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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**Russian online influence operations targeting Canada and Canadian public opinion****Background**

- On 20 November, CSIS Academic Outreach (AO) held a workshop on the strategic and national security impacts of disinformation, hybrid warfare, and 'fake news'.
- Subsequently, AO hosted a prominent US expert for a series of GoC briefings on Russian online influence operations and attempts at influencing public discourse.
- Together, these events illustrated a need to better understand the nature and potential impact of foreign influence activity targeting the online political discourse as it relates to Canada.

Project Description

- AO commissioned a trusted non-governmental researcher to conduct an analysis of Russia's social media influence operations in Canada.
- The project sought to understand which malicious actors and/or threat vectors are active in discrediting Canada's domestic institutions and practices and to identify the dominant messages or themes that are being amplified.
- Considering the central role of Twitter and Facebook in Russia's social media influence operations, activity on these platforms was analysed to produce findings and key policy recommendations for the Canadian context.

Key Findings

- Russian online influence operations targeting Canadian politics and public opinion were less extensive and less successful than operations targeting other Western countries.
- The network is fairly substantial in size and sophistication, and it is reasonable to expect that its activity may intensify ahead of election periods or times of political crisis.
- Classic Russian trolling behaviour was detected among Twitter accounts claiming to be located in Canada. Prominent network members also exerted a significant amount of influence on the pre-eminent Canadian politics hashtag #cdnpoli.
- The network's most visible activities included promoting far-right and far-left politics, trolling of prominent politicians, promoting climate change denial, and activity related to Canada's Magnitsky Act.
- An organized effort has been made by Russian organizations to influence Russian Canadians. Research has also identified interactions between Russian-Canadian community activists and far-right, far-left, extremist and conspiracy movements.
- Though French-language activity is currently under-represented, the proportion of Russian influence content and discussion in French could increase substantially as a result of the Kremlin's December 2017 decision to launch a French-language RT outlet.
- Russia has created some initial groundwork for influence operations against the Canadian government. Twitter and Facebook provide two important pathways for Russia to infiltrate, influence and divide Canadian audiences.



Canada