

MEMO #1

Canadian Election Integrity Project



Purpose

The purpose of this memo is to summarize what was discussed with students and faculty of the Political Management Program at Carleton University for the first session of the Canadian Election Integrity Project, held on February 13, 2020.

What was presented

Facebook officials gave an overview of Facebook's Canadian Election Integrity Initiative (bit.ly/2wsr84F), which launched in October 2017 as a direct response to the Communications Security Establishment's Cyber Threats to Canada's Democratic Process report. The Canadian Election Integrity Initiative consisted of investments in People, Technology and Partnerships:

People

Dedicated Canadian elections team

Facebook has in place a cross-functional team dedicated to ensuring election integrity in Canada on the platform. Led by the public policy team in Canada, this team also consists of employees from other disciplines including security, threat intelligence, product, community operations and legal.

Elections Operations Centre

In the final days leading up to the federal election, Facebook set up an elections operation centre in both Ottawa and Menlo Park, California to coordinate in real-time on any issues that surfaced in the run-up to the election.

Elections Authorities

Facebook worked with the Office of the Commissioner of Canada Elections and the Privy Council Office to protect the integrity of the election on Facebook ahead of the 2019 federal election. For past provincial elections, Facebook worked closely with provincial electoral commissions across the country and conducted outreach to help candidates and parties keep their accounts secure during campaigns.

Security and integrity team

Facebook now has 35,000 people working globally on security matters, including on elections around the world.

Technology

Fake accounts

Facebook has scaled up automated detection and removal of fake accounts using artificial intelligence. We disabled over 1.5 billion accounts in Q2 2019 and 1.7 billion in Q3 2019, of which the majority were removed within minutes of registration.

Advisory group

In Canada, where there aren't laws or agencies that list key issues that need to be captured in the Ad Library, Facebook consulted with a group of prominent Canadian leaders (bit.ly/3arhmCk), representing Canada's broad political spectrum. Facebook partnered with these local experts (bit.ly/2ljQMeH) to identify key issues likely to be debated in the federal election to help determine the type of issue ads that should be included in the Ad Library.

Partnerships

Third Party Fact-Checking

Facebook launched third-party fact-checking in Canada with Agence France-Presse, an International Fact Checking Network (IFCN) (poynter.org/ifcn/) certified independent fact-checker.

Women's Safety

Facebook developed a Women's Safety Guide, (bit.ly/2TsdW8M) in partnership with Equal Voice, to help political candidates and their teams stay safe while they connect with new audiences. Events were held with regional chapters of Equal Voice to help educate members on these important resources and as part of a commitment to providing a platform to help women safely connect and build communities.

Ad transparency

In June 2019, ahead of the October federal election, Facebook rolled out (bit.ly/3341ek9) a set of transparency tools for advertisers. Advertisers running ads about social issues, elections or politics must self identify by adding the "Paid for by" disclaimer to the ads.

Ad Library

The Ad Library (bit.ly/2TBoMFy) is a comprehensive ads transparency surface, providing a view of ads on Facebook and Instagram. It is a public, searchable database that houses ads related to politics, elections and social issues. The Ad Library shows a range for impressions (reach) and ad dollar spend, as well as the demographics of who saw the ad. These ads will live in the Ad Library for seven years.

Civic Engagement

Facebook worked with Elections Canada, and other partners such as Apathy is Boring and OCAD University, to develop a suite of civic engagement tools (bit.ly/2wtO5V8). These tools encouraged voter registration, connected people to information about when and where to vote, and allowed them to celebrate with fun ways to share they voted.

Civic Boost

In May and June 2019, Facebook Canada went on tour across the country, engaging Canadians on civic engagement, small business success and local news innovation. The tour included stops in Halifax, Ottawa, Montreal, Oshawa, Calgary, and Vancouver.

What was discussed

Following the overview presentation, students and faculty of the Political Management Program discussed the following points with Facebook officials.

Key themes

Digital Literacy

- ▶ Digital literacy was identified as a key bulwark against misinformation. It is important to educate all citizens, in particular high school students and seniors, on the challenges of misinformation online and the safe use of Internet platforms. The group discussed the importance that all stakeholders take digital literacy and cyber hygiene seriously.
- ▶ It was recommended that Facebook make an effort to be part of the curriculum development process at the provincial level to better build digital literacy into school curriculum. Partnerships, such as the one with Media Smarts (bit.ly/39Dtuw4) to create educational collateral are a great first step in educating target audiences, but there needs to be more steps taken to fill the education gap.

Political Advertising

- ▶ When discussing political advertising, it was noted that Facebook's ad transparency efforts focus on federal issues, rather than provincial and municipal issues, which can vary widely across the country. While it was acknowledged that Facebook classifies political advertisements under broad thematic buckets, which can include issues within the jurisdiction of provincial and/or municipal politics, it was recommended that more thought be given to how to bring further transparency to political ads at the provincial and local level.

Misinformation

- ▶ The group discussed the historical and geopolitical origins, dimensions and evolution of information operations. It was noted that misinformation is a historical and global problem that has perceptually become a "Facebook issue" rather than a broader societal issue. One member of the faculty suggested that this may be due to people's feelings towards Facebook rather than the facts of the matter, in particular in Canada. It was suggested that Facebook's Election Integrity Initiative seems to be an intellectual response to an emotional issue. A question was asked whether that was enough to address public perceptions and concern. How else should Facebook be working to address these concerns, however well founded or not?
- ▶ The group discussed the role of the fear of the unknown, as well as society's capacity to adapt to rapid technological change, as potential drivers of the broader issues and concerns about the digital economy. Facebook should do more to provide educational resources to bridge the gaps in knowledge and understanding of its technology.

Content Regulation

- ▶ Students discussed the merits and challenges of Government regulation of online content. There was a discussion on the appropriate limits to freedom of expression on the Internet, as well as whether it was better for government or private companies to draw lines on what content should be allowed online.
- ▶ It was debated that in liberal democracies, where there are strong functioning elements of a state and free press, that the responsibility may appropriately lie with politicians and the media to hold political figures to account. The group questioned whether demarcating the limits of free expression should be delegated to the private sector.

Civic Engagement

- ▶ It was noted that people who are skilled at using Facebook's tools and are equipped with training and best practices are at an advantage when advocating for political and social issues. It was recommended that Facebook increase its efforts to find ways to give everyone equal access to best practices and better educate people on how to use the platform.
- ▶ Facebook officials described the best practice tools freely available to the public through its Politics, Government and Advocacy website: politics.fb.com (politics.fb.com), as well as its outreach efforts in Canada.
- ▶ It was noted that there is not enough awareness of the Facebook resources freely available to everyone. It was discussed that tools such as politics.fb.com (politics.fb.com) or the Women's Safety Guide (bit.ly/2TsdW8M) could be better publicized and distributed to a broader community.

Suggested areas for further consideration by Facebook

- ▶ What else can Facebook do to address broader concerns about misinformation and individuals who abuse their presence on platforms, that goes beyond intellectual solutions and addresses the emotional root of some of these concerns?
- ▶ How can Facebook become more involved in digital literacy, particularly supporting the creation of educational curriculum for youth?
- ▶ In what ways can Facebook better distribute best practices, resources and tools to a wider audience, in order to help bridge gaps in skills and level the playing field?

Overview of the Canadian Election Integrity Project

Through a series of engagements in collaboration with Riddell students, faculty and the broader political ecosystem, the Project will reflect on the 2019 federal election and Facebook's ongoing work through the Canadian Election Integrity Initiative (bit.ly/2lPprWG) with the goal of developing lessons learned for the next federal election.

This work builds on Facebook's ongoing election integrity efforts and reinforces the commitment to engage in ongoing dialogue with the broader policy ecosystem in Canada. This effort is all the more relevant given the shifting landscape of elections and the importance of protecting the democratic process, both online and off.

Additional Feedback

The public may inquire about the Canadian Election Project and provide direct feedback to the following email: canadianelectionintegrityinitiative@fb.com

FACEBOOK