



Interview Summary: New Democratic Party (Lucy Watson and Jesse Calvert)

Lucy Watson and Jesse Calvert, on behalf of the New Democratic Party (NDP) were interviewed by Commission Counsel on 27 August 2024.

Notes to Readers:

- Text contained are explanatory notes provided by Commission counsels to assist the reader.

1. Background

- [1] Lucy Watson is a longstanding member of the NDP. Her first employment with the party was as its National Campaign Coordinator for the 2015 federal election campaign. From 2016 to 2018, she was the Deputy Chief of Staff for the NDP. From 2018 to 2023, she was the Provincial Director for the Ontario NDP. Following this role, she served as senior advisor to the leader of the NDP, Jagmeet Singh. In January 2024, she became the NDP's National Director, a position she continues to hold.
- [2] Starting in 2010, Jesse Calvert was employed in the Ontario NDP's Leader's Office. He joined the staff of the federal party in 2017 and became the federal NDP's Director of Operations from March 2018 to March 2020. Currently, he is the NDP's Deputy National Director.

2. Foreign Interference as a Threat to the NDP

2.1 The NDP as a potential target for foreign interference

- [3] The NDP views political parties as potential targets of foreign interference and is aware there are potential areas of vulnerability. Given that the NDP is a political party *and* a

membership driven and volunteer-based organization, there is always vulnerability to interference.

- [4] However, in Ms. Watson's view, there is not a significant concern with respect to foreign interference activities influencing the NDP's internal decision-making. The NDP has measures in place that reduce its vulnerability. For example, the party requires individuals who want to become members to provide their address, attest to their citizenship or permanent residency status, provide personal contact information to the party and attest that their membership fees are paid from their own funds. Additionally, the NDP's constitution sets out the rights and responsibilities of the various decision-making bodies.
- [5] The NDP is concerned about foreign interference activities that try to influence interactions on social media, including the use of bots, ads and posts purporting to be posts from the NDP and political actors in Canada. Additionally, the NDP is concerned about the ways in which foreign actors may seek to exert influence as described by MP Jenny Kwan and explored in phase 1 of the Commission's work.

2.2 Evolution in the party's thinking about foreign interference

- [6] The NDP's thinking about foreign interference has evolved since the 2021 general election. For example, it is now much more attuned to social media activity and its manipulation. The party also now considers the potential for foreign interference when undertaking candidate search work and vetting and in its nomination processes.
- [7] The NDP has had internal conversations about how to approach candidate searches. There is now an additional layer of scrutiny. The party also scrutinizes potential nomination contestants more closely, including their involvement in associations, clubs, engagement with foreign entities, and publications.
- [8] The party now applies a foreign interference lens when considering its nomination processes. The rules governing candidate search and nomination meetings are established democratically by way of a vote of the NDP's Federal Council. The NDP believes that the criteria in place to vet and nominate candidates strike an appropriate balance between democratic values and guarding against potential foreign interference.

- [9] As a result, there has been no change to the nomination process as a result of foreign interference concerns, because the NDP is confident its processes including the criteria for membership makes foreign interference unlikely. [Section 7, below describes the nomination process.]

3. Responsibility for Ensuring the NDP Is Not Vulnerable to Foreign Interference

- [10] There is no specific position within the party responsible for ensuring it is not vulnerable to foreign interference. Ultimately, the NDP's National Director oversees all aspects of the party's work, including responding to foreign interference. The Deputy National Director assists the National Director in this role.
- [11] The NDP federal staff leadership team is a small, collaborative team and all directors must consider the threat of foreign interference. The Director of Candidate Search and the Digital Director are responsible for identifying the party's vulnerability to foreign interference as it relates to candidate search and vetting and activity on-line, respectively, and identifying where the party needs to strengthen and improve its processes.
- [12] In the 2019 general election, Mr. Calvert, Melissa Bruno and Simon Pulsifer were the NDP's representative to the SITE Task Force ("**SITE TF**"). In 2021, it was Mr. Calvert and Anne McGrath. For the next election, it will likely be Mr. Calvert and Ms. Watson.

4. Systems in Place to Respond to Foreign Interference Threats

- [13] There are no formal party structures in place to respond to foreign interference threats.
- [14] If a specific issue with foreign interference arose, the NDP would engage legal counsel or other experts like information technology ("**IT**") experts if it was a cyber-related activity. It would also consult with the SITE TF.

- [15] Foreign interference concerns relating to staff would primarily go to Mr. Calvert, as Deputy National Director, currently responsible for human resource matters. Concerns about candidates would go to Ms. Watson, as National Director.
- [16] First point of contact for Electoral District Association executive members if they have a concern about foreign interference is their regional organizer who would then escalate the issue.
- [17] For the next election cycle, the NDP is developing a manual for party staff and political staffers which will include information about foreign interference. Some of its content will likely be informed by this Commission's recommendations and/or reflections. Training provided to nominated candidates will include information about foreign interference.
- [18] The manual and training will address how party staff, political staffers and candidates should conduct themselves with foreign state representatives. Ms. Watson and Mr. Calvert understand that Members of Parliament and their staff are given guidance around appropriate interactions with foreign state representatives, but the party is not provided this information directly.

5. Membership

- [19] General rules around NDP membership are set out in the NDP's constitution, The specifics around NDP membership are determined at the provincial or territorial level. Québec and Nunavut do not have a provincial or territorial party so membership in those regions is administered by the federal party.
- [20] In every province or territory, there is a fee to become a member. Members must attest that the money is from their own personal funds, which aligns membership fees with regulations for political contributions as outlined in the *Canada Elections Act*. The party accepts cash and online payment. Cash is becoming less common with each electoral cycle.
- [21] When memberships purchased with cash are received, the Party does spot checks to confirm people paid for their memberships personally. These checks are done by either the provincial party or the federal party, depending on which entity received the

memberships. Some membership applications have been rejected based on spot checks. A bulk sign-up using only one credit card will be flagged; however, family members in the same household are permitted to apply for membership using one credit card held by a family member in that household.

- [22] Eliminating cash payments entirely would be problematic. The NDP believes requiring a fee paid via electronic payment creates an inequity around one's ability to become a member of a political party. Some people may not have the means to pay electronically (e.g. they do not have a computer; cannot get a credit card; have a cultural aversion to electronic payments). Cash payments can be scrutinized so the party can detect when something does not seem right.
- [23] Nomination contestants can scrutinize membership lists of pre-existing members and those signed up by other contestants.
- [24] The age for NDP membership in British Columbia and Yukon is 12. In Ontario, there is no minimum age for membership, however voting rights are granted at age 13. In Manitoba, there is no minimum age for membership, however voting rights are granted at age 14. The age for NDP membership in Saskatchewan is 13. The rest of the regions restrict membership to those 14 years of age or older.
- [25] Membership is not restricted to the age of majority because the party believes youth involvement promotes good citizenship and encourages people to become politically engaged. Young people especially want to engage on issues such as the environment, education and diversity.
- [26] The number of voters in a nomination contest under the age of 18 is a very small percentage of the total.
- [27] When someone signs up to be a member, they must declare they are a citizen or permanent resident and they must provide an address. The party does not, however, ask for proof of residency or citizenship because this would increase the threshold of inconvenience for joining the party and there are other measures in place to guard against foreign interferences in the party's internal affairs.

6. Electoral District Associations (EDAs)

- [28] Amongst other roles, EDAs help to identify potential candidates, select delegates to national conventions, and administer nomination contests.
- [29] Some EDAs have a constitution and some do not. An EDA's constitution must be approved by the NDP's Federal Council. The party has discussed standardizing EDA constitutions, but EDAs have some autonomy about how they structure their work so this would require significant work to allow for those differences. There is a fair amount of overlap between federal and provincial EDAs in terms of people and approaches to an EDA's work.
- [30] The party does not vet EDA executive members. Executive members must be members of the party and are elected annually at an annual general meeting by members of the EDA. National staff provide support or guidance for these elections.
- [31] Mr. Calvert explained the NDP is a close-knit party and, for the most part, members know each other. National staff recognize or have worked directly with EDA executive members and delegates, so it is unlikely there would be a significant number of unknown EDA executive members or delegates—the party would take note if there were. EDAs submit the names of their delegates to the central party in advance of convention, so the party is aware of who is attending the national convention and all attendees must be credentialed in order to attend convention sessions.
- [32] If there are problems within an EDA, such as allegations of mismanagement of funds, national party staff get involved, formally or informally.

7. Nomination Contests

- [33] The only mechanism to become a candidate for election is by standing in a nomination contest unless the National Director appoints a candidate for an EDA following the drawing up of the writ. The National Director can only appoint a candidate if the writ has been dropped and there is only one nomination contestant. This ensures that the Party has a candidate during the writ and avoids the need to hold a nomination meeting during the writ period just to have the nomination contestant acclaimed.

7.1 Process

- [34] To become a nomination contestant, a person must:
- a. be a party member in good standing for at least 45 days prior to nomination,
 - b. have paid membership dues out of their own funds,
 - c. provide contact information.
- [35] The 45-day membership requirement gives nomination contestants time to review membership lists and decide if they take issue with how new members were signed up by other contestants. Signing up new members is an important part of nomination contests and is encouraged by the party. Party members can sign up new members at any time, but in practice, most sign ups happen when someone becomes a nomination contestant or during a leadership contest.
- [36] The local EDA administers voting for nomination contests with the support of party staff. Nomination contest rules are sent to local EDAs and nomination contestants. They are not posted on the party's website.
- [37] The date of a nomination contest is determined by the EDA in consultation with the nomination contestants. The date must be approved by the National Candidate Nomination Committee (NCNC).

7.2 Vulnerability to foreign interference

- [38] Because it considers the nomination process so rigorous, the NDP is not overly concerned about foreign infiltration of nomination contests. Membership rules, such as the 45-day cut-off, and the requirement that voters live in the riding, are effective in limiting vulnerabilities to foreign interference. Additionally, members must be permanent residents or citizens in order to be eligible for membership.

7.3 Vetting candidates for nomination

- [39] Because of foreign interference concerns, the party now pays closer attention to a potential nomination contestant's answers to questions about their involvement in associations, clubs and other organizations and community and political involvement

and affiliations. If there are concerns, more probing is done. Sometimes, potential nomination contestants are interviewed as part of the vetting process.

[40] Each election, incumbent NDP Members of Parliament must go through the nomination process in their EDA and are vetted afresh.

7.4 Voting procedure

[41] Voting in nomination contests is by secret ballot. Proxy voting is not allowed. Voting is in person or virtual, depending on the meeting format. There has not been a hybrid nomination contest, though this may occur in the future.

[42] For in-person meetings, membership is confirmed with a piece of photographic identification showing the member's address. Some EDAs also ask for proof of residency, such as a utility bill, if the address on a person's identification does not match their party registration. ID requirements are made on a best-efforts basis while balancing the need to not disenfranchise individual members from marginalized communities.

[43] Contestants can dispute the eligibility of a member to vote if they do so at least ten days before the contest. If during a nomination meeting a contestant has a concern with a voter's eligibility, they can complain to the Chief Electoral Officer, who may then contact the National Director. However, once the voters have been permitted to join the meeting and the voting process begins, it cannot be stopped.

[44] If the nomination meeting is held virtually, identification is not checked. The "check" is done through the process of sending out electronic ballots to the members' registered email addresses before the meeting begins. The party anticipates that the vast majority of nomination meetings in this upcoming cycle will be in-person.

[45] Scrutineers oversee the ballot count and can object to the vote count or final tally and can submit an appeal alleging the process was flawed. With sufficient grounds, the party can nullify a nomination vote and hold another contest.

[46] Results of a nomination vote are not publicly announced because it can be internally divisive; however, nomination contestants know the tally because they have scrutineers

watching the vote count. National party staff keep a record of nomination contest results (i.e., the count sheets), but there is no set timeline for the retention of those records. The NDP keeps a record of who attended nomination meetings and who was issued ballots but only until shortly after the meeting. Most meetings end with a vote to destroy the ballots.

7.5 Position on potential policy proposals about nomination contests

Notifying Elections Canada before a nomination contest occurs

- [47] The NDP would be open to notifying Elections Canada in advance of a nomination meeting if it would protect parties from foreign interference. The party does not, at first consideration, believe providing such information would prevent or guard against foreign interference.

Permitting only citizens to vote

- [48] The NDP does not support restricting voting in nomination contests to Canadian citizens because it would change who can join and engage with the party. Ms. Watson noted the party wants to encourage people to engage in the political process and foster discussion and debate. Further restricting membership would undermine these goals.

Publicly posting nomination contest rules

- [49] The NDP does not post its nomination contest rules because, in part, it is a process internal to the party and party's membership, it is not the purpose of the party's website, and the NDP wishes to guard against outside parties engaging in manipulation of the process. The party does not believe publishing such information would prevent or guard against foreign interference.

Publicly publishing results of nomination contest votes

- [50] The party is opposed to publishing the vote count of a nomination contest because it can be divisive and/or embarrassing for the contestants and may discourage future contestants from seeking the nomination. The party does not believe publishing such information would prevent or guard against foreign interference.

Requiring all nomination contestants file a full financial return¹

- [51] The NDP does not support requiring all nomination contestants to file a full financial return because it raises the threshold for participation and deters people from running for nominations. Additionally, Elections Canada establishes spending limits that all contestants must abide by. The party does not believe publishing such information would prevent or guard against foreign interference.

8. Withdrawing Party Approval for Nomination Contestants or Candidates

- [52] The NDP can withdraw its approval for a nomination contestant or a candidate for election at any point. If someone is already on the Elections Canada ballot, then the party will tell Elections Canada they no longer represent the party. The NCNC makes these decisions.

9. Leadership Contests

- [53] The NDP's Federal Council adopts the rules for each leadership contest. These rules are not, traditionally, posted publicly. Vote counts for each round of voting are announced during the leadership convention but not posted on the website. Final leadership vote percentages are also announced. The leadership candidates and their scrutineers are privy to the vote counts.
- [54] For future leadership contests, the party will consider what it can do to prevent foreign interference, including reviewing the Commission's recommendations and looking at best practices in other countries or jurisdictions and the rules adopted by provincial parties.

¹ Currently the contestants do not have to do this if they spend less than \$1,000.

- [55] Ms. Watson said she will strongly recommend that potential leadership contestants be required to participate in a vetting process, which will, in part, consider the risks of foreign interference, for the next leadership contest.
- [56] The party has not yet decided how identity and eligibility for voting will be confirmed or whether voting will be in-person, virtual or hybrid.
- [57] There may be some value to have the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol (CEIPP) apply to leadership contests. Generally, it may be good to have the CEIPP operate outside of the caretaker period.
- [58] The party's position on potential policy proposals about nomination contests apply equally in relation to leaderships contests.

10. Political Finance

- [59] When the NDP processes contributions made by credit card, it checks the addresses, especially any international address. Credit card processing companies take extensive measures to guard against fraud so they have rules and requirements for website payment.
- [60] The party has a small, well-known group of committed maximum donors so spikes in the number of maximum donations in a short period of time would stand out and be flagged for review. The same checks for memberships apply to donations.
- [61] The party is uncertain about whether cryptocurrency could facilitate foreign interference.
- [62] The party believes that two important changes could be made to the political financing ecosystem that could effectively combat foreign interference. First, government funding could be made available to political parties specifically for investments in cybersecurity infrastructure – investments that are outside the normal operating budgets of all political parties. Secondly, a return to a public subsidy for political parties such as the per-vote subsidy eliminated in 2015. Reducing political parties' reliance on individual donations could concretely make them less susceptible to foreign interference.

11. Electronic Infrastructure

- [63] The NDP has IT staff and a contract with an IT company. Its cloud infrastructure has a robust firewall system with redundancies. It is a “whitelist” model. [“Whitelisting” is a cybersecurity strategy under which only pre-approved or trusted users, entities or actions are allowed to operate on a system or network.] Users must provide their internet protocol (IP) addresses to get access and system use is constantly monitored.
- [64] Organizations that process payments and hold personal information, such as the party, are targets for cyber incursions and the party is no exception. The party has been subject to attempts to access its systems and information in the past, the most recent of note being approximately two years ago. The party engaged third-party specialists to review the event and ensure our systems were intact – which they were. Suggested infrastructure improvements were made. The party also alerted CCCS. There is no information that this was anything more sophisticated than an attempt to gain access to financial information. None was accessed.
- [65] The NDP has been in touch with CCCS about measures to protect its electronic systems. However, the CCCS mandate limits their usefulness to political parties. The party continues to monitor and upgrade its IT infrastructure through a security and protection of information lens. However, the resources available to political parties is significantly less than those available to government institutions and bodies and therefore political parties cannot reasonably meet the level of security that organizations such as CCCS might wish. The party continues to recommend the provision of funding to political parties for the express purpose of IT infrastructure and cybersecurity.
- [66] Although the NDP considers the CCCS to be of limited usefulness with respect to strategic advice, it is helpful when there is a specific tactical question.
- [67] Mr. Calvert said all political parties are vulnerable to cyberattacks. In his view, none will be equipped to deal with this threat until there is stable government funding provided to political parties for this purpose.

- [68] Ms. Watson said it would be helpful to have more practical guidance from a neutral person or agency to advise on the strengths and weaknesses of a vendor and who are trusted vendors.
- [69] The NDP tells its Members of Parliament, candidates, and campaign staff which applications are more or less secure and what kind of information should not be transmitted electronically. It relays best practices for social media use. Some of this information will also be included in its forthcoming manual which will have a section addressing foreign interference.

12. Interactions with the Government About Foreign Interference

12.1 The SITE Task Force

- [70] Since the 2021 election, the NDP has participated in unclassified SITE TF briefings in relation to byelections.
- [71] The party did not find these briefings particularly useful or informative. Unclassified information is not helpful.
- [72] At Ms. Watson's request, the NDP had a meeting with the SITE TF to discuss how to more actively address social media manipulation but the SITE TF had limited ability to assist with the party's primary concerns and experiences.
- [73] SITE TF meetings have been retrospective and have not resulted in immediate action or advice about what activities to look out for.
- [74] Meetings with the SITE TF have been helpful in building relationships with the security and intelligence community.
- [75] The NDP is not convinced the classified briefings provided important insights. Mr. Calvert's view was that the SITE briefings would continue to be of limited practical use unless the party representatives were authorized to receive information classified at the Top Secret level.

12.2 Government security and intelligence agencies

[76] The NDP has had contact with government security and intelligence agencies about foreign interference since the 2021 general election. It has raised suspicions and concerns. It raised those concerns with local police as well.

12.3 PCO

[77] With respect to PCO, the NDP contacts them through the PCO SITE TF member. It has provided information to PCO in this way, but it is not necessarily clear in all instances what happened to the information the NDP provided or whether it was passed on.

12.4 Elections Canada and the Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections

[78] The NDP has been in contact with Elections Canada and the Office of the Commissioner of Canada elections with respect to foreign interference.

13. Mis/Disinformation

[79] There are two categories of mis/disinformation: (1) fraudsters who use Jagmeet Singh's name because he is a well-known public figure; and (2) mis/disinformation about Mr. Singh. An example of the latter are fake news stories about Mr. Singh. The NDP has seen "articles" that look like they are by the Toronto Star, with false and inflammatory headlines. These "articles" are placed as advertisements on social media.

[80] The party has also seen activity on party social media accounts where thousands of fake accounts "follow" us, but due to the fact they are fake, they don't actually engage with our content, which has the effect of suppressing the party's reach and engagement globally. This type of activity stifles our ability to interact with Canadians, and hinders the ability of Canadians wishing to engage with our movement.

[81] The NDP does not suspect that this manipulation is coming from other domestic political parties and believes this is a form of foreign interference.

- [82] This online activity has an impact and there is no mechanism to address it in real time. Meta, the company that owns Facebook and Instagram, has a Canadian representative who is a direct contact for political parties, but it typically does not respond to complaints until 5-10 days later. By then, the damage is done.
- [83] The NDP cannot reach anyone at X (formerly Twitter).
- [84] The NDP has noticed issues with social media manipulation on the following platforms: Instagram/Meta, Twitter, YouTube, and Google.
- [85] The NDP is not currently on TikTok but might consider rejoining because it puts the NDP at a disadvantage to not have a TikTok presence.
- [86] The NDP finds it worrisome that government does not seem to have tools or a desire to deal with this type of social media manipulation. The party has reported mis/disinformation activity to its SITE TF contact at PCO but rarely receives status updates. At best, the NDP might get a brief email with no information about what to do. Thus, the NDP questions whether reporting out is of value.
- [87] When the NDP had a meeting with the SITE TF to discuss how to address social media manipulation, SITE TF did not provide tools or best practices as it related to the specific concerns.
- [88] The party has no mechanisms to track and respond to mis/disinformation. It has a small staff without the capacity to do more than report. It should not be the responsibility of political parties to ensure a safe and healthy social media ecosystem in Canada.
- [89] Outside of the writ period, there is a role for government to work on attributing mis/disinformation. The NDP is already seeing an uptick in mis/disinformation posts. The NDP's view is that foreign interference is not limited to the writ period.

14. Recommendations

15.1 Social media

- [90] The focus on responding to foreign interference should include mis/disinformation, like fake news and media manipulation, which is highly problematic. In the NDP's view,

there is a lot of focus on foreign interference by individuals at nomination meetings but this misses the more common and impactful ways in which foreign interference happens.

- [91] Government should regulate social media companies; specifically the NDP has called for the creation of an independent social media watchdog and for legislation to bring greater transparency to the social media companies' algorithms.

15.2 Cybersecurity

- [92] Government should fund cybersecurity for political parties to combat foreign interference.
- [93] Government should give guidance to political parties and support them in determining best cybersecurity practices.
- [94] Government should provide practical guidance from a neutral person to inform parties about the strengths and weaknesses of a vendor and who are trusted vendors.

15.3 Government processes

- [95] Government should have a sharper focus on foreign interference, including by making the SITE TF less bureaucratic.
- [96] The SITE TF should operate outside of caretaker periods.
- [97] Government should work on attributing mis/disinformation outside of the writ period.