Critical Election Incident Public Protocol – the Panel

Incident Evaluation

The Panel will be responsible for evaluating potential election interference incidents:

Disinformation

- Deep fakes
- Fake and manipulated news sites
- Amplification – bots
- Inauthentic SMP use

Cyber Attacks

- Hack and leaks
- Data manipulation
- Denial of Service

Person-to-Person, Espionage, and Interference

- Nomination interference
- Blackmail
- Bribery
- Infiltration
- Physical threats/ intimidation
- Illegal contributions

Who

Are the intended targets?
- ❑ Voters
- ❑ Marginalized groups
- ❑ Specific groups – divisive issue; gender etc.
- ❑ Electoral Process
- ❑ Political Parties, leaders, candidates or officials
- ❑ Other

Is doing it?
- ❑ Foreign state
- ❑ Third party or state proxy
- ❑ Domestic actors
- ❑ IMVE
- ❑ Unknown
- ❑ Other

Why

Are they doing this?
- ❑ Erode public trust in democracy
- ❑ Influence the outcome of election
- ❑ Anarchy
- ❑ Financial gain
- ❑ Other
- ❑ Unknown

Key Panel Considerations

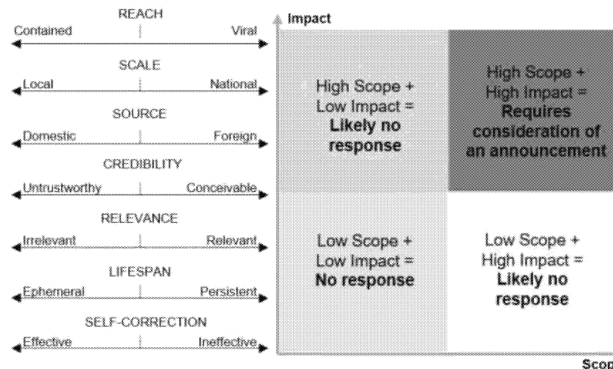The degree to which the incident(s) undermine(s) Canadians' ability to have a free and fair election

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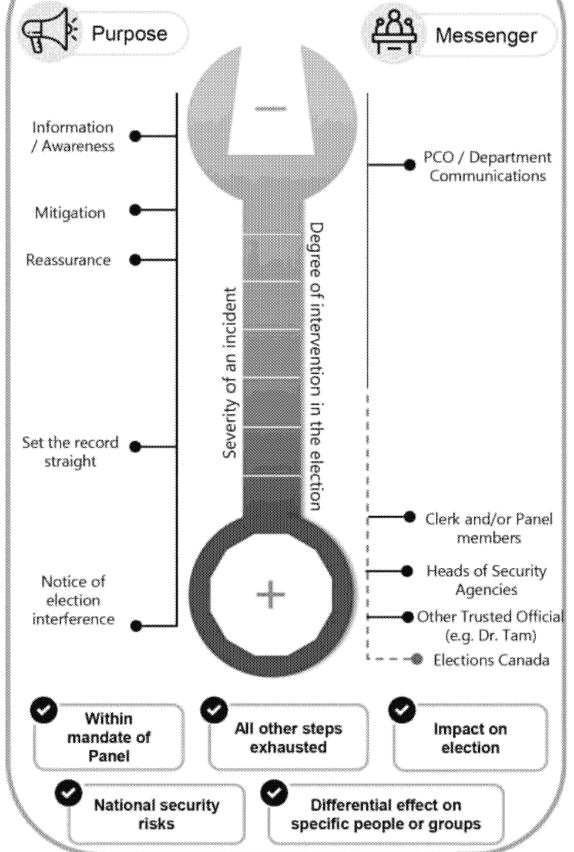The degree of confidence officials have in the intelligence or information

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The potential of the incident(s) to undermine the credibility of the election

Determining whether the threshold has been met will require considerable judgement that reflects the context around the incident – assessments can be made using certain parameters including, but not limited to:

Electoral incidents impact assessments

	High Scope + Low Impact = **Likely no response**	High Scope + High Impact = **Requires consideration of an announcement**
	Low Scope + Low Impact = **No response**	Low Scope + High Impact = **Likely no response**

REACH — Contained / Viral
SCALE — Local / National
SOURCE — Domestic / Foreign
CREDIBILITY — Untrustworthy / Conceivable
RELEVANCE — Irrelevant / Relevant
LIFESPAN — Ephemeral / Persistent
SELF-CORRECTION — Effective / Ineffective

Announcement Considerations

Purpose

- Information / Awareness
- Mitigation
- Reassurance
- Set the record straight
- Notice of election interference

Severity of an incident — Degree of intervention in the election

Messenger

- PCO / Department Communications
- Clerk and/or Panel members
- Heads of Security Agencies
- Other Trusted Official (e.g. Dr. Tam)
- Elections Canada

- ✓ Within mandate of Panel
- ✓ All other steps exhausted
- ✓ Impact on election
- ✓ National security risks
- ✓ Differential effect on specific people or groups

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Scenarios for Critical Election Incident Public Protocol Review – FOR EXERCISE PURPOSES ONLY

Scenario 1: Toronto Troubles

On polling day, a number of polling stations in four Toronto ridings are unable to function because of COVID-19 cases among its staff. Other stations in these ridings are also impacted as poll workers are now refusing to show up or leaving out of fear of exposure, leaving stations to operate at less than half capacity. As a result, the Chief Electoral Officer determines that in-person voting should be postponed in all four of these ridings, a recommendation which he provides to the Governor-in-Council (GiC). The GiC in turn determines that the writ will be withdrawn in those ridings, and the elections postponed by 7 days. Results of the election in those four ridings will therefore be delayed. This is a very close election; the results of these ridings could tip the balance of the election in favour of the incumbent party.

Inject 1:   As soon as the announcement is made, what seems to be a large-scale, online effort to suppress voters appears on multiple platforms. Numerous Tweets and Facebook posts inflate the risk of catching COVID-19 when voting in person, some even encourage people to refrain from voting in person. Rumours of outbreaks in workplaces, including grocery stores and pharmacies in the four ridings appear and later announcements from companies such as Loblaws, Shoppers Drug Mart, and Amazon appear confirming these outbreaks. A few hours later, the companies hold a press conference stating that these announcements are false. However, a barrage of Tweets and a discussion group on Reddit from people claiming to be employees allege that the companies are covering up how bad the breakouts - a new mutation in the Delta variant - really are. In addition, disinformation around the ineffectiveness of vaccines ramps up substantially.

Inject 2:   An op-ed by a reputable newspaper opines that the entire election should be scrapped, as it is difficult to tell how many people have not voted because of COVID-19 fears, even beyond the four ridings currently affected. Less reputable, but populist pundits begin surmising that all votes after Election Day are illegitimate, and should not be counted. The online discussion builds on these narratives and under the hashtag #NotWorthIt encourages people not to vote because the risk of catching COVID-19 is too great and the election will be scrapped in any case. The activity on social media is quite pervasive and many of the posts have gone viral; the discussion is now taking place on a national level.

Inject 3 :   SITE meets with the Panel and gives a preliminary assessment that there is a coordinated, inauthentic social media campaign afoot, and at the moment, it appears to be domestically driven. The agencies do not see any foreign interference. The speed of which the narrative appeared, the use of bots, and discussions with the social media companies makes the S&I community confident in its assessment.

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Scenarios for Critical Election Incident Public Protocol Review – FOR EXERCISE PURPOSES ONLY

Scenario 2: Discord in Quebec

Two weeks before the election, a hack and leak of incumbent Liberal government documents takes place over a secure network. Among the leaked documents is a strategy to deal with Quebec separatists that is extremely radical and divisive. It also contains several references to Quebec being a problematic province. The leak is being investigated by CSE.

The Panel is made aware that a foreign country is behind the hack and leak, and that the documents pertaining to Quebec have been doctored in a very convincing manner. The media however is unaware that the documents have been doctored and reports extensively on the leak and the Quebec strategy.

The Prime Minister holds a press conference where he launches a defence that the document has been doctored; however, journalists continue to report on the credibility of the documents. The Bloc Quebecois is outraged, as are many Quebec voters.

Inject 1: One week before the election, election officials in Quebec and Ontario contact Elections Canada after over 50,000 registered voters report receiving threatening spam texts denouncing the Liberal government and saying "votez #QuébecFort ou bien!" (Vote #QuebecStrong or else!).

Inject 2: Two days before the election, more doctored government documents are leaked that outline how the federal government plans to contain separatist sentiments from "east to west". The doctored documents include references to Alberta as being another problematic province where "federalism must continue to rule". These are also deemed to be false.

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For Public Release

Scenarios for Critical Election Incident Public Protocol Review – FOR EXERCISE PURPOSES ONLY

Scenario 3: Delayed Results and a Panic

The day after voting has ended and the ballots counted, the results signal the incumbent party will form a minority government. The following day, allegations of voter fraud related to mail-in-ballots begin to appear on social media, potentially affecting a significant number of ridings across Canada. These allegations are referred to the Commissioner of Canada Elections to investigate and it is unclear how long this process will take.

Inject 1:   According to the Rapid Response Mechanism, the initial allegations originated from Canadian sources, however a foreign actor has begun to amplify the allegations by means of a coordinated, bot-driven campaign that further suggests that the re-elected government is illegitimate. During this time, a reputable Canadian media outlet publishes an op-ed arguing that the public needs to know whether or not these allegations are legitimate, what role foreign states are playing and who will form the next government. The opinion piece also calls on the Panel to make a statement, as the Caretaker Convention should still be in effect given there does not seem to be a clear election result.

Inject 2:   Within hours of the op-ed being released, hacking group Anonymous shares a video in which they claim that Canadians involved with the group submitted multiple votes in the election as a way of testing Elections Canada's ability to identify voter fraud. They provide no indication of the number of illegitimate ballots allegedly cast.

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