



Foreign Interference Commission

Public Consultation Process

Small Group Consultation Meeting Public Summary

In the summer of 2024, Commissioner Marie-Josée Hogue and members of the Foreign Interference Commission's (the "**Commission**") Public Consultation Process ("**PCP**") team met with four individuals belonging to the Hong Kong Canadian community in a consultation meeting organized with the assistance of the Human Rights Coalition. This is the summary of the information provided during the consultation meeting.

Notes to reader:

- The Commissioner has not and will not be making any findings about the accuracy of the information shared at the consultation meeting or make any findings of fact based on this information.
- The meeting attendees did not make an oath or swear to tell the truth before sharing information at this meeting.
- The meeting attendees were not subjected to cross-examination.
- The meeting attendees have reviewed and approved the contents of this public summary.
- Meeting attendees were given the option to anonymize themselves for the purposes of the present public summary. Where meeting attendees have opted to anonymize themselves, they are designated as "Participant 1", "Participant 2", etc.
- At each of the consultation meetings, the meeting attendees were asked to answer two questions, which are set out below. The meeting attendees were each given a total of 15 minutes to respond to both questions.
- Where necessary, Commission counsel have provided explanatory notes in square brackets and in the footnotes to assist the reader.

Executive Summary

- Certain attendees spoke about the chilling effect of Hong Kong's National Security Law on Hong Kongers living in Canada, providing examples of its application to people who made social media posts when they returned to Hong Kong, stating that those people were arrested, prosecuted, and jailed. Certain attendees discussed their unwillingness to return to Hong Kong for fear of arrest and prosecution.
- Certain attendees said that Canadian Hong Kongers are monitored in Canada, providing examples from their personal experience and from the experiences of others in their communities. Certain attendees explained the fear that this monitoring instills in those who are subject to it, both for themselves and their loved ones living in Hong Kong. One attendee provided examples of Chinese Canadians who saw consequences for their actions in Canada visited upon their loved ones living in the People's Republic of China ("**PRC**"). One attendee described the relationship breakdowns that flow from this system.
- Certain attendees spoke about the chilling effect of Hong Kong's National Security Law, describing a decrease in those in Canada willing to attend protests in favor of democracy for Hong Kong. One attendee stated that some Canadian Hong Kongers are worried that if they participate in Canada's democratic processes, information about them may be leaked to Chinese spies. One attendee said that the situation presents a barrier to Hong Kongers in Canada exercising rights and freedoms.
- Certain attendees spoke about the vulnerabilities of the political party nomination contest to foreign interference, providing examples of how party membership costs may be paid for by others and how people can register in ridings in which they do not live. One attendee said they were offered cash after they signed up for party membership.
- Certain attendees talked about misinformation and disinformation in Chinese-language media, both traditional media and social media. Certain attendees singled out WeChat as a platform over which misinformation and disinformation is disseminated, particularly to Canadians who are more comfortable communicating and receiving news in Chinese.

1. Participants' responses to Question 1

The first question posed to the participants was: *How are you, your loved ones and members of your community impacted by foreign interference in Canada's electoral processes and democratic institutions?*

Participant 1

Participant 1 said that the Hong Kong community in Canada is impacted by the National Security Law imposed on Hong Kong in 2020 and the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance rubberstamped by the legislative assembly of Hong Kong in March 2024. Participant 1 explained that these laws are applied to Hong Kongers living overseas. For instance, Participant 1 provided examples of Hong Kongers who published social media posts contravening these laws and who, upon returning to Hong Kong, were arrested, prosecuted, and jailed.

Participant 1 said that Hong Kong Canadians seem to be monitored by Chinese and Hong Kong authorities. According to Participant 1, refraining from traveling to Hong Kong does not guarantee their safety. Participant 1 referenced the reporting about Chinese overseas police stations operating in Canada. Participant 1 also mentioned findings that the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in London was spying on and threatening Hong Kongers in the United Kingdom as being another example of transnational repression. Participant 1 noted that three individuals had been arrested in the United Kingdom for assisting Hong Kong's foreign intelligence service and raised the possibility of similar actions taking place on Canadian soil.

Participant 1 also referenced pro-democracy activists in exile, stating that they are on a "wanted list", with a HK\$1M bounty for their capture and return to Hong Kong. Participant 1 said that it is widely reported in the Hong Kong media that pro-democracy activists' family members may be arrested. Participant 1 also referenced a Chinese dissident in France who was nearly abducted by Chinese diplomats or spies.

Participant 1 said that their Hong Kongers group works to protect Canadian interests. Participant 1 said that their work has included meeting with MPs, Ministers, Public Safety, and Global Affairs Canada, advocating for Canada to be vigilant regarding foreign interference by the Chinese Communist Party (the “**CCP**”). Participant 1 said that they also sought to raise awareness at the meetings about the fact that Hong Kong and the PRC were no longer suitable economic partners for Canada, and that a decoupling should be undertaken.

Participant 1 said that they cannot return to Hong Kong to visit their loved ones, because they would likely be arrested because of their advocacy work.

Participant 1 said that few of the members of their group are willing to serve on the organization’s board of directors because their names would be listed in the non-profit registry, and the members worry about being identified and harassed; those with loved ones living in Hong Kong worry about the safety of their loved ones.

Participant 1 said that they are also afraid, but they are putting their fear aside. Participant 1 mentioned their fear for their loved ones still living in Hong Kong. Participant 1 stated that they regularly survey their surroundings for suspicious vehicles that may be following them. Participant 1 noted that they had not personally experienced any direct threats related to their advocacy work, but they suggested that it might just be because they were a new member of their group and had not been active for a long period of time.

Participant 1 said that overall, the Hong Kong community is seeing fewer people willing to join protests or sign petitions related to issues in Hong Kong or China since the passing of the Safeguarding National Security Ordinance. Participant 1 said that some Hong Kongers are worried that if they participate in Canada’s democratic processes, their information may be leaked to Chinese spies. Participant 1 said that the whole situation presents a barrier to Hong Kongers exercising their freedom of speech and to their ability to participate in Canadian democratic processes.

Participant 2

Participant 2 said that they immigrated to Canada and have been a Canadian citizen for over 50 years, and that they have no ties to Hong Kong.

Participant 2 said that they have personally witnessed Chinese government interference in all four levels of Canadian government, and that they have seen Canadian friends lose elections while others with help from foreign agents have won. Participant 2 said that rigged candidate nomination processes for provincial parties have achieved the desired outcome of interference for foreign perpetrators.

Participant 2 spoke about weaknesses in Canadian political party nomination contests that render them particularly vulnerable to foreign interference. Participant 2 provided examples, including different ways that those signing up as party members can have their memberships paid for by others, such as the use of prepaid credit cards by campaign workers and cash reimbursements. Participant 2 said they were once offered cash after signing up for membership with a political party.

Participant 2 said that diaspora community groups will sign up for memberships with all parties, and that they will vote in multiple nomination contests in ridings where diaspora community nominees come forward, changing names and addresses on legitimate documents in order to do so. Participant 2 said that political parties know of this reality but do not have the political will to close such loopholes because they may benefit from them. Participant 2 mentioned that another common tactic consisted of using a single address for multiple individuals, including some who do not reside in the riding and should not be entitled to vote in the nomination contest as such. Participant 2 also stated that they have witnessed illegitimate changes to the eligible voters' list used by political parties, in order to fictitiously increase the number of voters.

Participant 2 also detailed tactics used by prospective nominees to bolster their chances to win nomination contests, including controlling the nomination committee, the deployment of favourable contest rules or using technicalities to disqualify other contestants.

Participant 3

Participant 3 described themselves as a proud Canadian who has been here for over 30 years. Participant 3 said that they have been involved with the Canada Hong Kong Link (“**CHKL**”) and the Canadian Coalition for a Foreign Influence Transparency Registry. Participant 3 said that they have been involved in the democratic movement in Hong Kong for the last four decades, including by collecting data on, and monitoring and analyzing infiltration and interference by the CCP in Hong Kong and in Canada.

Participant 3 said that the CCP is the most active and malicious of the foreign powers in Canada and seeks to silence outspoken dissidents in Canada and infiltrate Canadian civil society organizations supporting democracy in the PRC. Participant 3 explained that the CCP is interested in infiltrating Canada at least in part because Canada is the back door to the United States. Participant 3 said that, by infiltrating Canada, the CCP hopes to gain access to information from the United States, the Five Eyes, and NATO, as well as about Canada’s liberal democratic allies. Participant 3 said that CCP interference on Canadian soil poses a major threat to our democracy, that it silences individuals and eliminates dissident groups.

Participant 3 identified themselves as a major target for the CCP, which wants them to stop their advocacy. Participant 3 described receiving numerous threatening anonymous phone calls. Participant 3 said that multiple attempts have been made to hack their computer system.

Participant 3 described a dissident living in Canada whose family members in the PRC were used by the Chinese authorities to try to convince them to return to the PRC. Participant 3 said that pictures of the dissident and their children were shown to the dissident’s brother living in the PRC. Participant 3 said that, when the dissident refused to stop their activism in Canada, their brother lost his job in the PRC and their parents, who also live in the PRC, lost their pensions. Participant 3 said that, out of fear of retaliation, spouses are forced to divorce, and parents are forced to disown their children in Canada.

Participant 3 said that transnational repression by the PRC has become increasingly arrogant in recent years, with pro-CCP counterprotests staged at protests in support of Hong Kong democracy. For instance, Participant 3 referred to counter-protesters attacking Hong Kong democracy protesters and surrounding a prayer meeting convened at the time of the protests taking place in Hong Kong.

Participant 3 also noted that the PRC had increasingly used misinformation and disinformation to manipulate voters in Canadian elections. Participant 3 said that the CCP launched a full-fledged disinformation campaign during the 2021 federal election to smear Canadians of Hong Kong descent. Participant 3 said that, as part of that smear campaign, Jenny Kwan and Kenny Chiu were described as racist towards Chinese Canadians. According to Participant 3, these disinformation and misinformation campaigns also took place on social media platforms such as WeChat and public forums.

Participant 3 said that political party nomination contests are vulnerable to foreign interference, including through fraudulent voter enrolment, paid volunteers working for election campaigns, fake organizations promoting candidates, and foreign donations that go unreported to Elections Canada.

Participant 4

Participant 4 said they have been in Canada for several decades. Participant 4 said that they have kept a low profile out of fear of repercussions for themselves and their relatives in the PRC, and that they will not travel to the PRC due to worries about being detained there.

Participant 4 described their frustration that their freedom of expression in Canada is being suppressed. Participant 4 said that their friends are similarly frustrated. Participant 4 said that Chinese Canadians are self-censoring, explaining that while they may criticize the Canadian government and officials, they need to be careful about what they say about the Chinese government and its proxies.

Participant 4 said that they have been studying Chinese language media outlets operating in Canada since 2013, and that they focused their studies on digital Chinese language media since the pandemic. Participant 4 has also studied and observed the Chinese-language social media environment, including WeChat groups. Participant 4 said that they and others in the mainland Chinese community believe that a digital media outlet in Canada is receiving funding from the Chinese government. Participant 4 said that the Chinese United Front Work Department (“**UFWD**”) has used a variety of methods to co-opt Chinese language media outlets in Canada, including inviting them to international conferences the UFWD has organized and financing media outlets. Further, Participant 4 said that agents from the Chinese Ministry of State Security threatened a popular Chinese immigrant Youtuber in Canada with imprisonment in the PRC if he did not stop criticizing Xi Jinping and the Chinese government.

Participant 4 said that the Chinese language media sphere is very important to recent immigrants from the PRC and for Chinese Canadians who are more comfortable consuming media in Chinese as their primary source of news. Participant 4 said that, more recently, WeChat has become a media platform of choice, including for their relatives. Participant 4 said that the information their relatives consume via WeChat is so different from the information they consume it is almost like they are living in parallel societies, and that this dissonance is causing relationship breakdowns. For instance, Participant 4 explained that their relatives were mostly consuming anti-West and pro-Russian information on WeChat. Participant 4 expressed concern over a lack of media literacy, saying that people without sufficient media literacy accept what is shown to them.

2. Participants’ responses to Question 2

The second question posed to participants was: *What are your suggestions for how you and others in your community who may be vulnerable to foreign interference could be supported and protected, and for how foreign interference could be detected or combated?*

Participant 1

Participant 1 said that the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (“**CSIS**”) should share information about what it is doing about spying and transnational repression in Canada with targeted communities. Participant 1 said that such targeted communities do not know what tools the Canadian government actually has or what actions meet the threshold for an arrest – without this information, the community doesn’t know the extent to which it is being protected.

Participant 1 said that vulnerable communities need information about what to do if they face harassment or think they are being followed. Participant 1 said that a public education campaign should be offered in the language(s) that the targeted community members are most comfortable communicating in.

Participant 1 said that diplomats from hostile states should be closely monitored. Participant 1 said that it was reported in 2023 that 176 Chinese diplomats were in Canada, and stated that some are suspected of threatening MPs and diaspora community members.

Participant 1 said that regulations for Canadian political party nomination processes should be implemented. Participant 1 said that only Canadian citizens and permanent residents should be allowed to vote in nomination contests, and that nomination expenses should be monitored by a third party.

Participant 1 summarized their suggestions by stating that the Canadian government should take actions to show Canadians that the government is aware of, concerned about, and taking actions about the issues of foreign interference and transnational repression.

Participant 2

Participant 2 highlighted that political parties’ nomination contests processes need to be reformed, to prevent exploitation. Participant 2 suggested that Elections Canada should

be involved in nomination contests, in order to remedy the existing vulnerabilities and weaknesses existing in these processes.

Participant 3

Participant 3 spoke favourably about the passing of Bill C-70¹ and said that Canada needs to ensure that it is properly implemented to ensure that it is a strong and effective tool to combat foreign interference. Participant 3 stated that the definition of “political activities” as it pertains to the foreign agent registry should be expanded to include, among other things, the election to internal party offices, party leadership contests, and the appointment of individuals to public office. Participant 3 said that the foreign agent registry should cover all levels of government and school boards. Participant 3 said that corresponding regulations applying to social sectors should be drafted and implemented. Participant 3 said that implementation and funding is required in advance of the 2025 federal election.

Participant 3 said that the administrative monetary penalties in Bill C-70 should be done away with because it weakens the effect of that legislation.

Participant 3 said that a competent and knowledgeable independent and permanent foreign interference commissioner should be appointed.

Participant 3 said that the foreign agent registry legislation should be reviewed one year after its implementation and every five years thereafter to address the rapid evolution of foreign interference.

Participant 3 said that a multilingual hotline and secure reporting system should be implemented to encourage reporting from the public to this permanent foreign interference commissioner.

¹ Bill C-70, *An Act respecting countering foreign interference*, was given royal assent on June 20, 2024.

Participant 3 said that public education is required to enhance public awareness of foreign interference and how to respond to it, suggesting that this could be the product of a collaboration between national security and civil society organizations.

Participant 3 said that Elections Canada should come up with guidelines and protocols to govern the integrity of nomination campaigns.

Participant 3 said that a fact checking system to identify fake news, like the one established in Taiwan, should be set up.

Participant 3 said that WeChat should be banned because it is used by the CCP as a major tool for manipulation.

Participant 3 said that security and surveillance protocols should be implemented to prevent intellectual property theft and elite capture by foreign states.

Participant 4

Participant 4 said that the Chinese language media environment in Canada needs to be improved in order to provide better sources of information for Chinese immigrants.

Participant 4 said that a public information and education campaign is required to raise the level of media literacy in Canada.