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Thousands promise to come out and protest against Canadian Nationalist Party rally

It's still unclear where the nationalist rally will be held, counter-protest planned for Yonge-Dundas Square

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Chimwemwe Alao, the vice president of equity at the University of Toronto Students' Union, said he's concerned about the safety of those on campus if the rally goes ahead. (Paul Borkwood/CBC)

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More than 3,300 people have pledged to come out to a protest against a nationalist anti-immigration rally being held in Toronto next month, a wave of support that vastly outnumbers those who have indicated they will attend the controversial event.

News of the rally — and the plan for a counter-protest — spread across social media just days after a demonstration involving white supremacists, neo-Nazis and members of the Ku Klux Klan in Charlottesville, Va., and anti-racism advocates ended with three people dead.

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And the protest in Toronto began as a call from Shannon McDeez to some of her friends on Facebook. It was prompted by the fact that alongside events like those in Charlottesville and the rise of the alt-right, there's been a normalization of racism and hate speech, she told CBC Toronto.

And she felt compelled to do something to make those people "feel

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uncomfortable."

"My intention for this is to really just show the world and show the city that there's more of us than them," she said.

She didn't realize that thousands of people would respond.



More than 3,300 people have indicated they'll attend the counter-protest on Sept. 14. (CBC)

Not happening at U of T

The counter-protest will be held at Yonge-Dundas Square on Sept. 14, but the exact location of the nationalist rally is unclear.

Although it's still advertised as happening at the University of Toronto, a spokesperson for U of T said the institution was neither contacted nor did it grant permission for the event happen on its grounds.

When asked how the university would respond to such a request, however, Althea Blackburn-Evans said the university considers those on "a case-by-case basis."

The student union is hopeful that, given the level of opposition to the rally on campus, the administration will deny organizers permission.

"We were particularly concerned about the safety of our students, particularly marginalized students on campus who would be the direct recipients of a lot of the anticipated hate speech that we would get from this rally," said Chimwemwe Alao, the vice president of equity with the student union.



An executive with the University of Toronto Students Union says he's confident the school won't allow a nationalist rally to take part there. (Katherine Holland/CBC)

The president of the Canadian Nationalist Party, the event's organizers,

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told CBC Toronto that the group does not hold white supremacist values. Travis Patron said the rally would be a peaceful protest against the openness of the country's current immigration policy.

Patron did not go into detail about his specific concerns with the policy, except to say that Canada should be more selective about whom it allows to enter. The organization's Facebook page, however, said that it wants to stop "mass immigration" and supports deportation.

Violent rhetoric

The platform on its website also calls for an end to the "destructive stance of multiculturalism" from the Charter and the formation of a national citizen militia for the purpose of "self-defense [sic]," among other things.

Alao said that given the nationalist group's rhetoric he remains concerned about the possibility of violence if tensions escalated.

The nationalist rally's event information notes that "anyone who violates the freedom of expression or the physical well-being of another person will be immediately escorted out and handed over to law enforcement".

It's unclear exactly what that means.

But when asked about it by CBC Toronto, Patron replied: "If you read what we have posted on our event page and you compare that with some of the comments and the messages that are being sent [by counter-protesters] advocating physical violence, saying very rude things, it's clear to us who is actually sending the hateful message."



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