

For Public Release

Rapid Response Mechanism Canada | Open Data Analysis Report
Mécanisme de réponse rapide du Canada | Rapport d'analyse des données

WeChat account activity targeting Canadian parliamentarian suggests likely foreign state involvement

Summary

Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) Canada has detected an information operation on WeChat targeting Michael Chong, Member of Parliament for Wellington-Halton Hills.

The operation occurred between May 4 and 13, 2023, and coincided with Canada's designation of a Chinese diplomat as *persona non grata* (PNG) and China's subsequent retaliatory designation of a Canadian diplomat as PNG.

The network involved in this information operation amplified a large volume of false or misleading narratives about Mr. Chong. Most of the activity centred on spreading false narratives about his identity, including commentary and claims about his background, political stances and family heritage. It is the assessment of Global Affairs Canada that nothing observed represents a threat to the safety of Mr. Chong or his family.

Following an analysis of the network and the operation, Global Affairs Canada assesses it is highly probable that China played a role in the information operation. Several indicators of foreign information manipulation and interference suggest this, including but not limited to:

- coordinated content and timing
- highly suspicious and abnormal shifts in volume and scope of engagement
- the concealment of state involvement

One third of the network included known state-media outlets and accounts that are likely linked to the Chinese state apparatus but whose linkages may be opaque. Two thirds of those accounts were anonymous and had not previously published any news stories on Canadian politics. Moreover, these accounts published or interacted with content at similar times and dates, increasing the likelihood WeChat users would see the false narratives by creating an increased volume on this topic.

The false narratives about Mr. Chong likely violated WeChat's user code of conduct on false information and coordinated inauthentic behaviour; however, RRM Canada found no indication WeChat attempted to apply its own content moderation standards.

It is difficult to provide the exact number of users who viewed or engaged with the content through liking, sharing and commenting. WeChat has over 1.3 billion monthly active users, and at least 100 million of those users are located outside China. WeChat has not revealed how many of its users reside in Canada, but some marketing firms put the number at over 1 million. RRM Canada estimates that between 2 and 5 million WeChat users viewed this content globally.

Implications

Foreign information manipulation and interference undermines Canada's democracy and the ability of Canadians to exercise their rights and freedoms free from intimidation. It could discourage members of Parliament from carrying out their duties and speaking out on important issues, and it negatively impacts diaspora communities living in Canada.

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Methodology

Located at Global Affairs Canada, RRM Canada leads the G7 RRM on an ongoing basis, supports Canada's international engagement to counter foreign state-sponsored disinformation and monitors the digital information environment, looking for indications of foreign information manipulation and interference.¹ Its responsibilities include acting as an early warning system for the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force during general election period and by-elections.²

RRM Canada takes an evidence-based approach in its monitoring and collection work. Its open-source data analytics are based on both primary open-source data and secondary sources to identify emerging trends and tactics related to foreign information manipulation and interference in democratic processes and institutions. RRM Canada's work is subject to an ethical and methodological framework, publicly available on the Internet,³ which outlines how its methods respect and reinforce human rights and freedoms. This includes the rights to privacy, freedom of expression and equality. The framework anchors the team's analytical activities in an existing policy, legal and regulatory context and is intended to provide transparency and accountability to Canadians.

Next steps

The Government of Canada will continue to monitor the digital information environment for foreign information manipulation and respond when necessary and appropriate, including through public disclosure.

The Government of Canada will continue to be observant of any and all recommendations made by the National Security and Intelligence Review Agency, the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians and the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in the course of their ongoing reviews of possible foreign interference in the 43rd and 44th Canadian federal general elections.

The Government of Canada has established numerous mechanisms for Canadians to report suspected foreign interference. Further details are available on Public Safety Canada's website.⁴

¹ For more information, consult Global Affairs Canada's [Rapid Response Mechanism Canada](#)

² For more information, consult the Government of Canada's [Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force](#)

³ See Global Affairs Canada's [Ethical and methodological framework for open source data monitoring and analysis](#)

⁴ See Public Safety Canada's [How to report foreign interference](#)