



Public Inquiry Into  
Foreign Interference in  
Federal Electoral Processes  
and Democratic Institutions

The Honourable Marie-Josée Hogue,  
Commissioner

**VOLUME 6**

CHAPTERS 20-21

# The Commission's Public Consultation



Public Inquiry Into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes  
and Democratic Institutions. Final Report.

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## CHAPTER 20

# The Commission’s Public Consultation Process

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## 20.1 Introduction

This volume describes the Commission’s public consultation process and the information received through that process. The first chapter of this volume is dedicated to examining the process employed by the Commission to gather the views and experiences of members of the Canadian public regarding foreign interference. The second chapter provides summaries of the information the Commission received from members of the Canadian public, organized according to the hostile foreign states concerned.<sup>1</sup>

Contributions made by members of the Canadian public, including those who identify as members of diaspora communities, provided crucial input to the Commission, and helped contextualize the phenomenon of foreign interference. At a human level, the information I received through the public consultation process also illustrated the impacts that foreign interference may have on the daily lives of many individuals and communities in our society.

I have treated the information shared by participants in the Commission’s public consultation process as information rather than evidence. The reasons underlying this decision and its implications are explained below. While this distinction is important, it does not intend to minimize in any way the valuable contributions made by members of the Canadian public.

I extend my thanks to all those who participated in the Commission’s public consultation process.

## 20.2 Overview

The public consultation process was launched in May 2024 after the release of the Commission’s Initial Report and continued until the end of the public hearings in October 2024.

The Commission gathered relevant information from the public through a three-part campaign: a call for written submissions, consultation meetings with members of diaspora communities and a questionnaire.

The information received included details of personal experiences, views and other information from individuals and groups on foreign interference and transnational repression. These were both specific to my mandate and more

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<sup>1</sup> A more detailed summary of contributions received through the Commission’s public consultation process as well as additional information about the process itself are also available on the Commission’s website, on its dedicated consultation webpage.

general, providing necessary context, insight and feedback that greatly helped the Commission’s work.

The Commission endeavoured to establish a climate of trust throughout the process, particularly with vulnerable individuals and groups. That is why the Commission designed a process centred on people and their needs, addressing risks and concerns about sharing information with the Commission, and responding to the needs of vulnerable individuals.

Our efforts to build trust involved balancing the Commission’s focus on Canadian electoral processes and other democratic institutions with the public’s broader experiences with foreign interference. These efforts were both necessary and worthwhile, as shown by the valuable contributions individuals and groups made to the Commission’s work, highlighted in the following chapter. Given the willingness of individuals and groups to contribute to a whole-of-society approach to addressing foreign interference in Canada, I anticipate any ongoing effort will benefit from the continued involvement of the public.

In this chapter, I discuss how the Commission developed a public consultation process that I believe fostered trust and facilitated broad participation across Canadian society.

## 20.3 The Importance of Consulting the Public

I determined early on that public consultation would be an important component of my work. Although the Commission’s Terms of Reference directed me to examine foreign interference in the 2019 and 2021 federal general elections and in our democratic processes, I felt it was essential to hear from the public about foreign interference in respect of those issues and more generally.

### Engaging the public and vulnerable communities

Public consultation is an important component of public inquiries. Through this public consultation process, I heard from members of the public about their experiences of foreign interference, its impacts on their lives and their views on how to improve Canada’s response. This gave me critical information about foreign interference in Canada and informed my investigation and recommendations.

In addition to receiving input from the general public, hearing from members of diaspora communities was crucial to me, as these groups may be especially vulnerable to, and may be the first victims of, foreign interference.

They are also key partners in Canada’s ongoing efforts to detect, deter and counter foreign interference. Where members of diaspora communities are subject to foreign interference, it is often in the form of transnational repression. I discuss this concept in Volume 4, Chapter 17.

The Commission sought to understand how foreign interference impacted various individuals, including Canadian citizens, permanent and temporary residents, refugees, immigrants and international students. This required acknowledging that foreign states and their proxies may employ different tactics against members of diaspora communities. Further, within these communities, individual views and experiences vary in a myriad of ways, including on the existence, nature, motivation and impact of foreign interference, and how best to respond to it.

## Promoting awareness and building trust

To inform the public of the opportunity to participate, the Commission announced the public consultation process on its website, issued news releases, and used social media platforms (LinkedIn and Twitter/X). The Commission also created a dedicated public consultation page on its website. In addition, the Commission launched a digital advertising campaign to promote broader awareness of the opportunities to participate in the Commission’s work. The Commission also asked Participants with standing at the Inquiry who represented diaspora community organizations<sup>2</sup> (the “**Diaspora Participants**”) to share information within their networks. These and other outreach efforts helped build awareness and make sure the information shared was clear and easy to understand.

Every public inquiry must consider how best to invite public participation depending on the nature of its investigation. The Commission designed its consultation process to address safety and security concerns as effectively as possible, given the security threats posed by hostile foreign states that may target and harm members of the public. However, simply including procedural safeguards would have been insufficient for the Commission’s work with consultation participants. The Commission first needed to build trust with members of the public so people would feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and experiences.

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<sup>2</sup> The Diaspora Participants involved were: Chinese Canadian Concern Group on the Chinese Communist Party’s Human Rights Violations, Human Rights Coalition, Ukrainian Canadian Congress, Russian Canadian Democratic Alliance, Sikh Coalition, Iranian Canadian Congress, and Iranian Justice Collective.

## 20.4 A Consultation Process Designed to Address Certain Challenges

To address the four challenges discussed below, the Commission formed a dedicated team focused on delivering the public consultation process in a way that established trust. This team included Commission counsel, the Research Council and Commission staff working in communications and administration.

### Implementing safety and security measures

Hostile states may seek to threaten, coerce or otherwise influence members of the Canadian public through covert means. The Commission expected that some people with important information to share might have security concerns arising from their interactions with the Commission.

Therefore, the Commission implemented safeguards within its public consultation process and informed the public about them. The Commission could not and did not, however, make any promises or provide any guarantees of absolute safety. The Commission provided options to participate (1) anonymously, (2) confidentially through a dedicated confidential email address and (3) through an encrypted messaging platform. Security protocols were also adopted for in-person and virtual consultation meetings, including having security personnel present and verifying the identification of attendees.

### Ensuring transparency

Transparency was a key guiding principle of this Commission, as mentioned in the Commission’s *Rules of Practice and Procedure* and evidenced throughout its work. The Commission tried to foster transparency about the public consultation process in two ways.

First, the Commission was transparent about what the consultation would involve and what it would do with the information received, including how that information would be shared with the public. Key information was made available on a dedicated public consultation page on the Commission’s website and updated on an ongoing basis. The webpage included information on how to participate, a summary of the Commission’s Initial Report and public consultation submission guidelines, as well as other resources to make it easier for members of the public to engage with the Commission.



Second, the Commission shared the outcomes of its public consultation process through various means, such as Notices to the Public, panels featuring members of diaspora communities and summaries of information received. The summaries helped balance the need for transparency and security by conveying individuals’ views and experiences while honouring the Commission’s commitments to confidentiality and anonymity. Attendees had the opportunity to review, comment on and accept these summaries before they were published.

## Fostering diverse representation

Given the varied experiences of foreign interference among different diaspora communities, the Commission needed to hear from groups and individuals with diverse perspectives. As such, the Commission adopted a strategy to reach individuals in different demographic groups, including age, culture, language and those living in different parts of the country.

The outreach strategy was successful. Through the public consultation process, the Commission heard from people from every province, spanning ages from 16 to 81 years and older,<sup>3</sup> and received information in English, French and several other languages.

## Facilitating accessibility

A key consideration for the Commission was ensuring the public consultation process was accessible. This involved recognizing and addressing various aspects of accessibility to create a process that was welcoming and easy to participate in.

For example, members of the public could participate in English, French or any other language. To reach people who may be more comfortable in a language other than English or French, the Commission translated its Initial Report summary and submission guidelines into 17 other languages.<sup>4</sup> These translations are available on the public consultation page on the Commission’s website.

The Commission also provided simultaneous interpretation during consultation meetings for those who wanted to express themselves in a language other than French or English.

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<sup>3</sup> The exact age data was not collected through the questionnaire and the last age bracket was “81+.”

<sup>4</sup> Languages were, in addition to English and French: Arabic, Bengali, Cantonese, Gujarati, Hindi, Mandarin, Persian/Farsi, Punjabi, Russian, Sorani Kurdish, Spanish, Tamil, Tigrinya, Turkish, Ukrainian, Urdu and Uyghur.

## 20.5 The Components of the Public Consultation Process

The Commission’s public consultation process provided a range of options to participate depending on individuals’ and groups’ preferences, time commitments and risk tolerance. They are further described below.

### Written submissions

The Commission invited members of the Canadian public and groups, such as civil society organizations and community associations, to make written submissions to share their experiences and ideas about foreign interference. No length limits were set for submissions, allowing those making submissions to share as much information as they thought necessary.

The Commission encouraged written submissions through various means:

- Its social media accounts.
- News releases to ethnic, cultural and mainstream media outlets.<sup>5</sup>
- A month-long digital advertising campaign, which generated over 76,000 clicks to the Public Consultation page on the Commission’s website.

Given that members of the public might want to submit sensitive information, the Commission allowed submissions to be made anonymously, confidentially, by regular mail, email or through an encrypted messaging application.

Submissions were welcomed in any language. Submissions made in third languages were translated using secure methods. The Commission received over 200 submissions, which were reviewed<sup>6</sup> by Commission counsel on the public consultation team and summarized on the Commission’s website.

For a detailed discussion of the themes derived from the written submissions, please see the following chapter.

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<sup>5</sup> The news releases were circulated using the Canada Newswire (CNW) ethnic and cultural media mailing list.

<sup>6</sup> In reviewing the submissions, the Commission assessed them for further actions needed by the investigative team, categorized the themes and summarized the content for further consideration and analysis by the Commissioner and Commission counsel.

## Consultation meetings

### Meetings with members of diaspora communities

The Commission held in-person and virtual consultation meetings with members of various diaspora communities to hear directly from individuals who believe they have been impacted by foreign interference. This required those who were willing to participate to dedicate substantial time to preparing for and attending a consultation meeting. Attendees shared their views and experiences directly with me and dedicated members of the Commission counsel team.

Meeting attendees were given the opportunity to anonymize themselves in the meeting and in the public summaries as a way to mitigate the concerns about safety expressed by some.

Commission counsel convened a series of preparation meetings with attendees, on a diaspora-by-diaspora basis. At these meetings, Commission counsel shared information about the process and how to prepare for the meetings, answered questions posed by the attendees and responded to attendee concerns. Security measures were put in place for these meetings.

Consultation meetings were kept small to foster an encouraging and approachable environment and to recognize that participation could be emotionally exhausting for attendees.

Other measures aimed at creating a safe environment included:

- Keeping the meetings and their location confidential.
- Treating the information shared by attendees as information rather than evidence. Unlike the evidence presented at the public hearings, the information shared by attendees during these meetings was not provided under oath or affirmation and was not tested under cross-examination.
- Providing security personnel for in-person meetings.
- Implementing security measures for both in-person and virtual meetings.

To encourage participation by members of diaspora communities, the Commission collaborated with the seven Diaspora Participants to identify potential meeting attendees. The Diaspora Participants’ assistance in organizing these meetings proved to be invaluable.

Each meeting included between 2 and 10 individuals put forward by the same Participant, often from the same diaspora. To maximize the number of people the Commission could hear from, each attendee was given 15 minutes to answer two questions:

- *How are you, your loved ones and members of your community impacted by foreign interference in Canada’s electoral processes and democratic institutions?*
- *What are your suggestions for how you and others in your community who may be vulnerable to foreign interference could be supported and protected, and for how foreign interference could be detected or combated?*

In total, 22 consultation meetings were held virtually and in various locations across the country, involving 105 individuals from 13 diaspora communities: Chinese, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Falun Gong, Hong Kong, Iranian, Russian, Sikh, Tamil, Tibetan, Tigrayan, Ukrainian and Uyghur.

Summaries of these meetings were published on the Commission’s website. The experiences and ideas shared during the consultation meetings are analyzed in detail in the following chapter.

## Consultation panels

During the final set of public hearings, the Commission organized 3 thematic consultation panels featuring 11 individuals from the consultation meetings. A member from each of the diaspora communities that participated in the consultation meetings (listed above) appeared on these panels.<sup>7</sup>

Transcripts of the remarks made by the members of these panels are available on the Commission’s website, and the experiences and ideas shared during the consultation panels are discussed in the following chapter.

## Questionnaire

In September 2024, during the final set of public hearings, the Commission published an anonymous questionnaire inviting all members of the public to share their experiences and opinions on foreign interference in our electoral processes and democratic institutions. The 5-to-10-minute questionnaire was designed for those who preferred a quicker, simpler way of taking part in the process.

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<sup>7</sup> Some individuals who participated in the consultation meetings identify with more than one diaspora community, so although 11 individuals were featured on the consultation panels, there are links to the 13 diaspora communities referenced above.

The questionnaire gathered information on how respondents had been impacted by foreign interference and their views on how to respond to it. It also included optional questions about their ethnic or cultural background and other demographic information.

By the end of the public hearings, more than 620 responses were received from people from every province in Canada, including members of a wide range of diaspora communities. These responses are described in the following chapter.

## 20.6 Sharing What I Heard

Through this process, the Commission gathered valuable information about the experiences and ideas of many individuals and groups. Some participants chose to identify themselves, but most information was provided anonymously or confidentially. Therefore, the Commission faced the challenge of sharing insights while respecting anonymity and confidentiality. The Commission shared the information with the public in several ways.

First, the Commission issued three notices to the public dealing with certain aspects of the public consultation process:

- 17 June 2024: the Commission called for written submissions.
- 29 August 2024: it announced the consultation panels to be held during the public hearings.
- 13 September 2024: it laid out the three components of the public consultation process.

Second, during the final set of public hearings, Commission counsel presented to the public the main themes that emerged from the public consultation process.

Third, the consultation panels provided an opportunity for participants in the consultation meetings to share their experiences and ideas with the public.

Fourth, the Commission published summaries of the 22 consultation meetings on its website. These summaries were reviewed and anonymized with the help of meeting attendees to ensure accuracy and respect confidentiality. Obtaining consent from attendees was crucial, as they were best placed to assess the risks associated with publishing their remarks and decide if they were comfortable with such risks.

Finally, the following chapter, titled “Public Consultation Process: What I Heard”, analyzes and summarizes the information received by the Commission through the three components of its public consultation process.

## 20.7 **A Summary of Key Factors Contributing to the Success of the Public Consultation Process**

In designing and implementing the public consultation process, the Commission had to address some key factors, including the following:

- Building trust to enable participation of vulnerable individuals and groups, to learn about their experiences and gather their ideas, and to faithfully convey the information they shared to the public.
- Allowing individuals and groups to share their views anonymously, confidentially and through an encrypted messaging platform.
- Engaging with Diaspora Participants to design flexible processes that were responsive to their needs as they arose, and to communicate through their networks.
- Using traditional media, social media, direct email and digital advertising to reach a broader audience.
- Accepting written submissions and meeting participation in any language.
- Creating a safe space for discussion on topics that were sometimes emotionally charged for attendees.

## 20.8 **Conclusion**

Individuals and groups who participated in the public consultation process have made a significant contribution to the work of the Commission. I appreciate their efforts and thank them for the trust they placed in me and the Commission by sharing their experiences and ideas. In the following chapter, I discuss some of the key themes shared with the Commission throughout this process.

## CHAPTER 21

# Public Consultation Process: What I Heard

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## 21.1 Overview

The Commission sought to hear from members of the Canadian public about foreign interference in Canada’s electoral processes and democratic institutions. During its consultation process, the Commission also received broader information covering foreign interference against Canada’s interests, the impact of foreign interference on members of the Canadian public and the actions of hostile foreign states elsewhere, including in the states themselves.

This chapter offers an overview of the information received, regardless of whether it falls strictly within the Commission’s mandate, to provide an understanding of how foreign interference is deployed against people in Canada.

This chapter discusses the information provided to the Commission on a foreign state-by-foreign state basis. For a detailed discussion of the themes and suggestions raised in consultation meetings, the written submissions and questionnaire responses provided to the Commission, please see the What I Heard Summary Report available on the Commission’s website on the dedicated Consultation webpage.

## 21.2 Purpose and Goals of the Public Consultation Process

The Commission set out to hear from (1) members of the Canadian public on the matter of foreign interference and how to respond and (2) members of Canada’s diaspora communities on their lived experiences of foreign interference and their views on how Canada’s efforts to detect, deter and counter foreign interference may be improved.

In addition to the importance of public participation in commissions of inquiry generally, this exercise was consistent with the Commission’s Terms of Reference. Indeed, an important part of the Commission’s mandate was to examine and report on the experiences of members of ethnic and cultural communities across Canada who may be especially vulnerable to foreign interference.<sup>8</sup> I recognize that members of diaspora communities may be some of the first targets of interference attempts by foreign states, and so learning about their experiences was an important aspect of the Commission’s investigation.

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<sup>8</sup> Order in Council P.C. 2023-0882, clause (a)(i)(C)(II).



Members of the general public may also have direct experience with foreign interference as well as views on efforts to detect, deter and counter it. Moreover, the Canadian public as a whole certainly has an interest in the integrity of Canadian elections and democratic institutions.

Foreign interference has garnered significant attention in the public discourse in recent years. While the focus of this Commission is the impact on Canadian democratic institutions and processes, the Commission has heard, through its public consultation process, a great deal on how the discussion about foreign interference and the actions of foreign states is impacting individuals in Canada. In this chapter, I discuss the tactics used by different foreign states as members of the Canadian public have experienced them.

The Commission sought to create a public consultation process that would allow me to learn as much as possible about the experience and ideas of individuals and groups. I recognize that some members of the public experience the fear of retribution from foreign states and their proxies as an ongoing reality, while others may have a distrust in government or democratic processes based on what they have experienced, and others fear that the attention paid to foreign interference will increase racism against ethnic and cultural communities here in Canada. With these concerns in mind, the Commission put in place security and encryption measures to allow members of the public to contribute to this public inquiry.

In addition to Canada's official languages, the Commission translated key information about the public consultation process into 17 different languages, including an Initial Report summary and participation guidelines. These languages were chosen to align with the languages of diaspora communities who are likely to be targeted by foreign state actors. Members of the public engaged with the Commission's multilingual resources.

The Commission invited written submissions in any language and offered interpretation services to those individuals attending consultation meetings. Some individuals sent in written submissions in different languages and used live interpretation to convey their story during the consultation meetings.

Members of the public were invited to share their ideas and experiences with the Commission through the following components of its public consultation process:

- an open call for written submissions
- an open online questionnaire
- an invitation to consultation meetings.

Also, at the Commission's September and October 2024 public hearings, three panels of individuals from a range of diaspora communities conveyed their suggestions on different themes so that members of the public could hear the voices of individuals who have been impacted by foreign interference.

## 21.3 Use of Public Consultation Process Information

The information shared by participants to the Commission’s public consultation process was treated as information rather than as evidence. Although not evidence, this information was crucial to the Commission’s investigation, as well as to the formation of the recommendations I have made in this report. In addition to providing very relevant context into the daily realities of members of the Canadian public, the information provided gave the Commission a privileged window into the public perception of measures deployed by the government to counter foreign interference and informed the Commission’s approach to certain topics when entering evidence into the record.

However, unlike the evidence which was entered into the Commission’s record during its public hearings, the information received either via written submissions, questionnaire response or participation in small group consultation meetings was not provided under oath or further to a solemn promise to tell the truth. Moreover, this information was not subject to or tested under cross-examination, and the Commission did not conduct independent fact-checking of the information.

As a result, I decided not to make any findings about the accuracy of the information shared through the public consultation process or make any findings of fact from this information.

## 21.4 Who I Heard From

The Commission heard from a broad range of individuals through the Public Consultation Process. Overall, individuals from every Canadian province participated and their ages ranged from 16 to 81 and older.

The Commission heard from individuals and groups identifying as belonging to a number of diaspora communities, including Chinese, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Falun Gong, Hong Kong, Indian, Iranian, Russian, Rwandan, Sikh, Taiwanese, Tamil, Tigrayan, Tibetan, Ukrainian, and others.

In total, participation in the Commission’s Public Consultation Process can be summarized as follows:

- Over 200 written submissions received from individuals and groups.
- 624 online questionnaire responses.
- 22 consultation meetings between the Commissioner and 105 individuals who identify as part of 13 different diaspora communities.
- 19 consultation panelists who shared their experiences and ideas at the Commission’s September and October 2024 public hearings.

A more detailed discussion of the key values and imperatives at the heart of the Commission’s public consultation process, as well as the design choices that were made in establishing it, can be found in the previous chapter of the present volume, *The Commission’s Public Consultation Process*.

## 21.5 What I Heard – Transnational Repression and Foreign Interference

In designing its public consultation process, the Commission adopted an inclusive approach and did not seek to preemptively filter out contributions and, thus, the information received covered a much broader scope than electoral processes and other democratic institutions.

Many contributions related to foreign interference affecting Canada’s interests more broadly, including social cohesion, international relations and the public’s trust in democratic institutions. I note here that a large share of the contributions received by the Commission through the three components of its public consultation process came from individuals who identified as members of diaspora communities and were about transnational repression. I discuss the evidence about transnational repression in Volume 4, Chapter 17 of this report.

The connection to the Commission’s Terms of Reference is clear: the tactics and the direct and indirect consequences of transnational repression can have a critical impact on participation in Canada’s democracy. More precisely, this connection stems from the heavy impacts said to have been suffered by some participants due to the foreign interference they report having been subjected to, and the Commission’s mandate to raise awareness among the broader Canadian public about the experiences of some individuals living in our society.

I also heard about actions said to have been committed by hostile states and foreign actors targeting Canada's democratic processes and institutions.

The information provided to the Commission in the Public Consultation Process points to three main characteristics of foreign interference targeting members of the Canadian public, and in particular, diaspora communities: its severity, the impact it has on people and Canadian society more generally, and its prevalence.

## Severity

The breadth of incidents attributed to foreign state actors and their proxies reported to the Commission through its consultation process range in severity and intensity. A substantial proportion of the incidents can be qualified as very severe and shocking.

However, even events which could be perceived as innocuous to the uninformed outside observer may cause real prejudice to those who believe they have been repeatedly targeted and threatened by hostile foreign states.

Indeed, many people reported having been threatened by foreign state actors and their proxies, often because of their open criticism or activism concerning said foreign states. These threats take multiple forms, including threats of physical violence, sexual violence and even threats to life, and are perpetrated in Canada and abroad, in person or online. Multiple contributions highlighted the fact that loved ones and family members in foreign states were used as leverage against individuals in Canada.

Beyond threats, the Commission also heard accounts of actual physical and verbal violence aimed at individuals and groups within Canada, including in the form of assaults and slurs. People told the Commission that protests and gatherings were sometimes the scene of such events. Some individuals also indicated having suffered damage to their property which they attributed to foreign state actors and their proxies.

In addition, for many participants, foreign interference takes the form of harassment by foreign states' proxies and supporters in Canada, and often by members of their own community. Another facet of foreign interference reported to the Commission was the exclusion and shunning of activists and dissidents within diaspora communities. This was particularly evident in relation to community organizations that participants said are aligned with or have been coopted by hostile foreign states. People and groups further indicated being the victims of attacks on their reputation and defamatory campaigns, which contribute to their exclusion from community life and dissuade other community members from engaging with them.

Another theme which was widely reported to the Commission through its public consultation process was the monitoring of individuals in Canada: this included having been followed by unknown vehicles or individuals. The Commission also heard that people feared that their communications and electronic activities were being monitored, their personal electronic devices had been compromised and that they had been targeted by cyber attacks they attributed to foreign state actors.

Finally, some indicated having been denied consular services from foreign states' consulates and embassies over their perceived criticism of said foreign states. This included visas for themselves or their loved ones, renewal of passports or other services such as pension payments handled by consular offices being leveraged against individuals.

## Impact on people and Canadian society

Concomitantly with the severe threats members of the Canadian public reported being exposed to in their daily lives, the Commission was also told about the important impacts such threats can have on people and their loved ones, as well as on Canadian society more generally. As appears from the examples listed below, in many cases, the impacts are far-reaching and serious.

First of all, the Commission received numerous accounts of individuals living in fear for themselves or for their loved ones being targeted or harmed by hostile foreign states and their proxies in Canada. Participants in the public consultation process also mentioned sentiments of fear for their loved ones still living in the foreign states, noting their increased vulnerability to eventual actions. People often explained that this ever-present fear was accompanied with high levels of stress and anxiety, as well as heightened vigilance in social or public settings.

Furthermore, the Commission was told that fear led individuals to isolate from other community members and to self-censor their criticism or advocacy efforts. Consequently, some individuals also reported being left feeling unable to freely exercise their rights and freedoms in Canada, namely their freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and protest, religious freedoms, and their capacity to freely engage in Canadian democratic life and electoral processes due to the foreign interference threats against them.

On a societal level, people told the Commission that the perceived constraints placed on their freedoms and rights undermined their sense of belonging to Canadian society. In addition, participants in the public consultation process explained to the Commission that their confidence in Canada's democracy and electoral processes had been dented by the fact that some within the society cannot enjoy their rights and freedoms to their fullest extent.

Another impact that was mentioned to the Commission was that individuals fearing foreign actor threats were less inclined to communicate potentially relevant grassroots information about threats and tactics to Canadian government institutions and law enforcement agencies.

Finally, some individuals noted that the work done by the Canadian government and its agencies to detect, deter, and counter foreign interference itself could be detrimental to some segments of Canadian society. This included fears of heightened levels of racism and suspicion aimed at diaspora community members, as well as potential government overreach in the actions deployed against foreign interference.

## Prevalence

As I mentioned in Volume 4, Chapter 17 of this report, members of Canada’s diaspora communities may be disproportionately affected by transnational repression efforts by hostile state actors and their proxies. Information received through the public consultation process reflected the fact that, for many diaspora community members, foreign interference, often in the form of transnational repression, is a daily reality.

People also communicated to the Commission that the tactics used by foreign actors and their proxies were varied and evolving. These tactics were often the reflection of complex and nuanced sociocultural, political and economic forces that are at play in the foreign states themselves. The Commission also heard that diaspora community members’ experiences vary significantly, even within the confines of a same community.

Another issue was the pervasive nature of some foreign interference threats. Indeed, the Commission heard from individuals and groups that foreign interference impacted important community spaces such as community organizations, religious and spiritual communities, artistic and cultural spaces and academic institutions, among others.

## 21.6 What I Heard – Actions by Hostile Foreign States

A high-level summary of the information the Commission received about tactics employed by hostile foreign states to perpetrate transnational repression against members of diaspora communities follows. The discussion is organized alphabetically by hostile foreign state.

## Eritrea and Ethiopia

I received information explaining that Eritrea and Ethiopia use transnational repression to control diaspora community members—particularly those advocating for change in the region—reinforce regime propaganda, discourage interest in democratic values and life and extract funds from diaspora community members to support the Eritrean regime and the Ethiopian government. I heard that tactics used to accomplish these goals include bullying, harassment, threats, intimidation and violence. I was also told that consular services may be complicated or denied to targeted individuals, rendering travel to Eritrea difficult or impossible.

Information provided to the Commission indicated that diaspora community members in Canada who represent or support the Eritrean regime actively work to mobilize Canadian political support for the regime, including by telling Eritrean Canadians who to vote for in Canadian elections and getting Eritreans in Canada to sign petitions to deter the Canadian government from placing sanctions on Eritrea.

I was advised that supporters of the Eritrean regime in Canada utilize community organizations, festivals and faith-based organizations to exercise control over diaspora community members, including through the spread of propaganda, the collection of funds from community members to remit to the Eritrean government (sometimes in a coercive or forceful manner), isolation of non-cooperative individuals (including by labelling them as terrorists) and threatening to deny or actually denying faith-based services.

People told me that supporters of the Eritrean regime in Canada are active in refugee sponsorship and have brought regime sympathizers to Canada under the guise of refugee claims by using community organizations to sponsor such regime sympathizers, some of whom then disrupt the lives of Eritrean diaspora community members trying to live in Canada beyond the reach of the regime.

I also heard that the Eritrean regime imposes reprisals, including threats, harassment and arrest, on the loved ones of diaspora community members in Canada perceived to oppose the regime. I was told that Ethiopian and Eritrean proxies target members of diaspora communities online because of their online advocacy on behalf of the Tigrayan community, and that this targeting includes online harassment, abuse and threats by large numbers of social media platform users, with the goal of silencing anti-regime activism.

## India

I received information that India uses a series of tactics as part of its foreign interference efforts to spread a positive narrative about India and silence activists. Among these tactics, India has exerted its influence in nomination races in Canada in support of candidates who are favourable to India, and against candidates who speak out publicly against India.

I was told that India has employed threats, including death threats, and targeted acts of physical violence (including assassination) to silence activists in Canada. These targeted acts and threats are well known and have had a profound impact on members of Sikh communities in Canada.

In addition to the assassination of a leader in the Sikh community in Canada, I was advised that India has used intimidation, surveillance of individuals and religious organizations, extortion and threats of violence against individuals in the Sikh community in Canada as well as family members in India. I heard that denial of consular services from Indian consulates, including the use of the visa process, has been employed by India to harass, blackmail and incentivize behaviours of members of the Sikh community.

I was told that India targets media and media personalities through emails, faxes and calls to the stations and to advertisers to discourage sponsorship and airing of programs and content labelled as anti-India. These attempts by India to silence media outlets and personalities that represent minorities, such as Sikhs, in Canada and within India, have included making baseless accusations to the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission.

I heard that the targeting of media outlets and personalities is part of a broader effort by India to suppress minority voices, which also targets Sikh activists on social media. Further, it was indicated that India uses coordinated disinformation campaigns to disseminate false information within and about the Sikh community, resulting in a chilling effect on those in media in Canada, and alienating, isolating and harassing individuals who speak out against India in Canada.

## Iran

Members of the Canadian public with ties to Iran shared information with the Commission about the tactics used by Iran and its proxies against targets in Canada. These tactics are used to discourage advocacy and activism in Canada for human rights in Iran and against the Iranian regime.

I heard that Iranian officials have travelled to Canada under false identities. I was told that known Iranian officials, including members of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and people known to have committed human rights violations in Iran on behalf of the regime, live openly and freely in Canada.

People advised that Iran, its proxies and third parties hired to act on their behalf monitor, harass, threaten and defame diaspora community members who speak out against its practices and those perceived to be acting contrary to its interests, including threats of violence and death threats.



I was informed that the results of the surveillance and monitoring of individuals in Canada are promptly reported to Iranian authorities, who may then swiftly target the loved ones of such individuals living in Iran. Further, I was told this targeting can include intimidation, harassment, threats, kidnapping, physical violence, arrest and detention, and is intended to silence the work of activists and advocates in Canada.

Members of the Canadian public informed me that Iran and its proxies defame diaspora members who speak out against the Iranian government and who advocate for human rights in Iran. It was also mentioned that the Iranian government and its proxies impersonate known activists online to the detriment of their efforts on behalf of Iranians in Canada and more generally.

I was told that Iran and its proxies also work to garner support for the Iranian government within Canada, including through the provision of resources.

## People’s Republic of China

I received information that the People’s Republic of China (“**PRC**”) uses transnational repression techniques to exert control over pro-democracy advocates focused on mainland China and those focused on Hong Kong, members of the Uyghur diaspora community, Falun Gong practitioners and Tibetans in Canada.

It was indicated to me that the PRC’s tactics deployed against all these targeted groups include monitoring, surveillance and threats against them and their loved ones in the PRC. Through these activities, the PRC seeks to maintain a climate of fear that leads to self-censorship among those targeted and others who fear that they may also suffer reprisals if they exercise their right of free speech to advocate for change in the PRC, or associate with those who do so.

### **Pro-democracy advocates**

I was told that the Chinese Communist Party (“**CCP**”) targets pro-democracy advocates in Canada, both those who focus on democracy for mainland China and those seeking democracy for Hong Kong, to try to silence them.

I heard that protests and demonstrations for democracy in Hong Kong have been met with aggressive and at times violent counter-protests.

Further, I was informed that the CCP and its proxies have doxed individuals advocating for democracy in the PRC, publishing their identities and other personal information, thereby increasing the risk of harassment and other reprisals for them and those associated with them.

## **Uyghur diaspora community**

I was advised that members of the Uyghur diaspora community in Canada advocate against the CCP's mistreatment of Uyghurs in the PRC, which includes arbitrary detentions, forced disappearances and other human rights abuses.

I heard that the PRC's transnational repression of members of the Uyghur community in Canada seeks, among other things, to interfere with their efforts to garner Canadian support for Uyghurs in the PRC, including through the disruption of events intended to raise awareness about the plight of Uyghurs in the PRC, harassing, monitoring and threatening those who speak out, exacting reprisals against their loved ones in the PRC and by demonizing members of the Uyghur Canadian community through the spread of disinformation.

Further, I was informed that the CCP uses harassment, threats and intimidation to coerce members of the Uyghur Canadian community to report and inform on each other to the CCP.

## **Falun Gong practitioners**

Information was shared with me to the effect that the CCP seeks to undermine Falun Gong practitioners in Canada working to attract the support of Canadian politicians, and society more generally, to end the CCP's human rights abuses of practitioners in the PRC. To achieve this, the CCP spreads disinformation portraying Falun Gong as a cult and threatens politicians that they will lose votes and/or helpful relationships with the CCP, Chinese embassy and Chinese consulate if they support the Falun Gong.

I was told that the CCP and its proxies isolate Falun Gong practitioners from Chinese diaspora members in Canada by excluding them from community activities and events. I was also informed that the CCP and its proxies also interfere with the Falun Gong's protests, both directly through threats, assaults and damage to protest-related property, and indirectly through efforts to curtail their rights to protest, including through the restriction of permitted protest locations and their duration.

## **Tibetans**

I was told that the CCP targets Tibetans in Canada working to raise awareness about the CCP's ongoing repression of Tibetans in the PRC, including by spreading misinformation and disinformation about Tibetan culture.

I was also informed that the CCP leverages the visa process to extract information from Tibetans in Canada about their loved ones in the PRC and obtain promises that the visa-seeker will refrain from engaging in community events commemorating the death of Tibetans in 1959.

## Russia

The Commission received information regarding actions perpetrated by Russia and its proxies targeting Russian and Ukrainian diaspora community members, as well as Canadian society and democratic institutions more generally.

It should be noted that the targeting of Ukrainian Canadians is different than the other foreign interference described in this chapter in the sense that members of the Ukrainian diaspora community report being targeted by a foreign state rather than by the diaspora's state of origin.

I was informed that Russian state actors, including Russian state-sponsored media outlets, members of the Russian diplomatic corps and their proxies (namely Russian trolls operating online), carry out misinformation and disinformation campaigns. These campaigns seek to undermine Canadian society and democracy generally, as well as the confidence of Canadians in their democratic institutions and processes. I was advised that some successful Russian disinformation campaigns have been amplified by mainstream Canadian media outlets, thus significantly increasing their efficiency and scope.

It was indicated that certain Russian-sponsored misinformation and disinformation campaigns have more specific aims. For example, Russian and Ukrainian Canadian participants reported having been smeared and defamed, often online, because of their activism or perceived opposition to the Russian government. I also heard about the creation and dissemination of false narratives on specific topics or issues, such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

I was told that Russia also resorts to the use of threats, attacks and harassment targeting Russian and Ukrainian Canadian activists and dissidents, both in person and online, in order to silence their speech. People reported physical threats, including death threats, being made against them and their loved ones. Specifically, members of the Ukrainian diaspora community advised that they have been subjected to hate speech and acts of violence against them and their property, the frequency and intensity of which have increased since the February 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Further, with regards to threats and attacks, I was told that individuals and groups have been targeted by hacking, and as a result have also been the victims of theft of personal information and blackmail, which actions they attributed to Russia and its proxies.

I was informed that Russia also leverages and sometimes denies consular services to its diaspora community members in Canada, thus taking advantage of some Russian immigrants' precarious or transitory immigration status in Canada as a way to silence their opposition. In a similar vein, it was communicated that Russia uses sanctions in order to target individual dissidents and activists of Russian and Ukrainian origin in Canada.

I heard that Russia resorts to the surveillance and monitoring of Russian and Ukrainian Canadian activists in Canada, including through brazen photography or filming in public settings such as protests or gatherings.

In addition, individuals reported that the aforementioned threats and tactics have a dissuasive effect on others who choose to not exercise their rights and freedoms, self-censor or mute their public activism out of fear of the potential consequences to themselves or their loved ones, in Canada and abroad.

Indeed, I heard that Russia leverages and threatens family members and loved ones living in Russia as part of its transnational repression playbook. In doing so, Russia's objective is to create fear and isolate Russian and Ukrainian Canadian activists, both within their communities as well as within the broader Canadian society.

## Sri Lanka

The Commission received contributions from members of the Tamil diaspora community in Canada who stated that their community was targeted by a misinformation and disinformation campaign carried out by the Sri Lankan government and its proxies. The campaign targets individuals and the Tamil community more generally.

It was reported that these harmful narratives often portray Tamil individuals as terrorists themselves or apologists for terrorist organizations opposed to the Sri Lankan government. In some instances, individuals reported being charged with trumped-up terrorism-related charges by the Sri Lankan government, which severely impacted their daily lives.

I heard that these narratives result in reputational damage, often impacting community members' relationships with their loved ones and other community members, as well as affecting the perception of the Tamil community as a whole by Canadian society. I was advised that individuals may self-censor or restrain their speech out of fear of being targeted by such disinformation campaigns. I was also told that Sri Lanka's disinformation campaigns have detrimental impacts on Tamil refugee claims.

## Other states

I also received information about the activities of other foreign states concerning Canada's interests and the interests of the people living here. As with the other foreign states identified in this chapter, more detail about the information I received in this regard is found in the Public Consultation section of the Commission's website.

## 21.7 Conclusion

The public consultation process was crucial to the Commission’s work. It highlighted the human impact of foreign interference. For many among the Canadian public, foreign interference is an amorphous concept, distant from their reality. But I understood from the submissions and in-person meetings that for many other members of the Canadian public, the impacts of foreign interference are indeed very real.

Written submissions, consultation meetings, panels and online questionnaire responses helped the Commission understand these impacts and gather strategies to address them. I thank everyone who contributed to the Commission’s work and acknowledge that some did so despite fear of retribution.

The public’s engagement in the consultation process showed a strong willingness to contribute to a whole-of-society approach to address foreign interference. This willingness is a great advantage in Canada’s ongoing efforts, provided conditions are put in place to enable such participation.

To engage meaningfully with individuals and groups, the Commission worked to balance transparency with security for those sharing information. The government must continue to address this balance to involve individuals, groups and communities in a whole-of-society approach to addressing foreign interference, especially transnational repression. This balance will remain a challenge in the face of evolving foreign interference threats. Facilitating the involvement of individuals and groups, including those directly impacted, will be crucial to Canada’s ongoing efforts to detect, deter, and counter foreign interference.



Public Inquiry Into  
Foreign Interference  
in Federal Electoral  
Processes and  
Democratic  
Institutions