

The Pillar Society contends that foreign interference from the PRC is a persistent and pervasive threat to Canada's electoral and democratic processes.

In the few years before the 2019 Federal Election, the government's interest in foreign interference was driven by intelligence relating to Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. Election.

A review of the SITE task force's work states that "when the Protocol was introduced in 2019," the concerns seemed to be with large-scale foreign interference along the lines of Russian actions in the 2016 U.S. election. ... The Panel did not find interference of that magnitude in Canada either in 2019 or 2021." Russian interference operations favour *Disinformation*, differing significantly from the PRC's operations, which are almost exclusively *Humint*.

The Rapporteur's Special Report concluded that Beijing's pervasive interference in Canadian politics escalated in 2015 when President Xi promoted a united front in Chinese Communist Party operations abroad.

The document asserts that a "clandestine network of PRC-linked individuals" worked in loose coordination to "covertly advance PRC interests related to the 2019 Federal Election in Canada."

The report's most consequential allegation states, "a large clandestine transfer of funds earmarked for the Federal Election from the PRC Consulate in Toronto was transferred" into the 2019 election influence network, which included at least 11 federal candidates and 13 campaign staff."

Those working in intelligence collection and assessment understand intelligence's shortcomings. However, they also appreciate its value and participate in an ongoing process to assess the reliability of sources and the credibility of the information. CSIS Assessments are the product of rigorous fact-checking and evaluation, serving as a vehicle for dialogue between government machinery and intelligence collectors. Discounting the reporting outright because the message might be unpleasant to hear or comes from multiple sources of varying degrees of known reliability is a mistake consistent with an immature appreciation of the

value of intelligence in mitigating threats to our national security. Feedback and questions from government clients are crucial.

During the hearing, which concluded on April 10, many witnesses stated there was no indication that the PRC had impacted the outcome of the 2019 and 2021 federal elections. The Pillar Society agrees with that conclusion. However, the PRC succeeded in interfering in those elections using clandestine means.

We credit the Service for obtaining the PRC's strategies and plans for interfering in our elections and for the thirty-four intelligence briefings the Service provided the PMO, various cabinet ministers and other senior officials in the years since 2018: a briefing note from 2023 02 21, tabled with the Inquiry, contained this sage advice: "Until (foreign interference) is viewed as an existential threat to Canadian democracy and governments forcefully and actively respond, these threats will persist."

Recommendations:

1. The Pillar Society recommends a whole-of-government approach to safeguarding our electoral and democratic processes. We recommend that legislative changes that are underway be fully supported to prosecute foreign interference enablers in Canada.
2. The Pillar Society recommends establishing a Foreign Agent Registry to mitigate and prevent foreign interference in all sectors of Canadian society. A registry would blunt the effectiveness of foreign influence in our electoral processes and clearly state that Canada considers foreign interference by other countries to be unacceptable.
3. We recommend that the threshold the government uses to determine a fair and free election in a riding or election be replaced by a sliding scale similar in scope and usage to that used to assess terrorism threats. The SITE TF and Panel of Five could assess intelligence to gauge the threat to elections as low, medium, high, and critical levels of risk.
4. The Pillar Society recommends that criteria for determining a threshold could be formally established. This would require a process enabling changes to be made as the threat environment evolves.

This Commission of Inquiry has undoubtedly raised the profile of the FI threat; whether that is sufficient to encourage decision-makers to take it more seriously is a more challenging objective that has yet to be seen.