

November 11, 2024

## Anti-Immigrant Politics is Fuelling Hate toward South Asian People in Canada

By: Reena Kukreja

*Mainstream politics in Canada has normalised narratives that South Asian migrants will transform the country into a nation with a non-white majority.*

The Canadian government recently announced that it is making significant cuts to the number of immigrants admitted into Canada. The number of new permanent residents is expected to be cut by nearly 20% next year, while fewer temporary foreign workers will be allowed to come to Canada.

The government says the cuts would result in a 0.2% decline in Canada's population and alleviate “pressures on housing, infrastructure and social services.”

The cuts come as Canada's political leaders are increasingly blaming immigrants for the country's housing and health-care problems. Political discourse from both Conservatives and Liberals routinely casts increased migration as the primary cause of Canada's housing and health-care crises.

The government's announcement of cuts further plays into this narrative and is already being used by anti-immigrant politicians, like Donald Trump, who said “even Justin Trudeau wants to close Canada's borders.”

Institutionalised hate takes the form of exclusionary policies like travel bans, while rhetoric from government officials influences public perception about targeted groups.

The broader societal fallout of this anti-immigrant discourse is the further normalisation of everyday hate and animosity toward migrants, especially those who are racialised.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announcing the government's plan to cut immigration.

### What is everyday hate?

In a recent incident in Waterloo, Ontario, a South Asian man was verbally assaulted and given the middle finger by a white woman. After he confronted her to ask what he had done, she told him “Indians are taking over Canada” and that he should “go back to India.”

This kind of everyday hate manifests during banal encounters between the victim and the perpetrators in the “everyday” of daily life. Hate constitutes violence and violent acts – covert and overt – targeted at people or groups “because of who they are, [rather] than because of what they do.”

Race, skin colour, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender and disability are categories for hate that can range from discrimination, threats, and slurs, to assaults and exclusionary policies.

In Canada, anti-immigrant and anti-newcomer hate often revolves around race, with racialised and ethno-religious groups, such as Sikhs and Muslims, becoming easy targets.

In 2023, 44.5% of hate incidents in Canada were motivated by race or ethnicity with South Asian and Black people facing higher rates of hate threats and assaults. Between 2022 and 2023, there was a significant increase in reported hate crimes against Muslims.

Institutionalised hate takes the form of exclusionary policies like travel bans, while rhetoric from government officials influences public perception about targeted groups. This, in turn, filters into the larger society to legitimise discrimination, prejudice, hate and exclusionary practices by ordinary folks against those who are singled out as “the other.”

Normalisation of white nationalism and white Canadians as “exalted subjects” is exhibited when ordinary folks accost racialised people in the streets.

Hatred resulted in the [stabbing death of a South Asian cab driver in Winnipeg in 2020](#) by a man who admitted that it was precipitated by animosity towards South Asian people.

In 2021, a man in London, Ontario, killed a Pakistani Canadian family, running them over with his truck. Islamophobic hate and the content contributed to the attack which a judge described as [white nationalist terrorism](#).

The 2017 [Québec City mosque killings](#) too illustrate what can happen when beliefs translate into violence, and the haunting impact on people’s psyche.

The [trauma is long-lasting](#) and felt both by the victimised individual and the community to which they belong.

### Fueling ‘Great Replacement’ theories

Since Spring 2024, I have been conducting a study on the online spread of centre-right populism and white supremacist ideology in Canada and Southern Europe that specifically targets racialised male migrants.

Both regions have witnessed a rise in [far right, nativist](#) and [Islamophobic beliefs](#), with political leaders and populist discourses scapegoating recent migrants for societal crises.

I am examining how the ratchetting-up of anti-immigrant discourse by the political elites translates into racialised abuse and attacks on migrants engaged in gig economy jobs like ride-hailing and food delivery.

According to my preliminary findings, the far-right online narrative both in Canada and across Southern Europe is increasingly using the [Great Replacement Theory](#) to stir up racial hate against migrants, especially against racialised male migrants.

A recent study by the [Global Project Against Hate and Extremism](#) revealed a sharp rise in online racism against South Asians. In Canada and elsewhere, online posts fuelling Great Replacement Theory push the narrative that increased South Asian migrants will transform Canada into a nation with a non-white majority. This normalisation of white nationalism and white Canadians as “exalted subjects” is exhibited when ordinary folks [accost racialised people in the streets](#).

Online hate is particularly worrisome as it not only creates echo chambers easily across social media networks, it also gets diffused offline.

As [Peter Smith](#), a researcher with the [Canadian Anti-Hate Network](#), notes:

“There is definitely a trend within the far-right spaces, particularly in Canada, of targeting South Asian communities and individuals for derision...They are making them the focus of a lot of anti-immigrant narratives and we’re seeing the phrase, ‘they have to go back’ being deployed a lot.”

The socialisation of a culture of hate through diverse media and the role of state policies and state actors in shaping hate discourse [reveals a correlation between increased hate crimes against specific groups and/or people with the rise of far-right discourses](#).

White Canadian young men are being drawn to white supremacist ideology through movements like the [neo-Nazi Active Club network](#). Online hate is particularly worrisome as it not only creates echo chambers easily across social media networks, [it also gets diffused offline](#).

With racialised migrants often occupying hyper-visible jobs in the gig economy and service sector, my study seeks to understand how their labour exposes them to a higher risk of [racial abuse](#), and [violence](#).

### The trauma of hate

“Hate crimes are preceded by hate speech [...] We have to bear in mind that words kill. Words kill as bullets.” These words by Adama Dieng, former United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, remind us how politically expedient discourse

about groups of people can easily translate into targeted violence against those who are not seen as “one of us.”

Anti-immigrant rhetoric makes racism and hate seem banal and everyday. It negatively influences the lived experiences of racialised people as they navigate public spaces where they are forced into face-to-face interactions with potential perpetrators of hate.

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What makes these more traumatic to the individual psyche is that they occur in the [everyday of daily life](#), are often unrecognised by the dominant society, and thus harder to prove by the victims. This hate results in racialised victims experiencing [racial trauma, stress, depression and anxiety](#). In the everyday, the [psychological impact is profound](#).

Hate crimes will only increase in Canada as anti-immigrant rhetoric is pushed and normalised by politicians. Governments need to see random acts of hate as part of a larger structural violence against racialised people in Canada. And they need to consider how their rhetoric might fuel that violence. Instead of waiting for the next targeted killing or attack, they need to stop scapegoating immigrants for political gains.

*The article was originally published on [The Conversation](#).*

*Reena Kukreja is an associate professor of global development studies at [Queen's University, Ontario, Canada](#).*