



Interview Summary: Nick Gamache

Nick Gamache, Director of Media Relations and Environmental Monitoring, Elections Canada, was interviewed by Commission counsel on March 7, 2024.

Notes to reader

- Commission Counsel have provided explanatory notes in square brackets to assist the reader.
- This summary contains information that relates to the Commission's mandate under clauses (a)(i)(A) and (B) of its Terms of Reference. Information provided during the interviews that relates to other aspects of the Commission's Terms of Reference has been omitted from this summary, but may be adduced by the Commission at a later stage of its proceedings.

1. Professional Background

- [1] Mr. Gamache has been employed at Elections Canada since October 2018. He has been the Director of Media Relations and Environmental Monitoring since March 2020. From May 2019 to March 2020, he was the Acting Director, Media Relations and Issues management.
- [2] Mr. Gamache holds a Secret security clearance.
- [3] Prior to working at Elections Canada, Mr. Gamache was a researcher, producer and senior producer at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.
- [4] In his role as Director of Media Relations and Environmental Monitoring, Mr. Gamache is responsible for four main areas:
 - a. Media relations;
 - b. Corporate social media;
 - c. Strategic communications; and

d. Environmental monitoring.

- [5] Environmental monitoring began in Summer 2019, ahead of the 43rd General Election. Prior to March 2020, when environmental monitoring was placed under his management, this function was housed in Elections Canada's regulatory affairs department as an event-based unit under the supervision of Elections Canada's integrity team. Mr. Gamache is familiar with Elections Canada's environmental monitoring during this time period due to the fact that he now supervises the staff who were responsible for that function at the time. He has had regular communications with his staff about their activities prior to March 2020, and had familiarized himself with relevant documentation from that time period.

2. Elections Canada's Environmental Monitoring Activities

2.1 General Background

- [6] Elections Canada monitors both traditional media and the digital environment in order to ensure Canadians have accurate information about the electoral process. Environmental monitoring is derived from Elections Canada's mandate to ensure that Canadians have the necessary and correct information to exercise their right to vote.
- [7] By understanding the information environment, Elections Canada is able to maintain awareness of the content that Canadians consume and is able to develop proactive and reactive communications to inform Canadians about the electoral process. For Elections Canada to fulfill its mandate, accurate information about the voting process needs to be provided to as many voters as possible.
- [8] At its heart, environmental monitoring ensures that the communications of Elections Canada are more effective and responsive to the information Canadians are consuming across various information platforms.
- [9] One area of concern for Elections Canada is inaccurate information about the voting process. When this type of information spreads during an election period, it undermines the ability of Canadians to vote, and requires a prompt response from Elections Canada.

- [10] Elections Canada's mandate does not extend to information unrelated to the electoral process, such as political party platforms, policy issues, or personal information about candidates.
- [11] Inaccurate information can take a variety of forms. It can include false information about voting, such as stating the wrong date for election day. It can also include information manipulation. Information manipulation is the posting of information that is true but is portrayed as something else or in a context that has the overall effect of misleading the viewer.
- [12] Environmental monitoring was made a permanent, ongoing function following the 43rd General Election. Elections Canada engages in environmental monitoring in between elections. However, its monitoring activities are more extensive during an election period. For example, Social Media Monitoring Reports (SMMRs) are prepared daily during a writ period, and weekly during a non-writ period.
- [13] Elections Canada does not attempt to discern the intent behind the posting of inaccurate information. Assessing the intent or identity of a party disseminating inaccurate or incorrect information does little to assist Elections Canada to fulfill its mandate in respect of ensuring voters have access to timely and accurate information about voting and the electoral process. Instead, the primary focus is on the potential impact of incorrect information on Canadians' ability to vote.
- [14] Therefore, while Elections Canada attempts to assess how many people have viewed a piece of inaccurate information and how quickly that information is spreading. Understanding how quickly inaccurate or incorrect information is spreading and how widely it is being disseminated assists Elections Canada to determine how best to respond to the information, if at all.
- [15] Knowing the impact of inaccurate information assists Elections Canada in determining the best way to address the inaccuracies. For example, widespread inaccurate information that is disseminating quickly may require a prompt response from Elections Canada through multiple channels. Importantly, Elections Canada does not attempt to determine the source of the information or the intent of the poster. Issues of identity and intent may fall within the mandate of other agencies or departments.

[16] Another area of concern for Elections Canada is information that could hinder or prevent Canadians from exercising their right to vote. Environmental monitoring assists Elections Canada to identify barriers to its administration of the electoral process. For example, reports of natural disasters and physical barriers to polling locations are all of interest to Elections Canada. When apprised of this information through environmental monitoring, Elections Canada can promptly provide information that will allow affected Canadians to exercise their right to vote.

2.2 How Environmental Monitoring Is Conducted

[17] Elections Canada uses digital tools to assist in monitoring the digital environment. These tools permit Elections Canada to conduct targeted searches of online platforms for content related to Elections Canada's mandate. However, these tools are not able to target all relevant platforms, and so Elections Canada staff also conduct direct searches on additional social media platforms.

[18] The digital environment is constantly changing, and Elections Canada regularly assesses which platforms it should monitor. Mr. Gamache noted that it is also common to see a conversation or narrative jump from one platform to another, and so having the ability to monitor multiple platforms can be important in tracking the spread and potential impact of inaccurate information.

[19] Elections Canada does not monitor closed messaging platforms. These are platforms where individuals can share messages without being seen publicly. However, Elections Canada would be able to assess information originating from closed messaging platforms that has migrated to public platforms, including social media and traditional media.

[20] Elections Canada monitors online content in a range of languages. It selects languages to monitor based on Statistics Canada information on the most commonly used languages in Canada, as well as its own past experiences and information from security and intelligence partners related to the online threat landscape.

[21] Elections Canada produces Social Media Monitoring Reports (SMMRs) based on its environmental monitoring. While the format of SMMRs has changed over time, they

have always been designed to identify main narratives or topics in order to maintain situational awareness.

- [22] To prepare SMMRs, Elections Canada monitors use targeted keyword searches to identify content related to the electoral process. Staff then filter out content that go beyond Elections Canada's mandate of administering the electoral process. For example, content related to partisan or policy issues is removed. Analysts then review the remaining content and prepare the SMMRs, which summarize the relevant social media activity.
- [23] During the election period, SMMRs are produced on a daily basis.
- [24] When it comes to improving and identifying gaps within Elections Canada's communications, Mr. Gamache described himself as the main audience for SMMRs. In addition, the SMMRs assist Mr. Gamache in maintaining awareness of inaccurate information. They are also used by a range of other audiences, both internal and external to Elections Canada. For example, they can be relied upon by Elections Canada field teams to quickly identify operational issues that are being discussed on social media. As discussed below, they are also shared with a number of external agencies and departments.

2.3 Interventions

- [25] Elections Canada may take steps to reduce or eliminate the impact of inaccurate information about the electoral process. The most commonly used method Elections Canada uses when it finds inaccurate information is to communicate accurate information to the public. This can take the form of correcting inaccurate information directly, or through broader educational campaigns about a particular topic that is or is likely to become the subject of inaccurate information.
- [26] Another intervention that Elections Canada may use, but much more rarely and only during an electoral event, is to flag inaccurate information to a social media platform through established communication protocols. For example, during the 44th General Election, Elections Canada flagged a total of six individual instances of inaccurate information to social media platforms: one of Elections Canada impersonation, one of

sharing the wrong election date, and four claiming that vaccine passports were required to vote. However, Elections Canada does not request that platforms remove inaccurate information. Elections Canada limits itself to identifying information about the voting process that is inaccurate. It is up to social media platforms to apply their own terms of service to content identified by Elections Canada as inaccurate. Platforms may or may not remove elections-related content that is inaccurate.

- [27] When Elections Canada addresses inaccurate information, it does so from the perspective of its obligation to serve all voters, including those who may be hostile or suspicious of Elections Canada. Elections Canada believes that it is important for it to be able to engage nonconfrontationally with people online in order to best serve them. Forging and preserving trust in Elections Canada is important.
- [28] Elections Canada does not attempt to intervene in response to all inaccurate information about elections. That would exceed its resources and raise potential concerns about policing social media. Elections Canada does not believe that this is its proper role.
- [29] To assess when it should respond to inaccurate information, Elections Canada conducts risk assessments using established tools. Relevant factors in this assessment include the reach of the inaccurate information and the risk to the electoral process that the information poses.
- [30] Reach refers to the audience that a post attracts. A social media post that is only viewed by a small number of people is less likely to merit a response than a post that is viewed by a larger number of people. Risk to the electoral process refers to the potential for harm presented by a post. For example, inaccurate information posted close to election day may present a higher risk than information posted early in the election period.
- [31] When asked by Commission Counsel whether Elections Canada attempts to measure the impact of its interventions, Mr. Gamache indicated that it does. Success is measured by whether Elections Canada reaches many people and whether Elections Canada provides as many people as possible with timely and accurate information about voting and the electoral process.

3. Relationship with Other Entities

3.1 Rapid Response Mechanism

- [32] Elections Canada maintains a relationship with Global Affairs Canada's Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM).
- [33] During the election period, the RRM receives Elections Canada's daily SMMRs.
- [34] Elections Canada also receives RRM social media analyses during the election period. These are provided to Elections Canada through its enterprise security team, not through its environmental monitoring staff.
- [35] Beyond the election period, Elections Canada's environmental monitoring staff maintain relationships with the RRM. This allows for knowledge transfer between the two teams, including best practices for monitoring for inaccurate information and awareness of trends in how inaccurate information is spread.
- [36] There is no formal information sharing agreement between Elections Canada and the RRM at this time. Mr. Gamache indicated that a more formal agreement with the RRM could be in place for the 45th General Election.

3.2 The Canadian Intelligence Security Service and the Communications Security Establishment

- [37] Elections Canada's SMMRs are shared with its security partners, including CSIS and the Communications Security Establishment (CSE), during the election period. Mr. Gamache is not aware of how SMMRs are distributed within CSIS and the CSE or how they may be used.

3.3 The Commissioner of Canada Elections¹

- [38] Election's Canada's SMMRs are shared with the Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections on an ongoing basis.
- [39] The Commissioner of Canada Elections and Elections Canada are both independent. As such, Mr. Gamache is unaware whether Elections Canada receives information about how the Commissioner uses Elections Canada's SMMRs.

4. Social Media Monitoring During the 43rd General Election

4.1 The Social Media Monitoring Unit

- [40] Prior to the 43rd General Elections, Elections Canada did not have a dedicated unit for monitoring social media activity.
- [41] As a result of events like the 2016 United States presidential elections, and the 2016 Brexit vote, Elections Canada became increasingly aware of how elections could be targeted, and the role that inaccurate information on social media could play. The Chief Electoral Officer wanted to establish a dedicated unit that would monitor the social media environment.
- [42] Mr. Gamache emphasized that, while allegations of intentional inaccurate information in connection with other elections may have informed Elections Canada's desire to get a better awareness of the social media environment, it wished to do so pursuant to its own mandate. Because of this, Elections Canada did not set out to create a unit that would distinguish between foreign or domestic inaccurate information, or between intentional and unintentional inaccurate information. Rather, the purpose was to monitor impacts on the electoral process. Elections Canada was aware that other bodies, such as the SITE taskforce, was focusing on foreign interference issues.

¹ Mr. Gamache only addressed the relationship between Elections Canada and the Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections with respect to the sharing of Social Media Monitoring Reports. Readers are referred to the Interview Summaries of Josée Villeneuve and Stéphane Perrault & Serge Caron for additional information about this relationship.

- [43] Ahead of the 43rd General Election, the Social Media Monitoring Unit was established, under the direct supervision of a Director. It was comprised of approximately 3-5 report writers and 20 monitors. The staff worked on shifts so that the Unit would be monitoring social media between 7am and midnight every day.
- [44] The Social Media Monitoring Unit was comprised of staff that was able to monitor 21 languages. The Unit relied on a tool called KISocial, which was developed specifically for Elections Canada.

4.2 Detection of Allegations of Foreign Interference

- [45] The work of the Social Media Monitoring Unit was directed at detecting elections-related information on social media platforms, including inaccurate information. However, in the course of doing so, it also detected social media users raising allegations of foreign interference into the election.
- [46] The types of allegations of foreign interference identified by the Social Media Monitoring Unit during the election period were not actionable by Elections Canada as they fell outside of its mandate. In other words, the foreign interference alleged in social media posts identified by Elections Canada did not relate to the administration of the elections system. Rather, those allegations related to matters outside of Elections Canada's mandate, such as accusations that foreign political figures were publicly commenting on the merits of candidates or party leaders.
- [47] Further, because Elections Canada is not an investigative body, it would not be capable of investigating allegations of foreign interference.
- [48] Elections Canada noted allegations of foreign interference on its monitoring reports for informational awareness. The SMMRs produced by the Social Media Monitoring Unit included information relevant to foreign interference and these reports were shared with Elections Canada's external security partners.

4.3 Relationships with Social Media Platforms

- [49] During the 43rd General Election, Elections Canada worked with a number of social media platforms. These included Facebook/Instagram, X (formerly twitter), Google, LinkedIn, and Snapchat. Elections Canada did not work with WeChat.
- [50] The main reason for these relationships was to work with platforms to create election-related initiatives. For example, Elections Canada worked with Facebook to create a “Voter Registration Reminder” function.
- [51] Another reason for establishing these relationships was to ensure that Elections Canada had a clear point of contact in the event of an urgent situation. These existing contacts were also used by Elections Canada to flag inaccurate information respecting the election to platforms so that they could be reviewed and addressed pursuant to the platforms’ terms of service. Elections Canada flagged a total of 28 posts to social media companies during the 43rd General Election.

5. Social Media Monitoring During the 44th General Election

5.1 Establishing the Social Media Monitoring Team

- [52] The majority of staff who worked in the Social Media Monitoring Unit during the 43rd General Election were casual staff who left their positions at the conclusion of the election. Only the Assistant Director and one junior analyst remained on staff.
- [53] In 2020, Elections Canada established an Environmental Monitoring Centre, which was comprised of two teams: the Corporate Social Media Team, and the Social Media Monitoring Team. The Monitoring Team effectively replaced the Monitoring Unit that had existed during the 43rd General Election. The goal of this reorganization was to establish a permanent social media monitoring function, and to hopefully achieve synergies between social media monitoring, and Elections Canada’s own social media activities.
- [54] The Social Media Monitoring Team reviewed posts in 15 languages, compared with 21 languages covered during the 43rd General Election. The lower number of languages was a product of Elections Canada’s experience in the previous election. Using its

experience in the previous election, Elections Canada was able to be more selective in its language coverage. The vast majority of information collected during the election period is in English, with some in French, Cantonese, and Mandarin. Elections Canada has observed that 0.5% of relevant content collected was written in Chinese languages. Using its experience in the previous election, Elections Canada was able to be more selective in language coverage without creating ‘blind spots’. When asked further questions about blind spots, Mr. Gamache indicated that Elections Canada would benefit from greater ability to cover Chinese languages, as there is a limited pool of individuals able to do this work.

- [55] The Social Media Monitoring Team also began to use a new monitoring tool called Meltwater. Compared to its previous tool, Elections Canada was able to capture more social media content.
- [56] Compared with the 43rd General Election, the social media landscape during the 44th General Election was more fragmented. This was the product of a greater number of alternative platforms that hosted content that migrated off of mainstream platforms.
- [57] Mr. Gamache commented that this fragmentation led to the creation of a greater number of “echo chambers” – platforms where individuals could go to hear messages that only reinforced their own existing perspectives. This in turn led to a digital environment that was more prone to extreme perspectives.
- [58] Mr. Gamache noted that elections, by their very nature, generate debate.
- [59] Much of the inaccurate election information identified during the 44th General Election related to voting by mail and the use of technology or electronic voting, with the pandemic (e.g. false claims that voters needed to be vaccinated to vote) serving as a constant undercurrent to inaccurate information. However, Elections Canada’s proactive initiatives to address pandemic narratives limited the spread of inaccurate pandemic election-related information.

5.2 Receipt of Comments about Allegations of Foreign Interference

- [60] Elections Canada also received comments from the public on its social media platforms about a variety of issues, including allegations of foreign interference. Inbound

comments about what social media users referred to as “foreign interference” represented 0.05% of the total comments directed at Elections Canada’s corporate social media accounts during the 43rd General Election, and 0.39% during the 44th General Election. Mr. Gamache hypothesized that the increase in the number of comments alleging foreign interference received by Elections Canada could be due to multiple factors, including the geopolitical situation, and other elections around the world that had encountered alleged foreign interference, and the use of a more powerful tool by Elections Canada to monitor social media.

[61] These allegations during the 44th General Election were generally non-actionable by Elections Canada. As always, Elections Canada shared SMMRs, including those related to foreign interference allegations on various platforms, with its external security and intelligence partners.

5.3 Relationships with Social Media Platforms

[62] During the 44th General Election, Elections Canada worked with social media platforms. While the specific contact points or the mechanisms for contact may have changed between elections, the lines of communication remained open.

[63] Elections Canada also provided information to TikTok so that the platform could create a voter information centre on the platform. While Elections Canada did not have a TikTok account, it was aware that people were discussing the election on that platform. As such, Elections Canada wanted to ensure that there was an authoritative source of elections information present on the platform.

[64] Elections Canada flagged six instances of inaccurate information to social media platforms during the 44th General Election. This drop from 28 in the 43rd General Election was in part due to Elections Canada’s increased emphasis on sharing accurate information as the main response to inaccurate information.

[65] Similar to the 43rd General Election, Elections Canada did not have a presence on Reddit or microplatforms such as Gab or Telegram.