

Proposed Communications Procedures In the Event of a Panel Announcement

Context

A public announcement during the writ period would only occur if the Panel determines that an incident or an accumulation of incidents threatens Canada's ability to have a free and fair election.

Broadly speaking, there are two scenarios that would necessitate a public announcement during the writ period:

1. The Panel determines that there is information which is not in the public domain and which should be available to voters.
2. The Panel determines that there is inaccurate information circulating in the public domain (as a result of clandestine interference) that will compromise the decision-making ability of voters.

As outlined in the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol:

- If a public announcement is deemed necessary, the Panel will inform the Prime Minister, the other major party leaders and Elections Canada that a public announcement will be made;
- Immediately after having informed the Prime Minister, the other political parties and Elections Canada, the Clerk of the Privy Council, on behalf of the Panel, would ask the relevant agency head(s) to issue a statement to notify Canadians of the incident(s);

Key points

- Though the protocol does not specify the format of the public announcement, given the high threshold for a public pronouncement by the Panel (or its delegated representatives) it is likely that the announcement would take the form of a news conference. Alternatively, other approaches, such as the release of a public statement, could also be considered.
- The public announcement would focus on:
 - notification of the incident;
 - what is known about the incident (as deemed appropriate); and
 - steps Canadians should take to protect themselves (e.g., ensure that they are well informed; cyber hygiene), if relevant.
- Given the requirement to prepare public communications products, arrange news conference logistics, etc., it should be assumed that the actual public announcement will take place the day following the Panel's decision.
- Consideration should also be given to the timing of when the Prime Minister and party leaders (or designated senior party officials who have received their security clearances sponsored by the Privy Council Office) are informed of the intention to communicate the incident to the

Canadian public. Given the possibility that parties attempt to leverage the information for their own partisan advantage, it is recommended that political briefings take place no longer than 2 hours before the actual public announcement.

- A public announcement by the Panel would require close coordination with Elections Canada, given the requirement to ensure that Canadians understand the immediate implications for the election. It is likely that a public announcement by the Panel would result in a follow-up statement by Elections Canada, outlining next steps for the Election. In the event that the Panel's announcement is made via news conference, it further recommended that Elections Canada participate in the event, in order to immediately address questions related to the status of the election.

Rollout of Panel Announcement

- Upon the identification of a threshold event(s), the Clerk of the Privy Council would task the Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet Communications and Consultations (PCO) with initiating planning for a public announcement, together with the Heads of relevant departments and agencies. (CSE, CSIS, GAC, RCMP, as required by the particular scenario).
- The Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet Communications and Consultations (PCO) would also immediately make contact with the the Executive Director of Policy and Public Affairs at Elections Canada to ensure joint coordination.
- In the event that the Panel announcement takes the form of a news conference:
 - Spokespersons for participating departments or agencies (including Elections Canada) would be designated by each organization's Deputy Head;
 - The news conference would be would be supported by communications materials, including speaking remarks, a statement to be issued publicly, and responsive messaging;
 - PCO Communications would use its convening role to ensure that a dry run takes place in advance of the press conference and that the spokespersons are well coordinated. In addition, PCO Communications would facilitate approvals of the announcement materials among the Deputies of the Panel.

Public Communications by Elections Canada, independent of the Panel

- During the election, it is possible that the Chief Electoral officer deems it necessary to make an announcement for any number of reasons.

- In this case, the Executive Director of Policy and Public Affairs, Elections Canada would reach out to the Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet, Communications and Consultations, who would inform the Panel Secretariat.
- The Executive Director would share logistical information about the timing and location of the announcement, and (when appropriate) share the text of the announcement with the Assistant Secretary.
- Depending on the reason for the announcement, it is conceivable that a Government of Canada spokesperson would be made available for participation in an Elections Canada news conference in a supporting capacity. This determination will be made in discussions between the Assistant Secretary to the Cabinet Communications and Consultations, the Executive Director of Policy and Public Affairs, Elections Canada and the Panel.