

# Combating disinformation and safeguarding fair elections

## Problem to be addressed<sup>i</sup>

Problem statement: there is a need to address the rising spread of disinformation in the country and its consequences on the health of our democracy, and to promote a healthy and reliable information ecosystem online.

Background: More and more, social<sup>ii</sup> media are becoming<sup>iii</sup> one of the main outlets for news<sup>iv</sup> and information. Around the world, this has contributed to the spread of disinformation thus threatening public trust, undermining the ability to conduct fair elections<sup>v</sup>, and weakening the voices of reliable news sources. The online behaviours observed during election periods and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has further demonstrated how the spread of disinformation can have harmful consequences on the health of our democracy and the lives of Canadians. It is critical that the Government<sup>vi</sup> improves its communications around authoritative information and strengthens its policy frameworks. The Government should also work towards giving to Canadians from various horizons the access and tools they need to think critically about the information they come across and by extension, participate more effectively in democratic processes and take decisions<sup>vii</sup> in their day to day lives.

For additional information on what we heard from Canadians and Civil Society, as well as on international best practices, please read this thematic backgrounder<sup>viii, ix</sup>.

## Commitment Title<sup>x</sup>

1. Combating disinformation and safeguarding fair elections

The Government of Canada **will support a healthy and reliable information ecosystem online by<sup>xi</sup>:**

1. Increasing the awareness of Canadians about disinformation and threats to democratic processes.
2. Strengthening international capacity to identify and respond to evolving threats to democracy.
3. Engage with social media companies around principles of integrity, transparency, and authenticity as part of Canada's integrated government response to protect Canada's democratic institutions.<sup>xix, xiii, xiv, xv</sup>

## Lead Department(s)

Canadian Heritage<sup>xvi</sup> (PCH)

Privy Council Office (PCO)

## Milestones and Indicators<sup>xvii</sup>

1. **Milestone: Leverage existing Digital Citizen Initiative programs and initiatives to better understand the origins, impacts and potential responses to online disinformation**

## Indicators

- 1.1. Projects are supported by the [Digital Citizen Contribution Program](#) with a focus of combatting online disinformation and other harms in a Canadian context (from prior to August 2021 to March 2023)
- 1.2. Projects are supported by PCH [Joint Initiative](#) with Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council with a focus combatting online disinformation and other harms in a Canadian context (From prior to August<sup>xviii</sup> 2021 to March 2023)
- 1.3. Annual Digital Citizen Initiative conference bringing together stakeholders for capacity building and knowledge dissemination are held (From prior to August 2021 to February 2022-February 2023)

## 2. Milestone: Support a healthy and reliable news ecosystem

### Indicators

- 2.1. New models are explored that enable private giving and philanthropic<sup>xix</sup> support for trusted, professional, non-profit journalism and local news (August 2019 to March 2024)
- 2.2. The Local Journalism Initiative supports the hiring of journalists to provide coverage for underserved communities across Canada (August 2019 to March 2024)

## 3. Milestone: Build an international framework to promote multi-stakeholder<sup>xx</sup> commitments on diversity of content online

### Indicators

- 3.1. Lead multi-stakeholder working group to develop and advance international priorities related to Diversity of Content Online (from prior<sup>xxi</sup> to August 2021 to March 2023)
- 3.2. Finalize specific commitments in line with the guiding principles on diversity of content online (from prior to August 2021 to December 2022)
- 3.3. Countries, private sector, and civil society organizations sign on to the Guiding Principles and commit to advance specific commitments<sup>xxii</sup> (from prior to August 2021 to March 2023)

## 4. Milestone: Continue to lead the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism to identify and respond to foreign threats to democracy<sup>xxiii</sup>, such as foreign state sponsored disinformation, including through sharing information, best practices and lessons learned.

### Indicators

- 4.1. Increase information sharing informed by national developments, lessons learned and assessments via monthly G7 RRM meetings and the regular and real-time exchange of information (ongoing)
- 4.2. Release an annual public report pertaining to the activities of the G7 RRM (March 2022)

## 5. Milestone: Chair the Freedom Online Coalition (FOC) to promote democracy and human rights in digital contexts with a focus on digital inclusion

### Indicators<sup>xxiv</sup>

- 5.1. Canada launches a program of action<sup>xxv</sup> for its FOC chairship grounded in digital inclusion<sup>xxvi</sup> (December 2021)

5.2. Canada advances its FOC program of action, including through multilateral, regional and country-specific engagement<sup>xxvii</sup> (ongoing through 2022)

**6. Milestone: Engage with social media companies around principles of integrity, transparency, and authenticity as part of Canada's integrated government response to protect Canada's democratic institutions.**

**Indicators<sup>xxviii</sup><sup>xxix</sup>**

6.1. Engagement with social media<sup>xxx</sup> companies takes place (May 2021 – ongoing<sup>xxxi</sup>)

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<sup>i</sup> Posted by Xiaoming Guo on 07/30/2021 at 3:43pm

Truth and facts are the best weapons to combat disinformation. The main foreign influence of our democratic politics is through the mainstream media. Postmedia Network Canada Corp. is currently 66% owned by an American media conglomerate (Chatham Asset Management). As a result, most of our election talking points are generated by one foreign country. Exposing foreign-controlled Canadian media is the key to combating disinformation.

<sup>ii</sup> Posted by John mcleod on 07/21/2021 at 4:05pm

Misinformation starts with political parties during election campaigns, both those who want to gain power and those wishing to hold on to it. Attack ads should be banned. The role of combating misinformation should rest with a publicly appointed body who act independent of government and who are accountable to the people of Canada.

Reply by CD on 07/22/2021 at 11:19am

Would tighter controls on election ad spending also address this?

<sup>iii</sup> Posted by Jon Douglas on 07/22/2021 at 1:21am

Any democratic government that attempts to control what the public is allowed to say or hear is a direct assault on democracy. For the most part, the government is the guilty party spreading the majority of the misinformation and I believe it is time Canadians stop letting the government manipulate and control us with the mainstream media or any media/social media platform. If there needs to be a governing body to oversee the media and its content, it must be completely separate from the government, must be non-partisan, has to be elected regularly, have a maximum term limit and is accountable to the people. The government censorship has to go followed by a law put in place banning government from even attempting to pass government censorship or any law like it.

Reply by CD on 07/22/2021 at 11:27am

Wouldn't another elected federal body ultimately have a similar makeup as a Parliament? What reason is there to expect a different result?

Would adding another elected body and granting them certain powers require a constitutional amendment?

Reply by Jon Douglas on 07/23/2021 at 8:48am

It would have similar make up as parliament however the only way to maintain a democracy is to make sure the government doesn't have the ability to control free speech, regardless of the reasons they are making up to get the people to agree with it. Only totalitarian governments censor their people, we need to stay as far away from any kind of government censorship as possible or we are no better than Cuba, North Korea, China or Russia to name a few.

Reply by CD on 08/03/2021 at 3:19pm

Sorry, I see; so to your original "If there needs to be a governing body to oversee...", you'd rather their not be that oversight. Who should be restraining tech firms? Should anyone?

<sup>iv</sup> Posted by Xiaoming Guo on 07/21/2021 at 12:05pm

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The reality is that much disinformation also comes from mainstream media. For example, the Postmedia Network dominates our political narratives and is 66% owned by an American media conglomerate (Chatham Asset Management). Such that Washington manipulates our public opinion. If we do not address this issue, the combating of misinformation becomes a tool to safeguard the influence of Washington on our election, politics, and public health issues.

<sup>v</sup> Posted by crowngenocide on 08/04/2021 at 3:45pm  
its only fair when the indigenous people lose

<sup>vi</sup> Posted by crowngenocide on 08/04/2021 at 3:49pm  
promulgating the rule of law is for peasants and proletariat. if you have money its never a crime only a fine.... if you have money there is no time in jail because you can make bail.... the just-us system fills prisons with indigenous people. the same way china fills its re-education camps with uigher.

<sup>vii</sup> Posted by anonymous on 07/21/2021 at 11:30am  
This should be the primary focus of this initiative. Rather than changing governmental jurisdiction over the dissemination of information, pressuring media giants to crackdown in ways they see fit, or increasing the authoritative nature of government messaging, why not focus primarily on developing Canadians' ability to do it themselves? After all, section 2 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms will continue to grant Canadians the right to free expression where it does not cause harm to others. Adjudication of this harm from the Government seems prone to debate in many of these cases.

Reply by CD on 07/22/2021 at 11:33am

Agree there is a need for tools and education.

The information landscape very changes quickly. This policy needs to prepare citizens not only what \*is\*, but also what \*may be\* in the next elections.

<sup>viii</sup> Posted by crowngenocide on 08/04/2021 at 3:51pm  
and indigenous non citizen nationals

<sup>ix</sup> Posted by crowngenocide on 08/04/2021 at 5:57pm  
The Truth and Reconciliation Commission reports are clear. The express intent of residential school system was to "civilize" Indigenous children and assimilate them into society.

<sup>x</sup> Posted by Robert Quine on 07/21/2021 at 4:08pm  
This is embarrassing. Safe guard elections???? You mean take away a legitimate vote???? You were exposed in the last US election with no accountability on both sides of the aisle. It's a fake flag of freedom. Voter ID AT VOTER STATIONS. End of story. If you don't support this then you are corrupt

<sup>xi</sup> Posted by John mcleod on 07/21/2021 at 4:09pm  
It is fine to say the government of Canada supports this provided this is entrenched in an act that cannot be compromised by the political ideology of a particular political party.

Reply by Jon Douglas on 07/22/2021 at 1:36am

Any government censorship is bad for democratic countries. Democracies only survive when the people are able question the governments every move and demand accountability, if the government is allowed to censor us, how do we hold them accountable?

<sup>xii</sup> Posted by Gloria Meunier on 07/21/2021 at 11:05am  
Develop and fund mandatory curriculum that includes the teaching of logic skills starting in the primary grades. It is important that the necessary skills to evaluate statement made are developed by all citizens especially in an

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environment when anyone can publish anything - Logic literacy and critical thinking skills are key as oversight and monitoring of information and access can only go so far

Reply by CD on 07/22/2021 at 11:38am

Agreed: the information landscape changes quickly. Education can prepare citizens not only for what is, but for what may be.

<sup>xiii</sup> Posted by Robert Quine on 07/21/2021 at 4:11pm

What you are talking about is called censorship. Read a book, 1984. Or a history book (anything that follows communism and it's origins) No government should be given the opera of mind control. Embarrassing that Canandians are even having this conversation, oh wait, we aren't.....only the government is and they are force feeding it down our throats. Should be tried for treason.

<sup>xiv</sup> Posted by Centre for Law and Democracy on 08/06/2021 at 10:12am

A healthy and reliable information ecosystem addresses misinformation, disinformation and other threats to democratic processes while preserving freedom of expression and other relevant human rights. Accordingly, a fourth priority should be inserted here: 4. Ensuring that all measures include deliberate steps, such as human rights due diligence, that ensure that freedom of expression, privacy and other relevant human rights are duly balanced with policy goals such as addressing disinformation, in line with international standards.

<sup>xv</sup> Posted by Democracy Watch on 08/07/2021 at 12:54am

Engagement with social media companies is not enough to stop false promises, claims and statements in politics and elections. Like any societal problem, part of the solution is to change the rules to prohibit the behaviour that is causing the problem. This can be done by enacting the changes listed in the Action Letters on the following webpages: <https://democracywatch.ca/campaigns/honesty-in-politics-campaign/> and <https://democracywatch.ca/campaigns/stop-fake-online-election-ads/> with the establishment of fully independent, non-partisan enforcement agencies being, of course, key to ensure the measures are enforced fairly and not to favour any politician or political party, or the government overall.

<sup>xvi</sup> Posted by crown genocide on 08/04/2021 at 3:38pm

but not indigenous heritage....

<sup>xvii</sup> Posted by Anu Amaru on 07/29/2021 at 3:57am

Please leave us alone stop getting in our life's and create more for us..we the people want to be free from arrassment free from nuisance.please get rid of low incomes debt you will create a better working stress free world

<sup>xviii</sup> Posted by CD on 07/22/2021 at 11:42am

Is there a way to reliably test how effective programs are at preparing citizens for misinformation? Is there a hard-and-fast metric or test that can be applied and a resulting measured value reported? That seems a critical indicator to include.

<sup>xix</sup> Posted by crown genocide on 08/04/2021 at 3:52pm

so rich people with an agenda?

<sup>xx</sup> Posted by Adrian on 07/28/2021 at 4:48pm

Diversity has to be a factor here too. Reliance on donors can skew financing against historically marginalized groups.

<sup>xxi</sup> Posted by CD on 07/22/2021 at 11:53am

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There is a need to regrow a decimated a journalism profession decimated by broken funding models, but proceed carefully. The ideal model demands more money made available but somehow less government oversight.

<sup>xxii</sup> Posted by crowngenocide on 08/04/2021 at 3:53pm  
and indigenous non citizens actually give input and participate????

<sup>xxiii</sup> Posted by CD on 07/22/2021 at 12:01pm  
If social media wants to provide news, shouldn't information on their sites be held to the same legal standard as, say, a newspaper?

Reply by anonymous on 07/22/2021 at 1:58pm

Fair point - but does social media proport to be a news outlet? In the same way people get 'news' from talking to each other, social media simply allows for opinions to be broadcast, albeit farther and wider that the voice can carry. Again this seems to come down to providing individuals with the tools necessary to navigate this emerging landscape of LOUD opinions.

Reply by Jon Douglas on 07/23/2021 at 8:59am

I can't stress this enough, censorship of any kind from the government is extremely dangerous to democracy.

Reply by CD on 08/03/2021 at 3:22pm

Who should be the ones setting limits for big tech firms?

<sup>xxiv</sup> Posted by Basics is back on 07/22/2021 at 11:51am

Adding to this debate feels pretty one sided. You are going to censor what people say to add to the topic. You can use this only in its entirety. One reason I believe the people in Canada are disappointed in our government is because we are not hearing both sides of the discussion. When covid started we did not hear from the scientific community only the corporate medical push for complete shutdown. It is terrifying to use a drug and call it a vaccine when it has none of the piece of what a vaccine should be. To use this on 70 % of the world when we have no proof of its safety put your word is unacceptable. Using a test that puts covid in with a flu and common cold is so inaccurate for the true numbers of covid. It is no wonder that our government is having problems with truth. Let us hear the truth about covid and ask the people if they want a vaccine passport, another way the government is pushing for the corporate medical field to monopolize health care. We are at the place where we have digital health care records, AI being put in place, on line prescriptions, online Dr. appointments and the list goes on. If I did not read the articles on Canada Health Infoway I would not know what our government is up to. With every 2nd add on tv being about hamburgers, you think our government could put an add in about our health care system. When everything is left to the internet there is to much information to go through. Our government is doing this to themselves.

<sup>xxv</sup> Posted by Kristina Bendikas on 07/28/2021 at 9:41pm

1. We need more funding and possibly a different funding model for legitimate news outlets so that they do not simply become a mouthpiece for the ruling party.
2. How about public service announcements that give tips to the public about how to spot fake information? We all should have learned them in school, but a refresher wouldn't hurt. That would be an unbiased approach to letting people (not the government) sort it out themselves.

<sup>xxvi</sup> Posted by crowngenocide on 08/04/2021 at 5:56pm  
still excludes indigenous languages and people.

<sup>xxvii</sup> Posted by crowngenocide on 08/04/2021 at 5:57pm  
add indigenous non citizens. or indigenous nationals.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Posted by Democracy Watch on 08/07/2021 at 12:52am

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with the establishment of fully independent, non-partisan enforcement agencies being, of course, key to ensure the measures are enforced fairly and not to favour any politician or political party, or the government overall.

<sup>xxix</sup> Posted by Centre for Law and Democracy on 08/06/2021 at 10:13am

Comment: Despite the title of this commitment document referring to safeguarding fair elections, it does not appear to contemplate any measures that are intended to directly safeguard fair elections, aside from improvements to the communications environment in general. For suggestions on potential election-specific commitments, please see the 2020 Joint Declaration by the four international special mandates on freedom of expression: [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Opinion/JointDeclarationDigitalAge\\_30April2020\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Opinion/JointDeclarationDigitalAge_30April2020_EN.pdf)

<sup>xxx</sup> Posted by crowngenocide on 08/04/2021 at 3:54pm

so negotiations wit fedbook great.... that always goes well for consumers....

<sup>xxxi</sup> Posted by Centre for Law and Democracy on 08/06/2021 at 10:13am

This commitment is too vague and does not explain any specifics or goals of this engagement. The government should commit to engaging with social media companies around specific goals, such as increased algorithmic transparency or greater cooperation in the removal of illegal content such as child pornography or terrorist propaganda.