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# Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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Chair: Chris Bittle





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• (1100)

[*English*]

**The Chair (Chris Bittle (St. Catharines, Lib.)):** I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 20 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3), the committee is meeting on its study of foreign election interference.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and have the opportunity to use the Zoom application.

Everyone, please consult the cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, especially our interpreters.

I will remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair. As always, raise your hand, whether you're here or on Zoom.

I would like to welcome today's first panel.

We have the Honourable Gary Anandasangaree, Minister of Public Safety. From the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, we have Daniel Rogers, director. From the Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, we have Tricia Geddes, deputy minister; and Sébastien Aubertin-Giguère, assistant deputy minister and national counter foreign interference coordinator. From the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, we have Jodie Boudreau, deputy commissioner, federal policing.

I'll turn it over to the minister for five minutes.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree (Minister of Public Safety):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the committee for this invitation.

Let me acknowledge that we're gathered here on the traditional, unceded territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin people.

It is becoming abundantly clear that the world is becoming more dangerous and divided. The order that underpinned global prosperity for decades is undergoing a profound transformation driven by geopolitical realignment and technological change.

[*Translation*]

These changes mean the threat landscape Canada faces is rapidly evolving.

[*English*]

Our adversaries are actively seeking to exploit vulnerabilities in this shifting landscape. What is their goal? It's to undermine our society and advance their own interests.

Canadians expect their government to protect their democracy and uphold western democratic principles. That includes ensuring fair, transparent elections.

Our approach is working. The integrity of the most recent federal election was not compromised by foreign interference.

[*Translation*]

That was thanks to our comprehensive election security framework, including continuous intelligence monitoring and assessment of foreign interference threats throughout the election period.

[*English*]

Our government has taken steps to ensure that existing measures against foreign interference are effective and to take other measures where necessary. At the same time, it is critical that we maintain transparency and accountability.

Throughout the last election period, Public Safety Canada and Elections Canada, along with national security agencies—including CSIS, CSE and the RCMP—worked in constant coordination. That collaboration was critical in the successful defence of our democratic process in the last general election.

Our agencies worked to detect covert foreign interference activities, as well as to monitor foreign state actors that would seek to undermine public confidence in Canadian democracy. Additionally, for the first time during a federal election, the security and intelligence threats to elections task force provided weekly technical briefings to the media that helped sensitize and educate Canadians about the threats that could impact the election.

In short, our election infrastructure and systems were constantly protected.

[*Translation*]

And I'll reiterate: Our safeguards functioned as designed, and the integrity of the federal election was not compromised.

[English]

In the event of a foreign interference threat, a non-partisan process called the critical election incident public protocol, established in 2019, is in place to inform Canadians. Even in non-election periods, our government and our national security partners remain steady. Our environment is constantly evolving. Threats have become more sophisticated, more covert and more persistent. We continue to examine our approach and seek improvements, striving for more efficient detection and greater transparency.

We have made significant progress. That includes advancing work to bring the Foreign Influence Transparency and Accountability Act into force. This act strengthens transparency regarding foreign influence activities, notably by naming Anton Boegman as the foreign influence transparency commissioner, who will oversee the upcoming foreign influence transparency registry. As you may be aware, Mr. Chair, I tabled on Tuesday the name of Mr. Boegman as the proposed commissioner for this registry.

The act also established an administrative monetary penalty regime to support enforcement and discourage violations. On January 2, proposed regulations to implement the act were published online for public consultations. Those consultations closed earlier this week. The proposed regulations identify the information to be collected and published about foreign influence activities, set out administrative monetary penalties of up to \$1 million and establish how we will work with partners at all levels of government to uphold the act.

I want to reassure all Canadians and my honourable colleagues that the establishment of the registry remains a top priority. These are delicate and complex mechanisms that require deliberate and careful implementation. Equivalent systems in the Five Eyes took over two years to fully implement. We are very much on track. These key initiatives make foreign influence transparent and safeguard the integrity of Canadian democracy. The threat of foreign interference is complex. Standing up these measures is being done with both urgency and care.

• (1105)

It is only through robust, careful planning that we will continue to be able to detect and manage these threats. We're committed to continuing our work of strengthening democratic resilience during elections and at all times. This means remaining alert; adapting to new, rapidly evolving threats; and protecting Canadians.

Canada's democracy is strong and we will continue taking action to protect it.

Thank you. I look forward to your questions and comments.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

I will now turn to Mr. Cooper for six minutes.

**Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Sturgeon River, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister.

Minister, what country is the most active perpetrator of foreign interference targeting our elections and democratic institutions?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Mr. Cooper, I think that's a question best posed to the director of CSIS.

**Daniel Rogers (Director, Canadian Security Intelligence Service):** Mr. Chair, through you, we've called out publicly in the past China, Russia, India and others.

**Michael Cooper:** Thank you for that.

I would note that NSICOP, in June 2024, identified the People's Republic of China as the biggest perpetrator of foreign interference, as did Justice Hogue, and CSIS as recently as July 2025.

Minister, in the face of that, we know the Beijing-based Communist regime has engaged in transnational repression and the targeting of members of Chinese diaspora communities in Canada. It is a regime that has surveilled, harassed and intimidated members of these communities, and in doing so it has shown no respect for Canada's sovereignty and has actively threatened the safety and security of Canadians.

Given all of that, how could the Prime Minister possibly have thought it was in Canada's interest to strike a deal to pursue co-operation with the Beijing dictatorship on matters of law enforcement?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** The Prime Minister has outlined on a number of occasions, most recently and comprehensively in Davos, that we are living in times that are unprecedented and in which Canada needs to broaden its relationships. We are the closest partner to the United States. However, we know that the situation and the trading relationship—

**Michael Cooper:** Minister, is the PRC a rule-of-law state?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** If you will give me the time, I will respond to you—

**Michael Cooper:** My time is very limited, so I'm asking you if the PRC is a rule-of-law state. Yes or no?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Mr. Cooper, to answer your previous question, the Prime Minister has clearly outlined the need for us to expand trade—

**Michael Cooper:** I'm asking you about—

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** —including with countries in which we are—

**Michael Cooper:** —pursuing co-operation in law enforcement. Is it a rule-of-law state? Answer yes or no.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Mr. Cooper—

**Michael Cooper:** Does it have an independent judiciary? Answer yes or no. These are straightforward questions. Answer yes or no.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Mr. Cooper, I'm not here as a foreign policy expert, nor as an expert on China—

**Michael Cooper:** Minister, it is obvious that Beijing is not a rule-of-law state. It doesn't have an independent judiciary. Does it have civilian oversight of the police in Beijing?

• (1110)

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Mr. Cooper, to your—

**Michael Cooper:** Do they respect human rights? Does the Beijing-based Communist regime respect human rights? Answer yes or no.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Mr. Cooper, if you wish for me to answer the question—

**Michael Cooper:** Answer it.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** —I will give you a proper answer.

As the Prime Minister clearly outlined at Davos and in many other speeches, there is a need for Canada to expand its trading partners. China is one of them. China is—

**Michael Cooper:** I didn't ask you a question about trading partners.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** —and will be the largest economy—

**Michael Cooper:** I asked you about co-operation on matters of law enforcement.

**The Chair:** Mr. Cooper, I'll intervene here for just a second. I'll pause your time.

This is a very serious issue, and members have the right to be passionate about this, but keep in mind our interpreters. Be careful. It is your time; you are correct. Just be careful of talking over one another.

**Michael Cooper:** Does Beijing respect human rights? Answer yes or no.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Mr. Cooper, what I will say is that Canada is at a crossroads right now. There's a need and an imperative for Canada to expand its trading relationships, and Canada can do both. Canada could protect and speak out on human rights at the same time—

**Michael Cooper:** Minister, I asked you four straightforward questions, to which the answer is no.

The Beijing Communist regime is not a rule-of-law state—

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.):** I have a point of order.

**Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson (North Vancouver—Capilano, Lib.):** On a point of order, the committee agreed.... Oh, I'm sorry.

**The Chair:** I have Ms. Kayabaga on a point of order.

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga:** Thank you, Chair.

I want to listen to the conversation, but we can't have a conversation if we're speaking over each other. We can't even hear the answer, so either we have a conversation or we don't.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much. You're reinforcing what I said.

We paused your time, Mr. Cooper. You have two minutes left.

**Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson:** Mr. Chair, I have a different point of order.

**The Chair:** Yes, go ahead.

**Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson:** The committee agreed that we would have two meetings on the implementation of the foreign influence transparency registry and, for that purpose, invite the Minister of Public Safety. I have a hard time understanding how Mr. Cooper's questions have anything to do with what this committee agreed to actually do.

**Michael Cooper:** With the greatest respect to Mr. Wilkinson, whom I have respect for, it seems that he must have missed the testimony of Mr. Tay, among others who have been targeted by the Beijing-based Communist regime. Here we have a government, your government, that is entering into co-operation on matters of law enforcement with a regime that has engaged in transnational repression, including in our elections.

**Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson:** We can have this conversation outside.

**The Chair:** I appreciate the interventions. Generally, when a minister is here, there is latitude, but Mr. Cooper is correct. I believe this is relevant. There is generally more latitude given. It is delving into debate, but we will turn back to Mr. Cooper.

**Michael Cooper:** Mr. Chair, the PRC is not a rule-of-law state. It doesn't have an independent judiciary. It doesn't have civilian oversight of law enforcement. It doesn't respect human rights. It's actively perpetrating genocide, among other crimes against humanity. In fact, the minister couldn't answer no to all of those questions. It illustrates the degree to which this government, under this Prime Minister, is prepared to downplay and whitewash the serious interference in human rights abuses, among other outrageous conduct, by a brutal dictatorship—all in the name of his new strategic partnership with that brutal dictatorship.

Minister, given that your government is engaging in greater co-operation, or is moving in that direction, with the Beijing regime on matters of law enforcement, what assurances can you provide that co-operation with Beijing will not lead to facilitating the intimidation, coercion and surveillance of Canadians—particularly of members of diaspora communities who are being targeted by Beijing—under the guise of law enforcement?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Mr. Cooper, the MOU that you reference with respect to the RCMP has critical significance for Canada. As you're aware, issues around fentanyl, for example, are of great interest to Canada. It's critically important to ensure that we curtail fentanyl and its precursors, in particular, from coming through our ports from places like China. The MOU addresses greater co-operation with respect to law enforcement on issues of critical interest to us. The notion of our national security is again embedded—

• (1115)

**Michael Cooper:** Minister, what I'm hearing is that there are no safeguards.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Mr. Cooper, if you give me a preamble and don't allow me.... It's a point of order, if I may.

**The Chair:** Hang on. Hang on.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** If you give me a longer preamble and do not allow me to answer the question, Mr. Cooper, that's really not constructive in a conversation as sensitive as this. For sure, you took time to give me a set of facts; allow me to please give you the context in which I'm addressing this matter.

**The Chair:** Minister, I appreciate that you were a committee member for many years, but as a witness you cannot raise a point of order.

That being said, we are well over six minutes.

We will turn to Mr. Wilkinson, please.

**Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson:** Thank you very much.

Thank you to all the witnesses for appearing.

Maybe I'll just start with the design of the act. I'm assuming that we looked at other international comparators. Are there similar kinds of registries that exist in other democratic countries? What best practices did we take in the design of our act?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** When the act was developed, we looked at a number of different options, particularly from Five Eyes and G7 partners, some of which have had a similar act for many decades. In fact, Canada is somewhat at the later stage of development of these acts. We learnt a fair bit from that. At the implementation stage, there are three elements to it, the first being the appointment of the commissioner. We are at the end of that process. Last week we had started consulting with the opposition and parties in both the House and the Senate. I formally tabled the name of the proposed commissioner on Monday. We look forward to a vote on this matter in both Houses.

This is coupled by the second element, the consultation of our draft regulations, and we've received a fair amount of feedback on a range of issues, particularly on the monetary penalties. We are looking into finalizing that over the next several weeks.

The third element is establishing and making sure that we have a functional data collection ability. Again, that work is happening. On the administrative side, it's finding the office, making sure it has the requirements for the renovation that's required. All of that is happening in parallel. We're hoping in early spring that we will be able to have both the office as well as the registry fully operational.

**Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson:** Obviously, the role of the commissioner is going to be an important one, given how important foreign interference is. Maybe you can just speak to Mr. Boegman's background and why he was the right choice.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Mr. Wilkinson, with your being from British Columbia, as well as Mr. Van Popta, I think you would appreciate the calibre of Mr. Boegman. He has served as chief electoral officer in British Columbia. I believe on top of that he has been involved with a number of issues around foreign interference in British Columbia, which in the past has had some challenges. He has conducted three general elections and 12 by-elections. Previously he served in other roles within Elections British Columbia. He is fully bilingual, someone who, by all accounts, is unimpeachable and who is of high integrity. We wanted to make sure that the individual who is named as commissioner will have the confidence

of Canadians, will have the administrative ability to establish a new registry and the functionalities of this commission, and will be another additional and important safeguard to our democracy.

**Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson:** Thank you.

As I understand it—and you can correct me if I'm wrong—the commissioner's office is to be housed within Public Safety but is to operate independently from the department and the minister. Can you tell me a bit about how that will work and also why that model was chosen?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** We have a number of different agencies. We have the portfolio agencies—CSIS, CBSA, RCMP and so on—that are independent agencies.

Then we have what I would consider to be the smaller focused agencies: the Parole Board of Canada and the Office of the Correctional Investigator. We're adding the commissioner to that slate of commissions. They act fully independently of Public Safety, although the reporting will happen through Public Safety and through me as minister. They're independent in all ways, in every manner.

On the funding of it, again, they seek funding authorities independently. We support them on an administrative basis. We have a number of models where it has worked exceptionally well. My role as minister, with Deputy Minister Geddes, would be to support them without directing them in any way.

● (1120)

**Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson:** The commissioner and the act are one piece of the efforts to counter foreign influence, but maybe you can just talk to me about how it fits in the broader context, because obviously there are a number of other pieces there.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Absolutely. There are a number of pieces as part of the election cycle, as you're aware. During elections, we have our portfolio leaders, as well as PCO, that meet regularly and report on a weekly basis to Canadians. We've seen that over the last election cycle.

We also have the ongoing work of CSIS particularly. Director Rogers will be more than glad to outline the ongoing work they do along with the RCMP.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

We'll now turn to Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Normandin, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ):** Thank you.

Thank you to the witnesses, especially to those who are here twice this week.

Minister, I would like you to tell me about the issues of artificial intelligence and digital sovereignty. Earlier this week, we talked about metadata analysis in the context of foreign interference. I imagine there's a pretty phenomenal amount of data to be analyzed to detect outside threats. I'd like you to tell me where the data is stored. Is it stored on servers exclusively in Canada?

It's a two-part question. I imagine that, with so much data, you may have no choice but to use artificial intelligence-based systems to analyze and cross-reference the data. If so, what AI systems are being used? Do they already exist? Is there an in-house system being used that is private?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Thank you for the questions.

[*English*]

I'm going to ask Dan Rogers to answer that. I know that he has a fair bit of experience and is in the process of implementing a number of processes right now.

[*Translation*]

**Daniel Rogers:** Thank you for the questions.

I'll start by talking about the majority of the data protected by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

[*English*]

We're very much using systems that are in Canada, within our facilities, very guarded and very secure, and with access controls to make sure it's limited to those who need to conduct investigations in order to access that data, which accounts for both privacy and security concerns.

With respect to artificial intelligence, you're absolutely right: It's something that CSIS has to adopt. It's something that we are currently adopting. We have to do that in order to keep pace with our competitors and the overall environment in order to keep Canadians safe.

We are doing that in accordance with some of the direction already set out for the federal public service, which includes a number of provisions in some of those policies issued by Treasury Board, and which we've also adopted, including making sure that humans are in the loop, making sure that we have a gradual, responsible process for the rollout of AI and making sure that we're looking at the processes within our AI systems to make sure they're responsibly tested and validated before they're put into production use.

We're still at a stage where all of the decision-making within CSIS is overseen by humans. We're not in a zone where we're at risk of that for now, but we're continuing to implement.

[*Translation*]

**Christine Normandin:** Good.

I'd like to pursue that a little bit. I'm thinking of some of the tools we use, as parliamentarians, on a daily basis. We use Outlook, which we know is run by the United States and that the databases are potentially outside Canada. For example, the United States is allowed access under the USA Patriot Act and the Cloud Act.

I would like to hear what you have to say about that. Is there even a sovereign cloud in Canada? The last I heard, Minister Solomon was asked about it and said there wasn't one. When we use cloud computing here, it's clear that we are potentially vulnerable because of the role of the United States, but perhaps other states as well.

• (1125)

**Daniel Rogers:** Thank you for the question.

I'm happy to answer, but I also want to say that senior officials at Treasury Board and Shared Services Canada would be in a better position to answer the question about the government's plans.

[*English*]

I would say that data sovereignty continues to be a concern for us when it comes to vulnerabilities that foreign states could take advantage of. It is certainly more secure and better to have data controlled within a Canadian legal context.

That said, when data is held outside of a Canadian context, there are still measures that can be put in place to keep that data secure, including things like encryption, where encryption keys are held in Canada, access controls, auditing and logging to make sure that, when that data is accessed, we are aware of that access. There are technical measures that can be put in place.

For government data, as I mentioned earlier, Treasury Board and Shared Services Canada are better able to answer that. Specifically for CSIS in a classified environment, with us, with Department of Defence, CSE and other high security environments like the RCMP, we have special systems with special provisions to make sure that our most sensitive data is kept secure and in Canada.

[*Translation*]

**Christine Normandin:** I have a question for you, Minister.

One of the problems we are aware of is the issue of commercial interference. In the past, China has tried to acquire major Canadian companies. There was also the issue of critical minerals in the north.

I would like to hear your comments on the criteria that limit Chinese purchases of Canadian companies. As we know, these purchases are made not by private Chinese companies but by the Chinese government.

Are decisions based on criteria such as the size of the acquisition, the percentage of Chinese ownership or the sectors of activity?

Why does it take so long for a decision to be made? That is often a problem. It takes time before an acquisition can be blocked based on national security.

[English]

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Thank you. That's a very important question.

The Investment Canada Act has a proscription in terms of foreign investment in Canada. It is a robust process. The first piece of it is undertaken by Industry Canada and the Minister of Industry. Then it comes to Public Safety for review and comment. If there are concerns, oftentimes we will seek additional time for us to undertake a thorough review. It doesn't always mean that it's a rejection of the proposal; oftentimes there are mitigation measures that are in place.

It has been working fairly effectively. I recognize the frustrations in terms of time but, when we do make a negative decision, we have to be absolutely certain. We take the time to do our due diligence in a very concrete way.

I know that Director Rogers as well as the RCMP along with Public Safety are very much intricately involved in this process.

**The Chair:** I'll cut you off there. We're well over.

We'll turn back to Mr. Cooper for five minutes, please.

**Michael Cooper:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, moments ago you set down another stake in the ground, so to speak, in what is a moving goalpost with respect to getting the foreign influence registry up and running. You say that it will be up and running in early spring, but I'll remind you of the timeline.

Nearly two years ago, when the legislation to establish such a registry was before Parliament, your predecessor, Dominic LeBlanc, promised that the registry would be up and running before the federal election. That didn't happen. Then your government promised that it would be up and running by June 2025. That didn't happen either. Then you, Minister, promised that it would be up and running by December 2025. That didn't happen. It's now February 2026, and you've set down another timeline, another date.

Given the record of making commitments that it would be up and running three times with three different dates and each time you missed the deadline, why should we have confidence that it's going happen now?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** I share the frustration that you have with the delays involved in getting to this point. What I can assure this committee is that all the requisite work has been done, it is essentially complete. With respect to the three elements I talked about, the first one being the appointment of the commissioner, we have canvassed with your party, with the Bloc, along with recognized groups in the Senate. We have tabled a formal request, and we will have a vote on that in the near future.

• (1130)

**Michael Cooper:** Minister, I'm going to ask you to be a little clearer. When you say early spring, what does that mean? What is early spring?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** If I may, I advised you on the first piece, and the second piece is the regulations—

**Michael Cooper:** No, I'm asking you for the latest timeline. You've given months, so what is the month? Is it April? Is it May?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** I'm not going to give you an exact month, Mr. Cooper—

**Michael Cooper:** Okay.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** —but I will say the work has been done. The first piece is the commissioner. The second element is the regulations, which are ready to be finalized.

**Michael Cooper:** With the greatest respect, your government has dragged its feet.

I'll remind you that, for years, your government opposed and obstructed the creation of a foreign influence registry.

Just before the 2021 election, then Conservative MP Kenny Chiu introduced a private member's bill to establish a foreign influence registry. As a result of his advocacy for a registry, MP Chiu was drowned by a sea of Beijing-directed disinformation, costing him his seat. This disinformation was amplified by the Liberal Party in Steveston—Richmond East. Only after Madam Justice Hogue's damning report did your government finally put forward legislation to establish such a registry, which the national security establishment has been calling for for years.

After opposing and obstructing a registry, isn't it the case that the new strategy is one of endless delay by your government? If it was such a priority, it would surely be up and running now.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** I would categorically reject your assertion on this, Mr. Cooper.

What I will say is the commission itself—the initial Hogue inquiry—was called by this government. When Prime Minister Carney formed government, it was a top priority for him. We've been identifying the appropriate commissioner; that name is now before the House. We have essentially completed the work on the regulations. There are some recommendations, including from members of your party, that I am taking into account and I will revise before the final regulations are tabled, and then the system itself will be up and running.

My commitment to this committee and to all Canadians is that the registry will be up and running in the spring.

**Michael Cooper:** Minister, the registry's not in place, the office isn't open and it's been more than two years. Your government talks a lot about obstruction, which is ironic, because Conservatives worked with your government to get Bill C-70 passed expeditiously in the last Parliament.

What we have seen up until now is excuses, dragging your feet in getting this important tool up and running in the face of very serious threats of foreign interference, including from hostile foreign states. This is foreign interference you have now downplayed in this committee when you refuse to, first of all, identify the obvious, that being that the People's Republic of China is the biggest foreign interference actor and threat to our democracy. You categorically refuse to state the obvious, that the Beijing-based Communist regime is a perpetrator of human rights abuses, doesn't respect the rule of law and doesn't have independent oversight over law enforcement. Now your government sees fit to do a deal on law enforcement with the Beijing-based Communist regime.

I don't know how Canadians could possibly have confidence in your government.

**The Chair:** Mr. Cooper, we're well over.

We'll turn to Madame Kayabaga.

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga:** Thank you, Chair. Through you, I'd like to welcome the minister.

I think I have a different memory from what my colleague just talked about. As far as I'm concerned, the Conservatives have long talked about being tough on crime but have obstructed every single bill the minister has actually put forward in this Parliament. Maybe we have a different experience of that.

Minister, you just talked about presenting the commissioner before the House. I'm not sure if this question has been asked before, but how quickly do you think the foreign interference transparency registry will be set up? Can you just explain a little bit of how that use is going to look for the public?

• (1135)

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** There are three major elements to it, and I outlined them. In terms of status, I think I've given you the status as to where they're at. With respect to the naming of the commissioner, it is now up to Parliament and the Senate to set a time and a date for a vote.

Concurrently, we're finalizing the regulations. We received feedback from the public, but I've also received feedback from individuals, including colleagues from the opposition, and I value those comments and that feedback. I will be incorporating them into the new regulations. For example, one of the comments that I received from opposition colleagues is that the \$50 floor is too low and that it should be a higher amount. We're looking at what that appropriate number would be. We're also open to suggestions from this committee on what that would look like. So, there are considerations such as that, and we're hoping to have it finalized.... The deadline for feedback was early this week. We will be incorporating the changes over the next two weeks and will have it formally gazetted so that the regulations will be in place.

The third element is the system that will be required for the registry to be operational. Again, work is being done, and we're very confident that it will be complete in time for both the commissioner and the regulations to be in place.

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga:** We're aware that there are some colleagues who have had concerns about the foreign interference ac-

tivities by means of cyberspace. We also know that in our increasingly digital and interconnected world, malicious actors are leveraging emerging technologies to conduct surveillance, espionage, online harassment and digital disruption against the perceived adversaries.

Could you go through the steps that the government is taking to counter cyber-threats and actors involved in transnational repression and foreign interference?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** There are a number of different ways in which this is addressed. One is through the CSE. I'm not sure if the director has appeared here, but the CSE is very much on the front line of ensuring our cybersecurity is safe and secure. We also have a cybersecurity centre out of Brampton that, again, does a lot of the work around cybersecurity and making sure that our systems are protected. We have Bill C-8 that's going through the House as we speak; clause-by-clause is taking place this afternoon. Hopefully, we will have a critical infrastructure that is very much protected, with disclosure of potential threats so that other institutions and infrastructure can be ready. We have a number of different measures that do speak to cybersecurity.

One of the challenges, I would say, is that, as technology evolves and develops, law enforcement will require powers, such as lawful access, a very important tool that law enforcement has been asking for. We're hopeful, again, that we can advance either Bill C-2, which is in the House, or similar legislation that will ensure that law enforcement has the tools to directly target and stop cyber-attacks.

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga:** Hopefully our colleagues will stop obstructing Bill C-2 so that we can actually get forward.

Could you talk a little bit about the foreign actors that are currently eyeing the Arctic and north region? I don't have a lot of time left, but just answer in a few seconds, and I'm sure other colleagues will allow you to finish that answer.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** I would say, from a departmental and ministerial perspective, that Arctic sovereignty would be the number one issue that we're facing but also proactively addressing. All of our portfolio agencies—the RCMP, which has a footprint in the Arctic; CSIS, which has increasing resources there; as well as the CBSA—have a footprint in the Arctic, particularly in Nunavut. As a department, we are in the process of making sure that we have a presence there as well. However, it is important that all Canadians, particularly those in law enforcement, have a direct link and prioritize the Arctic as an area of vulnerability.

• (1140)

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

I will turn to Madame Normandin for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Christine Normandin:** Thank you.

Minister, I asked a question about the purchase of companies by China, and I understood the process for arriving at a decision. I would like to hear your comments on the process for signing agreements to import products from China. I am referring in particular to the 49,000 cars that have the potential to be spies on wheels, because they can record phone conversations and take pictures of where we are going. They can also indicate, in real time, things like how many passengers are in the car.

Is the review process for such agreements similar to the one for the acquisition of national security-sensitive businesses?

[*English*]

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Issues around both privacy and security, and especially national security, I think, are critical, and all Canadians are vulnerable in so many ways.

I have a phone here, and every one of us at this table has a phone that probably has more capabilities of gathering personal information than any other advanced device, or equal to any other advanced device.

When we talk about vehicles coming in, particularly from China, and what you're referencing in terms of the agreement, I think what's critical for us, which the Minister of Transport is well aware of, is to make sure that whatever vehicles are here do not have the capability to transmit information to other sources, other countries. That is very much, I think, in line with our national security priorities.

[*Translation*]

**Christine Normandin:** If I may, Minister, I'd like to know the process. A little earlier, Mr. Rogers mentioned that CSIS was brought in when there were business acquisition issues. Is CSIS involved in the process in the same way when these kinds of trade treaties are signed, for example?

**Daniel Rogers:** Thank you for the question.

CSIS is involved in that.

[*English*]

I say this in the sense that we do provide advice on issues like this. I would say the process is different from the Investment Canada Act process, which is much more formalized and regularized through a process that public safety coordinates.

Our normal processes include having us provide intelligence and advice to the government around types of technologies, types of threat actors, which the government takes into account in its decision-making. If we are requested to provide specific advice on a particular decision, we will do so.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

We will now turn to Mr. Calkins for five minutes, please.

**Blaine Calkins (Ponoka—Didsbury, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Minister, you've been an MP for quite some time, as have I. You have been in cabinet. You would know that members of Parliament from time to time travel as part of international delegations. I know I have a few times. I'm assuming you have as well as a regular member of Parliament.

The only times I've ever seen MPs being recalled from international trips are generally when there is a confidence vote in the House. I think you and I would both agree that there was no confidence vote when the Prime Minister was in China. Is that correct?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** I don't—

**Blaine Calkins:** It's a very simple question.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Well, first of all, I don't believe I've gone on international travel. I will sponsor travel, anyway, so I will put that on the record.

I will say that it's up to each individual MP to decide how long they're on a mission—

**Blaine Calkins:** Okay. Well, let's—

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** —and there have been cases where people have come back early, have stayed later.

**Blaine Calkins:** —flesh this out, then, Minister.

I'm sitting here looking at this. As a member of Parliament, I've travelled. Most members of Parliament have travelled at some point in time. You might be the only exception. I have never seen anybody recalled from an international trip, whether it's sponsored travel or otherwise, unless they had a health concern or unless there was.... I've been recalled from Europe when we had a minority Parliament when Stephen Harper was the prime minister.

Quite simply, it was very obvious to everybody paying attention that two Liberal MPs left early. It doesn't appear to have been for any health reasons. It couldn't possibly be for a confidence vote, because the House of Commons wasn't in session. The question I have, Minister, is this: Did the Beijing regime ask your government to remove those two MPs from that trip, or were you so afraid of the optics of it that you, in fear of Beijing, asked your own MPs to come home early?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** This is well outside my scope of expertise, Mr. Calkins.

I will say that, if I recall, not all the Liberal MPs returned, including the chair.

I would say that you should pose this question to somebody who may be able to answer this question.

**Blaine Calkins:** The question is present in my mind, because I am trying to be confident that you actually have, and will have, the best interests of Canada at heart when it comes to implementing this foreign agent registry, because you've missed every deadline so far. Your government is now engaged in conversations about shared security environments with the regime in Beijing, and you've missed all of your deadlines for this registry.

I need to know if the regime in Beijing is actually influencing any of the decisions that government is making, under any threat of retaliation or any other type of threat, or out of any fear that your government has in conducting these negotiations and putting Canadians and our democracy at risk.

• (1145)

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Absolutely not. With respect to the timeline for the transparency registry, other countries that have established these registries have taken upwards of two years, so I will—

**Blaine Calkins:** Why did it take you so long? I mean, you've missed every.... Your goals are self-imposed. We didn't impose them on you.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Mr. Calkins, I'm the third minister within the timeline that we're talking about, from the time the act was put into place.

I will take responsibility for the tenure of my leadership in this portfolio. I will say that we have been working diligently to make sure that all three elements I outlined earlier are fulfilled.

**Blaine Calkins:** Will you commit to making sure that the registry is in place, the commissioner is in place and it's staffed and ready to go before the next general election? We're already at the next "next" general election.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Are we?

**Blaine Calkins:** Well, your government committed to having this in place by the next general election. You missed it, so your next opportunity is the next "next" general election.

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** I'm not going to make a commitment on a vote that is not in my hands. It's a free vote in Parliament and we don't know how other parties will vote.

If you want to hear from the deputy minister, I'm more than willing to have her comment. We will make every effort and I will make every effort. I will commit to working diligently to ensure that the registry is up and running by early spring.

**Blaine Calkins:** Are you sure that after the completion and the implementation of your foreign registry, it won't interfere in any way with Canadians voting in the next general election, whenever that happens to be?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** This is one tool, Mr. Calkins. This is not the only tool. There are other tools that you've heard about previously. This is definitely an important tool with respect to our democracy—

**Blaine Calkins:** It won't affect regular, ordinary, lawful Canadians in being able to vote. Is that correct?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** This is not a panacea, if I may be very candid. It is a very important tool. It's one of several recommendations of the Hogue inquiry. Of course others have recommended this as well, including this committee, I believe. It is one of several tools. This in itself will not solve all of our issues with respect to elections, but it certainly will assist us.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

We will turn to Mr. Louis for five minutes, please.

**Tim Louis (Kitchener—Conestoga, Lib.):** Thank you, Minister, for being here and to everyone for your service in keeping Canadians safe and keeping our elections secure. The actions taken by all of you have shown that foreign interference is taken seriously in Canada. I appreciate that.

Minister, you're saying the foreign influence transparency registry and the commissioner are important tools, but they're not the only tools that will work to protect Canadians' democracy.

Can you expand on our government's other efforts? How can we work together to counter foreign influence and interference, whether it's CSIS, the RCMP or CSE? You're all at the table and no one's working in silos here. Can you explain the co-operation that happens?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** I may just ask the officials from each of the portfolios represented here to comment on this. Maybe we'll start with Ms. Boudreau and then go to Mr. Rogers.

**Jodie Boudreau (Deputy Commissioner, Federal Policing, Royal Canadian Mounted Police):** We work very closely with our partners, the service and other public safety partners. We investigate every complaint of foreign interference.

Our primary role is to keep Canadians safe and secure. Whether it's during an election or any other period in time, we use all means that we can within the legislation, respecting the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of individuals involved, in investigating all complaints of foreign interference.

**Daniel Rogers:** I can add to that by saying that for CSIS's part, there are three things I might draw to the committee's attention.

One is that we continue to collect intelligence to be able to identify when foreign interference might occur. We can use that intelligence to inform things like the transparency registry or law enforcement actions that the RCMP might undertake.

The second thing that we can do is take action directly through our threat reduction measures to prevent that foreign interference from occurring.

The third thing is to provide information, whether classified or unclassified, to groups of Canadians to help them be resilient against foreign interference and to make sure that any attempts to influence them covertly or coercively are unsuccessful.

• (1150)

**Tricia Geddes (Deputy Minister, Department of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness):** I'll just add two pieces that we bring to the table from Public Safety.

One is the policy development and the policy-making. In some of the legislative initiatives that we've seen in recent years, including Bill C-70, there are some really important tools in there to protect Canadians against foreign interference.

Additionally, the work of our counter foreign interference coordinator in helping to do outreach to vulnerable communities is a really critical part of this tool. It's to ensure that we're building trust with those communities, so that they understand what the threat looks like and so that we're able to better understand how we can help them, whether it's through some of the law enforcement and intelligence tools or, frankly, whether it's through just better dialogue and understanding what the issues of concern are.

**Tim Louis:** Thank you. That is helpful, and it's helpful to know that you're continuing to work, whether it's an election or not.

I would imagine that during an election cycle, the work is increased, and the co-operation is increased as well. How much can you explain about how that happens?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** I think it's very important to note that during elections, the minister is not involved in any of the decision-making. It is, in fact, the SITE task force committee that is in charge. I think you heard from them earlier this week. It is strictly run by civil servants, and they report directly to Canadians. There's no reporting mechanism that goes through the regular channels in off-cycle election periods.

I think Canadians should be very confident that it is an independent body that truly reports to Canadians, as opposed to through elected officials.

**Tim Louis:** I appreciate that.

I want to continue, Ms. Geddes, our conversation about groups that might be targeted from other nations.

I think you mentioned that we need to reach out to them in the languages of their choice. How are we able to do that? You have to build trust to do that, and you have to meet people where they are. We had a brief conversation the other day at this table, but maybe you could expand on that.

**Tricia Geddes:** I think this is critically important. That was one of the key lessons that we took from the last election. We had increased transparency and we were using the traditional means of reaching out to media technical outlets in that way. I think we did genuinely feel that we did our best to try to reach communities directly in a couple of languages, but frankly, there's a lot more we could do. We have looked to secure contracts that we're able to put in place quite quickly to enable us to do translation and be able to reach directly into those communities.

Beyond just the language, though, it's also the means by which people in the communities are communicating with each other. When we have information we need to share, I think we need to continue to make sure that they're well informed about the threats and that we're using the right tools at our disposal to be able to inform communities where they are.

A lot of lessons were taken on that front, and we'll continue to do some work to improve our mechanisms there.

**Tim Louis:** That's great. Thank you.

**The Chair:** We will go to very quick rounds, and for once, I'm going to be militant. We'll do two minutes, two minutes and then one minute.

We'll start with Mr. Calkins for two minutes, please.

**Blaine Calkins:** Thank you, Chair.

Minister, I asked you the same question twice, just moments ago, and I'm surprised at your answer.

The question I asked you was this: Again, after you implement the registry into full effect, will it impede any Canadians from voting? You could not say no to that question. I don't know why you can't say no to that question.

Why would the implementation of the registry prevent a Canadian citizen from voting?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** I'm sorry, Mr. Calkins. I may have misunderstood your question.

My understanding of your question was that this establishment of the registry will, at the end of the day—

**Blaine Calkins:** It's supposed to be a tool to keep foreign interference out of our elections, not to prevent Canadians from participating in the election. Do I have that right?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** It is a tool. My point is that it is one of several tools that we have.

On that, I think we can agree. It is a tool, and it's an important tool, and once established, it will—

**Blaine Calkins:** Now that we've established that we understand each other, the question that I have for you, then, is as follows: Are you going to implement this in the same way that you implemented your gun confiscation program?

I ask because it seems to me, based on the premise of my previous questions, that Beijing says, "Jump", and your government says, "How high?" You pulled those MPs off that trip either out of a direct request from Beijing or because you're afraid of Beijing. It seems to me that your government doesn't understand, just as in the gun confiscation program, who the good guys are and who the bad guys are.

Can you reassure me that Canadians will not be affected or impacted with the implementation of your registry program in their ability to vote and participate in our democracy?

• (1155)

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** You just can't help yourself, can you, Mr. Calkins?

**Blaine Calkins:** I'm just following up on your initiatives, Minister.

When the camera is on and when people are recording, we just want to hear what you have to say.

**The Chair:** Okay, that's two minutes.

Madame Brière is next.

**Hon. Élisabeth Brière (Sherbrooke, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, and all the other witnesses, for being with us.

[*Translation*]

Minister, I'm going to ask my question in French.

You said in your opening remarks that Canadians expect their government to protect our democracy, which obviously includes our electoral process. You also mentioned that the threat of foreign interference was complex and that the mechanisms were also delicate and complex.

What would you say to Canadians to reassure them and show them that the government is doing what it needs to do to ensure that the fight against foreign interference remains a priority?

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** Thank you for the question, Mrs. Brière.

[*English*]

Let me just say at the outset that we have one of the most robust electoral systems in the world. It is one that is truly independent and that adheres to every element of democracy, ensuring that Canadians can go to the polls without repercussions and without having any form of intimidation. It is truly remarkable. We should be very proud of our democracy and our electoral process.

It is not perfect. When we see challenges from foreign actors or those who would try to undermine our democracy, we need to take action. That's what our government has done, including with SITE TF, an independent body that during the elections does their work very effectively, and with the establishment of the transparency commissioner. It is all meant to ensure that Canadians can not just be safe but also feel safe.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

We'll turn to Madame Normandin for one minute, please.

[*Translation*]

**Christine Normandin:** Minister, you mentioned that you would be mindful that cars entering Canada would not be able to transmit sensitive information. However, that's a core function of modern cars if we want them to work.

To what extent was the Prime Minister briefed on this security concern before proceeding with the agreement with China on vehicle imports?

[*English*]

**Hon. Gary Anandasangaree:** The Prime Minister is quite well briefed on many issues, including on issues around trade. I think you will find that especially with vehicles, all vehicles coming into Canada will have safeguards in place where our information will be protected. That is, I think, a very important principle that we're working under, and I'm confident that it will not impede on the privacy rights of Canadians.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

I'd like to thank the minister and the witnesses for being here.

We'll suspend for the next panel.

● (1155)

(Pause)

● (1205)

**The Chair:** We're back.

Again, I remind you to consult the cards on how to prevent audio and feedback incidents.

Welcome to our second panel. Welcome back once again to a frequent flyer, Mr. Perrault, Chief Electoral Officer; Serge Caron, deputy chief electoral officer for digital transformation; and Josée Villeneuve, deputy chief electoral officer, regulatory affairs.

Mr. Perrault, I invite you to give your opening statement please.

[*Translation*]

**Stéphane Perrault (Chief Electoral Officer, Office of the Chief Electoral Officer):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, for the invitation to appear before the committee as it studies foreign election interference.

I will briefly discuss our preparation for the 45th general election, what we experienced with respect to electoral operations, as well as our efforts to address inaccurate information about the electoral process.

Protecting elections against foreign interference requires a whole-of-society approach. At Elections Canada, our role in the delivery and protection of a federal election includes ensuring physical and personal security, the cybersecurity of our infrastructure and the security of the information regarding the electoral process. Our focus is on improving our resilience against attempts at election interference, whether they be foreign or domestic.

In the lead-up to and during the 45th general election, we continued to work closely with our security partners to understand potential threats and to secure our IT systems and the overall electoral process. And, as I told the committee when I appeared in October, Elections Canada did not experience any breaches to its IT infrastructure or interference with its electoral operations during the election.

[English]

However, as recognized by the Foreign Interference Commission, the biggest threat to our democracy comes from information manipulation, particularly through social media platforms. The role of Elections Canada in combatting disinformation and misinformation is very specific but critical to the security of our electoral process and the trust of Canadians. During and between elections, Elections Canada is focused on providing Canadians with accurate information about the federal electoral process, not only so that they may exercise their right to vote but also to inform them of the procedures and safeguards in place to ensure the integrity of the process.

In preparation for the election and to counter information manipulation, we've developed a range of information products as part of our voter information campaign. These include products available in 50 languages as well as detailed content on electoral integrity. We also published a media guide for speakers of Mandarin, Cantonese and Punjabi, the three most spoken languages in Canada besides English and French, with information on subjects beyond what we typically include in our information products, such as electoral security, the national register of electors and political financing safeguards.

Based on testimonies heard before the Foreign Interference Commission, and to prevent electors from being intimidated or influenced to vote in a certain way or not vote at all, we added new accessible web content about safeguards in the electoral process, including messages emphasizing the secrecy of the vote. These messages were shared widely through a range of communication channels during the 45th general election.

In the lead-up to, as well as during the election, we monitored the public information environment to observe inaccurate narratives about the electoral process. In addition to monitoring traditional media, Elections Canada monitors 60 different platforms, news websites, blogs and online forums in 22 different languages. I would note that Elections Canada is not equipped to determine whether the source of inaccurate information about federal elections is domestic or foreign. Instead it focuses on the impact that inaccurate information might have on Canadians' ability to register and vote or on their trust in the electoral process. Though we did observe an increase in inaccurate narratives compared to previous elections, we were able to provide Canadians with easy access to information about the electoral process. We promptly corrected this information and misinformation through our various channels such as a repository of official communications and our social media posts. We did interact with social media platforms when appropriate regarding specific messages that we saw that were concerning.

• (1210)

[Translation]

However, during the 45th general election, we noticed a shift in the digital information environment. The emergence of new elements, such as artificial intelligence and influencers, is changing the way in which Canadians have access to information about the electoral process and amplifies the manipulation and circulation of inaccurate information, whether domestic or foreign. This shift, in addition to the presence of other existing factors, such as polariza-

tion and the interconnectivity of the Canadian and American information environments, may lead to a situation where the information circulating online has long-lasting consequences on Canadians' trust in the electoral process.

Prior to the election, in November 2024, I presented to Parliament and to the Foreign Interference Commission a series of recommendations to better protect elections against threats, including from foreign actors.

A key recommendation I made was to prohibit false information about the electoral process that is knowingly and deliberately being spread in order to interfere with the ability of Canadians to exercise their right to vote or to undermine trust in an election or its result.

My other recommendations dealt with the use of deep fakes, the funding of third parties and the protection of nomination and leadership contests.

The Foreign Interference Commission endorsed most of my recommendations, including the ones I have mentioned here.

Mr. Chair, I would encourage the committee to consider these recommendations in its study of foreign interference. I would be happy to make my officials available to the committee should it wish to study those.

Thank you. I would be happy to answer members' questions.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

We'll turn to Mr. Van Popta for six minutes, please.

**Tako Van Popta (Langley Township—Fraser Heights, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here and to Mr. Perrault for coming once again to our committee to engage in this very important study on the impact of foreign interference in our elections.

I think we are all in full agreement that this is an extremely important topic. Commissioner Hogue, in her study, stated that information manipulation “poses the single biggest risk to our democracy.” She said, “It is an existential threat.” I gather from your earlier testimony that you would agree with that.

Earlier this week, we had witnesses from the critical election incident public protocol panel come before us. They have underlined that this is a risk. They expanded by saying that foreign interference activities in Canada continue to be “pervasive, sophisticated, and persistent”. Just before you came here, in the earlier panel today, the minister quoted those same words.

Despite that, the “Retrospective Report on the 45th General Election” stated that “none of the incidents reviewed by the Panel threatened Canada’s ability to have a free and fair election.”

I put that to the witnesses earlier this week. They reaffirmed that, but they also pointed out that one of their goals is that “Canadians must have full confidence that their election is secure”.

I know that in your testimony you talked a bit about that.

Earlier witnesses were less equivocal with this answer, in nice bureaucratic language:

The CEIPP Panel is encouraged that public reaction to the enhanced communications posture adopted during GE45 viewed such efforts as generally effective.

Have we met the goal? Has the panel met the goal? Has your department met the goal of ensuring Canadians have full confidence that their elections are in fact secure?

• (1215)

**Stéphane Perrault:** I think we have every reason to be confident in the overall security of our elections.

I think we face challenges, like all democracies, but I think Canada checks all the boxes in terms of a free and fair election. Some of the improvements you noted for the last elections were positive improvements, from my perspective. Overall, I share the assessments that were made.

**Tako Van Popta:** How can I be sure that the public in my riding, which has a large Chinese diaspora community, are confident and that they're not staying home because they're afraid of something? Would you have evidence of that? I'm not saying that specifically for my riding, but for any given riding. Would you be able to say with some degree of assuredness that the public there is confident in the robustness of our democratic systems?

**Stéphane Perrault:** Overall, I think the surveys show that Canadians trust our electoral process and trust that we at Elections Canada are among the most trusted institutions in the country, so generally speaking, yes.

I know there are pockets of distrust, and I think a lot of that distrust is based on incorrect information. One of our key roles is to make sure that we provide, as much as possible, information about the safety of our electoral process.

You mentioned something that is of concern to me and it was of concern to me prior to the election—and which I mentioned in my remarks—which is people staying home because they're afraid. I think it's important for Canadians to know and for anybody who's listening to know that the vote is secret, and that how they vote is not something that can be determined by anybody. They should feel secure in going to the polling stations and casting a ballot. It won't be known how they voted.

**Tako Van Popta:** I agree that they should feel secure. I believe our systems are robust, but my concern continues to be with diaspora communities that feel threatened because of something that is going on back in the country from which they've come. They still have family members and friends there.

**Stéphane Perrault:** I share that concern. That's why we launched a wide-ranging information campaign on the electoral safeguards. We also had some regional educators out in B.C., in

Surrey, and in Toronto to talk about the safeguards of our electoral process.

We have a network of community groups in our Inspire Democracy program with whom we share information. There are over 900 community groups that receive that information. They, in turn, are well positioned to share that with members of their communities or with people they work with. It's an important issue. There's no silver bullet for this. It's something that we need to tackle, and we need to continue expanding our efforts.

**Tako Van Popta:** Thank you.

I have a question about how new electors get their names put on to the list of electors. It's my understanding that it's pretty easy for a person to have their name entered. When I'm out door knocking, people will say, “My daughter just turned 18; what should she do?” You can go online or you can go to the polling station, get there a couple of minutes early and just show some ID. Showing a passport, of course, would be good enough—sufficient, but not necessary.

**Stéphane Perrault:** No, a passport—

**Tako Van Popta:** A driver's licence or anything else, other documents, even just a library card if they don't have government issued photo ID, almost anything is good enough.

Are you assured that no non-Canadians are getting onto the voters list?

**Stéphane Perrault:** We know that in some cases non-Canadians do get on the register, because we received the information from IRCC on non-Canadians and we checked that against the register.

**Tako Van Popta:** After the fact....

**Stéphane Perrault:** After the fact, however—

• (1220)

**Tako Van Popta:** They're casting their ballot immediately upon getting on the voters list.

**Stéphane Perrault:** Correct.

There have been very few cases of prosecutions, of people finding that there was elections fraud related to that.

It's important for people to understand the critical balance between making the system accessible and ensuring its integrity. A system that rejects too many people who are entitled to vote is not a system that has integrity.

The controls are in place. The vast majority—

**Tako Van Popta:** So—

**An hon. member:** It was a good line of questioning.

**The Chair:** It was a good line of questioning. I wanted to hear the answer, but then he interrupted the really good answer, so I'll have to just cut it off there.

We'll turn to Mr. Wilkinson.

**Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson:** Thank you again for appearing.

You mentioned in your opening statement that you made a number of recommendations with respect to some of the protections against foreign interference. I just want to explore a few of those.

I think Elections Canada has highlighted some of the vulnerabilities with respect to third party financing and also with respect to untraceable contributions. Could you speak to why those are a challenge at this point and what you would suggest that we do?

**Stéphane Perrault:** In my report, I want to make sure that any potential loopholes for illicit funding are addressed. We are concerned that if there are non-traceable instruments, prepaid credit cards, for example, that are used to make contributions, this does not provide a proper trace of where the money comes from. I see no reason why we should allow these kinds of contributions in our system and I've recommended that they be eliminated.

I also recommended some changes to the third party funding regime. Right now, third parties can use their own funds. Of course, in the case of individuals, that's appropriate, but what comes into a group's own funds can potentially be a range of sources. We've seen, increasingly, third parties report their expenditures as being paid out of their own funds and we don't know the original source of that money.

My recommendation is if groups want to use their own funds, that should be limited to groups that receive 10% of their revenues from contributions. Fundraising entities should not be able to use their own funds. Groups that largely depend on contributions should need to set aside a separate campaign bank account to receive contributions from Canadians and permanent residents.

**Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson:** What about cryptocurrency?

**Stéphane Perrault:** It's the same thing. We don't see that a lot, so it hasn't been a burning issue. We have issued guidelines on how to treat cryptocurrencies. We treat them as non-monetary contributions, the same as the U.K., which has recently followed our own guidelines. There's no really good reason, at the end of the day, to allow cryptocurrencies, whose main feature is the inability to trace the sources.

**Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson:** Obviously you folks are focused very much on general elections, but I do know that you have raised some issues, concerns and recommendations with respect to nomination and leadership races. Can you explain those?

**Stéphane Perrault:** There are a number of recommendations that I've made in that area.

I've not recommended—I think it's well known—that we overtake the oversight of nomination races. I don't think that would be a wise avenue.

However, there are a number of offences in the act that pertain to the electoral process, such as bribery, and we've seen the allegations of bribery in other races and jurisdictions, or threats. I see no reason why these prohibitions should not equally apply to nominations or leadership races. That's one area of recommendations.

I also think more transparency overall, in the rules pertaining to leadership and nominations, is warranted. I did recommend that parties, in the case of leadership and nomination races, ascertain that their members who vote have, at least, permanent residence.

**Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson:** Obviously, one big topic of conversation these days is the emerging importance of artificial intelligence. Associated with that are concerns relating to things like deepfakes. Maybe you can explore the issues that are there and some of the ways you think we can protect against them to ensure the integrity of the process.

**Stéphane Perrault:** There was a lot of concern coming into the last election that we would see—and not just in Canada but also in other elections around the world—deepfakes as a major threat. We have seen deepfakes, but I don't think the threats or the dangers have yet materialized.

I think you've heard witnesses before me who are of the view that it continues to be a risk. I share that view. The manipulation of voices and images could deeply mislead electors, and the sophistication that comes with AI increases that risk. It's very cheap. It's easily accessible to anybody. We have to expect that it's going to come.

I don't know that there's a magical solution to deal with that, but there are elements. I do believe that it would be appropriate to have a watermark, basically a marker, whenever AI is used in the production of electoral communications. At the very least, if it becomes unlawful to not put that label, platforms' own moderation policies, which typically include taking down unlawful content, could act upon that immediately. It creates additional leverage. Of course, it does create more transparency for Canadians.

I also think that there should be some very narrow but specific prohibitions on misrepresentations of political actors or of the Chief Electoral Officer, with regard to using or manipulating by any means the voice or the image to have them say things they haven't said or put them in a context where they haven't been.

• (1225)

**Hon. Jonathan Wilkinson:** You've made a range of recommendations, as have a number of other bodies. Of the various recommendations you have made, which do you see as being the most pressing, moving forward?

**Stéphane Perrault:** It's hard to point to a particular one. It's a matter of looking at every option we have to combat foreign interference.

I am concerned—and I mentioned that in my remarks—about the fact that people can, with impunity, deliberately put forward false information about the electoral process and can do so with the very specific intent of either preventing people from voting, though there are existing rules that we can use against that, or undermining confidence in the election. We saw—and I think you've heard from witnesses—after this election, AI-produced content showing or purporting to show poll workers stealing ballots. To me, this is the very kind of harm that we need to find remedies against before it's too late.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Normandin, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Christine Normandin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here. Once again, it's a pleasure to have them with us.

Mr. Perrault, I'd like to hear your comments on foreign interference, somewhat related to the testimony we heard earlier this week.

I don't know if you had a chance to listen to the presentations, including by people from the security and intelligence threats to elections task force. A pertinent question was asked by my colleague Blaine Calkins, I believe. Part of his premise was that the task force may have a bit of a fire alarm role: very good at detecting the presence of smoke, a good team on the ground capable of analyzing metadata to see any potential interference, but perhaps a little less adept at heading it off or sharing the information with the public, which seems to be more one of your strengths.

Early in your presentation, in your opening remarks, you talked about interactions on social media. The Chief Electoral Officer, or CEO, is also given credibility.

I would like to hear what you have to say about the collaboration or lack thereof between the CEO and entities like the security and intelligence threats to elections task force. Do they really work in silos or do they work together, obviously while respecting the independence of both entities? Do discussions already take place? If not, would it be appropriate for there to be more?

**Stéphane Perrault:** Yes, there are daily discussions during the election, through my colleague here, with members of the security community, including members of the task force. There are meetings every day, and we share all information. That way, we have access to all the information they have.

My mandate is very specific. In a way, you talked about the credibility of Canadian elections. Addressing disinformation or misinformation is extremely delicate. We could be accused of censorship.

However, when it comes to information on the electoral process, it's much easier. In terms of disinformation or misinformation about candidates, what they have said on their platform, it's much more sensitive. That's not our role.

It's a much bigger challenge. In this case, we're talking more about educating, informing and enlightening the public through efforts over time. I think that's the role of security agencies. We had technical briefings during the election to raise awareness among Canadians so they could take a critical look at the content.

**Christine Normandin:** Thank you.

I would like to hear your opinion on the importance of the foreign agent registry in relation to your role, particularly in terms of access to ministers. We know that contributions can buy a seat at a minister's or prime minister's table at an event or get privileged access. Unfortunately, there have been situations in the past that subsequently led to contracts being signed, particularly with the Bank of China.

Will the future foreign agent registry facilitate the work of the Chief Electoral Officer in analyzing potential foreign interference? Will it lead to further deliberation on the issue of paid access to ministers?

• (1230)

**Stéphane Perrault:** It further encourages the critical eye of the public, journalists and ministers themselves who may not know who they are dealing with. As a politician, you meet people from all walks of life in your riding. I think a registry can inject a level of transparency into who is working for foreign interests. Do these people make contributions? Are they working on political campaigns?

I think transparency is good for the system as a whole. To a large extent, the Canada Elections Act regime is built on that transparency, the transparency of contributions. There are very strict rules on fundraising, including meet-and-greets with ministers, to ensure transparency.

In my opinion, that's part of the same type of remedy, and I think it's a good thing.

**Christine Normandin:** Continuing on the issue of access, I would like to know if there has ever been any consideration, particularly in Quebec, on maximum contributions. Is that something that should be included in the discussions on lowering the funding cap? The goal would be to avoid everything that can be linked to the use of false names and money from third parties, which is harder or impossible to trace. You mentioned cryptocurrencies.

Do you think it would be useful to review the funding cap?

**Stéphane Perrault:** In my opinion, this is a matter for Parliament. Compared to other countries in the world, we have one of the most stringent contribution regimes. I know that in Quebec, for example, there are more restrictive rules at the provincial level. When you look internationally, we're among the toughest. Until recently, Australia had anonymous donations up to and including \$10,000, so we're in a different place.

We have a regime that I think is very robust. I also think it's Parliament's role to review it regularly to determine whether there is a fair balance. We have to make sure that candidates and political parties can still fund their activities, so we need to find a balance in the contribution thresholds.

**Christine Normandin:** Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Excellent.

Mr. Jackson, you have the floor for five minutes, please.

**Grant Jackson (Brandon—Souris, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

It's wonderful to see you again. Thank you for being here.

You mentioned that the percentage of people who are removed from the voters list is very small. I wonder if you would commit to providing a riding-by-riding breakdown of the number of people who have been removed from the voters list, who are not eligible to vote, per constituency.

**Stéphane Perrault:** I can, but it will not be the way you phrased it, in the sense that when we have information that someone, according to the IRCC, is not a Canadian citizen, it is not conclusive evidence. It may or may not be accurate. There may be errors. People who join the register have all done a solemn affirmation that they have Canadian citizenship.

These are cases where we have conflicting evidence: the evidence of the person who has attested that they have citizenship and bureaucratic information that says that they do not. When we match that, we take them out and we inform them that they've been removed. It may be an error, and we offer them the opportunity to join back.

The regime, as it exists, allows people to come in on polling day and, as was indicated earlier, to affirm formally that they are Canadian citizens. If they lie about that, then there are potential serious consequences.

**Grant Jackson:** Sure. I think that's fair.

We're not asking you about what happens before the vote. I'm just curious whether we can get a sense of the number.

**Stéphane Perrault:** We can, but I would caution not to assume that everybody who's been removed is not a citizen. That would be erroneous.

**Grant Jackson:** Okay, fair enough.

I am a little bit concerned that the main point of contention is IRCC's database. It's publicly well known that the immigration system is an absolute disaster. We have no idea who's a citizen, who's here

on PR status or who's on a temporary foreign worker permit. These guys have lost complete control of the immigration system.

If that's the only database that you're using.... I understand that you're limited in the available data points at your disposal, but if that's the sole piece.... I wonder whether Elections Canada has a concern around the status of that database and that it's deeply flawed.

• (1235)

**Stéphane Perrault:** I would say that the quality of the data, as far as we are aware, has greatly improved over time. The information that we receive—

**Grant Jackson:** Has that happened recently?

**Stéphane Perrault:** Yes, it has.

I would also inform the committee that, to my knowledge, we are the only jurisdiction that does this data matching with immigration data. Most democracies do not have documentary proof of citizenship, for a good reason—and I can speak to that—but they do not also do that cross-reference with immigration data.

I think what we have in Canada is one of the most robust systems that exist, but it's important not to make it so robust that it excludes legitimate Canadians from voting. Again, there's a balance here that needs to be struck.

**Grant Jackson:** I just wonder, for the average Canadian out there.... I can get a driver's licence and it doesn't matter. The vast majority of people who go to vote use their driver's licence. If you have that, I guess the question is this: What guarantee can you give them that there is some ratification confidence? They cast their ballot, and it might get removed later. Are you doing recounts in those seats? We've got seats that were won by one vote or four votes.

In the case where you remove a voter from the list after their ballot's been cast, is a recount then required in that seat if it's such a tight margin? I'm just curious how that works.

**Stéphane Perrault:** The law provides that if any citizen believes the election results have been affected by fraud, they can contest the election. It's up to the losing candidate or any other citizen, based on evidence they could provide, including, of course, prosecutorial evidence if somebody is charged, that the results have been affected. Then a court could overturn the election. That would be the role of a court, not the role of Elections Canada.

**Grant Jackson:** It would be very onerous for a candidate to pursue a court decision to ask for the election result to be redone after they've run an election campaign and lost it, four months later, or whatever the timeline is, they find out that in a one-vote-split seat, a vote was cast erroneously by an individual, whether it was intentional or not.

I'm just confused as to why the onus would be on the losing candidate in a situation where this happens.

**The Chair:** Give a very quick answer, please.

**Stéphane Perrault:** Any Canadian can contest an election based on evidence that the results were impacted by fraud, but you're right, there is an onus that comes with that.

**The Chair:** Thank you much.

Madame Kayabaga, you have five minutes, please.

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga:** Thank you, Chair.

Through you, I'd like to welcome Mr. Perrault.

Again, thank you for taking the time to continue to engage on these very important conversations.

I did hear you earlier when my colleague asked you questions around financing in elections. You talked about the problems around potentially foreign financing.

Can you mention some other systems that we can use to protect nominations and general elections from any foreign financing?

**Stéphane Perrault:** I think the committee should be aware that we have a very good system overall, but there are elements that can be improved.

For instance, the law prohibits someone like a third party from using foreign funds, but it does not necessarily prohibit a foreign entity from making that contribution. The law prohibits the provision of money by foreign entities but does not include non-monetary contributions. There are refinements that need to be made to the regime to improve it that I've recommended in my report.

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga:** Just for the record, I think a couple of people have asked you the question around the trust that the public needs in order to get out and vote and not fear any other foreign influencer that may know they're voting.

We know that Elections Canada is very good at protecting the voters. There's privacy involved, but for the record, because that question has been asked a couple of times, when we politicians talk about certain things, I think the public begins to worry about the wrong thing.

Can you just put on the record what you think about privacy and electors?

● (1240)

**Stéphane Perrault:** I can assure anybody that it is not possible for someone to know who voted for which candidate. When you vote in person with a regular ballot, the ballot is pre-folded in such a way that the elector is instructed to return it to facilitate covering the name of the candidate the person has voted for. There are, of course, scrutineers around to make sure the process is followed properly. We have audits of the election that look into ensuring this is done properly.

If you look into voting by special ballot, when we receive the ballot, it is protected by secrecy envelopes. We have to separate the envelopes before we can put in the secrecy envelopes. The outer envelope contains information about the voter. The inner envelope

contains no information. They're separated and counted only once that separation has taken place.

There are controls in place and, most importantly, witnesses to the count to make sure these controls are applied.

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga:** I appreciate your putting that on record. I think it's really important that the public is not misinformed about what happens when they go to the ballot box.

Earlier this week, I was able to ask a question to other people who work in that space. I was asking around about the markers on AI transparency and whether we should move towards making everyone who uses AI, especially if they're posting on a public platform, to put in that marker to indicate to the consumer that they are consuming AI information.

What are your thoughts on that?

**Stéphane Perrault:** I must say that my thoughts have evolved on that. I was skeptical at the outset. I now think that it should be a requirement, and that's been my recommendation.

People who use AI in good faith, and there are many people who do that, will not hesitate to put the marker on, and people should become educated as they see those markers to AI content. Obviously, someone could try to cheat and not put the marker on.

I think that the marker is also important in that once it can be determined that it was AI content, for that reason alone, it becomes illegal content, and platforms would normally take it down. It provides a lever to prevent attempts to improperly influence the vote that we currently do not have.

**Hon. Arielle Kayabaga:** I don't have a lot of seconds left, but I'll just say that I agree with you.

I think that the markers are really important, not just for elections but also for other uses where we see children and women being vulnerable with deepfakes taking over. I appreciate your putting that on the record and sharing that your thoughts have evolved since I last asked you this question. Thank you very much.

Is there any other comment that you would like to put on the record in five seconds?

**The Chair:** That's excellent. That's exactly five minutes.

Madame Normandin, you have three minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Christine Normandin:** Thank you.

Mr. Perrault, you've already discussed this a bit in response to questions from Mr. Wilkinson, but I'd like to hear you talk about anti-vote-buying measures at the federal level. It made headlines in Quebec. We know that you have previously recommended having something that would prohibit bribes, threats or attempts to interfere in the voting process for party nominations and leadership races.

However, I see that, when you made your recommendation, in November 2024, you also mentioned the issue of foreign agents and foreign influence. I'd like you to give us examples of situations where there could be foreign interference in a party's nomination or leadership process, talk a bit about the ideas that come to mind and tell us how that could be prevented through legislation.

**Stéphane Perrault:** I think we need to introduce transparency to know when it starts beforehand and not give notice after the fact. I'm talking about nomination races. For leadership races, there's advance notice, but not for nomination contests. Therefore, I think we need to inject transparency. The rules also need to be more transparent to reassure people about what the rules are. I think Parliament should let entities determine their own rules, but I think transparency is a good thing.

Next, regarding the measures we just talked about, it may come as a surprise that it isn't already prohibited, but it isn't. It is prohibited for voting in an election, but not for a nomination race. Intimidation and fraud can obviously be used by foreign states. We have seen allegations of intimidation in the electoral process. That could be the case in nomination races. We know that there are ridings in Canada that lean one way or another. In those ridings, the nomination race is actually the gateway to the Canadian political system. Therefore, it's important that basic protections be in place to ensure that foreign agents or states are not seeking to influence elections through nomination races.

• (1245)

**Christine Normandin:** Thank you.

I understand that it would be done in a way that complements the recommendations you've already made on the obligation to declare the rules for nomination races in advance and to prepare financial statements and everything that entails. That would not necessarily be enough. Measures should also be added to officially prevent any potential bribes, threats and so on.

**Stéphane Perrault:** It provides investigative tools. When we have investigative tools, when we have prohibitions, we can get search warrants, for example. There's work that could be done that couldn't be done otherwise.

**Christine Normandin:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Mr. Cooper, you have five minutes, please.

**Michael Cooper:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Perrault, I'm just following up on the line of questioning of Mr. Jackson. To be clear, is the only database that Elections Canada has to verify if someone who is on the list shouldn't be on the voters list the IRCC database, or are there other sources of data?

**Stéphane Perrault:** We have roughly 40 data partners such as drivers' licences and income tax returns, for example, and provincial electoral management bodies that share information that allows us to update the register of electors. Whenever people enter the register, at some point in the process, they will have had to have made a sworn statement to the effect that they are qualified as an elector.

**Michael Cooper:** Right, so someone can declare that they are a citizen, but the question is: What verification processes are in place to ensure that it is, in fact, the case? You have said that you have

data sources. If someone, for example, is identified as someone who appears to not be eligible to vote, what is the process? What would happen next?

**Stéphane Perrault:** They are removed from the register of electors, and they no longer receive the voter information card, for instance. If it is found that they have voted, if they do register and vote, then they are referred to the commissioner of Canada elections..

**Michael Cooper:** What if, for example, someone who was removed from the list showed up at a polling station and someone vouched for them or, if they're not on the list at all and someone vouched for them, are there any checks and balances or processes in place to ensure that someone who shouldn't be voting doesn't end up casting a ballot?

**Stéphane Perrault:** They are required to provide documentary proof of their identity and address or have somebody who's provided such proof of their own to vouch for them, so this is about identity and address.

In terms of the citizenship, it is a sworn statement. This is the rule across most democracies in the world. Very few, and for very good reason, do not require documentary proof of citizenship. It's important to understand that such requirements can lead to the exclusion of vast numbers.

**Michael Cooper:** We certainly wouldn't want anyone to be excluded, but we're talking about one vote or four votes. If someone who votes shouldn't vote, that cancels out a vote.

**Stéphane Perrault:** The reverse is also true.

**Michael Cooper:** I'm going to move on to another issue, which is third party financing.

Commissioner, there are significant loopholes with respect to the financing of registered third parties that participate in our elections in terms of the possibility of foreign sources of funding. As I understand it, as the law currently stands, a foreign entity or source could donate to a Canadian entity, and that Canadian entity in turn could donate those funds to a registered third party, and they would be treated as having been made from that Canadian entity. Is that right?

**Stéphane Perrault:** That's correct.

**Michael Cooper:** It seems to me that the most straightforward and effective way to stop the use of foreign money influencing our elections through third parties, which has happened, would be to require third parties to set up specific bank accounts for the purpose of engaging in activities during elections in which the funds donated to those accounts would be restricted to individual Canadian citizens. That would close any loophole, and it would put third parties on par with registered political parties to the extent that registered political parties can accept contributions only from individual Canadians.

What are your thoughts on that recommendation?

• (1250)

**Stéphane Perrault:** I would say that it is close to the recommendation I've made, but there's an important nuance.

My view is that there are groups that have money from different sources whose main purpose is not to participate in an election. They may find out at election time that there is an issue in the election that is of deep concern to them or their members, and they may wish to participate. To completely prevent them from using any of their existing funds could be an overly restrictive regime.

My recommendation is to allow those that are not fundraising groups to use their own funds as well as individuals, but I understand your point of view. It's a matter of striking the right balance.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

We'll turn to Mr. Louis for five minutes.

**Tim Louis:** Thank you.

Thank you, Monsieur Perrault, Monsieur Caron and Madame Villeneuve. Your repeated testimony and work shows that Elections Canada has an important role in safeguarding the integrity of our electoral process and maintaining that public confidence in democratic outcomes here in Canada. I appreciate that.

Monsieur Perrault, you mentioned there's a constant battle countering digital misinformation. You mentioned steps that you take, calling it out and debunking, for lack of a better word, doing outreach and posting. Can you expand on some of the ways you're doing that?

**Stéphane Perrault:** Certainly.

We've moved from debunking, which we continue to do, to also pre-bunking. What we do, first of all, is we seed as much correct information in the system, the ecosystem, as possible prior to an election. We want to make sure that there's as much understanding of the rules and process as possible. What we began to do ahead of the last election was something called ElectoFacts, where we singled out false narratives ahead of time—because we monitor across jurisdictions and across events—identified them and provided the correct, factual information on them. We proactively tell Canadians to beware of these narratives, this is the correct information.

Then, of course, during the election, we can correct and we do correct information. In some cases, we speak to platforms. For example, in the last election there was a fake Journal de Montréal article saying, for seniors, people over the age 65, the vote is on a Tuesday not the Monday. It was posted, I believe, on polling day, so

we immediately contacted platforms and they did take it down. We didn't have to ask them to take it down. They moved quickly on that.

**Tim Louis:** I can see speed and the need to move quickly is a challenge.

Another challenge might be that people on social media are, in a way, in echo chambers. They might not be in the same circle where you're posting and debunking or pre-bunking the information. What challenges do you have to reach people when social media today seems to be so segmented that people are seeing the news they want to see?

**Stéphane Perrault:** It does raise challenges. We have to think about what platforms we want to be on. Some platforms may not be as reputable as others, but if Canadians are there, then we have to decide whether we should go there, whether we should be on those platforms. We tend to err on the side of being there and sharing as widely as possible correct information.

While there are echo chambers, it's fair to say that we've also seen people correcting each other and people using some of our information that we put out. It was very encouraging to see people actually using our information to respond to other participants in a conversation.

**Tim Louis:** Then during, let's call it off-season or non-election time, is there outreach that can be done to Canadians? Let's use this as a public service announcement. How can Canadians find out where to turn if there are any questions?

**Stéphane Perrault:** There is a range of tools. Of course, they can contact us, but we do have a lot of information on our website. We also have documents and information products that we provide to a network. I spoke about that a bit earlier. The program is called Inspire Democracy, and we have over 900 participants. These are civic groups that use that information. It includes political parties. These groups in turn can share that information with their members or people who are close to them.

You're quite right this is not something that can only happen during an election. We really need to be ahead of the curve.

• (1255)

**Tim Louis:** A new phrase, “inspire democracy”, I shall be looking that up. That sounds like a motto of Elections Canada.

I was going to ask a question about you discussing with other countries, what information sharing happens, and what we can learn when elections in similar countries happen. Is there communication? Then, at the same time, you mentioned that our system is so robust and strong. Is it possible other countries are also learning from us?

**Stéphane Perrault:** Yes, one forum that I like to attend, it's very informal, is called the Four Countries Conference. It brings together Australia, New Zealand, the U.K. and Canada. We're very much alike in terms of where we are in terms of mature democracies. We share our concerns and practices and how we're evolving.

The example that I gave of ElectoFacts, which pre-bunks, is a takeoff from what elections Australia did previously, though they did it in a different way and in a way that we probably wouldn't do it. There are cultural differences. However, we do talk about what we do and learn from each other.

**Tim Louis:** I thank you for inspiring democracy.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Louis.

I was subbing in on a committee, and I noticed that the chair of that committee asked a question of all witnesses each time there was a panel. I'm not going to get into that, but I have a couple of questions, so I will use my discretion with the chair's prerogative.

I'm having some flashbacks from my last time on PROC, when we were dealing with the repeal of the so-called fair elections act. I think it comes from a good place, in terms of protecting the section 3 charter rights of Canadians, to ensure that there is fair voting. I agree with Mr. Cooper when he says he wouldn't want anyone excluded.

We saw past attempts from a previous government to bring in voter ID laws—again, that was under the so-called fair elections act—which it made it more difficult for seniors, indigenous people and people with disabilities to vote. I remember hearing testimony—perhaps this is anecdotal from those witnesses—that up to 250,000 Canadians who should have been eligible to vote were disenfranchised during that time.

I wonder whether you can comment on the difficulties caused by those voter ID laws and their impact. I believe that would have been in the 42nd general election.

**Stéphane Perrault:** I would like to preface that, if I may, with the statement that excluding an elector who has the right to vote is equally harmful to the integrity of the election as allowing somebody who does not.

The evidence we have tends to show that there are very few non-electors who vote, but there are significant segments of the population who face barriers to vote. When we look at legislation to ensure the integrity of the electoral process, the integrity is a mix of those two considerations. If legislation unduly excludes people by imposing requirements that cannot be met by large segments of the population, it is detrimental to the integrity of the electoral process in the same way as if it is too lax. There's fine tuning that needs to take place, and over the years, Parliament has turned its mind to different ways to find that balance.

I think it's fair to say that the changes brought in created some restrictions. There was a labour survey done, I believe, after the 2011 election that showed that a number of electors struggled to demonstrate their proof of address, and changes were made. It's good that it is an evolving conversation about what that right balance is.

It's always important to remember that when we talk about integrity, it's not just about excluding people who shouldn't vote; it's also about making sure that those who should be able to vote actually have that opportunity. If there's a risk, both elements have to be taken into account.

**The Chair:** Perhaps this is an unfair question to you, and it should be directed to the commissioner, but how many prosecutions were there for this past election that you're aware of?

**Stéphane Perrault:** This is an ongoing process, so I can't speak to that.

**The Chair:** Can you give—

**Stéphane Perrault:** I'm not aware for this election. If you're talking about electors who voted who should not have—

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Stéphane Perrault:** —I'm not aware of a single one.

**The Chair:** Thank you so much.

That's our time. This committee is adjourned.

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