

For Public Release

## Media Engagement Safeguarding the 2019 Election

### Issue

Foreign influence before and during a national election continues to be a threat for western democracies. While Canada may be slightly removed from the epicenter of this phenomenon, the activities of adversarial state actors and their proxies continue to be a preoccupation of the Canadian media and, indeed, the population itself.

Several media organizations have put in place units to try to identify and counter disinformation or fake news. There are also several journalists themselves who have developed a level of expertise about how to spot disinformation and are engaging with their colleagues about how foreign entities are using the “mainstream media” to further their strategic objectives.

Additionally, while not directly linked to elections, extremist groups are using the same techniques to spread disinformation, plan harassment campaigns and radicalize people.

### Concept of Media Operation

The Government of Canada will launch a whole-of-government media engagement series of events focused on information sharing and dialogue that will increase mutual understanding among journalists and public servants about the roles and capabilities of each side to work collaboratively to counter foreign Interference attempts during the next federal election. The series of events will take place over the summer and into the next election and will consist of technical briefings, background briefings, roundtable discussions and formal media briefings. There will be whole-of-government briefing as well as single-department briefings. All events, except formal media briefings, will be “not for attribution.”

### Government Departments with a Direct Role

- PCO – Coordination
- CSE
- CSIS
- RCMP
- GAC
- Democratic Institutions (DI)
- Heritage Canada (Digital Citizen Initiative)
- Elections Canada

There may also be a desire to include Public Safety and Justice given their Deputies’ roles on the G5 council.

## For Public Release

Considerations

In order for the engagement to be successful, there are several critical considerations:

1. While the media engagement is primarily about sharing what we are seeing in the disinformation or foreign influence sphere, the over-arching key message should be that the Government of Canada is highly prepared to address these threats.
2. Security agencies in the government must be prepared to find ways to responsibly de-classify as much information as possible to make these briefings **credible** and **worthwhile**.
3. Journalists will need to understand that the government can only offer observations about activities in the open source and (where possible) de-classified info gleaned classified spaces. We cannot, in many instances, offer conclusions about the motivations of actors. Additionally, journalists should be encouraged to do more investigation to validate these observations for themselves.
4. The government will need to be clear that while we will be looking for trends and threats, they are by design difficult to detect and may not be immediately apparent.
5. There will need to be a clear understanding on the part of journalists that while the government is undertaking to be as open as possible, there may be operational reasons to limit information shared.
6. The government must be clear that our observations are neutral and designed to expose inauthentic behavior without comment on the effectiveness of the behavior to influence the election.
7. Ministers will have no engagement beyond the initial launch. Political parties are not considered for this engagement to maintain a non-partisan posture.

Roll out

The rollout of this media engagement will take place over several months in the lead up to the next election. There will be two tracks. The first is multilateral engagement where all implicated departments work collaboratively to ensure journalists have the information they need to understand the way that the public service tracks and communicates about foreign interference and disinformation. The second will be bilateral engagements where departments continue to engage journalists one-on-one. After individual engagements, departments will need to ensure partner departments have detailed reports about information shared and reactions of journalists to ensure continued coordination.

Calendar for Multi-departmental Engagements

Early June: Ministerial update to the January 30 event. This would involve Ministers Gould, Goodale and Sajjan. The Ministers would update Canadians about progress made in the preceding months to safeguard the election. In addition to the Minister, Deputy Ministers for the G5 council would introduce themselves and provide further information about their approach to this role and the cautious approach they will take that is designed to avoid the impression of partisanship at all costs.

## For Public Release

A formal technical briefing involving CSE, CSIS, RCMP, GAC, DI and Heritage would precede the ministerial briefing.

Early July: Media Roundtable. This is an opportunity for departmental Communications and Policy staff, Journalists, and Editors to discuss the upcoming election. Discussions would take the form of a structured information sharing exercise where the public service and journalists could discuss areas of mutual interest while still maintaining the necessary separation of roles. Discussions would be "not for attribution but the government would be clear that if necessary, there would be off the record elements that would be clearly delineated. Departments would include PCO, CSE, CSIS, RCMP, GAC, Heritage and Elections Canada, Public Safety and possibly Heritage.

These roundtables would be repeated at the beginning of **August** and **September**. Consideration would also consider a briefing in early October depending on need.

#### Media Relations Protocol

Beginning in June, government of Canada will initiate a media relations protocol. This protocol will institute a variety of information sharing elements:

- A list of possible subject areas with associated departments of primary interest
- List of Media Relations contacts that will be shared with all implicated departments
- List of Spokespersons with their areas of expertise shared with all implicated departments
- A spokesperson with general messaging all departments can use
- A template that will encourage consistent concise information to be shared
- A daily End of Day report of all departmental media relations activity, This would be distributed by PCO Communications

#### Single Web Presence

PCO Communications will create single web presence as a non-partisan focal point for communications about threats to the election, foreign influence and disinformation. The channel would be a place for the government to provide updates about analysis suggesting emerging threats or to make general statements about the state of preparedness. Information could focus on, for example, known tactics of inauthentic actors, publically digestible versions of the RRM trends reports, tips for cyber hygiene and it could also promote awareness of other efforts (Cyber Centre and Heritage Canada) to build resilience in the Canadian population

**Possible channel brand could be ELECTIONSAFE.gc.ca, @electionsafecanada**

Notes :

- This plan assumes a September 15<sup>th</sup> election call.

## For Public Release

- There will need to be ongoing and regular coordination among departments during this media engagement activity.
- Throughout the calendar of events, if significant foreign interference is detected, there may be a need for more briefings.
- Additionally there will be regular contact with the DG ESSC and the ADM ESSC to ensure that the G5 council is briefed as appropriate