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**RRM CANADA WEEKLY TREND ANALYSIS**  
**Report #2: Week of 25 August – 1 September**

**Key Points**

- RRM Canada did not observe any significant trends of foreign state-sponsored information manipulation in its monitoring of the broader Canadian digital information ecosystem during the period of August 25 to September 1. Contracted partner reporting validates this assessment.
- Primary and secondary sources indicate continued efforts by foreign actors to influence outcomes of upcoming elections in countries of strategic importance to them, such as Germany and France.
- Sources affiliated with hostile actors also continued their information campaigns with respect to the Western withdrawal from Afghanistan and the situation in Ukraine.
- RRM Canada analysis of an alternative social media channel, BitChute, points to links between US and Canadian alt-right narratives.

**Objective**

This is a second report in a series of RRM Canada weekly reports aimed at consolidating and summarising trends and findings associated with possible foreign state-sponsored information manipulation in Canada's 44<sup>th</sup> General Election (GE44). The report is based on in-house monitoring, primary and secondary sources, and contracted partners' reporting available to RRM Canada at the time of its compilation. The report: 1) provides a summary of RRM Canada daily threat updates shared with the Security and Intelligence Threats to Election (SITE) Task Force and contracted partner reporting; 2) brings relevant insight into foreign state-sponsored information manipulation based on experience from other democratic elections; 3) highlights other issues covered by sources affiliated with known hostile actors; and 4) provides an analysis of alternative social media channels.

**1) Summary of RRM Canada Daily Threat Updates and Contracted Partner Reporting**

- During the reporting period, RRM Canada did not observe any significant indicators of foreign state-sponsored information manipulation in its daily monitoring of the broader Canadian digital information ecosystem;
- The vast majority of content assessed by RRM Canada originated from recognizable Canadian news or information sites (either in English, French, Chinese, or Russian);
- Russian state-affiliated and mainstream media continued to cover events in Canada, including those related to GE44, from a neutral perspective and with minimal engagement;
- Chinese state-affiliated media continued to cover Canadian events, with few references to GE44. RRM Canada observed and continues to monitor the following coverage in particular:
  - News sites linked to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) continue to push user interest in the topic of Meng Wanzhou's release. This appears to be continuation of a coordinated campaign, which began with the public petition on 18/08 calling for her release.<sup>1</sup> Her trial is described as a case of "political persecution against a Chinese citizen planned by the U.S. and carried out by its accomplice, Canada." The topic continued trending on Weibo, WeChat and Douyin platforms. The news sites did not link the Meng case to GE44 and did not mention any political party or candidate.

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<sup>1</sup> See RRM Canada Trend Analysis for the Week of 18-24 August for more information.

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- A *Hill Times* interview with Chinese Ambassador to Canada, Cong Peiwu, received some attention from Twitter and Facebook users in relation to his statement that some politicians are putting their own “political interests” ahead of the Canada-China relationship. However, neither the Embassy of China nor the *Global Times* included this specific comment in their official communications or coverage.
- WeChat *news accounts*<sup>2</sup> in Canada continued posting what appears to be a false story claiming that the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) leader will ban WeChat if elected. At least 10 accounts have shared the story. WeChat news accounts in Canada average between 50K to 350K followers each and largely service Sinophone communities in the Greater Toronto and Greater Vancouver areas. The accounts sharing the story do not appear to be affiliated with CCP media outlets.
- High profile figures in U.S. alternative media, who were among key influencers in spreading political disinformation in the U.S., continued commenting on issues in GE44. For example, the Liberal Party of Canada (LPC) candidate Maryam Monsef’s use of the word “brothers” in her appeal to the Taliban for safe passage of those who wish to leave Afghanistan. They did not link their comments to GE44, nor call on Canadians to vote for a specific candidate or party. Notably, this topic was also covered extensively in Russian and Chinese state media over several days, but without major engagements (see part 3 below).

According to reporting from contracted partner Yonder, there is an elevated percentage of inauthentic accounts engaging in discussions related to GE44 compared to baseline Twitter conversations. Yonder indicates that accounts they assess to be covert state-linked propaganda have taken an increased interest in Canada in comparison to the previous reporting period. However, Yonder does not assess that GE44 is the target of any sustained state-sponsored information campaign.<sup>3</sup> [NOT FOR ONWARD DISTRIBUTION.]

## 2) Potential Foreign Interference in Other Elections

### *German Bundestag Election (26 September 2021)*

- New partner assessments and media monitoring continue to point to the on-going potential for foreign interference in the Bundestag election. According to the Alliance for Securing Democracy (ASD), the leader of the Greens, and only female candidate for the Chancellorship, Annalena Baerbock, is being disproportionately targeted with negative coverage by domestic and foreign actors. Her nomination was undermined from the outset by sexist allegations and smear campaigns, which often receive amplification from Russian state-backed outlets.
- RRM Canada’s own monitoring of foreign state media revealed that *Sputnik* reported that Angela Merkel is “the most supported politician among all world leaders” according to a recent poll. *Global Times* published an image-based article of the Social Democratic Party’s rally in

<sup>2</sup> WeChat requires owners of news accounts to register with a Chinese resident identity card, and the service is not available to non-Chinese citizens. To open a WeChat news account in Canada, a user would need to engage a third party in China to set up the account in their stead or would need to maintain their Chinese citizenship and resident identity card.

<sup>3</sup> This information is based on reports produced by an independent service provider that GAC contracted to support RRM Canada’s monitoring activities during GE44. It is provided here for your information only. Yonder views and assessments, in part or fully, are those of its authors and may not represent those of RRM Canada.

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Berlin, where leader Olaf Scholz delivered a speech. *TRT World* (Turkish public broadcaster) also published a YouTube video of Scholtz' statements at the rally, including his gratitude for his supporters for reportedly keeping him ahead in the polls.

RRM Canada Take-away: the continued positive coverage of Angela Merkel and her ruling party, CDU, by Russian state media (including in popular German-language media outlets, such as *RT in German*, *Sputnik Deutschland* and *Ruptly TV*) is seen as an attempt to influence German voters to support the status quo in bilateral relations.

**Presidential Election in France (April 2022)**

- A RIA News op-ed entitled "Taliban intervened in elections in France and Germany" discussed how the withdrawal from Afghanistan and influx of Afghan refugees into Europe will influence these elections. The article focused on the failed initiative by President Macron to establish a 'safe zone' in Kabul (as part of the recent joint draft French-UK resolution at the UN) and continued emphasizing difficulties with assimilating refugees in France and social unrests. These failures were attributed to Macron's policies and juxtaposed against the rising popularity of Marin Le Pen in early polls.

**3) Topics of Significant Coverage by Known Threat Actors**

These topics continued to receive significant attention by media affiliated with known threat actors (Russia, China and Iran) monitored by RRM Canada and partner organizations.

**Withdrawal from Afghanistan**

- Russian state and affiliated media highlighted in numerous reports (1, 2, 3) U.S. military equipment falling into Taliban hands and compared the U.S. withdrawal with the 'orderly evacuation' of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in 1989. State media also continued to amplify bipartisan domestic criticism of President Biden's management of the withdrawal. Chinese state media accused the U.S. of enabling terrorism in the country and portrayed the U.S. withdrawal as the end of "Western civilization." Chinese state media also continued to promote the idea that the Taliban is building an "inclusive" government. According to ASD, Iranian media reporting on the drone strike in Kabul last week focused on civilian casualties. Some stories were presented neutrally, but others blamed the U.S. for the chaotic situation.
- Against this background, a number of Russian and Chinese media outlets covered growing coordination between the two countries in their approaches to Afghanistan. Overall, the narrative suggested Russia and China must step in to address numerous challenges after the West's disastrous involvement in the country.
- CNN coverage on 31 August addressed foreign disinformation by Russian and Chinese state media in the wake of U.S. withdrawal, presenting numerous examples of negative coverage and drawing parallels with narratives identified in right-wing domestic criticisms of the Afghan withdrawal.

**Ukraine**

- Continuing Russian influence campaign against Ukraine focused on preparations for and outcomes of President Zelensky's visit to the U.S.; the recently announced "Partnership for a Strong Ukraine Fund" (with Canada among signatories); and, discussions drawing parallels between the chaotic withdrawal of NATO countries from Afghanistan and likely Ukraine's future.

**4) Alternative Media Environments: The Case of BitChute**

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As part of its GE44 monitoring, RRM Canada conducts selective analysis of alternative social media channels. BitChute is a video sharing service with a similar infrastructure to YouTube.<sup>4</sup>

- RRM Canada did not observe any FI on BitChute. However, some patterns such as links to online petitions and overlaps between US and Canadian alt-right discussions were observed. No videos contained any overt calls to violence toward any Canadian politician, but common themes about PM Trudeau included videos of him being heckled during campaign meetings and degrading comments. Some links between US alt-right narratives and Canadian ones were observed. One video title stated that “election fraud” in Canada is “so obvious”, but the content of the video was a short clip of Trump making similar allegations in the US at a rally.

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<sup>4</sup> Created in 2017, BitChute has been reported to be a “hotbed of hate” by the Anti-Defamation League. CBC News reported in July 2021 that two out of five accounts removed by YouTube for violating its terms of service were found to have migrated to BitChute. This high-level analysis provides an overview of videos returned for the search term “Canada” while the data collection method for BitChute is standardised by RRM Canada.

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