

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

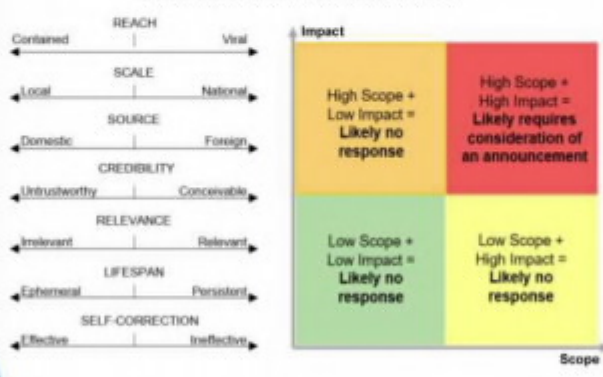


The degree of confidence officials have in the intelligence or information

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



Announcement Considerations

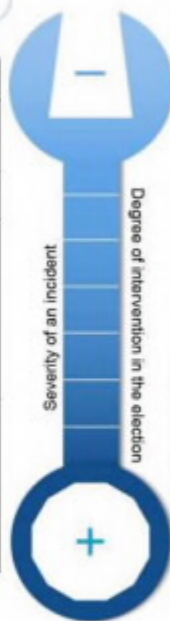


Purpose



Messenger

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



- PCO / Department Communications
- Clerk and/or Panel members
- Heads of Security Agencies
- Elections Canada

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

For Public Release

Scenarios for Critical Election Incident Public Protocol Review

Scenario 1: Middle Eastern Politics



Shortly after Party A announces that it is the only party willing to unquestionably support Israel, a leaked document circulates on social media indicating that Israel is planning to annex portions of the West Bank with the support and knowledge of Party A. An independent media oversight group outside of Canada determines the leaked document to be fake and the work of a network of Iranian troll accounts. Canadian media organizations report on this finding. However, Pro Palestinian groups in Canada call for Canadians to vote for Party B despite wide-scale debunking of the document. Many are arguing that had it been true, Party A would have supported annexation by nature of its foreign policy posture towards Israel.

Inject 1: Party A holds a press conference highlighting the faked nature of the documents, however the leader of Party A then ends the conference by reiterating the party's position of complete support for Israel. Pro- Palestinian groups abroad now join the discussion on a variety of platforms, spreading text and video content against Party A under a distinct hashtag, and the false document is still widely circulated along with expressions of concern around the current treatment of Palestinians by the Israelis. This campaign is also taken up by Iranian citizens who are pleading with Canadians to vote for Party B, however there is no indication that they are artificially amplifying the discussion.

Inject 2: Party A is publicly demands that the Panel examine the impact of false narratives around the annexation and the inaccurate depiction of the treatment of the Palestinians as Party A believes it will be detrimental to the election results; polls suggest that Party A and Party B are neck-and-neck. Party A's leader claims that while on the campaign trail, the politicians are often challenged about the support for Israel, and they claim the issue has taken on far more domestic importance because of the large-scale spread of disinformation and interference from Iran. Violent clashes between pro-Israel groups and pro-Palestinian groups break out in Montreal and Toronto, resulting the six serious injuries and over twenty arrests.



Scenario 2: "Shallowfakes"

Three weeks before the election a private Facebook group (of around 350 members) is publicly revealed through a series of media exposés to be creating and sharing simple and rudimentary manipulated photos of politicians in Canada and officials from the previous government. Many are of an untasteful or disrespectful nature, but few are outwardly hateful or violent; additionally, the crudeness of the manipulation makes it unlikely a person could reasonable believe a photo to be authentic. The group is partisan in nature, but not officially tied to any party. Some of the politicians whose likenesses have been used call on Facebook to remove the group, for the competing party leader to publicly apologize, and for authorities to investigate.

Inject 1: A day later, Facebook removes the group and suspends many of the accounts associated with it for violating community standards. Three days later, some members of the group are back in the media saying that they are being censored by Facebook and the government, that the group was satirical in nature, and that their Charter rights are being infringed upon. A day later it is revealed that a high-profile lawyer associated with the competing party leader is working with the disaffected members of the group, offering pro bono legal advice and connecting them with figures in the media.

Inject 2: Two days later (and two weeks before the election), CSIS announces that a dozen of the 350 accounts in the group could be tied to foreign coordinated information campaigns, but that these foreign-related accounts had not participated in the group for some months. Some news outlets take this and run stories about a massive web of foreign interference impacting Canada. Citizens, candidates, and politicians begin to publicly question the integrity of Canada's election system.

Scenarios for Critical Election Incident Public Protocol Review (2/3)



Scenario 3: Whistleblower

Two days before the election, a self-proclaimed political party volunteer publishes a post on social media alleging that a major party has been willfully disregarding data and personal information protection practices throughout the election. The volunteer additionally alleges that the party sold voter information to smaller private companies and that the data was subsequently leaked. The post immediately skyrockets in popularity and media outlets begin tracking the story. That same day, the affected party denies knowledge of the volunteer and says in a public statement that all of the accusations are untrue and that the post appears to be from an inauthentic account run by a foreign government.

- *Inject 1:* One day before the election, a trusted news media organization publishes a story alleging that the supposed whistleblower does not actually exist. The account used to make the post appears to be run by a human (with no automation), but none of the account's information can be verified. Additionally, there are no discovered connections to a foreign government, but the party leader of the affected party publicly continues to make accusations about a specific foreign government they believe is behind the "fake whistleblowing" and calls on the Panel to make an announcement. Throughout the two days, no one in the media can find any evidence about the sale or leaking of Canadians' private information from the Register of Electors.



Scenario 4: Foreign Interference NSICOP Example

Two weeks prior to the election, intelligence that is assessed to be accurate, indicates that a longstanding candidate of a major political party may be working for the benefit a foreign government of a country where she still has family residing. She has met multiple times in private with intelligence agents from this country, and has recently spoken publicly about mending the relationship between Canada and the country in question.

Intelligence agencies have warned that sharing this information will put the agency's ongoing investigation in jeopardy and possibly result in severe physical harm to a sensitive source.

- *Variation 1:* Subsequent reporting indicates that the candidate is unwittingly being manipulated, and is not aware that the people she is meeting with are intelligence agents. Rather she believes they are simply members of the diaspora.
- *Variation 2:* The following day, CSIS receives information that the person in question exchanged envelopes with the intelligence agent, however the contents are unknown.

Scenarios for Critical Election Incident Public Protocol Review (3/3)



Scenario 5: Destroyed Ballots

A few days after the closing of advance polls and one week before the election, the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) receives an anonymous USB stick. The stick contains a video recording of what looks like hundreds of ballots being dumped in a river. A voiceover says: mail-in votes are not safe from tampering. It is unclear whether the recording is authentic or manipulated.

Inject 1: A few hours later, the CEO receives an email from the president of one of the major political parties. In the email, the president notes that he received the same video recording and threatens to the CEO to publicly release the video to "shine the light on this disgusting election fraud" if the release is not done proactively by Elections Canada in the next 24hrs.

Inject 2: The video is made public two days before the election.



Scenario 6: Broadcast News

During a broadcast TV interview, the governor of a state that is a major trading partner with Canada, goes on a rant about the precarious state of democracy in the world as a result of biased electoral systems that favour elites. He points to Canada as an example (the writ dropped the day before on what is to be a very close election). He argues it is a fact that Canada's first past the post (FPTP) system has won the current government more elections than it should have, and has kept the Western provinces from being heard in Ottawa. He states this system will be the cause of the demise of the oil sector in Canada, and will result in overall economic hardships for the entire country in the long run. He ends his Canada comments by stating "I am surprised that Canadians have not protested the flawed system. They have something to learn from their US neighbours, who stand up and fight for what they believe in, any way they can. Just look at the patriots who were at the Capitol on January 6th".

A Canadian opinion piece in a large newspaper argues that the governor had a lot of good points to consider, and this would explain why there has been no electoral reform. At this point, the interview goes viral on the internet, and numerous groups begin to coalesce around the idea FPTP systems give the incumbent party a large advantage. The leader of an opposition party references the governor's comments in a series of online advertisements and in an interview with a major broadcast news station. Disinformation, misinformation and profiteering are rife on social media, including conspiracy theories related to the current government and the Great Reset. Protests at local MP offices of the incumbent party are planned throughout the country with the hashtag #restoredemocracy. US groups, including some far-right militia members are publicly planning to come to Canada "to support democracy". Although some of the protestors are linked to the Proud Boys, most are not. There also seems to be traction for mass protests at polling stations on election day, and some members of the public have expressed fear of possible intimidation as these protests have been getting a lot of media focus, including references to potential violence associated with the extremists groups.