

Recommendations for Bill C-332



**Act to amend the
criminal code
(coercive control of
intimate partner)**



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Summary

This document explores coercive control beyond intimate partner relationships, critiquing the limitations of Bill C-332 and advocating for a broader legislative approach. It highlights the diverse contexts in which coercive control occurs, such as familial relationships and high-control groups, emphasizing the need for expanded legal frameworks. This paper also offers policy recommendations, including reinstating and modifying the original definition of connectivity and creating pathways to rehabilitation for victims-turned-perpetrators.

At-a-Glance

Issues with Bill C-332

1. The limitations of the coercive control bill not extending beyond intimate partnerships

Recommendations:

1. Reinstatement of the original definition of connectivity and broadening the focus beyond intimate partners
2. Expansion of the definition to include non-related individuals or organizations
3. Creation of pathways to rehabilitation and deradicalization or exit for victims-turned-perpetrators



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Introduction

Coercive control is a destructive force in the lives of so many and it is vital to recognize the insidious nature of coercive control within intimate partner relationships. While traditional legal frameworks have made strides in addressing overt forms of abuse, such as physical violence, there remains a critical gap in legislation regarding coercive control—a pattern of behaviour that systematically undermines a person’s autonomy, dignity, and freedom.

Bill C-332 acknowledges the grim reality that intimate partner coercive control often escalates to domestic violence and homicide and is a piece of legislation that is not only necessary but urgent. However, Bill C-332’s approach must extend beyond the confines of intimate relationships. Coercive control is not exclusive to romantic partnerships; it can be found in many different relationships and contexts.

As we advocate for the inclusion of intimate partner coercive control, we must also broaden our scope to encompass other instances of coercive behavior. This includes acknowledging that coercive control tactics are used by many manipulative individuals, non-intimate partner traffickers, high-control groups, cults, and even certain multi-level marketing companies. These manipulators and organizations use elements of coercive control to exert undue influence over individuals, often leading to profound psychological, financial, and social harm.

This document will propose additional legislation that aims not only to address intimate partner coercive control but also to establish a comprehensive framework that recognizes and addresses coercive tactics regardless of the relationship dynamics involved. By extending the coercive control bill beyond the confines of intimate partner relationships, we can work to protect the rights and autonomy of everyone.

Background

On May 18, 2023, the first reading of Bill C-332 went through the House of Commons. Since then, the bill has been amended and has gone through a second reading and committee. Bill C-332 is extensive and describes behaviours constituting coercive control within intimate partner relationships. These behaviours encompass acts of violence, including threats or actual use of violence against the intimate partner, their children, or other individuals in their care, as well as against animals. Additionally, it includes coercing or attempting to coerce the partner into unwanted sexual activity. Moreover, the pattern encompasses controlling behaviours such as monitoring the partner's actions, social interactions, finances, appearance, and even their beliefs or access to healthcare. Threats of self-harm or suicide are also included. Together, these behaviours create a pervasive atmosphere of fear and intimidation, eroding the partner's autonomy and sense of safety within the relationship. The second reading of the bill saw a major change, with the focus moving exclusively to intimate partner coercive control and eliminating any further connectivity, including members of the same household, relatives or co-parents. These changes have limited the bill's scope in a way that is detrimental to helping those who have been damaged by coercive control beyond intimate partnerships.

For seven years, I was in a coercively controlling relationship. I was gaslit and manipulated, told my friends and family were evil and systematically isolated. One by one, my external support network vanished. I was closely monitored and coerced into confessing my every action and conversation. I was psychologically undone and made to believe I was stupid, weak, and evil. My spirituality was stripped from me, as well as other fundamental beliefs and choices. Eventually, I lost the ability to choose at all, with everything being dictated: the food I ate, the people I had sex with, and the way I presented myself to the world—total control.

My story is something many victims of coercive control will be familiar with. But my relationship was a little different. This control didn't come from an intimate partner or a family member but from two people I considered to be friends. I met them in my early 20s and was drawn into their orbit. Throughout my time with them, I came to see them as family, but we had no official ties. There is nothing formal or official to connect us beyond the seven years of their total control over my life and the deep trauma left in their wake.

I escaped my controlling relationship twelve years ago. Since then, I have worked tirelessly to understand what happened to me, and now I work to help others understand the complexities of manipulation and control. Coercive control is still, in many ways, misunderstood or unseen. The psychological mechanics of coercive control are complex. To many people, it is frightening to think that we all, as humans, have fundamental motivations that make us vulnerable. The more ground we can cover with bills like C-332, the more we can educate about these complex issues to work to create a safe society where the tactics of coercive control can be more easily understood and avoided.

- **Star Spider, Cult Survivor & Founder of Counter**

Coercive Control Beyond Intimate Partnerships

The extent and the damage of coercive control extends beyond intimate partner relationships. Coercive control can be found in many manipulative environments including but not limited to:

- › Manipulative familial relationships
- › Religious high-control groups
- › Spiritual high-control groups
- › Self-help or psychotherapeutic high-control groups
- › Professional development high-control groups
- › Non-intimate partner trafficking relationships
- › Certain manipulative Multi-Level Marketing companies (MLMs)

It is estimated that there exist over 5,000 active cultic or high-control groups in the U.S. and Canada alone, with over 2,500,000 members collectively²³. It has also been established that cultic groups, or high-control groups use a variety of coercive control tactics to take advantage of participants⁴⁵. Additionally it is estimated that approximately 1.3 million people in Canada are involved in MLMs⁶, which often use coercive control tactics to manipulate and take advantage of those involved⁷.

Although coercive control is steadily gaining recognition within legal systems and is being adopted into policy in many countries⁸, it is primarily within the realm of intimate partner violence and laws pertaining to children and families and largely ignores the devastating impact of coercive control in non-intimate partner relationships and environments. Because of this, individuals in non-intimate partner controlling relationships or groups are often left with limited legal recourse for the controlling aspect of these situations. Instead justice often comes in the form of other charges related to the situation such as fraud, human trafficking or sexual abuse.

The first draft of Bill C-332 contained language that encompassed more than just intimate partners. It included current spouses, common-law partners or dating partners, members of the same household, former spouses, common-law partners or dating partners, relatives or co-parents⁹. This expansive definition of connectivity was reduced in the second reading, where the language was limited to intimate partners¹⁰. The limitation to intimate partners for this bill significantly reduces the scope for those looking to seek justice for coercive controlling relationships and this needs to change.

Recommendations

Because of the wide swath of individuals affected by coercive control, it is recommended that Bill C-332:

1. Reinstate the original definition of connectivity and broaden the focus beyond intimate partners.
2. Expand the definition to include non-related individuals or organizations.
3. Create pathways to rehabilitation and deradicalization or exit for victims-turned-perpetrators

1, 2. Reinstate the original definition of connectivity, broaden the focus beyond intimate partners and expand the definition to include non-related individuals or organizations

Bill C-332 currently covers only intimate partner relationships. This leaves out a wide swath of individuals abused by coercive control tactics including relatives, members of the same household and members of high-control groups of all types. Therefore it is recommended to reinstate the original definition of connectivity, broaden the focus beyond intimate partners and expand the definition to include non-related individuals or organizations.

Recommended changes:

Offence

264.01 (1) Everyone commits an offence who engages in a pattern of conduct referred to in subsection (2) towards [a person](#) with whom they are connected that:

- (a) causes [the person](#) to believe that their safety is threatened;
or
- (b) has a significant impact on [the person](#).

Pattern of conduct

(Remains the same as in the second reading of Bill C-332⁸ except for changing “intimate partner” to “person”)

Interpretation – significant impact

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1), the conduct has a significant impact on the person if

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- (a) it causes the person to fear, on reasonable grounds, on more than one occasion, that violence will be used against them;
 - (b) it causes the person's physical or mental health to decline;
 - or
 - (c) it causes the person alarm or distress that has a substantial adverse effect on their day-to-day activities, including
 - (i) limits on their ability to safeguard their well-being or that of their children,
 - (ii) changes in or restrictions on their social activities or their communication with others,
 - (iii) absences from work or from education or training programs or changes in their routines or status in relation to their employment or education, and
 - (iv) changes of address.

Interpretation – connected

- (3) For the purposes of subsection (1), two persons are connected if
 - (a) they are current spouses, common-law partners or dating partners;
 - (b) [are related to each other in a employee/employer or volunteer capacity](#)
 - (c) [are members of the same group or organization](#)
 - (d) [have known each other for a period of 6 months or longer](#)
 - (d) they are members of the same household, and
 - (i) are former spouses, common-law partners or dating partners;
 - (ii) are relatives, or
 - (iii) carry out, or have carried out, parental responsibilities in respect of the same child, that child being under the age of 18 years; or

3. Create pathways to rehabilitation and deradicalization or exit for victims-turned-perpetrators

It is not uncommon in high-control coercive situations for a victim to become a perpetrator. In high-control groups, the leader often uses other members of the group to enact abuses, punishments and control over their fellow group-members. In trafficking situations, the victim is often coerced into illegal activity. Victims-turned-perpetrators may have been coerced to engage in many different activities including (but not limited to):

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- › Abuse of a minor
 - › Abuse or punishment of other members of the group, organization, or relationship
 - › Blackmail or extortion to maintain control over other members
 - › Coercion or manipulation of others within the group
 - › Collaboration in the grooming or indoctrination of new recruits
 - › Complicity in physical or emotional abuse of new recruits
 - › Condoning or participating in ritualistic or abusive practices within the group
 - › Conspiring to cover up illegal activities or protect the leadership of the group
 - › Facilitation of financial exploitation or theft
 - › Fraud or deception
 - › Illegal sex work
 - › Isolating or detaining other members of the group, organization, or relationship
 - › Participation in forced labour or servitude
 - › Recruitment into the group, organization, or relationship

Because of the coercion involved in these situations, it is vital when considering punishment that we also consider context and create pathways to rehabilitation and deradicalization or exit for individuals who are found guilty of perpetrating coercive control.

To better facilitate the possibility of these pathways, it is recommended that new language be added to section 720 (2) of the Criminal Code, regarding court-supervised programs. The current language is as follows:

“Court-supervised programs

(2) The court may, with the consent of the Attorney General and the offender and after considering the interests of justice and of any victim of the offence, delay sentencing to enable the offender to attend a treatment program approved by the province under the supervision of the court, such as an addiction treatment program or a domestic violence counselling program.”¹¹

The recommended new language is:

Court-supervised programs

(2) The court may, with the consent of the Attorney General and the offender and after considering the interests of justice and of any victim of the offence, delay sentencing to enable the offender to [participate in](#) a treatment [or rehabilitation program](#) [or a restorative justice process](#) approved by the province under the supervision of the court, such as an addiction treatment program, [a deradicalization or exit program](#) or a domestic violence [or coercive control](#) counselling program.¹²

This new language will allow for victims who become perpetrators, as well as others, to find healthy pathways to rehabilitation and exit.



Conclusion

Bill C-332 represents a critical step forward in addressing coercive control within intimate partner relationships, recognizing the pervasive harm caused by such behaviour. However, the current limitations of the bill in focusing solely on intimate partnerships fail to fully encompass the diverse range of coercive control situations that individuals may encounter. By broadening the scope of the bill to include all forms of coercive behaviour, whether within familial, organizational, or other non-intimate partner relationships, we can better protect individuals from manipulation and abuse. To do this, it is vital to reinstate the original definition of connectivity and expand it to encompass a wider range of relationships and organizations where coercive control tactics are employed. Additionally, creating pathways to rehabilitation and exit for victims-turned-perpetrators acknowledges the complexities of coercive control dynamics and offers a more holistic approach to justice and healing.

By implementing these recommendations, we can work towards creating a society where coercive control is recognized and addressed in all its forms, ensuring the safety and autonomy for all.



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¹¹Criminal Code, RSC 1985, c C-46, s 720 (2)

¹²Modification of the Criminal Code, RSC 1985, c C-46, s 720 (2)