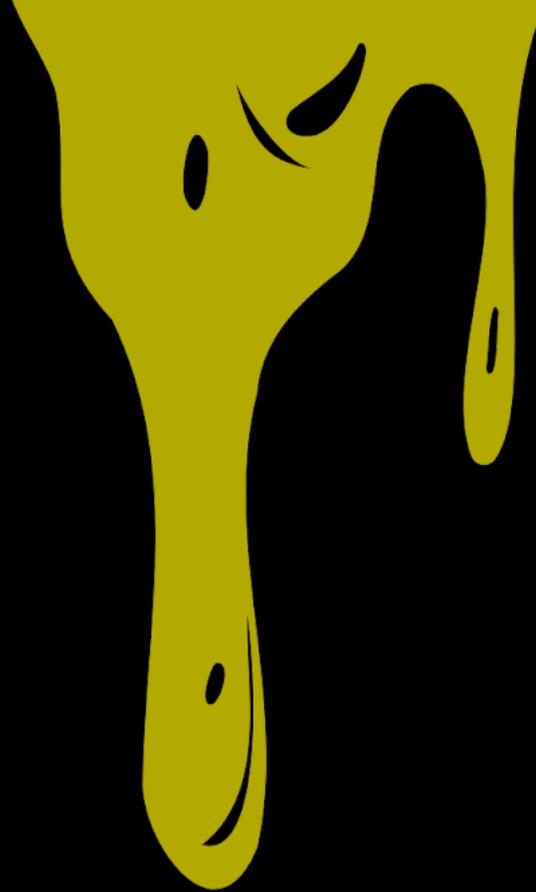


**ALLIANCE
CANADA HK**

Murky Waters

**Beijing's Influence in
Canadian Democratic
and Electoral Processes**

May 2023



Acknowledgements

We thank Alliance Canada Hong Kong (ACHK) volunteers, experts, and community partners who contributed their time, knowledge, and insights to *Murky Waters*. ACHK's work is built upon the members of diaspora communities who risk their safety, give up sleep, and offer their time in volunteerism.

ACHK is also supported by many in Canada and globally, who continue to encourage, inspire, and amplify diasporic voices like ours. We are also indebted to the experts we have consulted for this report. Thank you for your enthusiasm, generosity, and insights. We extend our gratitude to all those who have contributed, even though we are unable to acknowledge specific individuals or entities for their contributions to ensure their safety.

Finally, we are grateful for the participating elected officials, past candidates, campaigners, and party staff's participation in our survey. These responses allowed us to take a peek into the political community's knowledge and experiences with foreign interference and misinformation activities in Canada.

Disclaimer

This report was created without any internal or external funding. As of May 31, 2023, there are no paid staff at ACHK. *Murky Waters* was written by volunteers.

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in relation to the subject matter covered based on credible sources. It is provided with the understanding that this report is a brief and policy advice to the government, parliamentarians, elected officials, and policymakers. No person apart from public servants and government officials should act upon the contents of this publication without first obtaining advice from a qualified professional.

Report Synopsis

Most often, the objectives of hostile foreign principals engaging in influence activities are to erode public trust and shape the political environment to become more favourable for their national interests. *Murky Waters* identifies Beijing's influence activities in Canadian democratic processes, which extends across a variety of sectors, including academia, media, civil society, business and trade, and social media. The rise of social media has provided malicious actors with potent means to reach their goals at an incredible speed, making it necessary to enact new laws and regulations to counter the emergence of misinformation and narrative discursion manipulation in the realm of information warfare.

In this report:

Section 1: Community Observations

Section 2: Survey of politicians and campaign staffers

Section 3: Important Considerations

Section 4: Recommendations

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Introduction

While Canada is consistently recognized as one of the world's few full democracies,¹ no democratic institution or electoral system is completely immune to attempts aimed at weakening or destabilizing them.

Foreign interference in political institutions is present in all levels of public office and spans the entire political spectrum,² with allegations dating back as far as the 1990s. The objective of foreign principals³ engaging in such interference is to undermine and challenge the international rules-based order. Beijing's presence in electoral processes not only constitutes an encroachment on Canadian society, but also seeks to erode the integrity of democratic institutions and foster public distrust. During the 2019 federal elections, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) announced they are investigating "foreign actors interference activities".⁴ Significant leaks from the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) also alleges Beijing's interference in recent Canadian elections. Canadian security agencies,^{5 6} dissident communities,⁷ journalists and national security experts have long voiced concerns about foreign influence and interference in Canadian elections and political processes, but were largely ignored.

Inadequate public knowledge and awareness of the impact of foreign influence and interference in Canada is concerning. Canada needs to adapt and evolve to confront new and emerging threats domestically and globally.

Last updated in 2019, The *Canada Elections Act*⁸ provides a framework to address financing aspects of federal political institutions, but electoral campaigns and political engagement extends far beyond monetary contributions. Volunteer mobilization, community events, endorsements, and social media campaigns are all legitimate electoral activities that cannot - and perhaps should not - be banned easily or regulated. As these activities do not rely on monetary contributions, it is important for decision makers to carefully consider what should and should not be regulated.

We reiterate the words of Chief Electoral Officer Stéphane Perrault, who noted the *Canada Elections Act* does not define foreign interference.⁹ We also echo the Chief Electoral Officer's

¹ [A new low for global democracies](#) (February 2022). The Economist.

² [Foreign Interference Threats to Canada's Democratic Process](#) (July 2021). Canada.ca.

³ [Public Safety Canada](#)'s definition: A foreign principal refers to an entity that is owned or directed, in law or in practice, by a foreign government. This could inter alia include a foreign power, foreign economic entity, foreign political organization, or an individual or group with links to a foreign government.

⁴ [RCMP investigating 'foreign actor interference activities,' Lucki says, prompting China talk in the House](#) (November 2022). CTV News.

⁵ [CSIS is 'increasingly concerned' about China's interference in Canada](#) (November 2022). Global News.

⁶ [Canadian voters are likely to face foreign cyber interference in the next election, say cyber spies](#) (July 2021). CBC News.

⁷ [In Plain Sight: Beijing's unrestricted network of foreign influence in Canada](#) (May 2021). ACHK.

⁸ [The Electoral System of Canada: Political Financing](#) (December 2022). Election Canada.

⁹ [Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs](#) (November 1, 2022). House of Commons.

testimony on “the transparency of third-party funding which includes the issue of third-party foreign funding.”¹⁰ Commissioner of Canada Elections Caroline Simard and Chief Electoral Officer Perrault both spoke to the narrowness of their mandate, as current capacities are limited by powers granted by existing legislations.

Though Elections Canada made progress in challenging disinformation and misinformation on the voting processes, their focus is limited to electoral aspects. However, the rise of social media and evolving technologies has provided malicious actors with powerful tools to spread disinformation, requiring adaptation to counter emerging information and narrative discursion warfare.^{11 12}

We will be focusing on foreign interference in Canadian democratic processes, but foreign influence activities extend far beyond the electoral processes and political institutions. It is a multi-sectoral and whole-of-society challenge.

***Murky Waters* has four sections:**

1. Community Observations;
2. A Survey of Politicians;
3. Important Considerations; and
4. Recommendations.

We will be detailing on-the-ground observations of foreign influence and interference from the diaspora and other vulnerable communities in Canada, and identify specific tactics that have yet to be widely understood in the mainstream Canadian consciousness. *Murky Waters* will also provide policy recommendations for consideration to counter foreign influence in electoral processes.

From voters, candidates, political parties, donors, to the general public, it is crucial to foster trust, resilience, and transparency to ensure Canadians’ confidence in our democratic institutions.

¹⁰ [Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs](#) (November 22, 2022). House of Commons.

¹¹ [How Disinformation Evolved in 2020](#). (January 2021). Brookings Institute

¹² [Generative AI marks the beginning of a new era for disinformation](#) (April 2023). European Digital Media Observatory

Suggested Readings

This report is an update to our existing work.

We highly suggest reviewing previous Alliance Canada Hong Kong's (ACHK) reports for a holistic understanding of the foreign interference threat environment:

- [*National Security and Chinese State influence \(August 16-August 19 Pro-Hong Kong Democracy Events\)*](#) (2020): A case study of Beijing's global coordinated intimidation campaign against pro-democracy Hongkongers over the August 16th weekend in 2019, across 7 Canadian provinces, as well as globally in the United States, Germany, United Kingdom, Taiwan, Australia, and New Zealand.
- [*In Plain Sight: Beijing's unrestricted network of foreign influence in Canada*](#) (2021): A broad overview of Beijing's foreign influence activities in Canada.
- [*Written Submission to the Standing Committee on National Defence*](#) (2022): An overview of Beijing's non-traditional forms of warfare against Canadian society and institutions.

Background

All countries engage in influence activities, particularly in trade and business. However, what sets the People's Republic of China (PRC) influence apart and makes it dangerous are the vast resources Beijing pours into its influence operations, its economic leverage and the blurring of lines via Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) formal integration into non-governmental,¹³ military,¹⁴ academic,¹⁵ civil and business spheres.¹⁶ This makes **Beijing-sanctioned influence incredibly difficult to detect**.

Beijing also employs long-term 10/20/30-year plans¹⁷ to guide its development, utilizing globalization and trade¹⁸ as a means to gain influence and shape political environments in liberal-democratic countries. This helps the Chinese party-state strengthen its position as a global power to advance its own strategic interests for regime security.

Beijing's Interest in Canada's Political Systems

Beijing demonstrates a keen interest in Canada's political systems and, by extension, its electoral processes. Their interest in influencing Canada stems from several factors:

- **Economic Interests:** Canada possesses abundant natural resources,¹⁹ and a significant market for Chinese goods and investments. Beijing seeks to secure favorable trade relations, access to resources, and economic opportunities.
- **Geopolitical Considerations:** Canada is an influential member of important international alliances and organizations, such as NATO and the G7. Influencing Canada allows Beijing to have indirect access to these forums and strengthen its geopolitical position.
- **Ethnic Chinese Diaspora:** Canada has a substantial ethnic Chinese diaspora community, including individuals with political, economic, social and cultural influence. Beijing seeks to maintain control over overseas ethnic Chinese communities²⁰ to advance their interests.²¹

¹³ [Social Autonomy and Political Integration: Two Policy Approaches to the Government-Nonprofit Relationship since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China](#) (May 2018). Jinjun Wang and Qun Wang.

¹⁴ [Civil-Military Fusion: The Missing Link Between China's Technological and Military Rise](#) (January 2018). Council on Foreign Relations.

¹⁵ [The China Defence Universities Tracker](#) (November 2019). Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

¹⁶ [How the state runs business in China](#) (June 2019). The Guardian.

¹⁷ [The long game: China's grand strategy to displace American order](#) (August 2021). Brookings Institute.

¹⁸ [China Is Weaponizing Globalization](#) (June 2020) Foreign Policy.

¹⁹ [China using up natural resources fast: report](#) (June 2008). Reuters.

²⁰ While this report mainly focuses on ethnic Chinese diaspora's experiences, it is important to consider other ethnic minority communities that Beijing seeks to monitor and suppress dissent such as Uyghurs and Tibetans.

²¹ [The Party Speaks for You](#) (June 2020). Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

Alliance Canada Hong Kong

- **Soft Power Projection:** Beijing can project its soft power and shape narratives that align with the CCP's preferred worldview to enhance its global reputation, counter criticisms, and promote a positive image of the PRC.²²
- **Challenging the International Rules-Based Order:** Beijing challenges existing international rules-based order,²³ which it perceives as dominated by Western powers. Influencing Canada allows Beijing to promote alternative approaches.

It is important to note that the specific motivations and strategies of Beijing's influence in Canada may evolve over time as geopolitical dynamics and priorities shift.

When it comes to influencing elections, Beijing strategically selects individuals of influence who have a realistic chance of winning and can advance its agenda. These individuals may be involved in various sectors such as school boards,²⁴ tourism, land development,²⁵ investments, or business opportunities. Beijing's approach is often localized, focusing on specific issues or regions where their influence can have a significant impact.

One of the tools Beijing employs in its influence activities is the United Front Work Department (UFWD), which will be further discussed in the following section.

The United Front's Role in Foreign Influence Activities

In recent years, national security experts and diaspora communities have called attention to increasingly aggressive influence activities in Canada that are funded or affiliated with the PRC and the CCP. Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, the CCP's UFWD has received renewed resources and importance within the Chinese party-state apparatus.²⁶ The 2019 budget of the UFWD was \$2.6 billion (USD), far exceeding funding for the PRC's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Almost a quarter of UFWD's annual budget is set aside for offices designed to influence "foreigners and overseas Chinese communities".²⁷ UFWD operates within the PRC, but also globally. Almost all Chinese embassies and consulates host UFWD and affiliated actors.²⁸

The term "United Front Work"²⁹ encompasses a wide range of global activities undertaken by UFWD, in collaboration with other components of the Chinese party-state apparatus, to garner public support for the CCP, including silencing dissidence, swaying public opinion,³⁰ and establishing networks of influencers.³¹ Though UFWD is a department of the CCP, United Front

²² [China's Big Bet on Soft Power](#) (February 2018). Council on Foreign Relations.

²³ [Maintaining the Rules-Based International Order Is in Everyone's Best Interests](#) (August 2022). The Centre for International Governance Innovation.

²⁴ [Universities, school boards across Canada defend ties with China's Confucius Institute](#) (October 2020). The Globe and Mail.

²⁵ [China state-backed developer Greenland Group eyes more Canadian projects](#) (May 2015). Reuters.

²⁶ [Inside China's secret 'magic weapon' for worldwide influence](#) (October 2017). Financial Times.

²⁷ [Putting Money in the Party's Mouth: How China Mobilizes Funding for United Front Work](#) (September 2020). CSET.

²⁸ [How China's united front system works overseas](#) (April 2022). The Strategist.

²⁹ [Magic Weapons: China's political influence activities under Xi Jinping](#) (September 2017). The Wilson Centre.

³⁰ [United front work and propaganda: influencing people to influence content](#) (December 2020). JSTOR.

³¹ [Frontier influencers: the new face of China's propaganda](#) (2022). Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

work involves various segments of Chinese society, such as the party-state apparatus, non-government actors, and the private sector. Official Chinese party-state documents publicly identify journalists, business leaders, community and academic leaders, and media organizations as part of the UFWD network.

Utilizing Proxies and Third-Party Actors

UFWD utilizes proxy actors, such as law firms, consulting agencies, businesses and government relations firms, to distance themselves to initiatives.³² They cultivate relationships with influential individuals and organizations in different areas, creating separation between foreign interference and the foreign principal. Some proxy actors may go on to engage in lobbying activities to advocate on their business clients' behalf, who are doing Beijing's bidding. Other proxy actors, who may be unaware, allow foreign principals to create distance from influence activities. While some financial regulations are in place, it is difficult to disrupt funding at the speed of their operations.

The long-established United Front networks in Canada are operating with increasing sophistication and aggression.³³ These activities and individuals employ covert and coercive tactics to create a misleading impression of representing monolithic grassroots communities, also known as “[astroturfing](#)”. For outsiders that lack cultural or linguistic familiarity of the diasporic communities, it is difficult to differentiate between genuine community engagement and orchestrated United Front activities. This further complicates the identification of inorganic, deceptive and clandestine activities associated with the United Front by those on the outside.

³² [How China's Canadian lobbyists blurred the lines of PR, journalism and political activism](#) (April 2019). South China Morning Post.

³³ [The Expansion of the United Front Under Xi Jinping](#) (2015) The China Story.

Section 1:

Community Observations in Canada

The following section is an update to our existing work, focusing on political and election influence. Observations derive from lived experiences from the community, backed by research and investigative sources.

Foreign Influence in Canadian Elections

While election campaigns during the writ period often draw significant attention, it is crucial to recognize that foreign influence and interference activities extend far beyond these specific timeframes.

The Chinese party-state employs a multifaceted approach to exert its influence, targeting not only electoral processes but also other dimensions of Canadian society.³⁴ This can include activities such as:

- Lobbying and cultivating relationships with politicians, political parties and leaders in the community;³⁵
- Sponsoring events;³⁶
- Funding think tanks or research institutions;³⁷
- Exerting pressure through business connections through law firms and consulting agencies; and^{38 39}
- Utilizing economic leverage, relationships or other means.⁴⁰

Understanding PRC's Influence within the Diaspora

For many diaspora community members, they have nothing to gain but everything to lose if they speak up about foreign influence by the PRC publicly. Inherently, the ethnic Chinese diaspora recognizes that certain topics are deemed “off-limits” to Beijing and, as a result, unconsciously practices self-censorship as a habitual response.⁴¹ Political engagement is often perceived as a sensitive and ugly topic, regular folks deem it as 尋釁滋事, translated as “picking quarrels and provoking trouble”⁴².

³⁴ [Report 3 - A Threat to Canadian Sovereignty: National Security Dimensions of the Canada-People's Republic of China Relationship](#) (May 2023). House of Commons.

³⁵ [When Beijing Goes to Washington: Autocratic Lobbying Influence in Democracies](#) (April 2021). Stanford University

³⁶ [B.C. municipalities to review whether Chinese government should sponsor its meeting](#) (July 2019). The Globe and Mail.

³⁷ [Foreign Funding of Think Tanks in America](#) (January 2020). Center For International Policy

³⁸ [Exclusive: In China, the Party's push for influence inside foreign firms stirs fears](#) (August 2017). Reuters

³⁹ [China's Retaliatory Sanctions a Risk for Global Law Firms](#) (July 2021). Law.com

⁴⁰ [Exploring the Parameters of China's Economic Influence](#) (March 2021). Studies in comparative international development, 56(1), 18–44.

⁴¹ [Cultural sensitivity or censorship? Lecturers are finding it difficult to talk about China in class](#) (July 2021). The Conversation

⁴² [Explainer | 'Picking quarrels and provoking trouble': how China's catch-all crime muzzles dissent](#) (August 2021). South China Morning Post

Generational trauma and propaganda regarding political incidents in the PRC greatly disincentivized civic engagement⁴³ and deemed it too high a price to pay⁴⁴. Most are passive in developing their own perspectives⁴⁵, often unknowingly adopting positions or echoing narratives disseminated by foreign principals through community leaders and influencers, as well as ethnic and social media.⁴⁶ This renders diaspora members without access to sources other than ethnic media or ethnic community environments susceptible to foreign influence activities.

The new era of geopolitical relations with the PRC and other authoritarian regimes has come with increasing racial tensions, resulting in the rise of xenophobic and anti-Asian sentiments across Canada.⁴⁷ It is racist and reductive to assume Sinophone communities are a monolith, whether in culture, language, religion, political beliefs or their sentiments towards the PRC and CCP.

Views towards the Chinese party-state are incredibly diverse within the ethnic Chinese diaspora. Some levels of genuine community support can be attributed to successful state narratives and propaganda campaigns. Others may genuinely believe that authoritarian political systems are legitimate or effective,⁴⁸ or that a stronger PRC is beneficial to Sinophone communities. Culturally there is prestige, status and opportunities tied to being able to interact with government officials, and Beijing capitalizes and utilizes these opportunistic sentiments.

Beijing also provides incentives⁴⁹, funding⁵⁰, and benefits to individuals, organizations, and businesses in mainstream Canadian society who align with its agenda, extending beyond diaspora communities. On the other hand, members of the diaspora, and individuals involved with Chinese entities are often apprehensive about repercussions of expressing neutral or diverse positions, with the potential loss of resources, relationships, opportunities, and funding.

The PRC strategically engages UFWD-affiliated actors, known as "overseas delegates," to play a vital role in establishing connections, building relationships, and advocating for the PRC's interests.⁵¹ By tapping into the talent and networks of overseas Chinese, Beijing effectively extends its global reach, gaining support and influence in those communities.

Supporting or Sabotaging Candidates of Interest

A primary and direct approach in influencing Canadian elections is for the UFWD to simply support or sabotage candidates of interest. The fundamental goal is to advance Beijing's agenda by either supporting candidates deemed favorable or sabotaging candidates perceived

⁴³ [In China's Diaspora, Visions of a Different Homeland](#) (December 2022). ChinaFile.

⁴⁴ [Why Some Chinese Immigrants Living in Canada Live in Silent Fear](#) (March 2019). Human Rights Watch

⁴⁵ "Previous research indicated that the average Chinese citizen was highly risk averse and placed much more value on social stability than on political freedom" [Public Opinion in China: A Liberal Silent Majority?](#) (February 2022). Center for Strategic & International Studies

⁴⁶ [How China's TikTok, Facebook influencers push propaganda](#) (March 2022). The Associated Press

⁴⁷ [Reports of Anti-Asian hate crimes are surging in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic](#) (March 2021) CTV News.

⁴⁸ [What the West Gets Wrong About China](#) (May-June 2021) Harvard Business Review

⁴⁹ [Illegal Agents of the PRC Government Charged for PRC-Directed Bribery Scheme](#) (May 2023). US Department of Justice

⁵⁰ [Australia thwarts Chinese plot to fund election candidates](#) (February 2022). Reuters

⁵¹ [China's 'overseas delegates' connect Beijing to the Chinese diaspora](#) (February 2020) Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

as a threat⁵². Foreign interference in an election can happen at any time: throughout a nomination race, during the writ period, a one-off event supporting or demonizing a candidate, or through continuous and organized interventions.

Support and sabotage operations are mobilized in selective electoral races⁵³, depending on the specific electoral context, such as the level of government, riding demographics, past election results, and/or distinguished ridings and/or candidates (see [Appendix E](#)). The favourability of a candidate is not determined through ideological or political association with Beijing, but rather through a strategic decision that considers local, financial, social, political, and personal interests, including the candidate's chances of winning.

Even if a candidate or political party is perceived as "anti-Beijing," foreign principals may still see them as a favourable candidate in a localized community, especially if they believe that the candidate is likely to form a positive relationship with communities close to the consulate, or implement policies aligned with Beijing's interests.

The support or alienation of specific candidates or political parties can change rapidly, often reactive to significant sentiments or political events in Canada and the PRC. Foreign principals may withdraw support abruptly and shift backing to an opposing candidate.⁵⁴

The UFWD actively operates within the ethnic Chinese Canadian diaspora, exerting influence through proxies such as shell non-profit organizations and overseas business associations⁵⁵. If a candidate deems un/favourable to Beijing, there are existing capacities and resources available to mobilize significant support and volunteers.

By providing resources such as financial support or donations⁵⁶ through proxies, non-monetary donations, relationships and networking opportunities, access to volunteers, or skilled campaigners. For many election campaigns, especially among smaller-scaled elections and non-urban electoral districts, these campaign resources can easily skew the outcome of an election.

Foreign principals and their proxies can also mobilize against an unfavorable candidate by supporting opposing candidate(s) to prevent their success. Sabotage may occur through coercive and corrupted means in some extraordinary scenarios⁵⁷, a coordinated operation to discredit and destroy the public image of unfavourable candidates. This method is still to be observed in Canada, since other methods already proved to be effective, especially when coupled with disinformation/misinformation activities.

⁵² [China harassed Tiananmen Square dissident running for US Congress, prosecutors say](#) (March 2022). South China Morning Post

⁵³ [New group with Beijing links to promote friendly candidates in Canadian elections](#) (November 2022). National Post

⁵⁴ During the 2012 Hong Kong Chief Executive elections, Beijing shifted its support to then-candidate Leung Chun-ying three days before election day, fearing the continuing of new explosive allegations against Leung." [Beijing aims to lobby 800 votes for Leung, in order to prevent election re-run](#) (March 2012). Hong Kong Economic Journal. (Chinese-language article)

⁵⁵ [China's billionaires on cross-country tour to meet Canada's corporate and political elite](#) (October 2016). National Post.

⁵⁶ [Sam Dastyari quits as Labor senator over China connections](#) (December 2017). The Guardian

⁵⁷ [Chinese political interference has Western spooks worried](#) (April 2022) The Economist

The Use of Disinformation/Misinformation

One of the most common tactics employed is disinformation/misinformation about candidates and their party's stance through social media platforms. The Chinese party-state apparatus is now one of the leading global powers in propaganda and misinformation campaigns.⁵⁸ We urge readers to review the "Information & Narrative Discursion Warfare" chapter from *In Plain Sight*, which provides an overview of Beijing's influence over ethnic media organizations and public discourses overseas.

Murky Waters uses the term "disinformation/misinformation" to refer to the circulation of inaccurate information and malinformation.⁵⁹

- Disinformation happens when false information is presented as fact by intentional actors that seek to manipulate the audience.
 - Misinformation refers to false information dispersed by unintentional actors, which happens when someone passes along outdated or inaccurate information that is presented as fact.
 - Disinformation/misinformation, is a soft power tactic perpetrated by both domestic and foreign special interests individuals and/or organizations, generating distrust in public institutions, mainstream media organizations, and discredits facts.
-

Beijing often uses inaccurate information and divisive narratives⁶⁰ to flood the information environment in Sinophone spaces, shifting discourse to try and sway public opinions and political and social outcomes.⁶¹ This was repeatedly seen globally⁶² in recent elections in Taiwan⁶³, USA (see [Appendix F](#)), Australia⁶⁴, Canada⁶⁵ and more.⁶⁶

Social Media and the Public Discourse

Malicious actors can easily kickstart a disinformation narrative during an election, letting the public discourse ferment within diaspora communities and social media without further intervention. Even with minimal investments, foreign principals and their proxies can find easy

⁵⁸ [Army of Fake Fans boost China's messaging on Twitter](#) (May 2021). AP News.

⁵⁹ [How to identify misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation](#) (February 2022). Canadian Centre for Cyber Security.

⁶⁰ [Chinese State Interference In Canada's 2021 Election](#) (September 2021). DisinfoWatch.

⁶¹ [Mis- and Disinformation During the 2021 Canadian Federal Election](#) (March 2022). McGill University.

⁶² [China now seen as influencing politics more than ever, on a global scale](#) (March 2023). CBC News

⁶³ [How China Is Interfering in Taiwan's Election](#) (September 2019). Council on Foreign Relations

⁶⁴ [Social media campaign linked to Chinese government spreading disinformation about Australian politics, thinktank says](#) (December 2022) The Guardian.

⁶⁵ [CSIS Public Report 2022](#) (April 2022). The Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

⁶⁶ [Beijing's Global Media Influence 2022](#) (September 2022). Freedom House

success by adding messages to popular conspiracy theories and false narratives, further fueling the existing domestic disinformation/misinformation discourse.⁶⁷

Beijing strategically disseminates disinformation/misinformation to incite controversies using sensitive topics within the diaspora community, including subjects like drugs, anti-Asian hate, anti-LGBTQIA2S+ sentiments, immigration, and more. This approach is highly effective in eliciting strong reactions and influencing public opinion, particularly in predominantly Sinophone communities. The diaspora community saw this ploy extensively in recent elections (see [Appendix E](#) for examples and screenshots).

Disinformation/misinformation campaigns often involve a variety of online platforms, predominantly on social media and messaging applications. Foreign principals deploy a wide range of tactics, such as bot farms⁶⁸, paid ads⁶⁹, inaccurate news, social media posts,⁷⁰ and crowd mentality. Beijing also mobilizes an impressive array of government agencies, media outlets, educational institutions, influencers, media commentators, or even community leaders and politicians as a megaphone to repeat their narratives. Vocal supporters wooed through elite capture⁷¹ deliver Beijing's messages in op-eds and media appearances, helping to sway popular perceptions. Some may be unwitting victims of manipulation, falling prey to these disinformation tactics and repeat foreign principal-sponsored narratives and (in)directly advanced disinformation campaigns⁷².

In the ethnic Chinese diaspora, many individuals solely rely on the social platform WeChat to communicate with their families in the PRC. However, the platform is known for surveillance, censorship, and promoting information aligned with Beijing's goals.⁷³ While WeChat is heavily utilized in Beijing's influence operations in Canada^{74 75}, all social media and messaging platforms are vulnerable to disinformation/misinformation and foreign interference, such as the usage of LINE during influence efforts in Taiwan.⁷⁶

Non-English/Non-French Media and Information Environments

Foreign principals often seek to shape the content of non-English and non-French language news and by extension, the information environment. Many diasporic Canadian residents obtain their information via non-English and non-French forms of media,⁷⁷ social media applications,

⁶⁷ [Chinese Agents Helped Spread Messages That Sowed Virus Panic in U.S., Officials Say](#) (January 2021). New York Times

⁶⁸ [How Russian troll farms could impact Canada's federal election](#) (September 2019). CTV News.

⁶⁹ [Election ads on WeChat posted by users: company](#) (October 2019). CBC News.

⁷⁰ [Influence Operation Targeting Canadian 2021 Federal Election - DisinfoWatch](#) (December 2021). DisinfoWatch.

⁷¹ Page 14, [In Plain Sight: Beijing's Unrestricted Network of Foreign Influence in Canada](#) (May 2021). Alliance Canada Hong Kong

⁷² [Matt Gaetz unknowingly cites Chinese Communist newspaper during Ukraine military funding hearing](#) (February 2023). Business Insider

⁷³ [WeChat's surveillance of international users boosts censorship in China, researchers say](#) (May 2020). CBC News.

⁷⁴ [Election ads on WeChat posted by users: company](#) (October 2019). CBC News

⁷⁵ [The WeChat factor](#) (February 2019). Vice News

⁷⁶ [Deafening Whispers: China's Information Operation and Taiwan's 2020 Election](#) (October 2020). Doublethink Lab.

⁷⁷ [Ethnic media: trusted by community, hobbled by lack of resources](#) (January 2022). New Canadian Media.

influencers, community leaders and messaging applications, which are overlooked by mainstream society and regulatory bodies.

Underfunded and under-resourced, ethnic media organizations in Canada are often limited in their capacity to provide first-hand reporting on local news. Rather than producing stories from original sources, ethnic media will often translate English reporting and “culturalize” news for their audience. Some outlets would run content provided by the Chinese Consulates and the Embassy, marketing agencies they hired,⁷⁸ or even take entire transcripts and content provided externally to republish. For example, the China News Service, a news agency under the control of the UFWO, feeds articles and news images to 410 overseas media clients across the globe as of the end of 2014, which “basically cover all of the mainstream overseas Chinese-language media, both traditional and online.”⁷⁹

Ethnic media organizations have become increasingly reliant on external resources and opportunities. This vulnerability creates an opportunity for foreign principals to assert influence through funding and training⁸⁰. For instance, Beijing is actively recruiting and training⁸¹ journalists, media organizations, social media personalities, influencers, and key opinion leaders to tell a more favourable story about the PRC.⁸²

Sinophone communities can attest that censorship and propaganda is a serious issue in Canadian-Chinese media.⁸³ With journalists face job losses,⁸⁴ death threats, online threats⁸⁵, and threats to relatives in China for unfavourable coverage of Beijing, self-censorship and avoidance of sensitive topics has become the norm among Chinese-language media organizations in Canada.⁸⁶

Tabloid journalism is prevalent, with content designed to provoke strong emotions, such as patriotism or anger, by presenting partial truths and misrepresentations.⁸⁷ Many ethnic media narratives and content styles are often similar to the Chinese party-state apparatus’ messaging, if not identical.⁸⁸ Much of Beijing's efforts are directed at ethnic Chinese communities in Mandarin or Cantonese. Increasingly, Beijing also recruits individuals from diverse communities to create and promote Chinese state narratives in English.⁸⁹

⁷⁸ [Deafening Whispers: China's information Operation and Taiwan's 2020 Election](#) (October 2020). Doublethink Lab.

⁷⁹ [Chinese-language Media Should Play More Important Role as Global Public Opinion is Increasingly Complicated](#) (October 2015). International Communications. (Chinese-language article)

⁸⁰ [The 10th Global Chinese Language Media Forum Kicks off in Hebei](#) (October 2019) US News Express

⁸¹ [\(Chinese\) Tenth Forum on the Global Chinese Language Media opens in Shijiazhuang \(media guest list included\)](#) (October, 2019). San Diego Chinese Press

⁸² [Telling China's Story Well](#) (April 2021) China Media Project.

⁸³ [Inside Canada's Chinese-language media: 'Beijing has become the mainstream,' says ex-Sing Tao editor](#) (December 2020). National Post

⁸⁴ [Host on Chinese-language station in Toronto says he was fired for criticizing Beijing](#) (October 2019) National Post.

⁸⁵ [Chinese-Canadian reporter threatened and called a “whore” on Vancouver Stop Asian Hate rally organizer's WeChat group](#) (28 March, 2021). ThinkPOL.

⁸⁶ [\[Analysis\] Beijing's control of Chinese-language media in Canada](#) (March 2023). Radio Canada.

⁸⁷ [In this Toronto Suburb, Liberals Face Chinese-Language Disinformation Campaign](#) (October 2019). VICE News.

⁸⁸ [Inside China's audacious global propaganda campaign](#) (December 2018). The Guardian

⁸⁹ [Frontier influencers: the new face of China's propaganda](#) (2022). Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

Beijing's control of Chinese-language media in Canada has evolved to become increasingly sophisticated, encompassing both traditional and digital media platforms.⁹⁰ This issue has been exacerbated by ethnic media's lack of resources. When Beijing can't control or influence, they purchase, taking over nearly every Chinese language outlet⁹¹, leaving Sinophone viewers and readers with almost no independent coverage.⁹² These outlets have become increasingly Pro-Beijing over the years, with some even inviting Chinese diplomats to speak without follow-up or questioning even when they are making covert threats to Canadians of Chinese origin on-air.⁹³

Astroturfing of Community Groups

Astroturfing grassroots communities by the PRC refers to the practice of creating a false impression of support for its agenda. Pro-Beijing actors, operating in diasporic spaces, wield influence by positioning themselves as representatives of ethnic Chinese communities.^{94 95} It is common for these actors to conceal or deliberately misrepresent their affiliations.

UFWD's astroturfing efforts extend to non-government organizations, encompassing businesses, non-profits, and community groups. Some of their tactics include, but are not limited to: adopting similar names or acronym to an existing groups,⁹⁶ utilizing shell organizations and businesses, paid advertisements in media, and taking over corporate or non-profit boards. Individuals and organizations with ties to, or are collaborating with UFWD and their proxies may feel the pressure for self-censorship⁹⁷.

In addition, the Chinese party-state has a strong hold on Chinese entities throughout the civil, military, private, and public sectors via Military-Civil Fusion,⁹⁸ the integration of CCP committees in all PRC-operating businesses,⁹⁹ education institutions, and civil society.¹⁰⁰ The diaspora and dissident communities often view PRC-based entities, including businesses, social media companies, and scholars, to be within the Chinese party-state authority's reach. Diaspora and dissident communities also view NGOs with pro-Beijing individuals in paid positions or on governance/advisory boards as unsafe or susceptible to foreign influence.

⁹⁰ [\[Analysis\] Beijing's control of Chinese-language media in Canada](#) (March 2023). Radio Canada International

⁹¹ [Beijing's Global Megaphone](#) (January 2020). Freedom House

⁹² [How Beijing is Controlling Chinese Media in Canada and Around the World](#) (January 2023). Council on Foreign Relations

⁹³ [Chinese diplomat accuses critics of sowing division among Chinese Canadian community](#) (July 2020) The Globe and Mail.

⁹⁴ [Setting up astroturf "Tibetan Associations" in the West is China's latest ploy to mislead the world on Tibet](#) (April 2019). International Campaign for Tibet

⁹⁵ [Chinese interference in Canada? Chinese Canadians say they reported it for years — and were ignored](#) (March 2023). Toronto Star

⁹⁶ The Chinese Canadian National Council (CCNC) called for Ottawa to accept more refugees and support political dissidents after the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre. Pro-Beijing actors later established a rival organization with a similar name in written Chinese, National Congress of Chinese Canadians (NCCC). This is one example of how pro-Beijing actors seek to create confusion for those who are outside of the diaspora and dissident communities.

⁹⁷ [The Silencing of Hong Kong's Analysts](#) (November 2022) Bloomberg News

⁹⁸ [Military-Civil Fusion](#) (2020). US Department of State.

⁹⁹ [Politics in the Boardroom: The Role of Chinese Communist Party Committees](#) (December 2019). The Diplomat.

¹⁰⁰ ["Comprehensive National Security" unleashed: How Xi's approach shapes China's policies at home and abroad](#) (September 2022). Mercator Institute for China Studies.

Many in the diaspora and dissident communities often witness certain terminologies being manipulated to advance pro-Beijing or state narratives, such as friendship, peace, globalization, promoting business ties, or economic cooperation¹⁰¹. It is also crucial to recognize that the UFWD and UF-associated proxy groups are intentionally designed to be challenging for outsiders to identify, especially for those without language capabilities or cultural context. Some information may be omitted from the English version of the website, and wording may differ from the Chinese version.

Community organizations free from consulate or pro-Beijing ties are increasingly hard to find. In the past, individuals supporting Beijing could thrive in the Sinophone community with no safety concerns, while organizations with differing or neutral views often encountered astroturfing, leadership changes, safety concerns, missed opportunities, damaged reputations, and social isolation.¹⁰² Alienation and dissociation of resources from Beijing-friendly businesses and organizations further contribute to their challenges¹⁰³. The majority of the diaspora's complicity or disinterest in civic engagement compounds the difficulties faced by such organizations. Consequently, many once-neutral or diverse organizations either stay silent, align with Beijing's views to survive, or risk takeover by pro-Beijing actors.

Mobilizing a Network of Volunteers and Influencers

In recent federal, provincial, and municipal elections, pro-Beijing actors and proxies have mobilized civic actions among ethnic Chinese communities using various online platforms and social media. These communities may be influenced¹⁰⁴ by false and misleading information¹⁰⁵, and are often incentivized to participate in activities that are tied to the UFWD and their networks of influence¹⁰⁶. Diaspora communities with diverse or dissenting opinions may face pressure to remain silent and can be penalized for speaking up¹⁰⁷. It is important to avoid blaming members of the ethnic Chinese communities and instead recognize that many individuals feel compelled to choose complicity for their own safety; most in the diaspora remain unbothered or indifferent¹⁰⁸.

Differentiating between genuine grassroots activities and those influenced by foreign principals and their proxies is essential for a healthy democracy. Ethnic community organizations play a vital role in fostering civic-political engagement through events like debates, meet-the-candidate sessions, galas, and cultural gatherings. However, there is concern that foreign principals are funding and supporting these activities, potentially creating advantages or disadvantages for certain candidates or political parties within the Canadian electoral processes.

¹⁰¹ [China as a hybrid influencer: Non-state actors as state proxies](#) (June 2021). Hybrid CoE.

¹⁰² [Harassment & Intimidation of individuals in Canada working on China-related human rights concerns](#) (March 2020). Canadian Coalition on Human Rights in China & Amnesty International Canada

¹⁰³ ["Bullied Out of Pride": Hong Kong Group Removed from Fierté Montréal](#) (September 2019). The McGill International Review.

¹⁰⁴ [Beijing's Influence Tactics With the Chinese Diaspora: An Excerpt](#) (February 2023). Council on Foreign Relations

¹⁰⁵ [Impact of disinformation on democracy in Asia](#) (December 2022). The Brookings Institution

¹⁰⁶ [China's Overseas United Front Work: Background and Implications for the United States](#) (August 2018).

U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission

¹⁰⁷ [The cost of speaking up against China](#) (March 2021). BBC News

¹⁰⁸ [Chinese Diaspora Activism in the Age of Sinophobia and Anti-Asian Racism](#) (2021). Position Politics

UFWD seeks to exert control over the civic-political actions of the ethnic Chinese communities. UFWD weaponizes community sentiments and fabricates outrage to mobilize supporters (see Appendix E), voters and volunteers, often presenting their agenda as actions that protect and advance the interests of the ethnic Chinese communities.

Seldomly, foreign interference in electoral races can be measured like financial contributions from foreign principals. Nonetheless, less quantifiable activities can still have a profound and lasting impact on a political campaign, party, or movement.

For instance, community leaders and social media influencers may endorse candidates and political parties, host special events, urging their fellow citizens to volunteer, donate, and vote for specific candidates. However, the exact influence on voter behavior is difficult to quantify. In another case, social media disinformation campaigns may shape perceptions of candidates, but there is no measurable way to determine whether electoral decisions were influenced by the specific campaign.

Section 2:

Survey - What Politicians are Saying

Survey Responses

ACHK reached out to elected officials, candidates, campaign team members, and political party staff from all levels of public office to participate in a short survey.

The survey was not intended to determine whether foreign influence occurred, but to gain insights into campaigners' past experiences and knowledge. While designing the survey, we included questions to assess candidates and campaigners' baseline understandings on foreign influence, foreign interference, and disinformation/misinformation.

The survey received 39 submissions in total with responses in both official languages. Respondents hold diverse political backgrounds. Respondents include past candidates, campaign volunteers, paid campaign staff, and party staffers; over one third of respondents have served multiple roles in election campaigns.

Respondents also have diverse experiences in federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal levels elections; over one third of respondents have participated in more than one level of election campaigns. 32 respondents disclosed their partisan affiliation to federal, provincial, and municipal parties, including Greens, NDP, Conservative, Liberal, BC Liberal and Bloc/Parti Québécois.

Respondents were asked to answer these questions:

1. Were you equipped with knowledge, resources, and guidelines to identify and counter foreign state influence and/or interference?
2. Did you witness foreign state influence and/or interference (or what you believe to be) operations during the election campaign?
 - a. If Yes: Please describe what kinds of foreign state influence and/or interference you witnessed:
3. Were you equipped with knowledge, resources, and guidelines to identify and counter disinformation/misinformation?
4. Did you witness any disinformation/misinformation during the election campaign?
 - a. If Yes: Please describe what kinds of disinformation/misinformation you witnessed:
5. How can Canada better safeguard our democratic institutions?

Refer to [Appendix C for the full survey results](#).

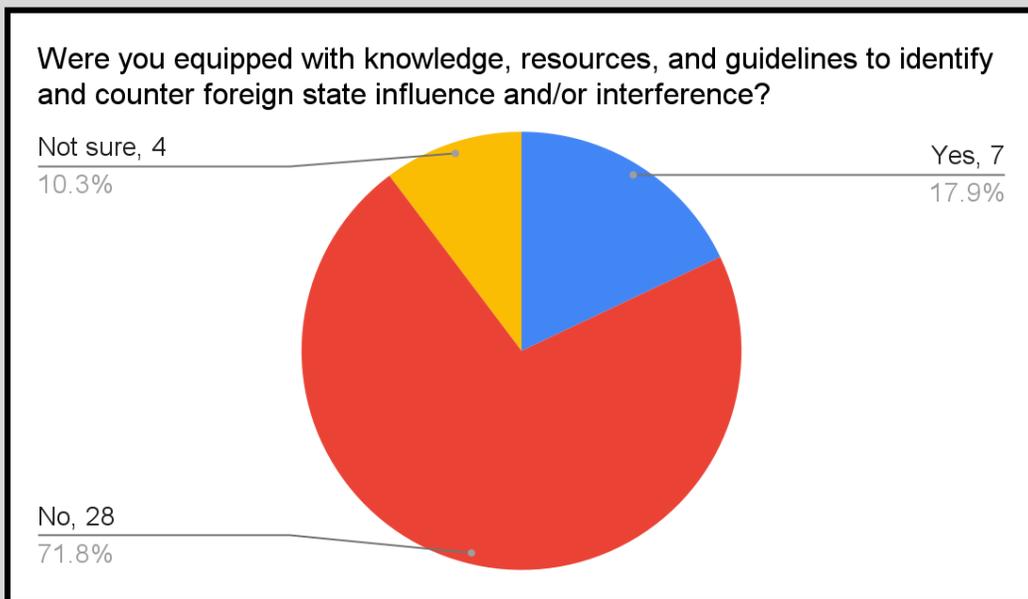
The results were alarming:

Alliance Canada Hong Kong

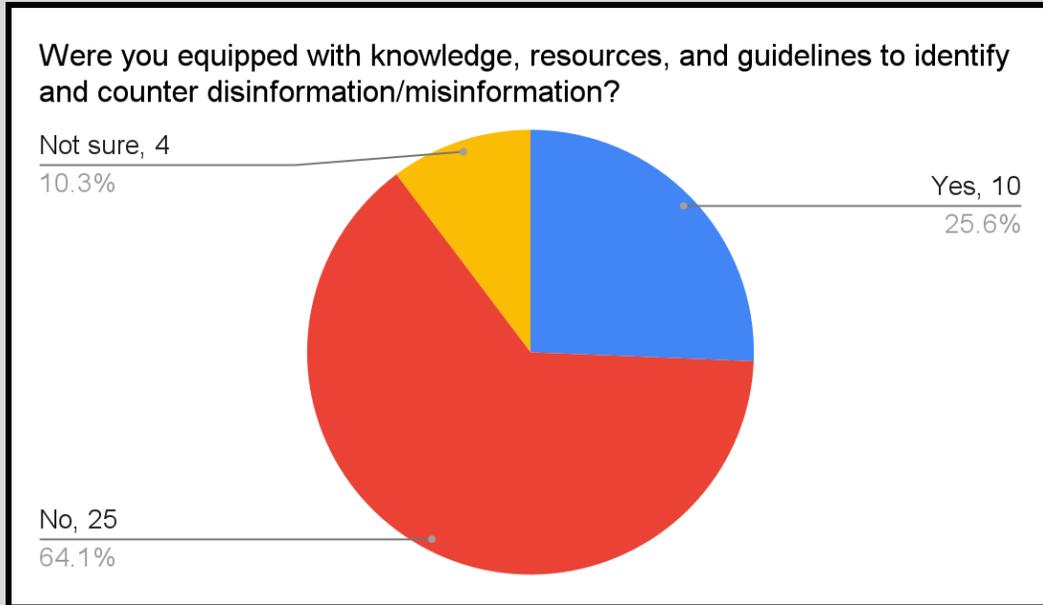
- Most (71.8%) do not feel equipped to identify and counter foreign state influence and/or interference.
- Most (64.1%) do not feel equipped to identify and counter disinformation/misinformation.
- A sizable group (17.9%) had witnessed or not sure (23.1%) if they had witnessed foreign state influence and/or interference.
- Most (66.7%) had witnessed disinformation/misinformation

Survey Analysis

The survey results showed a similar pattern: the majority of respondents felt unprepared or uncertain about their ability to recognize and counter foreign influence/interference and disinformation/misinformation, lacking sufficient knowledge, resources, and guidelines.



Graph 1: Were you equipped with knowledge, resources, and guidelines to identify and counter foreign state influence and/or interference?

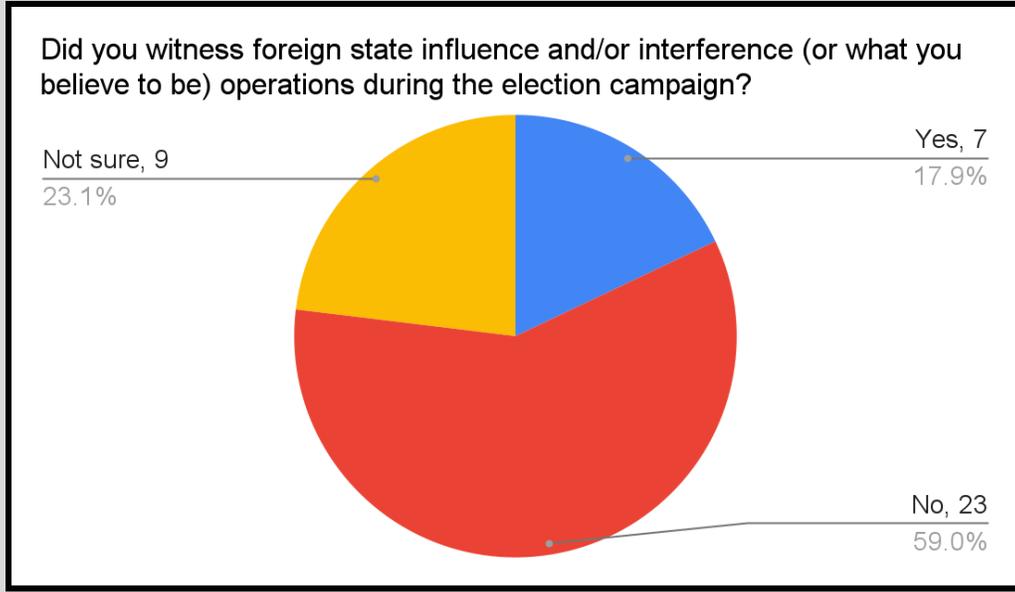


Graph 2: Were you equipped with knowledge, resources, and guidelines to identify and counter disinformation/misinformation?

It is concerning that the majority of respondents, whether candidates or campaign staffers, are not confident in identifying or countering foreign influence/interference or disinformation/misinformation. Despite the existence of public resources on these topics, it is evident that most respondents have not had the opportunity to benefit from them. These findings highlight a systemic and institutional failure in providing adequate resources and guidelines for candidates and campaigners.

Foreign Influence and/or Interference During the Campaign

Over half of respondents indicated that they did not observe foreign influence and/or interference during the election campaign. However, when looking back at the data, the number of respondents feeling unequipped to identify such activities raises questions about the accuracy of these observations. It is unclear whether respondents genuinely did not witness foreign influence operations or if they were simply unable to identify such activities. This discrepancy highlights the need for further investigation and a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges in detecting and addressing foreign interference.



Graph 3: Did you witness foreign state influence and/or interference (or what you believe to be) operations during the election campaign?

Respondents who identified foreign influence and interference activities during the election campaign disclosed various tactics used by state-affiliated actors. One notable observation was the prevalence of foreign interference at the party-levels: “In particular, foreign interference with respect to [federal and provincial] nomination races was rampant.” This suggests that foreign actors were actively involved in attempting to influence the selection of candidates within political parties.

There are deliberate efforts from pro-Beijing actors to appeal to ethnic Chinese candidates. However, one respondent shared their experience of receiving invitations to events sponsored by the Chinese government until their Taiwanese identity was revealed, indicating a shift in the nature of their interactions.: “I was sent various emails... invitations to PRC government sponsored events until they found out I'm Taiwanese.”

Another respondent who had connections to Hong Kong, expressed concerns about potential backlash or loss of support wrote: “As someone with connections to Hong Kong I was concerned as a candidate if I would be targeted or lose support for voicing my support for Hong Kong due to how the community would react and spread information on WeChat.”

Pro-Beijing actors selectively support ethnic Chinese candidates based on their alignment with Beijing's narrative, potentially withdrawing support if candidates diverge from their expectations. This highlights the significant influence and control wielded by these actors, where adherence to specific viewpoints determines the level of support received.

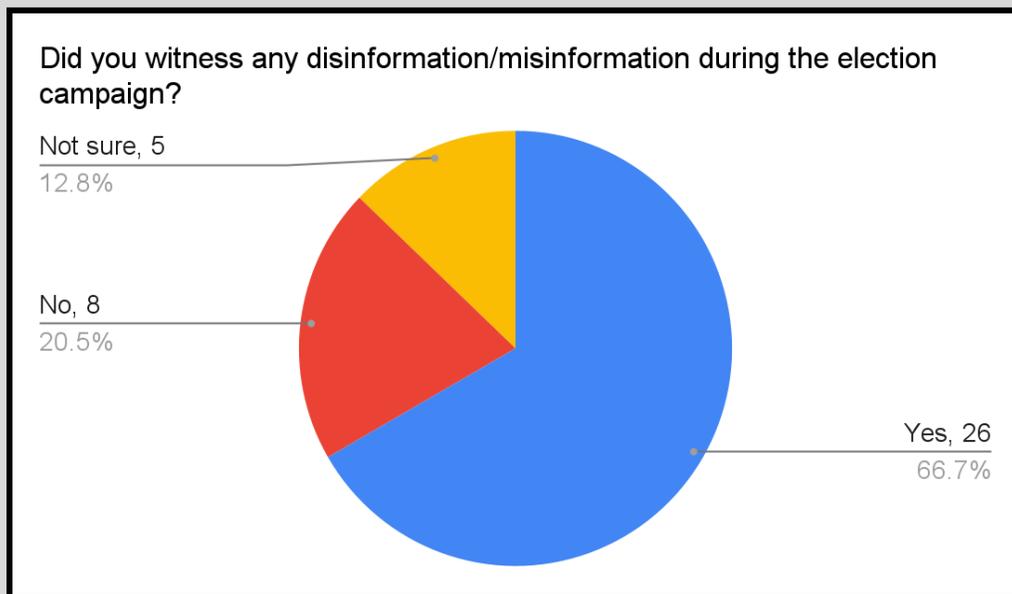
Respondents also identified these activities as foreign influence and interference during the election campaign:

Alliance Canada Hong Kong

- Phishing and cybersecurity issues;
- Directives on who to vote for;
- Highlighting special events, including state-sponsored events; to highlight and endorse specific candidates;
- Negative interaction with groups that are associated with the United Front Work Department;
- Disinformation/misinformation campaigns on social media and messaging platforms, some originated abroad; and
- Deliberate outreach and invitations from the business community.

Disinformation/Misinformation During the Campaign

The responses revealed systemic issues within the Canadian political discourse, shaped by partisan, political, and personal interests. While many respondents believe they have witnessed disinformation/misinformation, it is concerning that the majority of them felt ill-equipped to identify such false information.



Graph 4: Did you witness any disinformation/misinformation during the election campaign?

Across all political stripes, respondents expressed their concerns about the widespread use of false and misleading accusations aimed at discrediting candidates at a personal level. Responses suggested that political actors purposely intentionally engage in false, misleading, and inaccurate representations of opposing parties' policies, with some respondents acknowledging the pressure they face to make misleading claims about their opponents. A small number of respondents identified foreign state influence as a factor in the

disinformation/misinformation environment in Canada, the majority attributed responsibility to domestic actors for spreading false or misleading information.

One respondent summarized the core issue: “Disagreement of facts pushed for political reasons. Creating a distrust of the media & government for political reasons.” Additionally, the spread of false or misleading information is facilitated by certain far-left, far-right, and/or diaspora media organizations that often engage in sensationalized journalism.

24 respondents provided additional insights into disinformation/misinformation during the election campaign:

- Candidates are encouraged to make false, misleading, or inaccurate claims about opposing candidates and political parties, such as policy positions and party platforms;
- Intensified disinformation/misinformation operations in online spaces, such as diasporic media, social media, far-left/far-right news organizations, and messaging applications;
- Ignorance on the voting or electoral process;
- Misrepresenting facts or presenting biased information as facts; and
- Cultivating distrust of media and government for political reasons.

Safeguarding Democracy

Respondents across the partisan associations, highlighted partisan and purposeful misrepresentation of facts as sources of disinformation/misinformation in Canadian politics, indicating systemic and cultural issues among political actors. Respondents offered a wide range of policy suggestions to strengthen Canada’s electoral systems and promote democratic participation, including but not limited to electoral regulations, civic engagement initiatives, and media literacy programs. Transparency, civic education, and increased public funding emerged as prominent themes from the survey responses.

Respondents emphasized the importance of implementing a foreign influence transparency scheme, to publicly reveal and counter foreign influence. Respondents stressed the need to equip candidates with resources to counter disinformation and hate campaigns; as well as guidelines on dealing with foreign influence and interference activities. These measures should not be limited to political actors, but extended to the Canadian public. Provide tools and knowledge for making informed decisions, clearly communicating the risks and potential consequences. Respondents also suggested media literacy, disinformation, and cybersecurity education to empower Canadians with resilience against malicious misinformation campaigns.

Most of the respondents suggested some elements of electoral reform, such as moving on from First-Past-The-Post and/or implementing [Mixed-Member Proportional Representation](#); and regulation on nomination races. Many called for clearer voting guidelines for youths and

vulnerable communities, accessible voting mechanisms, and strengthening civic engagement among the Canadian public.

Media and social media were also identified as areas of influence during an electoral campaign. Some respondents suggested formal support for independent media to ensure unbiased and objective reporting. Disinformation/misinformation regulations on social media organizations can help combat the online information environment. In addition, respondents suggested that there should be independent bodies to conduct fact-checking during an election period, such as a non-governmental organization.

Respondents also called for active communication and collaboration from the Canadian national security communities. Not only to communicate threats, but also to provide guidelines for campaigns to proactively counter foreign influence and disinformation/misinformation campaigns.

Section 3:

Important Considerations

All Persons of Influence are Targets of Foreign Interference

Murky Waters is not intended to single out the intentions or allegiances of specific individuals or candidates. Foreign interference has been observed to be implemented through a mix of coercive and mutually beneficial tactics¹⁰⁹, sometimes involving actors who are unaware of the malicious forces behind their actions.

There remains little evidence to suggest that any political candidates supported by foreign principals have explicitly consented and/or have intentionally taken part in foreign interference in Canadian elections, as intelligence is not evidence. This does not mean there is an absence of foreign influence or interference. As foreign interference is of covert and clandestine nature, it is difficult to trace, and incredibly hard to differentiate whether the candidate is aware or consented to these seemingly grassroots and organic supports.

Beijing uses anyone and everything that aligns with their interest, with little differentiation between political affiliations, ideologies or ethnicity. Identifying people of influence, Beijing's ultimate goal is to court influential Canadians and to sway their views to be more aligned with Beijing's interests and create a more favourable environment to the PRC. On the other hand, Beijing is also utilizing their network of influence to alienate dissenting voices. Over time, those targeted by influence activities may start parroting Beijing's narratives,¹¹⁰ often repeating and promoting pro-Beijing stances without realization or explicit instruction to do so.

Country-Agnostic Solutions

Murky Waters primarily focuses on activities undertaken by the PRC, the CCP, and the affiliates of the Chinese party-state due to our community's lived experiences and observations on the matter. It is important to note that foreign principals across the globe, such as Russian,¹¹¹ Iranian,¹¹² India,¹¹³ and other states, also deploy similar tactics with varying effectiveness and reach.

Canada should seek varying country-agnostic solutions to counter foreign influence and interference activities. There is a strong need to build strategies and policies based on democratic and human rights-first principles, rather than state-specific countermeasures. ACHK urges policymakers to develop policies that are applied equally to any foreign principals that operate in Canada where possible. Through this approach, Canadian interests are safeguarded under a country-agnostic approach, even when allyships or diplomatic relationships change.

A country-agnostic approach, by not focusing on any one country, will also help counter narratives and stereotypes founded on systemic and institutional racism. At times with heightened geopolitical tension, racialized communities often suffer from discrimination. The

¹⁰⁹ [Running for municipal office. I was targeted by China](#) (August 2020). Toronto Star

¹¹⁰ [How China gets American companies to parrot its propaganda](#) (October 2019). The Washington Post

¹¹¹ [Intelligence community was concerned with Russia prior to 2019 vote, former top officials say](#) (April 2023) CBC News.

¹¹² [Spy agency investigating 'credible' death threats from Iran against individuals in Canada](#) (November 2022) CBC News.

¹¹³ [A public probe of foreign election interference should also look at India. Sikh organizations say](#) (March 2023) CBC News.

previous rise in Islamophobia and the current rise in xenophobia is detrimental to ethnic communities. However, country-agnostic approaches alone are not enough, Canadian institutions must also take proactive measures to ensure Canadian laws and regulations are equitably enforced.

In the past, Canadian institutions have implemented policies and legislations based on racist tropes, such as the Chinese Head Tax and Exclusion Act. There are community members with legitimate and well-founded concerns that policies to counter foreign influence may continue systemic and institutionalized patterns of harmful policies. ACHK urges the government and Canadian institutions to address these concerns, and to develop equitable policies that safeguard Canadian interests.

Blurred Lines between Foreign Influence and Interference

Public Safety Canada defines foreign interference as “activities perpetrated by a foreign state, or proxy, that are harmful to Canada’s interests and are clandestine or deceptive, or involve a threat to any person. This can include, for example, harassment and intimidation of Canadian communities to instill fear, silence dissent, and pressure political opponents.”¹¹⁴

Foreign influence, on the other hand, often refers to the exertion of power, persuasion, or control by foreign entities over a country’s political, economic, or social systems. It involves attempts to shape or influence the policies, decisions, and actions of another country. Foreign influence is legal, and can be carried out through various means such as diplomacy, economic incentives, cultural exchanges, lobbying, and information campaigns. When foreign influences are clandestine or deceptive, it becomes foreign interference.

The line between foreign influence and foreign interference is deliberately blurred by antagonistic states. It is increasingly difficult to trace direct or indirect associations with foreign principals. Though there are existing legislations that outlaws foreign interference in Canada, there are a wide range of covert, coercive, and/or corrupted activities that fall out of the current legislative and regulatory frameworks. *Murky Waters* seeks to discuss the wide range of activities that can be attributed to foreign principals (encompassing state, political, and non-governmental actors), which exert undue influence within Canadian society. These activities extend beyond the existing legislative and regulatory frameworks governing foreign interference.

¹¹⁴ [Enhancing Foreign Influence Transparency: Exploring Measures to Strengthen Canada’s Approach](#) (March 2023). Public Safety Canada.

Responsibility to Safeguard Canadians' Right to Vote

Section 3 of the [Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom](#)¹¹⁵ guarantees every citizen has the right to vote in an election of members of the House of Commons or of a legislative assembly. The Government of Canada has the duty to ensure Canadians' right to vote can be exercised free of unlawful foreign interference, in light of a purposive interpretation of the *Charter* and Canada's international human rights commitment.

ACHK believe that the *Charter's* guarantee of the right to vote necessarily imposes a duty on the Canadian government to address and pre-empt foreign interference in our elections. The interpretation of the *Charter* is purposive, that the meaning of a right guaranteed by the *Charter* is to be ascertained by an analysis of the purpose of such a guarantee: [R v Big M Drug Mart Ltd.](#), [1985] 1 S.C.R. 295 at para 116; [R v Beaulac](#), [1999] 1 SCR 768. The purpose underpinning the right to vote, and the constitutional principle of democracy is the basic value of the "consent of the governed": [Reference re Secession of Quebec](#), [1998] 2 S.C.R. 217 at para 67. If the voters' consent was sought under unlawful interference, the legal foundation of Canadian democracy would essentially be undermined. A meaningful exercise of the right to vote requires voters to express their consent freely, which is manifested in the ability to vote without unlawful foreign interference.

Canada's international human rights commitment also calls the Government of Canada to protect domestic elections from foreign interference. The interpretation of the *Charter* is guided by Canada's international human rights commitments: [R v Keegstra](#), [1990] 3 S.C.R. 697 at 733; [Canada \(Human Rights Commission\) v Taylor](#), [1990] 3 S.C.R. 892 at 919-20. The right to vote is protected by Article 25 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#),¹¹⁶ and it entitles electors to vote "**without undue influence or coercion of any kind** which may distort or inhibit the free expression of the elector's will."¹¹⁷ It suggests an obligation on the government, in order to protect the right to vote, to ensure that voters are able to form opinions independently with the "freedom from violence or threat of violence, **compulsion, inducement or manipulative interference of any kind**"¹¹⁸, which must include unlawful foreign interference.

Effective democracy requires Canada to facilitate meaningful exercise of this right.

¹¹⁵ Part 1 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, being Schedule B to the *Canada Act 1982* (UK), c 11.

¹¹⁶ 19 December 1966, 999 UNTS 171, Can TS 1976 No 47 (entered into force 23 March 1976).

¹¹⁷ UNHRC, *CCPR General Comment No. 25: Article 25 (Participation in Public Affairs and the Right to Vote)*, 57th Sess, adopted 12 July 1996, UN Doc CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.7, online: <<https://www.refworld.org/docid/453883fc22.html>> at para 19.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Section 4:

Recommendations

Context for ACHK's Recommendations

Foreign interference has far-reaching implications in Canada and can be observed at all levels of government and political processes. While certain recommendations in this report are aimed at the federal level, it is essential to explore equivalent policies at the provincial, territorial, municipal, and educational levels of government to address this issue comprehensively.

ACHK consulted community grassroots leaders from the diaspora and subject matter experts on how Canada can be better prepared for foreign interference (See [Appendix A](#), [Appendix B](#), and [Appendix C](#)).

ACHK acknowledges the efforts from the Government of Canada, including Public Safety Canada's 2023 [public consultation for a Foreign Influence Transparency Registry](#), an increased budget for the RCMP and Public Safety Canada to counter foreign interference, and the [establishing a new National Counter-Interference Office](#).

Transparency is still the best measure to counter foreign interference, which are designed to operate in covert, coercive, and clandestine means. However, it is critical for Canada to establish a comprehensive national security and counter-foreign influence strategy. These efforts should be backed by political consensus among partisan actors to ensure a sustainable strategy rather than piecemeal efforts.

While enforcement and intelligence agencies have their own intelligence and investigative processes, the information collected is not available to the public, or even most decision-makers. This leaves relevant stakeholders in the dark and this lack of awareness among Canadians about clandestine foreign interference activities will only put them at further risk. Canadians should be empowered with tools and knowledge to identify foreign interference, enabling them to make informed decisions on the ballot and in all aspects of their lives.

It is imperative to recognize that foreign influence activities are not always criminal or illegal. Relying solely on the criminal justice system would overlook a significant portion of foreign influence operations that fall outside its jurisdiction. ACHK proposes a whole-of-society approach to effectively combat foreign influence and interference, as seen in our recommendations below.

ACHK has also reviewed [Independent Special Rapporteur on Foreign Interference David Johnston's first report](#). We acknowledge that some of his findings and observations are consistent with ACHK's past reporting and community experiences, echoing existing recommendations from subject-matter experts. While ACHK believes that certain threats may have been understated, and that a public and transparent review into foreign influence during the past election is a critical step towards restoring Canadian trust in our democratic systems and institutions, the time for action is now.

Recommendation #1: Addressing Structural Inefficiencies and Dated Processes

Intelligence and security agencies are facing ongoing challenges. Some of these various systemic, institutionalized, and cultural challenges were identified in MP Michael Chong's testimony to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs on May 16th, 2023¹¹⁹ and Special Rapporteur David Johnston's report,¹²⁰ including the problem with dissemination of information. ACHK reviewed our community's past experiences with these agencies, and after consulting with subject-matter experts (including security experts such as [Stephanie Carvin](#) amongst others), ACHK recommends the following:

- Develop a long-term strategy for addressing foreign interference that goes beyond political cycles and has multi-partisan approval.
- Review and amend existing legislation to update and empower national security agencies to effectively combat evolving threats, including to provide a mandate for agencies to engage and support communities at risk.
- Improve structures for responding to real-time events and sharing appropriate information with the Canadian public and targeted individuals.
- Initiate cultural changes to enhance communication and information sharing across government departments and agencies, including greater transparency from national security agencies.
- Provide foreign interference threat briefings to Members of Parliament to equip them with necessary knowledge and awareness.
- Declassify intelligence and information and provide public education on foreign interference, addressing its racist undertones and empowering Canadians to understand and address the issue.
- Conduct a national security review involving Parliament as an equal partner to ensure a comprehensive assessment.
- Reconcile and align the definitions of foreign interference in relevant legislation to ensure consistency and clarity across all ministries and agencies.
- Establish a framework for collaboration and cooperation between intelligence agencies, law enforcement, and the judicial system to streamline the process of converting intelligence into admissible evidence.
- Allocate resources to the RCMP to prosecute cases of foreign interference and espionage effectively.

¹¹⁹ [Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs](#) (May 16, 2023). House of Commons.

¹²⁰ [First Report - The Right Honourable David Johnston, Independent Special Rapporteur on Foreign Interference](#) (May 2023). Government of Canada.

Recommendation #2: Establish a Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme

We recommend the Canadian government to adopt a new legislation, and amend existing legislation to establish a foreign influence transparency scheme. This recommendation is aimed at revealing foreign principals' activities in Canadian society, including foreign states, foreign political entities, their affiliates, and proxies. This involves the creation of a public registry of individuals, organizations, and proxy-representatives actively acting on behalf of foreign principals in Canada.

Key Considerations for the Transparency Scheme

- The registry must include political operatives, lawyers, and lobbyists, as well as foreign principals engaged in academia, civil society, media organizations, public and private sector, business collaborations and investments, particularly in critical Canadian industries.
- The registry must mandate foreign principals and their proxies to report details relevant to their arrangements and activities in Canada, such as frequency of correspondence, payment, financial exchange, and other forms of social or non-monetary exchanges.
- The scheme should provide public transparency into financial and monetary arrangements as well as the extent of involvement, such as meeting frequencies.
- The transparency scheme should incorporate an annual report that offers comprehensive data collection and analysis from the registry. This reporting mechanism would provide the public with valuable insights and serve as an accountability measure by also leveraging public reporting.
- The transparency scheme should include resourcing staff for data collection and reporting, who can also develop educational initiatives similar to those conducted by Statistics Canada and Chief Data Officers.

Canadians collaborating with foreign principals must disclose their activities through the foreign influence transparency scheme, similar to lobbying legislation and the lobbying commission. This will be a source of information for the Canadian public and those who are seeking more information on potential partners and collaborators. Canadians should be able to make informed decisions free of coercion or repression.

Transparency acts as a deterrent for malicious actors, who may be wary of their activities being exposed to public view. On the other hand, Canada's allies and foreign principals that respect Canadian legislations will willingly register and comply.

Investigation and Enforcement of the Transparency Scheme

- **Submission and anonymity:** The transparency scheme should include mechanisms that allow individuals to submit tips and complaints while providing anonymity, particularly recognizing the potential retribution faced by diaspora and dissident communities when they come forward.
- **Enforcement is necessary:** Amendments to existing legislations and new measures are necessary to empower the transparency scheme, enabling it to investigate, enforce, and coordinate among Canadian stakeholders. An effective transparency scheme must facilitate a whole-of-society approach and address sector-specific challenges.
- **Address non-compliance:** The transparency scheme must be paired with amendments to existing legislation and policy changes that address foreign principals-and-proxy's non-compliance. They will be held accountable if found to be in violation of the transparency scheme. Non-compliance must be investigated, penalized, and published for public accountability. The transparency scheme should provide opportunities for redress and appeal, ensuring an open, transparent, and safe procedure to challenge the transparency scheme's decisions.

Upon infractions and violations of the Transparency Scheme, some punitive measures can be taken to hold individuals and/or organizations accountable:

- Issuing public warning or non-compliance notices;
- Criminal investigations and/or charges;
- Revoking charitable status;
- Revoking incorporation status;
- Revoking funding agreements and/or banning from applying for future government funding;
- Placing a hold on financial, monetary, and/or ownership transfers;
- Expelling members of the diplomatic mission;
- Summoning the Ambassador or Consul General(s);
- Additional reviews on funding agreements and research collaborations with foreign principals and state-affiliated actors;
- Judicial reviews on export agreements, particularly dual-use technology and equipment; and/or
- Financial audit of organizational accounting.

Beyond a Registry: Other Transparency and Security Measures

While a Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme is an important step toward countering foreign interference in Canada, it must also be paired with other transparency and security measures to effectively counter foreign influence and interference.

- There are sector-specific vulnerabilities in regards to foreign influence and interference, hence there will be a need for sector-specific measures and guidelines to counter foreign interference.
- This is especially prevalent among diaspora community organizations, academic and research sectors, social media and messaging platforms, and non-English and non-French media organizations.
- It is crucial that these regulations and policies are grounded in safeguarding Canadian interests, targeted at foreign principals engaged in influencing activities, and where appropriate, to disrupt and counter illicit activities.

One example of sector-specific policy is the Government of Canada's newly created [National Security Guidelines for Research Partnerships](#). This policy establishes a formal process for accessing the risks associated with research partnerships involving foreign government, foreign military, state-influenced, or their proxies.

Note: There are concerns that the new guidelines may disproportionately affect researchers with Chinese or foreign citizenship(s) working on sensitive research areas, highlighting the challenge of striking a balance in creating an effective and non-discriminatory regulatory environment.¹²¹ ACHK calls on the Government of Canada to consult with researchers and enhance the review process. Additionally, an appeals process should be considered.

Recommendation #3: Resourcing the National Counter-Interference Office

The Government of Canada proposed the creation of a National Counter-Interference Office (the Office) through Public Safety Canada through Budget 2023, announced on April 6, 2023.¹²² While ACHK awaits the Government of Canada's announcements on the Office's official responsibilities and action plan, we will provide recommendations. Considering the potential when paired with the foreign influence transparency scheme, it is possible for the Office to fulfill a wide range of purposes, if properly resourced.

Within the Government of Canada, the Office can serve as the in-house experts in foreign interference and provide recommendations to different agencies and departments:

¹²¹ [The new security research rules threaten universities' ability to be open and inclusive](#) (July 2021). The Globe and Mail.

¹²² [Government of Canada provides update on recommendations to combat foreign interference](#) (April 2023). Government of Canada.

- The Office should be utilized as a centralized commission to coordinate data collection and knowledge dissemination, and develop materials for varying clearance levels to be distributed within the federal government, across different jurisdictions, and to the general public.
- The Office should be proactive and not reactive. It should conduct regular outreach and relationship building to those vulnerable to foreign interference, including diaspora and dissident communities, non-governmental organizations, ethnic and local media organizations, and the private sector.
- The Office should offer education on foreign influence activities in Canada. It should create guidelines, resources, and training on collaboration with foreign principals that is made widely available for the public, with culturally and linguistically-appropriate and industry-specific materials.
- The Office can also increase transparency and act as a centralized reporting hub for the public to report suspected foreign influence activities, with a focus to engage diaspora communities. Community members often receive contradictory information on how to report foreign interference. While many incidents (ie. relentless spam, cybersecurity issues, and veiled threats/statements) are not considered criminal or illegal, those that are, are regularly underreported.

ACHK recommends Canada to utilize the Office in some capacity to centralize the reporting processes on foreign interference, including activities that may not be considered criminal offences. This can help to provide insight into the scope of the issue and acts as a deterrent to these activities. In addition, this cost-saving measure will also prevent the need for multiple agencies and institutions to interview reporters separately about the same incident, which can minimize the secondary trauma of transnational violence survivors.

Currently, survivors often have to repeat the same incident to multiple agencies, reliving their trauma without updates after reporting their experiences. This discourages community members from reporting their future encounters with foreign influence, but also generates distrust in the Canadian government.

Recommendation #4: Strengthen Canadian Democratic Institutions

Briefing, Resources, and Guidelines on Foreign Influence

Elections Canada already provides free, formal and non-partisan resources to Electoral District Associations, candidates, political parties, and contestants. ACHK urges Elections Canada, in collaboration with relevant agencies, to develop and distribute formal resources and training on foreign interference, which can be used to inform candidates, campaign teams, and political parties.

Resources and trainings should train electoral campaigns and candidates in the understanding of:

- What does foreign interference look like? What types of activities/contributions are (not) regulated?
- Where to report suspicious and/or foreign interference activities? Where to seek help in countering foreign interference?
- Where to report disinformation/misinformation? Where to seek help in countering disinformation/misinformation?
- Best practices and guidelines for cybersecurity.

In addition to materials aimed at political participants, such as candidates and campaign staff, additional civic education materials on foreign interference, media literacy, and disinformation/misinformation can be developed for the general public.

Cultural-Sensitive and Linguistic-Sensitive Civic Engagement

ACHK calls on Canada to go beyond translating English and French materials and to produce cultural-sensitive and linguistic-sensitive outreach materials appropriate for specific audiences.

In the past few years, there have been deliberate efforts to produce translated outreach materials in written Chinese. However, many of these translations are lackluster and taken out of cultural and linguistic context. Promotional materials and resources targeted for specific communities should be designed to attract attention and communicate to the audience, instead of being a box-checking exercise.

Investing in a long-term and sustainable outreach strategy is essential for engaging with Canada's diverse ethnic and linguistic communities, enhancing civic values among citizens. This should involve an overarching strategy for culturally and linguistically sensitive outreach, as well as community-specific action plans that align with their interests and cultural experiences. Community outreach should reflect the community's concerns and topics of interest, using the target audience's preferred platforms.

Recommendation #5: Invest in Canadian Communities and Growing Resiliency

Investing in social infrastructures strengthens Canadian communities and empowers society. Researchers from McGill University recommend a multidisciplinary approach, supported by sustainable funding, to address cyberthreats like disinformation/misinformation.¹²³ Canada should develop a wider national strategy to counter these threats.

¹²³ [Governments should inoculate citizens to prevent the spread of fake news](#) (November 2021). The Conversation.

Free and accessible education in digital literacy, media literacy, and critical thinking builds resilience against disinformation. Media and cyber literacy should be integrated into the public curriculum to enhance collective resistance to misinformation campaigns.

ACHK strongly recommends the Government of Canada to hold social media companies and media organizations accountable for transparently labeling state officials, state-funded media, or disinformation/misinformation. Fact-checking and clear labels for state-owned communication entities will counter disinformation/misinformation activities in Canada. ACHK also encourages the Government of Canada to collect, analyze, and publish relevant data related to disinformation.

Dedicated Funding for Ethnic Communities

ACHK recommends dedicated funding for culturally and linguistically appropriate programming in ethnic communities. This includes local media, language, education, cultural, social services, and civic engagement initiatives. Canadians should be able to access resources and infrastructures that are free from financial coercion from foreign principals. By offering viable alternative funding sources away from foreign principals and their proxies, Canada can help make these communities less susceptible to foreign influence and promote independent, community-based services..

Many grassroots organizations in Canada are already growing community resilience through initiatives such as cultural exchanges, ethnic media programs, skills workshops, and civic engagement activities. Sustainable funding into ethnic and diaspora communities will facilitate stronger social and community ties.

ACHK encourages Canada to dedicate funding for ethnic and diaspora community services, including but not limited to:

- Local, independent non-English/non-French media programming;
- Non-English/non-French languages schools;
- Resources for localized ethnic media;
- Cultural events and celebrations; and/or
- Translation supports and services.

Specialized Support for Dissidents and Diaspora Communities

The community's needs have been long overlooked by Canadian institutions, we need to rebuild community resiliency against foreign interference. Offering resources, guidelines, and expert advice to diaspora communities can proactively counter and disrupt foreign interference.

Many members of the community are also surviving trauma and struggling with mental health, ACHK urges Canada to incorporate mental wellness support within the centralized reporting mechanism for foreign interference.

ACHK encourages the government to invest in free, accessible, and language-appropriate services to support dissident and diaspora community members, including but not limited to:

- Specialized legal aid services;
- Trauma-Informed mental health and counseling services; and/or
- Cybersecurity review and guidance to counter cyberattacks.

Recommendation #6: Multilateral Efforts on Countering Foreign Interference

Canada is not alone in dealing with acts of foreign influence into democratic elections, with many liberal democracies encountering similar challenges. We should learn from like-minded allies, to exchange best and innovative practices in strengthening democratic institutions and the electoral processes.

The Republic of China (Taiwan) has taken a proactive stance in countering foreign interference in the island nation's electoral processes.¹²⁴ Canada should engage and learn from Taiwan's legislative and regulatory frameworks. In addition, Canadian institutions can also learn from Taiwan's civil society, many are global leaders in research and investigative work into Beijing's foreign interference and disinformation operations. We strongly encourage interested readers to review DoubleThink Lab's report, [Deafening Whispers China's Information Operation and Taiwan's 2020 Election](#).

On the international stage, Canada can take on a leadership role and cultivate allyships to support global initiatives to strengthen democratic development, particularly engaging with newer democracies and underdeveloped nations. Canada is in a position to provide funding, expertise, resources, and support for democratic developments globally, and in turn strengthening democratic institutions globally.

¹²⁴ [Taiwan adopts sweeping legislation to counter Chinese interference](#) (December 2019). Financial Times.

Appendix A: Interviews with Experts

Interview #1: A Canadian international security academic

Name (or alias):

[Redacted by ACHK]

Field of study/ profession:

International Security

Any relevant affiliations or groups:

N/A

Interview Transcript:

1. What are your observations in terms of election interference, particularly when it comes to ethnic communities?

Key Points

We must clearly define what constitutes “interference”. International actors routinely seek to influence one another through open methods such as diplomatic engagement. However, interference takes place when open engagement becomes [clandestine/covert](#) or coercive. For example, the use of third parties by foreign governments to clandestinely shape public policy can be regarded as interference. Similarly, the use of coercive means or threats to compel entities to take specific actions can also be considered interference.

It is important to recognize that election-related or electoral interference is a subset of a broader range of foreign interference issues. Furthermore, interference in democratic institutions and/or processes (e.g., legislation, nomination of candidates/staff, and so on) does not necessarily have to be linked to a specific election. Interference transcends electoral cycles and can take place over several years; this can make it very difficult to observe and assess the potential impacts of interference.

Interference in democratic systems may take place in tandem with open ‘influence’ efforts that many countries engage in. Unfortunately, diaspora communities often tend to be the primary victims of state-sponsored or enabled interference. Some entities could also be manipulated or incentivized to engage in interference activities on behalf of a foreign state via the use of [inducements](#) or aggressive legislation with no territorial limits (E.g., the [National Intelligence Law](#)).

China’s Interference Activities

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While there has been for some time significant concern about state-sponsored or enabled foreign interference from the Russian Federation, we are only now starting to become more concerned with similar activities which are linked to the People's Republic of China (PRC/China).

While PRC-linked influence and interference efforts have been [meticulously and increasingly documented](#) in recent years, constructive public discussion on the issue in Canada remains nascent. In my opinion, PRC-linked foreign interference efforts present some of the most significant challenges to Canada and the rules-based international system.

Chinese leadership views the broader PRC-linked diaspora as critical to its efforts to build influence abroad. Importantly, many of these diaspora groups do not wish to be affiliated with the Party-State; that said, China's leaders appear to view it [as their responsibility](#) to monitor, control and exert pressure on these communities globally. Community members often find themselves in difficult positions; if they express views or opinions that are viewed as harmful to Party-State interests, they risk their own personal well-being or the well-being of their loved ones. Aggressive [covert repatriation activities](#) conducted by the Party-State only solidifies this fear in diaspora groups.

Interference Related to Democratic Institutions and Processes

Multiple players can be involved in relation to conducting foreign interference. In the case of China, [public research](#) reveals that state intelligence and security organs such as the Ministry of State Security (MSS) and the Ministry of Public Security are important threat actors. Also of concern is the ability of the Party-State to weaponize its "united front work" (i.e., work meant to further the Party's influence) [abroad](#).

It can be very difficult to conclusively identify how and if foreign interference impacts a specific election. It is possible that specific candidates viewed more favourably by a foreign power may succeed due to a multitude of factors; concluding that foreign interference played a role could be impossible (depending on external factors).

That said, there are a few observations to be made regarding how a foreign power could potentially support a specific candidate and interfere in an election:

- Permanent Residents in Canada can join political parties. Theoretically speaking, this means that foreign nationals that could be coerced or incentivized by a state (e.g., the PRC) to engage in interference activities can be members of Canadian political parties and play a role in how they are governed or function. It is critical, however, to acknowledge that permanent residents in Canada should not automatically be considered as agents of a foreign government.
- It is also possible that candidates viewed favourably by a foreign government could be nominated to stand for election via the clandestine use of proxies or third-parties. In such a scenario, a foreign government could indicate to a group it has a positive relationship with a specific candidate that would be ideal to further ties between Canada and the country in question, and ask this group to support the nominee in question.

- In such a situation, such support may not involve the exchange of funds; the Canadian group could use its own resources to support the candidate favoured by a foreign government. Diaspora groups looking to gain favour with a foreign government could support a candidate (either financially or otherwise) while simultaneously ostracizing those viewed as being too critical of the international power in question.
- Foreign states could also covertly seek to disrupt the election campaigns of candidates they view as problematic via state organs; for example, in 2021, China allegedly sought to [disrupt the campaign of a Brooklyn resident](#) involved in pro-democracy demonstrations at Tiananmen Square through the use of a suspected MSS asset in the US.
- Many diaspora communities rely on foreign-language media as their primary news sources. Some of these media outlets or platforms could be used to influence the views of groups in Canada either through open propaganda or via clandestine means. For example, China heavily censors content viewed to be not in line with the interests of the Party-State; it is theoretically possible that applications such as WeChat/Weixin can be used to promote specific candidates while demonizing others.
 - It should be noted that it can be extremely difficult (or almost impossible) to conclusively prove a foreign state has ordered an entity to engage in such activity. Media outlets or expert commentators may also seek to proactively censor themselves out of fear of negative repercussions should they contradict foreign state interests.

Challenges

As highlighted previously, it can be very difficult to detect whether foreign interference has taken place and to measure its efficacy. Furthermore, certain diaspora groups may implicitly understand the interests of a specific government they wish to grow closer to, and seek to proactively support those with views perceived to benefit both them and the government in question (this is what 'united front work' partly aims to achieve). Many diaspora members may also genuinely share views that align with the interests of a foreign government and seek to act upon these interests; such activity should not be considered foreign interference.

2. With your expertise, what do you think are the legislative and regulation gaps in addressing election interference?

In addition to [rules related to lobbying](#), Canada does have guidelines which address the issue of foreign funds in relation to elections. Specifically, Elections Canada [stipulates](#) a “third party must not use funds from a foreign entity to pay for regulated activities. It must not circumvent, or attempt to circumvent, the prohibition or collude with any other person or entity for that purpose”. However, as stated previously, foreign interference in our democratic institutions and processes transcends electoral cycles; interference need not involve the actual transfer of funds, and can take many forms.

The lack of a foreign agent registry in Canada remains a major gap. A registry which stipulates rules about how agents of foreign principals can engage in our open system could address some of the major challenges related to how interference activities are conducted. Such a registry should also impose enforceable penalties for those who fail to follow rules; this would associate a cost with not being transparent regarding representing foreign government interests. For example, a registry may impose a penalty on a community organization for conducting activities on behalf of a foreign government without properly following rules.

A potential foreign agent registry in Canada would have to be tailored to Canada’s unique domestic context. Thankfully, Canada can take inspiration from registries or systems developed in other countries, such as the US’ [Foreign Agents Registration Act](#), Australia’s [Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme](#) or the UK’s potential [Foreign Influence Registration Scheme](#). If Canada does develop a registry of its own, it will be critical to engage with stakeholders across the country to address potential concerns and ensure that new legislation not unfairly target specific communities or individuals.

3. Why do you think the issues of elections interference have not come into light until recently?

The issue of electoral interference can be extremely difficult to investigate and report on for democracies around the world. While risks associated with such interference can be extremely high, it can be equally risky to discuss the issue in the absence of verifiable facts. In Canada, there is generally a poor understanding of the issue of foreign interference in general, and it is not clear that authorities have all the tools and resources required to either investigate the issue holistically or prosecute interference cases openly (thereby releasing public information about such cases). Furthermore, there doesn’t appear to be a uniform definition regarding foreign interference – creating rules or guidelines about such activity (e.g., through a registry) would likely encourage a productive and more balanced debate about interference issues.

4. Any other comments?

Foreign interference is a real challenge that deeply impacts diaspora communities in Canada. Without a meaningful way to punish interference activities in Canada, we risk enabling a [permissive environment](#) for threat actors.

Interview #2: Professor Stephanie Carvin

Name (or alias):

Stephanie Carvin

Field of study/ profession:

Associate Professor, Norman Paterson School of International Affairs,
Carleton University

Field: National and International Security

Any relevant affiliations or groups:

N/A

Interview Transcript:

1. What are your observations in terms of election interference, particularly when it comes to ethnic communities?

- I worry that some of the recent coverage casts Chinese/Asian-Canadians as suspect communities. It's almost impossible to know why someone votes for a political party. We need to be careful in our assumptions.
- It's not just blatant propaganda, it's about an ability to control access to information through amplification and suppression of narratives. This can be done through trying to control Chinese-language media, shutting down opposition newspapers, by starving them of ad revenue.
- The issue isn't measuring whether or not it is successful, but if states are trying to engage in these activities. But we do not have good public data on this. The issue isn't measuring whether or not it is successful, but if it is happening. But we do not have good data on this.

2. With your expertise, what do you think are the legislative and regulation gaps in addressing election interference?

- I am not convinced we need new laws. A foreign registry act may have some use but would not cover the kind of covert activities that are being discussed. Election interference, including undeclared cash donations, often involves crimes that can be prosecuted with evidence. Threats of intimidation and harassment are crimes as well (even if law enforcement typically do not take them seriously.) What is lacking is data

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collection (to get a better understanding of the issue), coordination between local, municipal and federal authorities, and actual enforcement.

- Another issue is fixing “intelligence to evidence” – intelligence services collect information related to threats, but it is hard to convert this to court-ready evidence. This may be one reason we are lacking in national security prosecutions in this space.

3. Why do you think the issues of elections interference have not come into light until recently?

Put simply, foreign interference has not been seen as a Canadian issue until it seemingly affects Canadian institutions. We have ignored Uighurs, Tibetans, Taiwanese, and pro-democracy Hong Kong activists for years. They have all been saying that Canada has a problem with foreign interference, but have been ignored by law enforcement and the media. If we start taking this issue seriously, we should prioritize these voices because they know best what is happening on the ground!

4. Any other comments?

There is a real risk that this issue, as presently being discussed, may lead to more anti-Asian racism. We need to find a balance between discussing a real threat and showing solidarity with Asian-Canadians.

Appendix B: Interviews with Community Organizers

Interview #1: Ex-City Council Candidate in Vancouver, BC

Name (or alias):

[Redacted by ACHK]

Ethnicity:

South Asian

City/Region:

Vancouver, BC

Relevant Affiliation/Groups: Affordable Housing Advocate. Data Scientist. Software Architect.

Interview Transcript:

1. Are you a voter? YES
2. Have you encountered foreign influence activities during an election? YES
3. If YES/ UNSURE, can you describe which election and what you have witnessed. What are your concerns?

During the 2018 election, I ran as a Vancouver City Council candidate. I encountered co-ordinated threats, harassment, and intimidation online from accounts that parroted CCP talking points. This was due to my historic criticism of the Communist Party of China. Also, the mayoral candidate of the political party I ran with is of Taiwanese descent. I believe that was a contributing factor. During the same election, Vancouver Police Department announced an investigation into a vote buying scheme organized by a Chinese Communist Party (CCP) United Front group, [name of an allegedly associate to the United Front Work Department]

4. Have you encountered disinformation/misinformation? YES

5. If YES/UNSURE, can you describe which election and what you have witnessed. What are your concerns?

During the 2020 BC provincial election, I observed social media accounts that routinely parrot CCP talking points, sharing tweets promoting BC Liberal talking points and attacking the BC NDP.

6. Any other comments?

My associates who use WeChat informed me that there are coordinated election interference and disinformation campaigns carried out over WeChat.

Interview #2: Social Service Agency in Toronto, ON

Name (or alias):

[Redacted by ACHK]

Ethnicity:

Hongkonger-Canadian

City/Region:

Toronto, ON

Relevant Affiliation/Groups: Leader of a government funded social service agency for East Asian Ontarians

Interview Transcript:

1. Are you a voter? YES

2. Have you encountered foreign influence activities during an election? YES

3. If YES/ UNSURE, can you describe which election and what you have witnessed. What are your concerns?

Have observed such [acts of foreign influences] at elections of all 3 levels. Chinese media supporting particular candidates. Social media disinformation/misinformation about political platforms and character smearing. Targeted messages to me to support particular candidates by CCP supporters. Some nationally-organized bodies are also rooting for CCP-backed candidates based on "ethnic voting". There are also existing candidates who, when interviewed by the media, repeated the Freudian slip multiple times: "對對對，這就是中國政府喜歡的" (translation: yes yes yes, this is what the Chinese government likes)

4. Have you encountered disinformation/misinformation? YES

5. If YES/UNSURE, can you describe which election and what you have witnessed. What are your concerns?

They distort the words and platforms of politicians and parties. They confuse the public on what scope of work each level of [government] is responsible for. They also never focus on real local issues but focus on the economic and political interests of the Chinese [government] instead of the Canadian [government].

6. Any other comments?

They abuse the [anti-Asian racism] agenda and sway public opinion to believe that any accusations or prosecutions against Asians are acts of racism. We need to educate the public on what we as visible minorities are also responsible [in] civic responsibilities, just as all residents and citizens are responsible.

Interview #3: Hong Konger Voter in the Greater Toronto Area, ON

Name (or alias):

[Redacted by ACHK]

Ethnicity:

Hongkonger

City/Region:

Mississauga, ON

Relevant Affiliation/Groups: Hong Konger advocacy and community groups

Interview Transcript:

1. Are you a voter? YES

2. Have you encountered foreign influence activities during an election? YES

3. If YES/ UNSURE, can you describe which election and what you have witnessed. What are your concerns?

2019 Federal election:

A rally was held at a Chinese mall in Markham in Aug 2019. The rally was to support the Hong Kong Government and Chinese Government against the anti-extradition protests. The online Facebook post said [a former provincial minister and a federal election candidate] would be there. So I went with another person (Hongkonger) to check out what's going on.

The rally was held at the parking lot of the mall, with security guards present. Clearly, they have the permission from the owner of the properties. There were hundreds of people there with many so-called "community groups". [The federal candidate] didn't show up but [former provincial minister] was there and also gave a speech to show [their] support for the Hong Kong and Chinese government.

We went around the parking lot to check out the various groups, and I found someone was giving out some form to others. It turns out the form is a Liberal Party membership form. I don't know their dialect, and so can't provide more details on their intention or goals. I found it very odd that some people were looking to sign up Liberal memberships at such event. But I am also not surprised as [former provincial minister] was there, and [they are] well known to have close relationship with the Chinese consulate, and also [they are] involved in many election campaigns to support Liberal candidates in all levels of government.

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4. Have you encountered disinformation/misinformation?

YES

5. If YES/UNSURE, can you describe which election and what you have witnessed. What are your concerns?

In the 2021 election, there were various online posts in Chinese social media against the Conservative party leader Erin O'Toole. He was described as anti-Chinese and would hurt the Chinese Canadian interest if he is elected. Essentially, these online posts were leveraging Asian Hate and racism to drive fear against Erin O'Toole and the Conservative party to influence Chinese Canadian voting decisions.

Interview #4: Taiwanese voter in Vancouver, BC

Name (or alias):

[Redacted by ACHK]

Ethnicity:

Taiwanese

City/Region:

Vancouver, BC

Relevant Affiliation/Groups: Public Education

Interview Transcript:

1. Are you a voter? YES
2. Have you encountered foreign influence activities during an election? YES / UNSURE
3. If YES/ UNSURE, can you describe which election and what you have witnessed. What are your concerns?

Municipal election candidates spent a significant amount on [the] campaign but the record of their campaign contributors on [the Elections British Columbia] website did not reflect the same amount of funds.

4. Have you encountered disinformation/misinformation? YES
5. If YES/UNSURE, can you describe which election and what you have witnessed. What are your concerns?

I have concerns about the recent municipal election. There were uses of social media and other social platforms that misinformation and controversial information circulated. People who shared the content usually were unable to provide fact checks and references.

Interview #5: Youth Hong Kong Organizer in Toronto, ON

Name (or alias):

[Redacted by ACHK]

Ethnicity:

Hong Konger

City/Region:

Toronto, ON

Relevant Affiliation/Groups: Member from Ontario Hong Kong Youth Action

Interview Transcript:

1. Are you a voter? NO
2. Have you encountered foreign influence activities during an election? UNSURE
3. If YES/ UNSURE, can you describe which election and what you have witnessed. What are your concerns?

2021 Federal Election luncheon(dinner) in Markham - persuading voters to vote for a particular candidate
4. Have you encountered disinformation/misinformation? N/A
5. If YES/UNSURE, can you describe which election and what you have witnessed. What are your concerns? N/A
6. Any other comments?
 - a. Foreign Chinese police stations in Toronto [in] Canada's jurisdiction. It is concerning to have someone who could take us to the police station and threaten us for the family back home
 - b. The latest influence of [name of a local supermarket in Toronto, allegedly focused on Chinese interference probes]. People.
 - c. Although CSSA McMaster is shut down, students are concerned about the interference from CCP in the academic world
 - d. [name of a Chinese students and scholar association in Toronto]

Alliance Canada Hong Kong

Interview #6: Hong Konger voter in the Greater Vancouver, BC

Name (or alias):

[Redacted by ACHK]

Ethnicity:

Hong Konger

City/Region:

Coquitlam, BC

Relevant Affiliation/Groups: Vancouver Activists of Hong Kong (VAHK)

Interview Transcript:

1. Are you a voter? YES
2. Have you encountered foreign influence activities during an election? NO
3. If YES/ UNSURE, can you describe which election and what you have witnessed. What are your concerns? N/A
4. Have you encountered disinformation/misinformation? YES
5. If YES/UNSURE, can you describe which election and what you have witnessed. What are your concerns?

Last federal election in 2021 where Kenny Chiu, Former MP of Steveston-Richmond East, was smeared by messages spread via social media/Wechat about him being critical of Chinese due to his stance on implementing the Foreign Influence Registry Act.

6. Any other comments?

Strongly suggest implementing measures to address foreign influence and interference into our democracy as actions by the CCP and other actors are sowing mistrust into our system and weakening our values

Interview #7: NoBCforXi Campaign Organizer (2021)

Description of interview:

An interview with a member of the NoBCforXi election campaign on foreign influence awareness from the provincial government.

Interviewee information

Name/alias of interviewee: Jody Chan

Role/position/affiliation of interviewee:

- Volunteer organizer of the [NoBCforXi Campaign](#),
- Member of [Vancouverites Concerned About Hong Kong](#)

Date of interview: March 4, 2021

Interview Summary:

What was the reason for the campaign?

With the BC Election, we realized that provincial candidates are not aware of foreign influence operations, especially from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). We started the campaign because we wanted candidates and their political parties to be aware of the threat that Xi Jinping brings. The CCP actively violates human rights at home and are aggressively expanding their influence in BC.

Can you describe the campaign?

The campaign urges the community to contact candidates and asked two questions (please see [email template on this page](#)):

1. Will you pledge to decline any gifts or donations from the Chinese Communist government and its affiliates or any other foreign governments that abuse human rights? This includes, but is not limited to, monetary donations, and paid-for trips?
2. Will you reject the CCP's 'Belt and Road' initiative and other economic development initiatives in BC that are promoted by authoritarian governments or enterprises with ties to authoritarian states? This is a national security threat identified by CSIS?

These two questions served a dual purpose: educating provincial politicians and candidates about the CCP's influence, while providing reassurance to our communities that their politicians aren't in the CCP's pocketbooks. Our communities need to feel safe, knowing that their elected officials are not under the influence of their oppressors.

Alliance Canada Hong Kong

All BC provincial election candidates from major parties were contacted with the pledge questions throughout the campaign. Once we received the responses, we captured it and pulled the responses together in a spreadsheet that was made public.

Candidates were given a label of being CCP leaning or against CCP influence. The analysis was generated based on the evidence submitted from the candidate's previous track record (which is recorded in the spreadsheet) and the candidate's responses to the pledges (which is also documented in the spreadsheet). These were the six label categories: Against CCP Interference; Against CCP Interference (Likely); CCP Leaning (Likely); CCP Leaning; Awaiting Response; Declined to Respond.

What are your findings?

- Many candidates tried to dodge the question at first, until the community demanded an answer or the campaign would list them as not pledging (no response)
- While conversing with the candidates, some genuinely did not know of the Belt and Road Initiative, or did not realize it was a national security threat as identified by CSIS. Some were unaware that the CCP was trying to influence Canadian politics and a few didn't even know of the gross human rights violations committed by the CCP
- Of the 235 candidates from the three major BC provincial parties (BC NDP, BC Liberal Party, BC Greens), 197 declined to respond. There were 11 candidates that were identified as CCP leaning or CCP Leaning (Likely). There were 27 candidates that were identified as against CCP interference or against CCP interference - Likely).
- Some of the evidence submitted was alarming because we found that BC had signed a MOU for the Belt and Road Initiative and some of the candidates had spoken at United Front hosted events. Some candidates were seen shaking hands with key figures who were seen at counter protests that harassed pro-democracy Hong Kong-Canadians.
- Some community members were scared to even contact candidates as they did not know if their candidate was CCP leaning and they could inadvertently be identified as a pro-democracy Hong Konger to Chinese authorities.
- During the election [a reporter asked Premier John Horgan about the NoBCforXi](#) campaign, and this was his answer: "As a party and a government, we believe strongly in safeguarding human rights. However, foreign policy relations are the responsibility of the federal government, not the provincial government," said the NDP, providing no indication it may take any such concerns to Ottawa. Premier John Horgan has previously declined Glacier Media's request to address why his government continues to support a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which was signed in 2016 by the BC Liberals with Guangdong province and remains on the books under his party's governance. The controversial agreement is intended to foster increased economic, social and cultural ties between the countries.

Key takeaways:

The findings were alarming to many in the community because the provincial government has jurisdiction over trade agreements and other policy decisions that fall outside of federal oversight where there is slightly better understanding of foreign affairs and national security concerns. And the fact that a lot of candidates are declining to comment or thinking that foreign relations are the sole responsibility of the federal government is disturbing.

There is clearly a gap in understanding among provincial politicians about the threats of foreign interference and influence operations in Canadian society.

The fact that a campaign was needed to ask politicians to pledge they won't be influenced by some foreign entity is absurd. More concerning is the high number of declined responses. The questions were simple in nature, one asking to not be influenced by foreign donations and gifts and one to reject the CCP's Belt and Road initiative, which was [identified as a threat by CSIS](#). The fact that many declined to respond to such a clear cut ask is unsettling.

Appendix C: Full Survey Results

Demographic Information

Role in the Election Cycle

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| Candidate | 24 |
| Campaign Team (Paid) | 7 |
| Campaign Team (Unpaid) | 14 |
| National/ Provincial/ Party Staff | 5 |

Level of Government

| | |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| Federal | 25 |
| Provincial/Territorial | 19 |
| Municipal (City Council or Mayor) | 13 |
| School Board | 3 |

Province/ Territory

| | |
|----------------------|----|
| Alberta | 1 |
| British Columbia | 11 |
| Manitoba | 1 |
| New Brunswick | 1 |
| Nova Scotia | 4 |
| Ontario | 19 |
| Prince Edward Island | 1 |
| Quebec | 2 |
| Saskatchewan | 1 |
| Yukon | 1 |

If you are comfortable, you may disclose which political party you ran for:

| | |
|--------------------------------|----|
| BC Liberal Party | 1 |
| Bloc Québécois/Parti Québécois | 1 |
| Conservative Party | 7 |
| Forward Together | 2 |
| Green Party | 10 |
| Independent | 1 |
| Liberal Party | 2 |
| NDP | 5 |
| Saskatchewan Party | 1 |
| Surrey Forward | 1 |
| The Atlantica Party | 1 |

Foreign Influence and/or Interference

Were you equipped with knowledge, resources, and guidelines to identify and counter foreign state influence and/or interference?

| | |
|----------|----|
| Yes | 7 |
| No | 28 |
| Not sure | 4 |

Did you witness foreign state influence and/or interference (or what you believe to be) operations during the election campaign?

| | |
|----------|----|
| Yes | 7 |
| No | 23 |
| Not sure | 9 |

If Yes: Please describe what kinds of foreign state influence and/or interference you witnessed:

- Directions to individuals whom to vote for
- Emails, ads, and articles targeting specific human rights issues such as Hong Kong and Palestine.
- I was sent various emails from Chinese citizens in China and invitation to PRC government sponsored events until they found out I'm Taiwanese.
- In particular, foreign interference with respect to nomination races was rampant. This occurs at the federal and provincial levels.
- Lies, disinformation and misinformation originated from abroad get circulated in populate constituents' social media and messaging platforms.
- On election day, my phone number was used as the "spoofed" number in a phishing scam. As a result, I received over 30 phone calls from people thinking I had called them. Also, our campaign office had many Internet problems in the days leading up to the election.
- Plenty of invitations and attempts from visitors to the office to leave event invites and business cards
- special effort to outreach to ethnic Chinese candidates, to platform and highlight candidates at special galas and events.
- Yes - there was a clear campaign of misinformation of social media channels such as WeChat, as well as negative interactions with various groups aligned with the United Front.

Disinformation/Misinformation

Were you equipped with knowledge, resources, and guidelines to identify and counter disinformation/misinformation?

| | |
|----------|----|
| Yes | 10 |
| No | 25 |
| Not sure | 4 |

Did you witness any disinformation/misinformation during the election campaign?

| | |
|----------|----|
| Yes | 26 |
| No | 8 |
| Not sure | 5 |

If Yes: Please describe what kinds of disinformation/misinformation you witnessed:

- At a minor level, with candidates/incumbents not checking 'facts'
- Candidates not informing public of all the facts about various things
- Competing campaigns would mischaracterize our policies and positions or the personal statements of our candidates.
- Disagreement of facts pushed for political reasons. Creating a distrust of media & government for political reasons.
- Fabricated candidate slander
- False accusations about candidates.
- False and/or misleading social media posts
- False information about candidates
- False or inaccurate representation of candidates' political views and attempts to discredit certain political parties' policies
- Foreign disinformation against the Conservative Party of Canada appeared to be rampant, and occurred from both the left and right of spectrum. In some cases, it was focused in diaspora media, but largely it was on social media
- Green party leader Andrew Weaver declared "victory" in our riding 3 days before election day. They were polling not great
- I am always encouraged to say things like "Trudeau could never" when in fact it's misleading, and I think that attitudes opens up vulnerabilities to external influences gaining traction in the party.
- I was emailed periodically about various issues which seemed to have biased opinions at best.
- Opposing candidate pushing lies about our policy positions
- Other political parties
- Par rapport à la COVID-19 et les politiques des partis
- rebel media
- Saw a party collect signatures from people not eligible to vote
- Social media was rife with misinformation and misidentifying any accountability for Chinese nationals or people of Chinese heritage as racism.

- sometimes ground level rumours regarding policy points or statements about one candidate's platform or another. occasionally just ignorance about election or voting rules that crop up fairly often, nothing that I would deem systemic misinfo
- There was misinformation about issues like carbon pricing, and public safety. Not sure how any foreign interference played in however.
- voting knowledge/laws, policy platforms, COVID-19
- What was generally known, the Conservatives speaking mistruths
- When certain candidates brushed off factual information as rumours

Safeguarding Canada

How can Canada better safeguard our democratic institutions?

- Improve technology, equip candidates with more resources to counter disinformation and hate.
- Increased support for voter access; better training and support for identifying and countering disinformation
- Judicial independence
- Misinformation information / sessions, more accessible voting practices, clearer policies for students and young people
- more active civic engagement among the general population, not just during election periods.
- More oversight on political funding, more oversight on community groups/orgs/non-profits supporting specific candidates, campaign financing, thorough background checks on political and government staff and education on common methods of foreign infiltration and espionage.
- Move past first past.the post, better educate people on media literacy and myths
- Parties should be vetting their candidates more thoroughly, the fact that ACHK can dig up more incriminating facts about candidates in minutes than the parties they run for is disgraceful.
- Plus de politiques pour réguler la désinformation sans pour autant nuire à la capacité de journalistes indépendants de faire leur travail et rapporter des événements moins couverts; des initiatives d'information et d'engagement civils
- Question unclear - unsure what democratic institutions entails

- Regulate common standards for nomination races; empower the RCMP, CSIS, and other agencies with the laws and tools necessary to disrupt foreign actors. Create a registry of foreign agents.
- Regulation of social media companies to stop spreading misinformation, support for locally owned media. Ending foreign ownership of news organisations & limiting foreign ownership of social media companies.
- "Reputable NGOs should be empowered to act as authorized official fact-checkers on misinformation, especially prior, during and immediately after elections. Media, government agencies need to promote such mechanisms, and work with social media platform, minority media groups etc to educate certain Canadian segments targeted by foreign interference.
- Governments should also enact legislation to reveal and review activities of foreign agents that could jeopardize Canada's sovereignty and unity."
- Safeguard fair voting processes
- Treat social media like regular news outlets and regulate the messaging that goes out.
- We should NEVER go to voting machines, regardless of how tech advances. It is far too easy to sabotage or hack. We also need a much stronger will to prosecute those responsible for polls that cheat in counting with SEVERE consequences for anyone that facilitates cheating. I have been a scrutineer and poll clerk for provincial and federal elections. The last provincial election as a scrutineer I found two ballots that were counted wrong, each favoring a different party so it evened out. Not a big deal, but I was surprised none of the other scrutineers noticed. Additionally, I do not understand how polls suddenly "find" boxes with votes that weren't counted. If done properly, those boxes always have a chain of custody. If this is broken we have incompetent or corrupt people in charge of those polls.

Do you have anything to add?

- As someone with connections to Hong Kong I was concerned as a candidate if I would be targeted or lose support for voicing my support for Hong Kong due to how the community would react and spread information on WeChat.
- Government of Canada must take action to ensure diaspora communities are not manipulated and victimized as pawns in their attempts to influence Canada. Their activities will also undermine Canada's multicultural fabrics and drive wedges into our diverse yet relatively peaceful co-existence of modern Canada.
- I was extremely concerned about our last municipal election. I found it incredibly suspicious that in spite of a severe winter storm and snowfall on election day, the mayor (and certain councilors), received almost exactly the same number of votes as the previous election. A good portion of his base are seniors so many could not get out to vote. Our small city uses electronic voting machines. I simply do not trust that we got a true result.
- Needs to improve intelligence on foreign political influence. Foreign entities should not be allowed to donate to election campaign.
- Should include region - like northern/rural areas may not be as susceptible but could receive information

Appendix D: Canada Security Strategy Brief (March 2023). Community Submission.

ACHK's Notes

The *2023 Canada Security Strategy Brief* is a report drafted by Concerned Canadian Citizen (alias), a Hongkonger community member in Canada. ACHK has received explicit consent of Concerned Canadian Citizen, to attach their full report below.

The brief provides an overview of Beijing's Grand Strategy, Hong Kong as a hybrid warfare case study, and also offers policy considerations for the Government of Canada. Though this report is not explicitly focused on foreign interference or electoral processes, the report's discussion on hybrid warfare and multilateral collaborations provide relevant information that may further inform readers.

ACHK welcomes readers to review the [2023 Canada Security Strategy Brief](#).

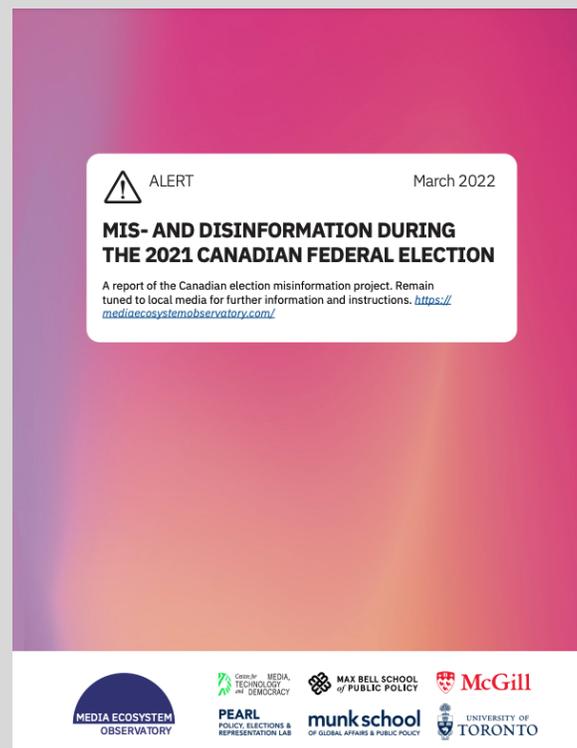
Appendix E: Excerpt from “Mis- And Disinformation During The 2021 Canadian Federal Election” (March 2022). The Canadian Election Misinformation Project

[*Mis- and Disinformation During the 2021 Canadian Federal Election*](#) is the final report of the Canadian Election Misinformation Project, published March 31, 2022.

Authors:

Aengus Bridgman, Mathieu Lavigne, Melissa Baker, Thomas Bergeron, Danielle Bohonos, Anthony Burton, Katharine McCoy, Mackenzie Hart, Robert Hiltz, Rupinder Liddar, Panging Peng, Christopher Ross, Jaclyn Victor, Taylor Owen, Peter Loewen

The Canadian Election Misinformation Project was a civil society and academic partnership that aimed to rapidly identify and respond to mis- and disinformation incidents during the 2021 Canadian Federal Election while evaluating the extent to which these incidents impact the attitudes and behaviours of Canadians.



Appendix E.1: Excerpt from page 60

On Aug. 26, two weeks after the election was called, China's Ambassador to Canada, Cong Peiwu, shared comments with the Hill Times on the election. Ambassador Cong suggested that some Canadian politicians were prioritizing their "personal political relationships" with American counterparts over Canada-China diplomatic ties¹²² and "hying issues related to China." Following the English-language federal leaders' debate on Sept. 9, Chinese state media outlet the Global Times responded by saying if a future Canadian government took hawkish actions against China, it would invite retaliation. These interventions raised significant concerns regarding the extent to which China may have meddled in the Canadian election. Moreover, some misinformation was circulated on WeChat among Chinese-language communities.

However, did Chinese state actors meaningfully interfere in the election on social media platforms in Canada? We find no clear evidence that there was a concerted effort by the Chinese state to interfere in the election. Moreover, we find Canadian-Chinese issues were not central to the campaign nor were they top of mind for voters. We judge there to have been little to no impact from these activities on the overall election result. We find no evidence of riding-specific impact, although cannot fully discount the possibility that misinformation and critical discourse of specific incumbent Members of Parliament may have had an influence in a small number of ridings with large Chinese-speaking populations.

Chinese-language social media

During the election, we searched for Canada-related content on China-based social media platforms such as WeChat, Douyin, Sina Weibo, and Tencent. In the early part of the campaign (Aug. 15 to Sept. 7), we did not identify any misinformation or major interest in the Canadian election circulating on these platforms. When Canadian politics was mentioned it was in relation to encouraging more participation among Chinese diaspora communities.

However, we found that interest in the Canadian election increased around the same time as the federal leaders' debates on Sept. 8 and 9. Notably, anti-Conservative mentions and articles increased, and a set of false or misleading claims and narratives emerged:

- the CPC would sever diplomatic relations with China once it takes power;
- CPC politicians were targeting Chinese Canadians for political gain. This narrative often equated criticism of the Chinese government to an attack against the Chinese-Canadian community;
- the CPC does not care about anti-Chinese discrimination in Canada because racism is not mentioned explicitly in the CPC platform;
- all ethnic Chinese with ties to China would be required to register as foreign agents, and their free speech would be curtailed.

保守党奥图尔称：一旦当选下届总理，先禁微信再打压华为！誓和中国对抗到底！

Original | CEIC 加信移民快讯 8/31

收录于话题
#加拿大 53 #政治 5



8月即将结束，距离联邦大选也越来越近了，四大党派最近都在花式拉票。除了承诺继续发钱，各党派还使出浑身解数来造舆论获取关注度。

保守党魁奥图尔 (Erin O'Toole) 就把眼睛盯上了中国。他可不是要和华人民众搞好关系，而是扬言一旦当选，就誓与中国对抗到底！

Appendix E.2: Excerpt from page 61

The prevalence of topics regarding the Canadian election on these Chinese-language platforms increased as election day approached, but the spread and reach of this information was low to moderate, and found to be largely confined to a single platform: WeChat. The content frequently asked Chinese-Canadian voters to review each candidate's background before voting and to vote carefully. We further documented content related to two specific ridings where incumbent MPs came under criticism.

Steveston—Richmond East

We observed misleading and false information directed at the former Conservative MP Kenny Chiu in the B.C. riding of Steveston-Richmond East, coming under criticism on Chinese-language social media, and by the domestic Chinese-language press. Criticism against him included the assertion he did not care about issues of Canadian Chinese communities and actively engaged in activities detrimental to their interests. On election day, Chiu lost the seat with 33.5% of the vote to the Liberal candidate Parm Bains who received 42.5% of the vote. He attributed part of his defeat to Chinese disinformation operations on WeChat.

An article in the free Chinese-language news site Today Commercial News, titled “Conservative MP Kenny Chiu reintroduces Foreign Influence Registry Act to repress Chinese Canadian communities” might substantiate Chiu’s accusation. This article was widely circulated on WeChat. It misleadingly suggests that Chiu intended to repress Chinese communities by introducing the Foreign Influence Registry Act. In fact, the bill had planned to impose an obligation on individuals acting on behalf of foreign governments and political organizations to file returns when they undertake specific actions with respect to public office holders—essentially another form of the federal lobbying registry. However, the narrative of the article was the bill targeted mainland Chinese associations and would ultimately be harmful to economic and cultural ties between Canada and China. Many sources on Today Commercial News come directly from the Chinese state media People’s Daily.

Chiu claimed after the election he was discredited by Chinese state actors, by being portrayed as against Chinese Canadians interests during the campaign. The article was mainly circulated on WeChat targeting Chinese speakers, but not widely shared on Facebook and Twitter. According to the 2016 census profile, Canadians whose mother tongue is either Cantonese or Mandarin account for nearly 40% of Steveston-Richmond East’s population.¹²³

加信移民快讯 >



如果奥图尔成功当选下一任加拿大总理，歧视华人的事件能不飙升？！



剩下 2 個多星期，就是聯邦大選。華人及僑社多年以來都是被忽視的一群人。這次聯邦大選，華人必要展示投票力量。現在這位自由黨初次在溫哥華東區參選。我們華人也應該讓政界認識華社力量。印度人已經有很大的影響力。中國人也應該展現一個團結。明天早上—富大酒樓，11:30 午餐，多少人去都可以。不用付費。各位可以找些朋友到場，顯示關注。將來勝出，起碼多幾個議員會關心中國人的議題。



Appendix E.3: Excerpt from page 62

Vancouver East

We also observed New Democratic Party MP Jenny Kwan was targeted by Beijing-friendly individuals and organizations in the riding of Vancouver East. Like Chiu, Kwan has been vocal in calling upon the Canadian government to take more direct action to respond to Beijing's persecution of Xinjiang's minority Muslim Uyghurs and their repression of Hong Kong's democratic movement. The pro-Beijing community leader, Fred Kwok—President of the Chinese Benevolent Association of Vancouver and Chair of the Greater Vancouver Chinese Cultural Center—posted messages on WeChat to advocate election for the Liberal candidate Josh Vander Vies. These messages show Kwok organized a free lunch for the Chinese Canadian community to meet with Vander Vies. On election day, Kwan was re-elected with 56.4% of the vote compared to 19.8% for Vander Vies.

Chinese state-affiliated social media accounts

In addition to monitoring Chinese-language social media, we evaluated known Chinese state-affiliated social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter to assess the extent to which they were commenting and potentially influencing the election. We used a publicly available list of Twitter accounts labeled "China state-affiliated media" alongside the social media accounts of Chinese diplomatic missions in Canada, and then searched for corresponding Facebook pages, yielding a total of 29 Twitter accounts and 17 Facebook pages.

Of the 4,094 unique articles shared on these Facebook pages since the beginning of the election, only 33 (approximately 0.8 percent) mentioned Canada, the Canadian election or Canadian-Chinese issues. On Twitter, out of 32,317 tweets shared by Chinese state-media accounts, only 261 mentioned Canada, the Canadian election or Canadian-Chinese issues (again 0.8 percent). When Canada was referenced, it was almost always in relation to Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou and the cases of Michael Spavor and Michael Kovrig.

The Global Times launched a petition on Aug. 18 to demand Huawei executive Meng's immediate release in response to her 1,000th day of detention. The portal for the petition displayed a counter which continuously added signatures at a regular interval claiming to have collected nearly 15 million signatures. The petition was widely shared by Chinese state actors' accounts on social media but evoked very few interactions among Canadians. Some Canadian voices, such as the Green Party and the Communist Party of Canada, have also called for the release of Wanzhou, but again, none of those posts have been widely shared during the election.

Chinese state media also published an article alleging that Spavor shared images of Chinese military equipment with Kovrig. This was shared on other Chinese state-affiliated Twitter accounts. The resulting discussions were a continuation of the long-held Chinese view that the Michaels were rightfully imprisoned criminals.

Wanzhou, Spavor, and Kovrig were repatriated to their respective countries shortly after the election. Figure 20 shows a boxplot of the distribution of likes, comments, and shares on Facebook and Twitter posts



Appendix F: Excerpt from “China’s Disinformation Strategy: Its Dimensions and Future” (December 2020). Atlantic Council.

[*China’s Disinformation Strategy: Its Dimensions and Future*](#)¹²⁵

Author:

[Dexter Roberts](#), non-resident senior fellow in the Atlantic Council’s Asia Security Initiative, housed within Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security

Excerpt from pages 8-9

“Overseas, Chinese social media companies have played a critical role in spreading news denigrating the US electoral system while directing bipartisan criticism at US President Donald J. Trump on the one hand and US President-elect Joseph R. Biden, Jr., and US Vice President elect Kamala Harris on the other. CCTV showed footage of Trump supporters besieging a polling station in Detroit, with the caption on the screen reading “multiple spots in the US have fallen into chaos,” as reported by the South China Morning Post.

Just as important in China’s disinformation efforts, however, have been the world’s biggest social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Over the past several years, Chinese government officials, ranging from public security to overseas diplomats, at the encouragement of Beijing have opened accounts on these foreign platforms and used them to often forcefully promote China’s rise. This has created the phenomenon of “wolf warrior” diplomats who tweet in often confrontational ways and increasingly spread fake news or even doctored images. Responding to disturbing revelations about war crimes committed by the Australian military, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian tweeted a falsified image of an Australian soldier holding a bloody knife to a child’s throat, further damaging already troubled relations between the two countries. “The US [is] in degradation,” tweeted Hu Xijin, the fiery editor of the Global Times, in the chaotic aftermath of the presidential election.”

¹²⁵ Peer reviewed by Iain Robertson and DFRLab team.

Appendix G: Excerpt from “Beijing's Global Media Influence 2022” (September 2022). Freedom House.

[Beijing's Global Media Influence 2022](#): Authoritarian Expansion and the Power of Democratic Resilience, published by Freedom House.

Authors:

Sarah Cook, Angeli Datt, Ellie Young, and BC Han

Continued on next page

Appendix G.1: Key Findings

1

The Chinese government has expanded its global media footprint. The intensity of Beijing's media influence efforts was designated as High or Very High in 16 of the 30 countries examined in this study, which covers the period from January 2019 to December 2021. In 18 of the countries, the Chinese regime's efforts increased over the course of those three years.

2

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its proxies are using more sophisticated and coercive tactics to shape media narratives and suppress critical reporting. Mass distribution of Beijing-backed content via mainstream media, harassment and intimidation of outlets that publish news or opinions disfavored by the Chinese government, and the use of cyberbullying, fake social media accounts, and targeted disinformation campaigns are among the tactics that have been employed more widely since 2019.

3

The success of Beijing's efforts is often curtailed by independent media, civil society activity, and local laws protecting press freedom. Journalists, scholars, and civil society groups in all 30 countries responded to influence campaigns in ways that increased transparency, ensured diverse coverage, and enhanced local expertise on China. Laws governing freedom of information or media ownership, which are present in many democracies, helped to ensure transparency and insulate media ecosystems from CCP influence.

4

Inadequate government responses leave countries vulnerable or exacerbate the problem. Declines in press freedom and gaps in media regulations have reduced democratic resilience and created greater opportunities for future CCP media influence. In 23 countries, political leaders launched attacks on domestic media or exploited legitimate concerns about CCP influence to impose arbitrary restrictions, target critical outlets, or fuel xenophobic sentiment.

5

Democracies' ability to counter CCP media influence is alarmingly uneven. Only half of the countries examined in this study achieved a rating of Resilient, while the remaining half were designated as Vulnerable. Taiwan faced the most intense CCP influence efforts, but it also mounted the strongest response, followed in both respects by the United States. Nigeria was deemed the most vulnerable to Beijing's media influence campaigns.

6

Long-term democratic resilience will require a coordinated response. Governments, media outlets, civil society, and technology firms all have a role to play in enhancing democratic resilience in the face of increasingly aggressive CCP influence efforts. Building up independent, in-country expertise on China, supporting investigative journalism, improving transparency on media ownership and disinformation campaigns, and shoring up underlying protections for press freedom are all essential components of an effective response strategy. Governments should resist heavy-handed actions that limit access to information or otherwise conflict with human rights principles, instead forging partnerships with civil society and the media to ensure that all legislative and policy responses strengthen rather than weaken democratic institutions.

Appendix G.2: Beijing's Tactics for Global Media Influence

Beijing's Tactics for Global Media Influence

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its proxies influence news and information flows around the world through a range of activities. These were the most notable tactics observed in the 30 countries under study from 2019 to 2021.

