



Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Election Protocol Panel

Thursday, September 23, 10h00 to 11h30 via secure CTSN

Objectives

- Receive a threat update from the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force (SITE) and reflect on General Election 44 (GE44) with other members of the Election Protocol Panel (Panel).

Run of Show

- This may be the final meeting of the Panel (TBC by Clerk).
- Agenda will include: (1) Introductory remarks; (2) Threat update from SITE; (3) Panel discussion; and (4) Wrap-up.
- Participants will include: Janice Charette, Interim Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet; Nathalie Drouin, Deputy Clerk of the Privy Council and Associate Secretary to the Cabinet; François Daigle, Deputy Minister of Justice and Deputy Attorney General of Canada; Rob Stewart, Deputy Minister of Public Safety; Shelly Bruce, Chief of CSE; David Vigneault, Director of CSIS; and, David Morrison, Deputy Minister and Foreign and Defence Policy Advisor to the Prime Minister. Mike MacDonald, Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet from the Office of the National Security and Intelligence Advisor to the Prime Minister, will stand in for the National Security and Intelligence Advisor.
- **Departmental Representative:** Dobner/IOL

Key Messages

- No clear evidence of malign foreign interference that impacted our ability to have a free and fair election.
- However, from open source information, we saw how an anti-Conservative Party narrative – which may have been part of a Chinese state-led foreign interference operation – rapidly reverberated across multiple web sites and platforms. We also saw how disinformation with respect to two Conservative candidates in particular – Erin O'Toole and Kenny Chiu – circulated in tandem.
- We do not know if these incidents were coordinated and involved inauthentic amplification or whether they were organic and constitute freedom of expression. Chinese social media platforms like WeChat are impervious.
- And we cannot know whether these incidents, if the result of foreign interference, had an impact on any aspects of the election.
- But what we do know is that these incidents highlight the complexity of the task of identifying and responding to foreign interference whether it be in an election context or otherwise.
- These incidents argue for our continued vigilance as a Panel, but also our departments' continued collaboration – during and between election cycles – to safeguard Canada's democracy from foreign malign actors.
- These incidents also argue for increased funding for academia and civil society (through vehicles like PCH's Digital Citizen Initiative) to monitor for and report publicly on potential foreign interference in the information environment to raise awareness and build resilience.

Context

- **Previous Interactions:** This meeting follows the September 15 meeting of the Panel during which members received a threat update from SITE and discussed the Panel announcement process.

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- **Threat Update from SITE:** SITE, including RRM Canada, will deliver a threat update on developments since the last panel meeting, followed by a discussion. SITE is also preparing an after action report to which RRM Canada will contribute.
- RRM Canada has not observed any significant trends of foreign state-sponsored information manipulation in its monitoring of the broader Canadian digital information ecosystem since the Panel last met, including on Election Day, but will continue to monitor and report until at least Friday, September 24.
- The vast majority of content assessed by RRM Canada originated from recognizable Canadian news or information sites (either in English, French, Chinese, or Russian). RRM Canada has validated these findings through its external partners and secondary research.
- Chinese state and party media reporting on GE44 and the Conservative Party of Canada's proposed China policies tapered off leading to Election Day. RRM Canada observed what may have been a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) information operation that aimed to discourage Canadians of Chinese heritage from voting for the Conservative Party of Canada from Sept 9-17. However, on Election Day, and during the three days that preceded it, CCP media outlets did not publish any stories about GE44. Canadian WeChat accounts did not publish any editorials urging Canadians of Chinese heritage to vote for a specific candidate or party either. There was no new circulation of the previously trending headline in the Chinese press that the Conservative Party "almost wants to break diplomatic relations with China".
- Canadian media – both major newspapers and Chinese language news – reported on the potential CCP information operation.
- Secondary sources pointed to the increasing scope and evolving breadth of Chinese influence operations targeting the U.S. around COVID-19 issues, including attempts to galvanize off-line actions.
- Russian state-affiliated and mainstream media continued to cover events in Canada, including those related to GE44, but from a mostly neutral perspective and with limited engagement.
- Russian state media outlets reported that PM Trudeau was hit with stones during one of his campaign events and stating his "campaign for a third term has been chaotic since one of his meetings had to be cancelled for security reasons".
- RT (Russian state media) published a podcast that discussed GE44 and claimed, with anti-LPC sentiment, that Canada has changed from a "popular, gentle country" to one that is "playing a controversial role in the world". It is not clear what level of engagement the podcast episode received.
- RRM Canada analysed alternative social media platforms BitChute and Rumble and the web browser Dissenter and did not observe foreign interference activity.
- **Panel Discussion:** A discussion will follow the threat update from SITE. No details have been provided. This may be an opportunity to reflect on GE44 lessons learned (e.g., communications), discuss the role of the Panel until the end of the writ period and provide constructive feedback to SITE.
- **Communications:** GoC communications have been a challenge throughout GE44, in part due to the Caretaker Convention. For example, the GoC did not proactively communicate plans to safeguard the election as was done for GE43; an updated web site went live without fanfare. As a result, academics, media and the leader of the Conservative Party – presumably unaware of the extensive measures in place – all criticized the GoC's lack of action to safeguard the election. This was a lost opportunity to raise public awareness and build resilience. Similarly, in the context of the Caretaker Convention, it was not entirely clear how incidents below the Panel's threshold but still worthy of public awareness might be addressed. There is a need to be more strategic about both proactive and reactive communications with respect to election security, as communications is a critical tool in the GoC's toolkit for building resilience to and responding to foreign interference. There is also a need to fund academia and civil society (through vehicles like PCH's Digital Citizen Initiative) to

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monitor for and report publicly on potential foreign interference in the information environment to further boost awareness and resilience.

Author's name/division/tel.:

Consulted divisions/departments: PCO

Approving ADM: IFM

Name and symbol of departmental officer attending/tel.:

Attachments:

- RRM Canada Weekly Report

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