

There is a strong case to be made that there was a degree of influence exerted by an outside actor in the Chinese community during the 44<sup>th</sup> General Election. From speaking with campaign teams and regional organizers, we believe this influence negatively impacted our standing in these seats:

#### Metro Vancouver

- Richmond Centre
- Steveston—Richmond East
- Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam
- Fleetwood—Port Kells

#### Greater Toronto Area

- Markham—Stouffville
- Markham—Unionville
- Richmond Hill
- Willowdale
- Don Valley North
- Scarborough—Agincourt
- Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill
- Newmarket—Aurora
- Mississauga—Centre (to a certain extent)

Through message groups in WeChat text-based and news-content style articles were circulated which directly targeted the Conservatives or expressed support for the liberals. From what we've been hearing, these articles have been popping up in all sorts of groups (especially non-political ones). However, when one of our supporters posted some of the pro-CPC articles, they were told their content was "too political" and were removed from the groups.

One example is an article that starts with "Crisis for Chinese Canadians, we need to save ourselves. Stop the conservative extremists from getting in power" another is "The Liberals want your money, the Conservatives want your life", a third is "The Canadian version of 'Trump'? The leader of the Conservative Party wants to block WeChat and vowed to fight China to the end." Attached you'll find additional examples of other articles that were posted and shared.

As you know, WeChat is the main messaging/social media platform used by the Chinese-speaking community in Canada and is directly controlled by Chinese corporations.

There were also Anti-Conservative ads (without authorization tags) that were displayed on digital screens in a Chinese grocery store in Scarborough—Agincourt (attached).

It's our understanding that the Federal Liberals were not expected to do as well as they did with the Chinese community, and that they did not coordinate this campaign directly.

Files: [https://www.dropbox.com/sh/fmasa665p0ezlup/AABEQsfb\\_LI6TPI31pFaJABla?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/fmasa665p0ezlup/AABEQsfb_LI6TPI31pFaJABla?dl=0)

Ultimately, it comes down to voter contact and the ability of a party to get its message in front of as many voters as possible. This works either as persuasion messages, or in the case of specific allegations from this campaign, dissuasion. It is straightforward for governments to use local contacts to push

messages in controlled environments such as WeChat or WhatsApp groups. It is impossible to track these conversations without having a friendly presence in the group. We need to understand and find a way to be present in these chats and in these communities.

In the specific context of the 2021 campaign, there were a couple specific incidents that could be classified as either influence or interference. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, we didn't have time to investigate these properly.

1. **Polling Panels & Bots:** We flagged this in an early meeting, and I'd forgotten about it until today. Our systems caught automated 'bots' completing our surveys due to certain patterns in the open text responses. At the time, we thought it was just a bot focused on collecting the \$0.50 survey incentives but these could easily have been malicious. These responses were set aside and we strengthened our processes, but this would be an effective way to change a narrative.

If I were looking to shape party or government policy, stacking these panels with automated respondents to swamp policy questions related to foreign policy would be an effective way to do it. This would be a machine learning problem, but one easily within the capability of certain actors. The media place too great an emphasis on polling without realizing the shortcomings of the panels that underpin this work.

2. **Mail-In Ballots:** This was alleged to be an issue in the recent BC campaign. Organizers in specific communities were alleged to have requested ballots on behalf of electors. These ballots were completed by community bosses and cast on their behalf.

When we received the first list of people requesting mail-in ballots, we noticed surprisingly high numbers in a couple of predominantly Chinese mail-in ballots. Two specific ridings - Richmond Centre and Steveston Richmond East jumped out, as they had comparatively lower numbers of mail-in ballots in the BC election. SRE was also the riding of former MP Joe Peschisolido, alleged to have staff affiliated with the United Front.

If the resources and interest was there, the way to track this would be to check the IPs of those requesting mail-in ballots. This would offer an easy indication of mischief. It would also be possible to confirm that these electors requested the ballot themselves, either with in person interviews or phone calls. If these electors are either unaware, or are afraid of discussing it, it could be an indicator.

3. **Intimidation / Influence:** Most of this would fall into grey areas. Direct contact between foreign agents and electors would be unlikely, but it is easy enough to have Canadian staff employed by shell corporations "volunteering" full time on behalf of local campaigns or candidates. It doesn't even have to be directly affiliated - businesses that are either friendly to a foreign interest or can be pushed to support a cause/candidate will comply. This could mean advertising space, distribution, or soft pushes at community or religious centres.

A focused effort on the ground will find these instances. We received reports from Scarborough of business owners pushing employees to vote Liberal, among other complaints, but these after often just hearsay. Given the limitations on in-person contact due to COVID, every campaign was more dependent on digital operations. Chinese control over platforms like WeChat provides

them the ability to limit messages they find uncomfortable, and amplify voices and candidates in line with their objectives.

Without building social listening tools and recruiting additional language skills, it will be very difficult to limit our exposure

**An Aggressive Path:** If I were in their shoes, I'd obtain a copy of the list of electors. I'd match it to data on Chinese controlled platforms, and find individuals in ridings that could be pushed to support a cause or candidate. This would be pushed through local staff pushing messaging on WeChat and other platforms. It could be funded either with cash, or with companies controlled by friendly or persuadable people in the ridings.