



FEDERAL POLICING NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE (FPNI)
STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE ANALYSIS (SIA)

PROTECTED B
SIA-IB-2021-005 -- 2021-08-27

STRATEGIC INTELLIGENCE BRIEF SECURITY THREATS TO CANADA'S 44th ELECTIONS

This assessment is intended to provide situational awareness of criminal threats related to election security. The information in this assessment is based on reporting from RCMP Divisions, law enforcement partners, searches conducted against RCMP holdings, and open source resources. The SIA continues to maintain visibility on such threats and will provide updates as required.

KEY POINTS:

- At the time of writing, the RCMP is unaware of any specific threats to the security or integrity of Canada's 44th general elections. (*Information current as of 27 Aug 2021, 1200hrs*)
- Threats to public safety arising from public order events with a political nexus are currently assessed as low. There are no indications that participants or protest organizers are overtly advocating for violence.
- Since the beginning of the writ period on August 15th, there has been a noted increase in threats made towards the Prime Minister specifically, but these reports have yielded no clear nexus to the electoral process or the election itself. These threats are under RCMP investigation.

FOREIGN ACTOR INTERFERENCE

The RCMP does not possess any information to indicate that foreign states or foreign actors have engaged in any criminal acts with the intention of interfering in, or impacting the results of, the 44th general elections. Should there be alleged instances of foreign actor interference, where reasonable grounds exist to suspect criminal activity, the RCMP will investigate.

NATIONAL CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Election infrastructure includes the facilities, technologies, and personnel which support the operation of the election. It includes both permanent facilities (e.g., Elections Canada regional and headquarters offices) as well as short- and long-term temporary facilities (e.g., including Returning Officer offices, advance polling stations and election day polling stations).

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While voters and the Canadian public may be the target of influence and disinformation, they have not been the direct target of physical attacks. Canada traditionally experiences peaceful elections and orderly transitions of power from one government to the next. Vandalism of campaign materials is usually the primary issue that is faced from a physical threat perspective.

Online forums associated to conspiratorial based ideologies have demonstrated an escalation of rhetoric directed towards the voting process for the upcoming federal election. As the election date approaches, it is possible the rhetoric in these forums may become increasingly aggressive, although no specific credible threats have been identified at this time.

The RCMP, in conjunction with Elections Canada, is tracking a number of recent social media posts containing threatening images and language targeting Elections Canada and its employees. The RCMP, however, does not possess any information at this time indicating that there are credible threats toward national critical infrastructure that would affect the results of the 44th general elections or the safety of Elections Canada employees.

The RCMP continues to monitor this space and will investigate any suspected criminal activity.

ONGOING GRIEVANCES THAT MAY IMPACT PUBLIC SAFETY DURING THE ELECTIONS

Currently, peaceful protests targeting Liberal campaign events have occurred. Open source information suggests that the majority of these events have been attended by COVID-19 deniers, anti-maskers, anti-vaxxers and anti-lockdown actors that are critical of the government response to the pandemic. These individuals and groups may perceive it as part of a broader conspiracy used as an excuse to gain greater control and strip Canadians of their rights and freedoms.

Indigenous issues continue to be at the forefront of online discussions among individuals and groups who believe that the government has not fulfilled promises to honour Indigenous sovereignty and protect Indigenous land and water rights. Public order activity related to these issues may target campaign events as they continue.

Recent media reports about extreme heat and wildfires forcing evacuations in some areas of Canada have been driving online discussions, and there is a perception of inaction by political leaders. "National Days of Action" are currently being planned which could target critical infrastructure leading up to the election or campaign events. Previous "Days of Action", primarily involving the energy and rail sectors, have generally involved peaceful protests or blockades.

Regardless of the election's outcome, it is likely that claims of election fraud will become mainstream narratives. These will likely be attributed to conspiracy theorists and racially and ethnically-motivated violent extremist networks in Canada, similar to what occurred during the U.S. election.

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THREATS TO PROTECTED PERSONS

The RCMP investigates all threats made towards Protected Persons¹. These include direct threats (e.g., a threat made with a specific action intended to be taken against a specific target) and indirect threats (e.g., vague, adverse comments).

For the year-to-date, the RCMP has opened 359 files regarding both direct and indirect threats to Protected Persons, the vast majority made to Prime Minister Justin TRUDEAU (181). There have been five threats issued toward Conservative Party leader Erin O'TOOLE, three towards Bloc Quebecois leader Jean-Francois BLANCHET and four towards NDP leader Jagmeet SINGH.

There has been an increase in the number of threats since the start of the general elections period. Since the beginning of August 2021, the RCMP has opened 22 new files, 11 of them after the writ dropped on August 15th. The Prime Minister continues to be the target in the majority of these threats.

There is normally an uptick in threats made in response to a political announcement, such as pandemic-related restrictions or immigration policy decisions, where people are frustrated or angered with the message. The threats to date have not contained a clear nexus to the electoral process or the election itself.

These threats have been made by Canada-based individuals in the form of phone calls, verbal statements, and social media posts and usually involve threats to people or democratic institutions (e.g., threats to the Prime Minister, police, Members of Parliament, Parliament Hill itself, etc.). Since August 1st, these specific cases have involved posts and comments on Facebook, 4chan² and Telegram³.

The Subjects of Complaint (SoCs) in the majority of these files have uttered online threats and adverse comments against the Prime Minister that reference broader controversies concerning the Government of Canada's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. During initial RCMP investigations, these SoCs appear to either suffer from mental health issues or are individuals who are frustrated or directly impacted by

¹ The Protected Persons category includes the Prime Minister, sitting Members of Parliament, Cabinet Ministers, other Official Party Leaders, and critical public officials as designated by the Minister of Public Safety.

² 4chan is an image-based forum website which allows anonymous users to share and comment on images (often memes or images intended to be funny or ironic). It is used by a wide array of internet users and users do not need to make accounts or provide phone numbers or email addresses to share or comment, hence the use of the term "anons" to refer to 4chan users. At times 4chan has attracted content containing extremist ideologies due to little or no moderation from the website owners and administrators. Popular content or narratives on 4chan may often spill over to mainstream websites. For instance, the QAnon movement originated on 4chan before QAnon content was re-shared on mainstream social media platforms. Due to its anonymous nature it is difficult for law enforcement to proactively identify users based on open source techniques.

³ Telegram is a free, encrypted social media and messaging app that is accessible to anyone with a mobile phone. Due to its lax moderation, it houses IMVE content and news reports indicate it saw a substantial increase in users following the incident at Capitol Hill in the U.S. Telegram has public and private channels. Although anyone can have a Telegram account, the platform has been embraced by racially and ethno-nationalists motivated individuals and groups who have been banned from the more mainstream platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. since content is less likely to be reported and removed due to the lax enforcement policies on the app itself. The founders' principles are based on freedom of speech and the owners have stated they will not block users or remove content unless it is terrorism-related.

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the COVID-19 pandemic. Once contacted by the RCMP, many SoCs realize the seriousness of their actions.

Other more serious threats have involved SoCs using 4chan to advocate for specific violent acts primarily against the Prime Minister. These users, however, are savvy to security intelligence and law enforcement techniques, and may be “trolling”⁴, purposefully utilizing threat keywords in order to provoke a law-enforcement response.

The RCMP continues to monitor threats to Protected Persons and engages with applicable security and law enforcement partners as required.

Distribution List

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⁴ “Trolling” refers to online activity where someone says something that is intentionally offensive, inflammatory, or inciting for the purposes of eliciting a response from other individuals online. The “troll” (the person making the provocative statement) may or may not believe or support what they are saying; the point is to elicit a response of some kind.

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