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## Protecting Canada's Democracy: Overview

### Overview

- Canada instituted a whole-of-society approach to safeguard the 2019 General Election and Canada's democratic institutions against foreign interference. The approach included activities under each of the four following pillars:
  - **Enhancing citizen preparedness:** Supporting the development of an engaged and informed citizenry
  - **Improving organizational readiness:** Ensure that government institutions, political parties, Elections Canada and the media are able to effectively plan, respond, and mitigate electoral interference
  - **Combatting foreign interference:** Ensure that Canada has a comprehensive awareness of the threats and strong international relationships
  - **Expecting social media platforms to act:** Encourage social media to take concrete actions to increase transparency and combat disinformation
- Specifically, new activities were initiated under each of these pillars. This includes:

### Enhancing Citizen Preparedness

- Creating the **Digital Citizen Initiative** to support digital news and civic literacy programming and tools to improve Canadians' resilience against disinformation. (Canadian Heritage)
  - Canadian Heritage received \$7M in off-cycle funding for digital news and civic literacy programming and tools to improve Canadians' resiliency against online disinformation. This will help to equip Canadians with a better understanding of deceptive practices used online, and give people the tools they need to navigate the internet, including tools to help them better understand the information they consume online.
- Increasing the reach and focus of **Get Cyber Safe**, the national public awareness campaign created to educate Canadians about cyber security and the simple steps they can take to protect themselves online, to include greater linkages to cyber threats to Canada's democratic processes. (Communications Security Establishment)
- Releasing an **update to the Cyber Threats to Canada's Democratic Process**, the public assessment of threats to Canada's elections, political parties and politicians, and media. (Communications Security Establishment)
- Establishing the **Critical Election Incident Public Protocol**, a mechanism for communicating with Canadians during the writ period in a clear, transparent, and impartial manner about incidents that threaten the integrity of the election. (Privy Council Office)

Page [APG] of [ANP]

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### **Improving Organizational Readiness**

- Offering additional **cyber security technical advice and guidance** to political parties to enhance security. (Communications Security Establishment)
- Offering **classified threat briefings to key leadership** in political parties to promote situational awareness and help them to strengthen internal security practices and behaviours. (PCO, Communications Security Establishment, Canadian Security Intelligence Service, Royal Canadian Mounted Police)
- Engaging with Elections Canada, who has leadership for the operational conduct of elections, to ensure seamless integration with the Government of Canada's national security apparatus.

### **Combatting Foreign Interference**

- Leveraging the newly-established **Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections (SITE) Task Force** to improve awareness of foreign threats and support assessment and response. (Communications Security Establishment, with Canadian Security Intelligence Service, Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and Global Affairs Canada)
- Activating the **G7 Rapid Response Mechanism** to strengthen coordination among G7 democracies in responding to threats to democracy, and monitoring malign actors in the social media space. (Global Affairs Canada)

### **Expecting Social Media Platforms to Act**

- Establishing a common understanding with platforms about their responsibilities in the online democratic space through the Canada Declaration on Electoral Integrity Online.

### **Budget 2019**

The Protecting Democracy initiative received a total of \$48M in Budget 2019, with the following year-by-year breakdown:

<i>(Millions of dollars)</i>	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	TOTAL (cash)
CSIS	0	0	2	3	6	12	23
CSE	0	2	1	1	0	0	4
PCH	0	5	5	5	5	0	19
GAC	0	1	1	1	0	0	2
TOTAL	0	8	9	10	11	12	48

Page [APG] of [ANP]

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- To protect Canada's democratic institutions from cyber attacks, the Government is proposing to provide the Communications Security Establishment with additional funding of up to \$4.2 million over three years, starting in 2019–20, to provide cyber security advice and guidance to Canadian political parties and election administrators.
- To strengthen cooperation and information sharing in response to foreign threats to our democracies, G7 Leaders agreed during the June 2018 Summit in Charlevoix to each set up a Rapid Response Mechanism unit, with Canada taking on an added coordination role on behalf of the network. To support this commitment, the Government proposes to provide Global Affairs Canada with \$2.1 million over three years, starting in 2019–20.
- To strengthen Canadians' resilience to online disinformation and to help ensure Canadians have access to a wide range of transparent, high-quality information, Budget 2019 proposes to provide the Department of Canadian Heritage with \$19.4 million over four years, starting in 2019–20, to launch a Digital Citizen Initiative. Funding would support research and policy development on online disinformation in the Canadian context. This investment would also enable Canada to lead an international initiative aimed at building consensus and developing guiding principles on how to strengthen citizen resilience to online disinformation. These guiding principles would then be adopted by Canada and other likeminded countries as a framework for efficient cooperation between governments, civil society organizations, and online platforms
- CSIS was also provided with \$23M to advance its efforts under this initiative.

**Background on the Communications Security Establishment's *Cyber Threats to Canada's Democratic Process Reports (2017 and 2019)***

- In 2017, in response to a request from the Minister of Democratic Institutions, the Communications Security Establishment (CSE) produced and made publicly available an assessment of the cyber threats to Canada's democratic process. The report's purpose was to let Canadians know about the cyber threats to our democratic process ahead of Canada's General Election. An update to this report was published in the months leading up to the election, focusing on the threats to (1) political parties and politicians, (2) elections, and (3) voters.
- CSE assessed that, in the 2015 Canadian federal election, Canada's democratic process was targeted by low-sophistication cyber threat activity, likely perpetrated by hacktivists or cyber criminals. This activity had no effect on the results of the election and had no impact on the privacy of Canadians.
- An update report published in 2019 found that half of all advanced democracies holding national elections in 2018 had their democratic processes targeted by cyber threat activity. Foreign cyber interference targeting voters has become the most

Page [APG] of [ANP]

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common type of cyber threat activity against democratic processes worldwide. Elections have also continued to be targeted by cyber threat activity over the past years.

- In addition to these threats, there is a growing recognition that digital platforms and social media companies have an important role in both the promotion of a democratic marketplace of ideas and the suppression of democratic values through the propagation of disinformation. Social media companies have a role to play in helping to reinforce the awareness and resilience of Canadians to information that could mislead them during the election.
- The variety of both paper-based and electronic systems used to carry out elections in Canada means that vulnerabilities to cyber threats vary by jurisdiction. As noted in the CSE's 2017 report, federal elections are largely paper-based and Elections Canada has a number of legal, procedural, and information technology measures in place to mitigate cyber threats. Political parties and politicians are vulnerable to cyber attacks, including cyber espionage, information theft, and the spread of misleading information. Social media is vulnerable to misuse through the spread of fake news or the use of bots to amplify particular viewpoints, giving a false appearance of public consensus or discord.

#### **Next Steps**

- The Panel did not observe any activities that met the threshold for public announcement or affected Canada's ability to have a free and fair election.
- As noted in the Cabinet Directive on the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol, an independent report will be prepared, assessing the implementation of the Protocol and its effectiveness in addressing threats to the 2019 general election. The report is intended to help inform the decision as to whether the Protocol should be permanently established to help protect the integrity of future elections and, if it is to continue, suggest potential adjustments that could strengthen the Protocol. A classified report will be presented to the Prime Minister and to the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, with a public version made available shortly thereafter. It is expected that these reports will be available in Spring 2020.

Page [APG] of [ANP]

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### Protecting Canada's Democracy: Speaking Points

- Canada recognizes that bad actors may use cyber technology to interfere and influence Canadians, as they have done or attempted to do in other democracies.
- Ahead of our 43<sup>rd</sup> General Election, Canada put in place a comprehensive, whole-of-society plan to counter foreign interference in our elections and safeguard our democratic processes.
- The plan mobilized expertise from across 10 departments and agencies in an effort to anticipate, recognize and respond to any potential threats to the integrity of our election. Over the months leading up to the election, the Government regularly tested its capacity, in order to probe its readiness and practice and refine its efforts.
- Canada's plan of action pursued initiatives under four pillars, and Budget 2019 directed \$48M towards these measures.
- The first pillar is Enhancing Citizen Preparedness. Canada's best defence against threats to democracy remains an engaged and informed public. Foreign and malicious actors are becoming more creative at using online platforms to manipulate opinions. Activities under this pillar were intended to ensure that Canadians are better informed about the tactics used online to deceive them, like phishing or trolling.
- To this end, the Government created the Digital Citizen Initiative to support digital news and civic literacy programming and tools. The Government also established the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol to communicate with Canadians during the writ period in a clear, transparent, and impartial manner about incidents that could threaten the integrity of the election.
- The second pillar is Improving Organizational Readiness. The activities under this pillar ensured greater coordination amongst government systems - and with Elections Canada - to identify threats, emerging tactics and systems vulnerabilities in order to strengthen security practices.
- The Government offered additional cyber security technical advice and guidance to Elections Canada and political parties to enhance their cyber security, and offered classified threat briefings to security-cleared political party representatives to promote their awareness of the threats and encourage the strengthening of internal security practices and behaviours.
- The third pillar is Combating Foreign Interference. Canada's security agencies worked to prevent covert, clandestine or criminal activities from foreign actors from interfering in our electoral processes. The Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force and the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism were two key

Page [APG] of [ANP]

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initiatives under this pillar, to improve awareness of foreign threats and support assessment and response.

- The final pillar is Expecting Social Media Platforms to Act. The government took action to increase transparency, authenticity and integrity of online platforms. In particular, the Canada Declaration on Electoral Integrity Online was signed to this end.
- Now that the election is concluded, evaluations and reviews of the innovative initiatives put in place are underway so that Canada can continue to reinforce its protections against interference in our democracy.

Page [APG] of [ANP]