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Daphne Bramham: Is China interfering in the Canadian election?

Opinion: Some Chinese-Canadians are warning of vote-buying by pro-Beijing forces targeting at least two Chinese candidates who don't toe the line.

Daphne Bramham

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27 Comments



NDP incumbent Jenny Kwan is one of the Chinese-Canadian candidates alleged to be targeted by pro-Beijing supporters. (Francis Georgian/ PNG staff) PHOTO BY FRANCIS GEORGIAN /PNG

Josh Vander Vies has an amazing personal story. Born without arms and legs, he is a lawyer and a Paralympian.

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Now, Vander Vies is also the Liberal candidate trying to knock off Jenny Kwan, Canada's longest-serving Chinese Canadian politician, in a riding that has voted solidly New Democrat for decades.



But if he wins what would be a stunning upset in Vancouver East, it may be due to geopolitics and, some suggest, thanks to the help of people and organizations tied to the Chinese Communist Party — the folks who don't think Kwan does enough to advance the CCP's interests.

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As recently as February, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service director, David Vigneault, flagged as “some of the most paramount concerns” efforts by China and Russia to “target politicians, political parties, and electoral processes in order to covertly influence Canadian public policy, public opinion, and ultimately undermine our democracy and democratic processes.”

Such efforts are something that an overwhelming majority of Canadians fear, according to a Nanos poll conducted in August and accurate to within 3.1 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

Released Wednesday, it found two out of three Canadians want the government to be more forceful in its dealing with China, with 88 per cent saying they support or somewhat support a foreign agent registry for anyone working on behalf of a foreign government or organizations to influence Canadian policies, which is something the United States and Australia already have.

Earlier this year, Alliance Canada HK reported on China's “unrestricted network of foreign influence” including elite capture, surveillance and intimidation of activists in Canada and the United Front Work Department's activities.

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So, back to Vancouver East.

In late August, Fred Kwok (aka Guo Yinghua) invited members of the Chinese community to a free lunch in Chinatown to meet Vander Vies.



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau talks with Liberal candidate for Vancouver East, Josh Vander Vies, as they are joined by fellow Liberal candidates during a campaign event in downtown Vancouver last week. PHOTO BY SEAN KILPATRICK /The Canadian Press

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“Throughout these years, the Chinese community and the Chinese people have long been neglected,” Kwok said in a WeChat invitation written in Chinese. “We the Chinese people must show the voting power to the politicians. ... When the future victory comes, at least there will be a few more MPs who

As a result, Kwok said he has been advised to register as a “third party,” which is defined as any person or group that “wants to participate in or influence elections other than as a political party, electoral district association, nomination contestant or candidate.”

Earlier this week, a lawyer for the NDP contacted Elections Canada and raised questions about whether Kwok had breached the Election Act provisions requiring third-party registration as well as the sections dealing with offering and accepting bribes.

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Although Kwok modestly described himself as “an ordinary citizen,” he has a wide circle of contacts and influence as president of the Chinese Benevolent Association, head of the Chinese Freemasons of Canada, chair of the Chinese Cultural Centre of Greater Vancouver, and a member of the B.C. government’s advisory board on Chinese legacy initiatives.

The Chinese Benevolent Association and the freemasons are among the groups that took out ads in Chinese- and English-language newspapers accusing Canadian parliamentarians of interfering in Chinese affairs after parliamentarians unanimously declared China was involved in the genocide of Muslim-minority Uyghurs. (Liberal cabinet ministers abstained.)

The two organizations have also sponsored ads supporting imposition of the National Security Law in Hong Kong, condemning democracy marches, and supporting the “reunification” of Taiwan.

The Chinese-Canadian Concerned Group on the Chinese Communist Party’s Human Rights Violation that first raised questions about Kwok’s free Chinatown lunch described it as alarming and “déjà vu of a well-tried and successful vote-buying tactic in Hong Kong” used by pro-Beijing parties and politicians.

STORY CONTINUES BELOW

It warned, “We don’t want Hong Kong to become our crystal ball.”

Kwok waved aside the accusations that he or the organizations that he is affiliated with are tied to the Communist Party of Canada as “quite silly.”

Kwok, who has gone to China as a guest of the government a number of times, said those organizations have supported the Chinese government’s positions that, “We don’t like to see China get unstable.”

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Via email, Vander Vies declined to be interviewed.

Getting it on to the agenda is why Gloria Fung's group Canada-Hong Kong Link along with the [Vancouver Society for the Support of Democratic Movement](#) and Saskatchewan Stand with Hong Kong commissioned the Nanos poll.

"No matter which party wins, we are going to use this poll to hold all parties accountable," she said. "This is what we need to do."

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Why? Because foreign influence behind the scenes during this election is "very, very significant", said Fung, who went on to note Kwan is not the only candidate who is being targeted.

dbramham@postmedia.com

Twitter: [@bramham_daphne](#)

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