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UNCLASSIFIED
MAY 2024



A SAFE, SECURE AND
INDEPENDENT ELECTION

Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force

Threats to the Durham Electoral District
By-election, March 2024

Canada

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Cette publication est également disponible en français :

Menaces pour les élections partielles fédérales du Canada – avril 2024

PS9-34/2024E-PDF

ISBN: 978-0-660-71369-4

Background

On January 29, 2024, the Honourable Dominic LeBlanc, Minister of Public Safety, Democratic Institutions, and Intergovernmental Affairs, announced that the Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections Task Force (SITE TF) was to provide enhanced monitoring and assessment of foreign interference (FI) threats against the federal by-election being held on March 4, 2024, in the following electoral district ([Government of Canada announces measures to protect Durham by-election from foreign interference - Canada.ca](#)):

- Durham, Ontario

This report covers the SITE TF activities and observations of foreign actors' intentions and FI activities directed at the March 2024 federal by-election.

Scope and resources

The SITE TF was initially created in 2018 and given the mandate to enhance monitoring and assess foreign interference threats directed at general federal elections. In 2023, the Government requested SITE's activation during federal by-elections.

On February 6, 2024, the SITE TF produced a classified baseline threat assessment on the Durham by-election taking into consideration potential FI indicators specific to the Durham region, for the Deputy Minister Committee on Intelligence Response (DMCIR)¹.

The SITE TF then provided DMCIR weekly updates on FI and violent extremism threats to the by-election from February 6 to March 14, 2024, based on weekly situation reports (SITREPs). The weekly SITREPs considered inputs from all SITE agencies further to ongoing consultations of their respective operational areas.

The current report covers the SITE TF observations of foreign threat actors' intentions and activities relating to FI as well as any observations of threats of violent extremism with respect to the Durham by-election. It is based on analysis, reporting and observations from classified and unclassified sources that were reviewed from January 29 to March 11, 2024. The vote was held on March 4, 2024.

¹ During general federal elections, as per the Cabinet Directive on the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol, the protocol is administered by a group of five senior civil servants initiated to respond to incidents that occur during the caretaker period ([Cabinet Directive on the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol - Canada.ca](#).) Incidents that occur outside of the caretaker period are addressed through regular Government of Canada operations.

SITE TF members and role

The SITE TF is chaired by the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) and consists of representatives from the Communications Security Establishment (CSE), the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and Global Affairs Canada (GAC). The SITE TF's role is to help safeguard the Canadian federal elections from FI by:

- providing a clear point of engagement with the security and intelligence community for government partners that are engaged in related work.
- reviewing and focussing intelligence collection, assessment and open-source analysis related to FI in Canada's democratic process in a coordinated manner.
- providing situational awareness for government partners, senior public servants and other relevant partners.
- promoting the use of intelligence, assessment and open-source information analysis in the protection of electoral processes through sharing with partners or, when respective mandates permit, taking action to mitigate the threat.
- providing political parties with advice and guidance during a SITE briefing, including an overview of common cyber threats and best practices for IT security.
- providing enhanced monitoring of cyber incidents.
- offering political parties a 24/7 Hotline Service² to obtain centralized support if party or candidate communications, email, or social media accounts are compromised.

Foreign interference

The SITE TF defines foreign interference as, “activity conducted or supported by a foreign state/actor that is detrimental to Canadian national interests and is clandestine, deceptive or involves a threat to a person.” In the context of Canadian electoral processes, the objective of FI is to affect electoral outcomes and/or undermine public confidence in Canadian democratic institutions.

Observations on foreign interference

The SITE TF monitored for FI directed at the Durham electoral district by-election from January 29 to March 11, 2024. The SITE TF did not observe any indication of FI activities directed at the by-election during the specified time period. No cyber incidents were detected to

² Supported by CSE's Canadian Center for Cyber Security, the 24/7 Hotline Service will continue to be available to political parties for reporting of cyber incidents until one month after the election. When the Hotline is activated, it triggers an immediate response to minimize damage and restore normal operations

suggest that any foreign state actors were specifically targeting Elections Canada's infrastructure from January 29 to March 11, 2024.

Violent extremism

While the SITE TF is focussed on FI, the RCMP and CSIS have mandates and authorities to investigate threats of violent extremism. For the March 4, 2024 by-election, the SITE TF committed to reporting any threats of violent extremism directed at the by-election.

Observations on violent extremism

The SITE TF monitored for threats of violent extremism directed at the by-election from January 29 to March 11, 2024. The SITE TF did not observe any threats of violent extremism directed at the Durham electoral district by-election during the specified time period. The SITE TF did not identify any direct threats to the by-election in social media, message boards, chatrooms, online forums or news media relating to the by-election. No direct threats to any of the candidates, nor to the administration of the election, were identified.