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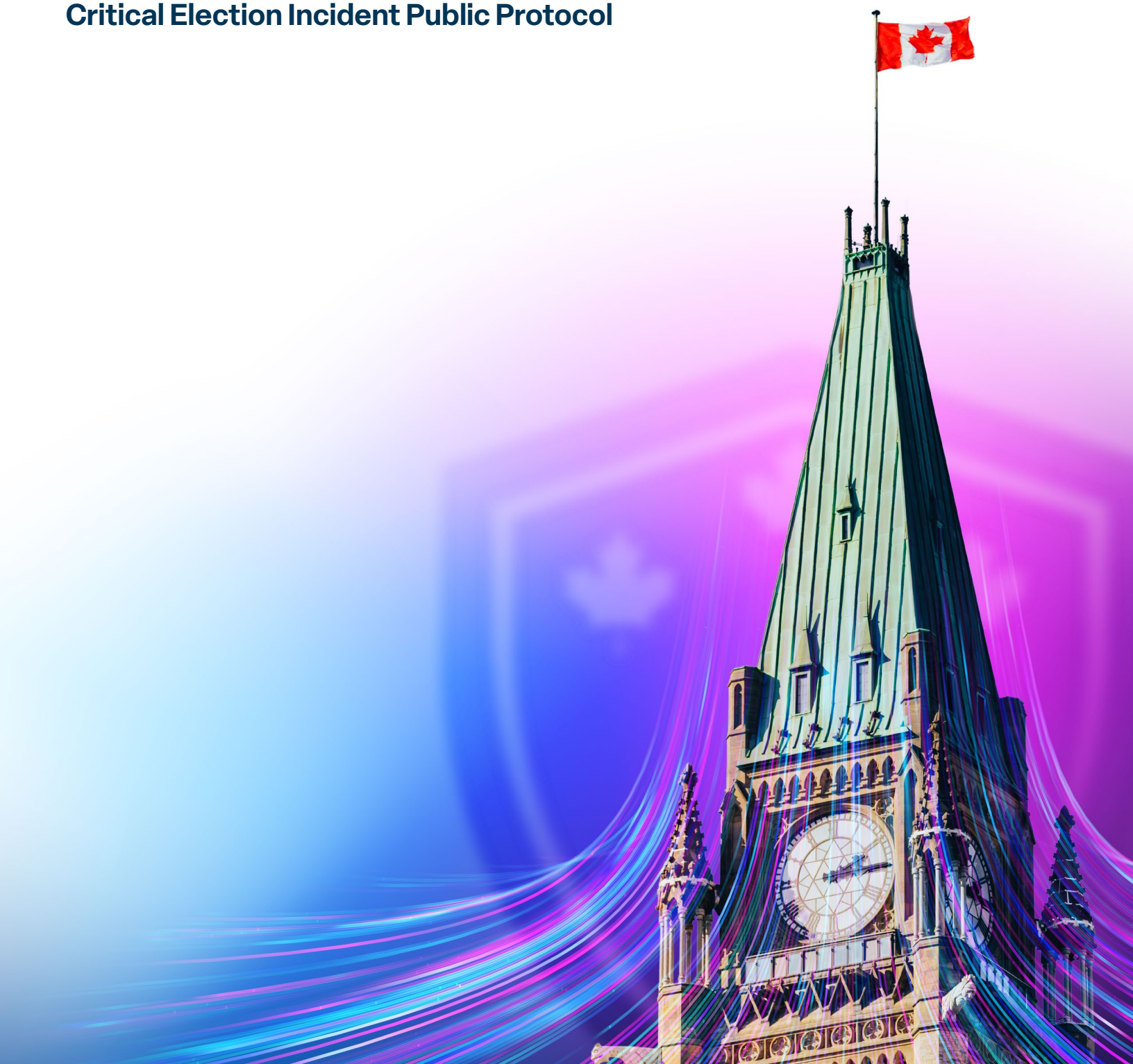
Retrospective Report on the 45th General Election

Critical Election Incident Public Protocol



Retrospective Report on the 45th General Election: Critical Election Incident Public Protocol.

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Foreword by the Clerk of the Privy Council

I have had the privilege of serving Canadians in many capacities, including Clerk of the Privy Council since 2023. As Clerk, I take very seriously my role in leading the Panel responsible for the implementation of the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol (CEIPP). It entrusts me and my fellow Panel members with the coordination of the Government's efforts to protect the integrity of Canada's federal elections against potential disruptive events, including the threats of foreign interference and violent extremism.

This is especially important because of the considerable attention that has been paid to foreign election interference in Canada and ensuring all necessary measures are in place to appropriately respond.

Since the 44th General Election, relevant findings and recommendations have been issued by Parliamentary Committees; the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians; Morris Rosenberg in his assessment of the CEIPP following the 2021 election; and the Independent Special Rapporteur David Johnston and Commissioner Marie-Josée Hogue through their reporting.

It is my hope, upon reading the deliberations and decisions detailed in this report, Canadians will feel assured the posture adopted by the Government to safeguard the 45th General Election rose to meet – and respond to – the thoughtful work of these individuals and committees. One example is the unprecedented communications with Canadians the Government of Canada undertook to raise awareness about potential threats; these efforts build directly upon the recommendations made by Commissioner Hogue and others.

I am very thankful to all those named above, as well as others who have offered advice on how to continue to improve the way in which the Government administers the CEIPP. I am also thankful to my fellow Panel members for the 45th General Election: Deputy Clerk of the Privy Council and National Security and Intelligence Advisor to the Prime Minister, Nathalie Drouin, Deputy Minister of Justice and Deputy Attorney General of Canada Shalene Curtis-Micallef, Deputy Minister of Public Safety Canada Tricia Geddes, and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs David Morrison. Each approached the task with the utmost seriousness, carefully deliberating each decision and weighing the information available to us.

Collectively, our Panel's work was guided by a single, unwavering principle: Canadians must have full confidence that their election is secure, their voices are heard, and their Government remains engaged on this issue. I am proud of the dedication and the hard work that was brought to bear on this mission for the 2025 election, by our Panel and all those who supported us. I am also pleased to note that none of the incidents reviewed by the Panel threatened Canada's ability to have a free and fair election.

Coming out of the 45th General Election, I believe that, in this regard, Canada continues to serve as a model to the world – a nation where democracy is not just a system, but a shared commitment. Where citizens take the time to make informed choices, to scrutinize, to engage, and ultimately, to shape the future of this country.

That is the true strength of Canadian democracy, and it is one we must always protect. The strength of our democracy lies in the safeguards we put in place, together with the trust and engagement of the people we serve.

John Hannaford

Former Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet

1. Introduction

Pursuant to the Guidance for Panel members for the implementation of the Cabinet Directive on the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol (CEIPP)[1], the report that follows details the deliberations and decision-making of the Government of Canada during the caretaker period[2] for the 45th General Election (GE45), related to incidents that may have had the potential to threaten Canada's ability to have a free and fair election.

It is intended to be read with the report of the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force (SITE Task Force). The SITE Task Force has, for the first time, issued a public version of its After-Action Report on threats to a general election detailing what the SITE Task Force expected to see, its observations of threat activities targeting GE45, and actions it undertook.[3]

Taken together, the intended purpose of the reports is twofold. Firstly, to the extent possible and based on the information currently available, to shed light on incidents of foreign interference, cyber threats, and violent extremism that were observed during the caretaker period, in order to raise awareness about these issues amongst Canadians and enhance citizen resilience going forward. Secondly, to detail how the Government prepared for GE45, how it responded, and how it continues to ensure readiness going forward. Both the Government and the Panel undertook extensive planning in anticipation of elevated foreign interference activity during GE45.

Foreign interference activities in Canada continue to be pervasive, sophisticated, and persistent. As consistently communicated by the Government, there is a baseline of foreign interference activity in Canada, including during a general election period. While the Panel was regularly briefed on incidents unfolding during GE45, these activities were largely consistent with the pre-election assessment of the potential for foreign interference and violent extremist activity. The Panel assessed that none of the incidents detected had a material impact on the election. The takeaways below, and the remainder of the report, are well aligned with the findings of the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference, which noted that while Canada's democratic institutions have remained robust in the face of foreign interference, there is an ongoing need for vigilance and continuous improvement to effectively counter evolving threats.

The following takeaways are highlighted, with further elaboration throughout this report.

1. As part of its efforts to safeguard the election during the caretaker period, the CEIPP Panel, and the Government of Canada more broadly, prepared extensively ahead of GE45, which was essential to ensuring readiness for the tasks at hand during the election period. Future CEIPP Panels should continue to commit to these efforts.

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1 www.canada.ca/en/democratic-institutions/services/protecting-democracy/critical-election-incident-public-protocol/guidance-panel-members.html

2 *The caretaker period begins when either the Government loses a vote of non-confidence or Parliament has been dissolved (either as a result of the Prime Minister asking for dissolution, or because of an election date set by legislation). It ends when a new government is sworn-in, or when an election result returning an incumbent government is clear. See* www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/services/publications/guidelines-conduct-ministers-state-exempt-staff-public-servants-election.html

3 *The Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force's "Threats to Canada's 45th General Election, June 2025 After-Action Report" is included in its entirety in Annex A.*

2. The Government proactively shared information with other entities, including Canada's political parties as well as online platforms, over the course of the campaign. Political parties, in particular, demonstrated a willingness to take the threat of foreign interference with the seriousness it deserves. Future CEIPP Panels should continue to view the provision of information to these entities as a key tool to mitigate risks, and should continue to cultivate these relationships to ensure information is shared in both directions at all times, and not only during election periods. Such communication should take into consideration the mandate of the SITE Task Force agencies, and the Government more broadly.
3. International engagement, with global partners and potential foreign malign actors alike, is a key, both ahead of and during the election. Such engagement served to ensure that the Government of Canada learns from others' experiences, and reinforces expectations related to what constitutes acceptable behaviours and deters unacceptable behaviours by foreign states during election periods. Future CEIPP Panels should continue to ensure that international and diplomatic perspectives inform their deliberations.
4. Establishing recurring public/media briefings to communicate Government of Canada findings during an election period allowed for regular updates and analysis to be provided to Canadians in a timely and consistent manner. The reception to these briefings from members of the media was largely positive. Future CEIPP Panels should continue to reflect on the best ways to ensure Canadians are informed about incidents during election periods, to the extent possible and keeping in mind national security considerations.

A classified version of this report was presented by the Clerk of the Privy Council to the Prime Minister and to the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians. This public version was developed to promote transparency and enhance awareness, while still respecting national security considerations.

2. Background

The CEIPP Panel, established in the Cabinet Directive on the CEIPP, is a non-partisan group of senior public servants established by the Government of Canada in 2019 to oversee and respond to potential threats to the integrity of federal elections during the caretaker period. Its primary function is to determine whether incidents, such as but not limited to foreign information manipulation and interference, cyber threats, and violent extremism, could undermine the electoral process or public confidence in it.

The Panel is composed of five senior public servants: the Clerk of the Privy Council, the National Security and Intelligence Advisor to the Prime Minister, and the Deputy Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Public Safety, and Justice. During a general election period, the Panel receives intelligence briefings and assessments from national security agencies, mainly through the SITE Task Force. If the Panel deems an incident or accumulation of incidents to be serious enough to threaten Canada's ability to have a free and fair election, the Panel may issue a public announcement to inform Canadians.

The CEIPP Panel, and the Cabinet Directive in which it is established, are key measures in place under the Plan to Protect Canada's Democracy, which has as its overarching objective to protect the electoral system against threats and strengthen trust in Canada's democratic institutions. The Panel complements other national security efforts and works closely with Elections Canada, the Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections, and other oversight bodies.

Outside of a general election period, other structures are in place to respond to instances of foreign information manipulation and interference, cyber threats or violent extremism, and ministers are engaged as appropriate. For example, the Deputy Ministers' Committee on Intelligence Action addresses actionable intelligence reports and coordinates operational responses to protect Canada's democratic processes and institutions. Further, the Assistant Deputy Ministers' (ADM) Election Security Coordinating Committee (ESCC) provides direction to ensure interagency collaboration, coordination and system preparedness as it relates to election security. In 2023, the Government established the position of the National Counter Foreign Interference Coordinator to combat foreign interference by providing leadership to advance a unified federal response and increase situational awareness and transparency through community engagement.

Following the 44th General Election, independent reviewer Morris Rosenberg assessed the CEIPP, its implementation and its effectiveness in addressing threats. In January 2025, Commissioner Marie-Josée Hogue also issued her final report on the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions (PIFI), which assessed the potential impacts of foreign interference on the 43rd and 44th General Elections and made recommendations, including in regards to the CEIPP. Both reports emphasized the need for the Government of Canada to better communicate and publicize the existence and mandate of the CEIPP Panel, as well as its decision-making process when reviewing incidents and determining appropriate responses. These reports also commented on the makeup of the Panel, what actions it could take beyond an announcement by the Panel itself, the briefings required before a general election to ensure the Panel's awareness and readiness, as well as the need to better inform political parties of the threat landscape. A similar independent review will be undertaken for GE45, as mandated in section 9 of the Cabinet Directive. This independent review will be made public and will inform future changes to the Cabinet Directive and Panel operations.

3. Preparation ahead of GE45

To allow sufficient preparation time ahead of GE45, each Panel member received an individual briefing on their responsibilities as a Panel member under the Cabinet Directive of the CEIPP.

From January 2024 to March 2025, the Panel held 17 meetings in preparation for GE45. During these meetings, the Panel was briefed by and met with various stakeholders from the Government of Canada, international governments, academics, and civil society. In addition, the Panel worked with officials across the Government to review and strengthen administrative and coordination processes in place for GE45, in alignment with the recommendations from independent reviewer Rosenberg and Commissioner Hogue. Lastly, the Panel also considered options to enhance communications with Canadians and increase their awareness of the threat landscape.

3.1 Panel's mandate, communication, and engagement tools

Ahead of GE45, the Panel considered and implemented a range of options to enhance the structures in place to support them in their role. One of the key initiatives to address evolving challenges identified in the 2021 assessment of the Protocol and recommendations from PIFI was the Guidance for Panel members for the implementation of the CEIPP, issued by the Clerk in January 2025. The Clerk's Guidance aims to enhance the Panel's preparedness, clarify its operational procedures, and ensure effective communication with Canadians during the caretaker period. It also outlines the

Panel's responsibility to consider a broad range of actions to safeguard electoral integrity, including clear communication with Canadians about the tools available to the Government, as well as the Clerk's expectations for Panel members during an election period. The Guidance also underscores the critical role of the Panel's leadership in coordinating Government efforts to safeguard the integrity of federal elections and highlights the necessity for collaboration among various Government departments and agencies.

To put these key principles into action, the Panel directed officials to prepare for a series of measures to be taken upon the issue of the writs, including to:

- Hold daily meetings of the Assistant Deputy Ministers' Election Security Coordinating Committee (ADM ESCC) during the election, to review open source reporting as well as intelligence from the SITE Task Force Situational Report (SITREP), and to offer advice and recommendations to the Panel on possible intervention options. The daily ADM meetings would also ensure that directions from the Panel were communicated quickly to Government partners to enable timely and efficient actions to respond to incidents.
- Hold weekly technical briefings with Canadian media representatives, to increase Canadians' awareness of the threats and incidents that could impact GE45.
- Develop a Panel statement, to be issued at the beginning of the election period.
- Develop and publish communications products (such as backgrounders and fact sheets on protecting Canada's elections) and a document outlining key considerations for Panel decisions, to increase awareness on the Panel's decision-making process.
- Develop and implement a clear plan to brief cleared political party representatives throughout GE45, to ensure political parties were aware of the threat landscape ahead of GE45 and to establish clear lines of communication with Government officials.

3.2 Increasing the Panel's awareness and knowledge on the threat landscape

Between January 2024 and March 2025, the Panel was briefed by the SITE Task Force and the Impact and Innovation Unit of the Privy Council Office (PCO) on multiple occasions, on a range of subjects and issues, including:

- Multiple federal by-elections, including the Cloverdale—Langley City by-election, the Lasalle—Émard-Verdun by-election, the Elmwood—Transcona by-election, as well as recent provincial elections in British Columbia, Saskatchewan and New Brunswick.
- Various updates on the current threat environment, including the intent and capability of state adversaries. This included individual assessments by SITE agencies of potential major threats to the next federal election.
- Findings from the Trust, Information, and Digital Ecosystems Study (TIDES), which highlighted research findings on democratic resilience in Canada.

The Panel also directed the SITE Task Force to develop classified and unclassified threat landscapes prior to GE45. The classified report was used to brief the Panel, while the unclassified report was used to inform Canadians as part of the weekly technical briefings.

In addition to receiving briefings on the threat landscape in Canada, the Panel undertook a series of scenario exercises, which were inspired by real-life scenarios worldwide, and deliberated on what actions they would direct officials to undertake and the rationale for each decision. The Panel also

attended, in collaboration with Elections Canada and the Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections, a half-day joint tabletop exercise, where all participants were tasked with addressing various incidents during a fictitious election period. Both the tabletop exercise and the regular scenario exercises helped Panel members familiarize themselves with the tools available to guide interventions, and ensured the Panel was equipped to consider a range of factors in its decision-making processes.

3.3 Collaboration and external engagements

As Canada is not alone in facing threats to the integrity of its federal elections, the Panel met with international counterparts who had elections in 2024 and 2025 to better understand the threats other countries faced and best practices these countries implemented to safeguard their election processes. The Panel met with representatives from France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Members of the Panel also met with representatives from Germany. These meetings provided the Panel with valuable, recent insights into the observations and experiences within each country, including feedback on measures implemented, highlighting both successes and challenges, as well as lessons learned.

Further, in November 2024, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs hosted a briefing session in Ottawa for senior representatives of countries with a presence in Canada. The briefing provided clear direction on acceptable and unacceptable diplomatic engagement practices in Canada, especially during a general election period.

In addition to increased international collaboration, the Panel held meetings with the Chief Electoral Officer and the Commissioner of Canada Elections to ensure that their roles and responsibilities during an election period were well understood, while also establishing communication channels for any necessary coordination. The Panel also met with civil society organizations and academics, such as the Canadian Digital Media Research Network (CDMRN), to gain insights from perspectives outside of the Government of Canada.

Furthermore, to enhance information integrity online in preparation for GE45, the Panel endorsed a plan for engagement with digital media platforms and tech companies. This included the "Statement of Canadian Democratic Principles,"[4] issued on March 23, 2025, which called for a collaborative effort to protect information integrity during the general election. In 2019 and 2021, social media platforms agreed to uphold the principles of integrity, authenticity and transparency of a voluntary Declaration. However, given the evolving online space, the Statement was issued to underscore the critical role that all sectors of society have, including social media platforms, in ensuring a healthy ecosystem.

Engagements with digital media platforms and tech companies began in September 2024 and continued until April 2025. Prior to GE45, bilateral conversations were organized with major social media platforms and companies.

4 *www.canada.ca/en/democratic-institutions/services/protecting-canada-general-election-2025/statement-canadian-democratic-principles.html*

3.4 Responding to PIFI recommendations

In the final report of PIFI published in January 2025, Commissioner Hogue noted that Panel members are relatively unknown to the public, and that not everyone understands that public servants are non-partisan. To address this, Commissioner Hogue recommended that the Government of Canada should consider adding to the Panel membership a distinguished Canadian, in whom the public has confidence to be the face of the Panel if an announcement is needed during the election period. To assure legitimacy and buy-in, Commissioner Hogue further added that prior to adding any member to the Panel, political parties represented in the House of Commons and senators should be consulted.

While Commissioner Hogue indicated that she did not expect this recommendation to be implemented prior to GE45, Panel members agreed that efforts should be made to expedite the appointment of an external sixth Panel member, given the potential of this recommendation to further demonstrate the Panel's impartiality to Canadians. As such, Panel members, via the Clerk of the Privy Council, sent a letter to political parties represented in the House of Commons and to leaders in the Senate on March 5, 2025, to propose the addition of an eminent Canadian to the membership of the Panel for GE45. Proceeding with this appointment was contingent upon the receipt of concurrence from all recipients, which was not attained.

Commissioner Hogue also stated that, in her view, information manipulation "poses the single biggest risk to our democracy. It is an existential threat."[5] Given the Panel's mandate to coordinate actions in response to threats, the Panel welcomed the Government's announcement of the provision of an additional $5.95 million, starting in 2024-25, to bolster Global Affairs Canada (GAC) Rapid Response Mechanism Canada's capacity to monitor and strengthen the defense of the Canadian open-source information ecosystem and keep Canadians informed of possible foreign interference during the election.[6]

4. Operations during GE45

When the 45th General Election was called on March 23, 2025, the mandate of the CEIPP Panel to monitor incidents that could threaten Canada's ability to have a free and fair election came into effect. As stated in the Clerk's Guidance, the Panel brings an important contribution in coordinating Government efforts to protect the integrity of the federal election. To accomplish this task, weekly and ad hoc Panel meetings were organized during the caretaker period to review incidents and direct actions by the Government of Canada to address and mitigate the impact of these incidents. Between March 24, 2025 and April 30, 2025, the Panel met on eight separate occasions to review identified incidents.

5 *Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions, Volume 1: Report Summary, page 6.* https://foreigninterferencecommission.ca/fileadmin/report_volume_1.pdf

6 www.canada.ca/en/democratic-institutions/news/2025/01/statement-from-minister-sahota-and-minister-mcguinty-on-the-final-report-from-the-commissioner-for-the-public-inquiry-into-foreign-interference-in-.html

On March 24, 2025, the Clerk of the Privy Council, on behalf of the CEIPP Panel, issued a statement on Protecting Canada's General Elections.[7] Two communications backgrounders on "Measures to protect the 2025 General Election" and "Detecting and reporting disinformation" were also published alongside the Clerk's statement, as directed by the Panel as part of their preparatory meetings.[8,9]

On March 24, 2025, the SITE Task Force started producing and sharing with Panel members daily Situational Reports (SITREPs), based on reporting from SITE TF members and observers. Between March 24, 2025, and May 7, 2025, 31 SITREPs were produced and distributed to Panel members.

The ADM ESCC group also held daily meetings, as requested by the Panel, to review the information provided in the SITE Task Force SITREPs and make recommendations to the Panel on actions and measures that could be considered. Between March 24, 2025, and May 1, 2025, ADMs and other officials from Elections Canada, the Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), the Communications Security Establishment Canada (CSE) and its Canadian Centre for Cyber Security (CCCS), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), Global Affairs Canada (GAC), the Integrated Threat Assessment Centre (ITAC), Public Safety, and the PCO teams for Communications, Security and Intelligence (S&I) and Democratic Institutions (DI) met 27 times to review incidents from the SITREPs, debrief on actions undertaken following Panel direction, and ensure cohesive and concerted efforts by the Government of Canada.

Ensuring that strong and robust structures were in place for GE45 was instrumental to delivering comprehensive briefings to the Panel, both to enable its timely decision-making and effective responses from the Government of Canada. These efforts also contributed to the Government of Canada adopting a more transparent and forthcoming posture with external stakeholders and the public in order to increase awareness of what to expect during GE45.

As outlined below and in the SITE After Action Report, the Panel was informed of and coordinated actions to respond to multiple instances of foreign interference attempts by hostile state actors throughout GE45. In response, the Panel requested that various partners across the Government of Canada take timely actions, which included a range of options: engaging with political party representatives, communicating with social media platforms, liaising with other countries, and communicating with Canadians via the weekly technical briefings.

When deliberating on the appropriate measures to be undertaken, the Panel looked at the broad context of each incident and considered a range of factors such as the potential for the incident to undermine the credibility of or have a material impact on the election, their degree of confidence in the intelligence or information, as well as the reach, scale, credibility and lifespan of the incident.

7 www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/news/2025/03/statement-by-government-of-canada-on-protecting-canadas-general-elections0.html

8 www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/news/2025/03/measures-to-protect-the-2025-general-election.html

9 www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/news/2025/03/detecting-and-reporting-disinformation.html

4.1 Communications with political party representatives and candidates

Building on insights gained from previous general elections, as well as from the 2021 Rosenberg Report and the PIFI Final Report, the Government of Canada recognizes the importance of enhancing information sharing with political parties. For this reason, a key area of effort for GE45 focused on providing briefings, including classified briefings, to political parties in order to support their informed and effective responses to potential foreign interference attempts during general elections. The importance of these efforts was highlighted in the Clerk's Guidance to implement other measures available to the Government of Canada, with its direct mention of engaging with political party representatives.

When the election was called on March 23 2025, meetings between PCO and SITE Task Force officials with representatives from political parties with appropriate security clearances were organized. Political party cleared representatives were briefed on the threat landscape for GE45, the role of the CEIPP Panel, as well as the Government of Canada's planned communications strategy for the upcoming election.

Political party representatives were also provided with an update on the Candidate Security Program, which was launched for GE45. The program aimed to enhance the security posture of candidates on an as and when needed basis. Through this program, an additional layer of security could be provided through unarmed, private sector security services to candidates who felt intimidated or threatened but did not meet the threshold to warrant RCMP and/or local police protection.

Further, to increase candidates' awareness of the resources available to them during GE45, an email was sent to all registered candidates. The email included resources, links and Government contact information to ensure that all registered candidates were able to seek support as needed. Both of these outreach efforts were done following Panel direction from preparatory meetings.

Ad hoc meetings were also organized throughout GE45 with political party representatives as information became available to the Panel on attempts by hostile state actors to influence election results. This included individual meetings with specific political parties to share information and discuss specific foreign interference attempts, some of which were also discussed through the weekly technical briefings held by SITE Task Force and PCO officials.

For example, in the context of the assessed potential for Russian FIMI in GE45 and in response to observed efforts by a network of websites, general remarks on potential tactics used by foreign actors were provided as part of a briefing to political party representatives. The information was shared to increase awareness of the issue while not drawing attention on the specific network and potentially amplifying its content, given low engagement observed. In the context of the targeting of CPC candidate Joe Tay and the information operation targeting LPC candidate Mark Carney, bilateral meetings were held with political parties. Such meetings were used to share information to enable political parties to take steps to better protect themselves and their candidates.

All meetings involving the disclosure of classified information took place in downtown Ottawa. The meetings included PCO and SITE Task Force officials to ensure that the most up-to-date and accurate information was provided to political party representatives.

In all these instances, after carefully assessing the incidents using various criteria – including the incidents' potential impact on the integrity of the election, the ability of voters to cast an informed ballot, and the risk of public confusion or loss of confidence in democratic institutions – the Panel concluded that the most appropriate and proportionate response to these incidents was to inform

the relevant political party representatives, sometimes in parallel with other intervention measures. This empowered those directly affected to consider taking prompt action to address the issue and mitigate any potential effect.

4.2 Communications with social media platforms

Throughout GE45 and at the Panel's direction, PCO held three multilateral meetings with major social media platforms and companies, with representatives from GAC, CCCS, Canadian Heritage and Public Safety Canada. This approach was in line with work undertaken prior to the issue of the writs and allowed for open exchange regarding the expectations of the Government about online information integrity during GE45. It also opened effective channels of communication within the Government and with digital media platforms and tech companies and provided a forum to flag and discuss incidents or threats to election integrity observed either by the Government or social media platforms.

Furthermore, SITE Task Force representatives met bilaterally with two social media platforms, when directed by the Panel, to discuss specific incidents:

- Officials engaged with representatives from Tencent on two occasions to provide relevant information on incidents related to the information operation on WeChat targeting LPC candidate Mark Carney and the targeting of CPC candidate Joe Tay.
- Officials from PCO and SITE Task Force engaged with representatives from Meta to provide relevant information on a FIMI Facebook campaign targeting CPC candidate Joe Tay.

When reviewing these incidents and deliberating on avenues of intervention, the Panel determined that engaging with social media platforms, alongside other intervention measures, was a critical and beneficial response measure. Such interventions align with the CEIPP's emphasis on proportional and effective intervention designed to minimize harm while preserving transparency and trust.

4.3 Communications with other countries

As in the previous two general elections, GAC issued a circular on March 23, 2025, to foreign diplomatic missions in Canada, and their consular posts, reminding them of their obligations under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and the Vienna Conventions on Consular Relations, and expectations for acceptable diplomatic practices during Canada's electoral period.

The Panel was made aware of possible interest on the part of foreign dignitaries in Canada to attempt to influence the election, including by using Canadian community groups.

The Panel determined that issuing a formal reminder to foreign diplomatic missions in Canada to re-iterate acceptable and unacceptable diplomatic conduct during Canada's federal elections was a prudent and necessary step. This reminder, which was sent on April 15, 2025, reinforced established diplomatic protocols and clearly articulated the Government's expectation that foreign governments respect Canada's sovereignty and the integrity of Canada's electoral process. By proactively addressing foreign representatives, this reminder sought to deter attempts at interference and aimed to maintain mutual respect and understanding between Canada and foreign nations represented in Canada.

The formal reminder to foreign diplomatic missions in Canada, to re-iterate acceptable and unacceptable diplomatic conduct during Canada's federal elections, may have resulted in diminished activity that could be perceived as foreign interference among foreign diplomats.

The Panel determined that informing a partner country of an incident of interest was a necessary and constructive measure. Sharing such information strengthens bilateral cooperation and enhances the collective ability to detect, respond to, and mitigate threats that transcend national borders.

4.4 Communications with Canadians

At the Panel's direction, officials from PCO, CSIS, GAC, CSE, and the RCMP held five weekly technical briefings with the media between March 24, 2025, and April 21, 2025. These technical briefings were a first of its kind pillar initiative. They enabled officials to communicate directly with Canadians on what was observed by the SITE Task Force during GE45, including factual and up-to-date information on a range of tactics used by foreign actors, and to inform Canadians on potential mitigation measures. Topics covered during the technical briefings included the threat landscape prior to GE45, the risks of transnational repression (TNR), cyber security best practices, as well as spearphishing and hack and release.

Through this initiative, the Government of Canada communicated with Canadians on a range of incidents that were observed throughout GE45. The Panel meetings would inform the topics that would be discussed by officials during the technical briefings, which enabled the Panel to make clear attribution in regards to detected incidents. The briefings also allowed for more generalized communications to Canadians on broader threats observed. For example:

- When the Panel was informed of contrasting narratives on LPC candidate Mark Carney having high levels of engagement on WeChat accounts, officials were instructed to publicly discuss the incident and make attribution to the People's Republic of China (PRC) at the technical briefing planned for April 7, 2025. This direction aligned with previous actions from the Government of Canada, when information was released on a similar campaign targeting Member of Parliament and LPC leadership candidate Chrystia Freeland, which was undertaken by the same WeChat account during the LPC leadership race in February 2025. The news release summarizing the technical briefing was published alongside a backgrounder with additional information on the incident in English, French, Traditional Chinese and Simplified Chinese in order to increase the reach to affected diaspora communities[10]. Given the scale and scope of the incident, the Panel agreed that, as stated in the Clerk's guidance, proactive and transparent communications with Canadians via the weekly technical briefing was warranted to ensure Canadians are well informed of the ongoing threats.
- When informed of the existence of a network of websites laundering and amplifying Russian government-controlled media outlets' aggregated items about Canadian candidates and the election throughout the election period, officials were instructed to publicly discuss it generally. Remarks were made as part of the technical briefing that took place on April 7, 2025, to provide information on the main actors usually associated with such efforts, without making direct attribution given the low level of engagements observed and the potential inadvertent amplification of the content.

10 *www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/news/2025/04/information-operation-on-wechat-targeting-the45th-general-election.html*

Prior to GE 45, there was a call by Chinese authorities in late December 2024 offering a financial reward for Mr. Tay's arrest, as well as high levels of engagement on social media platforms, which subsequently declined prior to the start of GE45. Throughout GE45, the Panel was provided with regular updates regarding observed and reported incidents related to CPC candidate Joe Tay. Considerable effort was dedicated to ensuring to obtain the best available information related to these incidents, and the Panel undertook extensive deliberations on determining the appropriate mitigations:

- After the general election was called, the SITE Task Force informed the Panel about an ongoing FIMI campaign against CPC candidate Joe Tay. The Panel spent considerable time discussing the TNR campaign against Mr. Tay.
- Given the low engagement observed on the various FIMI campaigns in the first week of the election period, and in order to protect Mr. Tay's privacy, it was determined that the technical briefing scheduled on March 31, 2025, should focus on TNR, and specifically digital TNR, without providing specific details surrounding Mr. Tay's case. This course of action was informed by the determination that publicly discussing the specifics at this time risked amplifying the digital TNR. Given the low level of engagement observed, the Panel instructed the SITE Task Force to continue to monitor the incident and report back to the Panel should there be any further developments.
- At a meeting on April 16, 2025, the Panel received reported information relating to Mr. Tay and determined that more information should be sought in order to determine the appropriate response. This included direction by the Panel for the Government to engage with the CPC for any updates on Joe Tay's campaign, and to obtain additional information regarding the reported potential barriers facing Mr. Tay's candidacy, including through further internal analysis and engagement with members of the Chinese Canadian diaspora community. The requested information was seen as a way to further assess the reporting received, and to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the potential impacts of the observed and reported incidents on the election, in keeping with the elements outlined in the Cabinet Directive.
- At a meeting on April 17, 2025, the Panel concluded that the ability to have a free and fair election (including in Don Valley North) was not threatened, and that a public announcement by the Panel itself was not required. However, the Panel concluded that public notification with regard to the PRC's digital TNR operations targeting Mr. Tay was warranted given the accumulation of incidents and should be undertaken by officials at the scheduled technical briefing of Monday, April 21, 2025. This determination reflected, for example, that online malign activity observed had received low engagement throughout the election period. Additionally, throughout the election period, the Panel had and continued to ensure that a range of actions were taken to support the integrity of the Don Valley North election. These actions included engagements with the CPC and engagements with online platforms where malign activity had been observed.

In some instances listed above, the Panel deliberated on how to strike the appropriate balance between the benefit of raising awareness of malign activity, against the risk of potentially furthering the objectives of hostile state actors. For example, in instances where limited online engagement was observed on FIMI campaigns, disclosing specific details could inadvertently amplify the threat by drawing attention to the incident. In these instances, the Panel viewed the technical briefings as an opportunity to inform Canadians of the overall tactics and measures employed by threat actors, while minimising the risk of amplifying specific incidents unnecessarily. Moreover, the deliberations by the Panel demonstrated the importance of ensuring that the Panel has the ability to obtain further information to complement and validate reporting received by the Panel for decision-making.

4.5 Other Incidents

In instances where the incidents reported to the Panel were limited either in scope or where there was limited intelligence available to fully assess the situation, the Panel advised officials to continue close monitoring of the reporting. This directive was intended to ensure that any changes or escalations could be detected early, allowing for timely and appropriate responses.

Additionally, the Panel reviewed other reported incidents that did not require its direct intervention. In some instances, such incidents were effectively resolved within the established responsibilities and authorities of the various national security agencies involved, allowing Panel members to focus their attention on more complex incidents. This included incidents reported to the Panel related to cyber threats and cyber crime, and the monitoring of threats of violent extremism. In others, this included a review of incidents being brought to the attention of Canadians by non-governmental entities such as the Canadian Digital Media Research Network.

Overall, this approach underscored the importance of coordination, clear communication, and confidence in the operational mandates of Canada's national security agencies and of broader efforts by non-governmental entities, while at the same time being prepared to increase Panel involvement should the nature of the incident change or increase in severity.

5. Lessons learned and next steps

As part of the Government's commitment to protecting democratic institutions, a range of initiatives were undertaken prior to and during GE45, supported by the work of the CEIPP Panel. The Panel aims to demonstrate improved ability to monitor and identify threats, coordinate responses, and strengthen public confidence. The following summary captures the areas to highlight, along with recommendations for future development, to help ensure that Canada's electoral processes remain safe, fair and transparent.

5.1 Preparedness

The use of scenario-based exercises, and of a table-top exercise, with the involvement of Elections Canada and the Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections, significantly improved the Panel's readiness by allowing members to explore various threat possibilities and response options.

There is a clear benefit in formalizing this approach, including through the creation of an evergreen database of scenarios informed by past, current, and hypothetical events.

Future CEIPP Panels should continue to invest in these efforts. Opportunities for improvement include ensuring situational awareness for CEIPP Panel members with regards to incidents or events that began before the writ period and that may extend into the election period, as well as undertaking analysis on, and mitigation strategies for, electoral districts most at risk for foreign election interference. This would help ensure a complete operational picture for timely and informed decision-making.

5.2 Engagement with other entities

The CEIPP Panel is of the view that building strong working relationships with other entities, such as political parties, online platforms, and civil society, was an essential component of its ability to fulfill its mandate for GE45. For example, these relationships permitted the Panel to be made aware of and take appropriate actions to help resolve incidents brought to the Panel's attention by political parties and candidates. Future CEIPP Panels should continue to view the provision of information to these entities as a key tool to mitigate risks, and should continue to cultivate the strong relationships built to ensure information is shared in both directions at all times, and not only during election periods.

Engagement with civil society organizations plays an important role in supporting the Panel's preparedness. Groups such as the Canadian Digital Media Research Network (CDMRN) provide valuable insights into the information environment and emerging issues that have the potential to affect the integrity of the election. Their perspectives help the Panel better understand the broader landscape and contribute to a more informed and responsive approach to safeguarding Canada's democratic institutions.

Future CEIPP Panels should also ensure that lines of communication are established and ready to be called upon with Canadians who may be most at risk of foreign interference and transnational repression. These connections would help ensure effective information sharing and allow the Panel to verify details about observed incidents. Moreover, for future elections dedicated translation support should be available to ensure that communications by the SITE Task Force and the CEIPP Panel can be quickly released and interpreted in various languages in addition to English and French in order to increase the reach to affected diaspora communities. The Government should also consider additional tools and ways to reach out to community leaders and Canadians across Canada during and beyond election periods, and take steps to ensure these tools are meeting the needs of recipients.

5.3 Collaboration across jurisdictions

The CEIPP Panel is of the view that future CEIPP Panels should strive to share lessons learned from GE45 with provincial, territorial and international partners. Providing scenario exercises to provincial and territorial governments, as well as determining the feasibility of offering classified briefings to cleared representatives of these governments, would bolster preparedness for provincial, territorial and municipal elections.

Continued collaboration with all orders of government in Canada as well as with international partners will be key to align threat assessments and strengthen democratic resilience, and future CEIPP Panel members should ensure adequate investment in such efforts.

5.4 Transparency

The CEIPP Panel is encouraged that public reaction to the enhanced communications posture adopted during GE45 viewed such efforts as generally effective, with weekly technical briefings and public updates playing a role in ensuring transparency and maintaining public trust. Future CEIPP Panels should consider the potential refinement and expansion of this approach by leveraging additional platforms – particularly social media and digital platforms – and ensuring multilingual outreach to engage communities at risk, including those affected by foreign interference and transnational repression.

5.5 Governance and responsiveness to outstanding recommendations

Governance structures in place during GE45, such as daily ADM ESCC meetings and PCO secretarial support to the Panel, were highly effective in ensuring the sharing of timely information from across the Government of Canada to the CEIPP Panel. Detailed Records of Discussion for Panel and ADM ESCC meetings also ensured accurate documentation of deliberations and tracking of decision points. Future CEIPP Panels should continue to ensure effective governance mechanisms and detailed recordkeeping are in place ahead of future elections.

Further, CEIPP Panel members should stand ready to contribute to broader Government of Canada plans to consider how best to respond to outstanding recommendations from PIFI, and potential future recommendations resulting from the post-GE45 independent assessment of the Cabinet Directive. This includes recommendations related to the future of the SITE Task Force and the Government's capacity to monitor the open source information environment for foreign information manipulation and interference, as well as potential amendments to the Cabinet Directive, including the PIFI recommendation for the appointment of an external member.

Pending the Government's consideration of revisions to the Cabinet Directive, future CEIPP Panels should consider continuing to incorporate elements from the Clerk's Guidance into their operations. For GE45, the Clerk's Guidance was seen as instrumental in guiding Panel deliberations and its work to coordinate the Government of Canada's response. It provided an essential supplement to the Cabinet Directive by setting expectations for effective and timely information sharing both internally and with the public, with the objective of contributing to increased transparency to reinforce public trust in the integrity of the election process. This includes the publication of this retrospective report.

6. Conclusion

It is the CEIPP Panel's hope that the above report documents an increasingly coordinated and mature approach to its role, during caretaker periods, to coordinate the Government's preparations for and response to threats to the integrity of Canada's federal elections. At the same time, future CEIPP Panels should deliberate on areas where further reflection and continued effort may enhance Panel readiness and resilience in future elections.

Ideally, the Panel's reflections point to the broader reality that electoral integrity must be tended to throughout the full life-cycle of democratic governance. As Canada looks to future elections, the lessons of GE45 will serve as a benchmark for progress and as a starting point for future engagement on how best to protect and promote democratic integrity in an increasingly challenging environment.

Annex A

Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force,

"Threats to Canada's 45th General Election, After-Action Report"

Government of Canada / Gouvernement du Canada

Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force

Threats to Canada's 45th General Election

Canada

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Executive summary

On March 23, 2025, Prime Minister Mark Carney presented Governor General Mary Simon with a recommendation to dissolve Parliament, which she approved. Election writs were issued, with a General Election date set for April 28, 2025.

In line with its mandate, the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force (SITE TF) conducted enhanced monitoring of foreign interference and violent extremism[1] threats directed at Canada's 45th general election (GE45). Monitoring was done from March 24 to May 5, 2025, extending one week after election day.

This report provides an overview of the SITE TF's expected threat landscape for GE45, its observations of threat activities targeting the election, and the actions it undertook following meetings of the Critical Election Incident Panel[2] ("the Panel"). It is based on reporting from the SITE TF members, as well as information directly provided to the SITE TF by political parties and candidates. Of note, a classified version of this report exists and was provided to the Panel.

During GE45, the SITE TF observed some activity that was consistent with known foreign interference methodologies, and that pertained to the SITE TF members' mandates None of the incidents observed by the SITE TF during GE45 were determined by the Panel to have had an impact on Canada's ability to have a free and fair election.

. Examples of activities observed by the SITE TF include:

- Transnational repression efforts, particularly by the People's Republic of China (PRC);
- Efforts by the PRC-linked actors to amplify contrasting narratives about political candidates across a variety of social media platforms where Chinese-speaking users in Canada are active.
- Efforts by Russia to undertake foreign information manipulation and interference activities online; and,
- Incidents where politicians' names and likeness were used to promote cryptocurrency and financial scams.

[1] Please see appendix for definitions.
[2] The Panel is comprised of the following five members:
* The Clerk of the Privy Council;
* The National Security and Intelligence Advisor to the Prime Minister;
* The Deputy Minister of Justice and Deputy Attorney General;
* The Deputy Minister of Public Safety; and,
* The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The SITE TF briefed these incidents to the Panel and addressed them based on the Panel's direction. The SITE TF informed Canadians of these incidents through various communications mechanisms, including as part of the SITE TF weekly technical briefings to media that took place throughout the election period.

Background

Mandate of the SITE TF

Created in 2019, the SITE TF[3] is an interdepartmental operational working group that coordinates the Government of Canada's collection and analysis efforts concerning threats to Canada's federal election processes. It is comprised of experts from the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), the Communications Security Establishment (including the Canadian Center for Cyber Security [CCCS]), Global Affairs Canada's (GAC) Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM Canada) and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). Each of these agencies and departments operates within their respective mandate. The SITE TF also had several observers, including the Integrated Threat Assessment Centre, Public Safety Canada, the Privy Council Office (PCO), and the Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections. For GE45, the SITE Secretariat was housed at CSIS, which also served as Chair.

The SITE TF provides a clear point for engagement with and coordination of the security and intelligence community. Its members coordinate intelligence review and analysis, provide situational awareness through threat assessments, reports and briefings and, where members' mandates permit, coordinate action to mitigate threats. During a general election, the SITE TF regularly provides intelligence briefings to the Panel. Based on the information and intelligence the SITE TF provides, the Panel assesses whether a threat warrants a public announcement, as per the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol ("the Protocol").

Previous iterations of the SITE TF

Since its creation in 2019, the SITE TF has been stood up three times to provide enhanced monitoring of threats to general elections; in 2019 for GE43, in 2021 for GE44 and in 2025 for GE45. Additionally, since May 2023, the SITE TF has also monitored 12[4] federal by-elections, as well as the 2025 Liberal Party of Canada (LPC) leadership race.

[3] https://www.canada.ca/en/democratic-institutions/services/protecting-democracy/security-task-force.html

[4] This number includes the by-election which was supposed to be held in the electoral district of Halifax, Nova Scotia, on April 14, 2025. Given the dissolution of Parliament on March 23, the by-election was superseded. The SITE TF, however, was operational from the time the by-election was called until the writs for the general election were issued. During that time, the SITE TF did not observe any indication of foreign interference activities or any threats of violent extremism directed at the by-election. Furthermore, no cyber incidents were detected to suggest that any foreign state actors were specifically targeting Elections Canada's infrastructure.

In accordance with the Cabinet Directive on the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol issued in 2019, the Protocol underwent two independent assessments by experts commissioned by PCO, the first conducted by James Judd[5] following GE43 and the second conducted by Morris Rosenberg[6] following GE44. Both reports included recommendations and were presented to the Prime Minister and the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians. As a result, the Protocol was renewed and updated for future elections. A key update is the implementation of clearer communications with Canadians to increase awareness of the threats and incidents that could impact GE45.

The Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference

On September 7, 2023, the Government established the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions (PIFI), and appointed Justice Marie-Josée Hogue as Commissioner. Her final report was published on January 28, 2025.

A key recommendation from Commissioner Hogue was that the Government should communicate more proactively with the public about the risks of foreign interference and about the measures the Government is taking to protect the integrity of federal elections.

Response to reports

The Protocol directs the Panel to communicate with Canadians only if it is determined that an incident or an accumulation of incidents has occurred that would threaten Canada's ability to have a free and fair election. However, in recent years, Canada and its allies have recognized the value of publicly disclosing incidents of foreign information manipulation and interference, to raise citizen awareness, build citizen resilience, and maintain trust in electoral outcomes.

Further to recommendations outlined in the Judd, Rosenberg, and Hogue reports on improving communications with Canadians, weekly technical briefings to media by the SITE TF were introduced during the caretaker period[7].

[5] James Judd is a retired Canadian diplomat and senior civil servant. He served as the Director of CSIS from 2004 to 2009.

[6] Morris Rosenberg is a retired senior civil servant who served as Deputy Minister of Justice, Deputy Attorney General of Canada, Deputy Minister of Health and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

[7] The Caretaker Convention typically begins on the dissolution of Parliament. It ends when a new government is sworn-in or a result returning an incumbent government is clear. The Caretaker Convention is a convention under which the government of the day deals with only routine matters of administration and refrain from taking significant decisions related to matters such as policy, spending or appointments when it is unclear whether the government enjoys the confidence of the House of Commons.

Developments in public awareness of foreign interference, social media, new technologies and the impact on GE45

Ahead of GE45, the SITE TF assessed that developments in social media and new technologies were impacting the threat landscape for the election. The SITE TF assessed that the evolution in the social media environment and the continued growth of PRC-based platforms in Canada were likely to affect the threat landscape. The SITE TF also assessed that hostile state actors were increasingly leveraging artificial intelligence (AI)—including generative AI (for example, “deepfakes”)—to interfere in democratic processes globally.

As anticipated, the SITE TF observed activity linked to foreign state-directed information operations on social media platforms in the lead-up to GE45. Compared to the last two general elections in Canada, some social media platforms that are widely used by Canadians had significantly reduced their election protection efforts, which may have contributed to an online information space more conducive to foreign information manipulation and interference activities. At this time, the SITE TF cannot determine the precise impact of the shift of approach on the part of some social media platforms.

While AI technology in general has become more sophisticated since the previous two elections, methods used by hostile state actors to advance information manipulation during GE45 were broadly similar to previous elections. The SITE TF did not observe any significant use of generative AI by hostile state actors against GE45. Additionally, as expected, most foreign-created AI-generated and non-AI disinformation content did not gain significant traction or visibility among the broad Canadian public.

SITE TF's monitoring and actions taken before and during the 45th General Election

Throughout 2024 and 2025, the SITE TF undertook considerable efforts to enhance the collective preparedness and response capabilities of relevant stakeholders in advance of and during GE45.

Pre-election readiness efforts

Prior to the election period, the SITE TF took proactive steps to inform and prepare stakeholders about potential threats that could impact the electoral process. Starting in 2024, the SITE TF offered periodic briefings to the Panel and the Assistant Deputy

Ministers' Electoral Security Coordinating Committee (ADM ESCC), focusing on emerging and evolving threats to the electoral process.

Following a commitment made at PIFI, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs hosted a briefing with the foreign diplomatic corps posted in Canada on November 21, 2024. The purpose was to raise awareness of the shifting context for diplomatic engagement in Canada and remind them about appropriate diplomatic engagement practices. Specifically, it provided some context about sensitivities related to foreign interference in Canada, and examples of acceptable and unacceptable diplomatic behaviours in Canada.

In December 2024, SITE TF representatives attended the Hybrid Center of Excellence (Hybrid CoE)[8] symposium Beyond 2024—Lessons Learned in Mitigating Hybrid Threats to Elections, which was held in Helsinki, Finland. This broadened the SITE TF's understanding of the lessons from global elections that security officials experienced in 2024 in the United States and the European Union. In winter 2025, the Hybrid CoE and PCO organized a two-part tabletop exercise in Ottawa, in which the SITE TF participated. The exercise tested the federal public service's response to a threat incident in the context of a federal election. As a result, the SITE TF developed a comprehensive understanding of lessons learned from global elections in 2024 and strengthened its capacity to identify and respond to threats to elections, thus enhancing the security and integrity of the electoral process.

During the winter of 2025, the ADM ESCC hosted two comprehensive half-day training sessions. They brought together key stakeholders, including SITE TF members, to discuss the current threat landscape, clarify roles and responsibilities, and outline the operational mechanics and communications framework for ensuring electoral security. As a result, the ability to address potential threats was improved, the electoral security posture of the government was strengthened and it was better positioned to address the evolving landscape of threats to elections.

During the same period, the SITE TF also engaged with various groups before the election period, including providing a briefing to the Leaders' Debates Commission in late February 2025 that covered the SITE TF's mandate and role in protecting the election. In late March 2025, the SITE TF provided a briefing to employees of the House of Commons, outlining its composition and mandate, and raising awareness about its scope and responsibilities. Also in late March, the CCCS as a member of SITE met with the media outlets televising the leaders' debates to discuss regular advice and guidance regarding cybersecurity defence measures and posture.

[8] The Hybrid CoE was established in 2017 and is composed of all North Atlantic Treaty Organization members and additional European Union members. It consists of a platform for experts to engage in discussions, exchange lessons learned, and offer training on hybrid threats.

Election period activities and engagement

Governmental and international engagement

During the monitoring period, the SITE TF produced daily situational reports[9] based on reporting from SITE TF members and observers that pertained to their respective operational areas. These reports were primarily prepared to support the Panel, but were also shared within the Government of Canada on a need-to-know basis. Additionally, the SITE TF met weekly and supported daily ADM ESCC conference calls. The ADM ESCC reviewed reporting, offered recommendations and suggested actions to the Panel. The Director of CSIS briefed the Panel weekly on behalf of the SITE TF, thus maintaining a high level of situational awareness throughout the election period.[10]

When the election period began, GAC sent a notice to foreign diplomatic missions in Canada, reminding them, and their consular posts, of their obligations under the *Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations* and the *Vienna Convention on Consular Relations* and expectations for acceptable diplomatic practices during Canada's election period. A second reminder notice was sent midway through the election period.

Throughout the election period, the Chair of the SITE TF also briefed representatives from political parties on possible threats to GE45, providing them with non-partisan insights and information to help protect their campaigns. Additionally, in April 2025 and once all candidates were confirmed, PCO sent a comprehensive email to all candidates that included information from the SITE TF on tactics used by threat actors, personal and cyber security advice, and instructions on how to report incidents to the SITE TF, further empowering candidates to take proactive steps to secure their campaigns. It was the first time that PCO directly engaged all confirmed candidates during a general election.

Finally, in April 2025, the SITE TF members met with representatives of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), in Ottawa. A role of the organization is to observe elections throughout its participating states, including Canada. As a result, it sent a needs assessment mission to Canada for the federal election. Their representatives met with key interlocutors involved in various aspects of GE45 to assess Canada's pre-election environment and preparation, how Canada's elections architecture had evolved since 2021 with a focus on coordination, structure and citizen outreach, and to determine whether Canada merited an OSCE election observation mission. The OSCE report underscored a sound electoral process in Canada, affirming confidence in the integrity of the country's democratic framework. As such, the OSCE did not recommend large scale monitoring of Canadian elections.

[9] A total of 31 situational reports were produced during GE45.
[10] The first official meeting of the Panel under the Caretaker Convention took place on March 27, 2025. Between March 27 and April 30, 2025, the Panel convened seven times, receiving a corresponding number of comprehensive briefings from the SITE TF.

Engagement with social media platforms

The SITE TF members engaged with social media platforms to address specific instances of suspected foreign information manipulation and interference and transnational repression. While the SITE TF did not provide direct instructions to social media platforms, it actively shared information and prompted them to enforce their terms of service to uphold online information integrity on their platforms.

Technical briefings to media

Threat activities can erode public trust in the integrity of Canada's processes and institutions. An informed and resilient public is assessed to be the best way to counter foreign interference. As such, and in direct response to recommendations from PIFI, the SITE TF took steps to increase transparency by sharing more information publicly about the threats that Canada faces and the measures put in place to detect and counter those threats. For the first time during a federal general election, and in direct response to recommendations from PIFI, the SITE TF provided weekly technical briefings to media during the caretaker period.

A communications framework outlining Government of Canada processes and procedures to safeguard the election during the caretaker period was created. The framework's primary objective was to ensure a coordinated communications approach by Government of Canada partners in the event of an incident during the election period that did not meet the Panel's announcement threshold for informing Canadians. Overall, the Panel concluded that a public announcement was not required during GE45 but that some incidents observed by the SITE TF warranted informing the public via technical briefings.

The technical briefings to media[11] were a means to help sensitize and educate Canadians via the media about threats that could impact the electoral process. Government of Canada representatives from the SITE TF held five technical briefings for media during the election period where they addressed observed incidents and the threat environment; provided reminders and recommendations for the public and the media pre-election day; and highlighted ongoing work to safeguard the elections. The technical briefings touched on a variety of topics, including:

- An outline of the threat landscape and the measures the Government of Canada had taken to protect GE45 from foreign interference;
- An overview of the new Candidate Security Program[12];

[11] https://www.canada.ca/en/democratic-institutions/services/protecting-canada-general-election-2025/technical-briefings-canada-45th-general-election.html

[12] As a new tool to safeguard the elections, the Government of Canada has introduced for GE45 the Candidate Security Program, which provides an additional layer of security through unarmed, private sector security services to candidates who feel intimidated or threatened.

- Observed online information operations, including an operation on WeChat targeting GE45;
- The threat posed by transnational repression, including a specific instance of such a threat;
- Engagement between the Government of Canada and social media platforms;
- Cyber threats to Canada's democratic processes and the use of AI in disinformation efforts;
- Recommendations such as defences against information manipulation, disinformation and phishing scams, responses to transnational repression, and cybersecurity best practices; and,
- Online resources available to Canadians.

Various communications products (including news releases, backgrounders, media advisories and social media content) were issued prior to and during the election period to provide Canadians with tools and resources, and to complement the information provided during the technical briefings to media. These products were published on the PCO website. Information related to an information operation on WeChat and to a transnational repression operation by the PRC[13] were also translated into traditional and simplified Chinese.

The technical briefings to media ultimately informed the media and the public that the SITE TF had not observed incidents that had been determined by the Panel to have impacted Canada's ability to have a free and fair election, in advance of Canadians casting their votes.

Foreign interference

The SITE TF emphasizes that sophisticated, pervasive and persistent foreign interference activities constitute a serious threat to Canada's national security and the integrity of Canada's democratic institutions at all times, not just during electoral processes. Foreign states that engage in foreign interference target all levels of government in Canada—federal, provincial, municipal and Indigenous—and various facets of Canadian civil society (e.g., religious, ethnic and cultural communities, the general public, media entities, and academia). Foreign interference activities transcend party lines, ideologies and ethnic backgrounds. For certain foreign states, foreign interference activities are part of their normal pattern of behaviour in Canada and elections are viewed as opportunities to conduct foreign interference activities.

Due to an increase in public awareness and scrutiny of foreign interference, threat actors likely adapted their tradecraft to further conceal their activity, making it even more challenging to detect. The threat landscape for GE45 was also impacted by changes in

[13] www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/news/2025/04/transnational-repression-operation0.html

the social media environment, the emergence of new technologies that assist malign information campaigns, an increased leveraging of artificial intelligence, and the rise in cyber threat activity targeting elections.

People's Republic of China (PRC)

Ahead of GE45, the SITE TF assessed that the PRC would likely continue to target Canadian democratic institutions and civil society to advance its strategic objectives. PRC officials and proxies were likely to conduct foreign interference activity using a complex array of both overt and covert mechanisms. The PRC was highly likely to use AI-enabled tools to attempt to interfere with Canada's democratic process during GE45, leveraging social media to promote narratives that were favourable to PRC interests. Additionally, the PRC was highly likely to target Chinese ethnic, cultural, and religious communities in Canada using clandestine and deceptive methods.

Furthermore, in previously noted behaviours, the PRC has been observed engaging in transnational repression activities, which involve a range of tactics designed to exert influence and control beyond its borders. These tactics include leveraging PRC-based relatives and other connections to pressure those in Canada to refrain from adopting views the PRC sees as hostile, or to return to the PRC, and threatening PRC-based family members with an array of potential coercive actions, including detention or financial penalties.

Online information operation on WeChat targeting GE45

Over the course of GE45, the SITE TF detected an online information operation that took place on the Chinese social media platform WeChat and was launched by WeChat's most popular news account, *Youli-Youmian*. The information operation amplified contrasting narratives about Prime Minister, and LPC leader, Mark Carney, with observed spikes of what is believed to be inauthentic and coordinated behaviour preceding the election campaign on March 10 and again during the election period on March 25, 2025. The campaign received high levels of user engagement and views; amplified articles received between 85,000 and 130,000 interactions, and an estimated one to three million views. The SITE TF does not have the ability to confirm the number of interactions or views that originated in Canada.

The articles posted on this account on March 25, 2025 were amplified in a coordinated and inauthentic way by a group of 30 smaller WeChat accounts that boosted the discoverability of the posts. Intelligence reporting links the *Youli-Youmian* account to the PRC Chinese Communist Party's Central Political and Legal Affairs Commission. The *Youli-Youmian* account was also responsible for targeting members of Parliament Michael Chong (in June 2023) and Chrystia Freeland (in January 2025).

The link established through intelligence between the *Youli-Youmian* account on WeChat and state-affiliated entities of the PRC suggests the potential of foreign interference that could have been aimed at influencing Chinese communities in Canada in the context of GE45.

The Panel was briefed on the WeChat information operation on three occasions, after which the following actions were taken:

- The SITE TF's April 7, 2025 technical briefing to media, alerted the Canadian public to the information operation on WeChat.
- The SITE TF and PCO engaged the LPC regarding the operation.
- GAC engaged with PRC diplomats in Canada regarding the operation.
- On April 7, 2025, the SITE TF published a news release and a backgrounder on the information operation on the PCO website, including in simplified and traditional Chinese.
- The SITE TF engaged with social media platforms.

Targeting of Joseph Tay

During GE45, the SITE TF observed digital transnational repression directed at Joseph Tay, a Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) candidate in the riding of Don Valley North, in the city of Toronto. The candidate is an activist known for his support of pro-democracy efforts in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region. In late December 2024, the Hong Kong Police issued a warrant for Mr. Tay's arrest and offered a bounty of HK$1 million (approximately CAD$185,000). The warrant alleges that Mr. Tay violated the Hong Kong National Security Law, citing allegations of "inciting secession" and "colluding with foreign forces."

The SITE TF observed inauthentic and coordinated amplification of content related to the bounty and arrest warrant against Mr. Tay as well as content related to his competence for political office. This activity was observed on various social media platforms and Chinese-language news sites and received varying levels of engagement. The call for Mr. Tay's arrest received high levels of engagement on social media platforms in December 2024, which subsequently declined prior to the start of GE45. The SITE TF also detected "keyword filtering," which suppressed search results for Mr. Tay's name in traditional and simplified Chinese on certain PRC-based social media platforms used by Canadians, returning information only about the bounty and arrest warrant on Mr. Tay.

Confirming attribution can take significant time and analysis and malign actors go to great lengths to hide their involvement in foreign interference activities. However, intelligence reporting indicates that one of the accounts involved in these activities has

historically been connected to PRC government authorities and to pro-PRC entities in Hong Kong.

The Panel was briefed on reporting related to Mr. Tay on six occasions during the GE45 monitoring period. Following Panel discussion, the following actions were taken:

- The SITE TF briefed cleared representatives of the CPC twice on the transnational repression campaign.
- On March 31, 2025, the SITE TF held a technical briefing focused on TNR generally, and specifically digital TNR.
- The SITE TF shared its findings with social media platforms, and raised concerns.
- The SITE TF held a technical briefing to media on April 21, 2025, alerting the Canadian public to the transnational repression campaign against Mr. Tay.
- On April 21, 2025, the SITE TF published a news release and a backgrounder on the transnational repression operation on the PCO website, including in simplified and traditional Chinese. GAC engaged with PRC diplomats in Canada about the SITE TF's observations on the digital transnational repression directed at Mr. Tay.

Russian Federation

Russia has undertaken sustained efforts to build dissemination networks across social media and news websites that repurpose and amplify the Kremlin's narratives. Ahead of GE45, the SITE TF assessed it was possible that Russia would continue to use its online networks to opportunistically conduct foreign information manipulation and interference operations directed at Canadians.

Throughout GE45, the SITE TF observed efforts by the Russian Federation to leverage its foreign information manipulation and interference networks online. This consists of a network of websites that launder and amplify Russian government-controlled media outlets' aggregated items about Canadian candidates and the election throughout the election period. Most content during GE45 focused on various narratives regarding LPC leader Mark Carney. Overall, posts from the networks received low levels of user engagement online and very few views; as such, it is unlikely that Canadians viewed this content.

The Panel was briefed on the foreign information manipulation and interference operation on three occasions, after which, the following actions were taken:

- The SITE TF held a technical briefing to media on April 7, 2025, addressing media literacy, and spoke specifically about AI models and large language model

grooming, in an effort to sensitize the public to overall information manipulation tactics.
- The SITE TF kept monitoring the specific foreign information manipulation and interference operation during GE45.

India

Prior to GE45, the SITE TF assessed that the Government of India had the intent and capability to interfere in Canadian communities and democratic processes to assert its strategic interests. The Government of India had been increasingly relying on Canada-based proxies and contacts to conduct foreign interference-related activities.

The SITE TF actively monitored for potential foreign interference related activities by the Government of India during GE45.

Pakistan

In advance of GE45, the SITE TF assessed that the Government of Pakistan could potentially conduct foreign interference activities against Canada in line with its strategic aim to promote political, security and economic stability in Pakistan, and to counter India's growing global influence.

The SITE TF actively monitored for potential foreign interference related activities by the Government of Pakistan during GE45.

Cyber threats

Ahead of GE45, the SITE TF noted that cyber threat activity targeting elections had increased worldwide and posed a real and growing threat to Canada's democratic processes, although the SITE TF assessed that Canada remained a relatively lower priority target than some of its allies, such as the United States and the United Kingdom.

Throughout the SITE TF's monitoring period, CCCS provided dedicated support to Elections Canada, monitoring for cyber security threats to the election and to elections-related information and information infrastructure. CSIS also reviewed its own sources of intelligence for indications of cyber threats to GE45. No significant cyber incidents related to GE45 were observed.

Violent extremism

While the SITE TF is primarily focused on foreign interference, the RCMP and CSIS have mandates and authorities to investigate threats of violent extremism. The SITE TF committed to monitoring and reporting any threats of violent extremism directed at GE45.

Violent extremists were assessed as unlikely to engage in acts of serious violence against persons or property related to GE45. Though such threat activity was assessed as unlikely, large public assemblies remained soft targets for threat actors.

Throughout GE45, no violent extremist activity targeting the election was observed. Extremist activity not meeting the threshold for national security during GE45 appeared likely to be criminal in nature and was likely intended to mock the Canadian democratic process as a whole. Certain individuals who hold extreme views have exploited previous elections and public events to disparage candidates and Canadian democratic values. While some uncivil activities and rhetoric, particularly online, are offensive and may even be criminal, most will not meet a national security threshold and be assessed as violent extremism. Historically, candidates, particularly party leaders, have been the targets of some ideologically motivated criminality.

Incidents not attributed to foreign state or violent extremist actors

Furthermore, through monitoring of social media platforms, the SITE TF observed fake news articles and online publicity with sensational headlines about Canadian elections that were being linked to websites promoting financial fraud schemes.

The SITE TF received a number of reports on incidents where politicians' names and likeness, including of LPC leader Mark Carney and New Democratic Party leader Jagmeet Singh, were used to promote cryptocurrency and financial scams. These scams used faked articles and videos that appeared to be from legitimate sources, such as CBC News, to deceive Canadians into registering for fictitious government programs or investing in cryptocurrencies. These incidents are indicative of a broader trend in impersonation of political figures for the purposes of online fraud and confidence scams, and assessed as not directly related to GE45 or to foreign interference.

Several scams were briefed to the Panel and actions were taken under existing authorities, such as issuing a takedown request for impersonation of a crown asset and informing the victims of impersonation and/or brand infringement.

Conclusion

Over the course of the election period, the SITE TF observed instances of foreign interference such as transnational repression, inauthentic and coordinated amplification of online content, and online threats such as scams and disinformation. These activities were observed at small scale and often remain difficult to attribute to a foreign actor.

Of all the incidents briefed to the Panel by the SITE TF during GE45, none have been determined by the Panel as having impacted Canada's ability to have a free and fair election.

Two of these potential instances were discussed openly during weekly technical briefings to the media provided by SITE TF members. These briefings were part of a broader initiative to further increase communications with the public during the election period to raise awareness about the risks of foreign interference and of the measures the Government is taking to protect the integrity of federal elections.

No cyber incidents directed at the integrity of the elections were detected during GE45, and violent extremist actors were not observed engaging in any threat-related activity directed at the election.

Increasing our collective resilience against threats to our electoral processes is a whole-of-society responsibility. As Canadians, it is essential to remain vigilant to such threats. A key threat is foreign interference, which can take the form of disinformation, transnational repression, and other forms of manipulation. Additionally, Canadians should be cautious of social media manipulation, including coordinated and inauthentic online activity, fake news articles, and scams that use politicians' names and likeness to promote financial fraud schemes.

Canadians should remain vigilant against transnational repression, which involves attempts by foreign states to intimidate, coerce, or harass, or threaten individuals, particularly those who are critical of foreign governments or their interests. Furthermore, cyber threats, including hacking, phishing, and other forms of cyber-enabled activity, can compromise personal information and undermine democratic processes. Therefore, it's crucial to be critical of information consumed online and be aware of the potential for disinformation and fake news, which can be used to manipulate public opinion and influence electoral outcomes.

Canadians can take several steps to protect themselves and the integrity of Canadian democratic institutions, for example, verifying information before sharing it online, being cautious of sensational or provocative content, relying on reputable sources of information, and staying informed about the risks of foreign interference and cyber threats. Individuals are encouraged to report any suspicious activity and any incidents of intimidation, harassment, coercion, or threats to the relevant authorities. Moreover, supporting initiatives that promote media literacy and critical thinking can empower Canadians to critically assess information and identify potential disinformation or manipulation. By remaining vigilant and taking these steps, Canadians can help protect the integrity of their democratic institutions and ensure the security and integrity of their electoral processes.

Appendix

Definitions

Cyber threats: Malign activity in cyberspace undertaken by actors (state or non-state) that aim to exploit information communication technology in order to gain unauthorized access to systems and networks and/or manipulate individuals, in pursuit of various objectives. These actors' objectives can be financial (e.g., cybercriminal activity) or constitute national security threats (e.g., cyber-enabled espionage, sabotage, or foreign influence activity).

Disinformation: False information that is intended to manipulate, cause damage, or guide people, organizations, and countries in the wrong direction.

Foreign information manipulation and interference: An umbrella term for foreign efforts aimed at covertly manipulating the information environment to achieve strategic objectives. This manipulation can undermine public trust in democratic institutions, increase societal polarization, and disrupt the implementation of government mandates and commitments. Foreign information manipulation and interference includes disinformation, as well as many other ways that information can be manipulated.

Foreign interference: Activities conducted or supported by a foreign state/actor that is detrimental to Canadian national interests and is clandestine, deceptive or involves a threat to a person. In the context of Canadian electoral processes, the objective of foreign interference is to affect electoral outcomes and/or undermine public confidence in Canadian democratic institutions. Foreign interference can take the form of foreign information manipulation and interference (including disinformation), transnational repression, or other means.

Transnational repression: Form of interference in which foreign states attempt to advance their interests and to silence criticism and dissent. They extend their own domestic repression beyond their borders to intimidate, coerce, harass, harm, and ultimately silence critics or those deemed a threat to their rule. Transnational repression can occur via physical methods, but is increasingly being perpetuated in the digital space where it can take the form of online harassment and smear campaigns.

Violent extremism: Threats or use of acts of serious violence against persons or property for the purpose of achieving a political, religious, or ideological objective in Canada.