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## OPEN DATA ANALYSIS REPORT

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## ALBERTA ELECTION ANALYSIS

## PURPOSE

This report analyses open source data gathered in the lead-up to the provincial elections in Alberta held on April 16, 2019. Its purpose was to identify any emerging tactics in foreign interference and draw lessons learned for the Canadian general elections scheduled to take place in October 2019. Prepared in support of the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM), the report was penned by RRM Canada. The RRM is mandated to strengthen G7 coordination to identify and respond to diverse and evolving threats to G7 democracies, including through sharing information and analysis, and identifying opportunities for coordinated response.

## KEY FINDINGS

Based on primary and secondary research, RRM Canada concludes that there were very likely **no significant foreign interference campaigns** targeting the Alberta election in the online space in April 2019. However, coordinated inauthentic activity was detected:

- **RRM Canada identified accounts that demonstrated coordinated inauthentic behaviour.** RRM Canada judges the activity is very unlikely to comprise one third of the online conversation as reported by Press Progress on April 11, 2019.
- RRM Canada identified cases of social media accounts, which were **likely inauthentic, coordinated behaviour<sup>1</sup>** around online discussions about the Alberta election. However, the majority of these accounts were very likely not foreign.
- RRM Canada identified known national far-right and hate group actors who have previously disseminated material, **using similar tactics as known malign foreign actors.**
- RRM identified **accounts tied to lobbying groups** that were unaffiliated with a political party spreading disinformation online in the run-up to the Alberta election.
- The Alberta election provides an example of a situation where there may be evidence of **coordinated inauthentic behaviour undertaken by Canadian actors**, making the identification of foreign interference more difficult.

## Alberta Election Findings

[1] RRM Canada reviewed social media data to search for obvious cases of coordinated, inauthentic behaviour with the objective of identifying any potential foreign activities. Based on available information, it is very unlikely there was any foreign interference. The two largest components of the graph are made up of supporters of the former Premier Notley and Premier Kenney, as expected in an election campaign [Annex A].

[2] RRM Canada assesses that none of the major communities taking part in online conversations related to the elections are driven by foreign interference. The presence of automated inauthentic activities does not appear central or crucial to the overall conversation or activity.

<sup>1</sup> Scale of Estimative Language: Almost No Chance – [0 – 10]; Very Unlikely/Very Improbable – [11 – 29]; Unlikely/Improbable – [30 – 39]; Roughly Even Chance – [40 – 59]; Likely/Probable – [60 – 69]; Very Likely/Very Probable – [70 – 89]; Almost Certainly – [90 – 100]

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[3] RRM Canada's findings stand opposite to the [April 11, Press Progress report](#), which claimed that a third of accounts talking about the Alberta election were bots. **RRM Canada's findings, using multiple tools and methods, judges that the online activity is very unlikely to comprise one third of bots.** The article appears to rely only on the online tool mentionsmap as a metric for "bot activity", which is not a proper means of assessment for inauthentic account behaviour or bot activity. RRM Canada therefore does not support the findings articulated in the Press Progress Report.

[4] RRM Canada identified communities that **demonstrated a suspicious account creation pattern that is indicative of troll or bot activity.** Recent spikes in account creation suggest the presence of accounts developed for a specific purpose; however, **the community was determined to very likely be domestic,** as it was mainly comprised of supporters of the United Conservative Party (UCP). A second small community was identified as supporters of the People's Party of Canada, which had similar suspicious patterns of account creation. This pattern was not identified within communities of supporters of the Alberta Liberal Party or Alberta New Democratic Party. The overall number of accounts is a small percentage of a larger collection [Annex B]. This highlights a key point, namely that **domestic actors are also emulating the tactics used by foreign actors, within the context of provincial elections. This behaviour will make it increasingly difficult to distinguish national from foreign interference efforts in the upcoming Federal election.**

[5] The RRM identified a small group of anonymous accounts pushing a pro-separation movement in Alberta and the Prairies. Though Alberta has an official separatist party, <https://albertaindependence.ca/>, these accounts do not appear affiliated with this movement. Creating false separatist movements or amplifying domestic ones is a known tactic in foreign interference. Though unaffiliated, at this time, RRM Canada cannot tie this small group of accounts to any foreign entity.

[6] In its review of the data of this election, RRM Canada found no evidence supporting a broad, coordinated campaign to influence the Alberta election. **RRM Canada assesses that automated inauthentic behaviour and trolling activities are very likely domestic in nature;**

Released: May 1, 2019

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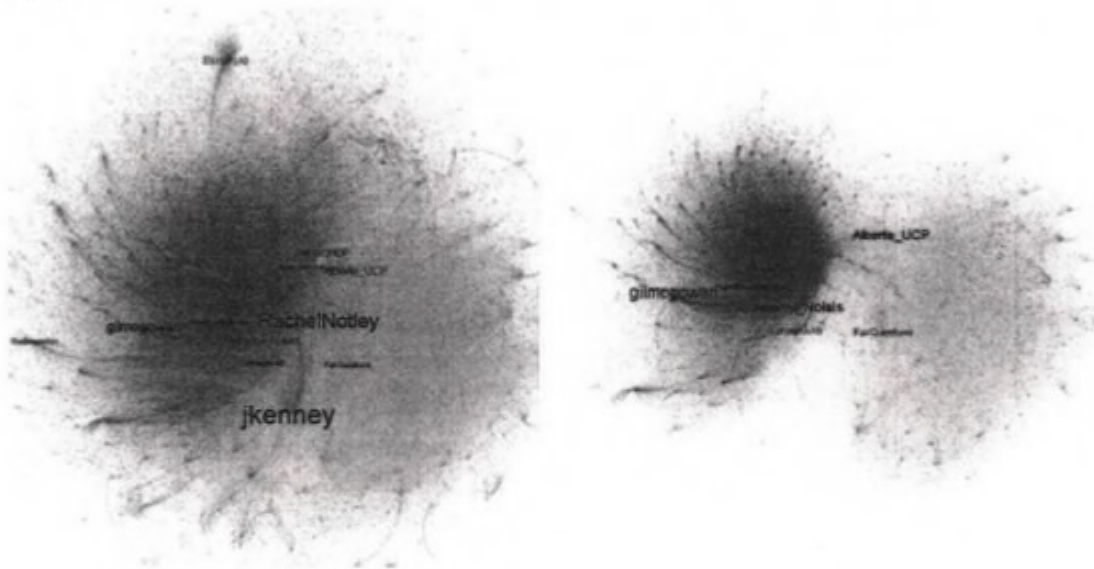
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## Annex A

This Annex is a visual representation of RRM Canada's data collection illustrating a high level of normality in the online conversation related to the Alberta provincial election. The analysis of activity would have been noteworthy for RRM Canada if there were other communities that rivaled the main political communities in size, but were predominately unknown actors, or actors from another geographical location.



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## Annex B

A review of the account creation dates of accounts in the community of UCP supporters. The size of the final spike is an indicator of inauthentic activity. One indicator of bot activity is a large number of recently-created accounts. In this case, a large spike in accounts created in Q1 2019 is suggestive of inauthentic activity by either automated accounts or anonymous accounts. This combined with a qualitative evaluation of the accounts by RRM Canada, as well as their posting behaviours and the social network analysis; these are indications of likely inauthentic behaviour.

