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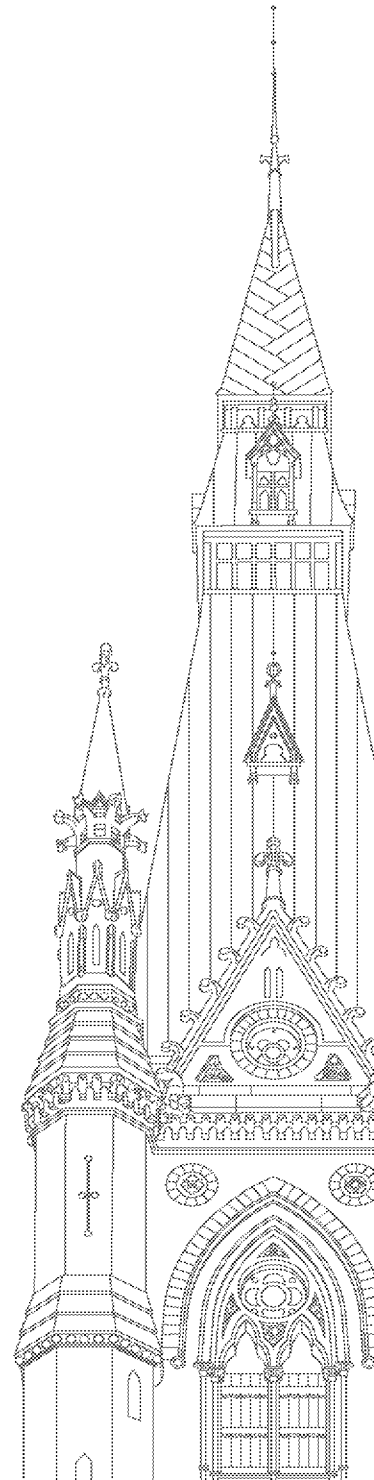
Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

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Tuesday, November 1, 2022

Chair: The Honourable Bardish Chagger



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• (1100)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting No. 37 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. The committee is meeting today to begin its study of foreign election interference.

The first panel of witnesses we will be hearing from is made up of the Chief Electoral Officer, the Commissioner of Canada Elections, and the staff accompanying them.

During the second hour of the meeting, we will be hearing from a representative of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and a representative from the Communications Security Establishment.

Today's discussion will relate to the new security threat presented by foreign interference in Canadian elections.

I would inform committee members that all witnesses who are attending virtually have successfully done the sound and connection tests before the meeting.

[*English*]

I would just like to remind members and our guests that all comments should be made through the chair.

My understanding is that our guests today will be sharing a combined eight minutes for their opening comments, and I will commence with Mr. Perrault.

Welcome back to PROC.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Perrault (Chief Electoral Officer, Elections Canada): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I am accompanied today by Serge Caron, deputy chief electoral officer for the digital transformation sector.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address the committee on the important issue of the risk of foreign interference in our elections.

I should state, at the outset, that, during the past two general elections, Elections Canada did not experience any breaches to its IT infrastructure or interference with our electoral operations. We are also unaware of efforts by foreign actors to undermine the ability of electors to vote.

The expression "foreign interference" refers not to any particular activity but to a source of threat, which can take different forms: cyber attacks, illicit funding of candidates, parties or third parties, disinformation campaigns, even intimidation. Because of the diversity of means through which it can occur, but also because it involves state-to-state relationships, addressing foreign interference in our electoral process requires efforts by a range of agencies and departments.

Today, I will talk about Elections Canada's partnerships with other agencies in this area, as well as our specific role and our governing legal framework.

It is important to note that the Canada Elections Act does not define foreign interference. Rather, the Act prohibits the involvement of foreigners in our elections in specific ways that are primarily related to the political financing regime. For instance, only an individual who is a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident may contribute. As well, the act prohibits foreigners from registering as third parties, and third parties are prohibited from using foreign funds for their regulated activities.

The act also prohibits certain activities as representing what the act calls "undue influence by foreigners," such as incurring any expense to directly promote or oppose a candidate or a registered party during the election. However, the Act recognizes that foreigners can have some level of influence, for example, by making a statement encouraging electors to vote for a specific candidate or registered party.

[*English*]

The role of Elections Canada is to administer elections and protect them from threats, irrespective of their source. This includes taking appropriate steps with the advice and support of security partners in protecting election IT infrastructure. Elections Canada has made significant progress in that area in recent years, and we are fortunate to be able to receive ongoing support from the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security, including close monitoring of our IT infrastructure.

Another key role for Elections Canada is to ensure that electors have correct information about the electoral process. This includes information necessary to register and to vote, as well as information that enables them to trust the electoral process and its results. To counter the spread of inaccurate information about the electoral process, whether the source is foreign or domestic, Elections Canada continually monitors publicly available information. When inaccurate information is detected in news media, on the Internet or on social media, it is addressed by communicating correct information.

It's important to note that our focus is on content related to the voting process and electoral administration. My mandate is not to scrutinize or to police what is said about party or candidate platforms by individuals or media organizations, whether domestic or foreign.

Protecting the security of our elections is a team effort and requires a whole-of-government approach. Elections Canada has been actively working with a variety of Government of Canada intelligence and security agencies, whose roles include detecting and responding to potential foreign interference, especially interference by state actors. These include the Canadian Security Intelligence Service and the Communications Security Establishment, among others.

Together, we have developed protocols and practices for discussing threats to an election, sharing information when necessary, and ensuring that each of us is properly prepared to play our own role in the promotion of electoral security.

Madam Chair, I know the committee will be hearing from representatives of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, and of course they will be best positioned to speak to matters relevant to their own mandate.

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline Simard (Commissioner, Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections): Thank you for the invitation to testify before the committee today, Madam Chair.

I am accompanied by Marc Chénier, deputy commissioner and chief of legal services in my office.

[*English*]

The issue of foreign interference is one that my office takes very seriously. As commissioner, my role is to ensure compliance and enforcement of the Canada Elections Act, which provides a legal framework for the activities of my office.

Activities that could be attempts at foreign interference are captured by several provisions in the act. The wording of the obligations and prohibitions of the act as adopted by Parliament determines the scope of our compliance and enforcement work.

For instance, the provision on undue influence is limited to the election period and does not capture the pre-election period.

[*Translation*]

It is also important to note that we are a complaint-based organization that operates primarily on the basis of complaints received

from the public. We encourage Canadians to contact us when they believe an offence under the Canada Elections Act has been committed.

I would like to inform you that my office did not observe any significant change in the number of issues giving rise to complaints containing allegations of foreign interference in either the 43rd or 44th general elections.

As you can imagine, cases of foreign interference can pose significant operational challenges for our work. The presence of activities, individuals or entities from outside of our borders can significantly increase the complexity of an investigation.

Of course, these challenges are not unique to our office.

[*English*]

Over the years, my office has worked with key law enforcement and national security and intelligence organizations. This was helpful to gain a better understanding of the potential threats to elections. It has also served to ensure effective communication, when appropriate, during an election period.

[*Translation*]

In conclusion, I wish to remind members of this committee that I am not in a position to discuss the details of files that may or may not be the subject of an investigation by my office. This includes any issues that may currently be the subject of a complaint or may have been the subject of a complaint in the past.

I would be happy to take your questions.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Commissioner.

We will now go to the first set of questions, in which each speaker will have six minutes.

We will start with Mr. Cooper, who will be followed by Ms. Romanado, Ms. Gaudreau and Ms. Blaney.

Mr. Cooper, the floor is yours for six minutes.

[*English*]

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the officials for being here.

I want to pose my question to Mr. Perrault. I want to specifically ask about foreign funding of third parties.

In the 2015 election, it was well established that a number of U.S.-based organizations laundered money through various entities. That money ended up in the hands of registered third parties. For example, nearly \$800,000 of U.S.-based Tides foundation money was transferred to the Sisus institute society, based in British Columbia, which in turn was laundered to Leadnow, which actively campaigned to defeat Conservative candidates in the 2015 election.

Amendments were made to the Canada Elections Act in 2018 with Bill C-76. Would you agree that the loophole that existed at the time of the 2015 election was not fixed in Bill C-76?

• (1110)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Madam Chair, I agree that there remain areas where foreign funding could find its way through parties, though I'm not aware that it has. This is why I have made a recommendation to Parliament, which I will be happy to explore with this committee in future months, regarding the potential use of foreign funding.

Essentially, that loophole, if you may call it that, relates to the ability of a third party to use its own funds, so unless the money was provided specifically for a regulated purpose, then it would not be captured. What is an owned fund, and how can you address that?

I have made some recommendations, and I could expand on them today if the committee wants to hear.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I'd be interested in any recommendations you have.

Would you agree there is nothing in the act that would prevent U.S. money from going to a Canadian entity, then to another Canadian entity, and then to another entity, for example? The source of that money might then be considered Canadian.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: There are opportunities for flows of money to make their way through a third party. If the party, however, raised the money for a regulated activity, they must disclose the source of the funding. It must be a Canadian source.

The concern is with money received for general purposes, which may, later on, become their own money, flow through various groups, then be used. In this case, it becomes an expense reported as from the source of the entity itself.

We have seen an increasing percentage of third parties funding their election activities with their own funds.

Mr. Michael Cooper: In short, loopholes exist with respect to third parties. You acknowledged that in your testimony on May 28, 2018, when you appeared before this committee. You said, "There is in my view a residual opening for foreign funding through third parties."

Nothing has changed. Isn't that right?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I committed to look into this and come back with recommendations, which I have.

Mr. Michael Cooper: One recommendation you put forward was an anti-avoidance clause.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: No. It's a recommendation that groups funded, in large degree, through contributions be required to have a separate bank account. If they use money for regulated activities, it comes from that bank account, and every penny comes from individual Canadians.

Groups, however, whether they be corporations or unions, that are not fundraising entities but earn money in Canada would continue to be able to use their own funds, as would individuals.

A fundraising entity—someone who receives money by way of contributions—should be regulated in a different manner. That's an avenue I'm putting forward to explore with this committee.

Mr. Michael Cooper: To be clear, a foreign third party can accept foreign money. That's clear. They can accept foreign money.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: They cannot accept foreign money for the purpose of regulated electoral activities, but any—

Mr. Michael Cooper: Otherwise, if it's not specific to one of the regulated activities, there's no limit.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Any individual in Canada is a third party, unless they're a candidate. They may receive funds through investments or earnings from different sources, including foreign sources. That may also include contributions, unless it's for the purpose of regulated activities, you're quite correct. People and groups in Canada receive funds from different sources.

Mr. Michael Cooper: As you said, it could be commingled, and there's nothing in the act that clarifies this. How do you enforce...?

You said, set up a separate bank account if money is ostensibly donated on the basis of an administrative purpose. Then, it's commingled and used for a different purpose.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: That is correct.

If money is given for general purposes, and not specifically for regulated activity purposes, it becomes their own money. It can then be used and reported only as their own money, even though it was a contribution.

I think that's an issue Parliament could choose to address in the legislation that reviews it.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Right.

What about an anti-avoidance clause?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: There are a number of anti-avoidance clauses in the act. I'm not aware of any prosecutions, although I may be incorrect.

Mr. Chénier has a long history of knowledge about these things and how effective they are. I'd leave that, perhaps, to Mr. Chénier.

• (1115)

Mr. Marc Chénier (Deputy Commissioner and Chief Legal Counsel, Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections): Yes, there's a prohibition against circumventing the prohibition against using foreign funds. That was added by this committee when Bill C-76 was before this committee.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Romanado, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being with us today.

Mr. Perrault, I would like to thank you for saying in your testimony that Elections Canada had not experienced any breaches to its IT infrastructure or interference with its electoral operations during the past two general elections.

[English]

It's important to highlight that, because there were a lot of conversations and reports on whether or not there was interference in the last two elections. I want to thank you.

I understand, Madam Simard, that you also mentioned there was nothing in the last two elections, in terms of foreign interference.

One area I'd like to touch on is the pre-election period. We hear a lot about initiatives happening and efforts made during an electoral period.

Could you elaborate on some of the work you're doing in a pre-election period, in terms of making sure our elections are safe?

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I would like to make one brief comment. As I tried to make clear in my opening remarks, the expression "foreign interference" can have several meanings, depending on the context. That is why I tried to be relatively precise when I said we had not experienced any such situation at Elections Canada.

I would say there are two work streams in a pre-election period.

[English]

One stream is working with our partners in the Government of Canada in terms of ensuring the security of elections. A lot of the work that goes on there, because people come and go between elections, is making sure everyone understands who is responsible for what, who you speak to when you have an issue, and which kinds of issues which agencies are responsible for. It's a lot of making sure the parameters of the mandates are understood and we have contacts. We also receive fairly high-level briefings from the security community in terms of the overall environment.

That's one stream of work. I would include in that stream our work in terms of cybersecurity.

The other one is making sure Canadians have the right information about the voting process. That is critical for us. That's really at the core of our mandate. For example, in the last election we put a lot of effort into putting information on our website about postal ballots, just because there was concern. How do we count them? What is the transparency? What are the safeguards in place to ensure the integrity of the process? That is an important part of our work.

Moving forward, I think we'll need to continue and expand on explaining to Canadians why they should be trustful of our elections and the procedures we have in place for them.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much.

I have a follow-up question to that. You mentioned mail-in ballots. I understand that approximately 200,000 special ballots were not returned in the last election. Obviously, with COVID, a lot of people availed themselves of special ballots.

Can you speak to that a bit? There have been some comments that perhaps the results of the election would have been different if the ballots that weren't returned on time had been counted. I would like to get your comments on that.

Thank you.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: First of all, there's no indication that mail-in ballots had any swing effect on the election in terms of their spread. I'm not aware of that.

When we talk about this figure of 200,000, sometimes people talk about uncounted ballots. These were not uncounted ballots. These were ballots that were either not received or not cast. In some cases, electors came and voted in person. They had applied for a kit but didn't send in their ballot, or it was received late, or it was completed in a manner that the law directs us not to count and to set aside. These are accounted for. They are counted in the same way that at the polls, if a ballot is improperly marked, it is set aside. It doesn't mean it is not counted.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you for clarifying that. As you mentioned, a lot of people have a misunderstanding of these "uncounted" ballots, as they call them.

You brought up misinformation campaigns. We've seen more and more, with social media, the ease with which misinformation about elections can happen. What are some of the other safeguards? In your testimony you mentioned that immediately, once you see something out there, you counter it and say, no, this is in fact the situation, whether it be the dates of elections or how people can vote.

Can you elaborate a little on what else we can be doing in terms of making sure that misinformation is addressed? The problem is that it's so quick. It can go viral very quickly. We can be trying to counter it, saying, no, actually, this is the information, but it's almost not believed...by political parties, by candidates, by Elections Canada. Can you elaborate a bit on what we can be doing together to make sure people have the right information about elections, about where they can vote and when they can vote, to make sure we have maximum participation?

• (1120)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Certainly, Madam Chair.

The language is important. We prefer to use the language "inaccurate" information, because we have no way of knowing whether it's misinformation or disinformation. It's simply not accurate information. We promote the idea that Elections Canada is the trusted source of information about the electoral process. That is something that you as candidates and your parties can do. You can promote that in case of doubt, turn to Elections Canada. That is a very important aspect.

We monitor the environment, especially the social media environment. We have relationships with social media platforms. We monitor 67 platforms in 15 languages. It's quite extensive.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): It is impressive to know that you monitor 67 platforms in various languages.

So I am going to frame my question a bit more precisely. Personally, I am concerned more specifically with disinformation and cyber threats. I would like to know what we are lacking for working effectively on prevention.

As an aside, I wonder whether laws at the international level are inadequate to properly regulate Internet service suppliers. There have been several committees that have examined the possible contribution of the Group of Five to legislating in order to target any attempted cyber attack or cyber threat, or even any attempt to spread disinformation.

In your opinion, is this not a tool we should first address before asking everybody to file complaints?

I would ask both witnesses to answer in turn.

Ms. Caroline Simard: Our office does have tools now it can use to do investigative work. It is important to understand the difference between the various roles. For our part, our role includes compliance and enforcement of the Canada Elections Act. With that in mind, as you know, tools have been created and new provisions added that came into force in 2019, for the most part. We were able to test it quietly.

I would like to add a clarification to the comment that was made. It is important to note that our office has received complaints relating to foreign interference, but no official action was taken.

On your question regarding recommendations, I will let deputy commissioner Chénier clarify that for you by giving you a more precise answer.

Mr. Marc Chénier: As Ms. Simard stated, new provisions were brought into effect with the enactment of Bill C-76. This strengthened the system and reduced the possibility of foreign money getting into the system.

On the question of foreign interference, our office's powers are limited to the provisions that Parliament has chosen to...

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: What are you lacking, then?

Mr. Marc Chénier: Mr. Côté, Ms. Simard's predecessor, had recommended that a third component be added to the definition of "undue influence" in the act. Under the act as it now reads, there is undue influence when expenses are incurred to promote or oppose a party or candidate, or when an activity that is carried out in order to promote or oppose a party or candidate contravenes a federal or provincial law.

According to Mr. Côté, while it is important to protect freedom of expression in political discourse, the right to freedom of expression and the protection of political dialogue are clearly diminished when foreigners deliberately attempt to sow confusion in people's minds. He had therefore recommended that the act recognize that third way of exercising undue influence: cases where a foreign enti-

ty or person sows confusion or intentionally disseminates disinformation.

• (1125)

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I am going to frame my question more precisely.

Would it help you if the G7 countries adopted rules that would determine what is acceptable on the platforms and what is not? Here, we are talking about foreign interference in elections, of course, but there could be rules that relate more generally to platforms that do not obtain people's consent or on which child pornography is found, for example.

The objective is to identify the factors that we should focus on in the action we take.

What are your thoughts, Mr. Perrault?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I made several recommendations in that regard in my report.

What we need, first and foremost, is greater transparency on the part of the digital platforms. We have to understand social media, know what their election advertising policies are, and understand how they deal with misinformation about the electoral process. As I said earlier, we monitor social media, and when we see what we consider to be misinformation or to meet the definition of disinformation, we can alert the major platforms. We have protocols in place for doing this. When cases are submitted to those major platforms, they deal with them in accordance with their policies. However, we do not always know their policies. There should at least be transparency. The platforms can make their own policies, but they should have to divulge them. I think that would help to establish trust.

I also have recommendations for strengthening the rules around disinformation, but I would start with transparency, before anything else.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: My next question is relatively simple: why does the commissioner limit herself to the election period for receiving complaints about foreign interference or for monitoring in this regard?

Ms. Caroline Simard: As the chief electoral officer explained in his remarks, there is no provision of the act that deals with foreign interference. I think you mean, rather, to refer to the provision on undue influence. On that subject, the chief electoral officer had in fact recommended extending the monitoring period, so that it was not limited to the election period. He could tell you about that. My predecessor approved that idea.

The Chair: Thank you.

I would like to point out to all witnesses that they can always answer a question in the official language of their choice, regardless of the language in which they are asked the question.

Ms. Blaney, the floor is yours for six minutes.

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Thank you.

I want to thank all of our witnesses here today. It's always important for us to talk about our election process and what we're doing to make sure we're protecting it from foreign threats.

One of the biggest hurdles is one that all of us as elected officials, and those in trusted positions such as yours, know, and that is getting people to trust the system. That's becoming increasingly hard with so much misinformation. We've seen recently, of course, what happened in the U.S., which was really a deliberate attempt to undermine the electoral system and make something that was concrete seem like it wasn't. That was very concerning. I know all of us are watching that and watching the outcomes of what happens when foreign entities abuse misinformation.

To both of you, through the chair, how can we ensure that accurate, reliable information is shared here in Canada so that misinformation isn't taken advantage of by foreign entities?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Madam Chair, it starts with seeding the environment with correct information. A big part of our work in preparing for an election is to build a repository of information about the voting process that the media and the candidates and the parties can turn to in order to understand what the rules and procedures will be.

The second thing is to monitor what is being said out there, to focus on information about the voting process, which is my mandate, and to respond to any misinformation or inaccurate information by pushing out the correct information. If there is the appearance of an attempt to interfere with the reporting process, I can refer that to the commissioner for investigation. My role is to make sure Canadians have correct information about the voting process.

In my recommendations report, I have made some recommendations about expanding the rules on disinformation. I'd be happy to speak more about that.

• (1130)

[Translation]

Ms. Caroline Simard: From a practical point of view, it is important that you know that in accordance with its role regarding compliance and enforcement of the Canada Elections Act, my office has initiated a dialogue with the platforms. To date, that dialogue has been extremely positive. Some content has been removed from the platforms, at our request, and the evidence has been preserved and communicated. Obviously, I am not talking strictly about foreign interference, but about our investigations in general.

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Just to go back to that idea, I guess I'm curious about methods that are being looked at in terms of reporting on which communities are the most vulnerable. What I mean by that, for example, is that indigenous communities, where there is often a sense of distrust already, could be more vulnerable to misinformation around how to vote and what the process is. We also know that new Canadians may not be able to access information through English and French. The other part I would add is that I think rural

communities can be under a particular level of concern. Because of their remoteness, often they don't have access to information as readily as other people.

In the work that is being done, how are those communities being considered around those particular vulnerabilities, especially in this area of foreign threats? There is a unique situation there that needs to be addressed. I would love to hear your thoughts on that.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Madam Chair, I think it's a very important point. We know there are communities in Canada that have a knowledge gap about our political institutions. They don't know as much as they perhaps should or could about the voting process and how our institutions work. That makes them more vulnerable. Our outreach activities are geared towards communities that have a knowledge barrier in terms of our voting process.

For example, right now we are working on a pilot project with indigenous communities in northern Ontario to build a civic education program specifically for indigenous Canadians. That's a pilot, and we'll learn from that and see how we can expand it.

We have a range of outreach activities aimed specifically at bridging that gap for certain communities. You're quite right to point out that it makes those Canadians—new Canadians and different groups—more susceptible to being vulnerable to disinformation.

Ms. Caroline Simard: Just so you know, this is not something included within our mandate of compliance and enforcement.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

We know that election interference is not just a Canadian problem, so I'm wondering from what other jurisdictions Elections Canada is learning lessons about protecting the integrity of elections, and what lessons are being learned.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Yes, again, Madam Chair, that is a good question.

We work with international partners. One of our good partners is Australia. They had in their most recent election a registry of misinformation. That registry would publish the false statements about the electoral process, and people could refer to that. They felt it was a valuable addition to their program. We're looking into something similar for our elections, so we are exchanging information. At the end of the month, I will be attending a meeting of the OAS—the Organization of American States. I expect to meet people there from Brazil, from the United States and from other jurisdictions in the Americas to deal with these issues.

The Chair: Thank you.

It's Mr. Calkins next, followed by Ms. Sahota.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Confirm for me if you can, Mr. Perrault, that approximately 17 million people voted in the last federal election. Is that correct?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: That's correct.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: The result from the last election was that on election night the Liberal Party of Canada, which is now the government, fell, I believe, 11 ridings short of a majority. Would you say that's correct?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I believe that's correct.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: If you look at the closest 11—and I'll just say 13, because there were some things that happened afterward—13 ridings was the number of ridings that the Conservative Party subsequently asked about foreign interference in. In the closest 13 ridings that the Liberal Party could have won, the difference between their candidate winning and the person who did win, in my estimation, falls a little over 20,000 votes. Out of 17 million votes cast, the difference between a majority and a minority government in this country was 0.1% of the ballots cast. How easy is it for a foreign state actor to move the needle by 0.1% in this country?

• (1135)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I don't have an answer to that question. I don't know the effectiveness of any interventions, be they domestic or foreign. I have to say one aspect of the work we do is that we're not equipped to distinguish and we have no means of ascertaining, when we're seeing, for example, debates on social media or criticism of a candidate or a party—and we do see some of that—whether that criticism is originating from a foreign source or a domestic source and whether it's a legitimate part of the actual process or an attempt at foreign interference. That's something that belongs to the national security agencies. Beyond that, it's hard to ascertain what the impact would be. I recognize that the challenge here is how we determine whether any aspect of that would have an impact.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: My former colleague, Kenny Chiu, who lost in the last election, was, prior to the election, very vocally critical of the things that were happening in Hong Kong, and he has alleged quite publicly that the Chinese Communist Party is using software that might not be physically available for everybody to see, but it is using chat groups and so on. These chat groups can get quite large, involving tens of thousands of people. In light of the fact that we've had people report in this country about unofficial Chinese Communist Party police stations or enforcement stations operating in certain parts of the country, how reasonable would it be to assume that these kinds of things are happening so covertly that we wouldn't be aware of them happening or of their significance?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: It's quite possible that some of that is happening, and that is a matter of concern. I think that's why we have national security agencies to look into these matters. I do not have the mandate or capacity to look into that. That said, if there are offences under the act or complaints that the commissioner receives that fall within the parameters of the legislation, then there are ways for her office to look into those. In terms of our agency, it's very difficult to ascertain to what extent there is foreign activity to influence the election.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: You said in your opening remarks that Canadian intelligence services—both CSIS and the Communications Security Establishment—have been in contact, or you are in contact with them. They obviously discuss things with you. What can you publicly share with this committee insofar as your instincts

towards the information that you've received from our security establishments go?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Prior to the election, we received briefings that informed at a general level of the trade craft of certain countries and the interest some countries may have in Canadian elections. It's fairly high-level information. They would inform us of anything that was actionable for us. The understanding is that if there is something that relates to the voting process, for instance, that I need to know in order to run the election, then I would need to be made aware of that. I have not been made aware of any of that, any activities in that regard. Beyond that, they are the ones who are concerned with foreign interference.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I have just a quick question. Would returning to enumeration help you, help your organization, improve the integrity of the election system?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: No, it would not at all. I think, very clearly, moving to enumeration would be to the detriment of the integrity of the election.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: That's excellent. Thank you.

Ms. Sahota, go ahead, please.

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Thank you.

I want to thank all the witnesses for being here today once again to help strengthen our democracy.

My first question is for either the Office of the Commissioner or for Elections Canada.

You are a party to this SITE task force that has been created. Even though it may not be your role to collect the information, I'm sure, at least at a high level, you are all briefed about the different threats and the nature of those threats that happen.

A report by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, "Foreign Interference Threats to Canada's Democratic Process", in 2021 said that although Canada's electoral system is strong, ongoing foreign interference threatens the integrity of democratic institutions and Canadians' trust in them.

It covers foreign interference and different techniques, which go from cybersecurity to elicitation, cultivation, coercion and illicit and corrupt financing. We have been made aware through different reports that when it comes to cybersecurity, countries like Russia, China and Iran are some of the top offenders. What countries other than those three have been involved in more of these covert operations that you have been informed about?

• (1140)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: You've named the countries that come to my mind. I'm sure you'll be hearing from the security agencies that follow us, but I don't have any additional information for the committee.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: No other countries have ever been mentioned, or you haven't been made aware of operations on the ground in any countries other than these three.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Off the top of my head, I don't recall. I want to be careful. It's difficult to remember whether or not the information you have is something that's sensitive. I would not want to put out there any information that I should not be sharing publicly, but quite frankly, there are no countries other than those that come to mind.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Perhaps we're saying that these are the publicly known threats. You may be informed of other countries' involvement, but you may not be able to share that information with us here today. Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Well, yes, and perhaps I should add that the source of a threat is something that is difficult to ascertain, whether that threat is misinformation or cyber-related. I'll let the cyber experts speak to that. It's something that during an event is not immediately apparent. You're seeing incorrect information. Whether it's misinformation or disinformation, whether it's foreign or domestic, it's just incorrect information, and we need to deal with it. The same is true, from our perspective, with cyber-attacks. We need to have walls. We need to have protections.

In terms of who's behind those cyber-attacks, this is, of course, of interest to Canada, but in terms of our role, the important thing is that we protect our infrastructure.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: It's not just cyber-attacks but other types of operations that could be influencing. If not other countries, could you state whether there are perhaps third parties or entities located in other countries that come to mind?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I'm not aware of any, Madam Chair.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Okay. My next question is about social media companies.

Many social media companies have signed the declaration on electoral integrity, which commits, among other things, to addressing disinformation. We know algorithmic transparency is an issue when it comes to these social media companies. A lot of those algorithms originate from the U.S. Many of these social media companies originate from there as well.

What impact do you think that has in terms of their being considered foreign influence on elections?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Again, this is a bit of a laced question.

[*Translation*]

We have to be careful: the fact that there are activities from outside Canada does not necessarily mean there has been interference. Under the Canada Elections Act, the concept of interference refers to very specific offences. So it is hard to untangle all the elements of your question.

I think Canadians would have more confidence in the electoral process if they were able to know what the social media platforms' policies are in relation to how misinformation, disinformation and illegal content are handled. At present, it is a black box. We have protocols in place for letting them know our concerns, but we do not get the transparency from them that we would hope for and that would assure us that actions are being taken to reduce the impact of misinformation or disinformation.

[*English*]

Ms. Ruby Sahota: I've run out of time, but I just want to thank you for all your hard work in making sure elections are run fairly and smoothly.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Given the short time I have, I will keep to very precise questions.

My first question is for the the commissioner.

Ms. Simard, you said that you work primarily on the basis of public complaints. You also said just now that there had been interference, but there had been no complaints during the last two parliaments.

So I am wondering: if there are no complaints, what type of monitoring to you do? I imagine you are going to do some fine-tuning, inspecting or more analyzing of what there is.

• (1145)

Ms. Caroline Simard: In answer to your question, I would say that the act gives me discretion. It is important to understand the parameters within which this discretion can be exercised and to know that this discretion has been exercised in the past. You will find that information in my predecessor's public reports.

That is what I can tell you at this time.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: You said that the presence of activities or entities from outside Canada's borders could significantly increase the complexity of an investigation.

We are here to help you. What might you need in order for your investigations to be less complex?

Ms. Caroline Simard: As I said, our mandate is set out in the act, we have tools now, and we are able to do work now.

What is important to understand is that our mandate is limited to those provisions and that framework, and we have to work in collaboration with partners. That is what we are doing now and will continue to do.

Since you seem to be offering us a hand by asking us what improvements might be made, I would say that a recommendation was made previously by my predecessor regarding the definitions and terms used in the act. The deputy commissioner could given you details on that.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Since I have only a few seconds left, I will invite you to tell us in writing what things you are lacking at present and what you might need, Commissioner.

Similarly, Mr. Perrault, we would really like to know what comes out of your exchange of ideas with Australia and your upcoming meetings with Brazil, among others, in order to include that information in our report.

The Chair: Thank you.

That is a good invitation, which I will also issue to all the witnesses. If anyone has additional information to provide to the committee, you need only send it to the clerk of the committee.

Ms. Blaney, the floor is yours for two and a half minutes.

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My last question for both of you is really on the pre-election period. We're hearing a lot more about the due diligence that needs to be done in the pre-election period. We can't ever overestimate how foreign influence will come through the process.

I'm just wondering if you could talk a little about what would be more beneficial around the pre-election period in terms of the services you provide and how they could assist us in building Canadians' trust in the systems we have here for our elections.

Thank you.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Madam Chair, if I may, it's important for us to increasingly talk about what we do to protect the integrity of our electoral process. This is something we certainly began in the last election. I think it was quite successful. We had a lot of information about postal ballots because of concerns with those.

It's also important to go beyond that and to explain to Canadians why they should trust elections. We have extraordinary safeguards in our procedures. They would know that it is a very transparent process, if only they knew more about it.

I think we have a responsibility to share that information with the Canadian population, of course, through the media and through MPs and candidates. That is certainly a way forward when we talk about work between elections, so that we seed the ground with healthy information about the voting process and not let the space be filled with conspiracy theories or inaccurate information.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Caroline Simard: My answer would be that it is important for Canadians to submit their complaints to us. For information, in the last general election, 13 situations involving foreign interference were brought to our attention in 16 complaints, while our total caseload came to 4,000. So it is important for Canadians to communicate with us.

In terms of the complexity of the investigations, you have to understand that it is all a matter of evidence. Because we operate on the basis of tangible facts, it is important that we be provided with those tangible facts.

[*English*]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: My time is wrapping up, but I will say again that it is by interacting with our systems that we build trust, so I think it is important for the pre-election component.

Thank you.

• (1150)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cooper, you have four minutes.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I will direct my question to whoever is in a position to answer.

The Canada Elections Act prohibits a third party from using foreign funds for regulated purposes, as you noted.

Let me just give you a hypothetical. A third party can spend \$1.5 million. They receive \$1.5 million from domestic sources and a U.S. entity donates \$1.5 million. If they spend \$1.5 million in an election, what happens?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: It's a hypothetical. We may not have a window on the historical assets of that third party. A third party is anybody in Canada who is not a registered party, the electoral district association or the candidate. Essentially, it's everybody.

We don't have visibility on the history of its assets. It does need to report, and that was an improvement brought in—

Mr. Michael Cooper: It needs to report monies that are spent for regulated purposes, right?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: That's right, but it—

Mr. Michael Cooper: Then what's the enforcement mechanism?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: If it reports that it has used that \$1.5 million—and very few of them reach that amount because, to be clear, the vast majority spend small amounts—it will have to report the source of the expenditure, of the funding for that money.

A significant portion could be its own funds, so we have no mechanism—

Mr. Michael Cooper: Those funds could be foreign funds.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: Those funds could be foreign funds. That's why I made recommendations that third parties—

Mr. Michael Cooper: That's even though the act says there's a prohibition on the use of foreign funds. You're saying that doesn't really mean much.

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I wouldn't go that far, but I'd say it's incomplete.

Until we have a grasp on the use of an entity's own funds, I think the act is incomplete and it needs to be addressed.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I want to ask another question.

I think, Madame Simard, you mentioned there was no significant difference between the number of issues giving rise to complaints containing allegations of foreign interference in the 43rd election and that in the 44th, but what were the numbers?

If there wasn't a significant increase, what were the numbers?

Ms. Caroline Simard: I'll ask the deputy commissioner to answer this question.

Thank you.

Mr. Marc Chénier: I believe for the 43rd general election there were 10 complaints involving some component that could be foreign interference. For the last general election there were 13 complaints. Again, those are allegations. In many cases they don't fall within the prohibited conduct in the act. It depends again on what the prohibited conduct is and what the allegation is. Often we cannot do anything with the complaint.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Mr. Cooper, I enjoy having you on this committee. You always give me time back, so I appreciate that.

Mr. Turnbull, you have four minutes.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Thanks, Madam Chair, and thanks to all the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Perrault, maybe I'll start with you. It's good to see you again.

In response to Ms. Blaney's comment about misinformation, I think you indicated that you're constantly monitoring it and that you're putting out messages to correct the misinformation that's out there. Obviously, this is a concern to all of us. The prevalence of misinformation and disinformation out there is quite troubling.

Would you like to comment on the impact of parties' attacking or undermining of our democratic institutions, such as Elections Canada? How do those things impact their ability—your ability—to be a trusted source of information?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: That's a very generic question, and I'll respond very generically. I welcome the support of all parties to reinforce the trust in the electoral process. It's a partnership we have with Canadians to make sure people trust the electoral process.

If parties have concerns about aspects of the electoral process, then of course there should be debate about that. There are avenues for that, but it's critical that we all work together to reinforce our democratic institutions.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Mr. Perrault, you said in your opening remarks that there was no foreign interference in the last two general elections, which is great to hear. How do you know that?

• (1155)

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: I said there were no breaches of our IT infrastructure. That I know for a fact. We have cyber-attacks every day, as does every institution. We have no mechanism for knowing whether they are foreign or domestic. I'm assuming that in large part they are foreign, but that we're not specifically targeted. We have had no breach, and we have had no interference with our operations.

That is not to say there is no foreign interest in Canadian elections and the political debates and the political outcomes, but these are areas that ultimately go beyond the reach of Elections Canada.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Okay. I guess if we're talking about pre-election periods in a minority Parliament, they're a bit more extended.

I'm interested in how the undermining of our democracy was attempted during the convoy we saw. We saw and heard media reports multiple times about how there was a significant amount of funding coming across the border to support that convoy, which had a stated intention of overthrowing the government and which was really trying to undermine policies that a democratically elected government had been elected to implement.

I'm wondering if you can make any comments on how we can protect against that? It's a form of foreign and domestic interference, I would say. It's foreign-sponsored domestic interference, and it's pre-election. What are we doing in that area?

Mr. Stéphane Perrault: This is an issue that's much broader than electoral administration. Certainly we monitor beyond the election period what I described with respect to the voting process, so if there was incorrect information on the voting process during the convoy or in any other circumstance, we would respond to that.

On the point you made about foreign funding, I read the papers, as we all do. I don't have any definitive knowledge about the source of the funding for the convoy, but certainly it was an illustration of how, should there be foreign funding of a group or an individual, we need to have measures to prevent foreign funding from seeping into the activities of third parties. I certainly hear agreement across the board.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Mr. Perrault.

The Chair: That's excellent. That brings to an end our time together for the first panel. We want to thank Madame Simard, Mr. Perrault, Mr. Caron and Mr. Chénier for joining us today.

If you have any additional information on the study that you would like to share with our committee, please share it with the clerk, and we'll make sure it is shared with all members.

With that, I thank you for the tremendous work you do and I wish you a good day.

• (1155) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: We will now resume the meeting.

[*English*]

We have with us for the second panel, Michelle Tessier, deputy director of operations with the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, also known as CSIS. We also have Madam Alia Tayyeb, deputy chief of signals intelligence with the Communications Security Establishment, also known as CSE.

We will be starting with four minutes of opening comments from Madam Tessier, then we will continue with Madam Tayyeb.

Welcome to PROC.

Madam Tessier, the floor is yours.

Ms. Michelle Tessier (Deputy Director, Operations, Canadian Security Intelligence Service): Thank you very much.

Madam Chair, members of the committee, good afternoon.

As was mentioned, my name is Michelle Tessier, and I am the deputy director of operations for the Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

[Translation]

Thank you for the invitation to appear before you today to talk about this important subject, foreign interference threats to our elections.

[English]

I would like to begin by defining what foreign interference is and what it is not. Foreign interference is not the normal diplomatic and public relations activity that is carried out by foreign states to influence policy outcomes. Those activities, when they take place overtly, are acceptable activities in Canada, even when conducted vigorously. They are not foreign interference.

[Translation]

Foreign interference activities are different. These are activities that cross a line. They attempt to undermine our democratic processes or threaten our citizens.

[English]

In the CSIS Act, Parliament defined foreign influenced activities, which is another term for foreign interference, as “activities within or relating to Canada that are detrimental to the interests of Canada and are clandestine or deceptive or involve a threat to any person”.

To be clear, foreign interference is a covert and malign activity undertaken by a foreign state to advance its national interests to the detriment of Canada's interests. It often targets Canadians, as well as our democratic institutions and processes. These activities take aim at Canada's economy, policy process, communities and media.

Today we are discussing how foreign interference impacts our democracy. It targets all levels of government, be it federal, provincial or municipal, as well as political parties, candidates, elected officials and their staff and elections themselves. States may seek to influence who becomes an official candidate and even electoral outcomes.

Indeed, individuals may be threatened or made to fear reprisals if they fail to comply with publicly supporting a particular candidate or contributing funds to a foreign state's preferred party or candidate. While state actors may use coercive techniques to achieve their objectives, they may also use flattery, promise compensation or appeal to an individual's sense of pride towards another country to elicit the desired behaviour.

We are also increasingly seeing states leverage media, including more traditional and community-based media in addition to social

media, to spread disinformation or run influence campaigns designed to confuse or divide public opinion or interfere in healthy public debate and political discourse.

As a member of the security and intelligence threats to the elections task force, known as SITE, CSIS worked closely with partners in efforts to raise awareness and assess foreign interference threats against the 2019 and 2021 federal elections. This included providing classified intelligence briefings on foreign interference to cleared political party members.

In both 2019 and 2021, the panel of senior civil servants responsible for the critical election incident public protocol determined that the Government of Canada did not detect foreign interference that threatened Canada's ability to have a free and fair election and that warranted public communication.

Last year, ahead of the 2021 federal election, CSIS released a public report entitled “Foreign Interference Threats to Canada's Democratic Process” to better inform Canadians of this serious threat. As this report shows, foreign states target our democratic process to covertly influence Canadian public policy and public opinion and ultimately undermine our democracy, but there are ways to help protect against this threat. Our report communicated some strategies Canadians can take to identify and resist foreign interference.

Both the RCMP and CSIS have phone numbers and online reporting mechanisms that are monitored 24-7 for anyone who would like to report a threat to national security, including foreign interference.

● (1205)

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Tessier. Four minutes fly by.

Madam Tayyeb, we'll go over to you.

Ms. Alia Tayyeb (Deputy Chief of Signals Intelligence (SIG-INT), Communications Security Establishment): Thank you, Madam Chair and members of the committee, for this invitation to appear today.

My name is Alia Tayyeb. My pronouns are she and her. I'm the deputy chief of signals intelligence for the Communications Security Establishment. CSE is Canada's national cybersecurity and foreign intelligence agency.

[Translation]

I am pleased to be here today with my colleague Michelle Tessier from CSIS.

Today, I will provide you with an update from CSE's perspective on the threat of foreign interference to our electoral system.

[English]

I'll begin by outlining some of the key trends we have observed. To complement Michelle's remarks, I'll focus on what we see from a cyber perspective.

On Friday we published our "National Cyber Threat Assessment", more commonly known as the NCTA. The NCTA highlights that online foreign influence activities have become the new normal, with adversaries seeking to influence elections and impact international discourse related to current events.

We assess that misinformation, disinformation and mal-information, or MDM, propagated by state-sponsored cyber-threat actors represents an ongoing, persistent threat to Canadians. Adversary states constantly circulate and amplify MDM that supports their interests. Further, we've seen that state-sponsored cyber-threat activity is impacting Canadians by targeting both individuals and Canada's economy at large. Individuals are targeted, including diaspora populations and activists in Canada. They may also target Canadians' personal information. Another method state-sponsored actors utilize is targeting Canada's economic value. This may be done through intellectual property theft and foreign intelligence operations.

● (1210)

[Translation]

Canada's active participation in the international community and membership in key organizations such as NATO and the G7 almost certainly make Canadians a target for online foreign influence campaigns.

Between 2015 and 2020, the vast majority of cyber threat activity affecting democratic processes could be attributed to state-sponsored cyber threat actors. Russia, China, and Iran were very likely responsible for most of the foreign state-sponsored cyber threat activity against democratic processes worldwide.

[English]

In terms of what we're doing to prevent and defend against these threats, we collect foreign intelligence on the activities of foreign states, including any foreign interference activities directed at Canada's democratic institutions or processes.

We provide cybersecurity and information assurance, including providing advice and defences against malicious state actors who may seek to use cyber as a tool for foreign interference. For example, since the Russian invasion of Ukraine began, we have observed numerous Russian-backed disinformation campaigns online, including those designed to discredit and spread disinformation about NATO allies and false narratives about Canada's involvement in the conflict. We shared this information on Twitter as part of the Government of Canada's efforts to help inform Canadians.

In addition, we can conduct active and defensive cyber-operations to disrupt hostile activities from foreign states, which could include disrupting foreign interference activities. We also provide

technical and operational assistance to CSIS and the RCMP as they seek to identify, prevent and disrupt foreign interference.

[Translation]

CSE and the Cyber Centre that it heads have also worked directly with Elections Canada for several years providing cyber security advice and guidance. This partnership continues today, and we continue to support their efforts to ensure secure elections.

[English]

I know that later this week you will be hearing from the security and intelligence threats to elections task force, or SITE for short, so I'll only briefly outline CSE's role in SITE.

In the lead-up to and during the 2021 federal election, CSE, CSIS, Global Affairs Canada and the RCMP worked together closely as part of the SITE task force to monitor for foreign threats and interference with electoral processes in Canada.

[Translation]

Outside of the context of an election, our intelligence work continues and provides insights to partners with respect to foreign interference, and our cyber security work continues to prevent and defend against cyber intrusions that could enable foreign interference.

[English]

Members, I can assure—

[Translation]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Tayyeb.

[English]

Time flies, I know, but we look forward to hearing more from you during the question-and-answer period.

Mr. Calkins, welcome. You have six minutes.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to our witnesses. I really appreciate your testimony. It begs more questions than I have time for, so I'll get straight to it.

The Communist Party of China passed its national intelligence law in 2017, which requires Chinese organizations and citizens anywhere in the world to assist with the Communist Party's state intelligence work. Would you agree with that?

Ms. Michelle Tessier: Yes, we absolutely do agree with that.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: In September, an article in The Globe and Mail exposed an extensive network of Chinese police stations operating not only in Canada but also in other democratic nations around the world. We also know that the Government of Canada had to limit the Chinese Communist Party's use of Operation Fox-Hunt in 2015, due to fears that it was used to intimidate dissidents in Canada.

My question to you is this: What ongoing measures are your organizations taking to monitor this threat?

I don't know if you followed the line of questioning I had with the previous guests, but 17 million Canadians cast ballots in the last election. The difference between a majority Liberal government and a minority Liberal government in the 13 closest ridings was a mere 20,000-some votes. I'm going to ask you this, even though it might not be directly related to your mandate: Can foreign state actors, which I think pose a different threat from third-party funding coming from other countries, move the needle 20,000 to 30,000 votes during a federal election campaign?

Ms. Michelle Tessier: Perhaps, Madam Chair, I can begin, and I'll certainly turn to my colleague, Alia, as well, for any comments she may have.

If I address the initial question about the overseas police stations, as I'm sure you can appreciate, I can't go into the operational details of the service's work, but I can say that we are using all the authorities we have to look at any potential threat to our communities. It is very important for us to ensure that our communities in Canada feel protected and are not the victims of any threat action towards them or any foreign actor trying to threaten them or their families back home, which we know is of concern. Obviously, this remains a priority for us.

In terms of foreign state actors influencing any elections, I'm not at liberty to say whether or not certain numbers could be influenced that way. I can say, as we have said in our public reports and other venues, that we are very concerned about foreign influence activities against our democratic institutions and against our elections, and we see these activities increasing. We are working with our stakeholders and other Government of Canada partners to increase awareness of this threat.

• (1215)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: In 2019 it was discovered that a spy from the communist Chinese government was recruited to run the constituency of an Australian parliamentarian. Despite our geographic distance from China, there are worries that China interferes with our politics here domestically, of course. I'll use the examples of former ambassador John McCallum's intervention on behalf of Meng Wanzhou, as well as China's praising Canadian senators who voted against the Uighur genocide motion.

Are there current parliamentarians or senators, volunteers in various campaigns or staff members working for members of Parliament or senators whom Parliament should be made aware of, who could potentially be compromised? If there are any, how would you communicate that, and who would get to know that?

Ms. Michelle Tessier: As I mentioned in my opening comments, we are very concerned about the targeting. We know there is certainly a desire to target elected officials at all levels of government, municipal, provincial and federal. We work to provide defensive briefings, and we certainly encourage individuals who have concerns or questions to reach out to us. We engage quite a bit in stakeholder awareness and in defensive briefings when these types of concerns are raised.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: In order to mitigate....

I'm sorry, Ms. Tayyeb. Do you have something you want to add to that?

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: I just thought I would echo what Michelle was saying in that regard. We work very closely, and we did, as part of the SITE task force as well in the lead-up to the election, the four agencies together, ensure that we were providing regular briefings to political parties. We also work very closely with the House of Commons to ensure that any and all information we should be sharing with them in the way of threat information about foreign interference is shared.

Thank you.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Given the nature of your comments about the tools you have available to you, Ms. Tessier, in regard to the increased level of foreign state interference, are there any new tools or any other authorities you think you would need, either of you, in order to continue to protect Canada's democratic institutions?

Ms. Michelle Tessier: We have highlighted in the past that we feel that the CSIS Act was written at a time, 1984, that has likely not kept up with the modern, complex threat landscape and technological advances, so we are constantly looking at our authorities and at the tools we require.

One example I would give is our ability to use and assess data. We are in a world of increased data. Although changes were made to the CSIS Act to enable us to look at data and manage datasets, we still feel that, again, with evolving technology and our authorities, there is probably discussion to be had in terms of CSIS's ability to assess data. Another example—

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sorry. I know our time flies by so quickly. You can always provide us this information, especially when it comes to input that we should be aware of to help you do the important work you do.

Mr. Turnbull, you have six minutes.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thanks, Madam Chair.

Thanks to both our witnesses for being with us today. I found your opening remarks really helpful.

Ms. Tessier, I'll start with you. In your opening remarks, you said that CSIS did not detect foreign interference that needed to be disclosed. Just going back to the critical election incident public protocol, it sounds like that wasn't used.

I wonder if you could speak to the fact that there can be a potential threat that did not meet the threshold under that protocol. Can you explain that a bit more for the committee?

• (1220)

Ms. Michelle Tessier: Certainly. As we've mentioned—and I believe there will be members of the SITE task force appearing later this week—we, as well as other government partners such as CSE, Global Affairs Canada and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, participate in SITE. It is really a combination of all our intelligence that is used to inform the critical panel if there is any type of foreign interference we feel could potentially affect the integrity of the overall election. In this case, there was not, but that is the work we do on a constant basis. The SITE group briefs the panel on a regular basis in terms of the incidents we see during an electoral period.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you for that clarification.

We can probably infer that there are potential threats in our electoral process. It's just that they're not going to impact or make a material difference on the election integrity. Is that correct?

Ms. Michelle Tessier: That's correct. As we've mentioned, we see activity of foreign interference or attempts at foreign interference in terms of trying to influence, but not enough to have met the threshold of impacting the overall electoral integrity.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you. I'll go to Ms. Tayyeb now.

Many social companies have signed what's called the declaration on electoral integrity, which, among other things, commits them to address MDM, as you call it.

We know that algorithmic transparency is an issue; it's been talked about quite often. The algorithms they use predominantly originate, as far as I understand it, from U.S., i.e. foreign-based, companies. What impact do you think this has, Ms. Tayyeb, in terms of being considered foreign influence on an election?

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: We work very closely with social media companies all around the world. We did so in a collaborative fashion as part of the SITE task force as well.

In terms of addressing your question about the U.S. origin of those algorithms, we definitely work with U.S. companies. As well, we will advise them of any information or any interference we suspect to have taken place. We have a very collaborative relationship with them. They've been very open to addressing those concerns. As you pointed out, they have very robust policies in and around proper use of those platforms, and we've found them very responsive to that.

Maybe I'll just clarify. When we here at CSE are looking at foreign interference and foreign influence activities, we're mostly looking at state actor activities. It's not to say that a foreign organization couldn't also be engaged in such activities. In the case of the U.S., we've found very strong partnerships with those companies, and we've been able to work with them in a collaborative fashion.

Thank you.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: One recent concern that stands out in my mind is Canada Proud tweeting @ElonMusk, hours after he became the owner of Twitter, to ask about Bill C-11, which we know was the subject of significant disinformation in the last election.

What role do social media companies have in being responsible actors during and leading up to elections?

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I'm sorry. Yes, I was directing that to you, Ms. Tayyeb.

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: I'll leave some room for Michelle to answer, in case she has anything else to add.

We think they play a very strong role in this domain. As practitioners in the security and intelligence community, it's important for us not to be seen to be interfering at all in what is healthy discourse, even when we don't like it. We definitely see activities that are not foreign state directed as being well within the purview of responsible industry to take care of. Certainly, our role in that is to advise them and provide them the information they need in order to protect themselves and to protect their audiences, but we absolutely believe that they are well placed to address those threats.

Thank you.

• (1225)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thanks.

Ms. Tessier, would you like to add anything?

Ms. Michelle Tessier: No, I find Alia answered quite well.

I would just reiterate that we work in a democracy. Managing social media, knowing that it is very much a tool used by foreign actors, is, of course, of concern, and we encourage awareness and liaison with these platforms so that they recognize foreign interference and are able to act on it.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Would you say, Ms. Tayyeb, that the majority of the MDM that's out there is propagated through social media?

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: I would say that it certainly is a very large vector we have in society these days. It's not exclusive to social media, but certainly, since the very robust propagation of social media throughout our society, we've seen an increase in those types of activities.

The Chair: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, the floor is yours for six minutes.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for being here. I am learning a lot from this testimony.

You know that just before you, we heard from the commissioner of Canada elections, the deputy commissioner, and the chief electoral officer. I asked them a question that I would like to ask you now, and I will have more after that. This is about the present legislative situation.

The monitoring you do is crucial. It is not only preventive, but also remedial; we don't want to have to get to that point, but, things being what they are, it is a possibility.

Are the laws in our country inadequate to regulate Internet service providers and online platforms? That is a subject we have been discussing for several years. There have been talks and consultations on this subject among the Group of Five, but we have not yet heard anything about any common legislative action being taken by the members of the Group of Five or the G7, for example.

What should we do to establish the priorities among our efforts in this regard, so that you could do your job better?

I would like to hear comments from both witnesses in turn.

Ms. Michelle Tessier: We are constantly reviewing the powers and tools we have. As I said earlier, the technology is evolving, as are the laws and the complexity of the environment. We are in constant discussions with other departments or agencies of the Government of Canada and with our allies to understand what might be useful for this country.

Obviously, we respect the fact that decisions relating to legislation and changes to policies belong to the political sphere. We simply send our recommendations or opinions. That said, we are always on the lookout for anything that could be useful for us here in Canada, based on experiences that other countries may have had.

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: For my part, I am going to answer your question in English, in order to be more precise.

[English]

I agree with what Michelle said. Our authorities are in a constant state of evolution. We have very robust engagement with partners across government in order to make sure they have the information we collect with respect to foreign threats to Canadian electoral processes but also in terms of manipulation of societal dialogue.

That said, regulation in that vein is not the purview of CSE. We'd be happy to provide advice to our government colleagues, but we ourselves don't have a part in the regulation of telecommunications or social media.

Thank you.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: You have given me some reassurance, nonetheless, when it comes to election interference. Certainly it is concerning to hear about malicious acts, clandestine activities, or even flattery.

Does what we see today in terms of cyber security and cyber threats give you cause for concern for the coming decades, if we look at it from a global perspective?

• (1230)

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: If I may, I will answer that question first.

[English]

From a CSE perspective, certainly we see that our adversaries are very well resourced. They're dedicated to their strategic interests. We have a lot of work to do to ensure that we can catch up and that we can continue to both identify and counter the threats they pose.

That said, we have a very robust set of authorities, at least at CSE, as they relate to a foreign intelligence mandate, our cybersecurity mandate, and furthermore, more recently, in 2019, we were given the authority to conduct both defensive and active cyber operations, which I think added significantly to the toolset Canada has in order to defend against these threats.

We also have very robust partnerships with our Canadian colleagues in the security and intelligence community and across government, in addition to robust partnerships with our Five Eyes and additional colleagues across the world.

I think we're well positioned to defend against these threats, but we need to make sure we are constantly evolving to match the threat. As you know, the cyber domain is increasing exponentially, and it is incumbent on us to ensure that we are constantly reviewing our authorities and our tactics in order to make sure we can continue to defend Canadians.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: In short, the answer is neither yes nor no; the important thing is to adapt to what is coming.

Ms. Tessier, can you tell us quickly what your thoughts are?

Ms. Michelle Tessier: I would add that a lot of information continues to circulate on the Internet. People have to protect themselves and be suspicious of the emails they receive. People have to stay up to date on threats and pay attention to the information they publish on the Internet themselves, to avoid making themselves vulnerable. It is always a question of education, because the actors use very sophisticated techniques that are constantly evolving.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Blaney, the floor is yours for six minutes.

[English]

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Of course, I thank the folks who are here testifying. I really appreciate the work you do. I'm learning a lot today.

As we're having this discussion, I can't help but reflect on how important it is that voters and institutions be protected from any threat to democracy, and how important it is to continue that work. I thank you for being part of it.

I will come to Ms. Tayyeb first and go to Ms. Tessier if she has anything to add.

In a July 2021 update on threats to democracy, the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security wrote that between 2015 and 2020, cyber-threat activity was directed at voters more often than at political parties in elections. Based on that information, how do you think an everyday Canadian should understand this? We're hearing that these threats are becoming more and more sophisticated. What sorts of actions should voters take to ensure that they are viewing correct information about democracy in Canada?

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: It's an excellent question, and it's really core to how we see this threat, which is to really do our utmost to ensure that Canadians are aware of the threat, that they're aware of the tactics that are used, and that they know what to expect when they are viewing material online. That is, in large measure, why we've published cyber-threats to democratic institutions in previous years. The 2021 one was, I believe, our third.

Our first line of defence is to ensure that Canadians have as much information as possible about the tactics that are used and the adversaries that we name, specific adversaries we see as most prolific in this space. We outline the tactics they use, including spreading disinformation about the political process, sowing divisive seeds in our social media and casting aspersions on the democratic process as a whole.

We feel it's important that Canadians receive as much information about that as possible. We regularly reach out to Canadians, through either media releases or Twitter, in order to emphasize those messages as much as possible.

Thank you very much.

• (1235)

Ms. Rachel Blaney: I appreciate that, but I also represent in my riding a lot of rural and remote communities that often have limited access to services. I'm just curious if there are any particular strategies or recommendations that you're providing for different community groups—rural communities, remote communities that have limited access to connectivity—or looking at different groups across our country that are more marginalized. I'm just wondering if there are specific strategies or recommendations around that, especially in terms of promoting democracy. We know that sometimes these groups are the groups that don't participate in democracy as often or as fulsomely. I'm just curious about that process.

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: It's an excellent question. It's one that we talk a lot about at CSE and the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security: how to reach more Canadians, how to increase the reach of our media campaigns and how to ensure we're reaching communities across Canada, including remote and northern communities. We are developing ways to do that in a better way, but we realize there is a lot of work to do in that regard.

Thank you.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: My next question is that, of course, when we look at this process, there has to be a balance between what we expect voters to do to inform themselves and understand and how government should ensure that accurate information is available to the public. How do you envision this task being balanced between the two?

Ms. Michelle Tessier: Perhaps I can start, and Alia can answer after that.

A lot of it is awareness and communicating to Canadians, to various communities, that, if there's any concern, if they see any information that they feel is questionable, and certainly if they feel threatened, our RCMP colleagues and other law enforcement partners are certainly available to address any potential threats.

It's really very much an awareness issue, so that Canadians know that they can address any questions or concerns to us, to the RCMP or to Elections Canada. We can answer questions and create awareness, so people feel they have the information they need and are well informed when it comes to the elections and their ability to vote.

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: Thank you.

I don't want to speak on behalf of Elections Canada, but I worked with them during the election campaign and I'm aware that this is something they are also seized with by improving their outreach to communities about the importance of participating in the democratic process. They may be able to offer more information on that as well.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you. I have only a couple of seconds, so I will cede those.

The Chair: Thank you always, Ms. Blaney.

Next we will go to Mr. Cooper and then Ms. O'Connell.

Mr. Cooper, you have five minutes.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the officials. I will direct my questions to whichever official is best positioned to answer them.

The first question I'll ask is this: Did the Chinese communist regime interfere in the last federal election?

Ms. Michelle Tessier: As I mentioned, I can't get into—as I'm sure you can appreciate—operational details of our investigations. What I will say is that we know that the Chinese Communist Party is involved and interested in promoting its own national interests. It is an actor in foreign interference. We have said that publicly. I can state again that we are concerned about the activities regarding threats against the security of Canada, including foreign interference by the Chinese Communist Party.

Mr. Michael Cooper: I understand that you can't get into operational details, but could you speak perhaps a little more broadly about some of the activities the Chinese communist regime is involved in in terms of interference?

Ms. Michelle Tessier: Yes. As I mentioned earlier, we know that China, among other countries, tries to target elected officials at all levels of government to promote its own national interests and to encourage individuals to speak or act, if you will, as proxies on behalf of the Communist Party of China.

There is even open information that talks about these types of activities and their use of proxy agents in other countries who they will use to represent their interests. That remains of concern to us in terms of its influence activities and how it tries to manipulate some individuals to work in their interests against Canada's national interests.

• (1240)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Would it be fair to say that it's threatening and intimidating individuals on Canadian soil?

Ms. Michelle Tessier: It's fair to say that it would use a number of techniques, including threats to communities here, including using proxy agents so that you don't necessarily know it's the Government of China behind it, and including attempts to use community resources. It's fair to say that there are a number of techniques it would use to promote its own national interests against Canada's.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Would it be fair to say that this is occurring on a fairly widespread basis?

Ms. Michelle Tessier: I hesitate to give a frequency. Again, I would say we are increasingly concerned. We have seen, as was mentioned earlier, the laws the Chinese Communist Party has passed, making it obligatory for everybody in China, including the private sector, to work on behalf of the government.

We are seeing increasing authoritarianism, if I can allow myself to say that word, in terms of the Communist Party of China's strategies in this regard.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Can you speak to the use of Chinese language media by the regime?

Ms. Michelle Tessier: We are concerned about the use of media by many of the hostile state actors, including China. We know there are attempts. We've talked about disinformation and misinformation attempts using all types of media. The media are very much a victim or a tool that is used for foreign interference.

Mr. Michael Cooper: [*Inaudible—Editor*] content farms?

Ms. Michelle Tessier: I'm sorry. I didn't hear the question.

Mr. Michael Cooper: What about content farms, content mills and information saturation?

Ms. Michelle Tessier: I would say all available vectors in media would be able to be exploited by hostile state actors, so all types of media are certainly vulnerable to exploitation.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. O'Connell, you have five minutes.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

I want to follow up on that line of questioning in terms of using media outlets. I believe, Ms. Tessier, you mentioned earlier that foreign state actors often use local media to spread disinformation or misinformation. You said just now, in that exchange—I'm paraphrasing here, of course—that all types of media could and would be used.

For CSIS, or CSE or any Canadian agency, for example, if a so-called media group like Canada Proud or Rebel News started using Chinese or Russian types of disinformation in their local disinforma-

tion or misinformation campaigns, what mechanisms would you have to then tell Canadians that this local source of information is being used by foreign state actors like China or Russia?

Ms. Michelle Tessier: I want to highlight what we said earlier, that we respect.... Obviously, we are in a democracy. We respect the media, and we do not want to be seen as interfering in the media. I want to underline that. That is certainly not an activity the service would undertake.

Without being able to get into great detail, we would look from an investigative perspective to try to determine what the nature of the threat was. Of course, we'd use the whole gamut of tools at our disposal.

I go back to the importance of working with the community and how important it is for us to work with stakeholders in the community to protect the community. That's why it is important for community members to be able to reach out to us should they feel that this type of activity is going on. It is certainly not the service that will be monitoring all media.

I want to be careful here. We recognize the right in a democracy to have the freedom of expression that exists, but we are concerned when our mandate is called into question. That is when hostile states working in a clandestine fashion are working against Canadian national interests or threatening the community. Our mandate is quite defined in that respect. I would want to reassure the committee that it is where our focus would be.

• (1245)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Thank you.

Following up on that, isn't that part of foreign state actors' attempts to undermine democracy in places like Canada, and, I'm sure, in other countries as well? It's to undermine democracy, our pillars of democracy and our trust in institutions. Foreign interference and the messages they send are not necessarily, "We like this person or that person or this party"; it's to sow doubt in our institutions. For example—I don't know—the Governor of the Bank of Canada, the local media that asked tough questions of certain parties.... Isn't it a factor that it's not very clear-cut support of this government over that government, but foreign interference is to sow doubt in our democratic institutions? That could take form in many different messages.

Ms. Michelle Tessier: You are absolutely correct. That is very much one of the vectors used to, as an example, try to find a divisive issue in society and amplify it one way or the other.

I'm pleased to say that the increased awareness and discussion about foreign interference highlights how society is becoming much more attuned to the threat it represents.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Did you see COVID as an opportunity? You mentioned taking a divisive issue and turning that against governments. For example, Canada Proud was criticized for spreading misinformation about vaccine rollouts. Did you see an increase in disinformation or sowing doubt in Canadian society? Did you see that vacuum open or increase during COVID?

Ms. Michelle Tessier: Again, focusing on our mandate, if I look back to the threats to the security of Canada, what we saw, certainly during COVID, was interest by hostile state actors to try to spread disinformation. We saw that from hostile state actors. We also saw attempts to conduct espionage against some of the vaccine work that was being done, so we undertook—

The Chair: Thank you. I'm sorry; that flew by really fast, but the clerk is always so efficient, so I know it was five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Gaudreau, the floor is yours for two and a half minutes.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My question is very simple and it is for Ms. Tessier.

You talked about the importance of education and raising awareness. For the purposes of the report we will be writing, I would like to hear your comments and suggestions as to how we could go about doing this. You have given me some reassurance, nonetheless, by explaining all the upstream work you are doing.

Ms. Michelle Tessier: In our public report, we describe a number of techniques used by states that are hostile to Canadian interests. They include what we call cultivation. That is when individuals cultivate relationships by offering gifts, paid travel or that kind of thing.

Our report also talks about cyber security. For example, it explains how to protect yourself online and describes the kind of emails that you should be suspicious of.

We also offer advice to individuals, for example, in cases where they feel they are being asked a lot of questions about a number of subjects and as a result they wonder whether they are giving too much information.

Our report provides advice based on the techniques used.

● (1250)

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: What I see is that there needs to be some alignment with the other commissioners who deal with issues relating to gifts, requests, or the ways in which certain people try to achieve their ends. I get the feeling that we need awareness and prevention programs. We have them at the House of Commons, for example to combat harassment. In addition to elected representatives and their staff, I get the feeling that there should be awareness programs for the general public in the near future.

Ms. Tayyeb, do you have a comment to add quickly?

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: I would like to add to what Ms. Tessier said. When it comes to cyber security, we publish a lot of advice, for various people, about how to protect themselves. I can list a few of them.

[*English*]

We counsel people about using difficult-to-guess passwords specifically. Michelle mentioned caution about—

The Chair: Thank you. I was trying to help you get one out. You can send the rest to us in writing to the clerk.

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: I will do that.

The Chair: I'm sure Madame Gaudreau and the committee would love to hear that.

Ms. Blaney, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

I'm going to leave this question open to both of you. I'll just let you decide who answers.

I'm seeing an increase of misinformation on social media, and it just continues to grow and grow. There's no longer that debate about different opinions or perspectives; it's more about debating the facts of reality, which I find really scary and concerning. We know there are reporting structures on social media sites. Twitter and Facebook, of course, are at the front line of complaints around this right now.

Can companies that profit from engagement effectively stop the spread of disinformation? How do we make sure, in this country, that misinformation isn't being impacted by foreign interference, especially in terms of our elections?

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: Maybe I could start and then pass it to Michelle.

It's an excellent question. We have discussed that with members of the social media companies. There are many of them with whom we have very robust relationships. It's in their business interest as well for their platforms not to be used for nefarious purposes. For the most part, we have found excellent collaboration among our industry partners.

There are certainly other online platforms that are maybe hosted in other countries, and we don't have a relationship with those. Those are the ones, at least from a foreign perspective insofar as they are in other countries, that we are actively looking at to determine whether foreign governments are using them in order to disseminate such information to Canada. We then advise government about those threats so that we can determine, particularly in a case of election interference, which organization might be best placed to address that.

Also, at CSE, we are able to use active cyber-operations. If ever we were to find reasonable grounds to believe that a foreign government was using platforms to target Canadians, there would be ways we could disrupt those activities.

I don't know if Michelle...?

Ms. Michelle Tessier: You answered it well, Alia. It is certainly a key topic during SITE discussions, that type of activity we see during an electoral period, and as Alia pointed out, who is best placed to address it to the best of our ability.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

We'll just do a quick one of up to two minutes for Mr. Cooper, followed by Ms. Sahota.

Go ahead, Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

In the CSIS report entitled, "Foreign Interference Threats to Canada's Democratic Process", it's noted that some donors to political candidates may have connections to foreign states and may be coerced into making donations. It says, "Political parties and candidates may also receive funds...seemingly from a Canadian, though this may have originated from a foreign threat actor", and, "Threat actors can use someone as a proxy to conduct illicit financing activities on their behalf."

Can you elaborate on this? This is quite alarming. Do you have a sense of how much foreign money is being funnelled in this way?

• (1255)

Ms. Michelle Tessier: Obviously I can't go into specifics about some of our investigations, but we know that this is of concern and that it is a possibility. We put it in our public report to bring awareness to this potential threat and to how some hostile state actors are seeking to use funding. I can't go into the details of what we have done operationally, but I can say that it was of significant enough concern for us to put it in our public report to raise awareness.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Do you have any recommendations on how to combat this threat?

Ms. Michelle Tessier: Certainly we would look at all the tools at our investigative disposal in terms of knowing, if we come across this type of activity, how we would address it, working with other stakeholders, creating awareness and raising it, perhaps, directly with an individual who may be unwitting to this type of information or this source of funding.

It really is looking at all the tools at our disposal to ensure that people are aware this is occurring, and working, as an example, with the Office of the Commissioner of Elections, should this meet its mandate as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Sahota, you have two minutes.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: Thank you, Madam Chair. My question is for Ms. Tayyeb.

Would you agree that many of Canada's policing agencies and intelligence agencies have traditionally had a blind spot for right-wing extremism? That has now been revealed through what has occurred on Capitol Hill and even with the commission we're seeing for the convoy, whether they are foreign actors or sometimes a mix of foreign and domestic, which becomes quite confusing.

I know some of the threats in Canada's terrorism reports have been revised over the years to include some of these threats more recently, but traditionally they weren't necessarily investigated to the extent that we are trying to catch up to today.

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: I can speak on behalf of CSE. Certainly, any ideologically motivated violent extremism that originates from foreign sources and is directed towards Canada would be something we would look at. We have been active in that space for a very long time.

With respect to the first part of your question, I wouldn't be in a position to comment on police forces or security agencies. I know we all take threats to Canadians very seriously. That's been my experience in the community.

Ms. Ruby Sahota: In terms of what distinguishes foreign interference from legitimate international diplomacy, could you maybe distinguish the characteristics of the two? From some of the stuff we've heard today, perhaps there's a lot of overlap that sometimes is used domestically here on the ground by different countries.

Ms. Alia Tayyeb: Indeed, I can start off with that, and I'll pass it over to Michelle as well. From our perspective, there are many legitimate diplomatic activities that are undertaken by nation states with respect to Canada. When we qualify it as interference or influence is when that activity is covert and deceptive in nature. The activities trying to be undertaken are to influence Canadian decision-makers in a way that is contrary to Canadian national interests, and—

The Chair: Thank you.

I appreciate the information. Because I've had to interrupt so many times, if you can take the time to provide us some of the information that was requested via the clerk, I believe members would really benefit from it for the purpose of this study.

I also want to appreciate the way both of you have worked together in providing answers. I think it's the first visual I've had as to how well our partners can work together.

I want to thank both of you for taking the time to be with us today. I look forward to seeing more from you, through the clerk, that will be shared with all members. With that, I wish the two of you a good day.

For PROC committee members, today the recommendations for the precinct study are due by five o'clock to the clerk. Thursday we will resume with witnesses on this study. On Friday by noon, we are asking for hybrid study recommendations to the clerk in both official languages.

• (1300)

Then we will be headed into a constituency week. I think there is some desire to see a subcommittee meet for the first time, which is probably what we'll try to do on the Thursday when we return from the constituency week. Then we'll make our plan accordingly.

Go ahead, Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Is it Thursday or Tuesday when we return?

The Chair: It's Tuesday, November 14. I'm sorry. I get so excited.

Through the constituency week, please stay tuned, as reports will be coming to you. We will make sure teams have about a week with

the report prior to our getting it to drafting at this committee, so everyone has time to read it. There's lots of information.

Happy Tuesday. Have a good day.

This meeting is adjourned.

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