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**RRM CANADA WEEKLY TREND ANALYSIS**  
**Report #4: Week of 9-15 September**

**Key Points**

- RRM Canada did not observe any clear evidence of foreign state-sponsored information manipulation in its monitoring of the broader Canadian digital information ecosystem during the period of 9-15 September. Contracted partner reporting validates this point.
- However, RRM Canada observed what may be a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) information operation that aims to discourage Canadians of Chinese heritage from voting for the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC).
- Secondary sources pointed to the increasing scope and evolving breadth of Chinese influence operations targeting the U.S. around COVID-19 issues, including attempts to galvanize off-line actions.
- State and affiliated media of known foreign interference (FI) actors focused on issues in Canada/GE44 as well as Afghanistan.
- RRM Canada analysed alternative social media platforms, BitChute and Rumble, and the web browser, Dissenter and did not observe FI activity. However content on BitChute included calls for violence against PM Trudeau.

**Objective**

This is a fourth 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 in democracies; 3) highlights issues receiving media coverage 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 clear evidence of foreign state-sponsored information manipulation in its daily monitoring of the broader Canadian digital information ecosystem. Contracted partners, the Media Ecosystem Observatory and Yonder-ai, confirmed this assessment.
- 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, but from a mostly neutral perspective and with minimal engagement;
- RRM Canada observed what may be a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) information operation that aims to discourage Canadians of Chinese heritage from voting for the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC):
  - A Chinese-language article from the Global Times suggesting the CPC "almost wants to break diplomatic relations with China" received widespread engagement on Chinese social media throughout the week. It was shared among WeChat news accounts aimed

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at Canadians of Chinese heritage and then re-shared in video form on the popular short-form video platform, Douyin. RRM Canada is unable to determine whether there is (1) coordination between CCP media and these Canadian WeChat news accounts or (2) inauthentic amplification of the narrative.

- RRM Canada has observed news reports that WeChat users in two Vancouver area ridings have received private messages encouraging electors to vote for a particular party (CPC) or candidate (LPC). RRM Canada is unable to determine the veracity of these claims or measure their impact as the messages were sent via private channels.

**Yonder** has not observed any indications of a sustained campaign targeting GE44 during the reporting period. The firm has seen less engagement from accounts that generally amplify Chinese state sources, but more engagement from accounts that generally amplify Russian state sources. It appears that both Chinese and Russian state and state-aligned accounts generally show low levels of engagement overall, often single accounts and only a few Tweets. In general, Yonder reports that Chinese and China state-aligned accounts amplify messages by, or are supportive of, the LPC while Russia-friendly accounts amplify Peoples Part of Canada-related content. Based on limited methodological reviews and discussions with Yonder, RRM Canada judges that, at the individual account level, analytic confidence in attribution is low; however, analytic confidence should increase with aggregate monitoring of many accounts.

**The Media Ecosystem Observatory** also found that Chinese interests in the election have become more visible in this reporting period, notably with mounting criticism of the CPC and Erin O'Toole across state and social media accounts. Despite this increased visibility, the Observatory found no evidence of inauthentic activity, nor of election-level impact.<sup>1</sup>

## 2) Foreign State-sponsored Campaigns Against Democracies

### *Pro-China influence campaigns across multiple platforms targeting the U.S.*

- According to Mandiant, a threat intelligence arm of the US-based cybersecurity firm FireEye, a vast network of pro-China accounts on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other platforms, operating in at least seven languages, actively sought to “physically mobilize protestors in the U.S. in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.” While Mandiant originally discovered this network in 2019, the scope of activity in terms of number of platforms (over 30) involved and linguistic coverage appears to be much broader than previously assessed. Researchers could not find evidence the campaign succeeded in galvanizing activities on the ground.
- The investigation, conducted in cooperation with Google, revealed that while initially the Chinese campaign was launched to discredit pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong in 2019, it has since evolved. Researchers observed multiple shifts in campaign’s tactics, including the use of fake photos for account profiles and the promotion of numerous narratives related to current events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, criticism of Chinese dissident Guo Wengui and his

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<sup>1</sup> This information is based on reports submitted by independent service providers contracted to support RRM Canada’s monitoring activities during GE44. It is provided here for your information only. Yonder and Media Ecosystem Observatory views and assessments, in part or fully, are those of its respective authors and may not represent those of RRM Canada.

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associates, and domestic politics in the U.S. Madiant also observed similarities with Russia's disinformation campaign targeting the 2016 US Presidential election.

**3) Issues Receiving Media Coverage by FI Actors**

During this reporting period, RRM Canada identified the following themes in relation to Canada/GE44 that received attention by media affiliated with known threat actors (Russia, China and Iran).

- Sputnik in Spanish and RT France (both are Russian state media) reported that Canadian PM Justin Trudeau was hit with stones during one of his campaign events. RT France further reported that Trudeau's "campaign for a third term has been chaotic since one of his meetings had to be cancelled for security reasons".
- Russian state media and numerous outlets, including 'grey sites', in Russian language worldwide reported on three other developments in Canada, generally portraying events in a negative tone: the case of burning of books by an Ontario school board in 2019; the delay in deportation proceedings against a former member of the SS, Helmut Oberlander; and, anti-vaccination demonstrations across the country.
- Russian, Chinese and Iranian state media continued to focus on the evolving situation in Afghanistan.

**4) Alternative Media Environments: BitChute, Rumble and the web browser, Dissenter**

As part of its GE44 monitoring, RRM Canada conducted selective analyses of alternative social media platforms, BitChute and Rumble, which are both video-hosting platforms similar to YouTube.<sup>2</sup> In addition, RRM Canada conducted a high-level analysis of the Canadian web ecosystem using the Dissenter browser.<sup>3</sup>

- RRM Canada did not observe any FI on *BitChute*. However, calls to violence against PM Trudeau were identified. In several videos (1, 2, 3) posted on the platform, viewers can observe individuals strongly objecting to COVID-19 vaccination, claiming "massive rigging" of GE44, calling PM Trudeau a "traitor" and suggesting that more serious actions could be taken to deal with such people (e.g. a video with the call "we used to hang traitors" in Canada received over 15,000 views). One of the videos bluntly stated that Trudeau "should be publicly executed for treason". This video included a link to a petition that has been circulating on BitChute calling for the removal of Trudeau from government. While not calling for violence, a BitChute account titled "Breitbart" (the account has over 20,000 followers, but it is impossible to verify whether it belongs to the Breitbart outlet) published a video of a protest in Vancouver, and the video title quoted the chant "TRUDEAU FOR TREASON".

<sup>2</sup> BitChute has been described as a "hotbed of hate" by the Anti-Defamation League. Rumble was created in Canada in 2013 and has been reported to be popular among US and Canadian conservative audiences. This analysis of BitChute and Rumble was conducted on videos that result from searching "Canada", "Canada election" on the platforms. "Trudeau treason" was also searched after the initial analysis found evidence of calls for violence.

<sup>3</sup> The Dissenter browser is similar to Google Chrome, but has an extension that when installed allows users to comment on any page on the internet. Dissenter was created by Gab, a destination for individuals who have been de-platformed by Twitter and Reddit for violating their terms of service. For this analysis, the Wikipedia profiles, social media profiles, and websites of all party leaders were queried to understand the content and sentiment of comments on these pages.

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- RRM Canada did not observe any FI on *Rumble*. Most viewed videos appeared to be published by known outlets such as Narcity Canada, MtIBlog, Rebel News, and Reuters.
- The analysis of the *Dissenter browser* revealed that no comments have been made on any political party or leader's website, Wikipedia page, or social media profile during the election period.

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