



# SITUATION REPORT

Technical briefing on the state of the information ecosystem, July 2024 • [www.cdmrn.ca](http://www.cdmrn.ca)

## Introduction

Welcome to the third edition of the **Canadian Information Ecosystem Situation Reports!** Each month, we report on the state of the information ecosystem in the previous month as it relates to politics, media, and the broader state of democracy. Our goal is to enhance collective understanding of the stable and dynamic dimensions of the Canadian information ecosystem (CIE), articulate its vulnerabilities, and characterize current and emerging information threats. Our method combines digital trace data (social media analysis of Canadian individuals and organizations that are politically influential across TikTok, X/Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and Telegram), opinion tracking (a monthly survey of the Canadian population), and media monitoring.

## Key findings:

- E Canadians care equally about US news and politics** — July gave Canadians a lot to talk about in regards to American politics, and they are paying attention. We find that only 8% care more about the outcome of the next Canadian federal election (82%) than the upcoming US election (74%). Interest in Canadian news (24%) is within the margin of error of US news (22%), with most being equally interested in both (55%). Taken together, this means more than three quarters of Canadians are as interested in American news as they are to Canadian news.
- E More than one third of Canadians believe that the United States covertly influences Canadian politics** — We evaluated perceived covert foreign influence for a broader range of countries in July. We find that Canadians are more concerned about foreign influence from the USA than India (39% versus 32%). We continue to find that the majority of Canadians believe China and Russia (63% and 52%) are also covertly attempting to influence politics and elections in Canada.
- E Significant increase of attention paid to news and politics** — Canadians paid more attention to news this month on topics ranging from the wildfires in Canada to political events in the US (attempted Trump assassination to Biden dropping out of the presidential race). The percentage of Canadians for both national and international news consumption is up (+5% for National, and +6% for International). We also saw a drop (-5%) in Canadians avoiding the news (34% to 29%).
- E One third of Canadians report using print for news weekly** — We assessed the extent the Canadian population report using digital (smart phones, tablets, laptops, etc) versus legacy (radio, tv, print) mediums for news consumption. On a weekly basis, we found three quarters of Canadians use digital means to consume news, while almost half of Canadians also use legacy means (radio and TV) and, despite the shift to digital, we see a strong appetite for paper — one third report using print as well.

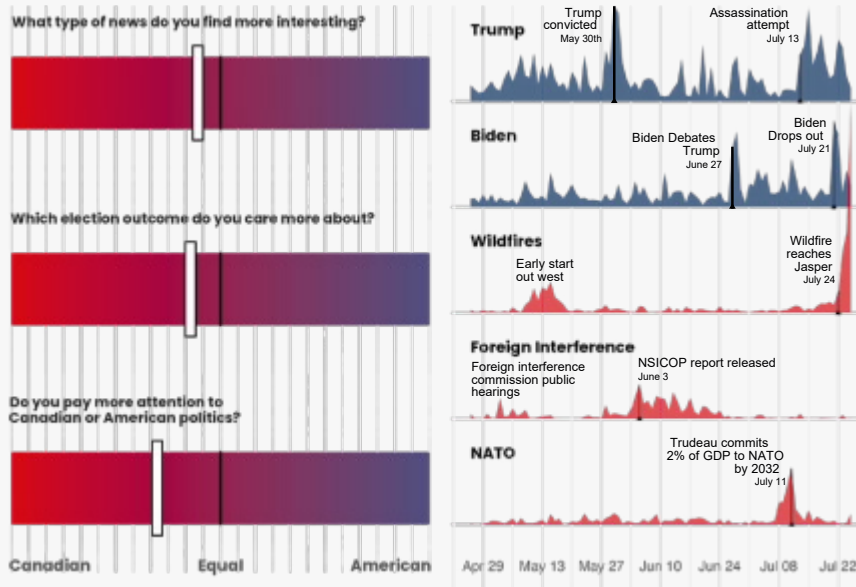
## Ecosystem Snapshot

### Canadian Interest in US News and Politics

Each month we provide a visualization of the CIE that highlights key findings.

In July, we saw a flurry of media activity in the US and Canadians were paying close attention. This month we assess the extent Canadians are oriented towards American versus Canadian content.

Using survey data, the left side of the figure shows relative orientations (white bar) of Canadians towards Canadian and American news and politics. We find that interests in Canadian news and politics are essentially equal, with Canadians reporting that they find **Canadian news and politics only marginally more interesting than American** (23.9% versus 21.7%), the majority report being equally interested in both (54.5%). We also see that **Canadians care a bit more about our federal election outcome**, with 81.8% caring a fair amount or more about the next Canadian federal election compared to 73.8% for the upcoming US election. Finally, we observe that **Canadians pay more attention to**



**Canadian rather than American politics**, with 12.1% of Canadians focused mainly on American politics, as compared to 41.8% paying equal attention (46.1% pay more attention to Canadian politics).

On the right side of the figure, we assess engagement with the highest trending topics from

April 2024 to present. By looking at the scale and frequency of peaks in engagement over time, we find Canadians on social media pay considerable attention to American political stories (blue peaks are larger than red peaks).

## Health of the information ecosystem

# VULNERABILITIES

We evaluate the vulnerability of the information ecosystem by looking at four characteristics. First, **inequality** helps us understand the extent the online conversation in the CIE is skewed towards a minority of voices. Second, **polarization** shows how segregated information flows are within communities. Third, **toxicity** captures how harmful and uninviting the information environment can be to individuals, communities, and organizations. Fourth,

we measure **trust** to gauge the extent that people believe information gatekeepers are acting in the best interests of Canadians. Together, these four characteristics can open or restrict information flows, diversify or narrow information sources and beliefs, and influence acceptance or denial of false or accurate information. Most measures are reported on a scale of 0 (low) to 1 (high).

## Inequality

### Measurement

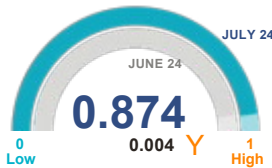
We evaluate **inequality** using the Gini coefficient (the extent influence within an information ecosystem deviates from a perfectly even distribution). The scale ranges from 0 (each entity has equal influence) to 1 (a single entity has all the influence). Fewer information sources (high value) severely restricts information flows, which can lead to the faster spread and deeper penetration of misinformation.

### Findings

Inequality in the CIE is 0.87. The conversation remains highly skewed to a small number of highly influential accounts.

### Inequality

How skewed is the CIE towards a small set of accounts?



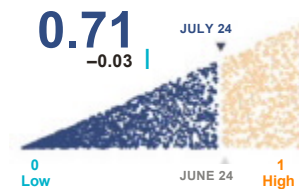
## Polarization

### Measurement

We evaluate polarization through **segmentation** (the extent a network is divided into distinct communities, 0=low segmentation and 1=high segmentation), **insularity** (the extent political party families engage with others outside their political party, with a higher number representing a more insular party family) and **division** (how people feel about their own political party versus other parties, 0=low and 1=high).

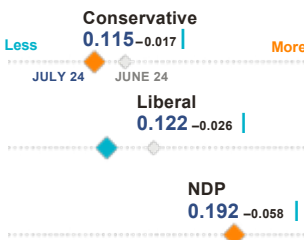
### Segmentation

How segmented into distinct communities is the CIE?



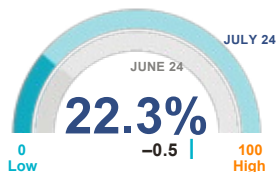
### Insularity

How insular are parties relative to one another?



### Division

How do people feel about their own political party versus other parties?



## Toxicity

### Measurement

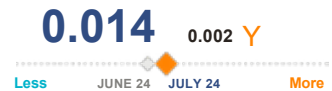
We evaluate toxicity by measuring toxic speech (presence of **toxic speech** among posts by political influencers, with lower values indicating lower toxicity), **chilled speech** (extent people avoid online political discussion and opinion sharing, 0=low to 1=high), and **news avoidance** (extent people avoid the news all together, 0=low to 1=high).

### Findings

Toxicity in the CIE is very low, with a score of 0.014. 65% of Canadians are fairly hesitant to engage in politics online and/or refrain from sharing personal opinions on politics, and 29.3% of Canadians actively avoid seeking out news stories on social media (a decrease from last month, -4.5%). Together, we observe that content produced by key figures in the CIE has low toxicity, but that a significant number of Canadians still avoid the news and abstain from political discussion.

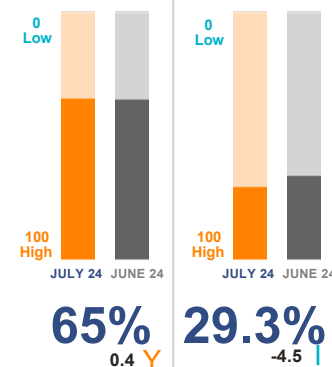
### Toxic speech

How prevalent is toxic speech in the CIE?



### Chilled Speech

What extent do people avoid political discussion and opinion sharing?



### News Avoiding

What extent do people avoid the news?

## Trust

### Measurement

We evaluate trust by asking Canadians about their **confidence in information gatekeepers** (journalists, media organizations, politicians, and big tech).

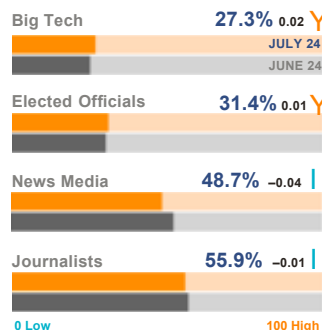
### Findings

Information gatekeepers have an average trust level of 40.8%. The most trusted actors are journalists (55.9%),

followed by news media (48.7%). The actors with the least trust are elected officials (31.4%) and big tech companies like Meta and Google (27.3%). Low trust in information gatekeepers makes the CIE more vulnerable to external influence and misinformation.

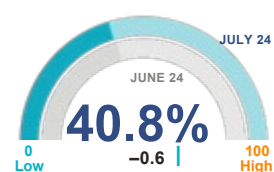
### Trust

How much do people trust each type of gatekeeper?



### Trust in information gatekeepers

How much do people trust the information gatekeepers?



## Health of the information ecosystem

# THREATS

## General

### Measurement

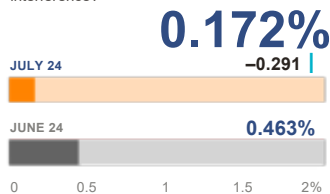
We evaluate the overall threat of misinformation and foreign influence by measuring public **discussion about misinformation and foreign interference** (0=low to 100=high discussion).

### Findings

We find that 0.17% of posts reference the topics of misinformation, disinformation, foreign interference/influence, fake news, or deep fakes — significantly less than the previous month.

### Discussion about misinformation and foreign interference

How often do people post about misinformation and foreign interference?



## Misinformation

### Measurement

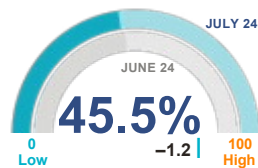
We evaluate the threat of misinformation by measuring Canadians' concern about **misinformation** (0=low to 100=highly concerned), and the extent **misinformation links** are shared and engaged with across social media platforms by politically influential voices (0=little to 100=high sharing)

### Findings

45.5% of Canadians are very concerned about misinformation. We find that 1.78% of links shared in posts by Canadian influential voices are to known misinformation websites, garnering 12.5% of total engagement with links. Canadians are deeply concerned about the role misinformation plays in our political discourse. This concern is appropriate, as significant engagement with the CIE goes to posts sharing links to known misinformation websites.

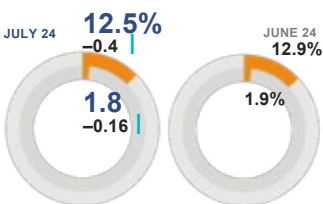
### Concern about misinformation

How concerned are people about misinformation?



### Linking to known misinformation websites

How common and popular are web links to known misinformation websites?



## Foreign influence

### Measurement

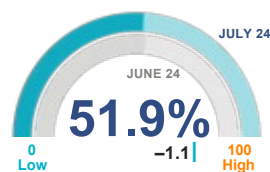
We evaluate the threat of foreign influence in the CIE by measuring **concern about foreign governments influencing Canadian media and politics** (in general and by country) and how **connected prominent news and political accounts** from countries with a record of interference (China, Russia and India) are to Canadian accounts.

### Findings

51.9% of Canadians are concerned about foreign governments influencing Canadian media and politics. By country, people are most concerned about China (63.3%) and Russia (51.6%) and the least with the UK (6.8%). Of all connections identified in our network, we observe that prominent Indian news and political accounts are most connected to the CIE (1.17%), a slight decrease from last month -0.41%. China follows with 0.376%, and Russia with just 0.189% of all connections. While Canadians believe foreign interference is being generally attempted, for this month we observe low overt information influence on the overall Canadian conversation.

### Concern about foreign influence

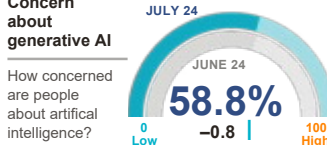
How concerned are people about foreign influence?



## Artificial intelligence

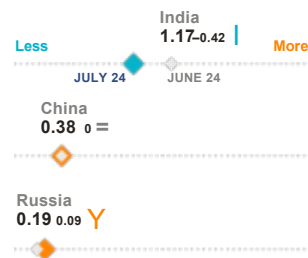
### Concern about generative AI

How concerned are people about artificial intelligence?



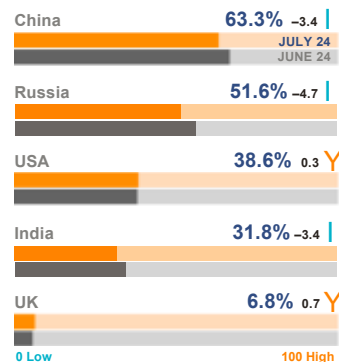
### Directed foreign influence

To what extent are overt foreign influencers impacting the CIE?



### Concern about foreign influence by country

How concerned are people about the following countries conducting foreign influence?



## Health of the information ecosystem

# STATE OF ENGAGEMENT WITH NEWS & POLITICS

We report on the state of engagement with news and politics to provide insight into social media preferences and behaviours for news and politics consumption and dialogue. We evaluate **news** by looking at news-seeking and sharing to capture the appetite for news, regional preferences for news consumption, and engagement in online political conversation. Second, we characterize engagement with **news outlets** by assessing inequality, top outlets, and platform preferences to identify dominant news sources and the main mechanisms for

digital news engagement. Finally, we examine **online engagement with politicians** by looking at relative engagement with party leaders and politicians, as well as platform preferences. We do so to identify where most of the political discussion takes place (on which platform) and who leads this conversation. In a healthy ecosystem, we would expect to see a high level of news seeking across a variety of sources and the free flow of ideas and commentary on the political and media landscape.

## News

### Measurement

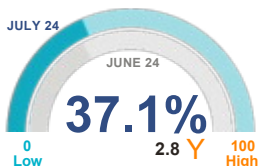
We evaluate engagement with political news and current events using six indicators: 1) **news seeking** (the extent Canadians seek out news); 2) **news sharing** (the frequency of sharing news and opinions on social media); and 3-6) **news consumption sources and mediums** (the proportion of Canadians that consume news from various sources and mediums weekly).

### Findings

We observe that 37.1% of Canadians search for news and 10.7% share news and their political views at least once a week. Unlike previous months, National news surpasses local news by a margin as the most reported source for Canadians to receive information (40.7%), +4.6% from last month, followed closely

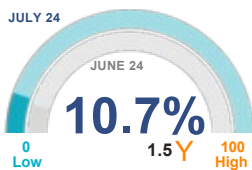
### News seeking

How many Canadians seek out information about the news?



### News sharing

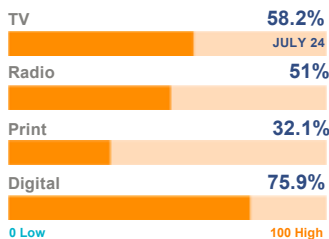
How much do Canadians actively engage in posting and sharing news on social media?



by local (40.5%), and international news sources (34.1%, +5.5% from last month). About three quarters of the Canadian public use a digital medium for news consumption weekly (75.9%), with more than one third using social media weekly for news (35.8%), followed by TV (58.2%) and Radio (51%) and print (32.1%).

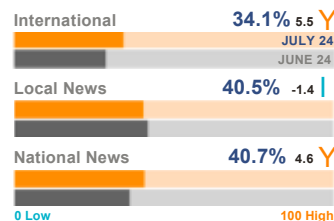
### Mediums of Weekly News (digital, print, radio and TV)

How many people use each medium weekly for news?



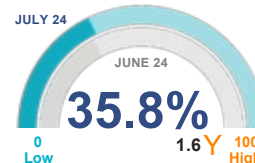
### Sources of Weekly News

How many people use each source for weekly news?



### Social Media for News

How many people use social media weekly for news?



## News outlets

### Measurement

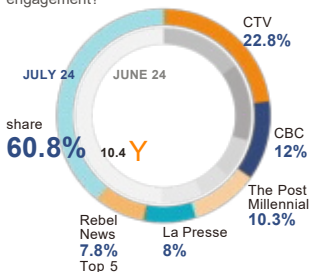
We evaluate four characteristics of Canadian news outlets: 1) **inequality** of engagement with Canadian news outlets; 2) **top outlets** (the scale and nature of engagement with Canadian news outlets); 3) **national versus local** news engagement (preferences for local versus national news providers); and 4) **social media platform usage** trends of Canadian news outlets.

### Findings

Engagement with Canadian news outlets is more unequal than the overall ecosystem with a Gini coefficient of 0.954. We find the top 5 Canadian outlets that attract the most engagement are CTV, CBC, The Post Millennial, La Presse and Rebel News. Collectively they receive 60.8%, +10.5% from last month of all online engagement with Canadian news content. Local news outlets received 31.8%, -4.1% from last month of all engagement with news content. Overall, TikTok was the platform with the most engagement with news outlets (37.1%) followed closely by X/Twitter (30.4%) and YouTube tied with Facebook (14.5).

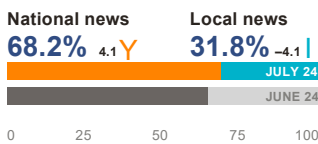
### Top 5 Canadian news outlets

What are the top 5 Canadian news outlets? What is their share of total engagement?



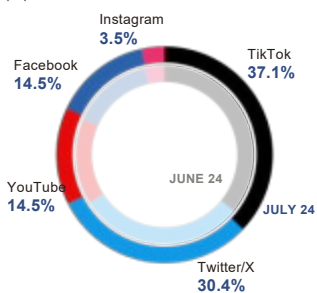
### National vs. local news engagement

How skewed is preference for national versus local news?



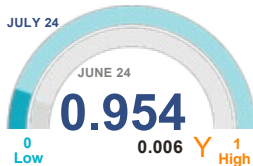
### Social media platforms

Which social media platforms are most popular for news?



### Inequality of news outlets

How skewed is the CIE to a small number of news outlets?



## Politicians

### Measurement

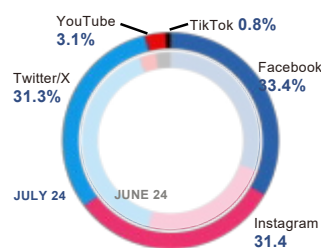
We evaluate the roles and characteristics of politicians in the information ecosystem using four measures: 1) the **top social media platforms** for engagement with Canadian politicians; 2) **political engagement** on social media (engagement with federal party leaders and elected party families); and 3) **news versus politician engagement** (comparing engagement between politicians and news outlets).

### Findings

Politicians received the most engagement on Facebook (33.4%, +2.9% this month replacing X/Twitter), Instagram (31.4%) and X/Twitter (31.3%). X/Twitter engagement with politicians declined significantly this month from first place to third (-8.6%). Once again, the leader and members of the federal opposition party (Conservatives) received significantly more engagement than other elected party leaders and members. We do see, however, that NDP leader and party member engagement drops slightly (-5.6% leadership, -3% membership). Engagement with news outlets (53.8%) is slightly higher than engagement with politicians.

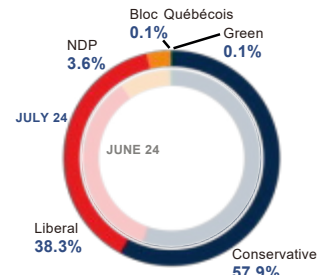
### Social media platforms

Which social media platforms are most popular for Canadian politicians?



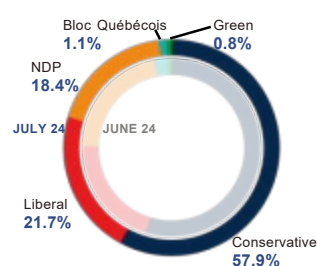
### Engagement with party leaders

Which party leaders are most engaging with Canadians?



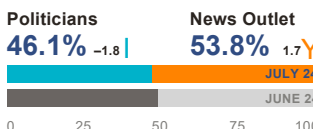
### Engagement with elected party members

Which elected party members are most engaging with Canadians?



### Politicians vs. news engagement

How skewed is preference for politician versus news content?





# TOP STORIES

Each month, we identify the top topics that were discussed online by prominent voices in the Canadian information ecosystem. We also analyze certain

elements of the conversation: when and where it occurred, who drove it, and what the nature of the discussion was.

## This month's topics

This month, Canadians were paying close attention to our neighbours down south. Information and discussion about the United States' upcoming Presidential election dominated the online conversation throughout the month of July, following a televised debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden at the end of June, an assassination attempt on Trump, Biden's announcement that he was dropping out of the presidential race on July 21, and the rapid ascension of Kamala Harris as the presumptive nominee for the Democratic Party. Overall, because there was so much to talk about, we saw significant and sustained interest in American politics this month. We mostly saw

engagement on TikTok (perhaps due to the high volume of Harris-related memes circulating on the platform) as well as X/Twitter and YouTube. Discussion was mostly driven by news outlets covering the US election and commentators chiming in; Canadian politicians were relatively quiet on the matter of US politics, only chiming in to condemn political violence after the attempted assassination of Trump on July 13.

Closer to home, Canadians shared their concern for Jasper, Alberta in the last week of July as the town was engulfed by a major wildfire. Although much of the conversation was focused on news coverage about the fire, many commentators, public figures, and politicians expressed their support for the residents of the town — including Danielle Smith, whose tears at a press

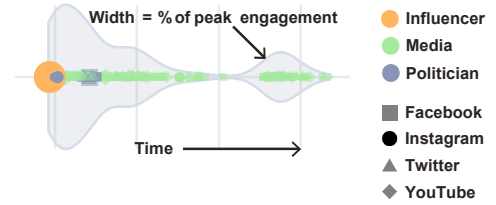
conference about the fire sparked headlines of their own. We also observed some discussion about the housing options currently available to Jasper residents, as well as about climate change and wildfire prevention policies.

Other major topics included the LCBO strike in Ontario, which some politicians and many commentators took as an opportunity to criticize Premier Doug Ford over his handling of the strike and other policies of his government. There was also the Summer Olympics in Paris, where the Canadian soccer teams recently became embroiled in a scandal over alleged spying; and Justin Trudeau, primarily driven by coverage of the NATO Summit and conservative commentators criticizing him. Finally, Canada Day generated a lot of conversation on July 1.

### Violin plots

We depict the online discussion of these stories using violin plots. The 'violin' (the shape of the outline) indicates the distribution of engagement with each topic. The width of the plot is normalized against maximum engagement (when a story is being talked about the most) across the time period. A small violin indicates a burst of attention whereas a large violin indi-

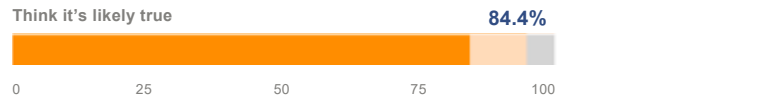
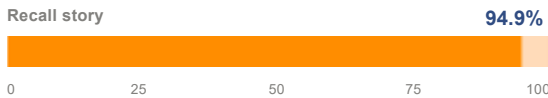
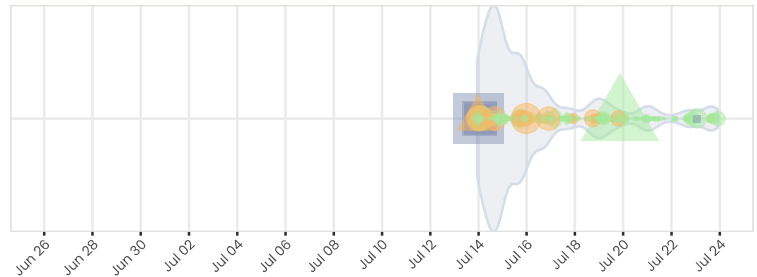
cates a longer, drawn out conversation. Shapes are used to depict different platforms (Facebook, Instagram, X/Twitter, and YouTube). Colours are used to identify the type of source (influencer, media, and politician). Combined, this analysis provides insight into engagement with news stories and misinformation across given news stories or events.



### Trump assassination attempt.

On **July 13**, former US President Donald Trump was shot, injuring his ear, at a televised rally in Pennsylvania. News quickly spread of the attempted assassination, sparking an exceptionally high amount of discussion about Trump in Canada. Within 24 hours, many Canadian politicians shared their horror at the attack and condemned political violence. In the following days, the conversation was dominated by influencers (political commentators and other public figures) on X/Twitter and Facebook, who shared footage of the rally, discussed Trump himself, and speculated about how the event would impact the remainder of the election.

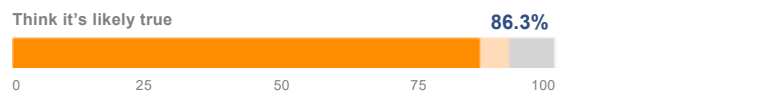
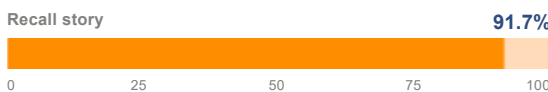
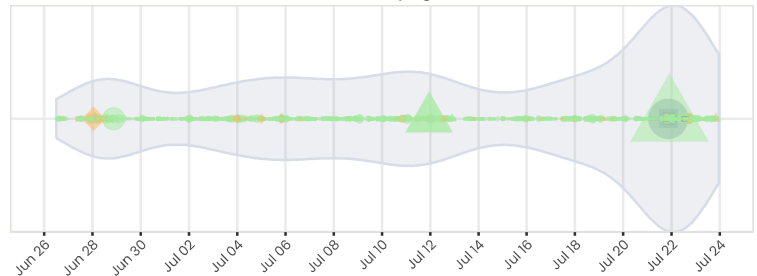
### Attempted Assassination of Trump



### Biden withdraws from the 2024 Presidential Election.

Conversation about Trump was soon overshadowed by discussion about his electoral opponent when, on **July 21**, President Joe Biden announced that he was withdrawing from the Presidential election. Although there was some coverage about Biden throughout the month, particularly after the debate on June 27, most discussion about Biden was in relation to his withdrawal from the race. Engagement was largely centered on X/Twitter, where Biden posted his announcement, but a handful of posts on Instagram received significant attention. Within days, conversation about Biden soon overlapped with discussion about his Vice President, Kamala Harris, as prominent members of the Democratic Party endorsed her as their new nominee in the three days immediately following the announcement.

### Biden Withdrawal from Presidential Election Campaign



## NATO Summit and Canada's Promised 2% Contribution.

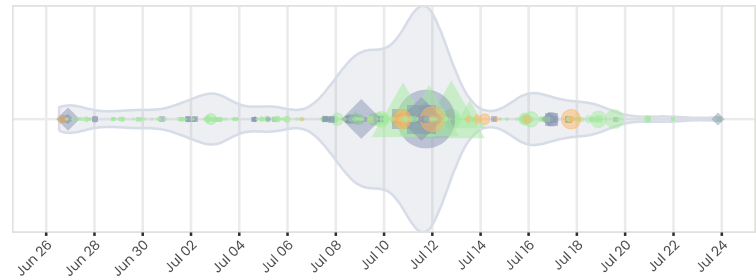
From **July 9-11**, leaders from NATO member states convened in Washington. Conversation online was largely driven by news outlets and Justin Trudeau himself, mostly covering events that occurred at the NATO Summit. Engagement increased particularly around Trudeau's meeting with Ukrainian President Zelenskyy where he pledged an additional \$500 million in military support. Trudeau also announced that Canada would finally meet its commitment to NATO and spend 2% of our GDP on defense by 2032. This announcement, which was mostly discussed on X/Twitter and Facebook, did not receive nearly as much attention as TikTok videos of Joe Biden calling Zelenskyy "Putin" at the Summit.

Recall story

55.2%

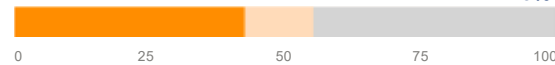


## NATO and Promised Contribution Increase



Think it's likely true

42.5%



## ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Data for this report includes 440,053 social media posts from 2272 unique entities with a total of 4276 unique and active social handles for the period of June 26 to July 23, 2024, and survey responses from 1463 Canadian adults conducted from July 24th to 29th using a commercial survey panel provider. The margin of error for a comparable probability-based random sample of the same size is +/-2.6%, 19 times out of 20. Engagement totals include

engagement from Canadian and international audiences, which cannot be distinguished from each other.

For a link to our detailed methodology [click here](#). To sign up for our month situation reports, [click here](#). Please provide any comments you have on these reports to [info@cdmrn.ca](mailto:info@cdmrn.ca).

## ABOUT THE CDMRN

The Canadian Digital Media Research Network (CDMRN) is a pioneering initiative committed to fortifying and fostering resilience within Canada's unique information ecosystem. Our mission is to understand the dynamics

of information production, dissemination, and consumption across digital media with the goal of empowering Canadians to navigate the complexities of the modern digital age.



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