



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 071

Tuesday, May 9, 2023

Chair: The Honourable Bardish Chagger



Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs

Tuesday, May 9, 2023

• (1845)

[English]

The Chair (Hon. Bardish Chagger (Waterloo, Lib.)): Good evening, everyone. I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 71 of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. The committee is meeting today to continue its study on foreign election interference.

We have with us today Mr. Kenny Chiu, former member of Parliament, by video conference, as well as Mr. David Salvo, managing director and senior fellow at the Alliance for Securing Democracy at the German Marshall Fund of the United States, also by video conference.

Mr. Chiu, welcome to PROC. We now pass the floor to you for your opening comments.

Mr. Kenny Chiu (Former Member of Parliament, As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair, for the invitation.

Freedom, democracy and the rule of law are not clichés. In fact, many from around the world have chosen Canada because of our respect for and practice of these ideals. Arguably, those who are from the outside come to treasure them and want to protect them even more, because many of us have seen and lived lives without these rights.

Twenty-first-century Canada is a multicultural society with immigrants and refugees from all continents and all walks of life, who call it their settlement home. It is a beautiful and ideal world that those before us in this generation worked very hard to build—a fair, respectable, multicultural society that honours diversity and yet commits to preserving the uniqueness and the very essence of being Canadian, those much-cherished ideals of equality, universal values and human dignity.

Authoritarian regimes around the world, however, do not subscribe to this same value system we believe in. Not only do they work to undermine us, to turn our country into a subservient state—kowtowing to their direct influence, whether they are the Russian Federation, China, Iran or other less resourceful or ambitious regimes—but they are also willing to sacrifice our trusted institutions, the harmonious society we have carefully built over decades and the people who are in it.

I used to be a partisan politician, but now that I'm back as an ordinary Canadian citizen, I continue to share with millions of fellow Canadians the same deep level of worry and concern for my adopted country, because foreign interference is a national threat. It

should have been a pan-partisan issue. Protecting the country and its people is arguably the top job for any sovereign government, yet we are seeing an inexplicably action-free policy exercised by our federal government vis-à-vis interference from the most resourceful and ambitious of all foreign states, the Chinese Communist Party regime.

To be clear, the government is not mute and has not been seen to have done nothing. It loudly verbalized its spontaneous concerns and cited SITE, CSE, NSICOP, NSIRA, CEIPP, CSIS and, recently, a rapporteur as proof of things it has done, but none of that, I would argue, has protected sufficiently the 21st-century Canada that we are in, and my experience has been that my country did not protect me from foreign interference and the attacks I've experienced.

In a thriving, diverse, multicultural country such as ours, it is up to those who are in power to stop the corruption and the deceit, to safeguard the exposed and the vulnerable few, to safeguard Canadians of all mother tongues from predatory states and their coercion, and to safeguard Canada from exploitation and manipulation.

I thank you for giving me this opportunity to answer many of the questions you may have and to share my views. Recently in the Canadian broadcasting world, we have seen more than sufficient coverage on the issues and the challenges that have been presented to us today, and I urge all of you to take some action, to be determined, to stand up and to protect our country, especially the people who are in our country.

Thank you again for this opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chiu.

We now go to Mr. Salvo.

Welcome to PROC. The floor is yours.

Mr. David Salvo (Managing Director and Senior Fellow, Alliance for Securing Democracy, German Marshall Fund of the United States): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Distinguished members of the committee, good evening from Washington, D.C., and thank you for inviting me.

I was asked to discuss the collaboration of my organization, the Alliance for Securing Democracy at the German Marshall Fund, with the Government of Canada and Microsoft on a joint initiative that brought together leading experts, policy-makers and industry professionals from around the world to produce a practical guide of best practices that key stakeholders in democracies can use to counter foreign interference in elections.

To provide some context to what motivated us to join this partnership with your government, it's worth briefly explaining the genesis of the Alliance for Securing Democracy.

We launched in the summer of 2017 to put Russia's interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election into context for American policy-makers and offer solutions on how to better defend our democratic institutions and processes from autocratic threats, not just from Russia but from other state-sponsored actors like China and Iran.

The name "Alliance" was very deliberate. What happened in the United States did not occur in a vacuum. Over many decades, Russian interference has targeted numerous democracies, including several of the U.S. and Canada's allies and partners in Europe. Autocrats' tools of interference, which include cyber-operations, malign finance and information manipulation, among many others, have been refined to exploit modern technologies and target all sectors of democratic society.

We knew that as a civil society organization we had some small role to play in facilitating the exchange of best practices between governments, companies and other civil society organizations, and that we could learn lessons from across sectors and national borders in order to offer guidance to policy-makers and shut down institutional vulnerabilities in our democracy. In this regard, our partnership with the Government of Canada and Microsoft on combatting election interference as part of the French government's Paris Call for Trust and Security in Cyberspace was at the heart of what we do.

The compendium of best practices that we published along with the Government of Canada and Microsoft offers reminders of best methods to secure election infrastructure, procedures to ensure voting integrity during the pandemic, transparent ways of communicating with the public about threats to elections, and best practices in building citizen resilience to disinformation. It even highlights examples of Canadian good practice, which include the Canadian Heritage programs to fund civil society initiatives to tackle election-related misinformation and disinformation, and the government-wide critical election incident public protocol. If used as intended, Canada's protocol should be an excellent model of transparency and communication with the public to reduce the likelihood of politicians' manipulating threat information about election interference.

This compendium of best practices is not just in circulation in Canada and the United States, of course. It is being put to good use around the world. Anecdotally, U.S. government colleagues have informed me that they disseminate the compendium to government counterparts in the global south, where many nations are under-resourced and increasingly at the forefront of Russian and Chinese malign influence operations.

In Canada, you do not need me to tell you that foreign interference in democracy remains a serious challenge. The rise in Chinese state-sponsored interference in Canadian democracy through targeting specific ridings and candidates in elections, malign financial coercion and subversion of civil society, including the Chinese Canadian diaspora, have been well documented and on the agenda of your committee, of course. Russian state-sponsored actors have amplified domestic divisions on issues of heightened political sensitivity, including the war in Ukraine, vaccination mandates, the "freedom convoy" in Ottawa and economic hardships facing Canadian voters.

Undermining Canadians' confidence in democratic governance and the integrity of Canadian elections is an overarching objective of these authoritarian regimes. Therefore, the compendium of best practices that we published continues to be a useful guide, not just in Canada but for democracies worldwide. It's illustrative not only of the importance of cataloguing the policies and procedures that can secure elections to rising autocratic threats, but also of the utility of conducting such multi-stakeholder exercises.

No nation, government, company or civil society organization is an island unto itself. By working together as allies and breaking down barriers between governments, industry and civil society, we will be better positioned to secure democratic elections and institutions from an ever-evolving autocratic threat ecosystem.

I look forward to your questions. Thank you very much.

● (1850)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now start with six-minute rounds, starting with Mr. Cooper and followed by Mr. Turnbull, Madame Gaudreau and then Mrs. Blaney.

Mr. Cooper, the floor is yours.

Mr. Michael Cooper (St. Albert—Edmonton, CPC): Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm going to direct my questions through you to Mr. Chiu.

Mr. Chiu, do you believe you were the target of Beijing's interference in the 2021 election?

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Yes, sir.

Mr. Michael Cooper: What do you base that on? Can you describe some of the incidents that occurred in your riding and some other experiences that you had on the campaign trail?

Mr. Kenny Chiu: The experience was not just within my riding, as we all know—as you all know, as federal politicians. A lot of time, especially at election time, the party's platform and the party's leadership accounts for a large number of people...who will be voting for you or not.

Much of the disinformation that I observed was levelled against my party, misconstruing the platform as well as attacking the leader for the Conservative Party of Canada back then, Mr. Erin O'Toole. It was also levelled at me. They attacked Mr. O'Toole as if he was a white supremacist and anti-Chinese, anti-Asian.

As if that's not ridiculous enough, they levelled similar attacks on me personally. The fact that I'm an ethnic Chinese, that I speak fluent Cantonese and Mandarin, and that I read and write the language, didn't prevent them from labelling me as a traitor. I was a sell-out for what I had proposed in the last session of Parliament as my private member's bill, Bill C-282, the foreign interference registry act. It was misinterpreted and misconstrued as something that would cause persecution against all Chinese-Canadians, causing them significant grief.

These are things that I saw and personally experienced.

• (1855)

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you.

Do you believe it was coordinated?

Mr. Kenny Chiu: With the level of organization, the various facets, and especially in contrast to previous elections that I was involved in, yes, I believe it was organized.

Mr. Michael Cooper: We know that the rapid response mechanism at Global Affairs detected a Beijing-driven disinformation campaign targeting you and other Conservative candidates, specifically in the Lower Mainland.

Did anyone from the Communications Security Establishment or from the SITE task force ever reach out to you about this disinformation campaign—and by the SITE task force, I mean the election panel that had been established?

Mr. Kenny Chiu: No, sir. None of these national security apparatus contacted me. I had, however, been contacted prior to the election by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. Therefore, during the election, when I observed unbecoming activities, significant evidence that showed me that there had been a coordinated attack against me and my party, I gave a call to the same CSIS contact I had. They came to my campaign office, and we had a meeting.

Mr. Michael Cooper: When would that have taken place, approximately?

Mr. Kenny Chiu: It would have been in September 2021.

Mr. Michael Cooper: How long was that before the election?

Mr. Kenny Chiu: It would have been 10 days, maybe two weeks, maximum.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you for that.

You heard nothing back, and as far as you know, no further action was taken by the critical election incident public protocol.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Negative—I did not hear anything.

Mr. Michael Cooper: You said, with respect to this government, that there is an inexplicably action-free policy when it comes to countering Beijing's interference. Can you elaborate upon that?

Mr. Kenny Chiu: The foreign interference started by the Beijing authority is not something new. We know, for example, of Huseyin

Celil being kidnapped by the Uzbek police, per directions by the CCP, followed in 2014 by Kevin and Julia Garratt, and the hostage diplomacy that was involved. Then there were the two Michaels. These were things that were happening to Canadians overseas, perhaps. At the same time, we also know that for years, CSIS, under Dick Fadden, for example—

Mr. Michael Cooper: Mr. Chiu, I apologize for interrupting, but—as you can appreciate, as a former member of Parliament yourself—my time is very limited.

I'll put it to you this way: Do you believe the election integrity defence infrastructure this government has established is adequate to deal with Beijing's foreign interference tactics?

Mr. Kenny Chiu: I don't know about adequate, but I surely do not think it's been effective.

Mr. Michael Cooper: You would submit that it was not effective in your riding, obviously.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: It was not effective in my riding or in a couple of other ridings I've been paying attention to, sir.

Mr. Michael Cooper: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Go ahead, Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull (Whitby, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chiu and Mr. Salvo, for being here today.

Mr. Chiu, I'll start with you.

Would you agree that any form of foreign interference or domestic interference is wrong and should be stopped?

• (1900)

Mr. Kenny Chiu: It depends on what you define as “domestic interference”. If you define it the way the CEIPP wrote in their report, then yes, domestic interference is something we Canadians need to pay attention to.

However, foreign interference has no place in Canada, in my opinion.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Are you against foreign interference but okay with domestic interference, or are you against both?

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Well, we have election laws, and every Canadian, domestically, has to abide by the Canada Elections Act. Now, whether you can clearly separate domestic from foreign is a separate issue.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Okay. The reason I bring up domestic interference is that your party sent out flyers across my riding in one of the elections, which misinformed the public right across my riding. It's interesting that we're here talking about foreign interference. I think we should equally be opening up the conversation to talk about domestic interference.

Anyway, I'll move on from that.

You lost the last election, as far as I understand, by 9% of the vote—that's approximately 3,500 votes. You maintain that foreign election interference was the reason you lost. Is that true?

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Mr. Turnbull, if you could answer what the voter turnout rate for my riding was compared with 22 months previously, in the 2019 election, you would see that a lot of the supporters—a lot of voters—stayed at home.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: I guess what I want to establish here is this: Did you lose by 9% of the vote or not?

Mr. Kenny Chiu: The candidate who won the riding won by a margin of 9%. I agree. Yes, 3,400 or something—

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Okay, thank you for that.

How many votes do you think were impacted by foreign interference?

Mr. Kenny Chiu: If I could have a camera installed in each and every booth and look at how people voted, then I would be able, for certain, to answer your question.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Mr. Chiu, thank you for that.

You admit that you don't exactly know how many votes were impacted by foreign interference. Is that the case?

Mr. Kenny Chiu: There is no way anybody, including the CEIPP, could tell that foreign interference was not a factor in the election result in my riding.

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you. That's a clear answer. We don't know.

I think that's true, although there's evidence in a report I found and read very intently. It's called "Mis- and Disinformation During the 2021 Canadian Federal Election". It goes through a very detailed analysis of... It mentions your riding and the disinformation campaign you were subjected to, which I don't think anyone doubts.

I have a couple of quotes from this report:

If it is these Chinese Canadian voters who shifted against the Conservative Party, it should be detectable in the survey data. We evaluated whether Chinese Canadians switched their vote intentions or changed their evaluations of the Conservative Party using survey data collected during the campaign and just after the election. We compared Chinese Canadians' vote intentions during the first two weeks of the campaign to their vote intentions during the last two weeks, with the results in Figure 22.

Here's the important part: "The two left panels show that there was no change" in voter intentions. That's interesting, because it demonstrates the exact opposite of what you are maintaining and what you have said publicly numerous times.

Given the fact that you don't know and have now said that on the record at this committee, and that there's evidence to suggest there actually was no change in voter intentions, how can you maintain what you believe?

Mr. Kenny Chiu: I haven't read the survey or the report of the survey, and I would be very keen to understand what language the survey is conducted in.

You mentioned, sir, about the Chinese. There are no homogeneous Chinese in my riding. There are Chinese from Taiwan. There are Chinese from Hong Kong and from mainland China.

Some of them use WeChat, especially the mainland Chinese. Some of them solely rely on WhatsApp—the Hong Kong Chinese—and the Taiwanese Chinese use LINE as a communication means. I don't know when the last time was that you picked up the phone when you didn't know the number, but perhaps....

I would probably refer the committee to also study the McGill University data mining professor's study on the disinformation that I experienced, or maybe Infowatch, as well as the Digital Forensic Research Lab.

● (1905)

Mr. Ryan Turnbull: Thank you, Mr. Chiu.

To get a last quote and question in here, the report also states, "We also did not find evidence that those using WeChat for political information were less likely to support the Conservative Party or that using WeChat had a different impact on East Asians than other Canadians".

Again, this report has a significant amount of evidence that contradicts the claims you've been making. I wonder if you've read the report that I'm referring to.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Mr. Turnbull, like I said, there has been significant research done on this, including by this infowatch.org. There have also been studies conducted by the Digital Forensic Research Lab, as well as the McGill University data mining professors.

I wonder if you, sir, have read any of their studies.

To give a straight answer to your question, no, I have not read that particular report, which does not corroborate what's been reported by CSIS whistle-blowers, sir.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chiu, and thank you, Mr. Turnbull.

Next is Madame Gaudreau.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Chiu, when you appeared before the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics on March 31, you said that you had been the victim of a plot. You just mentioned WeChat and allegations of anti-Chinese sentiment.

I'm trying to determine the source. How did you figure out this was a warning sign?

[English]

Mr. Kenny Chiu: During an election campaign, you have many volunteers and supporters volunteering for you. Many of my volunteers and supporters are people from the community. I did observe a significant detachment from supporting me between 2019 and 2021. There was a significant drop in mainland Chinese-background supporters of my campaign in 2021. However, there are still volunteers in my campaign who have access to WeChat, and they are also participants in the WhatsApp chat rooms. Therefore, they bear witness to much of the spreading of disinformation, the organizing to defeat Kenny Chiu, the organizing to defeat Conservatives in general.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Again, when you appeared before the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, you said you were glad that the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, or CSIS, had blown the whistle.

In your opening remarks, you said that no one had contacted you. Can you give us more information on what led you to a certain conclusion?

[English]

Mr. Kenny Chiu: In my term as a member of Parliament, I was first contacted by CSIS soon after 2020, I believe. It was an abrupt connection through my home phone here, and then, through my office in Ottawa, we sat down and chatted for the first time. It was all shrouded in secrecy. They would not tell me why they wanted to meet me. Similar meetings were conducted two more times during my term as an MP.

I know of a Vancouver contact of CSIS, so that's the person I contacted during the federal election. I also tried to collect this information on my own by going to YouTube and organizing a special town hall and all that. None of that was effective.

• (1910)

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I gather that you made your own efforts to investigate the matter.

This morning, we heard reports of underhanded tactics being used repeatedly, causing the person being targeted to wonder what was really going on. Paranoia was even mentioned.

I'd like more information on that.

[English]

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Well, ma'am, this information and the interference work did not start or stop just during the election writ period. This is something that I wish all members in this committee to understand. The foreign interference and infiltration of our community and of our country continues today. I'm sure you all are aware of Minister Mendicino's efforts across the country to conduct a town hall study of the potential establishment of a foreign registry. Right now, in many of the community chat rooms, this is being linked to anti-Asian racism, and they're also trying to stoke members of the community to speak up, to put pressure on the government so that it will not establish the foreign registry.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: You also talked about the thresholds for notifying the public. It's obvious that questions were raised and that things could have been done. You said at the outset that the thresholds were inadequate.

We are trying to get an overall understanding of the situation and figure of what needs to be done to detect any interference attempts going forward.

Do you think the thresholds were adequate to help in your case or even allow for a response to the foreign interference activity you faced?

[English]

Mr. Kenny Chiu: First of all, I have no confidence that the established mechanism would effectively detect and therefore provide me with sufficient warning ahead of the attacks.

Understand that these attacks are, a lot of times, using the foreign languages of Mandarin and Chinese. They're in written and verbal language, videos, and opportunities provided only to one particular candidate against the other. I don't know if the SITE task force is equipped to deal with that.

Secondly, even if I was warned, what am I going to do? How would I be able to counter this? What tools in the tool set am I, as a candidate in an election, provided with so that I can effectively combat this?

The CEIPP report mentioned notifying Canadians—with a very high threshold. The notification to Canadians, I would imagine, even if that high threshold was met, would probably be in English and French. None of these people who are subject to foreign interference would be listening to or receiving the message.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Blaney.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

As always, all of my questions go through the chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here today.

Mr. Salvo, I would like to come to you first.

I'm very curious. You talked about the partnership between you, Microsoft and the Government of Canada, if I have that correct. I'm just wondering how that works. Could you tell us a bit about how people are educated about it?

One thing that we're hearing, of course, is that people don't know where to go to find relevant information. As a member of Parliament who represents a more rural and remote riding, I see more and more across Canada that local papers are falling by the wayside and not having the resources to continue their important work to provide journalism that can be held to a certain standard. People are going more and more online, which may or may not give them the best information.

I'm just wondering how we are educating people about this resource.

• (1915)

Mr. David Salvo: Thank you, ma'am. It's a great question.

What's difficult, especially as a representative of civil society, is that our resources are extremely limited to do exactly the type of engagement that's necessary to make sure that these best practices get in the hands of the right people. By "the right people", I mean election officials all over the country, local journalists who are in a position to educate their specific communities, mayors, and people who are really on the ground in their communities.

This is an extremely dense and difficult set of issues. We're talking about election administration procedure. My organization works on these issues and I wouldn't even stick my hand up and say I'm an expert in every single aspect of election administration. To expect the ordinary citizen, who doesn't spend time understanding these things... It's difficult. The same is true for under-resourced election officials as well, all over the country.

It's really a challenge that government in particular... The federal level has to provide the resources for organizations, not just like mine, but also for state and local officials themselves, and for provincial officials in Canada to be able to work with community leaders on the ground to get this information out.

Look at the constituents in Mr. Chiu's riding, for example. They never would have been aware of state-sponsored disinformation tactics targeting a particular campaign or what they could do to inoculate themselves against such tactics. That information is very hard to come by.

This is why we created this initiative in the first place. It's incumbent on civil society and governments in particular. It's a resource exchange, but it's also an information exchange. The information gaps are all over in this field. The average voter is essentially a sitting duck for a lot of these tactics. That's why we tried to put together some sort of handbook that addresses both election administration and resilience. How do you provide Canadian voters with more information about these tactics? What defences can they adopt, so that when they go to the polls they are voting freely and fairly according to their conscience, without any sort of undue influence from foreign state-sponsored actors?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you for that.

I appreciate that you mentioned earlier some of the realities—for example, on the convoy that we had here in Ottawa. We know there was foreign money: There was Russian money sent to support that convoy. It's quite shocking when you read the information that

came out of the public inquiry, when you understand how quickly money was moving in ways that we couldn't necessarily track.

Of course, that means there's foreign money that's influencing us, either during the election or around an election, which is very concerning.

I think you said this well: This is an issue that is rapidly changing. How things are being done is changing, so we have to have processes that are responsive to that. I'm wondering if you could talk about the influence of that kind of money. What are the ways that we can track...? What are the ways that we can look into the future and think, "Here's how we're going to monitor that so that we make sure those dollars aren't influencing Canadians"?

Mr. David Salvo: Absolutely, and part of the problem is that we, as democracies, allow the fox into the henhouse. With a lot of our financial legislation, when the money comes in from China or Russia and is connected to state-sponsored actors or to the governments directly, oftentimes it's legal. It's through legal means. It's through shell companies and real estate and others.

That's because in Canada and the United States, at least today, to my knowledge there's no registry, not only for foreign agents... Well, we have one in the United States, but it's poorly implemented. Canada to date does not have one. Also, a beneficial ownership registry would at least unmask who the hidden owners are behind companies and behind property. That's how a lot of this autocratic authoritarian money enters into Canadian politics, American politics and European politics.

That's what's so insidious and long term about the use of the financial tools to corrode our democracies. It's not always about a particular election, a particular candidate or a particular riding. It's way more insidious than that. It's about moving money into our system, masking the origin of that money and presenting it as authentic Canadian voices trying to influence Canadian politics when there's a clear tie to an authoritarian regime like China or Russia.

Tightening up laws in the financial space...and this is applicable to my country too. I'm not trying to cast stones at Canada here. It's a problem facing a lot... In the EU, there are many governments facing this exact problem. Ensuring that there's full transparency over the money that's coming into our country through property and in companies is a sure way to expose and provide sunlight onto the origins of money entering domestic politics from abroad.

• (1920)

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll now enter our second round, starting with Mr. Nater, who will be followed by Ms. O'Connell.

Mr. Nater, you have five minutes.

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair, and, through you, thank you to our witnesses.

I want to start by quoting from the study that Mr. Turnbull quoted from earlier. It says this:

We cannot preclude the possibility, however, that there was some influence at the riding level. Moreover, the mere perception that China was able to influence the race in Steveston—Richmond East may have a chilling effect on criticism of China in Canadian politics.

Moreover, if Mr. Turnbull had read the explanatory notes, he would have read that the survey data was from 689 Chinese Canadians from across the country and was not specific to Mr. Chiu's former riding. I would commend to the committee the possibility of reading the entire report.

For you, Mr. Chiu, looking at intimidation efforts that may have happened in your riding and in other ridings where there are large diasporas of Canadians of Chinese descent, what impacts do these types of efforts have on individuals and their families here in Canada, and also on those who may have families in China, Hong Kong and other areas?

Mr. Kenny Chiu: It's something that even I, personally, do not feel completely comfortable with—sharing my own personal experience and thoughts, knowing that the PROC committee meeting here is public and is viewable by anybody with an Internet link. Therefore, I will just recount my observations during the election time.

There were seniors groups that Alice Wong and I, both Richmond MPs, organized to meet up with during the election time, because we sensed that we had seen some of these attacks happening to us. We thought we would be able to sit down with the seniors groups to clear their minds of some of the misunderstandings. We spent about two or three hours with a group of a dozen and a half. These were leaders in the seniors groups and were mainly mainland Chinese.

At the end of it, they cried. They had been worried about their kids—their children and their grandchildren—being discriminated against by Kenny Chiu and the Conservatives and their policies, and we cleared the air. We told them none of that was true. They were reassured. They all left happy. Some of them even carried some of the snacks that we provided.

In only 24 or 48 hours, I can't remember, I started to see the same group of seniors show up at my opponent's campaign office and cheer for that person. They had no idea who he was, were not able to communicate with him and also did not support him. I know that for a fact from many of the policies my opponent's party has espoused.

To me, that was a huge flip. One of the leaders in the seniors groups had gone incommunicado. He did not answer my calls. He would not answer my phone calls, my text messages, or anything. He just completely detached from me.

Mr. John Nater: Following up on that, we've heard that there were no public disclosures by the CEIPP, the critical election incident public protocol, or the task force during the election campaign. Do you think that threshold is too high to trigger a public disclosure?

• (1925)

Mr. Kenny Chiu: I'm sorry. In order to answer your question, I would have to be able to access the CEIPP report following the mentioning of my name and Steveston—Richmond East, but several bullets have been redacted. There's no way for me to understand

what they know and, therefore, to provide a true answer to your question, sir.

Mr. John Nater: Thank you, Mr. Chiu.

Following up on that, do you believe it would be important, if voters in even one riding were being impacted by organized foreign interference efforts by a foreign entity, that those people in that riding be notified? Ought there to be public disclosure if even one riding is being impacted by a coordinated campaign of foreign interference?

Mr. Kenny Chiu: I don't think the nation should be immediately informed, but definitely the candidates in that riding, even the benefactors, should be informed about the presence of the detection. They should also be offered, at the same time, some effective countermeasures that could be employed.

Yes, I believe the threshold should be set, at least hypothetically, to when there is foreign interference detected in a particular riding, that riding's involved candidate should be informed.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. O'Connell.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Chair, through you to Mr. Chiu, you mentioned in your Australian committee testimony, and mentioned here today as well, examples that your supporters had sent to you of disinformation on WeChat and on WhatsApp. Can you provide the committee with copies of that? Do you have any evidence that it was directly organized by a foreign agent?

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Ma'am, first of all, it's been almost a year and a half since the last election. Computers change hands, and I had, for example, stored some of the information on a parliamentary cellphone, which has been returned. Even with that, much of the information provided to me was from my supporters, so I don't want to present to you the sense that this information is comprehensive. Besides, when CSIS sat down and met with me, I had already printed every one of them, per their instructions—

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: That's perfect. I'm sorry. I have limited time.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: —and handed them to CSIS.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: If you don't have the information but you provided it to CSIS, so CSIS.... What we heard at this committee was that there was no question that there were lots of messages being spread; there was disinformation in a text, but there wasn't the connection that actually made it that it wasn't just Canadians that were unhappy with you or the Conservative Party. For foreign interference to take place, it has to be a coordinated effort led by a foreign entity. If all the information you had was presented to CSIS or other members of the national security community...they actually said that they couldn't determine that it wasn't just Canadians who were upset.

On that point, I would just like to point out that you, Mr. Kenny Chiu, Kerry Diotte, Tamara Jansen, Bob Saroya and Alice Wong all lost the 2021 election. Do you know what the members also have in common? Voting against banning conversion therapy.

In your riding in particular, the progressive NDP vote actually went up 4%. It's my understanding that you had two very public resignations from two of your youth council members over the fact that you voted against banning conversion therapy.

How much of this decision impacted your election loss, when a number of your other colleagues who also lost also had very public negative reactions about your votes on banning conversion therapy?

Mr. Kenny Chiu: I know that you have been trying to character assassinate me from that front, but I'm sure, ma'am, you would be able to access information that I voted for the conversion therapy ban when it was tabled. Only after the Liberal Party of Canada, at committee, amended the bill so much that I do not believe it strikes the balance between protecting Canadians' rights...and preventing conversion therapy from happening, did I decide to vote against it.

• (1930)

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: That's right, so you voted—

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Therefore, it's a different form of disinformation that you're trying to spread here, ma'am.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Mr. Chiu, you can't just refer to everything as disinformation that you don't agree with. In fact, you voted against the bill, and there was a very public resignation by members within your community.

Through the chair, I would also like to ask you this, Mr. Chiu. In 2015 you also lost the federal election. Was that as a result of foreign interference?

Mr. Kenny Chiu: If you look at the information that I've presented, I think it would be wise for the government to conduct a public independent inquiry on foreign interference in the 2021 election, because it—

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: Madam Chair, that wasn't the question I asked.

I'm sorry, Mr. Chiu. I asked you this very clearly. In 2015 you also lost an election. I'm asking if that was as a result of foreign interference, and then if in 2021 the foreign interference went away and then...or, sorry, in 2019 the foreign interference went away—

Mr. Kenny Chiu: You'd better get your facts straight.

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell: —and then in 2021 the foreign interference came back. Those are the facts. Those are the election results from 2015, 2019 and 2021.

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Well, yes, many members of the House of Commons, members of Parliament, have tried many times. For example, my colleague Alice Wong attempted it three times before she was able to get elected in the riding of Richmond. Therefore, you cannot blame foreign interference for everything. In fact, I did not experience foreign interference in 2015. I did not personally experience it in 2019. It doesn't preclude that it happened. That's why I was especially sensitive to the difference. Twenty-two months after the 2019 election there was a sea change. There were volunteers

quitting, who were staying *persona non grata*, as if I was the *persona non grata*, and staying out of contact.

The Chair: Thank you.

I'm just going to remind Ms. O'Connell and Mr. Chiu that if we can't take turns, then we need to go through the chair. I know that Mr. Chiu, as somebody who has served in the House, knows the rules, as does Ms. O'Connell, who is serving in the House.

I would just remind us all to go through the chair if we're not going to be able to just have a conversation back and forth and take turns.

With that, I'll go to Madame Gaudreau.

[Translation]

Ms. Gaudreau, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Madam Chair, my questions are for Mr. Chiu.

Certain things have been proven, and there is speculation as to whether certain allegations are true. Earlier I mentioned subversive tactics.

Right now, we need to determine whether an independent public inquiry is necessary to really get to the bottom of things. Otherwise, this discussion could go on and on. What do you think?

[English]

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Pardon me. Can you repeat the question? I didn't really get the question in there. I'm sorry about that.

[Translation]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: Given what's happening right now, with all the grey areas and the fact that partisanship may be at play, do you think an independent public inquiry is more than necessary?

[English]

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Absolutely, because with the latest news that we have heard, every day and every other week, it is becoming more and more concerning for Canadians in general. I'm now just an ordinary Canadian.

The people I've come into contact with wonder what is happening, how come our government has not acted to protect Canada, has not been the sunshine that it talked about and has not been transparent to Canadians about what happened.

For example, Mr. Michael Chong indicated that the national security adviser told him that multiple MPs have been targeted by Zhao Wei, the employee of the Toronto consulate.

Who are the other MPs? Could it be one of them among us here? Could it be Ms. Jenny Kwan, the MP who was born in Hong Kong and who has relatives in Hong Kong? We don't know. The government refused to answer. We have only to live in continued fear.

• (1935)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marie-Hélène Gaudreau: I have one last question, Madam Chair.

Mr. Chiu, you said earlier that you weren't giving all the examples. You said this goes back more than 18 months, but are you afraid of reprisal?

[*English*]

Mr. Kenny Chiu: The simple answer is yes.

The Chair: I'll take that. Thank you.

Mrs. Blaney, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you.

I have no questions for Mr. Chiu, but I would just ask him not to speak for other members of Parliament, because I can verify that some of the things he's said are incorrect. Maybe don't do that for other MPs.

Mr. Salvo, I would like to come back to you. In doing some research around the work that you do, I saw—hopefully I get this right—the authoritarian interference tracker, which is a really amazing tool. It gives a lot of information about interference and what kind of interference, and then there's a lot of information that explains it, so that if you were a civilian, you could look in there and understand what the type of interference was and what the implications are, and find information about how that works. I think it's really an amazing tool.

Could you talk a bit about that tool and how accessible it is? Is it something that a government like Canada's could get behind with a lot more focus?

The other thing that I want to note—maybe I'm just not good at using it, because I didn't spend a lot of time on it—is that there was nothing I could find that was past 2020. Is there a process that I'm missing in that system?

Mr. David Salvo: For those who don't know, the authoritarian interference tracker is an online tool we have, which maps and catalogues Russian and Chinese interference in the trans-Atlantic community, including Canada, since the year 2000. There are cases beyond 2020, but they may not be applicable to Canada. It is a living tool, so it is constantly being updated with new cases. Certainly, there are cases in Canada from the last two to three years that weren't being included.

The utility of the tool is to show two things. First, there are several tactics these authoritarian governments use to interfere in democracies, and ones we may not pay attention to, like the subversion of civil society groups. Think tanks and student associations are targeted and set up by authoritarian governments, which try to mask their connections to them, in order to shape discourse, promote censorship or forbid certain topics from being discussed in academic or political settings. It's to show how these tools are used to not only interfere in elections but to shape everyday democracy and discourse in our countries.

The other utility here is, hopefully, to show that these tools aren't really politically motivated. They are non-partisan when they are

deployed. Yes, there are moments, and we are having a political debate about moments in which an authoritarian government might weigh in, trying to shape a particular election campaign. The tracker shows hundreds of cases in which these tools are being used well outside of the context of electoral democracy, simply to get Canadians, Americans and Europeans at each other's throats and to denigrate the whole process of living in a democratic society.

The Chair: Thank you.

We're going to do a quick, two-minute round with Mr. Calkins, followed by Mrs. Romanado.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair. My question will be for my former colleague, Mr. Chiu.

Mr. Chiu, I'm sure you're familiar with a February 17 article published by Bob Fife and Steven Chase, which says:

A month after the September, 2021, vote, CSIS reported that it was “well-known within the Chinese-Canadian community of British Columbia” that Ms. Tong, then the Vancouver consul-general, “wanted the Liberal Party to win the 2021 election,” one of the reports said.

CSIS noted that Ms. Tong, who returned to China in July, 2022, and former consul Wang Jin made “discreet and subtle efforts” to encourage members of Chinese-Canadian organizations to rally votes for the Liberals and defeat Conservative candidates.

The article also says:

In early November, 2021, CSIS reported, Ms. Tong discussed the defeat of a Vancouver-area Conservative, whom she described as a “vocal distractor” of the Chinese government.

She went on to say in this article that she helped to defeat two Conservative MPs in the 2021 election.

Mr. Chiu, do you believe you're one of those two MPs?

• (1940)

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Yes, I do, although I do not have the screenshot showing the admission of guilt from consul general Tong Xiaoling.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Who would the other MP be?

Mr. Kenny Chiu: I believe it was the other Richmond MP, Ms. Alice Wong.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Why do you believe that, Mr. Chiu?

Mr. Kenny Chiu: Like I said at the beginning, the Conservative Party of Canada has been portrayed as not friendly to the CCP regime in Beijing, therefore.... Even in the article you just referred to, according to the CSIS whistle-blower, the consul general also saw the Conservatives as less of a preference than Justin Trudeau's Liberals.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Romanado, you have two minutes.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoine, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for being here today.

I will make one request of Mr. Chiu, and I have a question for Mr. Salvo.

Mr. Chiu, you mentioned that soon after 2020, you were provided a briefing by CSIS, and two more additional times. I'm going to ask you to submit to this committee the dates of those meetings you had with CSIS, for our timeline.

Mr. Salvo, you were talking a bit about the difficulties with respect to making sure average Canadians, and in your case Americans, understand what foreign interference looks like, some of the tactics that are used, and how we can detect, deter and counter some of those initiatives.

Can you elaborate a bit about any advice you would have for us in terms of recommendations that perhaps parliamentarians and their staff could be briefed on such tactics? What would you recommend our committee look at in terms of the detection and deterrents?

Mr. David Salvo: I think it's most important to look at what governments and countries that have been dealing with this challenge much longer than yours and mine have done to try to counter these threats and build resilience in their society. The Nordic and Scandinavian countries and the Baltic states are particularly good examples. Parliamentary exchanges, I would argue, are an excellent way to determine what you can do as a legislative body to not only pass legislation but to engage in outreach in your ridings.

That is really where a lot of the rubber meets the road. You all have cachet, presumably, with your constituents, and you are trusted, authoritative voices in your constituencies.

Leaving politics aside—I know that's hard—if you put aside, say, a specific instance of interference in a particular riding and talk about the tools and tactics that are used.... This shouldn't be controversial or partisan. These are tools and tactics that have been used in dozens of countries all over the democratic space. It's not unique to Canada, as you know. It's not unique to my country.

That will help. As we've learned in the States, that's really broken down some of the partisan divides. We shed light on these tactics and make ordinary voters aware of how they might be targeted at even the local level.

The Chair: Thank you.

I know, Mr. Salvo, that you have a bit more to share. I will ask this, if it's suitable, similar to the request made of Mr. Chiu: If you have additional information to share with the committee, could you submit it to the clerk? We'll have it translated and then shared with committee members in both official languages.

With that, Mr. Chiu and Mr. Salvo, I would like to thank you on behalf of PROC committee members for being here. We apologize for the technical issues at the beginning of this set.

We'll be moving into our next panel. With that, we wish you both a good rest of the day and thank you for your time and attention today. If there is anything else, please just send it to the clerk, and it will be circulated.

For the purpose of committee members, we know that bells will start shortly. Do we have agreement to work through the first 20 minutes of bells? We'll have the clock put up on the screen, so that we're all aware of it. Is that suitable?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

● (1945)

The Chair: That's excellent.

Depending on what happens, we will go into estimates next week. We will need a budget passed for the estimates, so that we can have the copy and so forth. Are we okay with that budget being passed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: That's excellent. We will suspend for two minutes, do quick sound checks and start on the next panel. We'll see you shortly.

Thank you.

● (1945)

(Pause)

● (1950)

The Chair: I call the meeting back to order.

In our next panel we have Sam Andrey, managing director of the Dais at Toronto Metropolitan University, by video conference.

We also have Vivian Krause, researcher and writer, by video conference.

We will now start our opening remarks.

Mr. Andrey, let's start with you. Welcome.

Mr. Sam Andrey (Managing Director, The Dais, Toronto Metropolitan University, As an Individual): Thank you, Madam Chair, for the invitation to address the committee today.

My name is Sam Andrey. I am the managing director of The Dais, a policy and leadership institute at Toronto Metropolitan University, where we work to advance public policy solutions for the responsible governance of technology and a strong democracy.

We have been conducting regular surveys of Canadians over the past four years to better understand online misinformation and to track public attitudes toward regulating online platforms.

I want to begin tonight by sharing a high level of what we understand from our research about the spread of online misinformation in Canada. About half of Canadians say they see false information online at least a few times a month. The use of online platforms for news, particularly Facebook, YouTube and private messaging apps, is associated with higher exposure to and belief in misinformation.

About 10% to 15% of Canadians have a relatively high degree of belief in misinformation and are more likely to hold false or conspiratorial beliefs about many topics, such as COVID-19, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and immigration. This group tends to have lower trust in mainstream media and public institutions in general. Conversely, this group shows higher levels of trust in and use of social media and messaging platforms for news, and people in this group are less likely to say that they fact-check things they see online using another source. These collectively are conditions that can be taken advantage of by foreign actors to both seed and amplify false information online.

What are potential policy solutions to this challenge? This is not an easy question for a liberal democracy while protecting free expression and avoiding unintended consequences, including the potential to produce chilling effects, surveillance creep and the censoring of voices that represent the most vulnerable.

There are of course proactive efforts the federal government is already supporting in some way—things such as digital literacy programming in schools and communities, and maintaining strong, independent journalism. We also have measures in place now, through the Canada Elections Act, to monitor digital election ads and prohibit foreign parties from directly purchasing those ads.

However, a number of allied jurisdictions are also now advancing regulatory models that place additional legal responsibilities on online platforms to more transparently address their systemic risks to society, including their role in spreading foreign disinformation that is designed to undermine democratic processes.

Regulatory models could, for example, advance responsibilities to require labels on synthetic or deepfake media, or to clamp down on what's commonly referred to as “coordinated inauthentic behaviour”, a tactic that can be used by foreign actors to artificially spread false information through the use of fake or automated accounts.

There are also efforts under way to improve tools that enable users to more easily fact-check or understand the context of what they come across online. For example, WhatsApp has rolled out a feature for highly forwarded messages, whereby you can tap on a magnifying glass and send that message to a Google search. Twitter has also begun piloting its “Community Notes” feature, which allows users to add context to misleading tweets, which others can then rate the helpfulness of. Nudging features like these, as well as other efforts that encourage users to think twice before sharing, can help mitigate the spread of misinformation without censorship.

I want to close by saying that we have found, through our surveys, that these platform governance proposals are supported widely, by more than 80% of Canadians, and that the majority of Canadians believe the intentional spread of false information is a threat to Canadian democracy that needs to be addressed by our governments.

Thank you for the opportunity. I'm looking forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Andrey.

Ms. Krause, it's over to you.

Welcome to PROC.

Ms. Vivian Krause (Researcher and Writer, As an Individual): Thank you very much for the invitation to join your meeting today.

My name is Vivian Krause. I am in Vancouver, and I am appearing here as an individual.

The reason I am here is that I've had two experiences since 2017 with Elections Canada investigations, and I think that those experiences can perhaps be useful in looking to see how they went and how they can be improved.

Since 2017, I should say that I have been involved with two investigations, which were Leadnow and WE Charity. In both cases, these were non-profit, youth-focused organizations, which are very different from an authoritarian state government.

In both cases, the organization at the heart of the investigation had openly acknowledged that it had been trying to influence election outcomes. In both cases, there was clear evidence of funding from outside Canada.

For example, in their book, *WEconomy*, the Kielburger brothers write that they had been approached by Allstate—that's the American insurance company—wanting to “buy election results”. That's on page 253 of their book. They go on to explain, “[I]t's not what you think. For the insurance [company], the cause [was] youth empowerment,” but the Kielburgers explain further that they had calculated that it cost \$34 to “buy” a youth vote. Allstate gave WE Charity \$34 million for their youth program, which I take was enough funding for one million youth votes.

I'm sure we all agree that we want to encourage youth voting. That's not the issue. The issue is the funding.

The second point I'd like to raise is that, with Leadnow, the reason this was a concern to me is that Leadnow was created by an American organization. After the 2015 election, its executive director wrote in its annual report that year that it had run a Canadian campaign that had moved the needle, contributing greatly to the ousting of the Conservative Harper government.

Even in these two cases, where there was an admission on the part of the organization being investigated that they had been trying to influence the election's outcome, Elections Canada found nothing wrong.

In the case of Leadnow, I was interviewed. It was a four-hour interview, if I remember correctly, and I remember at the end of it how frustrated the Elections Canada investigator was. He said, “People like you who are concerned need to get the Elections Act changed, because”—as he said—“we can only enforce it. We can't change it.”

I think there are three specific things that need to be tightened. One is the types of activities that are regulated, especially with a focus on online activity. Two, the time frame for reporting funds is way too short. Three, non-cash, in-kind contributions are really where the impact is being felt.

The second point I would like to make, and I'll be brief, is that, to make our elections more resistant to outside interference, I believe that it's at the CRA that we need to see change, and, in particular, at the charities directorate. The reason this is so important is that charities can, in essence, Canadianize funds, so that once funds have gone through a Canadian charity, in the eyes of Elections Canada those funds are Canadian.

As I see it, the charities directorate has been operating largely on an honour system. I say that because for the last 30 years, CRA has revoked only 584 charities. That's an average of 22 charities per year over the past 20 years. That's less than one-tenth of 1% of Canada's 86,000 charities, so it is a negligible number.

Since last summer, CRA has revoked or put into the process of revocation a total of 18 charities run by a single individual, a tax lawyer in Vancouver. These audits, I think, are important to take a look at, because they're revealing, not only about the charities but, even more importantly, about CRA oversight.

One of the important things to note is that these 18 audits took, on average, 10 years from the point of the transaction or the activity that CRA found to be offside and revocation. The range was from a minimum of seven years to 21 years. That's just far too long.

• (1955)

In one case the audit report was completed in 2012. It took another 11 years before the charity was shut down just last month, as of March 25.

I draw your attention in particular to the case of Howe Sound Samaritans' Foundation, a Canadian charity—

• (2000)

The Chair: Ms. Krause, are you close to the end? We have already—

Ms. Vivian Krause: Yes. I have two more sentences.

The Chair: Okay. Go ahead.

Ms. Vivian Krause: I was going to mention Howe Sound Samaritans' Foundation. They were revoked because they paid the cost of a consultant to provide information to the Chinese government about charitable activities in eastern Europe, particularly Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. This was paid for via a company called Enabling Environment Endeavours.

The Chair: I'm sorry. Those are a long two sentences. We're limited in time tonight. Thank you.

If you have opening comments, as always, just share them with the clerk and we'll get them circulated to all members.

We will enter our first round of six minutes with Mr. Calkins, followed by Ms. Romanado, Ms. Normandin and Ms. Blaney.

Mr. Calkins.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first question will be for Ms. Krause.

Would you want to elaborate on your concerns regarding the charities directorate at the CRA?

Ms. Vivian Krause: My concern is that the CRA is not enforcing the law requiring that charities stick to activities that are exclusively charitable. The example I was trying to illustrate was of a Canadian funded via a Canadian charity, who was providing information to the Chinese government about what's going on in former Soviet countries. That's not charitable activity.

If you read the revocation reports that are coming out, there are some very concerning activities the CRA is revealing.

It's the nature of the activities that are being conducted that's a concern, number one.

Second is the delay. When it's taking 10 years to shut down an errant charity, that's too long.

I could go on. It's the nature of the types of activities occurring that's a concern, and the other is—

Mr. Blaine Calkins: I don't mean to cut you off, but I want to move on.

I'm an Albertan, Ms. Krause. It's been glaringly obvious to me throughout my political career that money has come across the border through various foundations and charities to advocate against things like the energy sector, against pipeline development. We've seen this, and I know you've spoken on these things a lot as well.

Foreign money can interfere in our domestic affairs in numerous ways if we allow it. Now we have some relatively serious allegations of money being funnelled in by a foreign state through proxies in Canada to help certain candidates win elections, win nominations, etc.

I had a bill back in a previous Parliament, C-406, that would have banned third party advertising by any organization that received foreign funding. The issue seems to be, especially when it's on the charity side.... I'm wondering what conclusions you can infer when it comes to a foreign state actor, and how that would be different. The problem I believe Elections Canada has with this is that it's not able to sort out the molecules per se without keeping track of separate bank accounts and where the money actually comes from.

That's one of the glaring loopholes that I think we can all agree on here.

What are some of the other glaring loopholes that allow foreign money to flow into Canadian charities or into our political process that you think need to be closed?

Ms. Vivian Krause: That's the big question.

I think the answer is, number one, that the CRA is running the charitable sector on an honour system. There just isn't nearly enough auditing. When you have 80,000 charities and only one-tenth of 1% of them are shut down a year, it's just negligible.

Specifically with regard to elections, the two things I saw in the investigations that I was part of were, first, that organizations were having an influence via activities that aren't regulated. For example, online activities, or creating a donor base, or developing video content, or creating websites, editing reports, writing speeches, coaching and providing strategic guidance aren't regulated. None of those were reportable expenditures.

The second issue is the time frame. What I saw is that so much of the election preparation was done years in advance. By the time the two-year mark came around—that is, two years before an election—the groundwork was already laid. If you compare that with the timeframe for reportable expenditures, it's a matter of months.

It's very easy to circumvent the rules by making your expenditures before the reporting period even begins.

• (2005)

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Could you elaborate on this? You talked about the types of activities that should be regulated and the time frames—those are fairly straightforward—but you also talked about non-cash, in-kind contributions, which, I think, are very difficult things to track.

Could you give us some examples of how you think that's being abused?

Ms. Vivian Krause: There's a lot of online support you can give to a campaign from outside Canada. Even things like media monitoring or monitoring online activity.... That's going to be very difficult to control, because it can be done from a beach in Australia, or anywhere. I mention the beach in Australia because that's where the website for Leadnow was created, apparently. That's part of it.

I'll give you another example. The online donation mechanism for Leadnow was created by an organization based in Washington, D.C.

Whenever things online can be prepared by an online consultant anywhere, it's hard to track the expenditures.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Another rationale the government had for voting against my bill, Bill C-406, was that they were going to instead pass a government bill, Bill C-76, which, if you believe the government's talking points of the day, would have closed some of the loopholes in foreign funding of elections by third parties.

Do you think Bill C-76 has been a success?

Ms. Vivian Krause: I couldn't answer that question, to be honest. I really couldn't predict.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Romanado, you have six minutes.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Through you, I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here with us this evening.

My first question is for Mr. Andrey.

You brought up some very interesting information with respect to disinformation campaigns and social media. We all know how disinformation campaigns on social media were used in Crimea prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

We all know that members of Parliament have a role to play in terms of informing our constituencies, but we also have a responsibility to make sure the information we are providing people is accurate.

One of the areas you mentioned, which I think would be interesting to hear a little more about, is the evolution of AI and what that can do in terms of misinformation campaigns out there. I've seen videos that have obviously been faked. They look and sound like a person but have been proven to be incorrect.

Can you elaborate a bit on what you're seeing on the ground in this regard, and how we can combat that?

Mr. Sam Andrey: Absolutely. I think, in general, automated content or bot accounts—which are sometimes called “coordinated inauthentic behaviour” by some of the big platforms—have been tactics used by foreign governments and state actors for quite a number of years. It's a form of automation. The concern is that the sophistication of these tactics is growing and that AI—in particular, generative AI, where text, video or images can be created more easily—is rapidly getting better and will make the detection efforts that platforms have tried to ramp up over time less successful. That is, I think, the biggest concern. Doctored videos, deepfake images and...text, as well, are growing in frequency.

In terms of what to do about it, there have been proposals that any synth-fake media should be labelled. Of course, there is legitimate use of synthetic media that is satirical or artistic. However, if we're concerned about the spread of misinformation, perhaps there should be a little label on these platforms that informs the user that's the case. If it is meant to mislead, the platforms could try to impose labels on these images and improve over time—get to the point of kicking users off the platforms who continue to post manipulated images without labels, for example.

In its most extreme form—I'm sorry if I'm talking for too long—there have been suggestions that generative AI tools like ChatGPT could keep a log of their outputs and that platforms could then, basically, track against that log to automatically add the labels that....

Again, these are ideas people are putting forward to try to address the risks.

• (2010)

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: This may sound like a bizarre question. Given your experience, and your expertise in governance.... We have parliamentary privilege in the House of Commons, which means that during question period, during debate, we can make statements as long as we're using proper language and not using unparliamentary language, but we can state things in the House which could be incorrect.

I'd like to say all 38 million Canadians are watching CPAC, watching QP, and watching us all the time. For those who are watching, I would anticipate you would agree with me that we also have a responsibility as members of Parliament to make sure the content we are creating in the House of Commons, in terms of what we are saying, is factually correct.

Otherwise, hiding behind parliamentary privilege to make statements in the House that are actually misleading and/or disinforming.... Would you agree that as parliamentarians we also have a responsibility to make sure the information we are creating is accurate? We make clips for social media. We use parliamentary Par-IVU, or our parliamentary resources, to then post on social media, and a clip may have a missing preamble or whatever. Would you say that would mean we are creating disinformation campaigns as well?

Mr. Sam Andrey: That's a tricky question. I want to draw a distinction between the cut and thrust of domestic political actors who talk to their constituents and foreign disinformation. The appropriate response to those things, I think, is understandably different.

I agree with the general premise of what you're saying, which is that in an ideal state, our democracy is based on evidence and facts, and voters are informed correctly. What is true and what is false in a domestic debate context is subjective, of course.

Mrs. Sherry Romanado: I'm out of time, so I'll give that back to the chair.

Thank you so much.

The Chair: Thank you so much.

Madame Normandin.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin (Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My questions are for Mr. Andrey. I'm going to pick up on what he just said and piggyback on a question Mr. Turnbull asked during the previous panel. He said that it was just as important to address foreign interference as domestic interference. He compared a disinformation campaign on WeChat to a party sending out flyers containing false information.

Mr. Andrey, I'd like you to talk about your survey findings. Are people more wary when information comes from a political party—since they realize that it may be politically motivated—than they are when information is shared by their peers, colleagues and people like them on social media?

[*English*]

Mr. Sam Andrey: I'll start with your first question. In general, the use of messaging apps for news, things like WhatsApp or WeChat.... When people say they use that as a source of news, they are more likely to then also believe in misinformation.

It is in the scheme of these types of media, which are among the worst in terms of their effects on people's belief in misinformation. It is a concerning way in which people are accessing news. There is an inherent trust in the media that you receive through these messaging apps that come from friends and colleagues. It's different from news presented on a feed, where you might just scroll on by. It has a higher likelihood of being read and a higher propensity to be believed.

If I misunderstood your question, please feel free to elaborate.

The second question was, do people trust political parties? We haven't directly asked that question, so I couldn't answer that.

• (2015)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

As we've heard, one of the problems with information online is that it's hard to identify the source, especially when foreign interference is involved.

Would it be possible to use flag icons as a way to label information that is shared online, to encourage people to look at it with a more critical eye or question it further? Would a tool like that be helpful, say, when tweets are retweeted over and over again by bots or when sources outside the country are primarily responsible for spreading information about Canada? Identifying the source can be difficult.

[*English*]

Mr. Sam Andrey: Yes, absolutely.

A feature that used to be on Twitter, whereby you could see the location of the tweet, was removed recently with the Twitter ownership change, which has been a slight setback in that kind of transparency that you described.

Whether it's domestic or foreign is at the heart of this debate, of course. I've been watching the past meetings. The ability, in a short amount of time, in an election, to understand the source is sometimes not possible, and this relates to the threshold for mitigative communications.

While it's important to focus on what we can do about foreign disinformation through the Elections Act and through the penalties, it's also important to focus on what we can do in general about mis-information, regardless of its source, and how we can make the platforms healthier places for democratic discourse. This goes back to focusing on automated content and on nudges to encourage people to check things, and having different labels, as you described.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: Thank you.

You said that, when people fact-check things they see online using another source, it can help counter disinformation. The media come to mind.

One of the groups we are interested in, as part of this study, is the Chinese diaspora. Are members of that community at a disadvantage because they have access to very few—or no—reliable outside sources in their mother tongue?

[*English*]

Mr. Sam Andrey: Absolutely. In fact, as one example, we find that French Canadians are less likely to believe in misinformation. It's been proposed that it is in part because in the English language media ecosystem, disinformation flows up principally from the United States to Canada, so the French media ecosystem is less susceptible to it. There are all sorts of linguistic dynamics in our information ecosystem.

Specific to your question about the diaspora communities or Chinese-language communities, one potential solution that we shouldn't overlook is the importance of local media, such as Chinese language newspapers and other smaller outlets, that can be a voice and be a vehicle to address that. I think the federal government has made some efforts around supporting journalism. I think more of that is needed, because that is a key way to address that concern.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Normandin: That's all the time I have.

Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Blaney, please.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I thank the witnesses for being here today. I really appreciate your testimony.

Mr. Andrey, I am going to ask you the questions that I have today.

I thought it was very interesting when I read about the survey of online harms in Canada. The information was interesting.

I'm really curious, because I know that Canadians' use of social media is growing. I represent a more rural and remote riding, and one challenge for small communities across Canada is that local papers are really struggling to find ways to survive in this economy. There is not as much support for them to make sure there are actually accredited journalists doing the work and making sure the information is true and factual.

I'm curious about this. You also said that Canadians are ready to see action taken on this issue. I'm curious about how people are making decisions about what a trusted source is when they go online.

If we're going to combat misinformation, what kinds of thoughts do you have around what we could provide so that people know if something is a trusted source or not?

• (2020)

Mr. Sam Andrey: It's a great question.

There are a few things. We have been tracking trust in mainstream media as well as in social media for the last four years. The good news is that most of our mainstream media, like CBC, The Globe and Mail, CTV and Global News, are highly trusted institutions among most Canadians. While it has slipped slightly through the pandemic, which is a global phenomenon, not just in Canada, it has not significantly.

On the other hand, trust in social media continues to fall. In fact, fewer than one in 10 Canadians now say they have a high degree of trust in Facebook, TikTok and Twitter.

I think Canadians are getting the message about where they can access trustworthy information in some respects. On the other hand, though, use of these platforms for news continues to grow. These are a bit at odds, if that makes sense.

To your point, it relates to how we're consuming information and how we're using our phones. In terms of the ability to access forms of media like local media, there are a bunch of factors that contribute to that, which are worrisome. However, I wanted to answer your question specifically about trust.

Ms. Rachel Blaney: Thank you for that.

You talked a lot about ethnic media, and earlier today we heard testimony about different countries resourcing media within Canada. There should be more accountability in how people are trained and what resources they're getting. I think that's an important part.

I'm just wondering, when you did this research, if you did any particular research on social media that was in different languages in Canada, or if it was just on the French and English. Is that a gap? Do we need to see more resources to research that, to make sure those methods are really being held to account, so then we can support that transparency?

Mr. Sam Andrey: That's a really good question.

We did a study two years ago, specifically around messaging apps. We dug into WeChat, in particular. Private messaging apps tend to be a key vehicle for diaspora communities. For example, WhatsApp is heavily used in the South Asian community in Canada. Telegram is used by the Russian and eastern European communities. Different apps are used differently. It's easy to communicate back home, and there are also already groups with family and friends, etc.

Having said all that, in general, the use of these apps is associated with higher exposure to and belief in misinformation. People who use those apps say that they receive misinformation. I think about 40% said that they receive it at least a few times a month, and WhatsApp, WeChat and Telegram stood out among those. We haven't looked specifically at language, but I think our findings are decent proxies for that.

Does that help?

Ms. Rachel Blaney: That does help. Thank you.

This is my last question. It says here that 15% of Canadians have a high degree of belief in misinformation. This really makes me think of living through the convoy and watching journalists go on live television right there and ask people to share their thoughts. People just kept yelling, "Fake news!" and wouldn't say anything. I just watched that and found it so odd.

In any of the work that you've done, is there clarity about why this 15% is believing more misinformation. What can we do to remind people of the fact that Canada has some good things that we should look at?

Where is that distrust, and what can we do? It was mind-boggling to me that when they had a microphone in front of their face, and they could tell everyone whatever, they couldn't think of any words to say except, "Fake news!"

• (2025)

Mr. Sam Andrey: That's a great question. I think it's the key question.

There's concern that this group is growing and that the online information ecosystem is making it worse. Conspiratorial beliefs have always existed. In some ways we are focusing new attention on a thing that has always existed and maybe was never tracked adequately. Yes, there is a minority of Canadians whom we categorize as having a high belief in misinformation, because they believed at least six of eight statements that were common misinformation about a range of topics.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Andrey.

Mr. Sam Andrey: I'm sorry.

The Chair: Don't be sorry. We appreciate the information you have provided to us. I'd like to thank Mr. Andrey and Ms. Krause for the information.

I would just like to say that if there's anything else you would like committee members to know, please share it with the clerk. We'll have it translated and available in both official languages and shared with members.

We are heading off to two votes, and because it will take a bit longer, we will not return.

We wish you a good rest of the day. We thank you for the information you've provided.

Members, we will see you on Thursday at 10 a.m. in room 025-B.

With that, the meeting is adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of
the House of Commons

SPEAKER'S PERMISSION

The proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees are hereby made available to provide greater public access. The parliamentary privilege of the House of Commons to control the publication and broadcast of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees is nonetheless reserved. All copyrights therein are also reserved.

Reproduction of the proceedings of the House of Commons and its committees, in whole or in part and in any medium, is hereby permitted provided that the reproduction is accurate and is not presented as official. This permission does not extend to reproduction, distribution or use for commercial purpose of financial gain. Reproduction or use outside this permission or without authorization may be treated as copyright infringement in accordance with the Copyright Act. Authorization may be obtained on written application to the Office of the Speaker of the House of Commons.

Reproduction in accordance with this permission does not constitute publication under the authority of the House of Commons. The absolute privilege that applies to the proceedings of the House of Commons does not extend to these permitted reproductions. Where a reproduction includes briefs to a committee of the House of Commons, authorization for reproduction may be required from the authors in accordance with the Copyright Act.

Nothing in this permission abrogates or derogates from the privileges, powers, immunities and rights of the House of Commons and its committees. For greater certainty, this permission does not affect the prohibition against impeaching or questioning the proceedings of the House of Commons in courts or otherwise. The House of Commons retains the right and privilege to find users in contempt of Parliament if a reproduction or use is not in accordance with this permission.

Also available on the House of Commons website at the following address: <https://www.ourcommons.ca>

Publié en conformité de l'autorité
du Président de la Chambre des communes

PERMISSION DU PRÉSIDENT

Les délibérations de la Chambre des communes et de ses comités sont mises à la disposition du public pour mieux le renseigner. La Chambre conserve néanmoins son privilège parlementaire de contrôler la publication et la diffusion des délibérations et elle possède tous les droits d'auteur sur celles-ci.

Il est permis de reproduire les délibérations de la Chambre et de ses comités, en tout ou en partie, sur n'importe quel support, pourvu que la reproduction soit exacte et qu'elle ne soit pas présentée comme version officielle. Il n'est toutefois pas permis de reproduire, de distribuer ou d'utiliser les délibérations à des fins commerciales visant la réalisation d'un profit financier. Toute reproduction ou utilisation non permise ou non formellement autorisée peut être considérée comme une violation du droit d'auteur aux termes de la Loi sur le droit d'auteur. Une autorisation formelle peut être obtenue sur présentation d'une demande écrite au Bureau du Président de la Chambre des communes.

La reproduction conforme à la présente permission ne constitue pas une publication sous l'autorité de la Chambre. Le privilège absolu qui s'applique aux délibérations de la Chambre ne s'étend pas aux reproductions permises. Lorsqu'une reproduction comprend des mémoires présentés à un comité de la Chambre, il peut être nécessaire d'obtenir de leurs auteurs l'autorisation de les reproduire, conformément à la Loi sur le droit d'auteur.

La présente permission ne porte pas atteinte aux privilèges, pouvoirs, immunités et droits de la Chambre et de ses comités. Il est entendu que cette permission ne touche pas l'interdiction de contester ou de mettre en cause les délibérations de la Chambre devant les tribunaux ou autrement. La Chambre conserve le droit et le privilège de déclarer l'utilisateur coupable d'outrage au Parlement lorsque la reproduction ou l'utilisation n'est pas conforme à la présente permission.

Aussi disponible sur le site Web de la Chambre des communes à l'adresse suivante :
<https://www.noscommunes.ca>