Canadian Election Integrity Initiatives and Domestic Disinformation: Investigating the 2019 Canadian Federal Election Across Sectors

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines several efforts to address the threat of online disinformation to the 2019 Canadian federal election, and considers the degree to which election integrity initiatives by government, industry, and civil society stakeholders accounted for the role of domestic actors within the disinformation ecosystem. While much contemporary discourse on disinformation and election integrity focuses on foreign influence, the phenomenon also implicates domestic actors like political parties, third party groups, mainstream and partisan media, and average social media users. Through qualitative analysis of key legislative, policy, and public awareness initiatives, this thesis draws out common themes, strategies, and perspectives in Canada's approach to disinformation across sectors, alongside a supplementary analysis of Canadian mainstream media coverage related to the election. It concludes with a critical policy analysis that considers whether Canadian election integrity initiatives sufficiently account for domestically-driven disinformation, particularly given increased political polarization and far-right influence in Canada.

Acknowledgments

I began thinking about this project in the spring of 2019, after completing my first year of studies at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Information. By the fall of that year, I was busy collecting data and having regular consultations with my wonderful supervisor, Dr. Leslie Shade. Winter rolled around, and I thought I was on track to spend the summer of 2020 happily writing in the sunny window of a library or coffee shop, and to defend my work that September. Instead, it took me all summer, through the fall, and into the winter of 2021 to get this thesis done – because, well, it's difficult to write a thesis during an unprecedented global pandemic. Thank you to everyone who helped me stay on track and see this thing through during those strange times: Leslie Shade, for her ideas, advice, patience, and incredible support; Drs. Megan Boler and Elizabeth Dubois for their valuable feedback as second reader and external examiner, respectively; my friends and family, and especially my parents Pam and Joe McKenna, for their continuous encouragement; my partner Jon Tuyp for keeping me motivated and well-fed; and Sherry Dang from Student Services for being super helpful on the administrative side of things. Without the support of these fine folks and more, I would not have achieved the level of satisfaction I now feel having completed this project.

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Chapter 1:
Disinformation and elections in the Canadian context

1   Introduction

The relationship between digital media and democratic integrity has come under increased scrutiny in recent years by scholars, policymakers, and citizens concerned with the proliferation of mis- and disinformation online, particularly in the wake of the Cambridge Analytica data scandal and findings that Russian operatives used computational propaganda methods to interfere with the 2016 United States presidential election (Cadwalladr, 2018). Canada's federal election in October 2019 was widely predicted by experts within academia, government, industry, and civil society to be a likely target for disinformation and political influence campaigns online, and a number of legislative initiatives were implemented in an effort to prevent foreign interference in the vote. However, while much relevant research and policymaking has to date focused on the threat of foreign, often state-backed disinformation campaigns (Tenove et al., 2018; Centre for International Governance Innovation & the Alliance of Democracies Foundation, 2019; Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs, 2017; Bradshaw & Howard, 2019), the disinformation phenomenon encompasses a broad range of activity that also implicates non-state actors like national political parties, third-party organizations, mainstream and partisan media, and average social media users (Barrett, 2019; Silverman, Lytvynenko, Boutilier, & Oved, 2019; Orr & McIntosh, 2020). The aim of this thesis is to look toward this other, more domestic realm of the disinformation phenomenon that has to date seen comparatively little inclusion in research and policy reports on digital threats to democracy. By conducting a broad survey of Canadian government, industry, and civil society approaches to disinformation in the 2019 federal election, I present a critical look at how domestic activities fall into the policies and priorities of stakeholders addressing election integrity in Canada at the current moment.

Underpinning this study is a concern for the anti-democratic implications of increased political polarization both within Canada and globally (Bradshaw, 2018, p. 3), and in particular the emboldening of far-right "populist" movements and hate groups both on and offline (Owen & Greenspon, 2018, p. 5-7; Vaidhyanathan, 2018, p. 197). This study investigates the extent to which Canadian government, industry, and civil society-led efforts to support the integrity of the

2019 election accounted for the role of domestic, non-state actors in the spread of disinformation, and examines how initiatives in Canada considered the following categories of domestic actors:

- Political parties running for office
- Third-party campaign advertisers
- Fringe political movements
- Hyperpartisan media outlets
- Average citizens (as witting or unwitting participants in the spread of disinformation)

Specifically, I endeavour to answer the following questions:

1. What is the current level of understanding among government, industry, and civil society stakeholders regarding disinformation and the October 2019 Canadian federal election?
   a. What kind of attention do these stakeholders pay to disinformation beyond discussions of foreign interference? How does each acknowledge and assess the risk of disinformation campaigns from within Canada?
   b. What steps have been taken to gain this understanding?
2. What kind of initiatives and policy recommendations have emerged from the Canadian government, platform companies, and civil society organizations in response to predictions about disinformation and the 2019 federal election?
   a. What are the primary themes characterizing these initiatives?
   b. How do these approaches understand, perceive, and address the role that average citizens and other domestic actors may (knowingly or unknowingly) play in the spread of disinformation leading up to the 2019 election?
   c. How might the effectiveness of these initiatives be made clear?
3. How effectively have recent policies and activities undertaken by government, industry, and civil society stakeholders addressed the concerns about disinformation and the 2019 Canadian federal election?
   a. What gaps in policy are made evident in the lead-up to the election?
   b. What gaps in policy are made evident in the election's immediate aftermath?

In the pages that follow, I provide a broad overview of the landscape of disinformation policy in Canada, in particular as it existed surrounding the 2019 federal election. Chapter 2 consists of a

review of the literature in which I lay out a number of issues and perspectives related to disinformation and media manipulation, as well as an explanation of my data collection methodology and the critical policy framework I employ to conduct my final analysis.

In Chapter 3, I outline a collection of studies by various Canadian government agencies and federal departments, and take a deep dive into an important piece of legislation that emerged preceding the election – the *Elections Modernization Act*, or Bill C-76. I also outline a range of initiatives that comprised the Government of Canada's public Plan to Safeguard Canada's 2019 Election.

In Chapter 4, I review the public activities of three key technology industry stakeholders in Canada, highlighting the 2019 election integrity initiatives of the online platform companies Facebook, Twitter, and Google. In Chapter 5, I review a collection of civil-society led initiatives that received funding from the Government of Canada's Digital Citizen Initiative, a civic and media literacy program established as part of the government efforts described in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 6, I present a different perspective on the issues, themes, and priorities outlined in Chapters 3-5 by examining approximately 250 news articles from Canadian mainstream media outlets, which were collected over an 80-day period leading up to and following Canada's Election Day on October 21st, 2019. By examining the key themes to emerge from national media coverage about Canadian election integrity, I draw out additional areas for consideration regarding policy approaches to disinformation in Canada.

Finally, in Chapter 7 I respond to the above research questions. I offer an evaluation of the main themes and attitudes characterizing policy approaches to disinformation in the Canadian election context, and discuss the degree to which the role of domestic actors is accounted for across government, industry, and civil society sectors. Ultimately, I suggest that further action is warranted across sectors to address the needs and vulnerabilities of different audiences and populations, and argue that evidence of rising political polarization and the increasing influence of far-right political actors in Canada calls for more nuanced and targeted research and policy development.

Chapter 2:
Literature review and methodology

2   What is disinformation?

2.1   Clarifying terminology

Originating as a term to describe Russian strategic communications operations, "disinformation" has come to encapsulate a broader range of activities related to the proliferation of false and inflammatory information online, which has accompanied the growth of social media platforms with algorithmic infrastructures and data-driven business models over the last decade (Tenove, 2020, p. 519). Broadly, scholars and policymakers agree that the term refers to the propagandistic spread of false or misleading information online, typically in the form of emotionally provocative news articles, videos, memes, advertisements, or comments, for the purpose of manipulating public discourse to achieve a political goal (Benkler, Faris, & Roberts, 2018, p. 32). This kind of activity may emerge from a range of sources, including state-backed operatives, paid trolls and automated bots, hyperpartisan media outlets and influencers, fringe ideological or conspiracy-oriented communities, and average, often well-intentioned citizens who share false or misleading content with their personal networks (Woolley & Howard, 2018; Marwick & Lewis, 2018).

Discussions of online disinformation frequently refer to a number of similar, though subtly different concepts, and so terminology may vary by context. The term "information operations" is perhaps more common in national security contexts and industry circles, generally referring to hybrid electronic, social, and psychological warfare strategies that are deployed through traditional or digital media (Tenove, 2020, p. 519; Nadler, Crain, & Donovan, 2018, p. 29; Jack, 2017, p. 6). Woolley and Howard (2018) use the term "computational propaganda" to discuss how bots, algorithms, and human trolls are employed by political actors to manipulate social media and influence public discourse. In an influential piece, Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) proposed the term "information disorder" to describe the condition of contemporary social media and information ecosystems, outlining three distinct but related components of the phenomenon: *misinformation*, which refers to false information that is shared without a particular agenda or intent to harm; *disinformation,* which refers to explicitly false information

that is intentionally shared to cause harm; and *mal-information*, which refers to authentic, typically private or protected information that is shared with the intent to cause harm (such as hacked and leaked material) (p. 5). Benkler, Faris, and Roberts (2018) consider the broader "macroscale dynamics" of media ecosystems' susceptibility to manipulation through the concept of "network propaganda," which implicates both traditional and social media realms, and involves interactions between producers and consumers of disinformation, misinformation, and what they term "bullshit" – commercial or political clickbait published for the purpose of making money, without concern for its truthfulness or political impact (p. 24, 32-33).

Finally, discussions of disinformation and social media manipulation commonly include reference to "fake news," a term that initially emerged to describe those websites that deliberately published "bullshit," but which was ultimately adopted by U.S. President Donald Trump to discredit critical mainstream media coverage of his administration (Marwick & Lewis, 2018, p. 44; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017, p. 16; Benkler, Faris, & Roberts, 2018, p. 4). Considering its definitional limitations and political inferences, many scholars have eschewed the term in favour of more theoretically rigorous language (Tenove, 2020, p. 519; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017, p. 5; Jack, 2017; Lim, 2019); Woolley and Howard (2018), for example, opt for the alternative "junk news" to refer to fake, sensational material, including "misinformation about politics and public life," (p. 5, 9). With all this in mind, for the sake of simplicity, I will primarily use the term *disinformation* throughout this thesis: not only does it capture a wider and more nuanced scope of manipulation online, but its use is prevalent across the bulk of the policy materials I examine.

Media manipulation takes shape in many forms across different areas of the internet, but for the purposes of this study I will primarily focus on the proliferation of disinformation on mainstream social media and search engine platforms. A note about the term "platform": while the political economy of the digital platform business model can be applied to a range of different technologies, such as for gaming, shopping, ride-hailing, and cloud services (Srnicek, 2016), it is primarily the manipulation of popular social and news-oriented platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Google that concerns scholars and policymakers interested in disinformation and election integrity. Accordingly, my discussion of "online platforms" going forward will refer to these particular services.

There are a number of interrelated issues that contribute to the thriving of online disinformation which heighten its implications for democracy. In order to successfully evaluate the many policy initiatives outlined in later chapters, it will be useful to first highlight some of the existing scholarship on disinformation and social media manipulation that has emerged in recent years.

2.1.1 Platform data collection, targeted advertising, and algorithmic curation

The flourishing of disinformation on social media can be attributed to the ways in which platforms are built and the business models they are designed to sustain. Major platform companies have famously achieved much of their success by collecting vast amounts of demographic and behavioural data from their users, and using it to offer highly valuable data-driven ad-targeting services to marketers (Myers West, 2019; Srnicek, 2016, p. 26-28; Vaidhyanathan, 2018, p. 58, 88-89). While this system is obviously effective for selling products and services in the traditional sense, it has also proven useful for achieving political ends. Nadler, Crain, and Donovan (2018) describe how the advertising mechanisms of data collection and targeting inherent to contemporary digital platforms, which employ algorithms to deliver more relevant advertisements to users, can be exploited to facilitate political manipulation on a mass scale. By categorizing populations into discrete audiences and targeting them with content that appeals to their particular demographics, identities, political leanings, and psychological attributes, consumer profiling methods designed to maximize advertising effectiveness may pose anti-democratic implications for citizens' ability to exercise political agency (Nadler, Crain, & Donovan, 2018, p. 1, 6). The 2018 Cambridge Analytica scandal reinforced these ideas when millions of Facebook users discovered their data had been surreptitiously accessed by the firm through an apparently innocuous third-party application and used to develop highly sophisticated political advertising campaigns using psychographic microtargeting methods (Cadwalladr, 2018; Vaidhyanathan, 2018, p. 150-160). It is worth noting, however, that the effectiveness of the kind of microtargeting employed by Cambridge Analytica is not unanimously agreed upon by scholars, particularly in terms of its use for the purpose of spreading disinformation and promoting behavioural changes: some have posited that the often criticized "echo chambers" generated by social platforms' data-driven content curation algorithms may actually serve to direct disinformation toward groups of users who are already aligned with certain polarizing

ideologies, rather than succeeding in infiltrating the feeds and shaping the views of the broader public (Owen, 2019). Even if this is indeed the case, the fact that data-driven algorithms and targeted advertising can contribute to already polarized and radicalized users being continually exposed to misleading and inflammatory material suggests that there are deeper problems to consider with regard to the mechanisms employed by platforms to gain and keep users' attention.

2.1.2 The attention economy, changing media ecosystems, and the proliferation of junk news

Because social media platforms tend to use a "pay per click" system of revenue generation, content that receives more user engagement will typically be in turn pushed further across the platform through algorithms designed to promote profitable content to larger audiences (Nadler, Crain, & Donovan, 2018, p. 32). This business model, in addition to the sheer volume of information available for audiences to wade through on the internet, is both a cause and effect of what is known as the "attention economy," in which economic value is placed on that which attracts the most attention and engagement online (Marwick & Lewis, 2018, p. 42; Vaidhyanathan, 2018, p. 80-84). In the attention economy, publications battle for audience engagement, and consequently advertising revenue, in order to sustain their operations within a media ecosystem that has been subject to declining readership and a reduction in traditional means of income, such as paid subscriptions (Marwick & Lewis, 2018, p. 40-42).

Compounding this situation, as Nadler, Crain, and Donovan (2018) describe, is the fact that "many of the most popular social media interfaces are designed in ways that favor the spread of content triggering quick, emotionally intense responses" (p. 32). This set of circumstances has given rise to the proliferation of "clickbait," material that operates by employing emotionally affective language to compel viewers to click on enticing headlines or videos (Marwick & Lewis, 2018, p. 45; Benkler, Faris, & Roberts, 2018, p. 9). While mainstream outlets are no stranger to sensationalism, a particular form of clickbait has increasingly emerged in the form of what Benkler, Faris, and Roberts describe as "bullshit": junk or outright fake news content that uses inflammatory language, often ideologically loaded in nature, to drive clicks and exploit social media algorithms (Benkler, Faris, & Roberts, 2018, p. 9, 32; Marwick & Lewis, 2018, p. 44; Woolley & Howard, 2018, p. 9-10). This type of material provides an optimal vehicle for spreading disinformation, as its form plays into the mechanisms of social media and enables it to proliferate.

2.1.3 Disrupting democracy

Both microtargeted advertising methods and provocative clickbait strategies have been adopted by political actors aiming to promote their ideas or simply sow discord among populations, which is why discussions of disinformation so often include reference to "fake news" and the dubious financial origins of ad campaigns. But beyond clicks, other forms of engagement on social media, such as commenting, "liking," and sharing content are also important for harnessing algorithmic distribution (Marwick & Lewis, 2018, p. 31; Woolley & Howard, 2018, p. 6, 8; Nadler, Crain & Donovan, 2018, p. 16, 32). Political actors looking to take advantage of these mechanisms can deploy automated scripts alongside human actors to post and interact with certain content, allowing for the strategic amplification of messages across social networks (Woolley & Howard, 2018, p. 4, 6; Marwick & Lewis, p. 38). These activities function to make certain ideas appear more common or popular than they truly are, and to push certain conversations and hashtags to trend (Woolley & Howard, 2018, p. 4; Marwick & Lewis, 2018, p. 38). In the context of elections, Woolley and Guilbeault (2018) suggest that this type of "manufactured consensus" can "[create] the illusion of popularity for a candidate who might otherwise be on the political fringes," (p. 186) potentially "galvanizing political support where this might not previously have happened" through a bandwagon effect (p. 190). By generating engagement that may appear to be genuine to the untrained eye, tools like bots and troll accounts can aid in spreading disinformation through methods of communication that appear more organic or have a less obvious agenda than an inflammatory news headline.

Access to these kinds of tools is not necessarily limited to well-resourced foreign state operatives, but can be gained by individuals and other smaller, domestic groups of political or commercial actors willing to pay a nominal fee, including established political parties and advocacy groups (Marwick & Lewis, 2018, p. 38; Woolley & Howard, 2018, p. 10; Bradshaw, 2018, p. 6). Additionally, Marwick and Lewis (2018) describe how some communities of political actors seeking to manipulate media work to coordinate amongst themselves online; for example, white supremacist and misogynist far-right groups and conspiracy theorists have been found to collaborate on public and private forums to execute harassment campaigns, share strategies for social engineering and media manipulation, and create memes designed to be shared across platforms, where eye-catching visuals and humour help make their ideas digestible to new audiences (p. 34-36).

Scholars have increasingly considered the ways in which these combined technical and social components may be leveraged to influence pivotal political moments such as elections and referenda (Woolley & Howard, 2018, p. 5; Bradshaw, 2018; Nadler, Crain, & Donovan, 2018, p. 39; Howard, 2020). Bradshaw (2018) emphasizes that "as traditional democratic practices are disrupted by social media technology, there is an increasingly blurry line between news and entertainment, paid advertising and free media, and domestic actors and foreign adversaries" (p. 6-7). In the short term, political manipulation on social media and the spread of disinformation can threaten electoral processes by contributing to increasingly polarized and hyperpartisan public discourse, enabling voter suppression (such as through targeted messaging meant to dissuade certain groups from heading to the polls, or through bots that function to drown out useful information), and ultimately fomenting distrust in the validity of democratic processes and institutions (Bradshaw, 2018, p. 3, 8; Nadler, Crain, & Donovan, 2018, p. 6, 34; Dubois & McKelvey, 2018, p. 68; Howard, 2020, p. 12). As Benkler, Faris, and Roberts (2018) suggest, not only can disinformation lead audiences to embrace misperceptions and misinformation, but it can also operate as a means of distraction and disorientation, preventing citizens from realizing opportunities for collective action and compelling them to embrace whatever "truth" satisfies their need for belonging (p. 35-37).

In the long term, disinformation may contribute to an increase in political polarization globally, social fragmentation and division among ideological allies, political exhaustion and civic apathy, and, due to consistent cycles of fear and confusion, a fragile media and political landscape that may be more vulnerable to rising fascist movements (Deibert, 2019, p. 31-32; Howard, 2020). As Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) highlight in their research on information disorder, there are concerning implications when political influence campaigns are "designed specifically to sow mistrust and confusion and to sharpen existing sociocultural divisions using nationalistic, ethnic, racial and religious tensions" (p. 4). Indeed, these developments present a challenging set of circumstances for civil discourse and democratic integrity, which is exacerbated when the information circulating is false, heavily polarizing, or contains hateful ideas. Though election integrity is an important concern, there is evidence that taken to its furthest extreme, the logic of disinformation can result in violent, real-world consequences (Marwick & Lewis, 2018, p. 55-56; Mozur, 2018).

2.2   Understanding and developing policy responses to disinformation and democracy

Democratic governments and political institutions around the world are undertaking studies and attempts to develop regulations designed to address the threats posed by disinformation to their electoral processes and democratic integrity. The U.K. House of Commons Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Committee's *Disinformation and 'Fake News': Final Report of Session 2017-19*, and the European Commission's 2018 *A Multi-Dimensional Approach to Disinformation: Report of the Independent High-Level Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation* provide valuable insights into these efforts. In Canada, initiatives in this realm include the introduction of the federal *Elections Modernization Act*, as well as studies conducted by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy, and Ethics (ETHI), both of which will be examined more closely in Chapter 3. In addition to government-directed research initiatives, projects have also widely emerged from industry, civil society, and research institutes concerned with technology and democratic integrity.

As Bradshaw (2018) notes, "The confluence of big data analytics, foreign meddling in electoral processes, targeted political advertising, and a lack of transparency around the ways in which social media companies collect data and personalize newsfeeds is the context in which policymakers need to address the question of elections security" (p. 6). Policy responses in this context have thus hinged on solutions related to advertising transparency, algorithmic accountability, cyber security, data privacy, content moderation, and media literacy. A significant challenge in this area is the tension between measures intended to slow the spread of disinformation and their potential implications for civic values like freedom of expression and open political debate. Many scholars are thus divided on the issue of platform regulation, and debates continue on how governments might implement regulations on technology companies, or whether industry self-regulation is a sufficient and reliable option.

Tenove (2020) suggests that while a great deal of effort has been made to develop policies to address the threat of disinformation to democracy, there is in fact little understanding among scholars and policymakers of "what it actually means for disinformation to endanger democracy, and how different policies might protect it" (p. 517). He suggests that there are three key "normative goods" making up democratic systems that disinformation policies aim to

protect: "self-determination," "accountable representation," and "public deliberation," and that solutions tend to involve measures related to national security, electoral regulations, and media regulations respectively (Tenove, 2020, p. 517). Investigating a similar question with regard to digital threats to democracy, Kuehn and Salter (2020) suggest that platform issues concerning disinformation and digital surveillance are generally subject to a mix of "technological, regulatory, and culturally embedded approaches" to policy development (p. 2591-2599). Bradshaw, Neudert, and Howard (2018) outline "government responses to malicious use of social media" from around the world, highlighting four main categories of actions: measures targeting social media platforms, measures targeting offenders, measures targeting government capacity, and measures targeting citizens, civil society and media organizations (p. 6-10).

Many research and policy reports emphasize the need for increased media and digital literacy among citizens, as well as a more robust fact checking infrastructure. While reports frequently propose that improving these skills will help citizens become more resilient to disinformation, critics have identified potential flaws in relying heavily on media literacy, such as its effectiveness largely being reaped in the long term (Bradshaw, Neudert, & Howard, 2018, p. 9), its potential to backfire into distrust in credible media and "selective research" (boyd, 2017; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017, p. 68), and the common emphasis on fact-checking often failing to reach the most vulnerable and critical audiences (Miller & Vaccari, 2020, p. 347). Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) note that there is also an increased need for education on "the power of images to manipulate and persuade" (p. 68), highlighting an often-overlooked angle of the disinformation phenomenon.

2.2.1 Disinformation policy and Canadian democracy

Disinformation and its associated mechanisms have increasingly appeared on the Canadian policy agenda over the last half-decade. During the 2018 Ontario provincial election, concerns arose over political actors' potential use of social media bots to amplify certain ideas, as well as the influence of political third parties with large online followings – such as Ontario Proud, an advocacy group that used polarizing messaging to denounce centre and left-leaning parties (Bradshaw, 2018, p. 6; Cain, 2018). Examining the role of bots within Canada's political and media landscape more broadly, Dubois and McKelvey (2018) suggest that while their influence on Canadian politics has so far been relatively limited, their presence will likely

continue to grow, with political bots that serve to amplify or dampen certain messages presenting complex challenges for Canadian elections regulators concerned with advertising, digital campaigning, and the manipulation of public opinion (p. 80-81).

A 2019 analysis of the Alberta provincial election suggested that a degree of coordinated inauthentic behaviour was undertaken by domestic actors in an effort to influence the vote, with evidence that accounts linked to lobbying groups worked to spread disinformation leading up to the election, and that "known national far-right and hate group actors who have previously disseminated material…[used] similar tactics as known malign foreign actors" (Rapid Response Mechanism Canada [RRM], 2019). The report predicted that similar behaviour would be likely to afflict the 2019 federal election, and that domestic actors' adoption of media manipulation tactics would "make it increasingly difficult to distinguish national from foreign interference efforts in the upcoming Federal election" (RRM, 2019). These instances reflect Bradshaw's (2018) assertion that "election security is not just about foreign interference, but also about how domestic actors in democracies are leveraging technological affordances to pave the way for populist movements and polarization, which challenge Canada's traditionally diverse and pluralist political environment" (p. 3).

2.3 Methodology

Wardle and Derakhshan's (2017) discussion of information disorder highlights potential policy actions for technology companies, national governments, media organizations, civil society, education ministries, and funding bodies to take, suggesting that the challenge of disinformation should be addressed across sectors (p. 7-9). As such, my investigation of Canada's disinformation policy landscape is comprised of literature and data from three key categories of national stakeholders: the Canadian federal government, major online platform companies, and civil society organizations. By examining election integrity initiatives from these three distinct sectors, I aim to illuminate the attitudes of key regulatory and technological institutions implicated in Canada's disinformation infrastructure, as well as consider how the engagement of Canadian civil society and advocacy organizations can, as Kuehn and Salter (2020) put it, support the "building [of] knowledge communities and resilience to online disinformation," (p. 2599).

Additionally, considering the importance of healthy media ecosystems in countering disinformation, I propose that there ought to be value in observing how Canada's media itself contended with disinformation and the election. For example, some media outlets might represent attempts to regulate content on social media as acts of censorship; others might dedicate coverage to investigating and debunking false stories that are circulating online. As such, to supplement my review of Canadian government, industry, and civil society initiatives tackling disinformation and election integrity, this study also includes an analysis of Canadian mainstream media coverage from the period surrounding the 2019 election. I anticipate that examining domestic news coverage will help to illuminate the contexts from which domestic actors potentially emerge and the media landscape in which they operate. I am also interested in whether Canadian media managed to capture developments and issues that government, industry, and civil society stakeholders may have overlooked or failed to anticipate. These details and reflections are captured in Chapters 6 and 7. I did not examine initiatives conducted by Canadian media organizations to address the issue of disinformation within their own sector, other than a select few that emerged from the industry and civil society programs explored within my scope; attempts within the journalism industry to reckon with its own position in the disinformation ecosystem would make an interesting and valuable study on its own, and is a larger topic that should be pursued in future research.

To undertake this study, I gathered an assortment of research reports, legislative publications, policy documentation, terms and conditions, press releases, promotional material, educational resources, and website content from Canadian government, industry and civil society stakeholders, and performed a qualitative review of their contents to determine the key issues, themes, recommendations, and perspectives presented in each. I focused primarily on initiatives that were established between 2015, Canada's previous election year, and 2019, when the election at the centre of this study took place on October 21st. All of the material examined in this study is from publicly available online sources and primarily represents the public-facing initiatives of these stakeholders; a more complete picture of their actions on this issue could be achieved by examining internal activities and documents, but this would require more exhaustive methods of data collection (such as conducting interviews or submitting access to information requests) that are beyond the scope of this thesis.

To gather information about the Government of Canada's election integrity initiatives outlined in Chapter 3, I visited the websites of relevant federal departments and agencies such as Elections Canada, the Ministry of Democratic Institutions, the Communications Security Establishment (CSE), the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada (OPC), and the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics (ETHI)[1]. By accessing the publications, research, and media release sections of these websites, I was able to retrieve valuable documentation and information about the Canadian government's activities in preparation for disinformation and the 2019 election. To ensure I captured all relevant information, I also used each website's search function to look up material using keywords like "election integrity," "disinformation," "fake news," "digital democracy," "digital literacy," and "media literacy."[2]

I employed similar methods to collect information about the initiatives of platform companies in Chapter 4, by visiting the Canadian corporate websites of Facebook, Twitter, and Google. I selected these three platforms because they represent three separate corporate entities who own social media platforms popular in Canada (Facebook/Instagram, Twitter, and Google/YouTube). I accessed public information about their election integrity initiatives through methods of menu navigation and search, and often, information in one document led me to further information elsewhere. I employed an iterative process to explore the programs, policies, and terms of these three platforms until I was able to create a full picture of their activities. I also determined key projects and policies to examine by referring to research publications and media coverage about the role of these platforms in the 2019 election.

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[1] I focused primarily on these organizations based on my assessment of their relevance to the specific context of disinformation and federal elections, however, whenever I found other potentially relevant federal bodies mentioned in the initial round of literature I had collected – such as Innovation, Science, and Economic Development (ISED), Canadian Heritage, National Defence, Global Affairs Canada, and the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) – I made sure to check for information from their websites as well. Generally, the results from these departments were less relevant, or led me back to information I had already obtained.

[2] I found that search terms such as "information operations" and "computational propaganda" did not often generate useful results, as they either contained keywords that were too general, or that referred to specific contexts unrelated to my study.

The civil society-led initiatives outlined in Chapter 5 were determined by consulting a list of organizations that received funding under the Government of Canada's Digital Citizen Initiative, a federal civic and media literacy program that was introduced as part of the government's election integrity efforts as discussed in Chapter 3. While there are indeed other groups in Canada working on disinformation-related projects, I opted to limit the scope of my analysis to this particular set of organizations in order to investigate the results of intentional co-operative efforts between funding bodies and on-the-ground advocacy organizations in addressing online disinformation.

Finally, the media coverage I examine in Chapter 6 was collected from online news publications through a combination of email alerts, newsletter subscriptions, and manual investigation. To determine which mainstream media outlets would be most valuable to consult, I referred to an August 2019 study by the Digital Democracy Project, an initiative of Canada's Public Policy Forum think tank, which found that the top ten English language traditional news outlets consumed by Canadians at that time were CBC, CTV, Global News, the *Huffington Post*, City News, the *Globe and Mail*, Vice, the *National Post*, the *Toronto Star*, and the *Toronto Sun* (Owen et al., 2019, p. 5). I collected relevant articles on disinformation, political advertising, and other issues concerning the integrity of the 2019 election from these outlets over an 80-day period surrounding Election Day on October 21st. I chose this particular time period in order to trace the progression of media coverage about disinformation and election integrity from before and after votes were cast, in an effort to understand what issues were prioritized and how they were framed leading up to the election, compared to how they ultimately played out and what other developments arose. Further details on my media coverage collection and analysis methodology can be found in Appendix C.

I employed a qualitative method of comparative textual analysis to assess the collected materials, and evaluated the key themes, attitudes, and priorities that emerged through a sociotechnical, political economic framework. In my final analysis, I apply a critical policy lens to the projects discussed by considering their perspectives, agendas, and implications for different audiences, communities, and end-users. Ultimately, I aim to illuminate what kinds of disinformation policy measures are most common in Canada, evaluate their effectiveness, and consider potential gaps.

Chapter 3:
Research, regulation, and outreach: The Canadian federal government's 2019 election integrity initiatives

3   Introduction

The Government of Canada's approach to the threat of disinformation during the 2019 election involved a range of initiatives and took into account a variety of perspectives, from national security and intelligence agencies to industry stakeholders and scholars with expertise in media, technology, and political economy. This chapter highlights the main activities undertaken by the Government of Canada related to disinformation and election integrity that came about between 2015 and 2019, the period between Canada's 42nd and 43rd elections, during which a global reckoning with the state of big data and digital privacy was taking place, and major social media platforms' susceptibility to manipulation became increasingly clear. As revelations about mass data breaches and political influence campaigns emerged following the 2016 U.S. presidential election and U.K. "Brexit" referendum (Vaidhyanathan, 2018, p. 150), Canadian officials were propelled to consider the security of their own country's next federal election, and to reckon with the infrastructures of data collection, digital campaigning, and political polarization that might render it vulnerable to disinformation and interference.

The Government of Canada's most prominent election integrity initiative from this period was the *Elections Modernization Act* (Bill C-76), which received royal assent on December 13th, 2018, and came into force six months later on June 13th, 2019, in time for the election the following October. The bill made amendments to the *Canada Elections Act* that were intended to thwart election interference through regulations on advertising transparency, partisan activity, and third-party funding (Bill C-76, 2018, "Summary"). In January 2019, the Government of Canada also announced its "Plan to Safeguard Canada's 2019 Election," which entailed a series of initiatives focused on cyber security, social media integrity, and digital literacy (Gould, Sajjan, & Goodale, 2019).

Alongside these formal legislative steps, a series of research initiatives were undertaken by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics (ETHI), which resulted in the June 2018 report *Addressing Digital Privacy Vulnerabilities and Potential Threats to Canada's Democratic Electoral Process*, and its more comprehensive

follow-up *Democracy Under Threat: Risks and Solutions in the Era of Disinformation and Data Monopoly* in December 2018.

      This chapter outlines the Government of Canada's key public initiatives related to disinformation and the 2019 election more or less chronologically, beginning with a 2017 threat assessment report from the Communications Security Establishment (CSE), and concluding with an overview of the various federal election integrity programs that emerged in 2019. I have included a number of governmental research reports in this analysis because I am interested in exploring how the Canadian government conceives of disinformation and its threat, and these are particularly useful for considering how it came to its current understanding. In addition to summarizing these reports, I also provide fairly detailed descriptions of the policy initiatives and regulatory actions I was able to identify, so that I can more effectively illuminate their themes, consider their approaches, and evaluate their effectiveness in later chapters.

Table 1: Canadian government 2019 election integrity timeline

Publication Date	Organization(s)	Initiative/Publication
September 2016	Office of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, Elections Canada	*Retrospective Report on the 42nd General Election of October 19, 2015**
June 2017	Communications Security Establishment (CSE)	*Cyber Threats to Canada's Democratic Process* threat assessment report
	Standing Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs	*Controlling Foreign Influence in Canadian Elections* report*
February 2018	Canadian Security and Intelligence Service (CSIS)	*Who said what? The Security Challenges of Modern Disinformation* report from November 2017 Academic Outreach workshop
April 2018	Minister of Democratic Institutions (Liberal Party of Canada)	Bill C-76 tabled in House of Commons
June 2018	House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy, and Ethics	*Addressing Digital Privacy Vulnerabilities and Potential Threats to Canada's Democratic Electoral Process* report
October 2018	Communications Security Establishment, Minister of National Defence	Launch of the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security*
December 2018	House of Commons Standing Committee on	*Democracy Under Threat: Risks and Solutions in the Era of Disinformation and Data Monopoly* report

	Access to Information, Privacy, and Ethics	
	House of Commons	Bill C-76 receives royal assent and the *Elections Modernization Act* becomes law
January 2019	Government of Canada (via Minister of Democratic Institutions, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Minister of National Defence)	Plan to Safeguard Canada's 2019 Election announced • G7 Rapid Response Mechanism • RCMP Foreign Actor Interference Investigative Team • Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections (SITE) Task Force • Digital Citizen Initiative and Digital Citizen Research Program • Critical Election Incident Public Protocol
April 2019	Communications Security Establishment	*2019 Update: Cyber Threats to Canada's Democratic Process* report
May 2019	Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development	Release of *Canada's Digital Charter in Action: A Plan by Canadians, for Canadians**
	Minister of Democratic Institutions	Canada Declaration on Electoral Integrity Online announced
	House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy, and Ethics	*International Grand Committee on Big Data, Privacy, and Democracy* hearings and report, signing of the Ottawa Declaration

*For further reading, but omitted from this study due to lack of significant focus on disinformation

3.1 National security perspectives on disinformation and elections

3.1.1 *Cyber Threats to Canada's Democratic Process*

In 2017, the Communications Security Establishment (CSE) published *Cyber Threats to Canada's Democratic Process*, a threat assessment report focusing on digitally mediated election interference that was the first of its kind to be shared publicly by a Canadian intelligence agency (Democratic Institutions, 2017). Produced in response to a request from then Minister of Democratic Institutions Karina Gould, the report presented a high-level overview of the ways in which adversaries might seek to interfere with Canadian elections through cyber operations and media manipulation (Communications Security Establishment [CSE], 2017, p. 9-10).

The report identified six main types of adversaries found to engage in election interference activities or who likely have the means and motivation to do so. Nation-states, hacktivists, cybercriminals, terrorist groups, political actors, and thrill-seekers were all listed as potential perpetrators of election meddling, with motivations ranging from ideological, political, and economic, to personal and reputational interests (CSE, 2017, p. 12). The CSE assessed nation-states as likely to possess the most sophisticated cyber capabilities and to generally present the most significant source of concern (CSE, 2017, p. 4). The report highlighted three main strategic targets for interfering with the democratic process: the election itself (registration, voting, and results), political parties and politicians, and the media (both traditional and social) (CSE, 2017, p. 15, 18, 20). It described how nefarious actors deploy cyber capabilities to interfere with these processes, including through hacking voter and party data, tampering with campaign websites or other sources of election information, conducting cyberespionage to discredit targets, and manipulating media to influence public perceptions and opinions (CSE, 2017).

Because Canada's voting process is largely paper-based and therefore less vulnerable to cybersecurity threats, the most significant risks demonstrated in the CSE's report were associated with cyber influence operations. The report described how adversaries employ botnets and troll farms to amplify false narratives, masquerade as legitimate news sources to publish misleading information, and engage in campaigns of harassment against journalists in order to chill unwanted reporting and commentary (CSE, 2017, p. 20-21). It emphasized the effectiveness of disinformation for shaping the beliefs of voters and reducing trust in democratic processes and institutions, noting that even just the perception of foreign influence in public discourse can undermine the authority of credible sources of information (CSE, 2017, p. 20).

The report also suggested that many of the tools employed by powerful adversaries to spread disinformation are not out of reach from more average users, noting that bots, astroturfing services, and fake websites can be purchased or programmed relatively cheaply and easily (CSE, 2017, p. 21, 32), and that smaller domestic actors can infiltrate online communities and discussions to encourage particular views, conspiracy theories, and actions. The assessment outlined varying levels of cyber threat sophistication and their degrees of potential damage in the hands of different adversaries, from low-grade nuisance trolling to more complex coordinated hacking and social media manipulation (CSE, 2017, p. 26).

The report stated that Canada's 2015 election was targeted by "low sophistication cyber threat activity," most likely the work of hacktivist and cybercriminal groups, and predicted that the 2019 election would almost certainly be subject to interference, potentially with an increased level of sophistication (CSE, 2017, p. 4, 33). It noted that domestic political actors had been observed attempting to influence democratic processes in countries with higher levels of corruption, and suggested that the trend would likely continue due to the abundance of effective tools for online media manipulation (CSE, 2017, p. 33). It proposed, however, that because of its relatively low corruption levels, Canada might be spared from major attempts at election interference by domestic political actors (p. 33).

In 2019, CSE issued an update to its *Cyber Threats* report, which revisited many of the key points from the 2017 assessment and updated them for the context of the 2019 election. The report stated that cyber threat activity directed at democratic processes had continued to increase globally in the intervening years, and that activities targeting voters in particular were becoming more common and likely more effective, especially considering the emergence of new technologies for video manipulation (known as "deepfakes") (p. 17-18). The report presented a closer look at the Canadian context, describing how foreign adversaries had engaged in cyber influence activities targeting Canadian politicians and citizens on numerous occasions following the 2015 election (p. 21). Looking forward, the updated assessment predicted that, though interference on the same scale as that which occurred during the 2016 United States presidential election would be unlikely in Canada, there would be a high likelihood of Canadian voters "encounter[ing] some form of foreign cyber interference ahead of, and during, the 2019 federal election" (p. 21).

3.1.2 *Who said what? The Security Challenges of Modern Disinformation*

In 2018, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS), Canada's chief intelligence agency, published the report *Who Said What? The Security Challenges of Modern Disinformation*. It summarized the proceedings of a November 2017 workshop hosted as part of the agency's academic outreach program, which examined the effects of disinformation on democratic integrity and national security. The report discussed key aspects of the disinformation ecosystem, where they emerge from, and some of the approaches taken by different institutions to address the issue globally (CSIS, 2018). While it does not formally represent the agency's

position or any official intelligence analysis (CSIS, 2018), the report offers a valuable glimpse into the kinds of initiatives undertaken by different arms of the Canadian government to understand the threats posed by disinformation to democratic integrity.

The report explored a number of issues like the proliferation of data-driven advertising technology and the widespread disruption of trust in traditional news media. It highlighted some of the main state agents of disinformation and discussed how state-orchestrated information operations thrive by interacting with assorted independent "emergent" actors that develop out of "organic communities of online users" (CSIS, 2018, p. 16). The report also outlined a preliminary conceptual framework describing six primary categories of motivation for engaging in disinformation campaigns: sincere ideology, political propaganda, financial incentives, reputation gains, entertainment, and empowerment (CSIS, 2018, p. 18-20). The framework more significantly accounted for the role of non-state actors, describing how "purposeful disinformation strategies are not just leveraging the power of social media platforms, but are resonating with the activities of online crowds that form within those platforms" (CSIS, 2018, p. 20). The report examined the role of average citizens in the spread of disinformation, suggesting that false or inflammatory material may either be shared intentionally because of genuine beliefs and political, reputational, or entertainment motives, or unintentionally through interacting with and falling for deceptive messaging. It also acknowledged that it can be difficult to establish whether certain messages and conspiracies are self-forming or actually the perpetuation of an idea that was initially seeded in a propaganda operation (p. 18).

The report ultimately suggested that "the problem of disinformation cannot simply be attributed to the design of technological systems or the deliberate actions of government funded trolls," and that it should "take into account the people who are interacting with and affected by this information, not merely as victims, but as agents in its creation, propagation, and (hopefully) its correction" (p. 21). It proposed that too narrow a focus on "explicit coordination" without attention to the roles of independent emergent actors would result in gaps in research and policymaking, and highlighted the need for average users to receive further education on the complexity of the disinformation phenomenon and the systems that enable it (p. 20-21).

The report also offered a glimpse at some of the responses emerging from institutions concerned with the implications of disinformation, highlighting various government efforts to

regulate platform companies or block access to known sources of disinformation, initiatives at universities and research institutes to detect and analyze indicators of social media manipulation, and the emergence of specialized fact-checking organizations working to identify and expose disinformation campaigns to the public (p. 10-11).

To this point I have outlined how two prominent Canadian intelligence agencies made efforts to understand the threat of disinformation to democracy and published some of their findings for public consumption prior to the 2019 Canadian federal election. I will now turn to a major piece of legislation that emerged not long after the above reports were published, marking a tangible step toward addressing online disinformation as a threat to Canadian election integrity.

3.2   Regulatory action: The *Elections Modernization Act*

By early 2018, the heat was on platform companies to account for their privacy practices and data misdeeds. A few weeks after the publication of CSIS's *Who Said What?* report, the Cambridge Analytica scandal broke in March 2018, thrusting the grim reality of online data collection and the power of targeted political advertising into public consciousness. Shortly after, on April 20th, Bill C-76 was tabled in the House of Commons by the Liberal Party's Minister of Democratic Institutions, Karina Gould. The bill, also known as the *Elections Modernization Act*, proposed a number of changes to the existing *Canada Elections Act*, which were intended to enhance the integrity and accessibility of the Canadian federal electoral process. While its amendments covered a range of logistical and administrative issues, including making improvements to electoral services and procedures, addressing barriers to voter participation, and updating the roles and enforcement powers of electoral authorities, much of the bill's reputation came to revolve around its implementation of measures to prevent election meddling through online advertising and the publication of misleading information. Below I highlight some of the key sections within Bill C-76 that are intended to address the threat of disinformation and media manipulation in a modern Canadian election.

3.2.1 Political advertising and partisan activity: New rules for political actors

Previous versions of the *Canada Elections Act* largely approached regulation based on traditional broadcast advertising methods, due to the legislation's development during an era in which television was the prevailing election campaign medium (Elections Canada, 2020a, p. 4-

5). While the official election period (between the writ drop and polling day) has long been subject to regulations aimed at ensuring fairness and transparency among registered political parties and third party campaigners, the evolution of popular means of political advertising in recent decades has broadened the scope of needed attention beyond the official election period and traditional broadcasting considerations (Elections Canada, 2020a, p. 6).

Reflected in Bill C-76 was a recognition that the months immediately prior to an election period are significant to the atmosphere of public discourse leading up to the vote. Canada's election laws have for some time required that third parties register advertising expenses over $500 during an election period, and that campaign expenses by third parties and registered political parties not exceed a specified amount per election period (Elections Canada, 2020b). However, previous to the implementation of Bill C-76 there were few limitations on what political and third parties could spend on advertising in the months leading up to the writ drop (Elections Canada, 2020a, p. 6), potentially allowing those with greater financial resources to skew public dialogue in favour of certain perspectives during a key period for voter education and persuasion (Elections Canada, 2020b).

Bill C-76 amended the *Canada Elections Act* to introduce the concept of a pre-election period, which it defined as the period beginning on June 30th of a set election year and ending the day before the issuing of the election writ (Bill C-76, 2018, p. 5). As part of this amendment, third parties and registered political parties were made subject to new spending limits, with the requirement to register with Elections Canada upon incurring $500 in relevant expenses made applicable within the pre-election period as well as the official election period (Bill C-76, 2018, p. 122, 134).

In addition to extending the time period for which its campaign spending regulations would apply, Bill C-76 also expanded the scope of activities its regulations would cover. Beyond campaign advertising in the traditional sense, the bill's new regulations would also apply to "partisan activities" such as calling or texting constituents, door to door canvassing, hosting rallies and "get-out-the-vote" initiatives, developing campaign websites, and publishing organic social media content (Elections Canada, 2019, p. 33). The bill also introduced a distinction between "partisan advertising" and "election advertising," classifying the former as material published outside of the election period which explicitly names a promoted or opposed candidate

or party, and the latter as that which does the same but is published within the official election period (Elections Canada, 2020b). Messages that do not explicitly name parties or candidates but that take a position on issues "clearly associated" with a particular contender were alternatively defined as "issue advertising," which the bill sought to regulate during the election period only (Elections Canada, 2020b).

In addition to its efforts to ensure fairness and transparency among domestic third parties and political actors, Bill C-76 addressed concerns regarding the potential manipulation of Canada's election campaign system by foreign actors by removing a previous allowance of $500 for foreign third parties to participate in regulated campaign activities (Office of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada [CEO], 2020, p. 49). The bill also introduced a requirement for registered third parties to maintain a separate bank account specifically for managing the funds used to carry out regulated activities, and imposed more rigorous interim and post-election expense reporting requirements (Bill C-76, 2018, p. 137, 142, 143). With these transparency measures in place, enhanced scrutiny of third-party expenses and funding contributions would, in theory, help to prevent purveyors of disinformation from covertly participating in Canada's election time discourse through funding contributions to registered domestic third parties.

3.2.2 Political advertising transparency for platforms and publishers

Bill C-76 implemented the concept of advertising transparency not only to ensure regulators' access to campaign expense information, but also to enable voters to access information about the advertisements they encounter online in the lead up to an election. While the *Canada Elections Act* already required traditional broadcast advertisements to include a sponsorship disclaimer on political messages, the microtargeted nature of advertising on social media presented a new set of challenges for regulators that required a more nuanced approach to audience transparency. Bill C-76 thus introduced a new requirement for online platforms to maintain publicly accessible registries of partisan and election advertising messages (Bill C-76, 2018, p. 110). It defined "online platforms" as internet sites or applications "whose owner or operator…sells, directly or indirectly, advertising space on the site or application" (p. 109), and applied to those that, in a specified period, were accessed by internet users in Canada an average of at least 3 million times per month for primarily English-language sites, 1 million times per month for primarily French-language sites, or 100,000 times per month for sites operating

primarily in another language (p. 110). These parameters affected both social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, and Reddit, and also services like Google, Amazon, and many mainstream Canadian news websites.

The new regulations required platforms to catalogue advertisements placed both in the pre-election and election period by registered or eligible political parties, registered associations, nomination contestants, candidates or potential candidates, or third parties required to register with Elections Canada (Bill C-76, 2018, p. 110). Platforms were required to publish their registries in a publicly accessible location, include an electronic copy of each advertisement along with details on who authorized each message, keep all information published for two years following the election, and retain the information for five more years after that (p. 110). The bill also required advertisers to provide platform operators with all necessary information to fulfill their new obligations (p. 111). The new measures presented rather major challenges for online platforms, with varying responses by the dominant industry players Facebook, Google, and Twitter, as will be examined in the next chapter.

3.2.3 Preventing interference through false statements

Another significant amendment made by Bill C-76 was an expansion of the criteria present in Section 91 of the *Canada Elections Act*, which is concerned with the publication of false statements to affect election results. Previously, the legislation only implicated those who "with the intention of affecting the results of an election, knowingly make or publish any false statement of fact in relation to the personal character or conduct of a candidate or prospective candidate" (*Canada Elections Act*, 2003). Bill C-76 altered this clause to clarify its application within the election period, but also removed the word "knowingly" from its criteria (Bill C-76, 2018, p. 35). The amendment expanded the scope of punishable statements to include those that falsely claim "a candidate, a prospective candidate, the leader of a political party or a public figure associated with a political party" has been investigated for or charged with an offence, or which misrepresents the "citizenship, place of birth, education, professional qualifications or membership in a group or association" of any of the above (p. 35). Penalties for those found to be in contravention of these more comprehensive regulations include prison terms of up to five years and fines up to $50,000 (*Canada Elections Act,* 2019, p. 458).

3.2.4 Regulating the use and protection of personal data by political entities

Finally, Bill C-76 also considered the importance of protecting personal information collected by political entities, particularly in the context of electoral processes, where the use of demographic and behavioural data for executing targeted advertising campaigns has continually proven valuable. Previous election legislation based on traditional broadcasting did not account for the value of data collected by political entities, and so Bill C-76 created an obligation for political parties to develop and publish a privacy and data protection policy as part of their application to register with Elections Canada (Bill C-76, 2018, p. 159; CEO, 2020, p. 51). The new rules required parties to indicate what kind of personal information they collect, how it is collected, used, and protected, what kind of training employees using the data receive, and a link to the published policy on the party's website (CEO, 2020, p. 51).

3.2.5 Enforcement capacity and overall impact

One potential limitation to the privacy policy rules set out in Bill C-76 was that they did not place political parties' collected data under any specific privacy legislation or compliance regime – parties were simply required to include certain information when applying to register (ETHI, 2018a, p. 30). However, the new legislation did provide additional powers to some of the authorities in charge of overseeing Canada's federal elections, such as the Commissioner of Canada Elections, whose mandate is to enforce the *Canada Elections Act*. Under Bill C-76, the Commissioner was granted the authority to investigate and fine political entities who contravene certain provisions of the Act, such as those that fall under Parts 16 (Communications), 17 (Third Party Advertising, Partisan Activities and Election Surveys), and 18 (Financial Administration) (Bill C-76, 2018, "Summary"; CEO, 2020, p. 60). The enhanced ability for officials to penalize communications and administrative offences served to promote greater accountability and compliance among political actors and platform companies regarding partisan campaign activity, the protection of personal information, and other issues significant to the challenge of disinformation in elections.

Bill C-76 made changes to the *Canada Elections Act* that attempted to modernize its regulatory clout in order to contend with contemporary media technologies, information systems, and communications norms. Despite this, its reach was generally limited to issues of online political advertising, with other tools for spreading disinformation and disrupting electoral

processes likely to persist outside the bounds of its enforcement powers. Ultimately, however, the bill represented a step toward government regulation of platform companies, a concept increasingly discussed among academic, industry, and public policy stakeholders that hinges on a number of critical contradictions surrounding issues of harmful speech, content moderation and free expression. The Canadian government's involvement in these kinds of discussions can be further understood by examining the activities of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy, and Ethics, whose attempt to grapple with the implications of online disinformation will be examined next.

3.3 Disinformation and democracy: Legislators and experts convene

In March 2018 the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy, and Ethics (ETHI) adopted a motion to investigate the now-infamous mass privacy breach involving Facebook and political consultancy firm Cambridge Analytica, which saw millions of users' data surreptitiously accessed for use in developing political campaign tools based on psychographic microtargeting, and illuminated the dubious relationship between "data monopoly" technology companies and the integrity of contemporary democratic processes. The Committee's investigation first entailed a series of public hearings throughout the spring of 2018, which resulted in the June publication of a report entitled *Addressing Digital Privacy Vulnerabilities and Potential Threats to Canada's Democratic Electoral Process*. The committee continued its inquiry through subsequent months to address questions that emerged during its preliminary study, and produced a follow-up report called *Democracy Under Threat: Risks and Solutions in the Era of Disinformation and Data Monopoly* in December 2018. Together, these reports offer a useful look into the kinds of research and consultation efforts that Canadian legislators embarked on in order to confront the challenges of disinformation and democracy.

The ETHI committee's initial investigation focused primarily on the Cambridge Analytica scandal, and involved testimony from stakeholders with a diversity of perspectives. Representatives of key parties implicated in the affair testified before the committee alongside representatives from other major industry players, privacy commissioners' offices, and academia. The hearings covered a range of issues, from mass data collection and targeted political advertising, to data sovereignty and rights, to privacy legislation and its enforcement by

Canadian regulators. Though the committee ultimately acknowledged that it had only scratched the surface of the broader issues at hand, its report from the hearings contained a set of eight preliminary policy recommendations regarding advertising transparency on social media, data protection and ownership, and the enforcement powers of Canada's Privacy Commissioner. A detailed list of these recommendations is provided in Appendix A.

The committee's follow-up report, *Democracy Under Threat*, was published on December 11th, 2018, only two days before Bill C-76 received royal assent and passed into law. The report expanded on the discussions and findings of the committee's previous investigation, and produced eighteen additional policy recommendations. It touched on a number of issues concerning the relationship between online platforms and democratic integrity, the key details of which I will highlight below. The full list of these recommendations is also provided in Appendix A.

3.3.1 Political parties and *PIPEDA*

Political parties and their relationship (or lack thereof) with privacy legislation in Canada, such as the *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act* (PIPEDA), have come under increased scrutiny in recent years. PIPEDA is Canada's federal data protection law governing private sector entities that "collect, use or disclose personal information in the course of a commercial activity," such as through "the selling, bartering or leasing of donor, membership or other fundraising lists" (Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada [OPC], 2019a). Due to its private sector focus, PIPEDA does not inherently apply to the activities of not-for-profit organizations, charities, political parties, or political associations (OPC, 2019a).

In its preliminary report, ETHI recommended that political activities in Canada be made subject to privacy legislation, either by bringing them under existing laws or creating new ones (ETHI, 2018a, p. 35). As part of its continued investigation, the committee heard additional testimony from academics, political parties, and both Canada's Chief Electoral Officer and Privacy Commissioner. Academic participants generally expressed support for applying privacy legislation to political parties, as one measure to prevent bad faith access to and use of voter data. Political party representatives expressed a range of views, with the Liberals and Conservatives casting doubt on the effectiveness of expanding the reach of PIPEDA in its current form, and the

NDP expressing support for an expansion, arguing that it would enhance voters' trust in their representatives, and that all parties should be required to follow the same rules (p. 21).

Stéphane Perrault, Canada's Chief Electoral Officer, supported the committee's recommendation. He noted three primary flaws in the measures proposed in Bill C-76, highlighting its lack of provisions for minimum privacy standards, oversight by an independent body, or options for Canadians to validate and correct any information political parties possess about them (ETHI, 2018b, p. 22). Daniel Therrien, Canada's Privacy Commissioner, suggested that political parties' lack of oversight leaves Canadian elections open to manipulation through the misuse of personal information (p. 23), and suggested that PIPEDA should be applied to "'all organizations engaged in commercial or other activities that compile, use or transmit personal information,' including non-profit organizations and third parties" (p. 25).

Following these discussions, the committee reiterated its previous recommendation about political parties and privacy law, and proposed more specifically that the Government of Canada amend PIPEDA to cover political and third parties, and that the Office of the Privacy Commissioner be provided with the necessary resources to address modern privacy concerns (ETHI, 2018b, p. 25-26).

3.3.2 Regulating social media platforms

Another major topic of discussion in the *Democracy Under Threat* report concerned the regulation of social media platforms, particularly with the goal of countering mis- and disinformation. During the committee's hearings, experts from a range of backgrounds highlighted key issues related to "the nature of the digital information ecosystem, the very structure of social media platforms and the problems with self-regulation" (ETHI, 2018b, p. 29). Participants discussed the prevalence of algorithms and filtering mechanisms designed with platform business models in mind, and the challenges they present for governing public discourse, especially as platform infrastructures make it relatively cheap and easy to disseminate disinformation (p. 29-30). The report questioned platforms' responsibilities regarding what content they allow to exist, versus what is intentionally pushed to users (p. 33), and highlighted how a rising "politics of resentment" and populism offline can combine with the "distorting power of the digital information market" to create a perilous situation for democracy (p. 31).

The report ultimately discussed both the inadequacy of self-regulation by platform companies and the risks of regulation by government. Many hearing participants agreed that private sector monopolies could not effectively self-regulate or be relied on to address their own problems, and that governments should intervene in circumstances demanding the protection of the public interest; however, others expressed concern regarding the implications of regulating social media, stressing potential threats to freedom of expression and open democratic debate (ETHI, 2018b, p. 35-36).

In terms of potential regulatory solutions, the committee examined concepts related to transparency in online advertising and algorithm use, user control and consent, and content moderation. The committee acknowledged that Bill C-76 was set to introduce significant advertising transparency measures in the form of mandatory political ad registries for online platforms, but made supplementary recommendations for a more rigorous authorization process and registry design (ETHI, 2018b, p. 39). Further, it recommended that the Government of Canada implement regulations compelling online platforms to "clearly label content produced automatically or algorithmically (e.g. by 'bots'); identify and remove inauthentic and fraudulent accounts… and require the removal of defamatory, fraudulent, and maliciously manipulated content" (p. 41). The committee also recommended that platform algorithms be made subject to transparency requirements, and that either an existing or new regulatory body be provided with the mandate and authority to audit them (p. 41). Regarding content moderation, the committee recommended that social media platforms be regulated to "remove manifestly illegal content in a timely fashion, including hate speech, harassment and disinformation, or risk monetary sanctions," with allowances for the judicial oversight of takedown decisions and a right of appeal (p. 41).

The report discussed potential enforcement mechanisms such as an independent regulator, similar to a broadcasting standards council, which would work as a public authority to mediate decisions about content moderation and other related issues (ETHI, 2018b, p. 47). It considered the implications of treating social media platforms as broadcasters, noting that small-scale broadcasters such as community radio stations are subject to regulation by the CRTC, yet Facebook pages that disseminate information to millions of users do not receive the same level of oversight (p. 46).

3.3.3 Research and media literacy

The final chapter of the committee's report addressed the state of scholarship about online disinformation, and suggested that further research is needed in order to grasp the full extent of the issue. Academic witnesses explained how being unable to access data from social media companies, particularly about proprietary tools like algorithms and data analytics, creates barriers to strong empirical research (ETHI, 2018, p. 67). Some suggested that measures to enable easier access to data with clear ethical guidelines are needed in Canada, and that the present lack of research on the disinformation phenomenon makes it difficult to confidently recommend regulatory solutions (p. 67).

In addition to the need for more research, the report discussed the importance of digital literacy among citizens as a strategy for confronting disinformation. Hearing participants identified the need for increased skills development in practices like verifying source authenticity and recognizing bot activity, and highlighted that a lack of transparency about how social media platforms function contributes to users' vulnerability to mis- and disinformation (ETHI, 2018, p. 68-69). The report also discussed the value of access to trustworthy journalism and publicly funded broadcasting for the successful development of digital and media literacy, and highlighted a need for digital literacy efforts to work in conjunction with regulatory measures (p. 70).

The committee recommended that the Government of Canada invest in digital literacy initiatives and research about the effects of online mis- and disinformation (ETHI, 2018, p. 71). It also pointed out that large social media companies, who have played a significant role in the growth of these problems, should bear some of the responsibility to fund and execute similar efforts (p. 71).

The committee ultimately reiterated all of the preliminary recommendations from its interim report, and concluded that significant ethical, social, and political concerns remain to be addressed with regard to social media and democratic integrity. It suggested that Canada needs to make significant regulatory changes in order to responsibly deal with the disinformation phenomenon, but emphasized that efforts to regulate political parties, advertisers, and online platforms need to be accompanied by further research, widespread digital literacy education, and public awareness initiatives.

3.4 Government of Canada response to ETHI & Plan to Safeguard the 2019 Election

The Government of Canada presented its response to the ETHI Committee's *Democracy Under Threat* report to the House of Commons on April 10, 2019. In a letter to the committee, MPs Karina Gould, Minister of Democratic Institutions, and Navdeep Bains, Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development (ISED), outlined the government's plans to address the recommendations put forth in the report, highlighting a range of both immediate solutions and longer-term commitments. The response pointed toward a number of measures put in place under the *Elections Modernization Act* regarding privacy and political parties, transparency in political advertising, and the use of foreign funds in Canada's elections (Gould & Bains, 2019). To address the long-term challenges of online disinformation, the government declared it would commit to further studies and consultations on updating PIPEDA to better suit the contemporary digital economy (Gould & Bains, 2019). The response also highlighted the Government of Canada's 2018 Fall Economic Statement, which promised measures to support Canada's journalism industry (Department of Finance Canada, 2018, p. 40-41), as well as its Plan to Safeguard Canada's 2019 Election, which was published in January 2019.

The government's Plan to Safeguard Canada's 2019 Election was built on four main pillars: "combatting foreign interference," "strengthening organizational readiness," "expecting social media platforms to act," and "enhancing citizen preparedness" (Gould, Sajjan, & Goodale, 2019). It entailed a range of initiatives intended to secure the integrity of Canada's 2019 election, particularly with a view to the threat of online disinformation and foreign influence campaigns. The plan's measures for "combatting foreign interference" and "strengthening organizational readiness" largely involved enhancing cybersecurity and governmental coordination on threat detection. In their letter to the ETHI Committee, MPs Gould and Bains highlighted the work of the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security, which was established in October 2018 to bring together experts from CSE, Public Safety, and Shared Services Canada to create a central resource for cyber security "information, advice, and guidance" for Canadian companies, infrastructure operators, and citizens (CSE, 2018). They also stated that the Government of Canada would make use of its "Get Cyber Safe" campaign, delivered by the Centre for Cyber Security, to increase public awareness of cyber threats during the election (Gould & Bains, 2019; CSE, 2018).

The government's response also included the establishment of the G7 Rapid Response Mechanism, an initiative among G7 countries focused on "identifying, preventing and responding to threats to G7 democracies" that was announced in June 2018 (Democratic Institutions, 2019). In January 2019, the Government of Canada announced the creation of a Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections (SITE) Task Force, comprised of experts from the CSE, CSIS, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and Global Affairs Canada, whose mission would be to "prevent covert, clandestine, or criminal activities from influencing or interfering with the electoral process in Canada" (Democratic Institutions, 2020a). The RCMP also established a Foreign Actor Interference Investigative Team to "[investigate and disrupt] criminal acts that may be part of an effort to interfere with Canada's electoral process" (Gould & Bains, 2019).

In addition to these threat detection and cybersecurity measures, the government's Plan to Safeguard Canada's 2019 Election included a number of public awareness initiatives established under the pillar of "enhancing citizen preparedness." Their January 2019 announcement also highlighted the development of a Critical Election Incident Public Protocol, a system intended for use in exceptional circumstances where a significant threat to the integrity of the election is detected (Gould & Bains, 2019). The protocol, designed to be executed through a panel of "the public service's most senior officials mandated to be impartial, transparent and fair" (Gould, Sajjan, & Goodale, 2019), including the Clerk of the Privy Council, the National Security and Intelligence Advisor, and Deputy Ministers of Justice, Public Safety, and Foreign Affairs, would alert Canadians to election threats under specific conditions involving "egregious incidents that meet a high threshold, occurring during the writ period, and that do not fall within Elections Canada's areas of responsibility for the effective administration of the election" (Gould & Bains, 2019).

To further keep citizens alert and prepared, the government's election integrity plans also included the dedication of $7 million toward digital, media, and civic literacy programs to educate Canadians on platform manipulation and critical media consumption (Gould, Sajjan, & Goodale, 2019). These efforts were implemented through a program called the Digital Citizen Initiative, which was established to provide a range of civil society organizations and stakeholders with funds to deliver "skills development, awareness sessions, workshops and

learning material" about disinformation and democracy to Canadians (Democratic Institutions, 2020b).

In addition to investments in digital literacy programming, the Government of Canada allocated funding for disinformation research, with the Department of Canadian Heritage committing $19.4 million over four years, beginning in 2019, toward a Digital Citizen Research Program to increase Canada's understanding of online media manipulation and generate an enhanced evidence base to guide policymaking (Democratic Institutions, 2020b).

The final pillar of the Plan to Safeguard Canada's 2019 election was "expecting social media platforms to act." In its response to the ETHI Committee, the Government of Canada asserted that, beyond enforcing the new regulations for online platform companies imposed by Bill C-76, it would "continue to engage with online platforms and to monitor their behaviour" with an expectation of "greater action and specific measures to increase transparency, authenticity, integrity, and to combat the spread of disinformation" (Gould & Bains, 2019). In May 2019, Minister of Democratic Institutions Karina Gould released the "Canada Declaration on Electoral Integrity Online," a commitment signed onto by major technology companies that promised co-operation with the Government of Canada on efforts to address disinformation and election integrity. The declaration was structured around three guiding principles of "integrity, transparency, and authenticity," and included commitments related to cybersecurity, digital literacy, and responsible information sharing to ensure the protection of Canada's democracy (Democratic Institutions, 2019b). While the declaration did not contain any enforcement mechanisms, the commitments made by the platform companies provide a useful framework for understanding the actions they ultimately took in this realm, which I will examine in the next chapter. A detailed list of the Declaration's commitments is in Appendix B.

3.5 Conclusion

The Canada Declaration on Electoral Integrity Online was, interestingly, announced only hours before the ETHI Committee was to participate in another set of hearings, this time as part of the International Grand Committee on Big Data, Privacy, and Democracy, which was formed in response to increasing concerns about the impact of online platforms on democratic integrity globally, and whose inaugural hearing on *Disinformation and 'Fake News'* took place in November 2018 in London, U.K. (ETHI, 2019, p. 7). The second International Grand Committee

was held in Ottawa, and included members of Canada's ETHI Committee, parliamentarians from 10 other nations, as well as summonses to technology experts and stakeholders to testify about current and future challenges regarding social media, data privacy, and democracy. Discussion topics ranged from surveillance capitalism, to disinformation and hate speech, to algorithmic transparency and the need for increased oversight of large platform companies. Though the committee heard from representatives from companies like Facebook, Google, and Twitter, the hearings came to be known for Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and COO Sheryl Sandberg's refusal to attend despite being summoned. The event illuminated a persistent tension between government regulators and platform companies on issues of data, politics, and disinformation.

The Government of Canada's 2019 election integrity efforts attempted to contend with this tension, however, because many of the issues at stake are significant beyond the context of elections, a number of policy gaps remain to be filled. Bill C-76, while introducing some platform regulation measures, is primarily concerned with issues of political advertising and election campaigning as a potential vehicle for mis- and disinformation. A number of scholars and policymakers, as highlighted above, have suggested that the bill's approach to online political speech, as well as campaign-related data protection, still leaves many other potential methods of manipulation open for abuse. The bill, along with the government's other programs under its Plan to Safeguard Canada's 2019 Election, is somewhat bound by a limited framing of disinformation that does not fully account for the underlying social and technical factors contributing to political polarization and social media manipulation, largely favouring more reactive and punitive approaches to disinformation and election interference. Are there ways in which, before Canada's next election, government efforts may be able to address disinformation beyond its intersection with cybersecurity and public media literacy? How will future election integrity initiatives account for the emergence of new technologies, such as deepfakes, and the increasing popularity of more video-oriented platforms such as TikTok? How can regulatory measures and media literacy supports address the unique forms and contexts of communication via private message-based applications? These are all questions that will be difficult to address without further research, and while the Government of Canada did demonstrate an interest in investing in disinformation research, its efforts thus far have failed to create obligations or incentives for platform companies to share information beyond advertising data, or to make other

data generally more accessible to researchers – a key barrier for policymakers to overcome in order to develop effective disinformation regulations.

Chapter 4:
Industry Response: How Facebook, Twitter, and Google prepared for their role in the election

4   Introduction

While the position of government is important in policy discussions of disinformation and democracy, a comprehensive understanding of the issue cannot be achieved without also examining the roles of stakeholders in industry, media, and civil society. Scholars and policymakers have emphasized the importance of collaboration between a variety of different stakeholders on efforts to address disinformation, as it has been made clear that relying solely on either government intervention or industry self-regulation is unlikely to produce sufficient results. This chapter explores a broad scope of activity by technology industry stakeholders significant to the Canadian election integrity context, and examines how major platform companies in Canada responded to new regulations under the *Elections Modernization Act*.

The key platforms discussed in this chapter are Facebook, Twitter, and Google, as they represent three of the most influential social media and information companies that signed onto the Canada Declaration on Electoral Integrity Online in 2019, and also demonstrate three distinct approaches to the requirements set out by the Government of Canada in Bill C-76. My discussion of these platforms' activities draws from public information published on their respective company websites, as well as from Canadian news coverage from the period surrounding the 2019 election. By examining the materials these companies promoted as part of their election integrity initiatives for Canada in 2019, I aim to reveal what kind of attention is paid to the issue of disinformation beyond discussions of foreign influence, as a potentially domestically-driven phenomenon. Again, I summarize the key elements of these various projects in order to provide a basis for understanding the key perspectives, themes, and approaches taken within them, as well as to consider their effectiveness and potential gaps.

4.1   Platform companies and the Canada Declaration on Electoral Integrity Online

The Canada Declaration on Electoral Integrity Online introduced a list of commitments that were signed onto by the Government of Canada and major online platform companies

operating within the country, which sought to address concerns about the digital media ecosystem and its impact on the health of Canadian democracy. The Declaration was developed based on three key values: "integrity, transparency, and authenticity," and included commitments designed to promote each. Platform companies signing onto the Declaration agreed to promote integrity by intensifying their efforts to combat disinformation and enhance cybersecurity and privacy protection (Democratic Institutions, 2019b). To promote transparency, they agreed to provide users with information on regulated political advertising, and to ensuring their terms and conditions are made easy to access, understand, and be transparently enforced (Democratic Institutions, 2019b). To promote authenticity, the platforms committed to removing fake accounts, inauthentic content, and malicious bots from their services, and to helping users better understand the sources of information they encounter (Democratic Institutions, 2019b).

The Declaration was first signed onto by Facebook, Google, and Microsoft, with Twitter joining the call after a period of silence and mounting public criticism from Minister Gould (Bryden, 2019a; "Twitter joins Facebook," 2019). While some critics assessed the Declaration as ineffectual, pointing toward its voluntary nature and lack of any enforcement mechanism, its development offers a useful foundation from which to examine how large technology companies like Facebook, Twitter, and Google attempted to use their position within Canada's information ecosystem to address the threat of disinformation to the 2019 Canadian federal election.

4.2 Platform responses to Bill C-76: political advertising registries

The commitments under the Declaration's principle of "transparency" contained the most substantial prospects, as platform companies were confronted with new political advertising transparency regulations under Bill C-76. While all three major platform companies met the legal size requirement criteria for the development of political advertising registries, only Facebook and Twitter ultimately published one, as Google and a number of other major websites in Canada instead chose to forgo hosting political advertisements entirely, citing an inability to develop an appropriate registry application in time for the regulated period (Thompson, 2019).

Facebook announced in March 2019 that it would launch an Ad Library in order to comply with the new political ad registry requirements introduced through Bill C-76. The library would catalogue political advertisements targeted at users in Canada related to the election,

candidates and other political figures, or issues of national importance as determined in collaboration with a panel of experts from across the Canadian political spectrum (Facebook Canada, 2019). It would be "viewable and searchable by anyone globally… regardless of whether or not they have a Facebook account," would "share information on [an] ad's performance, like range of spend and impressions, as well as demographics of who saw it" and would be accessible for up to seven years (Facebook Canada, 2019). Advertisers seeking to publish political ads would be required to confirm their identities and complete an "ad authorizations process [to] comply with all applicable laws," and Facebook stated it would "work to systematically detect political, election related and issue ads that target people in Canada and confirm whether the advertiser has completed the authorization process" (Facebook Canada, 2019).

Twitter's response to Bill C-76 was similar though less immediate, with the company opting to prohibit political advertisements entirely during the newly established pre-election period, so that a carefully designed registry and appropriate policies could be implemented for the official election period (Austin, 2019a). Twitter had in fact already established an Ads Transparency Center (ATC) in conjunction with its 2018 Political Campaigning Policy in the United States, and had "expanded political advertising transparency to the EU, Australia, and India ahead of critical elections" (Austin, 2019a); its efforts in preparation for the 2019 Canadian federal election built on these policies in compliance with Bill C-76 (Austin, 2019a). Under Twitter Canada's policy, organizations seeking to post political advertisements were subject to a certification process for which they had to provide information about their identity, with a specific requirement that the information could be cross-referenced with the Elections Canada Political Participant Registration Database, as well as information about who paid for and authorized each advertisement (Austin, 2019b). The Ads Transparency Center would list details about "billing information, ad spend, and impressions data per Tweet," and, like Facebook's, would display "demographic targeting data for the ads being served" (Austin, 2019b). Twitter stated that advertisements in the Transparency Center would be retained indefinitely, and would be viewable "by anyone in the world, regardless of whether or not they own a Twitter account" (Austin, 2019b).

Google updated its political content policy in May 2019 to prohibit all regulated political advertising on its platforms in Canada, for the duration of the pre-election period beginning June

30th until the conclusion of the election (Google, 2019a). During the pre-election period, the company stated it would not allow for the publication of election advertisements, including those "that feature a federal political party, leader of a federal political party, a current member of, or candidate (including nomination contestant) for member of the Parliament of Canada" (Google, 2019a). Beginning on August 27, 2019, the ban would be expanded to include issue advertisements that "feature an issue with which a federal political party, a current member of, or candidate for member of the Parliament of Canada is associated" (Google, 2019a). Google representatives claimed that it would be too difficult for the company to comply with the registry requirements set out in Bill C-76 in general, let alone in time for the election, pointing toward its distributed and automated system of real-time bidding for targeted advertising, which would pose a significant challenge for gathering all their hosted political advertisements into one central registry (Cardoso, 2019). While the company's decision was criticized by Minister Gould, Google was not the only large tech company in Canada to take such an approach, with platforms like Reddit and Microsoft's Bing, as well as a number of news media publishers, also choosing not to host political advertisements leading up to the election because of the stringent requirements imposed by Bill C-76 (Cardoso, 2019; Thompson, 2019). This response by platform companies highlights some of the limitations of the Canadian government's regulatory approach to disinformation and election integrity, as platforms are inclined to opt out of certain processes due to a lack of enforcement or incentives for them to comply.

4.3   Platform efforts to promote integrity and authenticity

While the Canada Declaration's transparency-oriented commitments had somewhat of a guideline set out for them in the form of Bill C-76, those built on the values of "integrity" and "authenticity" were less clearly laid out in Canadian election regulations, and in many cases dealt with overlapping issues. In addition to establishing new policies for political advertising based on Canadian law, Facebook, Twitter, and Google each implemented their own election integrity programs independently. Facebook Canada's Ad Library was one part of its broader "Canadian Election Integrity Initiative," which was established in 2017 in direct response to the Communications Security Establishment's *Cyber Threats to Canada's Democratic Process* report from that year, and involved a range of complementary projects related to cybersecurity, political communications, and digital literacy (Facebook, n.d.). Similarly, Google organized a variety of initiatives related to news and civic engagement, and Twitter launched a handful of

special features on its platform specifically for the 2019 Canadian election, which operated alongside the election integrity policies it had applied globally.

The actions taken by Facebook, Twitter, and Google included a mixture of internal policies and technical decisions, as well as projects developed in collaboration with external partners in government and civil society, most often in the form of training and public awareness initiatives. I have identified several key themes in the public efforts of Facebook, Twitter, and Google to prepare for the 2019 Canadian federal election. They include, broadly: cyber security and safe social media use, tools and strategies to prevent and counter disinformation, research and knowledge generation about the disinformation phenomenon, and promoting civic engagement and media literacy. Table 2 summarizes these initiatives by theme.

Table 2: Elections integrity initiatives by platform stakeholders

Theme	Company	Initiative
Ad transparency measures in response to Bill C-76	Facebook	Ad Library
	Twitter	Ads Transparency Center
	Google	N/A
Cybersecurity and safe social media use	Facebook	Canadian Facebook Cyber Threats Crisis Email Line
		Cyber Hygiene Guide for Politicians and Political Parties
		#HerVoice Facebook Safety Tips for Women Leaders
	Twitter	Technical policies to prevent bad-faith activity on the platform (hacking, fake accounts)
	Google	Training sessions on Advanced Protection Program and Project Shield
Preventing and countering disinformation	Facebook	Fact-checking program with Agence France-Presse (AFP)
		Technical policies to reduce distribution of fake news and provide users with further context and reporting mechanisms
	Twitter	Civic Integrity Policy
		Platform Manipulation Policy
	Google	Technical policies to promote quality and counteract deceptive product use
		Support for journalism through Google News Initiative and investigative tools training for Canadian newsrooms through Google News Lab leading up to election
	Facebook	Hard Questions Roundtable Series
	Twitter	Public Archive of Information Operations

Research and knowledge generation	Google	Collaboration with outside experts, funding of and partnership with relevant organizations
Promoting civic engagement and media literacy	Facebook	Civic Boost Program
		Civic engagement tools (*I Voted* graphics, etc.)
		Reality Check! media literacy program with MediaSmarts
	Twitter	Custom emojis on election-related hashtags to encourage discussion and engagement
		UNESCO *Teaching and Learning with Twitter* handbook
	Google	Collaboration with Elections Canada for knowledge panel and "Posts on Google" tools
		Canadian Vote Coalition support
		Doubt It? media literacy campaign via Canadian Journalism Foundation and NewsWise

4.3.1 Cybersecurity and safe social media use

Facebook, Twitter, and Google each stressed the importance of cybersecurity and safe social media use in their efforts to address disinformation and election integrity, typically in the form of either infrastructural technical tools or externally oriented training resources. Facebook's Canadian Election Integrity Initiative took a number of steps with this in mind, such as the establishment of the Canadian Facebook Cyber Threats Crisis Email Line, an emergency reporting system for politicians and political parties in the event of a compromised account or suspected incident of cyber interference (Facebook, n.d.; Facebook Canada, 2017). To reduce the demand for such a hotline, Facebook also published a *Cyber Hygiene Guide for Politicians and Political Parties*, which provided guidance on responsible information security practices, common cyber threat tactics, and tips for responding to offensive content ("Cyber Hygiene," n.d.). In the same spirit, Facebook Canada also partnered with advocacy group Equal Voice, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting women's involvement in Canadian politics, to produce the *#HerVoice Facebook Safety Tips for Women Leaders* guide. The resource outlined strategies for strong account security, safe and effective campaigning on Facebook, dealing with harassment and calls to violence, and tips on managing community pages using the platform's reporting mechanisms, moderation tools, and privacy controls ("#HerVoice," n.d.).

Google Canada also undertook a number of initiatives leading up to the 2019 election that focused on digital security for campaigns, including offering training sessions to "policy makers, candidates, campaign teams, and journalists" (McKay, 2019) that focused on free tools like Google's Advanced Protection Program, a digital security package intended for "users with high

visibility and sensitive information, who are at risk of targeted online attacks" (Google, n.d.), and Project Shield, a service to defend against distributed-denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks on independent journalism, human rights, and elections information and monitoring websites (Project Shield, n.d.).

Twitter's promotion of cybersecurity and social media safety in the lead up to the election was largely performed through technical and policy decisions intended to prevent bad-faith actors from engaging in activities that threaten the integrity of the platform and its discourse. In a blog post about its Canadian election initiatives, the company reiterated a number of recently updated rules it had implemented in anticipation of various elections set to take place globally, which addressed security and trust issues like the malicious use of fake accounts, attempts to circumvent account bans through the creation of alternate profiles, and the distribution of materials obtained through hacking, particularly those which contain "private information or trade secrets, or could put people in harm's way" (Austin, 2019c). The company also stated it would strengthen its response to accounts that "claim responsibility for a hack, which includes threats and public incentives to hack specific people and accounts" (Harvey & Roth, 2018). While Twitter Canada appears to have focused more of its efforts on internal processes than on external partnerships in preparation for the 2019 Canadian election, it did state that its public policy team had engaged with "more than a dozen federal government organizations in Canada to better understand security and content best practices," including "to get intelligence on potential threats to the platform" (Austin, 2019c).

4.3.2 Preventing and countering disinformation

As part of its Canadian Election Integrity Initiative, Facebook introduced a third-party fact checking program in collaboration with Agence France-Presse (AFP) in June 2018, through which fact-checkers certified by the International Fact-Checking Network would work to review and rate the accuracy of news stories, photos, and videos in English and French on Facebook (Facebook, n.d.). The program primarily addressed disinformation in the form of "false news," which the platform also sought to address through a number of policies designed to reduce its distribution, provide further context about news stories, and offer users tools to identify and report misleading and harmful content ("How is Facebook addressing false news," n.d.).

Twitter highlighted its global efforts to ensure election integrity through strengthened rules against "deliberate attempts to mislead voters," with measures explicitly designed to prevent attempts to manipulate or interfere with election processes implemented under its "Civic Integrity Policy" (Austin, 2019c). The policy was developed to address three key forms of manipulative behaviour and content: "misleading information about how to participate in an election or other civic process," such as attempts to mislead users about voting procedures, times, or eligibility requirements; "suppression and intimidation," such as attempts to intimidate or dissuade users from participating in an election or other civic process, and activities presenting a "false or misleading affiliation" to a "candidate, elected official, political party, electoral authority, or government entity" ("Civic integrity policy," 2020). In addition to its Civic Integrity Policy, the company also highlighted its Platform Manipulation Policy, describing actions it had taken concerning features of its platform that were deemed more likely to be targeted by those seeking to spread disinformation, such as "communal spaces" like search, hashtags, and trending topics (Austin, 2019c).

Google's approach involved a combination of global technical and policy efforts and educational outreach initiatives, including "product quality improvements and support [for] newsrooms around the world with training and tools to better verify digital stories" (McKay, 2019). Describing their plans for the 2019 Canadian election, the company highlighted a number of its previously established policies aimed at preventing disinformation, like promoting quality in its products' ranking systems, counteracting deceptive product use, and offering users additional perspectives and context through mechanisms to access further information, provide feedback, or view advertising transparency data (Google, 2019a, p. 3-4). The company also stressed the importance of supporting quality journalism in the age of digital media, noting its Google News Initiative had committed $300 million (USD) over three years "to elevate and strengthen quality journalism, evolve business models to drive sustainable growth, and empower news organizations through technological innovation" more broadly (Google, 2019a, p. 6). In the lead up to the 2019 Canadian federal election, the company offered workshops through its Google News Lab team to train Canadian journalists on tools to support their reporting, such as the use of Google Trends to examine common searches related to the election or other events (McKay, 2019).

4.3.3 Research and knowledge generation about disinformation

Another key theme in the platforms' preparations for Canada's 2019 election was the promotion of research and knowledge generation about disinformation and democracy. On its Canadian Election Integrity Initiative website, Facebook Canada highlighted its "Hard Questions Roundtable Series," a set of in-person and live-streamed events in which representatives from Facebook engaged in discussions with stakeholders in civil society and research, as well as members of the general public, on issues of significance to Canada's information ecosystem, such as privacy, misinformation, governing speech on social media, and issues surrounding Canadian content and Indigenous culture in the digital realm ("Hard Questions," n.d.).

Twitter highlighted its Public Archive of Information Operations, which it established in October 2018 to share data and enable research on "potential state-backed information operations" detected on its platform (Austin, 2019c). The archive was developed to both promote transparency on Twitter and enhance users' understanding of disinformation, and as of 2018 consisted of "more than 10 million Tweets and more than 2 million images, GIFs, videos, and Periscope broadcasts" from accounts found to have engaged in coordinated activity (Gadde & Roth, 2018). According to Twitter Canada, the database was made public and searchable in order to allow "members of the public, governments, and researchers [to] investigate, learn, and build media literacy capacities for the future" (Austin, 2019c).

Google described its efforts to collaborate with "outside experts" in order to achieve a stronger understanding of online disinformation and the circumstances enabling it (Google, 2019a, p. 5). By funding and partnering with organizations in civil society, journalism, fact-checking, and academia, the company established efforts to predict and prepare for future risks and developments, and suggested that such efforts would be significant beyond the specific context of elections and malicious actors (Google, 2019a, p. 3).

4.3.4 Promoting democratic engagement and strengthening media literacy

Finally, the elections integrity initiatives produced by Facebook, Twitter, and Google all emphasized the importance of both democratic and media literacy, with each platform collaborating with election authorities and civil society organizations to promote the election, encourage engagement with Canada's democratic institutions, and enhance users' digital savvy.

Part of its broader election integrity initiative, Facebook Canada's Civic Boost program entailed a tour of events across the country to promote civic engagement, highlight the company's 2019 election integrity efforts, and provide training to small business owners, political candidates, and media publishers on optimizing their Facebook and Instagram presence ("Civic Boost," n.d.). The company also launched a package of "civic engagement tools" such as voter registration and election day reminders, which appeared in users' News Feeds and linked to the Elections Canada website, and *I Voted* graphics that directed viewers toward polling information ("Civic engagement tools," n.d.). Finally, Facebook's Canadian Election Integrity Initiative also entailed the launch of a partnership with MediaSmarts, a Canadian media literacy education non-profit. The two organizations collaborated to develop a two-year public awareness campaign called *Reality Check!,* which aimed to educate Canadians on disinformation and strategies to identify it through a "series of videos, tip sheets and activities" ("Digital Literacy," n.d.). Facebook's Help Center also included materials developed in collaboration with MediaSmarts aimed at helping users identify and avoid misleading material and false information ("Tips to spot false news," n.d.).

In the lead up to the 2019 Canadian federal election, Twitter Canada introduced features designed to encourage discussion and democratic participation on its platform, such as custom emojis that appeared on tweets using specific election-related hashtags, like #elxn43 and #cdnpoli (Austin, 2019c). While the company did not appear to have developed any public media literacy efforts directly related to Canada's 2019 election, it did announce a partnership with UNESCO in October 2019 to publish a media literacy education handbook called *Teaching and Learning with Twitter,* which, according to the company's Public Policy team, was developed to "directly complement [Twitter's] policy development process on misinformation" (Costello, 2019).

In anticipation of the 2019 vote, Google Canada engaged with Elections Canada to ensure accurate and reliable information would be easily accessible during the election period, including through the use of Google's "knowledge panel" tool, which provided users with a quick overview of facts about candidates and other relevant issues; additionally, Elections Canada employed the platform's "Posts on Google" tool to "communicate directly with voters from Search by sharing videos, infographics and images about the 2019 election" (McKay, 2019). To promote democratic engagement more broadly, Google Canada also supported Canadian non-

profit Apathy is Boring in their Canadian Vote Coalition initiative, which was executed in partnership with Ryerson University's Democratic Engagement Exchange program in an attempt to "collectively engage 1 million new voters in the 2019 federal election" (McKay, 2019). The company also collaborated with the Canadian Journalism Foundation, an organization dedicated to promoting quality in Canadian journalism, to launch a media literacy program called NewsWise, which delivered a national media literacy campaign called *Doubt It?* (McKay, 2019).

4.4 Conclusion

Facebook, Twitter, and Google collectively implemented policies and produced programming that confronted issues like cybersecurity, privacy and data protection, political campaigns and social media integrity, digital and media literacy, and civic engagement. In their efforts to counter disinformation in Canada, they appear to have recognized the need for structural solutions based on both more immediate technical adjustments and more high-level, external endeavours concerning the broader media ecosystems in which their platforms operate. However, their efforts to promote cybersecurity, trust, and safety on their platforms most often prioritized the role of individual users in the prevention of social media misuse. The scope of their media literacy-related programming was ultimately fairly narrow, focusing primarily on demonstrating to users how to fact-check and avoid being duped by "fake news" articles, with less emphasis on other potentially more surreptitious methods of manipulation. With minimal acknowledgement of their own infrastructures' role in the broader ecosystem of online polarization and disinformation, most of these platforms' election related programming and public awareness initiatives prioritized engagement with the voting process, with less concern for the nitty-gritty of disinformation as a threat to democratic integrity. Many of their efforts in this realm were conducted in conjunction with partner organizations, which, while valuable in terms of engaging with outside perspectives, might also function to ensure these platform companies can offer a bare minimum of effort and funding while maintaining the appearance of concern. Because these platforms' business models are intertwined with the way disinformation proliferates, their full and continuing adoption of the commitments made in the Canada Declaration on Electoral Integrity Online is likely to require the introduction of stronger compliance measures by Canadian regulators.

Chapter 5:
Awareness, literacy, and participation: Civil society initiatives to counter disinformation

5   Introduction

The election integrity initiatives of Canada's major platform companies occasionally involved participation from Canadian civil society organizations, highlighting the significance of cross-sector co-operation in the fight against disinformation, and the role of grassroots advocacy groups in connecting projects to local communities. This chapter examines how civil society and research organizations made use of the funding they received through the Government of Canada's Digital Citizen Initiative, which was established as part of its Plan to Safeguard Canada's 2019 Election. The program, which allocated funding toward digital and media literacy initiatives to combat online disinformation, distributed $7 million to a variety of Canadian non-profit organizations for projects ranging from training sessions and workshops to digital resources and voter outreach. The organizations that received funding under the initiative were largely non-profits and educational groups that worked in six main focus areas: digital and media literacy, journalism and media industry advocacy, democracy and civic engagement, culture and heritage, youth leadership and skills development, and academic institutions. I have identified four key themes present in the projects produced by these organizations: general democratic and civic literacy, digital skills and media literacy, programs for community information leaders, and research-oriented projects. Table 3 summarizes these organizational projects. Throughout this chapter, I provide brief descriptions of each project under the Digital Citizen Initiative as they fall under these four categories, in order to demonstrate how I came to identify these themes, as well as to highlight each project's audience of focus and key topics explored; by offering these details, I am able to consider how the approaches of these various projects might reflect a broader understanding of disinformation in the Canadian context, and to offer some analysis on the role played by civil society within the election integrity landscape – as either a supplement or alternative to government and industry efforts.

Table 3: Civil society projects funded through the Digital Citizen Initiative

Theme	Organization	Project(s)
Digital democracy, civic literacy	Apathy is Boring	Canadian Vote Coalition, *Keep it Real* campaign, Democracy Dictionary resource
	Democratic Engagement Exchange	Canadian Vote Coalition, community training events
	Encounters with Canada	Digital democracy modules throughout 2019-2020
	Global Vision	Junior Team Canada Digital Citizenship Ambassador Program
Media literacy and fact-checking	MediaSmarts	*Break the Fake* campaign
	Apathy is Boring	Creative Citizen Project
	News Media Canada	*SPOT Fake News Online* campaign
	Journalists for Human Rights	News literacy and disinformation resources for public
	Institute for Canadian Citizenship	Citizen Resilience Project
	Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec (FPJQ)	*#30sec to check it out* campaign
	Agence Science-Presse	Rumour Detector resource
	Vubble Inc.	Credibility Meter tool
Training for community information leaders: the role of educators and journalists in countering disinformation	Agence Science-Presse	Teaching guides and newsletter for media education stakeholders
	CIVIX	Democracy Bootcamps
	Historica Canada	*Critical Digital Literacy Education Guide*
	Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada	*Let's Talk Digital* activity guide
	Magazines Canada	Project to identify and combat disinformation and promote news industry trustworthiness
	Journalists for Human Rights	Resources and workshops to help reporters understand and expose disinformation
	New Canadian Media	Anti-disinformation training for journalists, reader survey on journalism credibility
Research-oriented initiatives	Samara Centre for Democracy	*Field Guide to Online Political Conversations* study
	Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue at Simon Fraser University	Strengthening Canadian Democracy national survey and reports: *Support for Democracy and the Appeal of Populism, Social and Digital Disinformation,* and *Trust, Participation, and Belonging*
	McGill University and the University of Ottawa	Digital Ecosystem Research Challenge

5.1   Digital democracy, civic literacy

Many of the projects that received funding under the Digital Citizen Initiative acknowledged that to defend election integrity it is important that citizens possess both a strong understanding of how Canada's democracy and public institutions function, and a level of enthusiasm and investment in its civic processes. A number of projects emerging from the initiative thus focused on promoting civic literacy and political engagement, delivering programs and training on topics like voting and Canada's parliamentary system, with an additional view to the unique role of online platforms in contemporary Canadian democracy. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the civic engagement group Apathy is Boring partnered with Ryerson University's Democratic Engagement Exchange to run the Canadian Vote Coalition, a project to engage new voters and educate youth on the electoral process; the group also published a series of resources, including a "Democracy Dictionary," that provided information on elections and other civic processes, and established a "youth-led civic literacy campaign" called *Keep it Real* to raise awareness about disinformation and "[encourage] informed action in the 2019 Federal Election," (Democratic Institutions, 2019d). Their collaborators at the Democratic Engagement Exchange also launched a series of events in partnership with community organizations across Canada, which aimed to provide underrepresented groups with training on the voting process and opportunities to discuss political issues (Democratic Institutions, 2019d; Democratic Engagement Exchange [DEE], n.d.).

On a somewhat smaller, more targeted scale, Encounters with Canada, a civic leadership youth forum run by Canadian cultural non-profit Historica Canada, received funding to produce a module on "digital democracy" as part of an event series throughout 2019 and 2020, in order to educate youth on disinformation and "how to be a responsible digital citizen" (Democratic Institutions, 2019d; Encounters with Canada, n.d.). Similarly, Global Vision, a Canadian non-profit that also runs youth-oriented leadership programming, established the Digital Citizenship Ambassador Program as part of its Junior Team Canada initiative, which planned to engage a select group of youth in a "four-day summit, online forums and a video challenge…[providing] them with the opportunity to gain skills and…engage in society, politics and government on digital platforms" (Democratic Institutions, 2019d).

5.2   Media literacy and fact-checking

The Digital Citizen Initiative also provided funding for projects that more directly addressed the challenge of disinformation through media literacy education, often with a focus on digital news, social media platforms, and online fact-checking. In addition to their previously mentioned *Reality Check!* program with Facebook Canada, MediaSmarts launched a "multi-pronged" initiative called *Break the Fake* to educate Canadians on the importance of critical media consumption and the implications of online disinformation; the project consisted of an "extensive social media campaign," online learning materials, and public awareness programming that culminated during the annual Media Literacy Week in October 2019 (Democratic Institutions, 2019d). In addition to their Canadian Vote Coalition initiative, Apathy is Boring also launched the Creative Citizen Project, which produced digital and media literacy resources about disinformation, social media algorithms, and source-checking tips and tools (Democratic Institutions, 2019d; Apathy is Boring, n.d.).

News Media Canada, an association for the Canadian news and journalism industry, launched a public media literacy campaign called "SPOT Fake News Online," which prompted audiences to "critically assess digital media and identify misleading or defamatory disinformation" (Democratic Institutions, 2019d) by asking four key questions (based on the SPOT acronym) about the Source, Perspective, Other sources' reports, and Timeliness of news stories (Democratic Institutions, 2019d; News Media Canada [NMC], n.d.) The media development organization Journalists for Human Rights compiled news literacy resources for the general public, which included tips on how to verify information online and what to do when friends and peers share disinformation on social media (Democratic Institutions, 2019d; Journalists for Human Rights [JHR], n.d.).

With a significant audience of immigrant Canadians, the Institute for Canadian Citizenship launched the Citizen Resilience Project, an online resource "developed through research, national polling, and consultations with new Canadian citizens" that aimed to "empower Canadians to recognize the threats of false information, to fight against it as informed citizens, and to engage in inclusive, productive discourse" (Institute for Canadian Citizenship [ICC], n.d.; Democratic Institutions, 2019d).

For French Canadians, the Fédération professionnelle des journalistes du Québec (FPJQ) launched its "#30sec to check it out" campaign, a public awareness initiative delivered through public campaigning and outreach in schools, which included workshops presented by journalists, partnerships with libraries, and the publication of materials providing guidance on verifying information online and understanding the disinformation phenomenon (Democratic Institutions, 2019d).

The Digital Citizen Initiative also provided funding for the development of tools to help media consumers verify the credibility of materials they encounter online. The Agence Science-Presse "rumour detector" was designed as a fact-checking tool to help either debunk or verify widely circulating news stories, and explain where they emerged from (Democratic Institutions, 2019d; Agence Science-Presse [ASP], n.d.). With a focus on video, Vubble Inc. received funding for its Credibility Meter, a video assessment tool allowing users to view how the "sources, data use, bias, presentation, and author credibility" of a collection of French and English public service videos have been rated by journalists (Democratic Institutions 2019d).

5.3 Training for community information leaders: the role of educators and journalists in countering disinformation

In addition to their rumour detector resource, Agence Science-Presse developed "teaching guides for schools and … a newsletter to encourage networking among key Canadian media education and information education stakeholders" (Democratic Institutions, 2019d). Other media and cultural organizations similarly developed programming aimed at providing stakeholders such as teachers, civil society leaders, and journalists with training on disinformation and election integrity, so that they could more effectively deliver civic and media literacy education to their networks, communities, and classrooms. CIVIX, a non-partisan civic education charity, hosted a series of "Democracy Bootcamps" to help educators more confidently deliver the organization's civic and media literacy lesson plans and e-learning activities, and also conducted "a research project assessing the impact of civic and media literacy tools in the classroom" (Democratic Institutions, 2019d).

The culture and heritage organization Historica Canada produced a *Critical Digital Literacy Education Guide* for teachers, which took a historical approach to understanding disinformation by using examples of propaganda campaigns from past eras to examine common

tactics of manipulation and the differences made by contemporary internet technologies (Democratic Institutions, 2019d; Historica Canada, n.d.). The Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada, in partnership with the Samara Centre for Democracy, developed the *Let's Talk Digital* activity guide to engage youth in conversations about issues like algorithms, privacy, political targeting and polarization, attention and emotions online, and disinformation, in order to help club leaders better promote critical information consumption among their youth participants (Democratic Institutions, 2019d; Su et al., n.d.).

Many initiatives demonstrated the importance of both equipping Canada's media industry to better understand and address disinformation, and of enhancing public trust in the institution of journalism as a means of confronting the phenomenon in the long term. The industry association Magazines Canada undertook a project to "identify successful tools and strategies, both domestic and international, that combat the 'fake news' phenomenon, thereby equipping the industry to promote its trustworthiness to audiences" (Democratic Institutions, 2019d). In addition to their resources for the general public, Journalists for Human Rights developed resources and a workshop for reporters to better understand, investigate, and expose mis- and disinformation, (Democratic Institutions, 2019d; JHR, n.d.). Finally, New Canadian Media, a non-profit collective dedicated to promoting journalism that engages Canada's immigrant communities, offered "anti-disinformation training for journalists" and conducted a "targeted reader survey on journalism credibility" with the goal of "help[ing] mitigate the impacts of disinformation within Canada's diverse immigrant communities" (Democratic Institutions, 2019d).

5.4   Research-oriented initiatives

The Digital Citizen Initiative also provided funding to think tanks and academic institutions for research-related projects concerning disinformation and election integrity that sought to integrate the perspectives of Canadian policymakers, journalists, and the public. The Samara Centre for Democracy conducted a study of Canadians' views about online political conversations, surveying frequent social media users in July 2019 to develop the *Field Guide to Online Political Conversations* report, which outlined citizens' concerns about social media discourse and presented "seven techniques for better political conversations online" (Samara Centre for Democracy [SCD], 2019; Democratic Institutions, 2019d).

The Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue at Simon Fraser University conducted a study as part of its Strengthening Canadian Democracy project, which consisted of a national survey of randomly selected Canadians in July 2019 to collect a representative sample of citizens' opinions about the state of Canadian democracy (Morris J. Wosk Centre, 2019). The study resulted in three reports: "Support for Democracy and the Appeal of Populism," "Social and Digital Disinformation," and "Trust, Participation, and Belonging" (Morris J. Wosk Centre, 2019).

Finally, the project to receive the largest amount of funding was the Digital Ecosystem Research Challenge, launched jointly by McGill University and the University of Ottawa (Democratic Institutions, 2019d). The initiative involved a national competition to "identify and fund research projects, tool development, and citizen-led experiments to better understand the information ecosystem in the lead up to and during the 2019 federal election" (Democratic Institutions, 2019d). The project ultimately provided funding for eighteen different studies, exploring a range of themes such as personal data and political advertising, online harassment and hate speech, public opinion and political participation, the flow of mis- and disinformation, and issue framing and agenda setting in the media and online (Dubois & Owen, 2020); some of the findings that emerged from this project are discussed in Chapter 7.

5.5 Conclusion

The civil society organizations that received support from the Government of Canada to produce media and civic literacy programs in anticipation of the 2019 federal election spanned a range of focus areas and target audiences. The initiatives described above were built around key strategies for addressing the threat of disinformation among Canadians, which included promoting media literacy and digital skills among citizens, implementing training on digital and democratic issues for community information leaders, and conducting research into nationally relevant political and media issues. Many initiatives placed a strong focus on civic literacy and democratic engagement, which has inherently come to require an understanding of how politics are performed in the digital realm, including by learning to navigate through online mis- and disinformation. While many initiatives combined public awareness campaigns with classroom-oriented activities and resources, a number of the organizations that received funding under the Digital Citizen Initiative opted to direct their programs toward those in the position to share

information with wider audiences, such as educators and journalists, in order to emphasize and strengthen their role in addressing disinformation.

These are promising developments that could aid in the creation of more effective media and civic literacy programming with specific contexts and audiences in mind. Ultimately, however, while the projects here spanned a fairly broad range of audiences and subjects, there is more to be done with regard to how different demographics are prioritized and targeted, as well as the level of nuance with which disinformation is framed and discussed across programs. It is of course also important to consider the limitations that some civil society organizations might have faced in expressing certain ideas when a portion of their funding has also come from big platform companies like Facebook and Google. This suggests that more public funding is likely needed for media literacy and other critical community-based programming, especially considering that the Digital Citizen Initiative only provided resources to a select group of organizations; there are likely numerous others operating in Canada whose areas of focus and expertise could be valuable in addressing disinformation and its underlying social factors. With that said, too much shirking of this responsibility onto civil society organizations without support for the engagement of scholars and policymakers with specific expertise in disinformation and Canada's distinct media ecosystem is also unlikely to be fully effective, as much of the onus is placed on the public to figure these complex issues out for themselves. One positive development in this area is the government's contribution of funding to The Digital Democracy Project, an initiative led jointly by Canada's Public Policy Forum think tank and McGill University's Max Bell School of Public Policy; the project, which seeks to address online hate speech and disinformation through media training initiatives, research and analysis, and policy development, did not receive funding under the Digital Citizen Initiative, but did share information with the abovementioned Digital Ecosystem Research Challenge (Digital Democracy Project, 2020; Dubois & Owen, 2020, p. 6). Its work, which is guided by scholars in the field of media, information, and political communication, offers valuable insights into the state of Canada's contemporary media ecosystem, and informs some of my methodology and analysis in the following chapters.

Chapter 6:
Election integrity in Canadian mainstream media coverage

6   Introduction

So far, I have outlined a number of initiatives established by government, industry, and civil society stakeholders in Canada that aimed to address the challenge of online disinformation and support the integrity of the 2019 federal election. The value of looking at these initiatives will be more fully realized, however, by considering how relevant they turned out to be in practice. As such, I now turn to an examination of media coverage from 10 mainstream Canadian publications, which was collected over an 80-day period spanning the immediate lead-up to and aftermath of the election on October 21st, 2019. By analyzing roughly 250 articles from the online homes of CBC, CityNews, CTV News, Global News*, the Globe and Mail,* the Huffington Post*, the National Post, the Toronto Star, the Toronto Sun,* and Vice, I found that the coverage of Canadian election integrity by these publications was broadly concerned with the following issues: Bill C-76, also known as the *Elections Modernization Act*; political parties, data privacy, and campaign advertising; populism and polarization in Canada; disinformation and political influence campaigns; and issues of media literacy and credibility. Some of the key figures often mentioned were: the six most popular Canadian federal political parties (the Liberal Party, Conservative Party, New Democratic Party, Green Party, Bloc Quebecois, and People's Party), administrative authorities like Elections Canada, major online platform companies, third party lobby groups, emerging political movements, media outlets, and technology scholars and critics. Below, I map out these themes and enumerate the sources. Appendix C contains a comprehensive list of my collected media coverage and the key themes and actors I was able to identify through qualitative analysis.

6.1 Pre-election media coverage

6.1.1 Bill C-76 and platform regulation

The passing of Bill C-76 caused a degree of commotion among political actors, advertisers, publishers, and online platforms. Media coverage during the election period frequently referred to the new law, raising questions about its implications for political speech, election security, and the regulation of major technology companies. The political advertising registries required by the law ultimately enabled reporters and commentators to examine things like how much money Canada's political parties were spending on Facebook and Twitter ads (Cardoso, 2019b; Paas-Lang, 2019a; D'Alimonte, 2019b). Advocacy groups opted to direct more spending toward "issues advertising" during the pre-writ period, during which time Bill C-76 only mandated that expenses related to explicitly partisan advertising be reported to Elections Canada; this meant that third parties executing campaigns about politically contested topics in the period immediately before the writ drop were not required to report those particular expenses or donor contributions (Paas-Lang, 2019c; Bryden, 2019b). To that end, debate about the impact of the law also came up regularly: on one hand, Bill C-76 was subject to a charter challenge by the Canadian Constitution Foundation, who claimed that its provision about publishing false statements placed unconstitutional limitations on Canadians' right to freedom of expression and would ultimately serve to chill political speech (Furey, 2019; Breakenridge, 2019; Dyer, 2019); on the other hand, critics questioned the law's effectiveness in addressing political advertisements on message-based platforms like WeChat, a popular application among Canada's Chinese immigrant population (Bogart, 2019c; Thompson, 2019b). Some suggested that Bill C-76 failed to account for other forms of political manipulation on social media, as in the case of a Buffalo, New York-based website that was found to be publishing blatantly false news stories about Canadian politicians (Oved, Lytvynenko, & Silverman, 2019). Bill C-76 itself was also the subject of misinformation, with claims circulating on social media that the new regulations would permit "foreign votes" (Bogart, 2019b).

6.1.2 Political parties: privacy, campaign data use, and advertising

In addition to the discourse surrounding platform regulation that accompanied Bill C-76, another frequently mentioned issue was the nature of political parties' campaign strategies and advertisements. Parties' use of data to target voters, as well as the privacy implications of the

digital tools used to deliver their campaigns, were frequently discussed ("Political parties and what they know," 2019; D'Alimonte, 2019a; Cardoso & Curry, 2019; Paas-Lang, 2019b; Ling, 2019). With Bill C-76 imposing rules on federal political parties to develop official privacy policies, media coverage also included discussions of parties' data protection practices, and the merits of subjecting them to the *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act* (Fionda, 2019; Khan, 2019; Pringle, 2019).

Along with increased attention to issues of advertising transparency, reporters looked into the sources of funding behind political and third-party advertisements placed on social media, highlighting the financial power of industry lobbyists and unions (Daflos, 2019b; Doolittle & McArthur, 2019). Public discourse surrounding disinformation and election integrity led to increased scrutiny of campaign advertisements that were deemed to be misleading: in one instance, the Green Party published an advertisement featuring a photo of leader Elizabeth May that had been altered to add a reusable metal straw to a disposable cup (Slaughter, 2019a; Forrest & Thomson, 2019; Lamoureux, 2019b); in another, the Conservative Party faced criticism over an advertisement that used an altered image of a Liberal Party policy document, as well as a Chinese-language Facebook ad that falsely claimed the Liberal Party planned to legalize hard drugs (Boutilier, 2019; Xu & Cardoso, 2019; Slaughter, 2019b). Political advertisements were also scrutinized for the use of inflammatory language and polarizing campaign tactics, such as by exploiting racial, cultural, and economic tensions, or making unfounded attempts to link opposition candidates to controversial political movements (Campion-Smith, 2019; Friesen, 2019; Harris, 2019b; Maloney, 2019; Quenneville, 2019; Bellemare, 2019).

6.1.3 Populism, polarization, and questionable political affiliations

While there may have been dubious attempts by politicians to link rival candidates to fringe political groups for campaign purposes, a significant amount of reporting emerged during the election period that investigated more well-founded claims of far-right, conspiracy, and white supremacist affiliations within the ranks of some parties. When the People's Party of Canada, a newly established right-wing populist party, gained enough support to be allowed to join the 2019 federal leaders' debates, controversy swirled around leader Maxime Bernier's participation; NDP leader Jagmeet Singh called for Bernier's exclusion, citing the party's "ideology of hate" and promotion of harmful conspiracy theories (Zimonjic, 2019; Zhou, 2019a). Coverage of the

party's affiliations included reports on a candidate active in the far-right online conspiracy movement QAnon, a so-called security employee of Bernier with ties to the white supremacist Canadian Nationalist Party (CNP), and revelations of founding members having ties to anti-immigration and hate groups like PEGIDA Canada and the Soldiers of Odin (Lamoureux, 2019a; Green, 2019b; Russell & Bell, 2019).

The People's Party was not the only one to be subject to background checks, however. A significant amount of media coverage during the campaign focused on exposures of discriminatory actions and social media posts by various candidates and party leaders, which contributed to the increasingly polarizing and inflammatory campaign environment. The People's Party, Green Party, Conservative Party, and Bloc Québécois were all found to be running candidates who had made Islamophobic social media posts in the past ("People's Party won't take action," 2019; Harris, 2019a; "Winnipeg Conservative candidate steps down," 2019; MacFarlane, 2019), and the Conservatives also faced questions over candidates with ties to far-right political figures and online conspiracy theories (Lum, 2019; Aiello & McGregor, 2019). One of the most pivotal moments during the campaign came when past images surfaced of Liberal leader Justin Trudeau in blackface and brownface, which generated charges of racism and hypocrisy among supporters and opponents (Maloney & Lum, 2019; Puzic, 2019). These instances highlighted the significant role of social media in Canadian electoral processes, especially as the incriminating images of Trudeau were adopted online to create political memes.

6.1.4 Memes, bots, and fake news: political disinformation during the campaign

In addition to the legislation, advertising, and candidate scandals that pervaded public discussions of election integrity, Canadian media also, predictably, paid a great deal of attention to the issue of online disinformation. Some reporting on the matter was dedicated to helping readers understand and recognize the phenomenon (Rogers, 2019a; Jackson, 2019; Leung, 2019), while some focused more on discussing the potential level of threat it posed to the election, highlighting predicted targets of interference and empirical research on its influence on conversations online (Daflos, 2019a; "Canada having 'largely clean' election," 2019). The role of platform companies in perpetuating and preventing disinformation was common in Canadian media discourse (Robins-Early, 2019; Yates, Rocha, & Bellemare, 2019), and reporters investigated the role of political memes and bots in amplifying certain ideas and sentiments

among Canadian social media users (Cousins, 2019; Green, 2019a; Bogart, 2019a; Bogart, 2019d). Actual examples of disinformation circulating online were also investigated, such as one story claiming that Canada's Finance Minister and RCMP Commissioner were cousins by marriage (Lilley, 2019), one that Canada was implementing a ban on protests and demonstrations by Christians (Rogers, 2019b), one suggesting Justin Trudeau planned to implement Sharia law (Bogart, 2019e), and one that claimed the use of pencils at polling stations could result in voters' ballots being intentionally spoiled (Burke, 2019).

6.1.5 Media literacy and credibility

Discussions of disinformation and political polarization inevitably led to questions about the role and credibility of more ideologically-driven media outlets in the Canadian news ecosystem. Two media organizations with openly right-wing viewpoints, Rebel Media and the True North Centre for Public Policy, were initially denied media accreditation and access to the federal leaders' debates on the basis that they engaged in partisan advocacy; the decision was eventually overturned, and controversy ensued when Bloc Quebecois leader Yves-Francois Blanchet refused to answer questions from *Rebel News* following a subsequent debate (Loriggio, 2019; Woods, 2019a). Beyond news outlets with overt political leanings, discussions about the need for credible, trustworthy reporting from mainstream publications also intensified as stakeholders acknowledged the relationship between journalistic standards and the ability of mis- and disinformation to permeate the media ecosystem (English, 2019).

Issues of media credibility and partisan agendas, along with concerns about the impact of disinformation on election integrity, also inspired coverage of media literacy initiatives that were delivered throughout the campaign period, such as the Canadian Journalism Foundation's *Doubt It?* campaign (Turvey, 2019; Farooqui, 2019), and MediaSmarts' "House Hippo 2.0" fact-checking advertisement (Woods, 2019b). A number of news outlets themselves also sought to promote digital and media literacy, as in the case of the CTV News Election Truth Tracker, and CBC's Facebook Messenger "chatbot," a tool allowing users to learn about trustworthy sources, manipulated images, and how to avoid spreading disinformation ("CBC's chat bot helps you spot 'fake news'," 2019).

Table 4: Number of pre-election articles collected per outlet by primary theme

Publication	Bill C-76 and platform regulation	Political and third parties: privacy, campaign data use, and advertising	Populism, polarization, and questionable political affiliations	Memes, bots, and fake news: political disinfo during the campaign	Media literacy and credibility	Other/ general election integrity and technology coverage
CBC News	5	8	21	9	3	4
CityNews		2	1	1		
CTV News	6	11	4	15	1	
Global News	3	8	2	6		1
The Globe and Mail	3	7	6	1	3	2
Huffington Post		3	9	4	2	
The National Post		5	2	2	2	2
The Toronto Star	7	3	6	3	6	
The Toronto Sun	3		1	1	1	
Vice		2	5			
Total per theme:	**27**	**49**	**57**	**42**	**18**	**9**
Total pre-election articles collected:						**202**

6.2   Post-election media coverage

After polling day, Canadian media coverage of the election inevitably looked back on how the parties' campaigns played out and what may have contributed to the Liberal Party's victory (Delacourt, 2019), despite them having "lost the meme war" (Peng, 2019) as well as every seat in Alberta and Saskatchewan (Kornik, 2019). Outlets published analyses of the degree to which online disinformation may have influenced the results, with the broad consensus among Canadian researchers being that despite some last-minute Twitter troll activity by American-linked account networks (Rocha, 2019a), as well as robocalls instructing voters to head to the polls on the wrong day (Bellemare & Rogers, 2019), concerns over election interference were largely overblown (Rocha, 2019b).

An interesting development throughout this period, however, was the emergence of #Wexit, an Alberta-based separatist movement that gained traction after Election Day, when the often quoted "western alienation" of Canada's western provinces was foregrounded as the region voted almost entirely Conservative but still ended up with a Liberal Prime Minister (Kornik, 2019). While some of this social media traction was later found to have been boosted by bots and

content aggregators (Romero, 2019), concerns persisted over the movement's founders having histories of promoting far-right conspiracy theories and affiliations with white supremacist groups, and the potential for its growing support base to be pushed toward violent ideologies (Zhou, 2019b; Mosleh, 2019). Media coverage of Wexit as a potential breeding ground for far-right ideas reflected a broader theme in the discourse surrounding the 2019 election, which concerned the trend of increased polarization and hyperpartisanship among Canadians, and the particular role of online platforms in enabling disinformation and hate speech to thrive: for example, *Global News* reported on a private, now shuttered Facebook group called "Justin Trudeau Must Be Stopped," which contained numerous posts threatening violence and espousing blatantly anti-Muslim sentiments (Cain & Semple, 2019). Both during and after the 2019 election period, Canadian news outlets covered the potential real-world repercussions of online extremism, highlighting such instances as attempted intimidation at the polls by hate group members, threats of violence on lawn signs and hate graffiti on campaign offices, and an RCMP threat report suggesting that online hate targeting immigrants and political leaders could lead to offline violence, a concern that was validated by reports of NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh being confronted by a man telling him to remove his turban, and that Justin Trudeau had worn a bullet-proof vest at a campaign rally following a security threat (MacLeod, 2019; Raney, 2019; Tunney & Burke, 2019; Mahe, 2019).

Table 5: Number of post-election articles collected per outlet by primary theme

Publication	Post-election debrief (impact of campaigns, memes, disinformation, Bill C-76)	#Wexit, polarization, violence, and the far right	Media ecosystem	Other/general election integrity and technology coverage
CBC News	6	10	1	4
CityNews				2
CTV News	1	5		1
Global News	1	6	1	2
The Globe and Mail	1	2	1	3
Huffington Post		3		
The National Post	4	2	1	1
The Toronto Star	5	5		
The Toronto Sun	1	1		
Vice	1	1		
Total per theme:	**20**	**35**	**4**	**13**
Total post-election articles collected:				**72**

6.3   Conclusion

In the 40 days prior to the 2019 federal election, Canadian mainstream media outlets produced coverage of a range of issues related to technology regulations, campaign scandals and strategies, and the threat of disinformation to democratic integrity. Stories often discussed criticisms of the government's recently implemented *Elections Modernization Act*, and highlighted a need for further strategies to address political polarization among Canadians, including considerations for how it plays out online and off, among both citizens and candidates, and its representation within the broader Canadian media ecosystem. In the 40 days following the election, media coverage appears to suggest that foreign interference on Canadian social media was not as prevalent as it was portrayed to be, but that there remains a significant cause for concern regarding the responsibilities of platform companies, the nation-wide rise of right-wing populism and extremism, and the combined effects of these elements on Canadians' information ecosystem.

The elections integrity coverage from the evaluated period supports the importance of considering the potential role of domestic political actors in driving disinformation and social media manipulation in Canada, particularly going forward. The categories of Canadian domestic actors proposed in my research questions – political parties, third party campaigners, fringe political groups, hyperpartisan media outlets, and average citizens – are all represented in the media coverage from this period. In particular, media coverage concerned with political advertising and campaign data use highlights the role of political parties and third party groups in spreading polarizing rhetoric and misinformation, as well as their potential use of digital campaign tactics that are not definitively addressed in election regulations. Coverage on populism, #Wexit, and candidate affiliations with the far-right highlights the growing influence of once-fringe political movements in Canada, in part due to the mechanisms of both mainstream and alternative social media platforms. The role of hyperpartisan media outlets within the Canadian disinformation ecosystem is demonstrated in media coverage concerned with issues of media literacy and credibility. Average citizens, as both producers and consumers of information online, are present throughout both the pre- and post-election media coverage. In the next chapter, I will revisit the government, industry, and civil society initiatives I have outlined so far, and assess to what degree they consider the relevance of these domestic political actors.

Chapter 7:
Disinformation, domestic actors, and democracy: Final analysis and research question response

The election on October 21st, 2019 was notable for being Canada's first federal election during which concerns about the impact of online disinformation had a significant presence in public discourse surrounding the vote. The government regulations, industry policies, civil society projects, and media coverage that emerged surrounding the event offer insights into the predominant attitudes held by Canadian technology and civic stakeholders regarding the relationship between online platforms and election integrity. In the previous chapters, I highlighted efforts from across these sectors to prepare for the threat of disinformation in the 2019 election, most of which centred on solutions involving platform regulation and media literacy. I now turn to my initial research questions to evaluate these initiatives' effectiveness in grappling with the nuances of online disinformation and its relationship to Canadian democracy.

1. What is the current level of understanding among government, industry, and civil society stakeholders regarding disinformation and the October 2019 Canadian federal election?
    a. What kind of attention do these stakeholders pay to disinformation beyond discussions of foreign interference? How does each acknowledge and assess the risk of disinformation campaigns from within Canada?
    b. What steps have been taken to gain this understanding?

The Government of Canada's body of knowledge on disinformation and media manipulation is likely larger than what has been demonstrated in this study. However, I found that the level of understanding represented in the above materials is fairly robust, and informed by a combination of national security and intelligence sources, and consultations with academic, industry, and policy experts in media, technology, and elections.

Many of the government's initiatives leading up to the election tended to focus on coordinated, typically foreign state-backed interference, though there was also an amount of consideration for the roles of platform infrastructures in sustaining the environment for disinformation to proliferate. Despite less focus on the potential risks posed by coordinated or emergent domestic actors, many initiatives did address the possibility of influence campaigns from within Canada by way of established political parties, politicians, and third-party

campaigners; however, the risk of interference in the 2019 election by domestic actors was ultimately assessed within these government materials as relatively low.

In terms of average citizens' capacity for engaging with disinformation, the government's initiatives leaned primarily on the state of digital and media literacy as a cause of and remedy to the issue, with less attention paid to potentially equally important concerns regarding broader societal and technical circumstances contributing to political polarization and vulnerability to disinformation among Canadians.

The industry players explored in this study framed their handling of disinformation and election integrity in similar terms to those of the Canadian government, often emphasizing protections against foreign actors and coordinated manipulation through "fake news," bot activity, and illegally purchased ads. While Facebook, Twitter, and Google acknowledged their own products' roles in the disinformation ecosystem to varying degrees, they generally emphasized the responsibility of individual users to recognize, avoid, and report fake accounts and disinformation – similarly placing most of the onus on user media literacy and fact checking. Issues such as visual memes and misinformation within closed discussions and community groups were not often mentioned in the industry materials highlighted in this study, possibly pointing toward a somewhat limited framing of disinformation that focuses primarily on foreign-backed cyber interference, with less regard for the role of the platform in hosting communities of domestic actors.

It is challenging for outside researchers to accurately grasp these companies' risk assessments concerning disinformation due to proprietary protections on their data use practices and algorithm designs, and a general lack of transparency regarding their internal studies and policy development processes in this area. While platform companies do publish information on key public instances of manipulation, it is often only through whistleblowers and investigative reporting that the true depth of the issue comes to light. Because these platforms' models of revenue generation are central to the issue at hand, it is in their business interest to downplay the degree and pervasiveness of disinformation's threat.

The public policies and tools promoted by Facebook, Twitter, and Google regarding Canadian election integrity generally focused on broader, more universal approaches to disinformation, which emphasized technical policies and basic user experience-oriented actions.

I did not find a great deal of election integrity material that addressed the Canadian context or the role of domestic actors specifically, beyond some basic election-oriented civic engagement initiatives.

The civil society initiatives examined in this study focused largely on improving the civic and media literacy of Canadian citizens. Together, the projects demonstrated a relatively comprehensive take on the disinformation phenomenon, though the depth of analysis within the materials varied across projects and organizations. Some projects, like the Boys and Girls Club of Canada's *Let's Talk Digital* activity guide, demonstrated a fairly nuanced understanding of media manipulation, covering issues like algorithms, attention and emotional affect, and political polarization online. Others, such as News Media Canada's "SPOT Fake News" tool, primarily focused on tips to assess media content and identify disinformation.

These civil society projects acknowledged the potential role of domestic actors to some degree, particularly in relation to political parties, advertisers, and the media industry. That Canadian citizens were often their intended audience suggests that these organizations (and their federal funders) also accounted for the role of average internet users within the disinformation ecosystem. Ultimately, the research-oriented initiatives highlighted in this study offered some promising nuance for future consideration, including by looking at the role of political participation, trust, polarization, and populism in the Canadian democratic context, as well as at differences in attitudes among various population subgroups regarding these issues.

The election integrity initiatives that emerged from Canada's government, industry, and civil society sectors in anticipation of the 2019 federal election broadly demonstrated an understanding of disinformation that prioritized issues of cybersecurity and data protection, online advertising, and media literacy. Most of the initiatives from these three sectors addressed the threat in terms of foreign interference, which was depicted as most likely to take the form of fake news articles and the occasional paid troll or bot network. Though the materials produced by these stakeholders did consider the role of domestic actors in Canada like federal political parties, third party campaigners, and average citizens, less potential risk was attributed to fringe political actors or extremist groups, and less attention was paid to the role of hyperpartisan media outlets within Canada's media ecosystem. Overall, the projects implemented across these three sectors demonstrated a reasonable understanding of the disinformation phenomenon – at least

considering the relatively small pool of research in this area to date – but did not exhibit a great deal of consideration for the unique context of disinformation and political polarization within Canada.

2. What kind of initiatives and policy recommendations have emerged from the Canadian government, platform companies like Facebook, and civil society organizations in response to predictions about disinformation and the 2019 federal election?
    a. What are the primary themes characterizing these initiatives?
    b. How do these approaches understand, perceive, and address the role that average citizens and other domestic actors may (knowingly or unknowingly) play in the spread of disinformation leading up to the 2019 election?
    c. How might the effectiveness of these initiatives be made clear?

The initiatives and policy recommendations that emerged from these three sectors generally overlapped on issues like cybersecurity and data protection, advertising transparency, media literacy, and the need for more research into online disinformation. The Government of Canada's responses to predictions of interference in the 2019 election included measures directed at political parties, third party organizations, platform companies, and citizens. These efforts largely reflected the key types of government response to disinformation and malicious social media use outlined by Bradshaw, Neudert, and Howard (2018), including measures directed at social media platforms, such as the advertising transparency requirements in Bill C-76; measures targeting offenders, like the criminalization of disinformation and expansion of what is defined as illegal content (in this case, changes to Section 91 of the *Canada Elections Act*); measures targeting citizens, civil society and media organizations, such as the Digital Citizen Initiative and Critical Election Incident Public Protocol; and measures targeting government capacity, such as the monitoring and reporting programs and security and defence initiatives in Canada's Plan to Safeguard the 2019 Election, and parliamentary inquiries like those of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy, and Ethics and the International Grand Committee on Big Data, Privacy, and Democracy.

A number of the government's actions indicated a view of disinformation through the lens of national security, such as the emphasis on "combatting foreign interference" and "strengthening organizational readiness" in its Plan to Safeguard Canada's 2019 Election.

Initiatives that emphasize "alerting" citizens to specific attempts to manipulate the election may reflect a view of disinformation that conceptualizes its threat primarily in terms of individual, time-specific "attacks" strategically deployed by adversaries, as opposed to an ongoing, constantly evolving, and widespread phenomenon. However, the government's allocation of funding toward citizen-oriented media literacy initiatives does also acknowledge the position of citizens in the disinformation ecosystem.

The Canadian government's efforts to address domestic actors' role in spreading disinformation were primarily manifested through the *Elections Modernization Act*, which implemented measures that focused on partisan campaign activity, online advertising transparency, and the publication of false statements with the intent to affect election results. The government also contended with the use of personal data by domestic political entities, as reflected in both the privacy policy requirements for federal parties implemented through Bill C-76, and the discussions about applying PIPEDA to political entities that took place during the ETHI Committee's hearings. In the opinion of Canada's Privacy Commissioner, however, the privacy policy requirements for political parties introduced in Bill C-76 were ultimately inconsequential, as "there is no requirement that the substance comply with international privacy standards" and "parties are left to define the standards they want to apply" (Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada [OPC], 2019b, p. 24).[3]

Facebook, Google, and Twitter established similar projects related to cyber security, advertising, and media literacy, which were broadly described in terms of integrity, transparency, and authenticity. Many of their key initiatives were established in response to measures either mandated or encouraged by the Canadian government, such as the political advertising registry imposed through Bill C-76, and the guidelines put forth in the Canada Declaration on Electoral Integrity Online. Considering Facebook's Canadian Election Integrity Initiative had been established directly in response to the Communications Security Establishment's 2017 *Cyber*

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[3] In November 2020, Bill C-11, *An Act to enact the Consumer Privacy Protection Act and the Personal Information and Data Protection Tribunal Act and to make consequential and related amendments to other Acts* was tabled in Canada's House of Commons. While the bill did propose significant changes to Canada's privacy legislation in order to better account for modern data use in the digital economy, it still did not make any changes to subject Canada's political parties to national privacy legislation (Bill C-11, 2020; Bronskill, 2020).

Threats report, which emphasized the role of foreign adversaries in manipulating Canadian media, it is not surprising that the company's efforts to ensure election integrity in 2019 were largely oriented toward more broadly applicable solutions concerning cyber security, advertising transparency, and fact-checking. Though the company did produce some materials geared toward Canadian politicians, the tips and guidance they provided could ultimately be applied in any jurisdiction and were not particularly concerned with any unique considerations for the Canadian election context. Though there was evidence that each of these platform companies engaged in some form of collaboration with Canadian government and civil society stakeholders, which may have resulted in a level of Canada-specific policy development, most of the public initiatives to emerge from these key industry players were built on an approach to disinformation that focused on its more universal characteristics and functions, as opposed to addressing threats through a potentially more nationally-driven and locally targeted approach.

The projects from civil society showed some promise in this area. The training and resources delivered by Magazines Canada, New Canadian Media, and Journalists for Human Rights highlighted the importance of credible journalism in addressing the challenge of disinformation and countering its spread. Like the major platform companies, a number of organizations under the Digital Citizen Initiative produced programming aimed at boosting citizens' investment in politics and trust in Canada's democracy; while there are indeed legitimate criticisms of these institutions and processes, efforts to promote civic engagement may help to lessen the impact of the disorientation, doubt, and discord that accompanies populations' exposure to disinformation, potentially laying the groundwork for a more digitally literate and resilient society than can be achieved by simply learning how to recognize fake news articles. Additionally, the inclusion of materials directed at community information leaders reflects the value of involving a diversity of domestic stakeholders in creating resilience to disinformation and political extremism within local communities. Research initiatives that specifically address Canadians' relationship with disinformation, polarization, and democracy may provide a useful foundation for developing further civic engagement and media literacy programs in this area.

In its post-election report *Lessons in Resilience: Canada's Digital Media Ecosystem and the 2019 Election*, the Digital Democracy Project highlights a range of efforts to track disinformation during the election that were carried out by various political, journalistic, and academic institutions as well as private citizens and civil society groups, noting that "we cannot

know if disinformation would have played a larger role in the Canadian election had these efforts from a cross-section of society not been undertaken," (Digital Democracy Project, 2020, p. 110). The effectiveness of these initiatives – and future ones – might be made clear by, in addition to examining media coverage on disinformation and platform regulation, consulting indicators such as statistics on political beliefs, polarization, and trust in democratic institutions, investigations by relevant enforcement bodies and federal agencies, and broader studies by technology-, anti-hate-, or media literacy-oriented organizations and think tanks. Interestingly, one of the projects that was supported by the Digital Citizen Initiative – the Digital Ecosystem Research Challenge – itself produced a report following the election that sheds lights on the effectiveness of some of Canada's integrity initiatives. The report, *Understanding the Digital Ecosystem: Findings from the 2019 Federal Election*, summarizes eighteen different projects that were executed as part of the research challenge, highlighting the key findings of studies on different elements of the 2019 election that were conducted in real time, covering a range of issues such as compliance with ad registry requirements, patterns in online harassment and hate speech, the effect of political memes, issue framing and agenda setting in the media, and the flows of mis- and disinformation throughout the election (Dubois and Owen, 2020).

Finally, another potentially valuable means of assessing the effectiveness of Canada's 2019 election integrity initiatives could be to compare Canada's variety of efforts with those of other jurisdictions who have either implemented more robust measures, or none at all. Additionally, examining similar democratic processes taking place under different industry landscapes may provide insight into areas not considered under the technological circumstances of the 2019 Canadian election; for example, in November 2019, Twitter changed its policies to ban political advertising from its platform entirely, with CEO Jack Dorsey stating that "political message reach should be earned, not bought" ("Twitter bans all political advertising," 2020). Studying the implications of this new policy for other electoral events (such as the 2020 United States presidential election) may provide insight into new challenges and potential issues to mitigate in advance of Canada's next vote. Ultimately, efforts to address the threat of disinformation to election integrity will require longer-term empirical studies and a few election cycles to determine their true effectiveness, especially those which focus on measures involving advertising transparency and media literacy.

3. How effectively have recent policies and activities undertaken by government, industry, and civil society stakeholders addressed the concerns about disinformation and the 2019 Canadian federal election?

   a. What gaps in policy are made evident in the lead-up to the election?

   b. What gaps in policy are made evident in the election's immediate aftermath?

The effectiveness of policies and activities surrounding disinformation and the 2019 Canadian federal election will be revealed in both the short and long term. Some of the more immediate effects of these efforts included increased public attention to issues involving social media and democratic integrity, and behavioural changes among various stakeholders and participants in Canada's electoral process to conform with new regulations.

The longer-term effectiveness of these measures remains to be seen. Twitter's subsequent ban on political advertising on its platform ultimately rendered its Ads Transparency Centre obsolete; this development further highlights that there are additional issues and strategies to be considered with regard to political speech on social media platforms, beyond the seemingly central pillar of political advertising transparency. Should platform companies increasingly resort to prohibiting political advertising, the possibility that users will be further subject to more surreptitious, less regulated forms of political messaging will require new and different approaches to election integrity and disinformation policy.

My review of the above materials has revealed a number of other issues for further consideration, either because they were not thoroughly addressed enough, or because they present potential future obstacles that have thus far been overlooked. These gaps in policy include: the breadth of media forms considered when discussing disinformation, different online platform formats, hyperpartisan media outlets, audience variability and key audiences left out, and context-specific approaches to political polarization and online disinformation in Canada.

Media coverage during the election, as well as expert commentary in policy and academic circles, illuminated the need for measures to address disinformation and media manipulation as it manifests through non-advertisement forms of communication online. While Bill C-76 introduced spending limits on partisan advertising and other activities during the months immediately prior to the election period, its emphasis on material that specifically names certain candidates or parties left out potentially equally (if not more) effective advertising based

on sensitive political issues; media coverage of third party groups re-directing a significant portion of their spending toward issue advertising in the pre-election period offers evidence of this effect (Paas-Lang, 2019c). Pal (2019) also notes that, despite the intent of Bill C-76 to prevent the influence of foreign money in third party advertising campaigns, the exclusion of issue advertising and some other types of communication from its definition of partisan advertising means that "foreign third parties are still permitted to engage in some limited types of advertising" (p. 176). Similarly, Dubois and Owen (2020) suggest that the bill "lacks necessary clarity in certain areas and leaves open the possibility that actors could exploit technologies to skirt the law" (p. 10).

The legislation's reach and enforcement powers have also been widely questioned with regard to political messaging and disinformation disseminated through untraceable networks of social bots and trolls, as well as intentionally misleading material published outside of Canada's borders. More visual vehicles for disinformation, such as memes, graphics, user-made videos, and deepfake technology, also clearly remain a challenge for regulators, platform operators, and educators to address. These methods of communication, which often take place among average citizens or via third party advocacy groups, present challenges in terms of mitigating their potentially harmful effects without restricting citizens' freedom of expression. Finally, while phone calls and text messages from political campaigns are commonly expected, instances of attempted voter suppression via phone calls and social media posts during the 2019 election point toward the need for further considerations regarding the use of personal information to target and manipulate voters.

A largely overlooked element of the Canadian disinformation context was the role of hyperpartisan outlets, which frequently operate on the threshold between political spin and outright fabrication, and whose misleading and inflammatory rhetoric may ultimately contribute to disinformation and political polarization in Canada. Initiatives centred on enhancing media literacy could more thoroughly address this angle, specifically in terms of providing contextual information about the history and landscape of Canada's media ecosystem and the implications of its structure for the spread of disinformation (here I imagine a simplified and Canadianized take on Benkler, Faris, and Roberts' *Network Propaganda* study of American media). While the Digital Democracy Project's (2020) *Lessons in Resilience* report suggests that Canadians to date have a "relatively high trust in the traditional news media…with only a marginal role for

hyperpartisan news" (p. 2), efforts in this area are needed in order to contend with the flows of hyperpartisan ideologies across borders on the internet.[4] Education in this area might help Canadians more effectively navigate their traditional and social media ecosystem, and enable them to better understand the media they consume, whether it is produced by traditional publications with slight political leanings, hyperpartisan news outlets, or online purveyors of fabricated clickbait.

Another gap in the policy and outreach initiatives surrounding the 2019 Canadian federal election related to the kinds of social platforms being prioritized. While my investigation was limited to the policy initiatives of Facebook, Twitter, and Google, the media coverage and government policy consultations included in this study offered evidence that further consideration is needed regarding the operations of other popular platforms and applications, particularly those which are message-based, video-based, or which are not English-language based, as they are likely to present different and overlooked challenges and issues that could require unique policy approaches. Additionally, reports that popular social media and content aggregator platforms like Reddit and Pinterest were not considered by the Canadian government to be significant sources of concern with regard to disinformation, despite evidence to the contrary, suggests that there is a need for more thorough consultation between regulators and technology experts who are not representatives of the platform companies in question, as well as further policy actions on disinformation that target the unique character and functioning of different platforms and websites (McIntosh, 2019; Orr & McIntosh, 2019).

In addition to addressing a variety of different communication forms and platform types, another area in which Canada's disinformation policy measures could be improved is with regard to reaching different strategic audiences and addressing their unique needs. For example, none of the civil society initiatives included in this study specifically sought to conduct outreach in major languages in Canada beyond English or French, and only a few French-language initiatives received Digital Citizen Initiative funding at that – surely an oversight in a country known for its diversity of languages and ethnicities. While the organizations included in this study broadly

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[4] See Elmer et al. "Fringe Politics: The Deep Web's Impact on the 2019 Canadian Election" in Dubois and Owen (2020), p. 58.

produced initiatives directed at youth and immigrants[5], demonstrating a consideration for the needs of some specific populations who may be vulnerable to disinformation, there was an overall lack of education directed at other, potentially less digitally literate populations, such as seniors and people in communities with less regular internet access. Additionally, the impact and value of projects that are run as part of programs involving a limited number of (typically youth) participants is questionable, considering it is most likely those who are already politically engaged enough to hear about the availability of such programs who will end up participating and benefiting from them; it would be interesting to see how far an equal amount of funding could go in the hands of more grassroots organizations working with less politically connected and literate populations. Finally, while there is obviously value in in-classroom media literacy initiatives, the risk that too much focus on fact-checking can either backfire or fail to reach the most susceptible audiences is also worth considering going forward; boyd's (2017) discussion of the "cultural context of information consumption" highlights that what is considered to be a credible source is not universal, and that different groups will research and fact-check based on subjective convictions of what is trustworthy. More policy initiatives are thus needed across government, industry, and civil society that focus on the foundational factors contributing to citizens' vulnerability to political polarization and disinformation.

One important development that appears to have been overlooked in Canada's 2019 election integrity efforts was the increasing degree of legitimacy being afforded to far-right ideas under the guise of traditional populist movements, not only within closed social media-based communities, but also on the campaign trail and within Canadian mainstream media.[6] That the exposure of federal candidates' affiliations with hate groups and far-right conspiracy theories was a frequent theme in the election-related media coverage I collected suggests that movements that exploit racial, sexual, cultural, and religious tensions are gaining enough traction in Canada to allow candidates and parties supporting these views to become integrated into official election

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[5] It is worth noting that these are two specific groups that typically cannot vote in a federal election, and so the value of initiatives directed toward these communities may be realized through less directly election-related consequences, or potentially on a more long-term scale when youths have reached voting age and some newcomers have gained Canadian citizenship.

[6] See Donovan et al. "Media Manipulation, Memetic Campaigns, and the 2019 Canadian Elections" in Dubois and Owen (2020), p. 66.

processes and mainstream narratives. Indeed, a study by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue found that right-wing extremist groups in Canada have grown in recent years, and that online activity within these circles spiked across platforms around the time of the election in October 2019 (Davey, Guerin, & Hart, 2020, p. 5). Canadian far-right groups have been observed operating across a variety of mainstream and fringe platforms to coordinate and recruit members, with Facebook in particular proving popular for spreading misinformation through memes, videos, and dubious news reports (Scrivens & Amarasingam, 2020, p. 64). Empirical studies that show anti-Muslim and anti-Trudeau rhetoric are among the most common topics of far-right conversation online in Canada track with some of the media coverage I collected that exhibits similar patterns (Davey, Guerin, & Hart, 2020, p. 5).[7] The apparent growth in support for political actors who are sympathetic to these views, such as the People's Party of Canada and elements of the #Wexit movement, in addition to the 2019 report by Canada's Rapid Response Mechanism on hate group actors deploying computational propaganda tactics in Alberta, highlights the need for Canadian policymakers to take the role of this particular brand of domestic actor seriously with regard to disinformation and democratic integrity.

7   Conclusion

Throughout this study, I endeavoured to provide a broad, high-level scan of the Canadian disinformation policy landscape as it pertained to the 2019 Canadian federal election. By examining key public initiatives across major government, industry, and civil society organizations, I found that the approaches taken by political and technological stakeholders in Canada to address the threat of online disinformation were generally built on concepts related to cyber security, privacy and data protection, advertising transparency and platform regulation, and digital and media literacy. Considerations were also commonly made for the sustainability of Canada's journalism and media industry, as well as the need for further research on disinformation and media manipulation. While a degree of attention was paid to the role of domestic actors such as political parties, third party campaigners, and average citizens, less

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[7] One of the projects conducted as part of the Digital Ecosystem Research Challenge, Zeinab Farokhi's "Rise of Islamophobic Emotional Rhetoric During the 2019 Canadian Federal Election," produced similar findings (Dubois and Owen, 2020, p. 38).

consideration was made for the significance of fringe political actors and hyperpartisan media outlets within the Canadian disinformation ecosystem. While this gap in policy may be attributed to a lack of alarm signalled by national security and intelligence agencies regarding the level of threat posed by fringe movements to the 2019 election in particular, a look at the trajectory of these movements within Canada and globally[8] should inspire urgent efforts to develop technological and policy measures to address their specific role in the online disinformation ecosystem, as described in Marwick and Lewis' (2018) work on media manipulation.

Research going forward might look more in-depth at the effects of different policies on certain platforms, and consider the role of online platforms and social media sites whose traffic and user levels do not meet the threshold for regulation outlined in the *Elections Modernization Act,* or whose format or primary language has led to neglect by Canadian policymakers. The November 2020 tabling of Bill C-10, which proposed amendments to Canada's *Broadcasting Act* that introduced a new category for regulation called "online undertakings," will also likely influence the course of future research on platforms and their responsibility for harmful content in Canada (Bill C-10, 2020; "Streaming platforms to incur penalties," 2020).

Concerning approaches to digital and media literacy, investigations into potential policy solutions that approach the issue of disinformation on a more locally-oriented, smaller scale may prove valuable for understanding how various communities interact with different forms of media and information, and how those interactions contribute to political polarization and susceptibility to disinformation and voter manipulation.[9] Dubois and Owen (2020) express similar ideas in their report on the Digital Ecosystem Research Challenge, suggesting that "research specific to the Canadian context is essential because digital ecosystems differ by

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[8] A draft of this thesis had already been completed by the time the 2020 United States presidential election rolled around, however, the events following Donald Trump's defeat are of significance to this area of study. In much the same way he co-opted the term "fake news" for his own purposes, President Trump attempted to manipulate the rhetoric of "elections integrity" to promote unfounded claims of electoral fraud following his loss at the polls. Conspiracy theories and disinformation about a stolen election proliferated online and off, and culminated in armed supporters and far-right groups storming the U.S. Capitol Building in an attempt to disrupt the certification of President-elect Joe Biden on January 6th, 2021.

[9] See Boler et al. "Affective Media, Social Movements, and Digital Dissent: Emotions and Democratic Participation in the 'Post-Truth' Era" in Dubois and Owen (2020), p. 62, for a discussion of how media literacy efforts also need to address the manipulation of emotions online.

country" (p. 1). In January 2020, Canada's Department of Innovation, Science, and Economic Development (ISED) published its broadcasting and telecommunications legislative review, which highlighted that "Canada lacks a coherent, national coordinated plan on digital literacy," (Innovation, Science, and Economic Development [ISED], 2020, p. 184). The report recommended that such a plan be developed by "the federal government, together with provincial and territorial authorities" (p. 185); whether this reflects a more context-specific approach to information consumption and digital and media literacy remains to be seen.

The election integrity initiatives implemented by the Government of Canada surrounding the 2019 federal election reflect Tenove's (2020) suggestion that "policies to address disinformation seek to defend three important normative goods of democratic systems: self-determination, accountable representation, and public deliberation" (p. 517). This is evident in the Canadian government's emphasis on issues of cyber security, advertising transparency, and media literacy. Initiatives by major industry players and Canadian civil society organizations also assisted in these efforts, with measures to deter technical methods of manipulation and to promote media literacy emerging most frequently. While the range of socially and technically positioned initiatives that emerged from these three sectors provide a good starting basis to address disinformation and Canadian election integrity from a more general standpoint, the unique threat to the normative goods of democracy that may be posed by domestic actors – particularly those with extreme-right sensibilities – is worth strong consideration and action going forward. By looking beyond concepts of disinformation that focus on coordinated foreign adversaries, online advertising, and citizens' ability to fact-check news articles, there may be a chance for Canadian policymakers and civic and technology stakeholders to address the underlying mechanisms of alienation, polarization, and creeping extremism, which pose real online and offline threats to Canadian election integrity, democracy, and society.

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Appendix A: ETHI Committee Recommendations

Preliminary recommendations of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy, and Ethics

Addressing Digital Privacy Vulnerabilities and Potential Threats to Canada's Democratic Electoral Process **Preliminary report of the House of Commons Access to Information, Privacy, and Ethics (ETHI) Standing Committee** **June 2018**	Recommendation 1 on transparency	That the Government of Canada enact transparency requirements regarding how organizations and political actors, particularly through social media and other online platforms, collect and use data to target political and other advertising based on techniques such as psychographic profiling. Such requirements could include, but are not limited to: • The identification of who paid for the ad, including verifying the authenticity of the person running the ad; • The identification of the target audience, and why the target audience received the ad; and • Mandatory registration regarding political advertising outside of Canada
	Recommendation 2 on implementing measures in Canada that are similar to the *General Data Protection Regulation*	That the government of Canada immediately begin implementing measures in order to ensure that data protections similar to the *General Data Protection Regulation* are put in place for Canadians, including the recommendations contained in the report on the *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act* tabled in February 2018
	Recommendation 3 on data sovereignty	That the Government of Canada establish rules and guidelines regarding data ownership and data sovereignty with the objective of putting a stop to the non-consented collection and use of citizens' personal information. These rules and guidelines should address the challenges presented by cloud computing.
	Recommendation 4 on the Privacy	That the *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act* be amended

	Commissioner's enforcement powers	to give the Privacy Commissioner enforcement powers, including the power to make orders and impose fines for non-compliance.
	Recommendation 5 on the Privacy Commissioner's audit powers	That the *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act* be amended to give the Privacy Commissioner broad audit powers, including the ability to choose which complaints to investigate.
	Recommendation 6 on the Privacy Commissioner's additional enforcement powers	That the *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act* be amended to give the Privacy Commissioner additional enforcement powers, including the power to issue urgent notices to organizations to produce relevant documents within a shortened time period, and the power to seize documents in the course of an investigation, without notice.
	Recommendation 7 on the sharing of information between the Privacy Commissioner and other regulators	That the *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents A*ct be amended to allow the Privacy Commissioner to share certain relevant information in the context of investigations with the Competition Bureau, other Canadian regulators and regulators at the international level, where appropriate.
	Recommendation 8 on the application of privacy legislation to political activities	That the Government of Canada take measures to ensure that privacy legislation applies to political activities in Canada either by amending existing legislation or by enacting new legislation.

Full report available at:

https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/ETHI/Reports/RP9932875/ethirp16/ethirp16-e.pdf

Final recommendations of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy, and Ethics

Democracy Under Threat: Risks and Solutions in the Era of Disinformation and Data Monopoly **Final report of the House of Commons Access to Information, Privacy, and Ethics (ETHI) Standing Committee** **December 2018**	Recommendation 1 on the application of privacy legislation to political parties	That the Government of Canada amend the *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act* in order to subject political parties to it, taking into account their democratic outreach duties
	Recommendation 2 on the application of privacy legislation to political third parties	That the Government of Canada amend the *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act* in order to subject political third parties to it.
	Recommendation 3 on personal information protection oversight powers over political parties and political third parties	That the Government of Canada grant the Office of the Privacy Commissioner and/or Elections Canada the mandate and authority to conduct proactive audits on political parties and political third parties regarding their privacy practices and to issue orders and levy fines.
	Recommendation 4 on the financial resources of the Office of the Privacy Commissioner	That the Government of Canada provide necessary new resources to the Office of the Privacy Commissioner, so it can address modern privacy concerns and efficiently exercise the additional powers granted to the Commissioner
	Recommendation 5 on the foreign funding of political activities	That the Government of Canada take all steps to prevent the foreign funding and influence in domestic elections, including foreign charitable funding.
	Recommendation 6 on political advertising	That the Government of Canada amend the *Canada Elections Act* to require an authorizing agent to submit identification and proof of address when placing political ads online.
	Recommendation 7 on the creation of an online political advertising database	That the Government of Canada amend the *Canada Elections Act* to require social media platforms to create searchable and machine-readable databases of online political advertising that are user-friendly and allow anyone to find ads using filters such as: the person or organization who

		funded the ad; the political issue covered; the period during which the ad was online; and the demographics of the target audience.
	Recommendation 8 on regulating certain social media platforms	That the Government of Canada enact legislation to regulate social media platforms using as a model the thresholds for Canadian reach described in clause 325.1(1) of Bill C-76, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and make certain consequential amendments. Among the responsibilities should be included a duty: • to clearly label content produced automatically or algorithmically (e.g. by 'bots'); • to identify and remove inauthentic and fraudulent accounts impersonating others for malicious reasons; • to adhere to a code of practices that would forbid deceptive or unfair practices and require prompt responses to reports of harassment, threats and hate speech and require the removal of defamatory, fraudulent, and maliciously manipulated content (e.g. "deep fake" videos); and • to clearly label paid political or other advertising.
	Recommendation 9 on algorithmic transparency	That the Government of Canada enact transparency requirements with respect to algorithms and provide to an existing or a new regulatory body the mandate and the authority to audit algorithms.
	Recommendation 10 on the taking down of illegal content by social media platforms	That the Government of Canada enact legislation imposing a duty on social media platforms to remove manifestly illegal content in a timely fashion, including hate speech, harassment and disinformation, or risk monetary sanctions commensurate with the dominance and significance of the social platform, and allowing for judicial

		oversight of takedown decisions and a right of appeal.
	Recommendation 11 on data portability and system interoperability	That the *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act* be amended by adding principles of data portability and system interoperability.
	Recommendation 12 on modernizing the *Competition Act*	That the Government of Canada study the potential economic harms caused by so-called "data-opolies" in Canada and determine if modernization of the Competition Act is required.
	Recommendation 13 on collaboration between the Competition Bureau and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner	That the *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act* and the *Competition Act* be amended to establish a framework allowing the Competition Bureau and the Office of the Privacy Commissioner to collaborate where appropriate.
	Recommendation 14 on cyberthreats for political parties and the Communications Security Establishment's recommendations	That political parties follow the recommendations made by Communications Security Establishment that pertain to them regarding electoral cybersecurity
	Recommendation 15 on the need to study cyberthreats	That the government of Canada continue studying how cyber threats affect institutions and the electoral system in Canada.
	Recommendation 16 on research regarding online disinformation and misinformation	That the Government of Canada invest in research regarding the impacts of online disinformation and misinformation.
	Recommendation 17 on education and digital literacy:	That the Government of Canada increase its investment in digital literacy initiatives, including for initiatives aimed at informing Canadians of the risks associated with the online prevalence of disinformation and misinformation.

	Recommendation 18 on the addictive nature of some digital products	That the Government of Canada study the long-term cognitive impacts of digital products offered by social platforms which create dependence and determine if a response is required.
	Recommendations 19-26	See recommendations 1-8 of preliminary report.

Full report available at:

https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/ETHI/Reports/RP10242267/ethirp17/ethirp17-e.pdf

Appendix B: The Canada Declaration on Electoral Integrity Online

Declaration value	Platform commitments	Government commitments
Integrity	1. Intensify efforts to combat disinformation to promote transparency and understanding and inform Canadians about efforts to safeguard the Internet ecosystem. 2. Apply their latest advancements and most effective tools from around the world for the protection of democratic processes and institutions in Canada, as appropriate. 3. Promote safeguards that effectively help address cybersecurity incidents and promote cybersecurity, protect against misrepresentation of candidates, parties and other key electoral officials and ensure privacy protection.	4. Ensure that the platforms have clear Government of Canada points-of-contact for election-related matters for both the pre-election and election periods.
Transparency	5. Ensure transparency for regulated political advertising, including helping users understand when and why they are seeing political advertising. 6. Ensure their terms and conditions are easily accessible, communicated in a manner that is easy to understand, and enforced in a fair, consistent and transparent manner.	7. Implement the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol to ensure public communications on cyber incidents are clear and impartial. 8. Promote, where possible, lawful information sharing that may assist in detection, identification, or enforcement against malicious actors using the platforms' products and services.
Authenticity	9. Work to remove fake accounts and inauthentic content on their platforms. 10. Work to assist users to better understand the sources of information they are seeing and block and remove malicious bots.	11. Work with civil society, educational institutions and/or other institutions to support efforts aimed at improving critical thinking, digital literacy and cybersecurity practices to promote digital resilience across society. 12. Facilitate the sharing of information on emerging developments and practices that could help protect Canadian democracy within relevant legal mandates.

Appendix C: Media Coverage Methodology and Data

The media coverage I examine in Chapter 6 was collected from ten key Canadian mainstream news outlets: CBC, CTV, Global News, the Huffington Post, City News, the *Globe and Mail*, Vice, the *National Post*, the *Toronto Star*, and the *Toronto Sun.* I selected these particular outlets based on a study by the Digital Democracy Project, an initiative of Canada's Public Policy Forum think tank, which determined these were the top ten English language traditional news outlets consumed by Canadians at the time of its publication in August 2019 (Owen et al., 2019, p. 5).

I began collecting my material on September 11th, 2019, when the writ was dropped for Canada's federal election on October 21st, 2019. This provided me with 40 days to collect media coverage data before Election Day. I collected my post-election media coverage data for an equal 40 days following Election Day, concluding on December 1st, 2019. I chose this particular time period in order to trace the progression of media coverage about disinformation and election integrity from before and after votes were cast, in an effort to understand what issues were prioritized and how they were framed leading up to and following the election.

I collected my data from the online homes of these news publications through a combination of email alerts, newsletter subscriptions, and manual investigation. I collected relevant articles on disinformation, political advertising, and other issues concerning the integrity of the 2019 election from these outlets by subscribing to their daily and weekly e-newsletters, following their pages using my personal social media accounts, and directly visiting their websites on a weekly basis. Additionally, I set up daily Google News email alerts, using key terms and phrases like "Canada election disinformation," "Canada fake news disinformation," "Canada federal party," "Canada political advertising campaign," and "Canada election 2019," which allowed me to receive consistent updates about new publications and evolving stories. These alerts were set up in the early stages of my research into Canada's election integrity landscape, before I had conducted the qualitative analysis that led to my identification of specific themes in the government, industry, and civil society materials I had collected; thus, these search terms were intended to capture a broad range of articles while still offering some level of specificity and relevance to my broader topics of interest.

By the end of my data collection period, I ended up with roughly 250 articles to analyze. Throughout my daily collection process, I had read each article and made note of their key subjects and themes, which I initially determined based on my own takeaway from the text, and then validated through factors like article title, quotes included, and website categories tagged. As I collected and analyzed my data, I created a table that listed all of the key themes on one axis, and all of the key subjects on the other; I then entered the titles of each article, along with the link to find them online, into their corresponding placements on the table (though some articles did cover a number of different subjects and themes, I categorized them based on what I understood their primary focus to be). This process was useful for enhancing my own understanding of the media coverage I had collected, and, if this was a larger study, could potentially have provided another layer of nuance concerning which attitudes and political perspectives were dominant among each outlet with regard to different issues and subjects. However, in order to maintain a more manageable and high-level scope, I examined the key themes I had identified, and established a set of broader categories through which to frame my analysis – these are the themes that I highlight in Chapter 6, and which structure the following tables presenting my collected data.

Below is a simplified presentation of the original table I used to keep track of the key actors and themes I identified throughout my collection of articles. It lists the number of articles per category that, in my assessment, primarily focused on each key actor. In my original organization of this data, article titles were highlighted with specific colour codes to show which were from before the election and which were from after (I also saved each article I found as a .pdf file and placed them into folders labelled for pre- and post-election so that I could easily retrieve them if any of the links in my table became inaccessible online). Hence, my analysis in Chapter 6 is primarily structured around the key theme categories my collected data was sorted into below. Because there was less post-election coverage overall, I structured that particular section of Chapter 6 based on more specific categories that I identified through both my colour coding system and direct readings of the text.

Content coding matrix: Number of articles per theme by primary actor focus

Key actor	Memes, bots, and fake news: political disinformation during the campaign	Political and third parties: privacy, campaign data use, and advertising	Bill C-76 and platform regulation	Media literacy and credibility	Populism, polarization, and questionable political affiliations	Other/general election integrity and technology coverage
General/ multiple	29	16	8	7	30	9
Bloc Quebecois					1	
Conservative Party	7	2		2	9	
Green Party	3		1		5	1
Liberal Party	7	3			7	2
NDP		1			1	
People's Party	1	3			18	2
Other/fringe parties						1
Facebook/ Instagram	5	4	1	2	1	1
Google/ YouTube	1			1		1
Twitter	3	4		1		1
Other Platforms	2	2				1
Digital Democracy Project	1			1		
Canada Proud/Third party/lobby groups	1	15	1			
Media outlets	3		1	4	4	
Media organizations	1			4		
Other advocacy organizations			3			1
Canadian regulators	3	2		1		1
International regulators	1	1				
Wexit/populist movements	2				14	3

Pre-election media coverage

Theme	Publication	Title	Date	Author(s)	Link
Bill C-76 and platform regulation	CBC News	Facebook advertisers can write their own headlines for shared news stories	16/09/2019	Jeff Yates, Andrea Bellemare, Kaleigh Roberts	https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/facebook-ads-headlines-1.5283197?cmp=newsletter-news-digests-canada-and-world-morning
		YouTube now recommends fewer conspiracies — and less Canadian political content	04/10/2019	Jeff Yates, Roberto Rocha, Andrea Bellemare	https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/youtube-algorithm-political-content-viral-1.5307775?
		Election ads on WeChat posted by users: company	14/10/2019	Elizabeth Thompson	https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/wechat-election-social-media-1.5318589?
		Facebook has no business policing political speech, Zuckerberg argues	17/10/2019	CBC News	https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/zuckerberg-facebook-free-speech-1.5324440
		'Be careful in your comments,' warns CPC candidate to environmental filmmaker	20/10/2019	Chad Pawson	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/byron-horner-ian-mcallister-third-party-elections-canada-dispute-courteny-alberni-1.5327995
	CTV News	Facebook working with Elections Canada to increase voter registration	13/09/2019	Nicole Bogart	https://election.ctvnews.ca/facebook-working-with-elections-canada-to-increase-voter-registration-1.4590664
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		Maxime Bernier Declared Eligible For Leaders' Debates	16/09/2019	Jon Rumley, Ryan Maloney	https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/maxime-bernier-federal-leaders-debates_ca_5d7faee7e4b00d69059c5f52?
		Hate Graffiti Has Tainted Candidate Election Signs In 3 Ridings This Week Alone	17/09/2019	Samantha Beattie	https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/canada-election-signs-swastikas_ca_5d80f28be4b03b5fc88a3620?
		Singh: Bernier Is Being Given Platform To Promote Hate With Debate Inclusion	17/09/2019	Ryan Maloney	https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/jagmeet-singh-maxime-bernier-debates_ca_5d8125dee4b03b5fc88ad9d7?
		Trudeau: Brownface Photo From 2001 Was 'Racist,' Dumb Mistake	18/09/2019	Ryan Maloney, Zi-Ann Lum	https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/justin-trudeau-brownface-photo_ca_5d82bcc1e4b0957256b0dfc8?
		People's Party Of Canada Candidate Chad Hudson Quits Citing Bernier's 'Racist Garbage'	30/09/2019	The Canadian Press	https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/peoples-party-chad-hudson-bernier_ca_5d926503e4b0e9e760514fd7?
		So, About Those Anti-Immigration Claims	07/10/2019	Laura Schemitsch	https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/canada-election-

		Being Made This Election				immigration_ca_5d9655bde4b029 11e117eeeb?
		Jagmeet Singh Says Canada Lacks Polarization Of 'American-Style Election'	15/10/2019	Zi-Ann Lum	https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/ent ry/jagmeet-singh-polarization_ca_5da5df28e4b029 01e276e022?
		Scheer Dodges Questions On Hiring Consulting Firm To 'Destroy' People's Party	19/10/2019	The Canadian Press	https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/ent ry/scheer-bernier-kinsella_ca_5dab6470e4b042242 2c5de5f?0em&?ncid=newsltcahp mgnews
	The National Post	'Mr. Singh is straining my patience': Elizabeth May blasts NDP over fake stories	03/10/2019	The Canadian Press	https://nationalpost.com/news/poli tics/election-2019/green-leader-elizabeth-may-losing-respect-for-ndps-singh-over-fake-stories?
		John Ivison: Trudeau's security scare a dark turn for an election filled with online threats	13/10/2019	John Ivison	https://nationalpost.com/news/poli tics/election-2019/john-ivison-trudeaus-security-scare-a-dark-turn-for-an-election-filled-with-online-hate?
	The Toronto Star	Why aren't we talking about how to keep Canada safe from Trumpism?	27/09/2019	Susan Delacourt	https://www.thestar.com/politics/p olitical-opinion/2019/09/27/why-arent-we-talking-about-how-to-keep-canada-safe-from-trumpism.html?
		For Liberal and Tory voters, 'it's two worlds out there. Two Canadas'	06/10/2019	Mitch Potter	https://www.thestar.com/news/fed eral-election/2019/10/06/for-liberal-and-tory-voters-its-two-worlds-out-there-two-canadas.html
		He says he works security for Maxime Bernier. He's also listed as a founding member of a party promoting white nationalism	09/10/2019	Melanie Green	https://www.thestar.com/vancouv er/2019/10/07/he-says-he-works-security-for-maxime-bernier-hes-also-listed-as-a-founding-member-of-a-party-promoting-white-nationalism.html
		Election campaign marked by 'unhealthy' polarization, and it may be about to get worse	16/10/2019	Bruce Campion-Smith	https://www.thestar.com/politics/f ederal/2019/10/16/election-campaign-marked-by-unhealthy-polarization-and-it-may-be-about-to-get-worse.html
		Elizabeth May slams Jagmeet Singh over 'disgraceful' NDP flyers	16/10/2019	Alex Ballingall	https://www.thestar.com/politics/f ederal/2019/10/16/elizabeth-may-slams-jagmeet-singh-over-disgraceful-ndp-flyers.html

		Digital Democracy Project shows Canada is becoming more polarized, less tolerant	18/10/2019	Kathy English	https://www.thestar.com/opinion/public_editor/2019/10/18/digital-democracy-project-shows-canada-is-becoming-more-polarized-less-tolerant.html?
	The Toronto Sun	Trudeau dons bulletproof vest for campaign event in Mississauga	13/10/2019	Stephane Mahe	https://torontosun.com/news/national/justin-trudeau-dons-bulletproof-vest-for-campaign-event-in-ontario/wcm/e4c6e526-d98e-4ae9-bb98-edae48ad876f?
	Vice	A QAnon YouTuber Is Running for Office in Canada	11/09/2019	Mack Lamoureux	https://www.vice.com/en/article/8xwxpv/a-qanon-youtuber-is-running-for-office-in-canada
		Andrew Scheer Had a Very Bad Weekend	16/09/2019	Steven Zhou	https://www.vice.com/en/article/8xw8eb/andrew-scheer-had-a-very-bad-weekend
		Maxime Bernier's Party Doxxed and Called This Man a Terrorist, so He's Suing	17/09/2019	Mack Lamoureux	https://www.vice.com/en/article/9ke3p8/maxime-berniers-party-doxxed-and-called-this-man-a-terrorist-so-hes-suing
		Canadian Media Is Very Politely Covering a Far-Right Party	27/09/2019	Steven Zhou	https://www.vice.com/en/article/ne8dym/canadian-media-is-very-politely-covering-a-far-right-party
		In this Toronto Suburb, Liberals Face Chinese-Language Disinformation Campaign	16/10/2019	Steven Zhou	https://www.vice.com/en/article/7x5mpz/in-this-toronto-suburb-liberals-face-chinese-language-disinformation-campaign?utm_source=reddit.com
Memes, bots, and fake news: political disinformation during the campaign	CBC News	Political disinformation is rampant online. How can voters cope?	12/09/2019	Kaleigh Rogers	https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/disinformation-political-spin-online-election-2019-1.5279919
		CBC's chat bot helps you spot 'fake news' — and avoid spreading it	13/09/2019	CBC News	https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/chat-bot-canada-federal-election-disinformation-1.5270765
		Federal parties being warned of efforts by 6 foreign countries to influence election: sources	16/09/2019	Catherine Tunney, Ashley Burke	https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/china-india-interference-1.5284473?cmp=newsletter-news-digests-cbc-news-politics
		Conservative riding association posts fake	17/09/2019	CBC News	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/rick-

		meme of Rick Mercer endorsing party			mercer-fake-conservative-endorsement-1.5287411
		False online rumour claims RCMP chief is married to Bill Morneau's cousin	18/09/2019	Andrea Bellemare, Kaleigh Rogers, Jeff Yates	https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/lucki-morneau-married-cousin-rumour-false-1.5288672
		Canada banning Christian demonstrations? How a private member's bill sprouted fake news	19/09/2019	Kaleigh Rogers	https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/canada-banning-christians-fake-news-1.5261564
		An old photo of Stephen Harper in Indigenous garb is being misrepresented online	23/09/2019	Kaleigh Rogers	https://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/stephen-harper-headdress-trudeau-blackface-1.5294119?
		Canadians' misperceptions about immigration reflect disinformation online: experts	10/10/2019	Kaleigh Rogers	https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/immigration-disinformation-election-2019-poll-1.5316934?
		Robocalls tell voters to head to the polls a day late	21/10/2019	Andrea Bellemare, Kaleigh Rogers	https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/election-robocalls-voters-polls-misleading-1.5329199?
	CityNews	Most Canadians still struggling to identify fake online content, new poll finds	15/10/2019	Kurtis Doering, Hana Mae Nassar	https://winnipeg.citynews.ca/2019/10/15/canadians-struggling-identify-fake-online-content-poll/
	CTV News	Truth Tracker: Are right-wing U.S. Twitter accounts amplifying anti-Trudeau sentiment?	17/09/2019	Nicole Bogart	https://election.ctvnews.ca/truth-tracker-are-right-wing-u-s-twitter-accounts-amplifying-anti-trudeau-sentiment-1.4597418
		Truth Tracker: No, Rick Mercer did not publicly endorse the Conservative Party	17/09/2019	Nicole Bogart	https://election.ctvnews.ca/truth-tracker-no-rick-mercer-did-not-publicly-endorse-the-conservative-party-1.4597597
		Truth Tracker: No, RCMP Commissioner Brenda Lucki isn't related to Bill Morneau	18/09/2019	Nicole Bogart	https://election.ctvnews.ca/truth-tracker-no-rcmp-commissioner-brenda-lucki-isn-t-related-to-bill-morneau-1.4599371
		How Russian troll farms could impact	20/09/2019	Peter Akman	https://www.ctvnews.ca/w5/how-russian-troll-farms-could-impact-

		Canada's federal election			canada-s-federal-election-1.4600619
		How are memes being used to sway voters? Researchers aim to find out	26/09/2019	Ben Cousins	https://election.ctvnews.ca/how-are-memes-being-used-to-sway-voters-researchers-aim-to-find-out-1.4612306
		'It'll be something new': Canadian election interference likely in unexpected places	30/09/2019	Penny Daflos	https://bc.ctvnews.ca/it-ll-be-something-new-canadian-election-interference-likely-in-unexpected-places-1.4617441
		Truth Tracker: Examples of misinformation on the campaign (video)	09/10/2019	CTVNews.ca Staff	https://election.ctvnews.ca/truth-tracker-examples-of-misinformation-on-the-campaign-1.4632011
		Truth Tracker: Concerns about non-citizens getting voter cards in the mail	09/10/2019	Nicole Bogart	https://election.ctvnews.ca/truth-tracker-concerns-about-non-citizens-getting-voter-cards-in-the-mail-1.4631454
		Election has been mostly free of mis- and disinformation, research shows	10/10/2019	The Canadian Press	https://election.ctvnews.ca/election-has-been-mostly-free-of-mis-and-disinformation-research-shows-1.4632443
		How to avoid disinformation this election (video)	12/10/2019	N/A	https://www.ctvnews.ca/video?clipId=1803302
		Truth Tracker: The security threat against Trudeau was not made up	16/10/2019	CTVNews.Ca Staff	https://election.ctvnews.ca/truth-tracker-the-security-threat-against-trudeau-was-not-made-up-1.4641910
		Truth Tracker: How does anti-Scheer sentiment stack up against anti-Trudeau talk online?	17/10/2019	Nicole Bogart	https://election.ctvnews.ca/truth-tracker-how-does-anti-scheer-sentiment-stack-up-against-anti-trudeau-talk-online-1.4643010
		Truth Tracker: No, Justin Trudeau does not want to implement Sharia law in Canada	18/10/2019	Nicole Bogart	https://election.ctvnews.ca/truth-tracker-no-justin-trudeau-does-not-want-to-implement-sharia-law-in-canada-1.4644834
		Robocalls, social media posts urge Canadians to vote the day after the election	21/10/2019	CTV News	https://election.ctvnews.ca/robocalls-social-media-posts-urge-canadians-to-vote-the-day-after-the-election-1.4648754
		Truth Tracker live blog: Tracking misinformation on election night	21/10/2019	Nicole Bogart	https://election.ctvnews.ca/live-blog-replay-tracking-misinformation-on-election-night-1.4648495

	Global News	Fighting disinformation during federal campaign (video)	12/09/2019	N/A	https://globalnews.ca/video/5897058/fighting-disinformation-during-federal-campaign
		Canadian academics, scientists fight back against online election disinformation	13/09/2019	Jeff Semple	https://globalnews.ca/news/5901707/canadian-academics-scientists-election-disinformation/
		Canada's election has been 'largely clean' of misinformation, research shows	10/10/2019	The Canadian Press	https://globalnews.ca/news/6017741/canada-election-misinformation-research/
		Experts warn of disinformation during election but say political attack ads within legal limit	22/09/2019	Hannah Jackson	https://globalnews.ca/news/5907430/canada-election-combating-disinformation/
		Twitter says Canadian election campaign free of major manipulation attempts so far	24/09/2019	Christian Paas-Lang	https://globalnews.ca/news/5943227/canada-election-twitter-manipulation/
		Trudeau blackface photos vulnerable to exploitation, disinformation, U.S. study says	03/10/2019	Stephanie Levitz, The Canadian Press	https://globalnews.ca/news/5984484/trudeau-blackface-photos-vulnerable-to-exploitation-disinformation-u-s-study-says/
	The Globe and Mail	How do our brains fall for disinformation?	14/10/2019	Wency Leung	https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-how-do-our-brains-fall-for-disinformation/
	Huffington Post	Fake Justin Trudeau Blackface Photos Are Circulating Online: Researchers	03/10/2019	The Canadian Press	https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/fake-trudeau-blackface-photos_ca_5d95d4f0e4b0da7f66223307?
		Canada Having 'Largely Clean Election' Compared To U.S., U.K.: Researcher	10/10/2019	The Canadian Press	https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/canada-election-campaign-misinformation_ca_5d9f0827e4b02c9da044dbf0?
		Canada Joins The Growing List Of Countries Where Election Misinformation Reigns	16/10/2019	Nick Robins-Early	https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/canada-election-misinformation-trump_n_5da76552e4b0a9a0f1d0c192?ri18n=true
		Robocalls Told Voters To Head To Polls On	21/10/2019	Samantha Beattie	https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/robocalls-voters-election-

		Wrong Day: Elections Canada			day_ca_5dae3931e4b08cfcc320c77b?mbt&?ncid=newsltcahpmgpols
	The National Post	Twitter says Canadian election so far free of major manipulation attempts	24/09/2019	Christian Paas-Lang	https://nationalpost.com/pmn/news-pmn/canada-news-pmn/twitter-says-canadian-election-so-far-free-of-major-manipulation-attempts
		So far, federal election has had little misinformation or disinformation: researchers	10/10/2019	The Canadian Press	https://nationalpost.com/news/politics/election-2019/election-has-been-mostly-free-of-mis-and-disinformation-research-shows
	The Toronto Star	Why political memes — which are virtually unregulated — matter to this federal election	05/10/2019	Melanie Green	https://www.thestar.com/vancouver/2019/10/05/why-political-memes-which-are-virtually-unregulated-matter-to-this-federal-election.html
		Addressing the real problem of fake news	19/10/2019	Tara Deschamps	https://www.thestar.com/business/2019/10/19/addressing-the-real-problem-of-fake-news.html
		Why are Twitter and Facebook taking a position on Canada's elections?	21/10/2019	Shenaz Kermalli	https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2019/10/21/why-are-twitter-and-facebook-taking-a-position-on-canadas-elections.html
	The Toronto Sun	Fake news links Bill Morneau to RCMP commish	19/09/2019	Brian Lilley	https://torontosun.com/news/national/fake-news-links-bill-morneau-to-rcmp-commish
Media literacy and credibility	CBC News	For New Brunswick millennials, making an informed vote isn't always easy	25/09/2019	Elizabeth Fraser	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/new-brunswick/voting-federal-election-1.5296362
		Right-wing outlets win legal battle to attend the leaders' debate	07/10/2019	Paola Loriggio	https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/rebel-media-true-north-federal-election-debate-2019-1.5312172
		CBC taking Conservative Party to court over online election ad	12/10/2019	CBC News	https://www.cbc.ca/news/cbc-conservative-party-lawsuit-1.5319209
	CTV News	Journalism group launches anti-fake news campaign ahead of election	02/10/2019	Salmaan Farooqui	https://election.ctvnews.ca/journalism-group-launches-anti-fake-news-campaign-ahead-of-election-1.4620124

	The Globe and Mail	Press freedom applies to everyone – even The Rebel	16/09/2019	Ezra Levant	https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-press-freedom-applies-to-everyone-even-the-rebel/
		Sept. 18: Where readers stand on Ezra Levant and The Rebel. Plus other letters to the editor	18/09/2019	N/A	https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/letters/article-sept-18-where-readers-stand-on-ezra-levant-and-the-rebel-plus-other
		CBC's lawsuit against the Conservatives reveals a broadcaster lost in the digital world	13/10/2019	Michael Geist	https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-the-cbc-is-lost-in-a-digital-world/
	Huffington Post	Rebel Media Question Shut Down By Bloc Quebecois Leader Yves-Francois Blanchet	08/10/2019	Mel Woods	https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/rebel-media-debate-yves-francois-blanchet_ca_5d9bfd83e4b03b475f9ecec0?
		New 'House Hippo 2.0' Ad From Media Smarts Aims To Teach Us About Fake News	09/10/2019	Mel Woods	https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/house-hippo-videofake-news_ca_5d9e472ae4b02c9da0437f8a?
	The National Post	Colby Cosh: Who is a journalist? The question that won't leave Canadians alone	11/10/2019	Colby Cosh	https://nationalpost.com/news/politics/election-2019/colby-cosh-who-is-a-journalist-the-question-that-wont-leave-canadians-alone
		CBC sues the Conservative party over copyright, 'moral rights' of journalists	12/10/2019	Michael Higgins	https://nationalpost.com/news/politics/election-2019/cbc-sues-the-conservative-party-over-copyright-journalists-moral-rights
	The Toronto Star	Journalists and 'fake news' entering election spotlight in 2019	20/09/2019	Kathy English	https://www.thestar.com/opinion/public_editor/2019/09/20/journalists-and-fake-news-taking-election-spotlight-in-2019.html?
		Canadian media 'unimpressed' by Google news changes	24/09/2019	Tony Wong	https://www.thestar.com/business/2019/09/18/canadian-media-unimpressed-by-google-news-changes.html
		Far-right website Rebel Media removed from Conservative campaign stop by police	30/09/2019	Mitch Potter	https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2019/09/30/rebel-without-a-media-accreditation.html
		Journalism group launches anti-fake	02/10/2019	Salmaan Farooqui	https://www.thestar.com/politics/federal/2019/10/02/journalism-

		news campaign ahead of Canadian election			group-launches-anti-fake-news-campaign-ahead-of-canadian-election.html
		As journalism goes, so goes democracy — the fight against fake news	02/10/2019	Natalie Turvey	https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2019/10/02/as-journalism-goes-so-goes-democracy-the-fight-against-fake-news.html
		Suspect fake news? Here are tools to check it, challenge it	04/10/2019	Kathy English	https://www.thestar.com/opinion/public_editor/2019/10/04/suspect-fake-news-here-are-tools-to-check-it-challenge-it.html
	The Toronto Sun	BRAUN: Canadian Journalism Foundation joining fight against fake news	02/10/2019	Liz Braun	https://torontosun.com/news/local-news/braun-canadian-journalism-foundation-joining-fight-against-fake-news
Other/general election integrity and technology coverage	CBC News	Foreign interference in elections hard to investigate, prosecute: Côté	18/09/2019	Elizabeth Thompson	https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/election-canada-interference-investigations-1.5287291?
		Federal public servants warned about online posts while in 'caretaker' mode	23/09/2019	The Canadian Press	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/public-servants-federal-election-caretaker-1.5293616
		Here's what Albertans have Googled related to the federal election	13/10/2019	Stephanie Dubois	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/google-trends-alberta-federal-election-1.5319733
		You've heard of the 'big 6' political parties, but what about the 'fringe 15'	19/10/2019	Peter Zimonjic	https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/fringe-parties-canada-election-2019-1.5327413
	Global News	Elections Canada website could be 'vulnerable' to cyberattack: RMC professor	02/10/2019	Jennifer Basa	https://globalnews.ca/news/5982444/elections-canada-website-cyberattack-rmc-professor/
	The Globe and Mail	Non-partisan group Future Majority aims to motivate young Canadians to vote	14/10/2019	John Friesen	https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-how-the-youth-vote-may-impact-the-election/
		Opinion: Forget foreign interference. We can mess up our election on our own, thanks	21/10/2019	Simon Houpt	https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-forget-foreign-interference-we-can-mess-up-our-election-on-our-own/

| | *The National Post* | How to suss out the pro-China candidate: New online voters guide probes Beijing's 'infiltration | 10/10/2019 | Tom Blackwell | https://nationalpost.com/news/politics/election-2019/how-to-suss-out-the-pro-china-candidate-new-online-voters-guide-probes-beijings-infiltration |
| | | Kelly McParland: Now who's interfering in an election? And the Liberals don't seem at all concerned | 16/10/2019 | Kelly McParland | https://nationalpost.com/news/politics/election-2019/kelly-mcparland-now-whos-interfering-in-an-election-and-the-liberals-dont-seem-at-all-concerned? |

Post-election media coverage

Theme	Outlet	Title	Date	Author	Link
Post-election debrief (impact of campaigns, memes, disinfo, Bill C-76)	CBC News	Researchers found evidence of Twitter troll activity in the last week of the federal election	25/10/2019	Roberto Rocha	https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/twitter-trolls-maga-trump-2019-election-1.5334038?
		'More needs to be done,' Gould says after some online election meddling detected	28/10/2019	Elizabeth Thompson	https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/election-misinformation-disinformation-interference-1.5336662
		Watch what you tweet: New election law 'chills speech,' say critics	03/11/2019	Evan Dyer	https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/elections-canada-section-91-2019-election-1.5345250?
		Fears of election meddling on social media were overblown, say researchers	03/11/2019	Roberto Rocha	https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/social-media-bots-trolls-canadian-election-2019-1.5343210?
		Elections Canada tried to beat back 'implausible' online rumours about pencils spoiling ballots	09/11/2019	Ashley Burke	https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/disinformation-pencil-smudging-ballot-election-2019-1.5353018?cmp=newsletter-news-digests-canada-and-world-morning
	CTV News	Foreign actors tried to influence Canadian election talk, but did they succeed?	25/11/2019	Nicole Bogart	https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/foreign-actors-tried-to-influence-canadian-election-talk-but-did-they-succeed-1.4701228

	Global News	Number of 3rd parties registered with Elections Canada up 28 per cent in 2019 vs. 2015	04/11/2019	Amanda Connolly	https://globalnews.ca/news/61040 91/third-parties-canadian-election-2019/
	The Globe and Mail	May's Greens evaluating campaign tactics after disappointing election results	23/10/2019	Justine Hunter	https://www.theglobeandmail.com /canada/british-columbia/article-federal-greens-learn-from-disappointing-campaign/?
	The National Post/Financ ial Post	Vivian Krause: Obama wasn't the only American interfering in the Canadian election	22/10/2019	Vivian Krause	https://financialpost.com/opinion/ vivian-krause-obama-wasnt-the-only-american-interfering-in-the-canadian-election
		Tech giants are turning their customers into products in threat to democracy, warns Jim Balsillie	07/11/2019	Barbara Shecter	https://financialpost.com/technolo gy/tech-giants-are-turning-their-customers-into-products-jim-balsillie-warns-gathering-on-fake-news?r
		John Ivison: Barack Obama — the man who won the Canadian federal election	13/11/2019	John Ivison	https://nationalpost.com/opinion/j ohn-ivison-barack-obama-the-man-who-won-the-canadian-federal-election?
		Colby Cosh: One cheer for Kevin O'Leary's quixotic attack on election law?	18/11/2019	Colby Cosh	https://nationalpost.com/opinion/c olby-cosh-one-cheer-for-kevin-olearys-quixotic-attack-on-election-law
	The Toronto Star	Justin Trudeau won the election — but lost the meme war	22/10/2019	Jenny Peng	https://www.thestar.com/vancouv er/2019/10/21/justin-trudeau-won-the-election-but-lost-the-meme-war.html
		Twitter's ad ban won't fix what ails our political culture	01/11/2019	Susan Delacourt	https://www.thestar.com/politics/p olitical-opinion/2019/11/01/twitters-ad-ban-wont-fix-what-ails-our-political-culture.html
		It wasn't on the ballot, but here's what voters really felt on election day: Irritated. Indifferent. Excluded.	13/11/2019	Martin Regg Cohn	https://www.thestar.com/politics/p olitical-opinion/2019/11/13/it-wasnt-on-the-ballot-but-heres-what-voters-really-felt-on-election-day-irritated-indifferent-excluded.html

		How the Liberals won — an inside look at the targeting and tactics that got Trudeau re-elected	23/11/2019	Susan Delacourt	https://www.thestar.com/politics/2019/11/23/how-the-liberals-won-an-inside-look-at-the-targeting-and-tactics-that-got-trudeau-re-elected.html
		How Obama — and Trump — helped Trudeau win the election	24/11/2019	Susan Delacourt	https://www.thestar.com/politics/2019/11/24/how-obama-and-trump-helped-trudeau-win-the-election.html
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