

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

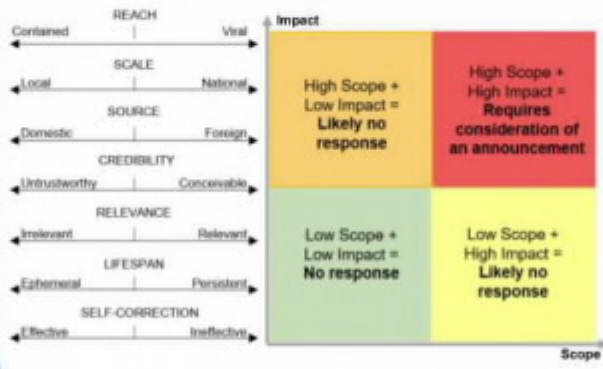


The degree of confidence officials have in the intelligence or information

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
- ✓ National security risks
- ✓ All other steps exhausted
- ✓ Impact on election
- ✓ Differential effect on specific people or groups

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 (3/3)



Scenario 3: 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 4: 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".

Inject 1: 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.

Inject 2: 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.

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



Scenario 5: 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.

- *Inject 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.
- *Inject 2:* The following day, CSIS receives information that the person in question exchanged envelopes with the intelligence agent, however the contents are unknown.



Scenario 6: Trouble in Quebec

Two weeks before the election, a hack and leak of incumbent Liberal government documents takes place over a secure network. Among the leaked documents is a strategy to deal with Quebec separatists that is extremely radical and divisive. It also contains several references to Quebec being a problematic province. The leak is being investigated by CSE.

The Panel is made aware that a foreign country is behind the hack and leak, and that the documents pertaining to Quebec have been doctored in a very convincing manner. The media, however is unaware that the documents have been doctored, and reports extensively on the leak and the Quebec strategy.

The Prime Minister holds a press conference, where his defense of the leak and claims that the document has been doctored is perceived as not credible and weak. The Bloc Quebecois is outraged, and so are many Quebec voters.

Inject 1: One week before the election, election officials in Quebec and Ontario contact Elections Canada after registered voters report receiving threatening spam texts denouncing the Liberal government and saying "votez #QuébecFort ou bien!" (Vote #QuebecStrong or else!).

Inject 2: Two days before the election, more doctored government documents are leaked that outline how the federal government plans to contain separatist sentiments from "east to west". The doctored documents include references to Alberta as being another problematic province where "federalism must continue to rule". These are also deemed to be false.

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



Scenario 7: The Elbonian Candidate

Rumours emerge that Candidates in the Lower Mainland of Vancouver have received support during their nomination contests from a foreign country which has strong tensions with Canada. On social media, screenshots of messages in a foreign language promoting nomination contestants by the foreign country are widely shared as evidence. The messages provided detailed instructions, including for non-Canadians citizens, on how to register to be a member of the political party that ran the nomination contest and to how to vote for the contestant.

Inject 1: The media is reporting about this, and two narrative emerge:

1. That the foreign state is interfering with Canadian democracy, and that members of this group are complicit.
2. That these are baseless accusations that seek to create racial divisions and foster hate towards members of the group.

On social media, lists of Canadian politicians at all levels and parties (federal to municipal) with affiliations to the foreign country are made, saying these candidates are traitors and that the political parties are compromised. The lists contain personal information on the Candidates, escalating to mob protest at their personal homes and violence.

Inject 2: Candidates from the Greater Toronto Area, the National Capital Region, and Montreal are alleged to have received similar support from the foreign country. Op-eds questioning the legitimacy of our electoral process begin to surface in the media.



Scenario 8: Pre-Emptive Strike (based on US example)

Immediately prior to the issue of the writ, the RCMP and CSE release a joint announcement raising awareness of potential disinformation campaigns about a foreign entity hacking into databases containing voter information. The announcement directs any person who receives communications alleging hacking or cyberattacks related to the election, to furnish information to the Commissioner of Canada Elections, the RCMP and the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security. The joint announcement follows an earlier pre-election report *Cyber Threats to Canada's Democratic Process* published before the 44th general election.

Two weeks following the joint announcement, a national newspaper reports that seemingly thousands of Canadians in across five different provinces have received unsolicited emails from a fringe group in Canada threatening harm unless the recipients vote for a particular candidate.

Inject 1: CSE informs the Panel that these communications are from a state-backed foreign entity posing as a domestic group. The contact information likely the result of a cyberattack perpetrated a few days before the emails went sent.

Inject 2: Canadian media begins to run stories about domestic interference in the election and calling for government comment.

Scenario 9: Toronto Troubles COVID-19 Scenario



On polling day OR on the first of the 3-day polling period, a number of polling stations in four Toronto ridings are not able to function at all because of COVID-19 cases among its staff. Other stations in these ridings are also impacted as poll workers are now refusing to show up or leaving out of fear of exposure, leaving stations to operate at less than half capacity. As a result, the Chief Electoral Officer determines that in-person voting should be postponed at all four of these ridings, a recommendation which he provides to the Governor-in-Council (GiC). The GiC in turn determines that the writ will be withdrawn in those ridings, and the elections postponed by 7 days. This also means that the results of the election in those affected ridings will be delayed.

This is a very close election, and the results of these ridings could tip the balance of the election in favour of the incumbent PA1

Inject 1 As soon as the announcement is made, what seems to be large-scale online effort to suppress voting by taking advantage of the situation appears on multiple platforms. Numerous Tweets and Facebook posts appear that inflate the risk of catching COVID-19 when voting in person, some even encourage people to refrain from going out to vote. Rumours of outbreaks in workplaces, including grocery stores and pharmacies in the ridings appear and later announcements from companies such as Loblaws, Shoppers Drug Mart, and Amazon appear confirming these outbreaks. A few hours later, the companies hold a press conference stating that these announcements are false, however a barrage of Tweets, and a discussion group on Reddit from people claiming to be employees allege that the companies are covering up how bad the breakouts really are. In addition, disinformation around the ineffectiveness of vaccines ramps up substantially.

Inject 2 An op-ed by a reputable newspaper opines that the entire election should be scrapped, as it is difficult to tell how many people have not voted because of COVID-19 fears, even beyond the ridings currently affected. Less reputable, but populist pundits begin surmising that all votes after Election Day are illegitimate, and should not be counted. The online discussion builds on these narratives and under the hashtag #NotWorthIt encourages people not to vote because the risk of catching COVID-19 is not worth it as the election will be scrapped anyways. The activity on social media is quite pervasive, and although there seems to be a targeted approach towards interfering in the voting activity at the specific ridings, many of the posts have gone viral, and the discussion is taking place on a national level.

Inject 3 SITE meets with the Panel and gives a preliminary assessment that there is a coordinated, inauthentic social media campaign afoot, and at the moment, it appears to be domestically driven as the agencies did not see any foreign interference. The speed of which the narrative appeared to amplify the message, the use of bots, and discussions with the social media companies makes the S&I community quite confident in its assessment.

Inject 4 A day later, SITE provides a briefing to the Panel wherein they note that there are now indications that there is foreign involvement. It appears that posts in a foreign language are being targeted towards a particular diaspora community which are also inflating the risk of COVID-19. A number of influencers contacted CSIS to report that they had been approached online to help spread this same disinformation for money, and these communications were traced back to the same foreign country.

Slide 6

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As you'll see, I've chosen the scenario wherein the GiC does not agree the writ should be withdrawn and the election in those given electoral districts is postponed by up to 7 days. Conversely, if the GiC agrees, the CEO must issue a new writ within 3 months. Here is a link to the section 59 protocol; an important word of caution, since the provision itself has never been used, the protocol has never been used: "Section 59 Protocol (43rd GE - 2019).doc" can be accessed via the following link: <https://gcdocs.gc.ca/pco-bcp/llisapi.dll/Overview/8067123>

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