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Michael Chong story 'good example' of what Chinese Canadians fear, says Toronto MP Vuong

(National security issues and policies ... usually get little notice on the campaign trail.

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Maybe it will be different next time. It should be,' says intelligence expert Wesley Wark.



Conservative MP Michael Chong speaks with reporters outside the party's caucus meeting on May 3 following the publication of allegations that he and members of his family were targeted by the Chinese government. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

NEWS (/NEWS/) | BY CHRISTOPHER GULY (https://www.hilltimes.com/ht_author/christopher-guly/) | May 11, 20

Recent revelations that a Chinese diplomat in Toronto targeted Conservative MP Michael Chong and his family in Hong Kong will likely place foreign interference in Canada as an issue in the next federal election, according to an ethnic Canadian Chinese MP who also believes he has been victimized by foreign government meddling.

“In my riding of Spadina-Fort York, we are home to Toronto’s Chinatown. One in seven of my constituents, like me, are of Chinese heritage,” said Kevin Vuong, who won the riding in the Sept. 20, 2021, federal election just two days after the Liberal Party of Canada removed him both as a candidate and party member following a Sept. 16, 2021, *Toronto Star* (<https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal-election/2021/09/16/liberals-ask-toronto-candidate-charged-with-sexual-assault-in-2019-to-pause-campaign.html>) story about an April 2019 sexual assault charge against him that was dropped by the Crown seven months later.

Vuong said that many of his constituents who came to Canada from China sought “a place where they can feel safe to live the life that they want.” He told CP24 on May 6 that “it’s no surprise that my community would be a high target for the Chinese Communist Party.”

“Many now are concerned and are fearful. They’re worried about their own family and relatives that might still be back at home in China. As a result, people are afraid, people are feeling intimidated and they are self-censoring,” said Vuong, who has yet to decide whether he will seek re-election, in an interview with *The Hill Times*.

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He said that Chong’s (Wellington–Halton Hills, Ont.) situation is “a good example of what people are afraid of: that the Chinese Communist Party would unfairly attack, intimidate, threaten their family members. Heaven forbid they do what China did to the two Michaels [Spavor and Kovrig], to unfairly imprison, and effectively torture, members of their own family.”

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(<https://www.hilltimes.com>) **On May 2, *The Globe and Mail***

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(<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-csis-confirms-mp-michael-chong-and-family-targeted-by-china/>) reported that Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) director David Vigneault told Chong, the Conservative for foreign affairs critic, that Zhao Wei—a diplomat with China’s consulate-general in Toronto—targeted him and his family after Chong sponsored a successful [House of Commons motion](https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/uighur-genocide-motion-vote-1.5922711) (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/uighur-genocide-motion-vote-1.5922711>) in February 2021 that condemned Beijing’s conduct against the Muslim Uyghur minority in the western Xinjiang region as genocide.

On May 8, following calls to do so from Chong and his Conservative colleagues, Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly (Ahuntsic–Cartier, Que.) announced that Canada declared Zhao “persona non grata” and that his expulsion should serve as a warning to other diplomats in Canada. “If they engage in this type of behaviour, they will be sent home,” she said.



(https://www.hilltimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/568A0032_58.t645a4bfd.m800.xXAnWVX6D.jpg)

On May 8, Foreign Affairs Minister Mélanie Joly announced that Canada declared Chinese diplomat Zhao Wei ‘persona non grata’ for his role in allegedly targeting Conservative MP Michael Chong and his family. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

On May 9, in a tit-for-tat measure, [China’s Foreign Affairs Ministry](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/202305/t20230509_11073784.htm)

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(<https://www.hilltimes.com>) announced that it had expelled Jennifer Lynn Lalonde of the Canadian consulate general in Shanghai.

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Vuong said he believes that China played a role in his ouster as a Liberal candidate in the last federal election.

In a three-page document he sent to *The Hill Times*, Vuong said he wonders why the “miscarriage of justice” that befell him “may have had more to do with political machinations intent on interfering in our democracy than the commission of an actual criminal act.”

As he detailed in both the document and in an interview, Vuong met a woman on a dating app in November 2018 whom he dated until February 2019. A month later, through “a chance meeting—perhaps not a chance meeting,” and following a few weeks of exchanging text messages, Vuong was invited to her apartment on April 7, 2019, to “Netflix and chill.”

He explained that in the middle of the night, the woman said she needed to check in on a friend who needed help “for something.” Vuong said he offered to accompany her, but she declined, so he went back to sleep.

At 2 a.m., he said he was awakened by another woman, whom Vuong both had never previously met and who he could not see clearly, but who asked him to leave the apartment.

Later that morning, he said that he was contacted by Toronto police and charged with sexual assault based on a complaint from the woman whose home he had visited, and confirmed by the other woman, who “was not present when the alleged incident occurred.”

But Vuong said that the charge was never publicly revealed until *The Star* story, in which the complainant said she was awakened by Vuong touching her sexually and that she contacted a friend to tell him to leave, along with subsequent coverage of the Chinese government targeting Chinese Canadian MPs. The timing has led the MP to only one conclusion.

“The Liberals wouldn’t have shot themselves in the foot,” said Vuong. “The Conservatives are not viable in the riding, so they wouldn’t have bothered—and frankly, the NDP would know better that if they wanted my name removed from the ballot, they would need more than four days.”

“So, who would make this kind of amateur mistake? Maybe an actor who doesn’t operate in a democracy and doesn’t know the nuances of an electoral system—but were still able to drag my name through the mud and destroy my character,” said Vuong, who noted that he shared his concerns with CSIS in a two-hour meeting and wants to meet with former governor general David Johnston, whom Prime Minister Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Que.) [appointed in March](https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2023/03/15/prime-minister-announces-independent-special-rapporteur-to-help-protect) (<https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2023/03/15/prime-minister-announces-independent-special-rapporteur-to-help-protect>) to serve as special rapporteur tasked with investigating foreign interference.

Vuong said that “the Chinese MO is a honey trap,” or sexual entrapment, which CSIS says “foreign governments are known to employ, and said that “what happened to me is entirely plausible that this was an act of Chinese interference.”

“Whether or not the Chinese had planted this from the very beginning, or they saw an opportunity with somebody to incentivize them to disrupt in my run in the final days of the election, I don’t know. I don’t have a direct line to the Chinese consulate general in Toronto.”

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(<https://www.hilltimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Vuong.jpeg>)

Independent MP Kevin Vuong says many of his Toronto constituents are 'worried about their own family and relatives that might still be back at home in China.' *The Hill Times photograph by Andrew Meade*

The woman whose accusation prompted the sexual assault charge told *The Star* she came forward after returning to Toronto after living elsewhere and seeing his face on election signs, having been previously unaware he was running for the Liberal Party.

Vuong did not disclose the charge to the Liberal Party at the time of his candidacy. He said that he did not inform them since he did not become a member until July 2021, "right before I was acclaimed as a candidate," but provided the party with a clean criminal record check in July 2021.

He also did not inform the Royal Canadian Navy, where he's a reserve officer who holds the rank of sub-lieutenant. In July 2022, Vuong was fined \$500 for failing to inform his commanding officer of the withdrawn criminal charge.

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to apologize also to the people who supported me, for embarrassing them. I had let them down, and I was naïve,” Vuong told a Toronto radio station in November 2021, as reported by the CBC (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/kevin-vuong-mp-liberals-charge-1.6255056>).

The revelation of the withdrawn charge came on the heels of the headline-grabbing sexual misconduct crisis in the Canadian military, as well as allegations against other candidates that led to the end of their Liberal campaigns.

Sexual-violence survivor and advocate Kristin Raworth, chair of ParityYEG, an Edmonton-based bipartisan organization that encourages women to seek leadership in public service, does not discount the possibility that Vuong was targeted by a Chinese operative and caught up in a honey trap.

“But the issue with him is that he seemingly likes to forget that he didn’t disclose the allegation to the Liberal government or the military,” said Raworth. “If I had an allegation made against me that was withdrawn, I would still probably let the party know so it could defend itself against it.”

She added that “there has been no movement by the Liberal Party to try to bring him back into the fold.”

“What is the issue then? Did they not give him any kind of roadmap, and if not, why?”

Raworth said that when the Alberta New Democrats formed government in 2015, newly elected MLA Deborah Drever was suspended (<https://calgaryherald.com/news/politics/new-mla-deborah-drever-suspended-from-ndp-caucus-over-homophobic-remark-under-photo>) from the caucus even before she was sworn into office over an image she posted on Instagram featuring then-interim Progressive Conservative cabinet minister Ric McIver and former premier, the late Jim Prentice, with the phrase “Gay boyz” written beneath it.

However, in 2016, Drever was welcomed into the NDP caucus after she “met” and “exceeded” (<https://calgaryherald.com/news/politics/brian-mason-deborah-drever-to-make-announcement-in-calgary?r>) the requirements set out for her to do so, Notley said at the time.

Vuong told *The Hill Times* that the Liberals have not reached out to him to join their caucus.

(<https://www.hilltimes.com>) ~~He said that since the last federal election, he continues to~~

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face “baseless attacks and racial slurs,” as well as five bomb threats directed at his offices in both Toronto and on Parliament Hill—starting last November, when he said he began speaking out against Chinese government meddling in federal elections.

In Vuong’s view, he has primarily faced the assault because of his “standing up against foreign interference” and his standing with “democratically elected” members of Hong Kong’s former government, along with his family’s “lived experience” in which his parents fled their home in Vietnam in the late 1970s following the protracted war.

Vuong said that he wants the federal government to act and stop allowing Canada to be a “doormat” to foreign interference.

Part of his ask of the Liberals is to have the government close what the RCMP have said are Chinese government police stations run by two Montreal-area Chinese community organizations.

However, Independent Senator Yuen Pau Woo (British Columbia), former president and CEO of the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, said at a May 5 [news conference](https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-senator-says-rcmp-must-release-evidence-of-alleged-chinese-police/) (<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-senator-says-rcmp-must-release-evidence-of-alleged-chinese-police/>) in Montreal that the two groups have been found guilty of allegations without the Mounties providing information.

Woo told *The Hill Times* he expects that in the next federal election, there will be a debate about foreign interference “based on freelance allegations and innuendo rather than on the assessments of impartial professionals who have been tasked with this work.”

“This debate may be dressed up as foreign policy, but it is really about the politics of fear,” said Woo, who in 2021 opposed a [Senate motion](https://sencanada.ca/en/senators/woo-yuen-pau/interventions/563966/32) (<https://sencanada.ca/en/senators/woo-yuen-pau/interventions/563966/32>) calling Chinese actions against Uyghurs in Xinjiang as a genocide, which he argued did “not add any actionable measure specific to the Uyghur situation in China” and was “simply an exercise in labelling.”

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(<https://www.hilltimes.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Woo-Meade-2.jpg>)

During the next election, the debate about foreign interference will be 'based on freelance allegations and innuendo rather than on the assessments of impartial professionals,' says Sen. Yuen Pau Woo. *The Hill Times* photograph by Andrew Meade

He told *The Hill Times* that in the next federal election, "candidates with the wrong backgrounds or views will be stigmatized, and voters who have the audacity to support such candidates will be deemed to have been manipulated by foreign states. It is a subtle form for voter suppression."

However, Woo said he believes that "disinformation from domestic and American sources will be a greater factor in our next election than disinformation from so-called 'unfriendly' states."

"But most of the attention will be on the latter because our leaders have cultivated a collective blind spot in the body politic, aided and abetted by foreign influence and the media."

National security and intelligence expert Wesley Wark said that foreign interference could become a federal election issue.

It depends on three factors which could show "whether the Liberals are able to demonstrate that they have recovered from the current crisis and that they can show that they have effective policies in place, he said. He added that the establishment of a foreign influence transparency registry; the [reviews by Johnston \(https://www.canada.ca/en/democratic-institutions/services/independent-special-rapporteur/terms-conditions.html\)](https://www.canada.ca/en/democratic-institutions/services/independent-special-rapporteur/terms-conditions.html) as well as the National Security and Intelligence Review Agency and the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians on foreign interference; and whether or not there is a public inquiry, will also play a determining role.

A second point, as Wark explained, is whether "the [intelligence] leaks will continue and continue to be damaging until we hit the next electoral cycle."

(<https://www.hilltimes.com>) **The third factor** that could haunt the Trudeau Liberals in the

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next election campaign is whether opposition claims about a “cover-up” continue—and “if something worse happens in the interim,” said Wark, a senior fellow with the Centre for International Governance Innovation who served two terms on former Conservative prime minister Stephen Harper’s Advisory Council on National Security from 2005 to 2009.

“National security issues and policies are always part of election campaign platforms. They usually get little notice on the campaign trail. Maybe it will be different next time. It should be.”

However, he said that national security was raised during the 2015 federal election campaign in which the governing Conservatives were targeted for their “ill-tempered” anti-terrorism Bill C-51 “and the implications drawn about that by the Liberals to cast the Harper government as extremist.”

The Liberals won the election and formed a majority government.

“In certain circumstances, national security issues—if they’re sufficiently topical and sufficiently tasty—can really influence the ways in which an election goes,” said Wark, who added that in the 2021 election, “all of the party’s election-campaign platforms had references to national-security issues.”

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EDITOR’S NOTE: This story was updated on May 12 at 10:55 a.m. to reflect that Kevin Vuong was contacted by the Toronto police the same morning as the alleged incident, not two days later, as was initially reported.

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