

Politics

Foreign interference is the 'greatest strategic threat' facing Canada's national security, CSIS says

Intelligence service says foreign actors aim to make 'geopolitical gains'

Jessica Mundie · CBC News · Posted: Mar 17, 2023 6:02 PM EDT | Last Updated: March 17, 2023



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau speaks during a news conference on Parliament Hill in Ottawa on Monday, March 6, 2023. Trudeau is under heavy pressure to order a public inquiry into reports of foreign interference in Canada's elections. (Sean Kilpatrick/The Canadian Press)

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The Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) is calling foreign interference activities by the Chinese government the "greatest strategic threat to national security."

In a statement provided in French to CBC/Radio-Canada on Friday, a CSIS spokesperson said that this threat comes not from the "Chinese population" but from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which is deploying a strategy aimed at "geopolitical gains" on economic, technological, political and military fronts.

"To do so, it uses all the state powers at its disposal to carry out activities that directly threaten the national security and sovereignty of the country," said the unnamed spokesperson.

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The intelligence service said it takes foreign interference "very seriously" and uses all available legal tools to investigate threats, advise the federal government and take threat reduction measures.

In an opinion piece published in the Globe and Mail on Friday, meanwhile, the anonymous national security official who shared information with the publication about China's alleged election interference wrote that they "do not believe that foreign interference dictated the present composition of our federal government."

"Nonetheless, the growing impact of foreign interference on our ability to enjoy a free and fair political process is undeniable," they said.



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Prime Minister Trudeau has appointed former governor general David Johnston to oversee the investigation into accusations of Chinese meddling in Canada's last two elections.

Recent reports by [The Globe and Mail](#), based on CSIS documents provided by the unnamed national security official, have claimed that China attempted to ensure the Liberal Party won a minority government in the 2021 election and that certain Conservative candidates were defeated.

Other reporting alleged intelligence officials warned Trudeau that the Chinese government's interference campaign included funding a ["clandestine network of at least 11 federal candidates running in the 2019 election."](#)

The official said in the opinion piece that they hoped providing information about election interference would "begin a much deeper conversation about what it is that we expect of our government."

"I hoped that we could launch a conversation about how to improve transparency, how to enhance accountability, how to protect all members of our society against external threats, and ultimately, about how we continue to pursue a system of governance that best serves all of its citizens," they said.

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In its statement, the CSIS spokesperson said that organizations sponsored by foreign states continue to carry out campaigns to interfere with "Canada's democratic institutions" and that these campaigns are "increasingly frequent and sophisticated."

CSIS said it has identified the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Russia as foreign states that attempt to influence "decisions, events and elections" for their own benefit.

"When it comes to politics, it can include pressure on communities, secret funding or exploiting foreign language media," said the spokesperson.

While it advises Canadians to "be wary of secret and misleading activities led by foreign states," CSIS maintains it cannot confirm or deny the authenticity of the claims in the Globe and Mail's reporting.

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