



## The Initial Report in a Nutshell

On 3 May 2024, Commissioner Marie-Josée Hogue released her [Initial Report](#). It completed the first phase of the Foreign Interference Commission's work, in which the Commission reviewed thousands of documents and heard from more than 60 witnesses during 21 days of hearings.

The main objective of the Initial Report is to give the public a better understanding of what foreign interference is, why we should be wary of it, how it manifested itself in the last two general federal elections, and how the government responded.

Below is a summary of the key issues, events and conclusions found in the Initial Report.

### Foreign interference is...

**Not new.** It has been a national security threat for decades in Canada and worldwide. But it is evolving, reflecting changing geopolitics and technology.

**Constant.** There is a constant baseline of foreign interference in Canada. It is not something that only happens during elections.

**Clandestine, deceptive, or personally threatening activities** by a foreign state, or those acting on its behalf, which are detrimental to the interests of Canada.

**Not always clear and obvious.** In practice, the line between foreign influence (legitimate) and foreign interference (illegitimate) can be difficult to draw. There is often a grey zone where foreign actors may use established, legitimate channels to engage in secret activities to advance their national interests.

**Multifaceted.** States and non-states actors that engage in foreign interference:

- **Use a range of tactics to interfere with Canada's democracy**, for example long-term cultivation of long-lasting relationships with their target, financial support, bribery, blackmail, threats, cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns and the use of proxies (people who take direction from a foreign state to obscure the link between the activity in question and the foreign state).
- **Target many different groups:** candidates and elected officials, civil servants and political staff, voters, interest groups (e.g., donors, lobbyists, community groups) and the media (both mainstream media outlets and community sources).
- **May have a distinct interest in targeting diaspora communities**, notably to silence dissidents, amplify the foreign state's messages, control public opinion and sow discord. Members of diaspora communities experience some of the most harmful impacts from foreign interference, including threats to their families in their countries of origin.

For more details:

[Chapter 4 – What is Foreign Interference?](#)

[Annex B – Q & A: Elections, Foreign Interference and Commissions of Inquiry](#)

## The impacts of foreign interference

The Initial Report is clear: foreign interference occurred in the last two Canadian general elections.

While the People's Republic of China ("PRC") currently stands out as the most persistent and sophisticated foreign interference threat to Canada, the intelligence holdings examined by the Commission also identify Russia, India, Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran, among other countries, as possible foreign interference actors in Canada.

Given this reality, the Initial Report considers a series of questions about the 2019 and 2021 general elections, and the impact that foreign interference had on them. These questions and the Commissioner's findings are summarized below.

### **Did foreign interference undermine the integrity of the electoral system itself?**

No. Both elections were administered with integrity at both the national and individual riding levels. Voters were able to cast their ballots and their votes were duly registered and counted. There is no evidence to the contrary.

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### **Did foreign interference impact which party came into power in 2019 or 2021?**

No, it did not. The Liberal Party would have been in government with or without foreign interference in 2019 and 2021.

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### **Did foreign interference impact any election results at a riding level?**

It is possible that results in a small number of ridings were affected, but this cannot be said with certainty. In these ridings, foreign interference could have impacted both the nomination contests and the electoral campaign, affecting who was elected to Parliament or which party won the seat.

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### **Did foreign interference impact the broader electoral ecosystem?**

It did. Regardless of the impact on specific election results, the events named in the Initial Report likely diminished the ability of some voters to cast an informed vote, thereby tainting the process. This impact has likely been slight to date but may become more severe in the future.

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### **Did foreign interference undermine public confidence in Canadian democracy?**

Regrettably, it did. Undermining faith in democracy and government is a primary aim of many of the states that engage in foreign interference. This is perhaps the greatest harm Canada has suffered as a result of foreign interference.

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### **Did foreign interference impact everyone equally?**

It did not. While all Canadians are victims of foreign interference, the means and methods of foreign interference harm diaspora communities in Canada in distinct ways. Their experiences must not be ignored, and specific attention shall be given to them.

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For more details on these conclusions, see [Chapter 8 – Assessing the Impacts](#)

## Other information you will find by navigating the Initial Report

<p><i>Report Highlights</i> summarizes the key conclusions of the Initial Report in 15 pages</p>	<p><i>Table of Contents</i> gives a complete overview of the Initial Report</p>
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A chronological review of events leading to the creation of the Commission.

→ [Chapter 1 – How the Commission on Foreign Interference Came About](#)

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Details on the Commission’s mandate and how it has organized its work.

→ [Chapter 2 – Scopes of the Commission’s Mandate](#)

→ [Annex C – Commission’s Operations and Organization](#)

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Rules and notions related to intelligence and classified information, and the approach taken by the Commission to balance transparency and different security interests.

→ [Chapter 3 - Transparency and National Security Confidentiality](#)

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Description of intelligence agencies and other federal entities and processes that respond to foreign interference, and how information circulates within government.

→ [Chapter 5 - How Does Canada Respond to Foreign Interference?](#)

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Specific allegations of foreign interference in the 2019 general election, and the government’s response → [Chapter 6 - The 2019 General Election](#)

For example:

- Irregularities in the Liberal Party nomination contest in Don Valley North (Ontario).
  - PRC interference activities in Greater Vancouver.
  - Allegations of a \$250K financial support to a group of known and suspected PRC-related threat actors in Canada.
  - Attempts from the Government of Pakistan officials in Canada to clandestinely influence Canadian federal politics.
  - Negative articles about the Prime Minister on a website called the *Buffalo Chronicle*.
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Specific allegations of foreign interference in the 2021 general election, and the government’s response → [Chapter 7 - The 2021 General Election](#)

For example:

- Disinformation targeting the Conservative Party of Canada’s policy platform, its leader Erin O’Toole, and its candidate Kenny Chiu in Steveston–Richmond East (British Columbia).
  - Suspected foreign interference activities in the Greater Vancouver Area targeting New Democratic Party MP Jenny Kwan and other candidates.
  - Potential clandestine financial support from the Government of India.
  - Suspected Russian Disinformation Activity.
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## The Second Phase of the Commission's Work and the Public Consultation

The Commission's work is far from over and the second phase is already ongoing.

In this phase, the Commission will examine the capacity of various state actors and processes to detect, deter and counter foreign interference, and make recommendations on how to strengthen this capacity.

The Commission will, among other things:

- Look at how intelligence and information about foreign interference should be communicated to government, the public and those likely vulnerable to foreign interference and whether it is advisable for our intelligence agencies to share more information.
- Consider a range of issues that could include the challenges of responding to online misinformation and disinformation.
- Examine the rules, or lack of rules, governing nomination contests. The first phase has shown that these contests are particularly vulnerable to foreign interference.

### Public consultation

Foreign interference is likely to increase and have negative consequences for our democracy unless vigorous measures are taken to detect and better counter it. It must be discouraged, and its effects must be mitigated to protect our democracy and all Canadians.

This is why the Commission has set up a public consultation process. All members of the public, and especially those from diaspora communities, are invited to share their experience and ideas on issues related to foreign interference in our democratic institutions.

More information about the Commission's public consultation process can be found here: <https://foreigninterferencecommission.ca/public-consultation/submissions-by-individuals>

Commissioner Hogue is planning to release her final report in December 2024.