

**From Online Anti-Gender Groups to Offline Protests: Analyzing Mobilization  
in the “1 Million March 4 Children” Movement in Canada**

A Graduate Thesis

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**Abstract**

This study examines how supporters of the anti-gender movement “1 Million March for Children” use social media to articulate arguments, engage with opponents, build trust, and mobilize offline protests. Through thematic analysis of 503 tweets tagged with #handsoffourkids from September 20, 2023, to October 21, 2023, the study identifies four main themes: clarifying arguments and trust-building, mobilizing supporters and calls to action, counterstrategy, and trust-destroying and trust-building narratives. The findings indicate that supporters enhance group cohesion and public trust by emphasizing patriotism, diversity, and unity, and framing parental rights in moral and emotional terms. They articulate positions on LGBTQ+ issues, sex education, and broader political matters, fostering in-group solidarity. Notably, a significant portion of the data employs counterstrategies aimed at delegitimizing opponents through accusations of child sexualization, grooming, violence, hatred, pathologization, political extremism, censorship, and dishonesty.

Though limited to tweets from the supporters of the movement, this research provides timely, valuable insights into Canada’s contemporary anti-gender mobilization. The real-time social media data analysis offers an essential primary-source perspective, laying groundwork for future studies and highlighting critical issues for scholars and policymakers.

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### Introduction

The debate around gender and parental rights has been ongoing for decades. In recent years, parental rights have increasingly been invoked to oppose the inclusion of transgender youth in education (Ashley, 2024). On September 20, 2023, thousands of protesters and counter-protesters gathered across Canada during the movement called “1 Million March 4 Children.” This movement aims to eliminate Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) curriculum and policies from Canadian schools (Canadian Anti-Hate Network, 2023). The mobilization of the “1 Million March 4 Children” - mainly orchestrated by the group “Hands Off Our Kids” and “Family ♥ Freedom” - represents a significant instance of digital activism manifesting into tangible public actions within Canada’s parental rights movement. This movement demonstrates how online far-right groups can effectively mobilize offline protests through strategic use of social media and rhetorical appeals that resonate across diverse demographics.

Research has shown a growing efficiency in the online mobilization tactics used by extremist groups (Caiani et al., 2012; Caiani & Parenti, 2013; Davey & Ebner, 2017; Hutchinson et al., 2023). The Internet provides a platform for transnational communication, fundraising and mobilization (Davey & Ebner, 2017; Castelli & Pirro, 2019; Caiani & Parenti, 2013). Many extremist groups are adept at developing and using Internet tools to increase their visibility and legitimacy (Baele et al., 2023; Castelli Gattinara & Froio, 2023; Crosset et al., 2019; Urman & Katz, 2022). The transformation of these digital interactions into physical actions raises significant concerns about the influence of online radicalism on societal norms and the safety of marginalized communities. Studies such as those by Zhang and Davis (2022) emphasize the complex dynamics of e-extremism and its capacity to shift public discourse and influence policy, particularly regarding rights and education.

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While there is a large body of literature on online radicalization, there is a distinct lack of in-depth analyses that directly link the online activities of specific groups - such as “Hands Off Our Kids” - to their real-world impact. While left-wing radicalism is often analyzed through the lens of mobilization theory, research on far-right mobilization remains limited. In addition, there are gaps in the understanding of the cross-cultural and multiracial appeal of these movements, whose supporters often come from different backgrounds.

This study is crucial for educators, policymakers, and the broader public to comprehend how digital platforms serve as powerful tools for mobilizing potentially harmful ideologies. Understanding these mechanisms can help in developing more effective strategies to counteract the spread and influence of harmful radical ideologies in educational environments and beyond.

This study employs the connective action frame and movement-counter-movement theory, alongside theories of social movement mobilization, online radicalization, and organizational trust. These perspectives elucidate the processes through which the online activities of far-right groups are translated into offline actions, contributing to a deeper understanding of digital-to-physical mobilization.

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the mobilization strategies of the “1 Million March 4 Children” movement, focusing on how their online strategies are implemented in offline contexts. This includes examining the role of social media in shaping and disseminating the movement’s ideologies and actions.

To achieve the study’s purpose, the following research questions are addressed:

RQ1: What are the positions and arguments expressed on social media by supporters of the '1 Million March 4 Children' protest?

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RQ2: How do the “1 Million March 4 Children” protest supporters utilize social media platforms to articulate, frame, and disseminate their narratives, build trust, and mobilize actions?

RQ3: What are the counter-narratives and trust-destroying narratives against the counter-protesters, deployed by '1 Million March 4 Children' protest supporters on social media?

### Literature review

#### **1 Million March 4 Children**

On September 20, 2023, far-right and conspiracy-theory groups, including Christian nationalists, COVID-19 conspiracy theorists, sovereign citizens and anti-public education activists, organized and supported demonstrations under the “1 Million March 4 Children” banner at legislatures, city halls and school board offices across the country (Canadian Anti-Hate Network, 2023). The movement “1 Million March 4 Children” is considered as a part of the widespread parental rights movement and anti-gender movement carried out in various cities throughout Canada. “Hands Off Our Kids” is one of the main organizing groups. According to their website, the movement is “dedicated to safeguarding parental rights and advocating for the removal of intrusive elements of sexual orientation and gender ideology from the educational system” (Hands off Our Kids, 2023). They openly stated that they do not fight against the LGBTQ community. However, in the letter template for the Minister of Education on their website, it’s stated that they believe “gender identity and expression are innately connected to biological sex”, and they object mixed-gender or gender-neutral washrooms, change rooms, and mixed gender sports.

On this day, more than 1,000 people reportedly participated in demonstrations in Vancouver, and thousands gathered in front of Parliament Hill in Ottawa. More than 1,000 counter-protesters were present at Queen’s Park in Toronto (Alberga & DeClerq, 2023), and hundreds of protesters and counter-protesters demonstrated in downtown Halifax (Cuthbertson et al., 2023). Reports from British Columbia, Ontario and Nova Scotia indicate multiple arrests (CBC news, 2023). Prime Minister Justin Trudeau expressed his support for LGBTQ people via X (formerly Twitter). Additionally, The Canadian Press advised Conservative MPs to avoid publicly commenting on the protests on Parliament Hill (Taylor, 2023).

### **Parental Rights**

Parental rights have long been used as a political issue and tool. Eichner (2022) outlines the significant impact of the parental rights movement in the United States since the 1970s and the laws proposed by various states. These include policies and regulations such as prohibiting discussions about abortion, giving parents the right to decide whether their children should wear masks and receive vaccinations during the COVID-19 pandemic, restricting school education on sexual orientation and gender identity, banning Critical Race Theory education, and giving parents the right to decide their children's names and pronouns, etc.

In anti-gender movements, the debate among political and religious conservatives around parental rights has been largely directed at public schools as places of progressive education. They believe that they have the rights to control the contents and ideas their children learn at school, medical decisions, and values (Ashley, 2024). They wish to limit their children's exposure to ideas they find unacceptable (Ganshorn, 2024; Hornbeck, 2023). Ganshorn (2024) points out a similarity between the coalition of neoliberal market fundamentalists and neoconservative religious elements that are concerned about the "indoctrination" and "grooming" of their children and seek to take more control of beliefs in education by supporting publicly funded school choice and opting out of public education. Claire Greslé-Favier (2009) explains how Christian conservatives use the agenda of parental rights to reaffirm traditional family values and patriarchal hierarchies, limit state intervention, and emphasise that parents have the right to control their children's moral values, opposing sex education in schools in order to "raise sexually pure children." Hornbeck (2023) clarifies that parental rights put individual parental interests supersede those of students, state, or community.

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The idea of parental rights is supported politically by the conservative parties in Canada. In Alberta, publicly funded school choice policies are considered desirable. Additionally, New Brunswick and Saskatchewan have introduced policies whereby children under the age of 16 must obtain parental consent if they wish to use a different name or pronoun in school. New Brunswick Education Minister Bill Hogan and Saskatchewan Premier Scott Moe both used the language of protect “parents’ right” (Ashley, 2024).

### **Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI)**

“Gender ideology” emerged as a term from conservative and religious groups, particularly the Vatican, as a response to feminist and LGBTQ+ advancements during early 1990s UN World Conferences. It was initially used to criticize progressive policies on reproductive rights and gender equality, suggesting these ideologies contravene the natural differences and roles of men and women (Corredor, 2019).

The concept has been politicized and used as a slogan in anti-gender mobilizations globally. Different contexts have seen varied interpretations, but commonly, it serves as a critique against the liberalization of gender and sexuality norms, perceived as threats to traditional societal structures (Graff, 2016; Corredor, 2019). Corredor (2019) conceptualized gender ideology as “a rhetorical counterstrategy” of the right-wing. Conservative groups such as Action4Canada (2022) consider SOGI as “sexualization of children”. They are referring it to the program and resource named “SOGI 123” by the ARC Foundation alongside British Columbia’s Ministry of Education (Srivastava, 2020). It is worth noting that in the “SOGI 123” program, “SOGI” stands for “sexual orientations and gender identities” (SOGI 123, 2025). However, it was interpreted as “sexual orientation and gender ideology” by opponents as Hands Off Our Kids (2023). This initiative aims to educate and create inclusive environments for students with diverse gender identities and sexual

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orientations, illustrating a direct response to the biases and misconceptions often propagated by opponents of gender ideology. Johnson and Falcetta (2021) discuss the backlash against incorporating SOGI content into education, where opponents, often from faith-based groups, claim it promotes premature sexualization and contradicts traditional family values.

The present debate about parental rights in schools versus SOGI has been intensified during COVID-19. In the United States, for example, amid the widespread panic brought on by COVID-19, the rhetoric and strategies of some conservative politicians and activists have boosted conservative advocacy for parental rights. Coupled with the huge impact that legalizing same-sex marriage has had on American politics, conservative parent groups such as “Moms for Liberty” have gained a great deal of traction. The views of these anti-government organizations range from opposing COVID-19 public health regulations to opposing LGBTQ+ and racially inclusive school curricula and advocating for book bans (Hornbeck, 2023). In Canada, conservative groups like “Take Back Alberta” and “Action4Canada” have been trying to take over school boards to combat “gender ideology” in schools during recent years (Ganshorn, 2024).

### **Anti-Genderism and the Far-Right**

Kováts et al. (2015) discussed how anti-genderism utilized the tools of historical enlightenment to unite conservative and far-right political parties, targeting the LGBTQ community in order to strengthen Christian cohesion in Europe. This strategy contributed significantly to the success of far-right parties in European elections, where anti-genderism works as “a symbolic glue.” Rawłuszko (2021) examines the democratic shortcomings of the Europeanization of gender policies, which have often bypassed extensive public participation and parliamentary oversight. This top-down approach to policy implementation fuels anti-gender mobilization, and opponents portray these policies as examples of nation-states losing control over

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undemocratic supranational entities. This narrative resonates with broader public concerns about democratic control and declining trust in state institutions.

The effectiveness of anti-genderism in mobilizing support lends credence to its examination as a significant component of far-right ideology. The far right is a broad term used to describe political tendencies. There is no universal definition, and it varies widely across governments and languages (Davey & Ebner, 2017), with differences influenced by factors such as political culture, value systems, and ideology (Sotlar, 2004). However, the concepts of “extreme right,” “far right,” “alternative right,” and “right-wing extremism” have been widely applied by academics. According to Mudde’s (1995) summarization, right-wing extremism is characterized by exclusivism, which is manifested in nationalism, racism and xenophobia; and by right-wing characteristics, which are anti-democracy and advocating for a strong state. The anti-democratic features are often characterized by targeting of racial, religious and sexual minorities, with an emphasis on authority and hierarchical order at its core (Caiani et al., 2012). Castelli Gattinara and Pirro (2019) emphasize the difference between the extreme right and the radical-right within the umbrella concept of the “far right”, distinguishing between “extreme right” entities that are in direct opposition to the democratic constitutional order, and “radical-right” groups that operate within democratic norms. It is also argued that the generality of the definition of far right should be maintained in research because the emergence of Internet behaviors may push the boundaries in the traditional definition (Crosset et al., 2019). Miller-Idriss (2020) also argues that the term “far right” should be used as a set of beliefs and approaches. Mudde (2019) sees this definitional ambiguity as a factor that contributes to members finding common ground with each other and mobilizing. This thesis will also apply an aggregated definition, using the term “far right group”

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to refer to groups with anti-democratic, anti-equality, racist, terrorist, authoritarian, ultranationalist, homophobic, transphobic, etc. views and approaches.

### **Approach and Theories in Past Studies**

#### *Social movement theory, mobilization approach and frame analysis*

In analyzing the radical right, Caiani and Della Porta (2018) highlight how social movement theory concepts offer valuable insights into far-right dynamics. These concepts prioritize “political opportunities rather than social threats, organizational resources rather than grievances, frames rather than ideology, repertoire rather than violence, networks rather than individual pathologies, and relations rather than structures” (p.328). By viewing the far right as a social movement, the focus shifts to its political opportunities, mobilization structures, and framing strategies (Caiani & Della Porta, 2018).

Caiani et al. (2012) contrast the traditional sociological breakdown theories with mobilization approaches. Whereas breakdown theories associate far-right extremism with rapid social change and disintegration of social ties, mobilization theories prioritize the interplay of organizational structures and networks that shape the mobilizing capacity of the far right. This approach acknowledges the relational, cognitive, and emotional effects of protest actions on participants, helping construct a collective identity essential for further mobilization.

By considering the extreme right’s organizational structure and networks, Caiani et al. (2012) reveal the complex interplay between various actors linked in cooperative and competitive relationships. This network-oriented approach examines how the extreme right forges alliances and frames issues to mobilize sympathizers. Caiani et al. also claimed that frame analysis is

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particularly useful in understanding how far-right organizations bridge diverse concerns and strategize their actions.

### *Movement-counter-movement theory*

Movement-counter-movement theory offers a crucial framework for understanding the dynamics between social movements and their opponents (Corredor, 2019). This perspective insists that we need to understand movement by considering their counter-movements, as their interactions significantly influence strategies and resources on both sides. Corredor integrates movement-counter-movement theory to analyze the dynamics between anti-gender campaigns and feminist/LGBTQ+ social movements. He argues that anti-gender campaigns as counter-movements have adopted gender ideology rhetoric as a primary counter-strategy to mobilize support, neutralize feminist and LGBTQ+ movements, and gain control over the concept of gender.

Corredor (2019) identifies four fundamental conditions that give rise to counter-movement activity:

1. The presence of a social movement seeking to challenge existing power structures.
2. A privileged collective perceiving its interests as threatened by the social movement.
3. The social movement demonstrating signs of policy success or being perceived as likely to achieve its objectives.
4. Opponents of the social movement having political allies and resources to support counter-mobilization.

Understanding the movement-counter-movement dynamic is essential for comprehending the strategies and impacts of social movements and their opponents. This thesis utilizes this theory

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to describe the “1 Million March 4 Children” movement as countermovement and examine their strategies.

### *Trust-building theories*

The solidarity and mobilization in social movement groups requires political trust, public trust as well as trust between group members. Trust is defined as a belief or confidence that an individual, characterized by honesty, benevolence, competencies, will take actions in the future that are likely to result in beneficial outcomes for the truster, especially in situations where there is perceived risk and vulnerability (Castaldo, Premazzi, & Zerbini, 2010). Mayer et al. (1995) defined trust as “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party” (p. 712). They believe that the factors of perceived trustworthiness include ability, benevolence, integrity. Childers Hon and Grunig (1999) defined trust with similar dimensions: “integrity: the belief that an organization is fair and just ... dependability: the belief that an organization will do what it says it will do ... and, competence: the belief that an organization has the ability to do what it says it will do” (p. 3). There are three analytical dimensions of trust-cognitive, emotional, and behavioral (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). Zaheer et al. (1998) stress that due to the ambiguity about the multilevel nature of trust, it is necessary to study trust at both the macro and micro levels within an organization. In an organizational context, research points out trust can be conceptualized as an organizing principle that can motivate participants to contribute to collective action and integrate resources through structuring and mobilizing pathways (McEvily et al., 2003).

In the context of social movements, activist groups also need to gain both internal and external public trust to effectively mobilize their support, influence policy changes, and achieve

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their social or political goals. Weipert-Fenner et al. (2024) argue that there are two types of trust that are relevant for social movements: vertical political trust, which is “the level of trust that members of social movements have in specific political institutions or in their political regime more broadly”, and horizontal intra-movement trust, which is “the level of trust between individual and collective members of social movements and broader protest networks.” (p.6) Within intra-personal trust, three different levels are included: personal level, ingroup level, and outgroup level. They believe that not only trust is an independent variable for mobilization, but social movements can also shape social relations by deliberately attempting to create or destroy trust.

By synthesizing movement-counter-movement theory with trust-building theories in social movements, we can better understand how anti-gender movements like “1 Million March 4 Children” use strategies of building and undermining trust to mobilize supporters.

## **Methodology**

### **Philosophical Assumptions of Qualitative Research**

This study adopts a constructivist worldview, emphasizing that knowledge is constructed through human interaction and experience. It employs a qualitative research methodology to explore the subjective realities of the participants involved in the 1 Million March 4 Children movement. This approach provides insights into how supporters of the movement interpret their participation, communicate their views, and mobilize through social media.

### **Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedures**

During the data collection process, I collected data from X (formerly Twitter) using specific hashtags associated with the movement (e.g., #handsoffourkids, #1MillionMarchForChildren, #LeaveOurKidsAlone, and #StopSOGI) from September 20, 2023 to October 21, 2023. The analysis focuses on identifying themes and patterns in these tweets to understand the movement supporters' narratives and mobilization and trust-building strategies and counter strategies against counter protesters. Data collection ended on the day of the second round of the march to capture real time engagement and avoid censorship of public discourse over time.

After reading the data, I found a high rate of duplication across the four hashtag datasets. Among them, #handsoffourkids had the largest dataset, with 503 entries, and a higher proportion of tweets from supporters of the movement—particularly those referencing the 2023 march. Therefore, this study selected and manually coded each tweet containing #handsoffourkids. Prior to coding, I removed duplicates, non-English content (2.6%), and content that was clearly expressing the standpoint of the counter-protesters (1.6%). A thematic analysis approach was

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applied to categorize the data by using open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. I identified four themes and provided detailed data descriptions of each of them.

### **Theoretical Framework**

During the thematic categorization phase, the study applies the lens of both movement-counter-movement theory and trust-building theories. This study considers 1 Million March 4 Children as a counter-movement to the broader queer movement by its very nature and analyzes how the dynamics of both sides in their interactions affect the movement's mobilization. It is worth noting that during this movement in 2023, transgender rights supporters also held counter-protests against the movement, so transgender rights supporters are referred to as counter protesters in this movement. Since the subject of this article is the supporters of 1 Million March 4 Children, transgender rights supporters are referred to as counter-protesters, and the side of 1 Million March 4 Children is referred to as supporters. Incorporating trust-building theory, I focused on identifying the ways in which the 1 Million March 4 Children movement build trust for their groups as well as break down the other side's trustworthiness in order to destabilize their relationship with the public.

During the data analyzation, this study referenced trust-building theories, primarily trust categories associated with social movements outlined by Weipert-Fenner et al. (2024) which include vertical political trust and horizontal intra-movement trust. Intra-movement trust consists of three levels: personal, ingroup, and outgroup. Outgroup trust also refers to public trust. At each level of trust-building strategies, specific trust-building elements—ability, benevolence, integrity, and dependability—that are utilized are identified, as well as how these elements are articulated, framed, and disseminated to strengthen the group's trustworthiness. This means that activist

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groups, through their communication, aim to convey to the public that they are able, competent, have integrity, and are dependable.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In this study, the researcher maintained the role of an observer, analyzing the data without direct interaction with the subjects. This position is essential to ensure objectivity and adherence to ethical standards of research, which requires careful interpretation of the data without influencing it through personal involvement.

### **Strategies for Validating Research Findings**

To validate the findings of the study, this study employed the following strategies:

Self-reflection. I articulate my positionality and how it may affect the interpretation of the data. I am deeply connected with the local LGBTQ+ community through my work and personal relationships. My interest in this research stems from a commitment to understanding and supporting LGBTQ+ rights especially transgender rights. I anticipate finding strategies and narratives used by anti-gender groups and will bracket these assumptions to ensure impartiality. This research allows me to enhance my advocacy efforts while remaining mindful of my privileges and biases. I also sought feedback from individuals from diverse experiences to guide my self-scrutiny and objectivity throughout the study.

Presenting Conflicting Evidence. To ensure a balanced analysis, this study also presents data that may contradict or challenge the dominant themes.

### **Anticipated ethical issues**

Ethical issues that will be prioritized in this study include:

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Anonymity of social media users. The research only used publicly available social media content. For data that do not need to be cited individually or are highly homogeneous, I aggregated them so that the data in each aggregated category come from multiple respondents, rather than specific individuals, thereby diminishing the identifiability of individuals. When referencing individual user-generated content, I pseudonymized the user by replacing personal identifiers with numeric codes. Upon completion of the study, I further anonymized the data by permanently removing all personally identifiable information (including coding references) from the dataset.

Harm Reduction. This study is designed to avoid sensitive personal information and to ensure that all viewpoints are respected, thus ensuring that no harm will be caused to participants or those being studied.

### Results

The thematic analysis of tweets from supporters participating in the movement discussion revealed four major categories: clarifying arguments and trust-building, mobilizing supporters and calls to action, counterstrategy and trust-destroying, and related sharing with less intent to debate. With reference to the movement-counter-movement theory and the trust-building theory, I began my categorisation by dividing the content of the data that carried out viewpoint interpretation into two main categories, which are positively outputting their own perspective—*clarifying arguments and trust-building*, and negatively countering the other side's perspective—*counterstrategy and trust-destroying*. Content that is less about expressing ideas and more about inspiring action is classified as *mobilizing supporters*. *Related sharing with less intent to debate* is not listed separately in the analysis results because its contents were either irrelevant to the research question or were discussed in other categories.

#### **Clarifying Arguments and Trust-building**

Among the four categories, arguments and trust-building category includes themes of patriotism, diversity, and unity, parental rights, opinions to LGBTQ+ and sex education, broader political opinions and defence against accusations. Trust was identified as one of the key factors motivating people to participate in the protests (Benson & Rochon, 2004). In analyzing X users' compliments about the movement and its allies, as well as their clarification of opinions, this study also focuses on identifying trust-building strategies.

#### ***Patriotism, Diversity, and Unity***

Supporters complement and cheer at the large number of people in the protest, emphasizing that there are more protesters than counter-protesters:

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“We outnumbered them may be 4 to 1”

“We kept the counter-protestors in check!”

“Millions came out today in support of parents while a tiny minority came out to antagonize and try to start fights that were against parental rights.”

This is also reflected in the naming of the movement (“One Million”). On a factual basis, the researcher did not find statistics comparing the number of protesters and counter-protesters. According to pro-LGBTQ+ media reports, counter-protesters far outnumbered protesters (Woods, 2023; Phillips, 2023; Ronson, 2023).

Supporters’ description of the number of protesters on X might be influenced by cognitive biases due to their own position, or it might be a mobilization and rhetorical strategy. By emphasizing their numbers to signal broad support, supporters frame their cause as a democratic majority position. Emphasizing their numbers is also a way of demonstrating the reach of their groups and their mobilization ability, thus demonstrating their competence to build trust.

Starting from the viewpoint or rhetoric of “a large number of people”, supporters have extended the compliment of “Canadians of ALL religions & colour unite” and “diversified” to the protesters. Emphasizing the diversity of protesters is also a legitimization strategy to demonstrate that their positions are representative of the broader population. Diversity is typically associated with contemporary liberalism, and by employing this framing, anti-gender activists seek to dispel criticisms that their movement is discriminatory or exclusive. This strategy has also been observed in far-right nationalist movements (Tetrault, 2024), where Canadian nationalist movements present themselves as mainstream and tolerant by utilizing the familiar language of civil libertarianism,

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and by doing so, they broaden their appeal while attempting to distance themselves from accusations of extremism.

In the rhetoric of unity, “Canada” and “Canadians” are often used as the subject, which shows the attempt to arouse patriotic emotions. During the protests, the “1 Million March 4 Children’s side was identified by holding Canadian flags, which was also recommended on the organizer Hands off Our Kids’ website (Hands off Our Kids, 2023), along with holding up the banner “CANADA HAS ONE FLAG”. This slogan and the Canadian flag were used as a response and objection to the pride rainbow flag held by counter-protesters. Such a statement also appears in the data of this research:

“True Rainbow is when followers of different faiths coming together for a cause.”

Such attacks on the rainbow flag as a symbol of LGBTQ+ coincide with the narrative of the #ReclaimTheRainbow movement, which was started by conservative Christians to accuse the queer community of misappropriation of the religious symbol (Studebaker & Whiteside, 2025). By redefining the symbol of the rainbow, the protesters have put themselves in the position of victims, reframing the rainbow flag as an appropriation of the Canadian flag, further implying a violation of patriotism by the queer community.

This narrative of amplifying issues is considered in framework theory to be a strategic process of frame amplification, which involves embellishing and idealizing existing values in social movements (Benford & Snow, 2000). Through frame amplification, the protesters clarified and invigorated their conservative ideas about gender into more universal and admirable values, such as love, patriotism and unity. The emphasis placed on these values demonstrates their integrity, which is one of the factors that earns the trust of the public.

### *Parental Rights*

The data shows that emphasis on parental rights is a central argument in the 1 Million March 4 Children movement. Protesters frequently mention in their tweets that their main demand is to “protect our children.” They argue that protesters are “good people who just care about their kids.” They believe that parental rights are human rights, and that parents have the right to decide how to raise their children. Parents know their children best, have full responsibility for them, and have ownership over them. Children should obey their parents and not keep any secrets from them.

**Parents as a Collective Identity.** The tweets about parental rights first construct a collective group identity in which each member is defined as a parent. This is evident in tweets such as:

“Parents know best.”

“Parents should have a say in their children’s learning that align with their values.”

“My kids, my responsibility!”

“Loving parents standing up for their kids.”

Parents have authoritative biological and legal status, and the moral obligation to protect their children from external threats. The formation of this collective identity strengthens the identity of its members, cultivating a sense of belonging and a collective consciousness. Under this collective identity, members work towards a shared goal, which is “uniting to fight the State on behalf of the kids”. The political goal of activism was thus extended to a moral obligation as parents, which strengthened the internal trust and loyalty of the protesters and shaped the protesters’ image as benevolent and righteous to obtain external trust.

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By contrasting the righteous parents with the external threat, they were fighting against (e.g., “Our values are being trampled by the hateful abusive LGBTQ religious cult SEXUALIZING CHILDREN and trying to steal parents rights away from them”, “The government doesn’t own our kids. The teachers and their unions don’t own our kids. They are OUR kids.”), the tweets also created a binary opposition narrative of “us vs. them”. The rhetoric constructed a clear enemy, which is government agencies, teachers, LGBTQ+ activists, etc. They were framed as oppressors, while parents were framed as victims defending their children, thus reinforcing the protesters’ collective identity and antagonism towards the other side. The use of “Canada” and “Canadians” as the subject and emphasizing “Canadians of ALL religions & colour unite”, as pointed out above, is also a strategy of constructing a collective identity which is “Canadians” to enhance solidarity within the group.

**Parental Rights as a Legal Discourse.** In the data from this study, the tweet posters used the hashtag #parentsknowbest. The idea that “parents know best” and that parental rights should take precedence over government policy is a recurring theme in conservative and far-right movements. Parental rights have been used in the contemporary parental rights movements to oppose policies related to sex education, LGBTQ+ inclusion, and public health interventions (Hornbeck, 2023). To justify parental rights, the tweeters claim that:

“The government doesn’t own our kids. The teachers and their unions don’t own our kids. They are OUR kids.”

“Parental rights>government”

“We have the emotional, legal, and financial responsibility for the child.”

“Parents will inform their CHILDREN as they raise them.”

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These arguments suggest that they believe parental rights are something that parents are entitled to, and that parents naturally have superior knowledge of the best interests of the child than other subjects such as the government and educational institutions. According to this understanding of parental entitlement, parental rights are independent of the interests of the child, and parents have control over the child regardless of whether the decisions they make promote or harm the interests of the child (Ashley, 2024). By using legal language of parental “rights”, the supporters of the movement obscure the nature of parental rights, which implies that the will of parents can be independent of the interests of their children, and thus rhetorically demonstrate the legitimacy of this claim.

Supporters also mentioned that “parental rights are human rights.” This statement reflects the appropriation of discourse, in which conservative movements borrow human rights language to advance their agenda. This strategy reflects the way in which far right and anti-gender movements appropriate civil rights discourse to justify opposition to progressive policies (Tetrault, 2024). Additionally, an entry has mentioned abortion rights to support parental rights:

“I’m so glad I have the right to choose to kill the baby in my womb, but if I choose not to kill it, do I have the right to choose how to raise it?”

This argument can also be seen as a frame appropriation or a frame bridging strategy. Abortion rights, as an important proposition in the feminist movement, are generally supported by progressive activists who seek gender equality (Joffe, 2005). By confirming their position in support of abortion rights, the poster aligns part of their identity with progressives and then throws out the reasoning that “if I have the right to kill the baby in the womb, I should have the right to choose how to raise the baby.” In this reasoning, they first confuse the concepts of “baby in my womb” and “baby,” equating the fetus with a human being with an independent personality and

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thus argue that they should have the same rights over their child as they would over the fetus. Such an argument with the feature of frame appropriation is reminiscent of how anti-vaccine activists' appropriation of the abortion rights movement's slogan "My Body My Choice" during the Covid-19 pandemic has caused malicious attacks on the reproductive rights movement (Blom, 2024).

**Parental Rights as Property-Like Interests.** Another notable aspect is that supporters emphasize the ownership of children by parents through statements such as "kids belong to God and their parents" and "They are OUR kids". At the protest site, there were children seen holding signs that shows "I belong to my parents" (Short, 2023), which is also one of the slogans approved by one of the organizers "Hands Off Our Kids" (2023). The organization also encouraged parents to take their children out of school to protest at the scene. And in fact, the protesters did so (Cresswell, 2023), with children carrying politically charged signs being wedged between the police, protesters and counter-protesters. Whether it is from the tweets, slogans, or the behavior of the protesting parents taking their children out of school and bringing them to the scene of the conflict-filled protests, it shows the protesters' intention to control and possess the children. As Ashley (2024) explains in arguing for the illegitimacy of parental rights, treating children as solely a means rather than an end is a dehumanization that treats children like property by exploiting their dependency. The fact that they have their children hold up signs that state "I belong to my parents" during protests is a direct reflection of treating their children as a means, because the children become part of the protest props in this manner.

**Parental Rights as a Religious and Moral Imperative.** Religious discourse is frequently found in the data, such as the statements on honouring of parents (especially fathers) and obedience to them:

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“Honour thy #father and thy #mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the #LORD thy #God giveth thee.”

“Children’s children are the crown of old #Men &the glory of children are their #fathers.”

“My son, keep your #father’s commandment, and forsake not your #mother’s teaching.”

This corresponds to conservative Christian values and moral traditionalism, and these religious statements are used to justify the sanctity of parental authority. If seen from the perspective of conservative Christian ideology, the advocacy of parental rights and opposition to sex education is not hard to understand. Claire Greslé-Favier (2009) explains in their book *‘Raising Sexually Pure Kids’: Sexual Abstinence, Conservative Christians and American Politics* that for conservative Christians, children are the parents’ “possession” and are essentially on loan from God (as evidenced by the statement “kids belong to God and their parents” in the data of this study). Therefore, parents must guide their children to lead a “purest” life following God’s will. However, the emphasis on the rights of the child as an independent individual contradicts the hierarchical concept of the family defined in the Bible. Meanwhile, sex education in schools has “replaced” parents and religious authorities and questioned their moral standards by conveying the idea of “neutral morality”.

Therefore, sex education for children and the protection of children’s rights by schools and governments as secular institutions have become the targets of conservative Christians. By sanctifying parents’ ownership of their children and blending parental rights with religious obligations, they legitimize the claims of the parental rights movement and the anti-gender movement and pave the way for moral accusations against the opposition.

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**“Protect Our Children”**. Ironically, when I was looking for evidence that supporters build trust through the discourse of parental rights, I expected them to demonstrate benevolence by expressing parental love and care for their children to build trust, as “protecting our children” is one of their most common slogans. However, there were no obvious tweets in the data of this study that advocated for the interests of children and thought of them. The entries that are most closely aligned with protecting the interests of children are only “Leave the innocence of children” and “Children go to school to learn LANGUAGE & MATH & SCIENCE.” Among them, the claim to protect the “innocence” of children means that they are expected to remain “pure” and to stay away from sex and gender education. In this expectation, what they really “protect” is a conservative and even shaming attitude towards sex, and in the case of conservative Christianity, abstinence. They are also “protecting” ignorance of gender knowledge. The idea that “children go to school to learn LANGUAGE & MATH & SCIENCE” is more of a meritocratic parental expectation. These two seemingly child-oriented statements do not focus on the physical and mental health and overall development of children from the perspective of children, which makes it hard to believe their claim that they are “Loving parents standing up for their kids.”

What is even more concerning is tweets that reads:

“No child should have secrets from their parents.”

“Parents will inform their CHILDREN as they raise them. Not a driven ideology from a stranger who then drives a wedge by demanding they keep sexual secrets with a child.”

These claims deny the privacy rights that minors retain from their parents by phrasing privacy as “secrets” and “sexual secrets.” The reason why parents are so concerned about their children’s “sexual secrets” - their sexual orientation or gender identity - is because they disapprove

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of or even want to interfere with their children's diverse identities, which is precisely why children keep these "secrets" from them. Due to these parents' intolerance toward the LGBTQ+ community, especially transgender people, disclosing sexual privacy to them is in fact harmful to children. A large amount of literature and empirical research related to the information privacy of minors (e.g., Gilbert, 2007) has already shown that minors have the right not to disclose their sex-related information privacy to their parents, and there is no reason for the government to disclose this information to their parents. In terms of sexual healthcare, the lack of confidentiality from parents will instead increase the risks to the physical and mental health of minors (Cullitan, 2011; Klein et al., 1999; Kretz, 2013; O'Shaughnessy, 1996; Ramos, 1996; Reddy et al., 2002). The claim that children should not be allowed to keep secrets from parents also refers specifically to sexual privacy in this protest. This claim implies that parents want to find out about and possibly control their children's sexual orientation, gender identity and even sexual behavior. From children's perspective, this "protection" may be more oppressing than caring.

### *Opinions to LGBTQ+ and Sex Education*

One of the main targets of 1 Million March 4 Children is gender identity education in schools and the recognition of transgender people in society and the media. By claiming parental rights, the protesters' primary goal in this movement is to regain control over what their children are taught in school, especially the removal of content related to sexual orientation and gender identity. This makes their opposition to LGBTQ+ and especially transgender people clear, even though they claim in the official statement that they do not oppose LGBTQ+ (Hands off Our Kids, 2023).

**Anti Transgender.** Protesters' objections to transgenderism mainly include denial of the conceptual distinction between sex and gender and denial of the fluidity and non-binary nature of

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gender. They believe trans rights are anti-human rights, and transgender identity is harmful for children. First, through arguments such as the following, protesters describe their arguments as based on objective science:

“There are two genders. Finished. Klaar. Facts. Science. Biology. Not Juju’s woodwork.”

“Feelings are not facts.”

Protesters try to support their position on gender with scientifically authoritative explanations, while describing opposing positions and scientific findings as “Juju’s woodwork” and “feelings.” By focusing on the biology of the binary sex, they deny the social significance of gender, including socially constructed roles, behaviors, expressions, and identities. This is a form of essentialist thinking about gender, which has been shown to be one of the causes of gender stereotypes and prejudice (Eidson & Coley, 2014; Hotine & Swan, 2021; Skewes et al., 2018). However, gender essentialism is an outdated but long-standing view of gender that is common particularly among conservatives. The emphasis on the scientific and biological basis of the gender binary makes it easy for people with gender essentialist thinking to believe that it is indisputable truth. And because the distinction between biological sex and social gender and the non-binary nature of gender are such delicate and complex subjects, adopting an arbitrary rhetoric that stops people from thinking more deeply and accepting the gender binary is effectively giving brains a shortcut.

Similar as arguments on parental rights, the protesters again borrowed human rights language yet to attack trans rights:

“#Trans = anti human (rights)”

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“Kids rights in living an innocent children is human right. Trans operations for kids is a crime against humanity.”

“Canadian and Wet declare trans humanism is their priority which is anti #HumanRights for ALL.”

It is hard to understand the logic behind the comments that “trans rights are anti human rights”, which portraying transgender advocacy as oppressive rather than liberatory. One of the counter-protest’s slogans is “trans rights are human rights”, which I would argue is the target of “trans rights are anti human rights” counterattack. This argument not only denies the human rights of transgender people but also accuses supporting transgenderism of being an attack on human rights. Here, “human rights” obviously refer to the “human rights” of people other than the transgender community, which is a dehumanization of the transgender community. And according to this logic, transgender operations and support for transgenderism contribute to turning a “human” into a transgender person, whom they consider “non-human,” so this is anti “human” rights.

**Anti LGBTQ+.** In this section, I try to pick out only the statements that convey their own opinions with reasoning rather than attacking the other side, although these are rare. Majority if the anti LGBTQ+ comments are made through accusations against LGBTQ+ community and supporters, which will be discussed in later sections.

The most common opinion indicating an opposing attitude towards LGBTQ+ is against schools, teachers’ unions and teachers displaying the rainbow flag:

“The school boards decided to raise the pride flag; nothing for the #Parents.”

“A local teacher from Ottawa comes to classes wearing LGBTQ flags. Your own sex life has no place in school, sir!”

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“Note the sickening display of a sexual propaganda flag on the headquarters of the @albertateachers.”

The controversy over the LGBTQ+ pride flag is nothing new and is often linked to demands for parental rights (Casey, 2022; Factor, 2023; Sampson, 2023). There is a petition of “No LGBT ‘Pride’ flags at our schools” started by the website Campaign Life Coalition (2025) that has been signed by over 27,000 people, which states that “The LGBT Pride flag is a political symbol that divides our communities and creates conflict. It therefore has no place on the school grounds.” In response to these controversies, research has shown that the public display of the rainbow flag in schools is legitimate and provides a sense of safety and belonging for students from sexual minorities (Eckes, 2024; Robertson, 2005; Wolowic et al., 2016). The comments in the above tweet put parents on the opposite side of the rainbow flag by emphasising “nothing for the #Parents”, while also placing parents in the role of unrepresented victims. By defaming the rainbow flag and associating it with sexual propaganda, they try to portray an image of parents as the protective, pure side.

This contrast between “filth” and “purity” is a key device used by protest supporters to vilify LGBTQ+ people and shape their own narratives. As another tweet implies, homosexuality is opposed to the value of family:

“Stand as one against this filth of homosexuality, and protect what is most precious to society, families.”

Family values rhetoric was one of the most common political discourses used by Christian evangelicals and conservative politicians in the 1970s to 1990s. The classic conservative argument against the gay rights movement was that homosexuals were evading their family responsibilities

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selfishly and immorally (Dowland, 2015). One of the harmful aspects of this view is that it denies the possibility of sexual minorities forming a family or a “normal” family, and this is the only logic that can explain why they consider sexual minorities to be the antithesis of families. Family values have been such a central and important part of political propaganda for so long that any ideas or behaviours that are interpreted as being contrary to those values are easily targeted. By using language as “stand as one against” and “protect what is most precious to society,” it builds collective confidence and positions their group as protectors of family values as shared social norms.

Another tweet writes that:

“(pan, trans, non binary, gay, lesbian, and whatever other gender identities are available)  
It’s about Social contingent and Trends. Majority are not any of this.”

This statement implies that diverse gender identities are not legitimate identities, but rather social fads or trends. It denies LGBTQ+ as a real identity or life experience and instead attributes it to peer pressure or cultural manipulation, which is superficial and artificial, simply because “the majority are not any of this.” As mentioned above, the protesters emphasised that they outnumbered the counter-protesters. This tweet once again highlights the “majority” in debates against LGBTQ+. Because the majority are not LGBTQ+, teaching content related to them is not worth appearing in schools, issues related to them are not worth mentioning, and individuals in the community are not worth paying attention to. On the contrary, portraying oneself as the majority enhances the legitimacy and representativeness of their opinions, even though this conceals indifference towards minorities.

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In this tweet, the informal tone, “whatever other gender identities are available”, uses a dismissive rhetorical device. It trivialises and ridicules gender diversity through colloquial language. Within the group of protesters, this rhetoric sends an unspoken signal: “We see through the absurdity, and so do you.” This shared sense of “knowing” strengthens internal trust and cohesion. On the contrary of this “absurdity” of LGBTQ+, this rhetoric makes members of the protester groups as the “majority” feel part of a group with “common sense” beliefs, thus they are more likely to trust each other and remain committed to the movement.

**Anti Sex Education.** Regarding opposition to sex education and SOGI123, the protesters’ core position is that schools should adhere to their “true” academic purpose of teaching subjects such as math, language, and science, and that the LGBTQ+ movement has caused them to deviate from this purpose and move into fields of progressive ideology and moral corruption. These comments include:

“Kids can’t read or do math, but they now know dozens of genders and all kinds of sexual acts.”

“Children go to school to learn LANGUAGE & MATH & SCIENCE.”

They believe that education should be neutral and traditional, emphasising standardised curricula and low-level cognitive activities, which is a common argument in right-wing educational discourse (Kincheloe, 2006). On the contrary, sex education and gender diversity discussions are inappropriate, unnecessary, and even harmful in schools. They use crisis rhetoric to emphasise that progressive education will lead to “Kids can’t read or do math.” While by addressing “they now know dozens of genders and all kinds of sexual acts”, they try to associate sex education with sexual depravity and danger, describing the issue as an urgent and serious moral

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problem, arousing people's concerns and fears about children's safety and maintaining "purity". These emotions are a powerful mobilising tool for parents.

They also try to inspire a sense of cultural nostalgia, hoping to "return to" the time when schools should be apolitical and "old school." Another tweet compliments:

"KUDOS TO THIS TEACHER FOR STANDING HER "OLD SCHOOL" GROUND AGAINST THE SENSELESS COLLAPSE OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND THE LATEST COMICAL GENDER IDEOLOGY HOAX."

The comments about the "collapse of the English language" and the "latest comical gender ideology hoax" here frame gender-inclusive language as not only misleading, but also as a deliberate attack on standardised knowledge and culture. Protesters and their supporters, such as this teacher who refuses to use gender-inclusive language, become the defenders of standards, discipline, civility and correct language, thereby reinforcing their internal group image of being rational, intelligent, principled and apolitical. Meanwhile, the reference to the teacher as a member of the education profession and public figure builds credibility through perceived authority, thereby establishing trust within and outside the group.

### ***Broader Political Opinions***

Under the hashtag #handsoffourkids, supporters of the movement have also expressed their opinions around other political issues besides the movement itself. In general, these views express a broader anti-liberal sentiment. They see the Liberal Party of Canada and the New Democratic Party (NDP) - in particular then-Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and NDP leader Jagmeet Singh - as morally corrupt and authoritarian. They portray these politicians as a threat to democracy and freedom while siding with right-wing political figures such as Donald Trump and Pierre Poilievre,

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whom they perceive as defenders of individual rights, religious freedom and conservative values. They also mentioned some opinions on other political issues.

**Opinions on Political Parties and Politicians.** On the day of the movement, September 20, 2023, then-Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (2023) posted on X:

“Let me make one thing very clear: Transphobia, homophobia, and biphobia have no place in this country. We strongly condemn this hate and its manifestations, and we stand united in support of 2SLGBTQI+ Canadians across the country - you are valid and you are valued.”.

On the 22nd, Pierre Poilievre (2023), leader of the Conservative Party of Canada, responded: “Justin Trudeau always divides to distract from all he has broken. This time, he is demonizing concerned parents. Parents should be the final authority on the values and lessons that are taught to children. Trudeau should butt out and let parents raise their kids.”.

Their confrontational statements about the movement prompted discussions of the movement around the political parties. In the data in this article, supporters of the movement posted comments such as:

“Canadians are now United. @JustinTrudeau Trudeau will no longer remain in power using his divide and conquer strategy. Thanks @PierrePoilievre for supporting concerned parents in their decision of how they want to raise their kids.”

“Let me make one thing very clear to you Mr. Trudeau: You are ignoring legal rights and freedoms of Canadian majority.”

“Careful protesters, Trudeau will be coming for your bank accounts soon!”

“#TrudeauDestroyingCanada”

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“JUSTIN TRUDEAU, YOU AND YOUR CORRUPT LIBERL PARTY HAVE NO PLACE IN CANADA.”

Their views are basically consistent with those of Pierre Poilievre, and they complimented him on his stance. While Poilievre being positioned as a trustworthy ally who supports parents and their decisions, Trudeau has been accused of being a threat to freedom, justice and democracy by using “divide and conquer strategy”. By using the same sentence structure as Trudeau’s statement as “Let me make one thing very clear to you Mr. Trudeau” and “YOU AND YOUR CORRUPT LIBERL PARTY HAVE NO PLACE IN CANADA”, these comments indicated that t they indicated that these were direct responses to his statement and were ironic. Although it is not new for Canadians to question and denounce Trudeau during his term of office, this movement has taken the denunciation to such a serious level that it has gone beyond his ability to govern and the specific decisions themselves, and has escalated to the moral level. One tweet reads:

“YES TRUDEAU IS A TREASONOUS THREAT TO HUMANITY.”

Statements as this reinforce the apparent ideological divide, characterizing Trudeau and the Liberal government as the common enemy of Canadians who actively undermine traditional values, and even the common enemy of all humanity. This hostility, with a clear target and exaggerated impact, had a powerful mobilizing effect in counter-movements, especially in a context where people were already dissatisfied with Trudeau and his government for various other reasons. This hostility has also extended from Trudeau to the Liberal Party, the New Democratic Party and its leader Jagmeet Singh:

“Another downfall for @JustinTrudeau and the #Liberal government. NO leader should be calling his own people names when they disagree with his policies!”

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“Mr. Trudeau and Mr. Singh stand with #Antifa and #CUPE. Never forget.”

“These 3 have caused more problems in Canada than anything else @JustinTrudeau @theJagmeetSingh @cupenat”

“Not surprised this ‘MeetHead’ was on the side of all the colourful ‘haters’. Surprised he pulled his head out of Trudeau’s arse long enough to attend. #JagmeetSinghMustGo”

In these comments, we can see a clear narrative of othering, which groups Trudeau, the Liberal Party, Singh and the NDP together as a team, who collectively form the enemy of Canadians and the culprit of Canada’s many social problems. Here, they portray so-called gender ideology as a social problem. Especially against Jagmeet Singh, they used contemptuous and derogatory personal insults to undermine his personal credibility, describing him as submissive, ignorant or morally corrupt, thereby inspiring emotional solidarity by expressing shared contempt for the political opponent. They also employed a broader rhetoric that implied an alliance between these political parties and controversial or negatively perceived entities such as Antifa, which were seen as extremist, violent, or disrupting social order. By identifying a clear and specific “enemy” together, the movement strengthens the sense of identity within the group and enhances ingroup trust.

Supporters of the movement also used predictive language to convince people that the decline of the Liberal Party was a foregone conclusion:

“Canadians are canceling their Liberal Party memberships thanks for @JustinTrudeau and the liberal divisive policies”

“Next vote will see the Liberals &NDP sink to unprecedented low levels.”

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“(replying to Trudeau) Look at all of these new Canadians in Edmonton who are probably never going to vote for you again. Your social engineering crossed a line when you came after our kids. Resign now.”

These negative predictions are not only threats to politicians and political parties, implying that “if you do not support our demands, you will lose our votes.” but also messages to voters that “the Liberal Party will obviously fail so you should make a wise choice.” Many of these posts about political parties are followed with hashtags like #CPC, #PPC, #LPC, #NDP, which shows their intention to influence the vote.

In addition to Canadian politicians, some tweets also mentioned support for Trump and used the hashtag #Trump2024. It is worth noting that these tweets were posted before Trump was elected President of the United States in 2024. One tweet read:

“Donald Trump said it right! ‘Our children are captives to unhinged Marxist educators who are pushing inappropriate sexual, racial, and political material on our children from the youngest possible age.’”

The Trump administration has actively demonstrated hostility and moral criticism towards transgender people (Moreau, 2018; Pepin-Neff & Cohen, 2021), which is reflected not only in Trump’s personal statements, but also in a series of discriminatory policies on education, healthcare, housing, and military service (Williams, 2019). His comments mentioned in this tweet were made more than once at rallies in 2022 (C-SPAN, 2022; Lane, 2022; REV, 2022), including a conference on “Road to the Majority” organized by the Faith and Freedom Coalition, the largest conservative Christian political organization in the United States (Allen, 2022). In these speeches, he also described public education system as “corrupt education cartel” and personally insulted

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transgender female athletes. The supporters of 1 Million March 4 Children's invocation of Trump's anti-crossover statements in tweets about the movement is a strategy of establishing authority and legitimacy for the core ideas of the movement. Trump has a particularly sharp and direct style of speech that appeals to a large number of fervent right-wing political believers, among whom he has great influence and authority. Even for the public beyond his supporters, he is still a celebrity who has achieved great success in business and politics, and his views still attract a great amount of attention. The core ideas of the campaign, which are to expand parental rights and oppose trans-gender and gender education, are directly and strongly mentioned in these speeches by Trump. The audience for these speeches, which are political conservatives and Christian conservatives, also coincides with the main supporters of the movement. The quotation of Trump's speech has strengthened the beliefs of both the supporters of 1 Million March 4 Children and Trump's supporters by giving mutual affirmation in their ideologies. The anti-transgender policies in the United States due to Trump's opinions have also given supporters of 1 Million March 4 Children confidence that similar changes will be made in Canada.

**Religious Rhetoric.** In addition to the conservative Christian worldview that supporters express when arguing for parental rights that are mentioned in previous section, other religions and broader religious discourse also appear in these tweets:

“At various #1MillionMarch4Children rallies, we had #christians #Sikhs #jews #Muslims #atheist. They were all united in one voice.”

“#Jews #Muslims #Christians #Hindu #Sikhs all people of faith in addition to #atheists #Agnostics came together.”

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The explicit reference to different religious identities suggests that their communications approach aims to broaden their perceived legitimacy and build a united alliance of diverse communities. By crafting an inclusive narrative frame, as opposed to marginal or extremist groups, these statements have weakened the Christian affiliation of the parental rights movement from its early stages and instead expanded its appeal to a broad consensus across cultural and religious backgrounds.

Some tweets revealed personal religious identities, for example:

“I’m a #Muslim and I am not #Brainwashed. As a father of two, I will do anything I can to protect my #Kids.”

The purpose of this is to declare authenticity, using the poster’s personal beliefs as an authentic example to make their claims more relatable and convincing. In addition to the seemingly inclusive and unifying positive rhetoric, the religious narrative also takes the form of threats and intimidation against opponents of the movement:

“@AndyFillmoreHFX is the real harbinger of HATE. Far right bozos? Because we want the schools to keep their hands off our kids? Karma is coming for you lunatics and I can wait to see you all burn in hell.”

This is in response for the Mayor of HRM, Andy Fillmore (2023)’s tweet calling the protesters “far-right bozos” on the day of the movement. In this angry response, “karma” is used as a kind of moral intimidation and threat. The term karma originates from Indian spirituality and refers to an impersonal force that causes actions to have consequences, i.e. good deeds bring good consequences, and bad deeds bring bad consequences (Larson, 2020). In this context, the use of the term, combined with the religious concept of divine judgment and eternal punishment “you all

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burn in hell”, emphasizes a context of predestination. Opponents of the movement are positioned as inherently immoral and sacrilegious in this religious narrative, and criticisms against them are escalated to a sacred level.

**Other Political Issues.** Their political statements about other issues incorporate religious rhetoric, anti-vaccine sentiment, distrust of mainstream media and institutions, and skepticism of the globalist agenda. Hashtags such as #UnionsNeedToBeDismantled, #JesusIsComingSoon, #IStandWithIsrael, #VaccineMandatesKill, #IvermectinWorkedForMe and #HomeSchoolNow show that they share relatively consistent views with international far-right movements, demonstrating a blend of political, cultural and religious discontent. They want to protect and strengthen traditional social norms and resist what they consider to be the influence of excessive liberalism or radical social change. Meanwhile, some tweets also express support for abortion rights as a strategy to expand their audience and a way to convey their message about the 1 Million March movement:

“See this is ok, who wants to go for abortion can, who doesn’t won’t. There is an open choice, for “adults’. Please don’t impose gender ‘confusion’ upon our kids innocent minds”

“I’m so glad I have the right to choose to kill the baby in my womb, but if I choose not to kill it, do I have the right to choose how to raise it?”

These tweets strategically link abortion rights—a major progressive and feminist issue—to parental rights. They use language familiar to liberals about bodily autonomy (“open choice,” “right to choose”) to frame their own narrative about parental autonomy. This framing makes their argument seem rational and moderate. By actively acknowledging abortion rights—even in a provocative or ironic tone—the tweets send a seemingly inclusive signal to liberal audiences who

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value personal autonomy and freedom of choice. These arguments seek to strike a delicate balance that appeals to both conservative and liberal audiences.

### *Defence Against Accusations*

Supporters of the movement used defensive language to counter accusations that their cause promotes hatred, discrimination, or phobia. A significant part of this defensive discourse focused on the central point that different opinions do not equal hatred:

“Protecting our CHILDREN is NOT hate”

“Parents Protecting CHILDREN is not hatred”

“To disagree is NOT hatred”

“The March4Children wasn’t about hate”

These arguments are mostly response to the counter-protesters’ slogan, #NoSpaceforHate. These tweets use clear and repetitive language to separate their opinions from hate. They emphasize their motivation of protecting children’s innocence and family values, trying to explain that it’s morally justified. However, it is worth noting that even if the protesters’ actions were motivated in part by a desire to protect the innocence of children and family values, their actions themselves were aimed at excluding diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, targeting LGBTQ+ people and their supporters. The outcome of their demands would result in a more vulnerable situation for transgender people. Therefore, even for those protesters who did not directly attack transgender people, the purpose of their actions was to cause structural and cultural violence against transgender people.

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In response to accusations of phobia, tweets often dismiss such descriptions as misunderstandings or deliberate distortions of their targets:

“Let me make one thing very clear: our Prime Minister needs to take 10 minutes to understand what exactly is at issue. #clueless. Hint: it’s nothing to do with hate or phobias. #handsoffourkids”

This tweet attributes accusations of hatred and phobia to the ignorance or misunderstanding. By labeling Trudeau as “#clueless,” supporters imply that their movement’s intentions are misunderstood rather than malicious and accuse Trudeau of being incompetent.

Supporters of the movement also assert that their actions do not constitute discrimination but rather protect their children from being indoctrinated by their opponents:

“No no no! It’s not discrimination what we’re asking. Do anything you want, you “choose” with your kids! Please for heaven’s sake, keep your #handsoffourkids. Don’t push your ideas, your agendas, please don’t generalize don’t normalize for our kids!!”

This argument attempts to shift the focus of the movement to respecting parents’ educational autonomy while avoiding the reason why these parents do not want their children exposed to education about sexual orientation and gender identity: they believe LGBTQ+ people are not normal and should not be “normalized”.

### **Mobilizing Supporters and Calls to Action**

This section analyzes the mobilization strategies and explicit calls to action used by supporters of the movement. These tweets demonstrate how the movement mobilizes supporters to take concrete action by exploiting emotional anxiety and a sense of collective identity. Calls to

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action include raising awareness, participating in offline protests, spreading information on social media, and strategic voting.

They often use urgent, emotional language to urge people to take immediate action:

“Wake up parents. Speak up and speak out.”

“Time to save the Kids!”

“Lock the doors. Groomer at the door.”

“Parents, if you can, move to Alberta. That is all.”

These narratives leverage fears of a direct threat to children’s safety to inspire swift and decisive action. This tone, urging parents to take immediate action for the sake of their children, reinforces the anxiety of parents who are at a loss about the education of their children. This movement exploits the anxiety about “protecting children’s safety” to weaken the underlying prejudice that “transgender people and their ideas are dangerous”.

Several tweets explicitly aim to reinforce unity and collective identity:

“Drop your personal feelings and come together”

“Put our differences aside and come together for the children”

“Standing united for children.”

These tweets succinctly summarize the common goal, urge individuals to submit to the collective, and reinforce group identity. By evoking a sense of shared outrage, they effectively build trust and unity. Some tweets urge rapid dissemination and increased visibility:

“Please share as much as possible. To show support and Protect Parental Rights”

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“Must read/watch”

“Like. Share. Follow.”

They encourage widespread digital participation, sharing anti-gender digital content, and provide clear guidance on how supporters can engage, leveraging social media to advance the movement’s visibility.

These tweets also include explicit political calls to action, reflecting an intent to translate digital activism into tangible political outcomes:

“Wake up 70 Percent @CPC\_HQ. If you want your children to truly be protected, vote @MaximeBernier @peoplespca”

“Next election will you vote for #CUPE unions or parental and women’s rights? The choice is clear. If you want complete peace of mind, vote @MaximeBernier”

“Please help spread this. We need to put massive pressure on the NDP to end this coalition.”

These tweets articulate clear political goals and urge followers to engage in direct political action to achieve the movement’s objectives. In particular, Maxime Bernier, whom they support, and the People’s Party of Canada he leads have clear populist tendencies and explicitly oppose gender diversity on their platform, referring to transgender women as “men pretending to be the other sex” (People’s Party of Canada, 2024).

### **Counterstrategy and Trust-destroying**

Among the tweets with the hashtag #handsoffourkids, a significant portion of them are accusations and insults towards their opponents. They mainly target two groups: one is the LGBTQ+ community, especially the transgender community, which they fundamentally oppose;

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the other is educators, policymakers, and government officials who support these communities. Many of the arguments used in these accusations are consistent with long-standing anti-gay and anti-gender movements, so this study also views these accusations as counterstrategies against the LGBTQ+ movement. Unlike the narratives discussed earlier, which mainly presented opinions and built trust, these counterstrategies aim to point out the problems of the other side, discredit them, undermine public trust in them, and deny their legitimacy.

### *Children Sexualization and Groomer Discourse*

Linking queer and transgender communities to sexual deviance, sexual crimes, and child safety is a common tactic used by right-wing anti-LGBTQ media to delegitimize opponents and creating moral panic. Supporters of the movement often use the concept of “sexualization” to portray LGBTQ-inclusive educational content as essentially inappropriate and harmful. Tweets such as

“We all know how LGBTQ like little boys girls, SEXUALIZING girls and boys”

“Our values are being trampled by the hateful abusive LGBTQ religious cult SEXUALIZING CHILDREN and trying to steal parents rights away from them”

“Keep p()rn out of the schools. It’s that simple.”

“Go to adult venues and do your adult things.”

“you want young children exposed to pornography, you are one sick puppy!”

This shows a strategy that deliberately equates inclusive curricula and different sexual orientations with explicit pornography and sexualization of children, making progressive educational practices appear morally suspect. This argument is effective because it leverages deep-

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seated anxieties about child protection and the myth that strangers are the greatest risk to children. It suggests that opponents' agenda invades children's innocence, thereby justifying harsh countermeasures.

Beyond the discourse on the sexualization of children, the widespread popularity of the term "groomer" in contemporary contexts, particularly on social media, has drawn the attention of scholars (Cassisa, 2024; Ciesemier, 2022; Evans, 2024; Peterka-Benton et al., 2025), which is also reflected in the data of this article. The definition of term "groomer" from a criminal law perspective is:

The process by which a child is befriended by a would-be abuser in an attempt to gain the child's confidence and trust, enabling them to get the child to acquiesce to abusive activity. It is frequently a pre-requisite for an abuser to gain access to a child. (Gillespie, 2002, p. 411)

According to this definition, the purpose of sexually grooming of children is to ultimately commit abusive acts. However, the original meaning of the term has been expanded and distorted, especially in current social and political discourse. Opponents of LGBTQ+ rights and inclusive education policies use the label "groomer" to conflate legitimate sex education and LGBTQ+ visibility with pedophilia and child abuse. Rod Dreher (2022), a famous American conservative writer, admitted this extension of the term by stating: "It may not specifically be to groom them for sexual activity, but it is certainly to groom them to take on a sexual/gender identity at odds with the norm." It indicates that the target of the groomer discourse is the existence of LGBTQ+ people and knowledge instead of just the criminal acts it should be.

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In the study's dataset, the hashtags #groomer, #stopgroomers, #stopchildgrooming, #okgroomer and #NoSpaceForGroomers are often used. These tweets intentionally implied the groomer discourse to invoke fear, disgust, and outrage among their intended audiences:

“Lock the doors. Groomer at the door”

“This is what #childgrooming looks like. Fucking disgusting”

“OUR children are being sexually groomed in govt funded schools & that you ARE pushing & encouraging this abusive grooming narrative.”

They also implied that LGBTQ+ people are “recruiting” children: “they are not looking for just acceptance, but actively recruiting children to join them.”

Some tweets directly implied that the opponents are criminals using tags as #CrimesAgainstChildren, #CrimesAgainstHumanity, #ChildTrafficking, #OrganHarvesting, #ChildRape and stating that:

“You are all criminals.”

“This is CRIMINAL.”

It's worth noting that none of the “groomer,” “pedophile,” “abuser,” or “criminal” accusations are based on factual evidence. This narrative, as a means of delegitimization, is sophisticated in that although “grooming” in this context does not refer solely to criminal behavior, the term itself is criminal terminology. With the intention of stigmatizing LGBTQ+ individuals and their allies as sex offenders, this stigmatization is easily confused with actual criminal acts by the general public who are unaware of the context. As this language becomes more commonly

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used, LGBTQ+ communities, along with left-wing progressives, may naturally be associated with sexual offenses and even pedophilia in public perception.

Further escalating the rhetoric, tweets also terms such as “pedophile,” and “predator”:

“#CapitalPunishment4Pedophiles”

“CHILD grooming PREDATORS pedophilia PREDATORS PEDOPHILES”

“It isn’t anti lgbtq its anti grooming of children. You pedos can shit in litterboxes for all us normal people care just #handsoffourkids”

“The term ‘Home Adults’ now includes traffickers and pedophiles who don’t care about the welfare of children.”

“#transrightsarethetalkinghorseforpedophilia”

If the rise of groomer discourse can be attributed to the ambiguous definition of the term “grooming,” then the explicit introduction of baseless accusations of “pedophilia” is clearly a deliberate slander. These extreme accusations of grooming and sexualization are a powerful strategy to destroy trust. They attack the moral character of opponents, severely damaging their credibility and preventing constructive public conversation. This will result in social shaming, marginalization, and even potential threats of violence against LGBTQ+ people and educators (Robinson, 2008; Walker, 2003). Furthermore, it shifts rational debates about education policy into emotional and hostile interactions and even hinders the identification of actual grooming and child sexual abuse (Ciesemier, 2022).

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### *Violence and Hate Accusations*

Supporters of the movement also made moral accusations against their opponents' behavior and attitudes toward others to undermine their credibility. By vaguely emphasizing the aggressiveness of the opposition's actions, these tweets describe opponents as dangerous and physically threatening individuals, implies the necessity of protective and defensive mobilization:

“March organizers have called off this national event due to the potential of disruptive actions that threaten the safety of the families and children participating.”

“They want to scare families away. Stand strong families, your children will see how the other side behaves and will respect you for standing up for their safety!!!”

“fighting against the childish woke and to protect parents from the violence of the woke”

They also describe gender-affirming medical care as physical violence:

“Poilievre & the other 337 twits passed the law to jail parents if they don't accept their child being mutilated.”

These tweets specifically accused counter-protesters of threatening the safety of families and children, thereby amplifying fear, mobilizing parents' protective instincts, and further reinforcing the image of the “1 Million March” side as protectors of justice. Some tweets pointed to specific evidence of the opponent's violent behavior, but I couldn't access video evidence while collecting data:

“Lovely. More death threats from the bigots. It's getting harder and harder to believe they aren't just a hate group”

“Here is a video of one of the violent protestors today pushing me.”

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The lack of evidence further proves that these allegations are in fact a means of mobilization using the victims' narratives, which is a narrative that runs throughout the entire movement. The accusations of hate in the tweets also prove this narrative:

“@AndyFillmoreHFX is the real harbinger of HATE.”

“They hate Canadians Parents and CHILDREN families.”

“Silly silly man, what hate? You mean yours?”

“The rainbow crowd are so hateful they can't even show their faces. It's embarrassing the place of hate that they operate from. We see your hate, and we will keep fighting it.”

“Your whole tweet is bigotry. Your intolerance is so blatant. We used to live all beside each other without issue. Now? Now you are taking this whole movement backwards. Creating more hate. More animosity.”

By directly labeling opponents as haters, these tweets aim to reverse the typical accusations of intolerance directed at the movement itself, thereby attempting to reclaim moral authority and describe themselves as victims rather than attackers. This strategy aims to blur the facts, making it difficult for neutral public to clearly distinguish between the initiators of hatred and the victims.

It's ironic that they stated. “We used to live all beside each other without issue,” because before the LGBTQ+ movement, what they saw as peaceful coexistence was in fact the long-standing silent oppression of sexual minorities. It is only because sexual minorities are gradually becoming visible, and their voices are gradually being heard that the oppressors are beginning to notice the conflict. However, simply because their voices are being heard, sexual minorities are being portrayed as disruptors of “peace” and haters who are taking the movement “backwards.”

*Pathologization*

The data in this article also found some tweets describing the transgender community as having mental health issues and being mentally deranged. In addition to using adjectives such as “sick,” some tweets included statements such as:

“Live in your LARP world all you like. Just don’t expect the world to agree that your fantasy is reality. You all need psychiatrists. Pronouns Good/Day.”

This view denies the existence of gender identity and describes it as a “fantasy” of transgender people, which is detached from reality. Therefore, transgender people are mentally ill and need psychiatric treatment. This pathologizing attack is common in the history of oppression against LGBTQ+ people (Kunzel, 2017). Unfortunately, despite a long fight, such statements still exist in 2023. The stigma of linking transgender people to mental illness is so harmful because transgender people are considered mentally deranged; therefore, they are unable to defend themselves against this accusation. This narrative is a means of enforcing heteronormativity, rendering the experiences and existence of transgender people invalid (Evans, 2024).

There were also tweets accusing gender confirmation services of causing mental health problem among minors:

“They create the problems for these kids by the confusion brought on by SOGI.”

“It’s a proven fact that these kids end up in suicidal positions only after activist Social Services & Teachers get to them first.”

“Several countries have banned gender affirmation for minors and (thank God) there has not been a wave of suicides . . .”

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This narrative aims to point out that transgenderism is not only a mental disease that is serious enough to lead to suicide, but also a disease that can be infected to minors through gender identity education. This perceived “contagiousness” reinforces fear and hostility towards transgender people as “pathological” by extending concerns about a perceived illness to a direct threat to the health and even the lives of their own children.

### *Political and Ideological Accusations*

In political and ideological accusations, the tweeters try to create deeper contradictions: the contradiction between state “control” and individual rights. In their conspiracy-laden narrative, educators, institutions, and governments that support LGBTQ+ groups and inclusive education are conspiring to indoctrinate children with gender ideology, thereby undermining traditional culture, democracy, and freedom.

**Ideological Indoctrination.** Supporters of the “1 Million March for Children” movement described the educational content as indoctrination, suggesting that educational institutions were deliberately manipulating children’s beliefs and values:

“We want to protect our children from their indoctrination!”

“Education should empower, not indoctrinate. Parents should have a say in their children’s learning that align with their values.”

“So how about you don’t push religious LGBTQ ideologies on religious communities?”

“Don’t push your ideas, your agendas, please don’t generalize don’t normalize for our kids!!”

“Driving harmful political ideology into our kids’ lives.”

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They imply the evil intentions behind education policies, which undermines public trust in educators and school administrators. By accusing inclusive education of promoting hidden political agendas, they conveniently exaggerate differences in curriculum content into ideological conflicts, thereby justifying the political motives behind the movement itself: because they need to “counter” their opponents’ ideological indoctrination. They also escalate the rhetoric by using emotional and morally condemnatory language to amplify the accusations of indoctrination:

“you are disgusting and inappropriate toward parents who simply want to protect their children — we want to protect our children from people like you and we will do all we can to keep them safe from your vile indoctrination.”

These highly provocative statements are intended to evoke emotional disgust, framing opponents not only as ideological adversaries but also as morally reprehensible. Phrases like “Indoctrination is unacceptable” and “#EducateNotIndoctrinate” condense complex policy debates into simple dualistic terms, making them more accessible for widespread engagement and rapid dissemination.

**Extremists and Radicals.** Supporters of the movement not only view inclusive education as a political ideology they oppose but also label its supporters as extremists and radicals. In their tweets, the language used to describe their opponents includes “Radical ideologies”, “childish woke”, “Globalist entities”, “RADICALISM”, “Communists”, “#TransRadicalNonsense”, “#transfascism” and “A FASCIST”.

These accusations include a variety of political ideas and movements that have been widely criticized throughout history. From the accusations of fascism and communism, it seems that they are trying to link inclusive education with state authority, anti-democracy, and thought control,

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thereby reinforcing the narrative that parents' rights to educate their children are being stolen by the state and that children are being indoctrinated with extreme political ideas. This logic would appear to be reasonable if we ignored the fact that the ideas being "indoctrinated" into children are simply about inclusion of gender and sexual orientation diversity, and that the ideas these parents wish to educate their children about are, instead, opposed to and discriminatory toward the LGBTQ+ community. The accusation of "globalism" is a common far-right conspiracy theory ideology and an oversimplification of globalization (Smith, 2021). In addition, "anti-woke" discourse is also a classic tactic employed by contemporary global right-wing forces to demonize and otherize those fighting for social justice by creating moral panic (Cammaerts, 2022). The following tweets further reinforced the image of evil and mind-control of opponents by adding accusations of "religious cult":

"The LGBTQ religious cult held signs of Marxism revealing themselves as a Fascist Hate group on Wednesday."

"Our values are being trampled by the hateful abusive LGBTQ religious cult"

"Look no farther than CHRC to find out what the new religion is."

These labeling languages, which exaggerate and simplify the conflict, are piled up to form a strong accusation that requires no explanation and leaves no room for debate. When these labels are constantly reinforced by right-wing movements and media as standard insults against social justice and inclusivity movements, people don't even need to understand or think about their actual meaning and logic, but they can clearly identify that the targets of these accusations are evil and irreconcilable with "us."

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**Incompetence and Corruption.** To undermine public trust in public institutions that do not align with the movement's ideology, the tweets accuse them of incompetence and corruption, particularly regarding investments in inclusive education and advocacy, which are viewed as a misuse of public funds:

“my own union is wasting my money in the counter-protest”

“pushing LGBTQ ideology in public schools, with public money.”

“I assume #abgov #ableg #abndp MLA #JanisIrwin of #HighlandsNorwood/ #YegHighlandsNorwood was being paid by the public purse to counter protest at #1MillionMarch4Children”

These accusations damage public trust in the integrity and reliability of public institutions that support inclusive education policies. The tweets also emphasize that public funds were wasted on the counterprotest of “1 Million March for Children,” conveniently directing blame toward the counter protesters and the LGBTQ+ community, thereby redirecting public anger away from the institutions and toward the LGBTQ+ community.

Other tweets highlighted the negligence and betrayal of “the people” by public institutions and the government:

“You work for the people. Act like it.”

“The entire elected parliament in Canada has sold our sovereignty & rights to the UN Marxists.”

These accusations imply that the government is indifferent to the public interest and have escalated into allegations of large-scale political corruption and even betrayal of national interests,

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fueling widespread disappointment with the government's incompetence in a challenging economic environment. These accusations have increased fears of political conspiracy and ideological subversion, undermining public trust in public institutions in terms of both competence and integrity.

**Residential School Analogies.** This study also identified a strategy used by supporters of the "1 Million March," which draws an analogy to the historical crimes of Canadian residential schools:

"What Canada gov. is doing in schools today, same as residential schools in the 1800's. They erase kids identity by putting them in a system that distorts thier nature and innocence. psycho. disconnect them from parents& lying to parents! The govt is creating new residential schools be taking away parents' rights."

"Keep in mind on this #OrangeShirtDay teachers are telling students about the evil of govt residential schools, while at the same time teachers and govt are trying to remove the parental rights over their children."

"The ignorance is alarming. Did we do quickly forget the harms of kicking parents out of their rights to instill values into their children? Residential school system anyone?"

This analogy likens contemporary inclusive education practices to one of the most severe acts of abuse in Canada's colonial history. The residential school system was a recognized cultural genocide characterized by forced cultural assimilation and abuse. The logic behind this analogy is that SOGI and residential schools both take away parental rights. However, the two are entirely incomparable. SOGI education aims to promote inclusivity and oppose bullying and has no connection whatsoever to cultural assimilation or child abuse. By using this trauma as a political

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tool, the tweets accuse gender identity education of repeating historical crimes, thereby severely undermining trust in contemporary educational institutions, educators, and the government.

Some of these tweets explicitly label contemporary policies as authoritarian or totalitarian:

“A CLASSIC POLITICAL TACTIC TAKEN BY ALL TOTALITARIAN REGIMES. take children away from parents, tutelage of the state so young people have no identity, no commitment to families, communities, or nation. THAT is how all the biggest mass murders in history started.”

These accusations frame educators and the government as authoritarian figures seeking to break family bonds and community identity. By using totalitarian language, these posts create an atmosphere of extreme distrust toward the public education system and authorities. This rhetoric evokes public fears of losing parental control, state overreach, and ideological indoctrination.

This accusation is so disturbing because it misappropriates the real, devastating trauma of Indigenous peoples as a rhetorical device to advocate for issues completely unrelated to them. This is not only a severe slander against the transgender community and educators but also an exploitation and harm to Indigenous peoples. This narrative has also been deemed misleading, panic-inducing, and divisive by some residential school survivors and their communities (Skrypnek, 2023; Wynton, 2023).

### ***Censorship and Dishonesty***

Supporters of the movement used accusations of news censorship and dishonesty to undermine trust in opponents, especially the media. These accusations claimed that media outlets and institutes deliberately censored or distorted information to advance a particular ideology:

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“The truth welcomes debate. Lies thrive on censorship - which is exactly why @albertateachers are locking down comments on their posts. Shame.”

“The revolution will not be televised [by your mainstream media]”

“Anyone who disagrees with the new religion is hateful and deserves to be silenced.”

These tweets suggest that the voices of the movement’s supporters are being deliberately suppressed by mainstream media. Due to people’s fears of state authoritarianism and the loss of free speech, social media censorship and state control of the media are indeed cause for concern. However, the supporters of the movement are demanding freedom of speech because they want their opposition to the LGBTQ+ community to remain uncensored. Based on the data presented in this study, many such statements clearly constitute hate speech. While hate speech should not be protected by freedom of speech on moral grounds, whether the state should enforce a ban on hate speech remains a point of debate in the laws of different countries (Howard, 2019).

The tweets also accuse opponents of dishonesty, providing false information, and deliberate deception:

“lying activists”

“@ctv should be charged with false accusations. It isn’t anti lgbtq its anti grooming of children.”

“Well, the news they said a couple hundred. Of course, they lied, we knew it was thousands.”

These accusations call into question the reliability and impartiality of news sources, accusing the media of deliberately misleading the public, undermining their legitimacy, and

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thereby weakening public trust in mainstream narratives. Ironically, the following tweet seems to speak the truth from their perspective:

“We’ve lived in a post-truth world for some time now... people believe whatever they want and there’s plenty of bogus material out there to affirm almost anything. Worth remembering: there is still an actual flat-earth movement.”

It is not hard to see that as supporters of the movement, the tweet implies that transgender identity is not real or that the accusations made by opponents of the movement are false. This argument takes advantage of contemporary anxieties about misinformation and “fake news,” yet misinformation and fake news do exist. As critics of “misinformation,” supporters may well be the true believers and victims of actual misinformation of “gender-critical” discourse (Billard, 2023).

### Discussion

After analysing the tweets of supporters of “1 Million March for Children”, I felt the power of language as a weapon in social movements. The hostility and incitement in these words inevitably cause concern about the growing division between people with different opinions. This chapter discusses concerns about this division created by the movement and how it affects the wider public.

Who would be convinced by their discourse? This study found many tweets that attempted to portray themselves as moderate, neutral, and inclusive, but in fact directly or indirectly expressed discrimination against transgender people. The way they define the movement is a subtle way to avoid directly expressing opposition or discrimination towards transgender individuals and the broader 2SLGBTQ+ community. By presenting the movement as a parental rights movement for the sake of children, they hide their intention to use parental rights to prevent schools from providing SOGI education and children from receiving gender affirmation care, which is motivated by their fear that their children may identify as LGBTQ+ members. The anti-gender nature of this movement is so deeply hidden that even the organiser’s website declares that it is inclusive of the LGBTQ+ community. This shows the movement’s desire to influence not only those who already share its views, but also those who are neutral or even moderate liberals. There is reason to believe that many parents who are not opposed to the transgender community may have been swayed to support or join the movement out of genuine care for their children and worries about the “pornographic” content in school curriculum according to anti-gender activists. When this movement portrays LGBTQ+ people as paedophiles and directly refers to them as “paedophiles” and “groomers”, people’s anger is transferred from actual criminals to LGBTQ+ people. When such language becomes normalised, people may even forget who their anger is really hurting.

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As a way to avoid directly discussing anti-gender views, many issues that are being exploited, such as the conflict between family education and state supervision, child sexual abuse, and the identification of gender affirming care needs for minors, may also be affected by this left-right divide, preventing valuable discussions on these issues from taking place. In terms of parental rights, excessive focus on SOGI education may lead to the neglect of debates concerning the actual welfare of children, such as the privacy rights of minors, domestic violence, and school bullying caused by family political ideologies. My background from an authoritarian country has made me particularly vigilant about the abuse of parental rights. In China, due to legal and cultural favouritism toward parental rights and the lack of institutional oversight of guardianship responsibilities, numerous tragedies have occurred, such as LGBTQ+ children being forcibly sent by their parents to “conversion therapy” involving physical abduction, arbitrary detention, forced medication and injections, and the use of electric shocks (Tcheng, 2023). The parental rights movement is not yet mainstream in Canada, but as it develops, how far will we be from such tragedies?

Furthermore, the analysis in this paper highlights the significant role of social media in contemporary right-wing social movements. Twitter has become a key battleground for political discourse, particularly conservative political discourse, where debates unfold rapidly and intensely. This is one of the reasons why Twitter was chosen as the platform for data collection in this research. The political bias of this platform, combined with the immediacy, interactivity, brevity, and anonymity of social media, both facilitates mobilization and exacerbates deep divisions. A notable feature of the data in this paper is the extensive use of concise hashtags that are not limited to the movement itself, which enhances mobilization effects and attracts audiences with similar political leanings but who are interested in other issues. The brevity required by social media often

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leads people to use emotionally charged, simplistic, and labeling language. While such content can quickly grab attention, it simplifies complex issues. This tendency toward simplification may exacerbate division, as factual statements are replaced by more sensational and confrontational information, such as accusations of “child sexualization” and “grooming.”

The interactivity of social media provides a continuous feedback loop that shapes and reinforces collective identity and in-group solidarity. Supportive responses, retweets, and likes create an echo chamber where opinions and even conspiracy theories become increasingly dogmatic and radical through affirmation and validation. Posts by public figures and opinion leaders can quickly guide followers and generate extensive responses and discussions. This phenomenon was also evident in the QAnon movement and the “Stop the Steal” movement in the United States.

The strategies employed by the “1 Million March 4 Children” movement also share significant similarities with anti-vaccine and anti-lockdown movements during COVID-19. Similar rhetorical techniques, such as emphasizing individual and speech freedoms, accusing public authorities of corruption, and undermining trust in traditional media institutions, highlight the role of social media in mobilizing diverse groups driven by widespread dissatisfaction rather than specific events. They often frame their views as objective science and biology, which is particularly effective for a broad audience who does less fact-check, as this unquestionable language provides a shortcut for the brain.

When placing the “1 Million March 4 Children” in the context of the international anti-gender movement, clear commonalities become apparent. Movements in Europe and the United States similarly leverage social media to mobilize protests, advocate for parental rights, and disseminate anti-gender rhetoric. The rhetorical strategy of framing progressive education policies

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as indoctrination and portraying LGBTQ+ identities as a threat to children's innocence is consistently present in these contexts.

The significant role of social media also underscores the responsibility platforms must assume. For example, a significant portion of the accusations in the data presented in this research could cause alarming harm, particularly the analogies of the residential school system. If such content were hidden, it might mitigate the emotional harm inflicted on affected groups. Additionally, while considering whether platforms should implement stricter moderation policies, we must also consider: if platforms with inherent political biases and conflicts of interest are granted greater censorship authority, how can we trust them to steer social movements toward more positive outcomes?

### **Limitations and Possibilities for Future Research**

Despite employing the lens of movement-counter-movement theory, this study has limitations in examining the dynamics between the movement and its counter-movement. Future research could analyse the 1 Million March for Children campaign itself, alongside its counter-movement's Twitter data over the same period of time, in order to examine the responses of both sides to each other's arguments and mobilizations for offline action. Replies to tweets from public figures such as Justin Trudeau and Pierre Poilievre that took a stand on the movement are also a valuable dataset for studying how both sides of the argument counter each other. Future research could also use this social media data for relational content analysis to examine the associations between different stakeholders and their rhetorics, as well as the connections between various arguments.

Since "1 Million March for Children" first emerged in 2023, there is currently limited literature specifically addressing it in Canada. The protest and counter-protests resurfaced in 2024, though with less intensity than in 2023. However, following the 2024 election victory of Donald Trump in the United States and the subsequent implementation of policies infringing upon transgender rights, as well as the 2025 ruling by the UK Supreme Court that the legal definition of women is based on biological sex, the rights of transgender individuals are now under threat globally. At this critical juncture, the growing anti-transgender movement in Canada warrants the attention of activists and scholars. Future research could explore the role of the movement's key organisers in influencing changes to legislation regarding gender identity education across Canadian provinces, as well as the evaluation of such policies.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study is to analyze how supporters of the anti-gender movement “1 Million March for Children” use social media to articulate their arguments, attack opponents, build trust, and mobilize offline protests. This study collected a total of 503 tweets with the hashtag #handsoffourkids from September 20, 2023, when the protests first erupted, to October 21, 2023, the day of the second wave of protests. Applying a thematic analysis approach and lens of both movement-counter-movement theory and trust-building theories, I categorized the data by using open coding, axial coding, and selective coding identified four themes: clarifying arguments and trust-building, mobilizing supporters and calls to action, counterstrategy and trust-destroying. The results find that the supporters of the movement build ingroup and public trust by articulating arguments that complimenting the patriotism, diversity, and unity of the supporters’ groups, demanding parental rights from emotional and moral perspectives, expressing opinions to LGBTQ+ and sex education and broader political opinions. A bigger portion of the data shows counterstrategies and trust-destroying against their opponents, accusing them for sexualization and grooming of children, violence and hatred, pathologization, political ideology, censorship and dishonesty.

While the current study is limited to analyses of tweets from movement supporters, it does provide a timely overview of the perspectives and mobilisation strategies of anti-gender individuals for contemporary anti-gender movement studies in Canada. The movement took place in 2023, so relevant literature is extremely limited. By collecting and analysing real-time Twitter data, this study provides valuable primary-source information about the movement and offers a relatively comprehensive overview of the arguments, rhetorical strategies, and trust-building strategies employed by its supporters from various perspectives. This research could lay the

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groundwork for future more in-depth studies of Canada's anti-gender activist community, and raises several topics of concern for scholars and policymakers.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasise the dangers of words as weapons. The framework appropriation, terminological distortion, factual exaggeration, stigmatisation and other tactics utilised in the campaign are sometimes very subtle, especially when they appear in rapidly refreshing social media posts where it can be extremely difficult to detect their true intent and logical flaws. Avoiding oversimplification and terminological abuse is essential for us to promote valuable and rational discussions on social issues.

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