



Political campaign materials used to sway voters in the 2021 territorial elections seen on July 5, 2022. (Dana Hatherly/Yukon News)

‘Growing threat’ of foreign interference in Yukon elections, chief electoral officer says

Maxwell Harvey finds no evidence of foreign intervention

DANA HATHERLY / Mar. 23, 2023 2:00 p.m. / LOCAL NEWS

Elections Yukon will continue to take measures to better position and protect territorial elections against the “growing threat” of foreign interference, according to territory’s chief electoral officer.

Considering recent conversations on the national stage, Premier Ranj Pillai prompted chief electoral officer Maxwell Harvey in a March 9 letter about how foreign interference can continue to be prevented in the territory’s elections.

“While I am not aware of any evidence that foreign interference has occurred in a Yukon election, this is an opportune moment for Elections Yukon to describe what policies and procedures exist to protect our elections from foreign interference,” Pillai wrote.

In his March 13 response, Harvey wrote that foreign interference in Canadian democratic institutions is a matter of shared interest and common focus for all jurisdictions.

“Foreign interference is an attack on democracy and a threat to fair, secure and compliant elections,” Harvey wrote.

“While there is no evidence of foreign intervention in Yukon elections, it is a growing risk that must be recognized and managed.”

Harvey said the subject is complex given it is a global phenomenon that is dynamic in scale and scope and often involves state actors and large networks.

“It is one of many serious threats to electoral integrity,” Harvey wrote.

He noted that at the core of preventing foreign interference is an ecosystem of interdependent and interconnected measures.

“Typically, this ecosystem has three strategies: strengthening campaign finance regulations to prevent the influence of foreign influencers (this includes third

parties), reducing the impact of social media disinformation and the strengthening of cyber security to prevent hacking and privacy breaches.”

Elections Yukon is responding to potential electoral interference within existing capabilities, budgets and authorities, according to Harvey. Beyond internal means, introducing meaningful legislative change, realigning organizational structures, strengthening partnerships and expanding monitoring and enforcement measures can also be done.

“Progressing an *Elections Act* change has been problematic,” Harvey wrote.

Harvey wrote that most of the Elections Yukon recommendations have been stalled or dismissed without follow up by the legislative assembly’s Members’ Services Board or Yukon government’s Executive Council Office.

“If *Elections Act* changes are needed, a corresponding willingness, commitment and priority to make the necessary legislative change are required,” he wrote.

“The *Elections Act* and the *Electoral District Boundaries Act* should be administered by the legislative assembly to ensure complete independence from government while ensuring that Members’ Services Board, an all-party committee of the legislative assembly, can provide guidance and facilitate the amendment process.”

Harvey indicated Elections Yukon is working on a report on foreign interference.

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