Elections Canada's Approach to Digital Information at the 43rd General Election

Presentation to the Group Of Five DGs Communications

May 23, 2019

Elections Canada

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Presentation objectives

- To describe our current digital environment and Elections Canada's approach to monitoring and responding to information that could interfere with Canadians' ability to register and vote at the 43rd general election

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2

Current digital environment

- **Opportunities:** Digital forums promote increased engagement, interaction and information sharing and allow Elections Canada to identify and respond to operational issues

- **Risks:** The deliberate dissemination of false information poses threats to our democracy:

  - Affecting voters' behaviour

  - Taking advantage of voters' vulnerabilities and fears

  - Influencing voters' views and opinions

  - Sowing confusion

  - Undermining trust in election results

  - Impacting the desired level of participation

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3

Types of digital information

- Elections Canada will monitor for three types of digital information:

  ➢ Disinformation: False information that is deliberately spread with the intent to cause harm or to mislead

  ➢ Misinformation: Incorrect information that is shared without intent to cause harm or to mislead – generally a mistake or misunderstanding

  ➢ Operational incidents: Occurrences related to the electoral process that require action by Elections Canada

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4

Canada Elections Act (CEA) provisions

- Elections Canada will refer evidence of potential CEA offences to the Commissioner of Canada Elections

- Bill C-76 amendments to the CEA:

  ➤ New offences related to impersonation and the misuse of computers

  ➤ Requirement for certain online platforms to maintain registries of political advertisements

- The CEA does not:

  ➤ Generally regulate the content of election messages

  ➤ Provide authority to the CEO to block or take down election advertising

  ➤ Provide for an election to be suspended due to disinformation

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Elections Canada's role

- Where the goal is to suppress the ability of certain individuals to vote and/or cause a loss of confidence in the fairness of the election, Elections Canada will act within the limits of its mandate by:

  - ➢ Championing electoral integrity and fairness while remaining politically neutral and non-partisan

  - ➢ Focusing on detecting and responding to inaccurate information about when, where and ways to register and vote

  - ➢ Acting on information related to the administration of the electoral process

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Not Elections Canada's role

- It is not Elections Canada's role to:

  ➢ Manage the Government of Canada's cybersecurity policy

  ➢ Protect political parties' IT systems

  ➢ Regulate the Internet and social media

  ➢ Serve as the arbiter of truth in advertising

  ➢ Correct information about issues, personalities or platform policies as this could be perceived as favouring one political party or candidate over another

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Digital techniques

- Information campaigns aimed at the general population or that target supporters of a particular group or political party

- Techniques include micro-targeted ads, misleading online discussions or videos, impersonation websites and accounts, digital propaganda or other harassing behaviour

- Elections Canada is addressing this issue through three key activities:

  ➤ Collaboration

  ➤ Awareness and engagement

  ➤ Detection and response

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Approach: 1) Collaboration

- Disinformation is a societal issue that extends beyond elections and Elections Canada's mandate

- Combatting disinformation requires collaboration among all those who have a stake in safeguarding the security and integrity of the election, including:
  - ➤ The Commissioner of Canada Elections
  - ➤ Political entities
  - ➤ Government partners and security agencies
  - ➤ Social media and online platforms
  - ➤ Civil society groups
  - ➤ Academics
  - ➤ Mainstream media
  - ➤ Citizens

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Approach: 2) Awareness and engagement

- Voter information and stakeholder mobilization activities that position Elections Canada as the authoritative source of information about when, where and ways to register and vote

- A repository of Elections Canada communications products and advertising on the website

- Efforts to promote fact-checking services and to encourage Canadians to be vigilant

- Information about what Elections Canada does not do – for example, we do not contact electors by phone or text

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Approach: 3) Detection and response

- The most effective way to deal with disinformation is to counter it with correct information

- Dedicated social media monitoring and response coordination team

  ➢ Supported by a disinformation action group with representation from all business lines

- Use of social media monitoring and analytics tools

- Development of a risk register, playbook and escalation protocol

- Scenario building and tabletop exercises

- Continued research to follow developments and learn from the experiences and best practices of others

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Upcoming Communications Activities

- June 2019 Activities
  - Launch of Pre-writ period Voter Information Campaign
  - Ongoing Stakeholder Mobilization Activities – Inspire Democracy
  - Proactive Media Relations – Getting Ready for the GE Theme
    - Technical Briefings
    - CEO Press Conference
    - CEO Media interviews (TBD)
  - CEO Participation in Group of 5 Press Conference (TBD)
- Summer
  - CEO lower profile
  - Continuation of other above items
- September Pre-writ
  - CEO Press Conference and select interviews
  - Full communication calendar and Stakeholder Mobilization for GE
  - On the ground outreach program in place

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13

Questions?

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