

**SECRET//CANADIAN EYES ONLY**

19 OCTOBER 2021  
SITE TF ASSESSMENT

---

PRC INTERFERENCE IN ELECTION 2021: RESPONSE TO THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA

---

**What is the purpose of this document?**

- This document has been prepared on behalf of the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections (SITE) Task Force [REDACTED]. The primary goal of this paper is to respond to the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC's) concerns regarding foreign interference (FI) during the September 2021 federal election. [REDACTED] (S//CEO)

**How does CSIS define foreign interference?**

- The CSIS Act defines FI as those activities that are within or relating to Canada that are detrimental to the interests of Canada, and are clandestine, or deceptive, or involve a threat to any person. It is important to note that public and overt diplomatic statements by a foreign government to spread propaganda, or further their state interests, generally do not meet the threshold of 'foreign interference' (unless, for example, there is a clear threat to a person). That said, GAC advises foreign missions in Canada through a diplomatic letter, prior to federal elections, that these missions refrain from interfering in Canada's democratic process. (S//CEO)
- It is important to note that, though mandated to investigate FI, CSIS does not investigate allegations of voter fraud and/or irregularities in voting. CSIS also cannot request certain types of information on individuals without existing investigative authorities and/or warrants. (S//CEO)

**Was the federal election a target for threat actors?**

- Intelligence indicates that the 2021 federal election was an attractive foreign interference target for hostile state actors. The People's Republic of China (PRC) was particularly interested in this election and looked to engage in FI in specific instances. CSIS has reported all known and suspected interference attempts to the appropriate authorities as required. (S//CEO)
  - Such attempts were primarily conducted through trusted third parties or 'proxies', and in a manner that is consistent with the PRC's 'united front work'.<sup>1</sup> (S//CEO)
  - SITE cannot measure the impact of such foreign interference attempts. (S//CEO)

<sup>1</sup> United front work includes a spectrum of overt as well as clandestine and deceptive approaches. This work, which is guided by the United Front Work Department, often takes place in a legal and normative 'grey zone'. United front work involves the co-optation of entities abroad (especially elites) to expand the Party's support base, while marginalizing and silencing opponents. Targets of united front work include diaspora communities, businesspeople, academics, politicians and political staffers, media, and religious communities. The line between 'influence' and 'interference' by the PRC is often intentionally blurred. (S//CEO)

SECRET//CEO  
October 19, 2021

#### What can SITE conclude at this time about Election-related FI?

- [REDACTED] SITE cannot decisively conclude that the PRC sought to clandestinely and deceptively influence outcomes in all of the thirteen (13) ridings identified by the CPC. (S//CEO)
- [REDACTED] SITE also cannot conclusively assess to what extent a foreign government sought to clandestinely orchestrate online and/or media efforts to discredit the CPC, its candidates, or policies with the specific intent to influence the outcome of the election. (S//CEO)
  - [REDACTED] several pieces targeting the CPC were published and shared around the same time on Chinese-language media on separate platforms, including WeChat (a highly censored and monitored platform aligned with PRC national security legislation). [REDACTED] certain narratives in these articles appear to be consistent with one another. [REDACTED] the close timing of publication and similar content of these various pieces across several platforms is noteworthy and unusual, [REDACTED] [REDACTED] some material mirrors narratives that have been publically presented by the PRC government and the CCP [REDACTED] (S//CEO)

#### What did the PRC say openly?

- SITE assesses that the PRC, through [REDACTED] and its propaganda outlet *Global Times*, was attempting to overtly convince Canadians not to vote for the CPC. This effort was likely motivated by a perception that parts of the CPC platform were 'anti-PRC' and 'anti-CCP', and that a CPC government would not be favourable to PRC state or CCP interests. (S//CEO)
  - [REDACTED] on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the *Global Times* published propaganda material that clearly threatened "counterstrikes" from the PRC if the Government of Canada turned "hawkish words into action". This article also notes that the CPC's views on the PRC cater to a "toxic atmosphere" against Beijing. [REDACTED] the *Global Times* is an important propaganda arm of the CCP [REDACTED] (S//CEO)
  - [REDACTED] the CCP and PRC government perceive portions of the CPC's foreign policy platform to be 'anti-PRC' and 'anti-CCP', and that the *Global Times* was likely seeking to signal this point. [REDACTED] release may have been a response to the upward trajectory of the CPC in public opinion polling prior to the Canadian federal election. (S//CEO)

#### Manipulating the 'grey zone'

- In some cases, FI threat actors seek to utilize the 'grey zone' between appropriate, overt activities, and illegitimate and clandestine activity. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Individuals or groups of concern can have well-established relationships with the PRC's government and/or Party entities and proactively act in a manner that benefit PRC interests given an intimate knowledge of Party-state priorities and a general understanding of issues of concern. By proactively behaving in this manner, individuals or groups of concern invite 'benefits' and the favour of the PRC and CCP.

SECRET//CEO  
October 19, 2021

Canada's lack of a 'foreign agent registry' makes it impossible to legally designate these entities as 'agents' of a foreign government from an FI perspective. (S//CEO)

- It is important to note in light of the above that there is an intended effect when the PRC Ambassador and CCP-affiliated media (such as the *Global Times*) make pointed statements about these topics. PRC proxies that are not yet aware of Party-state preferences often rely on open statements and declarations as signposts for what kind of activities to undertake that are in the interests of the PRC and/or CCP. These groups, which can include entities in Canada, often seek to demonstrate their value to the PRC by then aggressively pursuing a particular pathway of interest. Usually, proxy groups will action state interests by attempting to mobilize diaspora communities to enable a preferred outcome (e.g., through WeChat groups, community events, canvassing, etc.). (S//CEO)
- Furthermore, it is likely that higher authorities in the PRC were supportive of certain articles and narratives of a similar nature that were published or circulated by third parties in Canada on WeChat and other online Chinese-language media. [redacted] difficult to determine whether these actions result from specific state tasking. Often, Chinese-language media outlets and private PRC companies understand the general preferences of the Party-State and seek to satisfy them. (S//CEO)

#### Summary

- As noted previously, [redacted] the 2021 federal election was an attractive foreign interference target for hostile state actors. The PRC showed particular interest and looked to engage in FI in specific instances. CSIS cannot assess the impact of any potential or actual interference attempts, but has reported them to relevant authorities. (S//CEO)
- [redacted] certain pieces shared common narratives and were unusual in that they were published at around the same time across disparate platforms. These narratives also echoed points that were openly stated by the PRC government and in CCP propaganda. (S//CEO)
- [redacted] This 'grey zone' manipulation is problematic: [redacted] (S//CEO)

FI is an issue that transcends election cycles, levels of government, and party lines. The Government of Canada (GC) continues to investigate FI attempts in Canada, with particular attention to those linked to the PRC. The GC is committed to providing stakeholders with timely and relevant intelligence and analysis on this important subject. (S//CEO)