soldiers of Odin chapters.<sup>44</sup> In summary, it would seem that the SOO, in Canada and elsewhere, are largely responding to a threat which they do not perceive immediately, but which is influenced at least in part from abroad. In this, they are no different than many other right-wing extremist groups; the distinguishing feature, however, remains the significance of the global links and of the connection to the Finnish SOO. Without it, it seems, much of the movement loses its driving force.

## Methodology

Social media has undoubtedly contributed to new and revitalised form of civic engagement. However, despite being celebrated as a great instrument of democracy and global thinking, conveying real-time information and coordinating actions during the early days of the Arab Spring and the Euromaidan protests in Ukraine, its development has also empowered actors with explicitly undemocratic and anti-inclusive agendas. This is evident in what Caiani and Parenti called "the dark side of the Web" – the emergence of dynamic far-right activities on the Internet.<sup>45</sup> The extreme right's early adoption of the internet has gained plenty of scholarly attention, with recent studies increasingly highlighting how social media is used to "spread propaganda, preach to the unconverted, and as a means of intimidating political adversaries."<sup>46</sup> Michael Whine was one of the earliest scholars to draw attention to the

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<sup>42</sup> Finnish Immigration Service, "Asylum Applicants, 1.1-31.12.2015," *Finnish Immigration Service*, [http://www.migri.fi/download/65010\\_EN\\_tp-hakijat\\_2015.pdf?1e2bbc74c55bd488](http://www.migri.fi/download/65010_EN_tp-hakijat_2015.pdf?1e2bbc74c55bd488)

Finnish Immigration Service, "Asylum Applicants, 1.1-31.12.2014," *Finnish Immigration Service*, [http://www.migri.fi/download/57245\\_EN\\_tp-hakijat\\_marras\\_2014.pdf?b29d0f75c55bd488](http://www.migri.fi/download/57245_EN_tp-hakijat_marras_2014.pdf?b29d0f75c55bd488)

<sup>43</sup> Lamoureux, "Soldiers of Odin, Europe's Notorious, Anti-Immigration Group, Beginning to For Cells in Canada."

<sup>44</sup> Reuters and VICE News, "The Anti-Immigrant 'Soldiers of Odin' Are Expanding Across Europe," *VICE Media*, (March 2, 2016), <https://news.vice.com/article/the-anti-immigrant-soldiers-of-odin-are-expanding-across-europe>

<sup>45</sup> Manuel Caiani and Linda Parenti, "The dark side of the web: Italian right-wing extremist groups and the Internet," *South European Society and Politics* 14, no. 3 (2009): 273-294.

<sup>46</sup> Manuel Caiani and Linda Parenti Caiani, "The Spanish extreme right and the Internet," *Análise Social* 46, no. 201 (2011): 719-720.

connection between the far-right and the internet, noting that its anonymity, lack of regulation, and accessibility to young audiences make it ideal for the diffusion of racist and xenophobic ideologies.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, while extremist organizations may be small in number, in the online public space the use of links between sites within a network help to create a collective identity, forging a stronger sense of community and purpose, which can convince even the most ardent extremist that he is not alone, that his views are not, in fact, extreme at all.<sup>48</sup> Gerstenfeld et al. finds evidence that far-right extremists use mutual links to create a collective identity and that these groups often use the same borrowed rhetoric.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, in their study of white supremacist sites, Bih-Ru Lea et al., find that the internet has helped create a “virtual extremist community, a set of people, organizations, or other social entities connected by a set of socially meaningful relationships...”<sup>50</sup> The importance of understanding how radical right groups interact through social media is becoming more apparent as networked social movements in the digital age represent a new form of social movement, and as interactive communication facilitates more active involvement.<sup>51</sup>

The social networks individuals construct on Facebook reflect the breadth and diversity of users’ offline networks as people create social ties constituting groups based on existing relationships in real life, such as relatives, friends, colleagues, or based on common interests and shared tastes.<sup>52</sup> Likewise, individuals generally avoid creating online personas that are substantially different from their offline selves because they treat social media platforms as

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<sup>47</sup> Michael Whine, “The Far Right on the Internet” in *The Governance of Cyberspace: Politics, Technology, and Global Restructuring*, edited by Brian Loader, (London: Routledge, 1997); Michael Whine, “Cyberspace – A New Medium for Communication, Command, and Control by Extremists,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 22, no. 2 (1999): 231-245.

<sup>48</sup> Barbara Perry, “‘Button-Down Terror’: The Metamorphosis of the Hate Movement,” *Sociological Focus* 22, no. 2 (2000): 113-131.

<sup>49</sup> Phyllis B. Gerstenfeld, Diana R. Grant, and Chau-Pu Chiang, “Hate online: a content analysis of extremist internet sites,” *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*, 3 (2003): 29.

<sup>50</sup> Bih-Ru Lea, Yu Wen-Bin, Nisha Maguluru, and Michael Nichols. “Enhancing Business Networks using Social Network Based Virtual Communities,” *Industrial Management and Data Systems* 106 (2006): 122.

<sup>51</sup> Manuel Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope. Social Movements in the Internet Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

<sup>52</sup> Matthew G. Birnbaum, “The Fronts Students Use: Facebook and the Standardization of Self-Presentations,” *Journal of College Student Development* 54, no. 2 (2013): 155–71; Bernie Hogan, “The Presentation of Self in the Age of Social Media: Distinguishing Performances and Exhibitions Online,” *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society* 30, no.6 (2010): 377–86; Eden Litt, “Understanding Social Network Site Users’ Privacy Tool Use,” *Computers in Human Behavior* 29, no.4 (2013): 1649–56; Soraya Mehdizadeh, “Self-Presentation 2.0: Narcissism and Self-Esteem on Facebook,” *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 13, no. 4 (2010): 357–64.

reflections and extensions of their offline selves.<sup>53</sup> Tracking, mapping, and analysis of such online communities can provide researchers with significant insight into a group or network's structure, relationships, and ideological commitments. Thus, mapping the relationships present between members of the Soldiers of Odin can reveal general patterns of cooperation and contestation among transnational actors, allowing us to establish the relative importance of members within the group and of contacts outside of SOO Canada, and thereby to evaluate the ideological formation of the Canadian SOO. In order to do so, this study employed Social Network Analysis.

### Social Network Analysis

Social network analysis (SNA) is a research approach that analyses the structures and processes of social networks and is made up of nodes (individuals, groups, organization) connected by edges (friendship, kinship, financial transactions). SNA hence focuses on the relationships between individuals and the significance of their interactions, rather than on specific attributes of individuals such as age, gender or occupation. SNA illustrates these relationships through the use of graphical representation, where nodes represent individual units and links – called edges – represent their relationship in order to answer questions such as ‘who is most connected?’ or ‘who is the most important member in a network?’ The analysis of social networks can be applied to both online networks, that is, networks formed on platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, where information is exchanged in real time through different types of messages, or to offline networks, which are formed by in-person relationships among individuals. Social network analysis has become increasingly important amongst scholars as a rich source of meaningful information otherwise unobtainable through traditional social science research methods, and thus has quickly been adopted in a variety of disciplines including: anthropology, where tribal, urban and informal groups are mapped to facilitate the understanding of formal and informal structure;<sup>54</sup> health sciences, where diseases such as the Avian flu and HIV/AIDS can be geographically mapped and better prevented through the focus on interactions between infected individuals; and criminology, where scholars employ SNA to map the structure of criminal organizations and analyse the power dynamics, distribution and criminal patterns of key players.

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<sup>53</sup> Patrick R. Miller, Piotr S. Bobkowski, Daniel Maliniak and Ronald B. Rapoport, “Talking Politics on Facebook,” *Political Research Quarterly*, 68, no. 2 (2015): 377 – 391.

<sup>54</sup> Been Van Den Ende, “Understanding and combatting terrorist networks: Coupling social media mining with social network analysis” in *The Proceedings of 14th Australian Information Security Management Conference, 5-6 December, 2016*, edited by M. Johnstone, (Perth: *Edith Cowan University*, 2016), 48-51.

The role of networks in political violence has become well recognized in recent years, with scholars increasingly employing SNA's unique analytical capabilities to advance the study of this subject. Krebs' use of SNA to map the network responsible for the September 11, 2001 attacks and to identify the important actors in the network quickly drew the attention of academics to the potential of SNA.<sup>55</sup> Soon after, Marc Sageman published *Understanding Terror Networks* where – using public sources of information on 100 individuals affiliated with al Qaeda – he established that there were four major clusters spread across several countries.<sup>56</sup> Several studies similar to Krebs' work have also followed major terrorist strikes, such as the Bali bombing in 2002,<sup>57</sup> the bombing in Madrid in 2004,<sup>58</sup> and the Mumbai attack in 2008<sup>59</sup>. Researchers have also used SNA to draw up hypotheses about how to destabilise covert network by identifying individuals with dynamic roles whose neutralisation would most disrupt the structure of a network,<sup>60</sup> or to speculate on the potential replacement of Bin Laden as leader of al Qaeda.<sup>61</sup>

In addition to offline networks, researchers interested in political violence have also increasingly employed SNA to analyse online networks, particularly hate-promoting communities on social networking websites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr. In fact, even before the widespread emergence of Web 2.0 platforms, researchers anticipated the use of the internet by right-wing extremists to spread their messages. One of the first studies on the subject, conducted by the Anti-Defamation League, examined the use of bulletin boards by extremists in the United States.<sup>62</sup> As the online sphere developed and became increasingly sophisticated, so did research on the subject. Burris et al. used hyperlink analysis to explore white supremacist websites in the United States.<sup>63</sup> Elsewhere, Tateo examined the online

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<sup>55</sup> Valdis E. Krebs, "Mapping networks of terrorist cells," *Connections*, 24, no. 3 (2002): 43-52.

<sup>56</sup> Marc Sageman, *Understanding terror networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

<sup>57</sup> Stuart Koschade, "A social network analysis of Jemmah Islamiyah: The applications to counterterrorism and intelligence" *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 29, no. 6 (2006): 559–575.

<sup>58</sup> Josep A. Rodriguez, "The Terrorist Network: In its Weakness Lies Its Strength." Paper presented at the XXV International Sunbelt Conference, Los Angeles, 2005.

<sup>59</sup> Sarita Azad and Arvind Gupta, "A quantitative assessment on 26/11 Mumbai attack using social network analysis," *Journal of Terrorism Research* 2, no. 2, (2011).

<sup>60</sup> Kathleen M. Carley, "Destablization of overt networks. Computational and Mathematical Organization Theory," 12, no. 1, (2006): 51-66.

<sup>61</sup> Edith Wu, Rebecca Carleton, and Garth Davies, "Discovering bin-Laden's replacement in al-Qaeda, using social network analysis: A methodological investigation," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 8, no. 1, (2014).

<sup>62</sup> David S. Hoffman, *The Web of Hate. Extremists Exploit the Internet* (New York: AntiDefamation League, 1996).

<sup>63</sup> Val Burris, Emery Smith, and Ann Strahm, "White Supremacist Networks on the Internet," *Sociological Focus* 33, no. 2 (2000): 215–235.

structure of the Italian radical right through network analysis.<sup>64</sup> Recently, the use of SNA in this relatively new field of study has flourished. Most notably, Caiani and her colleagues have contributed astute works comparing extreme-right online networks in the United States, Italy, Spain, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom,<sup>65</sup> whilst Conway et al. identified English and German language extreme right communities on three distinct social networking platforms (Twitter, Facebook and Youtube), as well as cross-platforms interactions.<sup>66</sup>

### Data Collection

In order to study the social interactions between Canadian SOO members and SOO members abroad through the social networking platform underlying these interactions, namely Facebook, this research initially used the publicly available data crawling application, Netvizz.<sup>67</sup> 71 Facebook groups in 16 different countries with a membership ranging from a handful to upwards of 5000 were uncovered. Amongst these, the unique ‘Facebook ID’ number of each member in the 12 Canada based SOO Facebook groups was captured using the web scraping Chrome browser extension DataMiner<sup>68</sup> with a various *xpath* queries.<sup>69</sup>

In total, 1022 unique members were identified across the 12 groups. However, membership to a SOO Facebook group was not deemed sufficient for an individual to merit inclusion into the dataset, as it is not clear evidence of actual active membership in an SOO chapter. As such, the photos associated with each account were individually sifted for clear indications of actual membership in the Soldiers of Odin, such as identifiable pieces of SOO uniform or a group logos. When faced with an individual whose privacy settings prevented the display of the pictures in the timeline, the search command “.../search/[Facebook ID]/photos-

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<sup>64</sup> Luca Tateo, “The Italian Extreme Right On-line Network: An Exploratory Study Using an Integrated Social Network Analysis and Content Analysis Approach,” *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* 10, no. 2, (2005).

<sup>65</sup> Manuela Caiani, Donatella Della Porta, and Claudius Wagemann, *Mobilizing on the Extreme Right. Germany, Italy, and the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Manuela Caiani and Linda Parenti, *European and American Extreme Right Groups and the Internet* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013).

<sup>66</sup> Maura Conway, Joe Carthy, Pádraig Cunningham, Derek O’Callaghan, and Derek Greene. “An Analysis of Interactions Within and Between Extreme Right Communities in Social Media,” in *Ubiquitous Social Media Analysis*, edited by Martin Atzmueller, Alvin Chin, Andreas Helic, and Andreas Hotho, (Berlin: Springer-Verlag), 88–107.

<sup>67</sup> Bernard Rieder, “Studying Facebook via data extraction: the Netvizz application,” in *Proceedings of the 5th Annual ACM Web Science Conference* (ACM Press, 2013), 346-355.

<sup>68</sup> “Extract Data from Any Websites into a Spreadsheet.” Data Miner. <https://data-miner.io/>

<sup>69</sup> Out of these 12 Canadian based SOO groups, 10 were closed groups, meaning that members had to be approved by administrators and only these members are able to see posted content. As such, accessing these groups to conduct content analysis of these groups beyond the ethical boundaries established at the onset of this study.

of’ – which displays photos in which the individual is tagged, regardless of whether it is hidden from their timeline – was employed.

Having identified individual accounts satisfying the criteria for inclusion in the dataset, snowball sampling was employed to identify additional individuals, as it is ideal for overcoming the problems associated with sampling concealed and hard to reach populations such as those engaging in criminal, illicit or socially stigmatized activities.<sup>70</sup> The entire ‘friend’ list of each individual identified from the 12 Canadian groups was then also scrutinized, with the profile of each friend analysed for indications of membership. Unique Facebook ID numbers, geographical location, and their relationship to other individuals meeting the inclusion criteria were then recorded in the database. While this approach originally led to duplications in cases where two linked profiles both had their friends list visible, it also overcame barriers in cases where one individual had implemented privacy settings preventing us from seeing their friends list. In cases where two individuals had private friends lists, capturing the link was not feasible; however, the number of private friend lists encountered was relatively low and could be deemed insignificant. In total, 737 individuals were uncovered, among which there were 265 Canadians, 104 Finns, 33 Swedes, 83 Germans, and 116 Americans. While this by no means represents the entirety of the worldwide membership of the Soldiers of Odin, it does provide a good estimate as to the composition of the Canadian networks of SOO, along with their international connections.

As a final step, a list containing the Facebook IDs of the 737 aforementioned individuals was compared to the membership of the remaining 51 worldwide SOO Facebook groups. The completed database contained 773 different nodes (representing 737 individuals and 36 groups), along with 13,048 edges representing linkages between these different nodes. The data collection on the Canadian SOO networks took place between January 22 and March 15, 2017.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Rowland Atkinson, and John Flint, “Accessing Hidden and Hard-to-Reach Populations: Snowball Research Strategies,” *Social Research Update* 33, no. 1, (2001): 1-5; 01. Research Update 33: 1-5; Maryse Marpsat and Nicolas Razafindratsima, “Survey methods for hard-to-reach populations: introduction to the special issue,” *Methodological Innovations Online* 5, no. 2, (2010): 3-16; Matthew J. Salganik; Douglas D. Heckathorn, “Sampling and estimation in hidden populations using respondent-driven sampling,” *Sociological Methodology* 34, no. 1, (2004): 193-239.

<sup>71</sup> One limitation of our dataset is caused by the breakaway of the Saskatchewan chapters on February 1<sup>st</sup>, in the middle of our data collection. However, it was decided not to take into account whether an individual had left the group or not at the time of the data collection. Therefore, unless a former member of the SOO deliberately went through their Facebook profile to delete any identifiable link to the SOO, they would still have been captured in our data collection.

## Visualisation

To create a visual image of the entire body of data being considered and its network characteristics, the open-source visualization software Gephi was employed. Gephi was chosen because it allows the user to interact with graph representation, manipulate structures, shapes and colours and to apply a series of force-directed algorithms to reveal properties which may be hidden or hard to observe. The structure of the network helps determine its usefulness to the nodes within it: networks with tighter ties between the nodes may be more useful than those with loose ties. In addition, a network's usefulness to a node may depend on the node's position within the network.

The dataset was subjected to the Force Atlas 2 algorithm, which simulates gravitational attraction between connected nodes in a network; accounts which share a high level of interconnectivity among each other will be placed closed to each other, forming a cluster, while accounts and clusters that share few common connections will repel one another. The position of each node – individual accounts or groups – in the graph is a function of its links with neighbouring nodes. Force Atlas 2 is especially useful for this study, because of its ability to visualize large and complex network with a highly dense interconnectivity.<sup>72</sup>

## Research Findings

In order to answer the research objectives of this paper, a series of different graphs were constructed from the dataset:

- Firstly, a relationship graph of all the Canadian members of the Soldiers of Odin was generated. This graph contained 281 nodes and 4136 edges and is referred to as CANADA (see Figure 1).
- Secondly, a relationship graph comprising all Finnish links to the Canadian network was generated. This graph contained 351 nodes and 5392 edges and is referred to as CANFIN (see Figure 2).
- Lastly, a relationship graphs of the Finnish and Swedish links to the Canadian network was generated. This graph contained 385 nodes and 5510 edges and is referred to as

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<sup>72</sup> In Jacomy et al., the authors of the Force Atlas 2 algorithm discuss the respective advantages and drawbacks of their approach in comparison to other popular algorithms. However, as previously noted, there are a large number of other network visualization approaches available both within Gephi and in other network visualization tools, such as UCINET, ORA, NodeXL, NetworkX, and therefore there is no one 'true' representation of any network dataset. See Mathieu Jacomy, Tommaso Venturini, Sebastien Heymann, and Mathieu Bastian, "ForceAtlas2, a Continuous Graph Layout Algorithm for Handy Network Visualization Designed for the Gephi Software," PLOS ONE 9, no. 6, (2011): e98679.

CANFINSWE (see Figure 3). This graph was used mainly to validate insights from the first two graphs.

In order to properly analyse the topology of these three networks, a series of descriptive network metrics were computed to measure the structural characteristics of the network, including modularity, network density, average path length, and betweenness centrality.

Modularity is indicative of the community structure of a network. It is calculated by the number of edges falling within groups minus the expected number in an equivalent network with edges placed randomly. A positive modularity value implies the possible presence of a community structure, meaning natural divisions in the network.<sup>73</sup>

Network density refers to the proportion of edges between a set of actors in the network as a whole and suggests the extent to which the actors communicate with all other actors.<sup>74</sup> In other words, it is defined as the total number of actual connections in the network divided by total number of possible connections, ranging from 0 to 1. This measure provides insight into how effective information spreads among the network users.

Average path length refers to the average number of steps in the shortest paths between all pairs of nodes. This measure represents the average number of steps it takes to get from one node in the network to any other node. In 2011, the results of the analysis of the friend networks of 750 million active users in Facebook showed that the average distance between Facebook network nodes was only 4.74 degrees.<sup>75</sup>

Betweenness centrality is a measure representing the centrality of a node based on shortest paths. For every pair of nodes in a graph, there exists a shortest path between the nodes, such that the number of edges that the path passes through is minimized. The betweenness centrality for each node is the number of these shortest paths that pass through it. This metric reflects the position of an edge in the graph. Moreover, in addition to being broadly represented visually by its position in the graph and more exactly through its betweenness centrality score, betweenness centrality indicates a node's social capital. The higher the betweenness centrality,

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<sup>73</sup> M.E.J Newman, "Modularity and community structure in networks," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 103, no. 23, (2006):8577–8696.

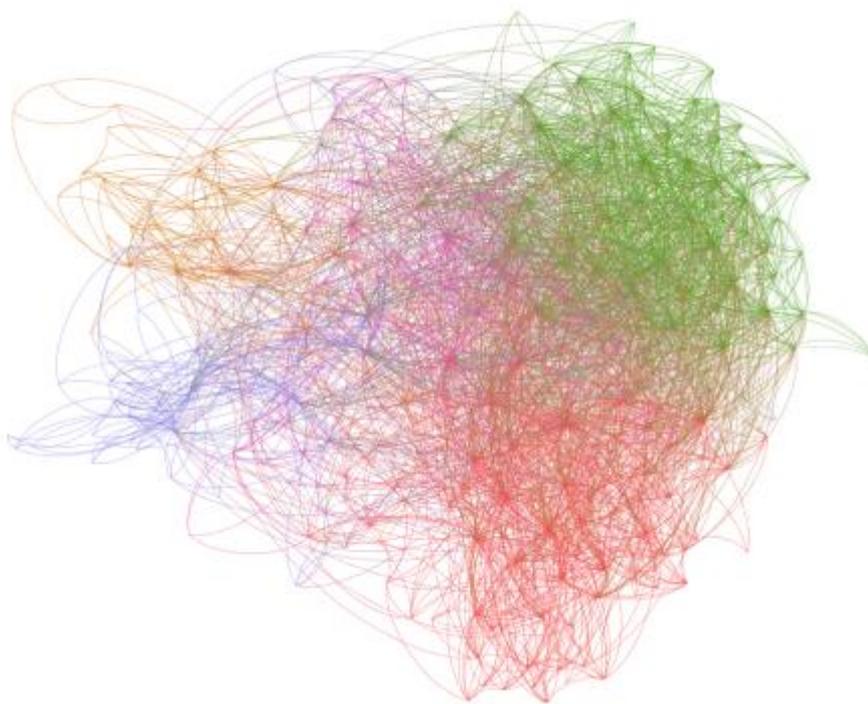
<sup>74</sup> Stanley Wasserman, and Katherine Faust, *Social Network Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>75</sup> Lars Backstrom, Paolo Boldi, Marco Rosa, Johan Ugander, Sebastiano Vigna, "Four degrees of separation," in *Proceedings of the 5th Annual ACM Web Science Conference* (ACM Press, 2012), 45-54.

the more the node can serve as a conduit for resources and information to other nodes and the greater ability the node will have to shape the flow of information.<sup>76</sup>

The three network mappings graphs have been complemented by qualitative analysis of the key imagery and messages publicly available on confirmed members' profiles as well as on public Soldiers of Odin Groups. This provides further information about the key members of the Soldiers of Odin and allows us to assess to what extent group hierarchy conforms to the patterns observed in our network analysis, as well as providing important contextual information.

### The Canadian Network (CANADA)



*Figure 1: The Domestic SOO Network*

Blue: Ontario; Orange: British Columbia; Green: Québec;

Pink: Alberta; Red: Manitoba/Saskatchewan.

The modularity of the Canadian network is 0.306, providing evidence of a community-based structure. As shown in Figure 1, the typology of the network shows five major clusters, each roughly separated along provincial lines. At the centre of the network are several members

<sup>76</sup> Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, Miles Kahler, and Alexander H. Montgomery, "Network Analysis for International Relations," *International Organization* 63, no. 3, (2009): 570.

(or recently removed members) of the SOO executive: this implies that these individuals successfully play a role not only as key informants in the movements but also as information brokers, forming bridges between the other clusters in the network. Moreover, this implies that individuals across Canada tend to not only be linked to other Soldiers of Odin members within regional proximity, but in addition that the majority of members of the Canadian network are also linked to the members of the executive. It seems clear, therefore, that the Soldiers of Odin is a group which is built around a rigid hierarchy, rather than from the ground up. Leaders provide links to other sections of the group, while rank-and-file members tend to be locally based and communicate mainly with members of their own local chapters.

One key finding made possible by the figure above is the presence of quite sharp differences between provincial chapters. As noted above, the rank-and-file members are generally connected to other members of their local chapters, but have limited connections to other provinces. This is particularly significant in Québec, where most of the members are isolated from the rest of the network. Part of this might be due to a language barrier – the Québec SOO seem to operate in French – but there are also differences in operational style and rhetoric, which a quick comparison of three public Facebook groups may indicate. These three groups are "Soldiers of Odin Québec Support"<sup>77</sup>, "Soldiers of Odin Northern Ontario Support"<sup>78</sup>, and "Patriots of Unity Regina Support."<sup>79</sup> The groups from Regina and Northern Ontario show a combination of anti-crime, xenophobic and community service postings. In the case of Regina, a particular emphasis was put on snow removal efforts – where SOO members would shovel snow on behalf of citizens – as well as on images from patrols. In the Northern Ontario group, again, anti-immigrant posts are present alongside a focus on community action – here, drives collecting empty beer bottles and cans for charity are particularly highlighted. The Québec group, meanwhile, is devoid of any posts about community action; rather, it is filled with reports (often from dubious sources) of crimes committed by immigrants, anti-Islamic or anti-immigrant rhetoric, and announcements about upcoming protests and marches. Therefore, the relative distance between the Québec chapters and the rest of the Canadian

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<sup>77</sup> "Soldiers of Odin Québec Support," *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1292307334178114/?fref=ts> These three groups are 'support groups', for members as well as non-member sympathisers.

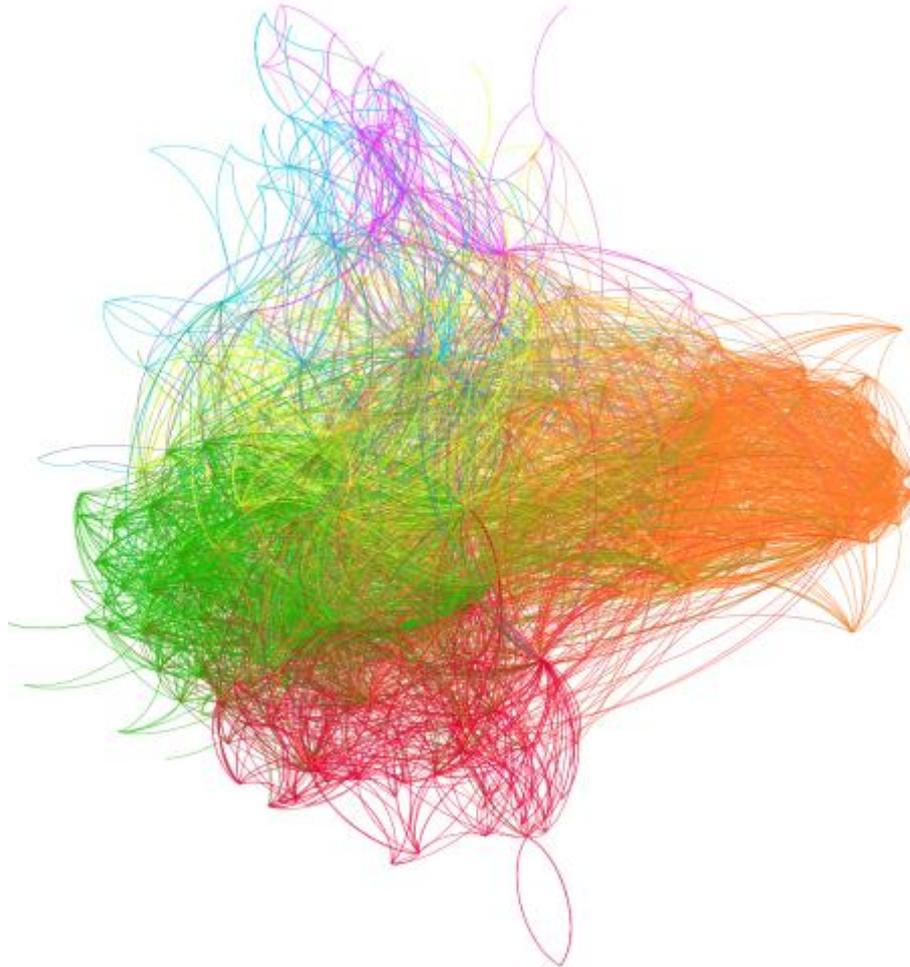
<sup>78</sup> "Soldiers of Odin Northern Ontario Support," *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1745618239046014/?fref=ts>.

<sup>79</sup> "Patriots of Unity – Regina Support," *Facebook*, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/544191002419317/?fref=ts> This group, administered by Ryan Ward, transferred to the Patriots of Unity on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017, when Ward and most of the Saskatchewan chapters of the SOO left to found the Patriots of Unity. Nevertheless, the content before February 1<sup>st</sup> can be reliably considered to be SOO content.

network may also be due to ideological differences, with the Quebec wing being more militant and open about its far-right rhetoric.<sup>80</sup>

The network also possesses a relatively high network density at 0.078, and at 2.31 the network also possesses a short average path length – especially compared to average distance between Facebook users across the entire platform, suggesting that the network could efficiently facilitate the spread of information among the Canadian chapters.

### The Canadian Network with Finnish Ties (CANFIN)



*Figure 2 Canadian Network with Finnish Ties*

Orange: Finland; Green: British Columbia; Yellow: Alberta;  
Blue: Quebec; Purple: Manitoba/Saskatchewan; Red: Ontario

The analysis of the CANFIN graph – that is, Finnish members of the Soldiers of Odin linked to Canadian members, rather than the entirety of Finnish members of the Soldiers of

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<sup>80</sup> It is also worth noting that since Dave Tregget's resignation/dismissal as national vice-president and Quebec leader in December 2016, it would seem that no member from Quebec has any official function in the national leadership.

Odin – also provides some interesting insights. As one would expect, Finnish members are clustered quite heavily; in other words, Finnish members have stronger ties to other Finnish members than to Canadian members. This is undoubtedly due to their regional proximity to each other, their shared language and culture, and potentially shared membership in overlapping SOO chapters in Finland.<sup>81</sup> Taken by itself, the cluster of Finnish members is more tightly intertwined than the CANADA network previously analysed. While the CANFIN network had a group network density of 0.078, the Finish cluster can boast a staggering group network density of 0.315.

Taken as a whole, the CANFIN network possesses a group network density of 0.086, certainly due to the interconnectivity of the Finnish nodes. More interesting is that the addition to the Finnish nodes to the Canadian Network only increased the average path length from 2.31 to 2.35, meaning that information, despite the presence of additional transnational nodes, can spread across the CANFIN network nearly as efficiently as it does within the CANADA Network. This means that, notwithstanding potential language barriers, content emerging from the SOO chapters in Finland can spread to Canadian chapters nearly as freely as content emerging from within Canada. This finding has a profound implication, namely that irrespective of the presence or absence of racist content on the Canadian side of the network, the presence of numerous links to Finnish SOO – where the presence of racism and white supremacy have been widely documented – means that Canadian members of the SOO are exposed to such content on a routine basis. On Facebook, the content to which one is exposed is provided by one's friends; therefore, the presence of links to Finnish SOO indicates at least a willingness, on the part of the Canadian Soldiers of Odin, to be exposed on a regular basis to racism, anti-immigrant ideology, and thereby suggests a much more extreme right-wing side to the movement than their emphasis on community action would otherwise suggest. In other words, given the similar average path lengths, Canadian members of the SOO can be exposed as routinely to content from the Finnish SOO as they are to content from the Canadian SOO. Therefore, even if the Canadian SOO were to refrain from racist anti-immigrant propaganda altogether,<sup>82</sup> it is highly likely that such content would still be disseminated from Finnish sources.

Also worth noting is the appearance of Mika Ranta as an influential node positioned near the centre of the graph in proximity to members (or recently removed members) of the

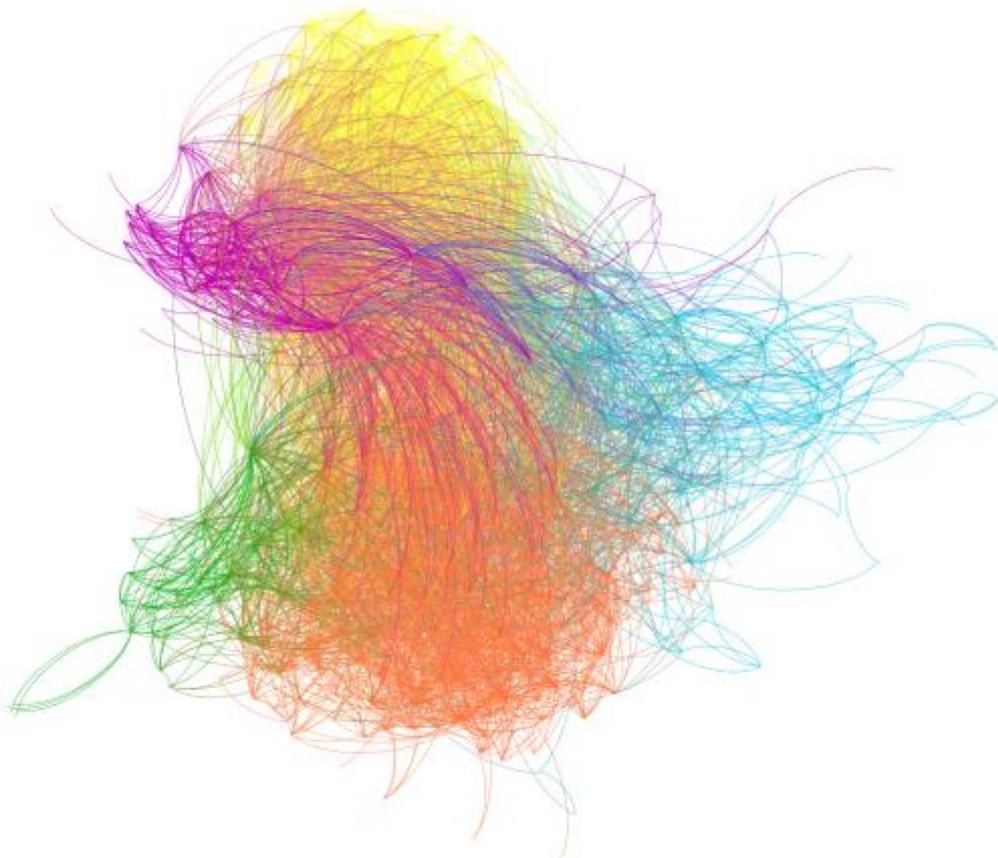
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<sup>81</sup> We did not seek to identify the precise location within Finland or Sweden of international members.

<sup>82</sup> As mentioned above, a significant number of public postings in SOO groups and by SOO members contain racist, Islamophobic, and anti-immigrant messages.

Canadian SOO executive. While there is no evidence (due to privacy settings) that Ranta actually interacts with Canadian members, his position as a central node (and the high number of connections between him and Canadian members) supports the argument made above regarding the dissemination of racist propaganda within the Canadian SOO network. It is also worth noting that Ranta, as mentioned above, possesses well-documented links to white supremacist and neo-Nazi groups; his position as a central node allows him therefore to participate effectively in the dissemination of such content, and implies that Canadian SOO members tolerate – or share – his views.

### The Canadian Network with Finnish and Swedish Ties (CANFINSWE)



*Figure 3: Canadian Network with Finnish and Swedish Ties*

Yellow: Finland; Purple: Sweden; Blue: Quebec;  
Orange: Alberta/British Columbia; Green: Ontario/Manitoba & Saskatchewan

In addition to Finnish ties, Swedish ties to the Canadian network were also plotted. Once again, these Swedish nodes do not represent the entirety of the Swedish Soldiers of Odin membership but rather the Swedish members tied to the Canadian network; in other words, Swedish SOO who are Facebook friends with Canadian SOO. The subsequent graph provided

insights consistent with the findings derived from the CANFIN network. Firstly, the Swedish clusters also boast an impressive group network density of 0.34, increasing the overall network density. The average path length remained relatively stable at 2.36, thus demonstrating the ease of access to Swedish content enjoyed by Canadian members, a finding with potentially important significance, given that Swedish Soldiers of Odin have previously been involved in violent street fighting and altercations.<sup>83</sup> Secondly, members of the Swedish leadership seem to serve a similar role to those of the Finnish leadership, as central nodes acting as transnational bridges amongst Canadian and European members. For example, the most important Swedish node amongst the CANFINSWE network is Mikael Johansson, the national leader and spokesperson for the Swedish SOO.

Lastly, the Swedish cluster's proximity to the Finnish cluster demonstrates a higher level of interconnectedness amongst both European groups, which was expected. However, the addition of the Swedish cluster has caused several of the Canadian clusters to collapse into each other: Alberta and British Columbia formed a single cluster, and Ontario and Saskatchewan formed another, with Québec remaining clearly distinct, once again supporting the finding about the uniqueness of the Québec chapter within the Canadian network, as more militant and more open about its far-right rhetoric and organisationally separate.

## Conclusion

This paper has advanced a number of claims concerning the structure of the Soldiers of Odin in Canada and their relationship to the Finnish leadership of the movement. As this paper demonstrates, despite SOO Canada's denials of the charges of racism and Islamophobia, their close integration with Finnish and Swedish networks suggests otherwise, as information flows very easily between the Canadian and international networks. Furthermore, the findings have demonstrated that the SOO is a rather hierarchy-centric network, in which members tend to be localised while leaders communicate across provinces, allowing for regional difference between chapters. Finally, the findings demonstrate that while the SOO is relatively flexible in its ideology and oscillates between Canadian ethno-nationalism and a focus on a transnational

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<sup>83</sup> The Local, "Swedish Soldiers of Odin group involved in 'extremist' clashes."

Marina Ferhatovic, "Slagsmål på Masthuggstorget när Soldiers of Odin patrullerade," *Göteborgs-Posten*, (April 3, 2016), <http://www.gp.se/nyheter/goteborg/slagsmål-på-masthuggstorget-när-soldiers-of-odin-patrullerade-1.182967>.

Ryan Ward, then head of the Regina (Saskatchewan) chapter, explicitly likened the Antifa group involved in the brawl in Jönköping in January 2017 to the Anti-Racist Collective, a group active in Canada in tracing and reporting on right-wing extremist movements.

Ryan Ward, "Nationalist 'Soldiers of Odin' Clash with Militant Leftists in Sweden," *Patriots of Unity – Regina Support* [Soldiers of Odin – Regina Support], (January 11, 2017), <https://www.facebook.com/groups/544191002419317/?fref=ts>.

European culture, in general they commit to the global movement and a global perception of threat, which may not be informed by their immediate experiences in Canada.

Methodologically, this paper also made a number of points. First, it reiterates the value of social network analysis in studying hard-to-approach extremist groups. Second, it highlights the potential of using data collected from Facebook; the data collection was made possible by the fact that friendship links are reciprocal on Facebook – unlike on Twitter – thereby strengthening our research findings and making possible the interpretation that the presence of Canada-Finland links shows a commitment to the transnational alliance. Finally, this research emphasises ways in which extremist networks may attempt to reach out beyond their narrow local bases, and suggests effective ways of tracking the establishing of such links.

Lastly, as mentioned in the introduction, our most general aim was to suggest that there is an increased need to study right-wing extremist groups as part of the disciplinary purview of political violence. The SOO have, to our knowledge, not been directly accused – as a group – of engaging in violence, except for a street brawl in Göteborg in April 2016, and another in Jönköping, Sweden, in early 2017 and most recently a fight when they attempted to disrupt an anti-racist protest in Vancouver in March 2017.<sup>84</sup> Nevertheless, the presence of rhetoric targeting deliberately one group (Muslims), associating this group with criminal activity and portraying it as a security threat, and the regular conducting of vigilante street patrols creates conditions which supports the suggestion that the group presents a heightened risk of violence.

Two further elements support the suggestion that right-wing extremism ought to be studied as political violence. Firstly, many members of the Soldiers of Odin support fire-arm deregulation in Canada, often with arguments which echo those of fire-arm advocates in the United States, namely personal security. Facebook images of SOO members firing rifles are rather common, as are images claiming a personal commitment to combat crime. In other words, combined with the targeted hate rhetoric identified above, the presence of a clear appreciation for fire-arms for personal use among a significant section of the membership should be of concern. Secondly, a significant section of the SOO membership also expresses

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<sup>84</sup> Ferhatovic, "Slagsmål på Masthuggstorget när Soldiers of Odin patrullerade." *The Local*, "Swedish Soldiers of Odin group involved in 'extremist' clashes."; Lamoureux, "Soldiers of Odin Tangled with Anti-Racism Protesters in Vancouver."

A protest in Montreal at which at least some SOO members were present led to some episodes of fighting recently on March 24.

CBC News, "Groups clash outside Concordia University during 'resist far-right' event," *CBC News*, (March 25, 2017), <http://www.cbc.ca/beta/news/canada/montreal/concordia-university-clash-protests-far-right-resist-1.4041508>.

The disruption of anti-racist protests seems to be a new tactic for SOO in Canada, with two instances at the end of March 2017. This, of course, should it continue, raises the prospects of violence.

support for criminal biker gangs such as the Hells Angels. While mere support of gangs of this sort is not illegal in itself and does not *per se* indicate a support for violence, the intertwining of criminal organisations and right-wing extremism should be of concern. The structure of SOO chapters – with a chapter president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, and sergeant-at-arms – is also highly reminiscent of biker gangs, as are the bylaws which emphasise the respect for the group's "colors" and elaborate a path for prospective membership.<sup>85</sup> Finally, similar to biker gangs, the SOO uses patches worn on jackets to indicate membership; we have seen at least one instance of a new member referring to himself as a "full patch."

The links between right-wing extremism and biker gangs need to be investigated further, and by and large lie beyond the scope of this study. However, we believe that we have uncovered enough circumstantial evidence which, combined with the exclusionary rhetoric and the prevalence of street patrols, suggests that an increased focus on right-wing extremism as part of the study of political violence is needed. As groups multiply and diversify, there is an ever-increasing need to keep track of right-wing extremists, especially given the transnational nature of groups such as the Soldiers of Odin.

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<sup>85</sup> "SOO Canada Bylaws." The SOO bylaws also claim that they are not "a biker gang."