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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT OF THE QUEEN'S PRIVY COUNCIL FOR CANADA AND MINISTER OF INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

c.c.:

**APPROACH FOR ENGAGEMENT WITH PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES ON PROTECTING DEMOCRACY**

(For Information)

**SUMMARY**

- o This briefing note provides an overview of the two-step approach PCO-Democratic Institutions officials will undertake, following discussions with your Office, to engage with provinces and territories (P/Ts) in the protecting democracy space.
- o Your 2021 mandate letter identifies working with other orders of government in continuing to lead an integrated government response to protect Canada's democratic institutions. Engagement with P/Ts across two different forums will therefore be an opportunity for the federal government to exercise leadership and guidance in the protecting democracy space, and bolster information exchange with P/Ts on this file.
- o As a first step, PCO officials will engage in a targeted manner with P/T, and potentially municipal, policy counterparts. This initial engagement would be followed up with Election Administration Bodies, including Elections Canada, through their Working Group on Election Security and Disinformation. Both engagement points are planned to take place over Summer 2021.
- o This approach will allow PCO to bolster P/T working relationships and information exchange between orders of government.

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- In your January 2021 mandate letter, the Prime Minister tasked you with continuing to lead an integrated government response to protect Canada's democratic institutions, which includes working with other orders of government.
- Engaging P/Ts is an important step to strengthening overall domestic preparedness, awareness, and capacity to respond to threats to democratic institutions.
- In 2019, PCO-Democratic Institutions Secretariat (DI) led a meeting of Cabinet Secretaries following the release of the Protecting Democracy Plan. Security agencies also engage with P/Ts on a more regular basis through their existing networks (e.g. the Cyber Centre), where past briefings with P/Ts have taken place alongside Elections Canada.
- PCO-DI has also facilitated engagement with P/Ts in the protecting democracy space on an ad hoc basis, most recently in 2020 during a briefing with British Columbia on the 2019 Plan to Protect Canada's Democracy.
- In 2017, at Elections Canada's biannual conference, the federal government facilitated a cybersecurity briefing with P/Ts' Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs). Elections Canada has already expressed that P/Ts Election Administration Bodies (EMBs) would further benefit from a discussion focused on practical tools and resources that they can use to recognize and mitigate election integrity-compromising inaccurate and misleading activities.
- In consultation with your office, the two-step approach to P/T engagement outlined below has been developed with an aim to realize your mandate letter commitment and strengthen PCO relations with P/Ts counterparts.

**Two-step Approach for Engagement****Step 1: *PCO-Democratic Institutions P/T Policy Counterparts (Summer 2021)***

- As an initial step to engagement, PCO officials will engage with their P/Ts policy counterparts at the Director General-level. A roundtable discussion will feature an overview of the Plan to Protect Canada's Democracy, an unclassified briefing from security agencies on the Threat environment, and an information exchange on any related measures P/Ts have implemented in this space.

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- Objectives for this discussion include bolstering overall domestic preparedness in the protecting democracy space, and encouraging other orders of government to proactively think about election security and preparedness; and where possible, provide guidance based on proven GoC models in this space. Further details on the proposed format for this discussion can be found in **Annex A**.

**Step 2: P/T Election Administration Bodies (Summer 2021)**

- As a second step to engagement, PCO will, working with Elections Canada, engage with the P/Ts' EMBs Working Group on Election Security and Disinformation. A roundtable discussion will feature an information exchange on protecting democracy measures, with a focus on election integrity and security. This format would serve as a natural follow up to the 2017 briefing with CEOs.
- Objectives for this discussion include increasing capacity and awareness building among election administrators in an evolving threat space, as well as an opportunity to bolster these working relationships.
- This point of engagement also provides an opportunity to leverage existing working relationships with Elections Canada and their counterparts. Further details on the proposed format for this discussion can be found in **Annex A**.

**PCO Comment**

- PCO plans to undertake Step 1 as an initial point of engagement with P/Ts. As a starting point, this will allow PCO to establish working relationships with their P/Ts counterparts and build on previous outreach in the protecting democracy space.
- As a second step, engagement with EMBs will also build on existing, trusted, relationships through an established forum. This also addresses gaps in electoral security guidance already identified by the EMB network. Engaging with the EMB network would, by nature, also include support to municipalities, as several P/Ts' EMBs are also responsible for the administration of municipal elections (e.g. New Brunswick, Nunavut, Quebec, and Prince Edward Island).

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- Both engagement points effectively addresses the broad objectives of P/Ts' engagement, including exercising leadership and guidance in the protecting democracy space, and bolstering information exchange between levels of government.

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Attachment (1)

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- Format for this engagement could feature four key discussion themes:
  - (1) Highlighting key components of the Protecting Democracy Plan and inform on updates since 2019; and promoting GoC public resources in the protecting democracy space, including CSE/CSIS public reports, and guiding principles from the UK RESIST model.
  - (2) Including partners from Microsoft to talk about the work of the Paris Call and the publicly available resources (e.g. the Compendium). Also potential inclusion of a civil society organization such as CIVIX, funded through DCI with programs in K-12 schools, to speak to disinformation efforts at the local level.
  - (3) Focus on threat awareness through unclassified threat discussion outlining principal threat actors and commons strategies and tactics used.
  - (4) Discussion on lessons learned from P/T elections, P/T experience in election security measures, and general exchange of best practices. This could also include an exchange on support to municipalities, and encourage pursuit of discussions at the local level.

**Step 2: P/T Election Administration Bodies (Summer 2021)**

- Format for this engagement could feature four key discussion themes:
  - (1) Highlighting key components of the Protecting Democracy Plan and inform on updates to the Plan since 2019. For example, of key interest to Elections Canada would be relevant changes to the Protocol.
  - (2) A threat awareness discussion lead by CSE/Cyber Centre that builds on previous briefings to EMBs in 2017 and provides an update on the evolving cyber landscape, including how the COVID-19 context has impacted the security space.
  - (3) Integrated focus on disinformation as a key threat in the cyber space. There would be an opportunity to highlight the work DI is

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doing in this space, and how it relates to the working group's mandate. This could also include highlighting the CSE/CSIS public reports as informative security resources.

- (4) Information exchange on how EMBs engage with Elections Canada and other key partners in this space, and in what ways further federal guidance could positively inform their work.