CANADIAN DIGITAL MEDIA RESEARCH NETWORK

Canadian Information Ecosystem (CIE)
SITUATION REPORT
Technical briefing on the state of the information ecosystem, June 2024 • **www.cdmrn.ca**

Introduction

Welcome to the second edition of the Canadian Information Ecosystem Situation Report! Each month, we report on the state of the information ecosystem in the previous month as it relates to politics, media, and the broader state of democracy. Our goal is to enhance collective understanding of the stable and dynamic dimensions of the Canadian information ecosystem (CIE), articulate its vulnerabilities, and characterize current and emerging information threats. Our method combines digital trace data (social media analysis of Canadian individuals and organizations that are politically influential across TikTok, Twitter/X, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and Telegram), opinion tracking (a monthly survey of the Canadian population), and media monitoring.

Key findings:

◆ **Mounting awareness of and concern over foreign influence (FI)** — The release of the NSICOP report and the passage of Bill C-70 focused Canadians attention on the threat of foreign interference. Canadians experienced a noticeable increase in their concern about FI and associated phenomena (misinformation and generative AI) as well as an increasing belief that China (67%), Russia (56%), and India (35%) are using convert means to influence Canadian politics.

◆ **Lower appetite for news and politics in June** — As spring rolled into summer, Canadians spent less time consuming political information, with self-reported social media consumption dropping most dramatically (-5.4%). Correspondingly, we observe a pronounced drop (-11%) in overall volume of social media engagement, specifically among politicians (-12%) and media organizations (-16%).

◆ **Top Canadian news outlets are moderate and have broad appeal** — CBC, CTV, and Global News each reach a large number of Canadians and are consistently among the highest social media engagement earners. The average reader of these outlets is ideologically moderate.

◆ **Small right-wing outlets punch above their weight on social media** — True North, The Post Millennial, and Rebel News are all ideologically right-wing outlets that are only read weekly by between 5-7% of Canadians. Despite this small footprint, they have a large online presence, all ranking in the top ten for Canadian news outlets for engagement. They receive the bulk of their engagement from Twitter and YouTube, with some from Instagram.

CIE This Month
State of Engagement with News Outlets

Each month we provide a visualization that provides insight into some features of the CIE. This month's ecosystem snapshot focuses on the state of engagement with top Canadian news outlets. We capture engagement by contrasting their online engagement on major social media platforms with self-reported weekly use of these outlets and ideologies. We observe CTV and CBC leading in social media engagement, with Rebel News, The Post Millennial and La Presse rounding out the top five outlets. Survey data showing self-reported weekly use for political and current affairs content has CBC, CTV and Global News leading the pack, reaching approximately a third of Canadians. After that we see a notable dropoff, with other outlets reaching only 10% or less of the Canadian population each week.
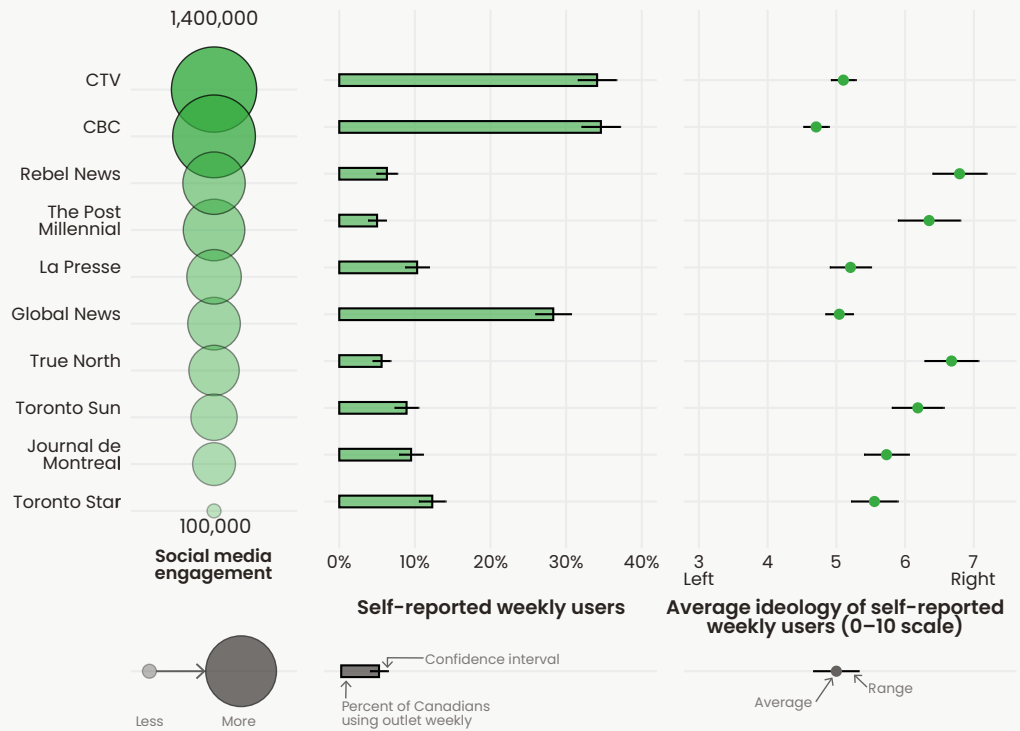
The average readers of the most consumed news outlets, CBC, CTV, and Global News, are ideologically moderate (self-reported). In contrast, outlets that are read by more ideologically right leaning audiences have disproportionately large online engagement metrics compared to their national readership levels. Overall, there is no single dominant outlet in the top 10 news outlets in Canada when considering engagement or usership levels.

Health of the Information Ecosystem
VULNERABILITIES

We evaluate the vulnerability of the information ecosystem by looking at four characteristics. First, inequality helps us understand the extent the online conversation in the CIE is skewed towards a minority of voices. Second, polarization shows how segregated information flows are within communities. Third, toxicity captures how harmful and uninviting the information environment can be to individuals, communities, and organizations. Fourth, we measure trust to gauge the extent that people believe information gatekeepers are acting in the best interests of Canadians. Together, these four characteristics can open or restrict information flows, diversify or narrow information sources and beliefs, and influence acceptance or denial of false or accurate information. Most measures are reported on a scale of 0 (low) to 1 (high).

Inequality

Measurement

We evaluate **inequality** using the Gini coefficient (the extent influence within an information ecosystem deviates from a perfectly even distribution). The scale ranges from 0 (each entity has equal influence) to 1 (a single entity has all the influence). Fewer information sources (high number) severely restricts information flows, which can lead to the faster spread and deeper penetration of misinformation.
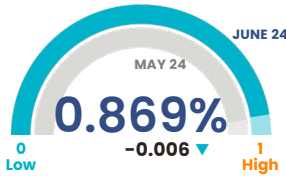
Findings

Inequality has dropped from extremely high to high with a value of 0.87 this month versus 0.93 the previous. The conversation remains highly skewed to a small number of highly influential accounts.

Inequality

How skewed is the CIE towards a small set of accounts?

MAY 24 — JUNE 24
0.869%
−0.006 ▼
0 Low — 1 High
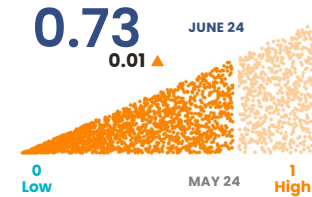
Polarization

Measurement

We evaluate polarization through **segmentation** (the extent a network is divided into distinct communities, 0=low segmentation and 1=high segmentation), **insularity** (the extent political party families engage with others outside their political party, with a higher number representing a more insular party family) and **division** (how people feel about their own political party versus other parties, 0=low and 100=high).

Findings

Group segmentation is moderate-to-high, with a score of 0.73. The least insular party is the Conservatives and the most insular is the NDP. Overall, we see party groups becoming slightly more insular than the previous month. Division towards political outgroups is moderate, with a score of 22.8%. These moderate-to-high scores indicate that information flow does occur across and between communities but that the flow is quite unequal and there is some suspicion of information from political outgroups.
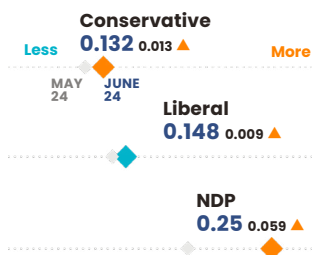
Segmentation

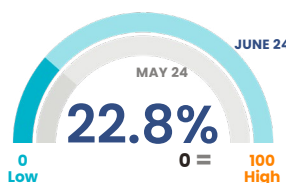How segmented into distinct communities is the CIE?

0.73 JUNE 24
0.01 ▲
0 Low — MAY 24 — 1 High

Insularity

How insular are parties relative to one another?

Conservative
0.132 0.013 ▲
Less — MAY 24 / JUNE 24 — More

Liberal
0.148 0.009 ▲

NDP
0.25 0.059 ▲

Division

How do people feel about their own political party versus other parties?

JUNE 24
MAY 24
22.8%
0 =
0 Low — 100 High

Toxicity

Measurement

We evaluate toxicity by measuring **toxic speech** (presence of toxic speech among posts by political influencers, with lower values indicating lower toxicity), **chilled speech** (extent people avoid online political discussion and opinion sharing, 0=low to 100=high), and **news avoidance** (extent people avoid the news all together, 0=low to 100=high).

Findings

Toxicity in the CIE is very low, with a score of 0.0123. 64.6% of Canadians are fairly hesitant to engage in politics online and/or refrain from sharing personal opinions on politics, and 33.8% of Canadians actively avoid seeking out news stories on social media. Together, we observe that content produced by key figures in the CIE has low toxicity, but that a significant number of Canadians still avoid the news and abstain from political discussion.

Toxic Speech

How prevalent is toxic speech in the CIE?

0.012 0.002 ▲
Less — MAY 24 / JUNE 24 — More

Chilled Speech

What extent do people avoid political discussion and opinion sharing?

0 Low — 100 High
JUNE 24 | MAY 24
64.6%
−0.3 ▼

News Avoiding

What extent do people avoid the news?

0 Low — 100 High
JUNE 24 | MAY 24
33.8%
−0.5 ▼

Trust

Measurement

We evaluate trust by asking Canadians about their **confidence in information gatekeepers** (journalists, media organizations, politicians, and big tech).
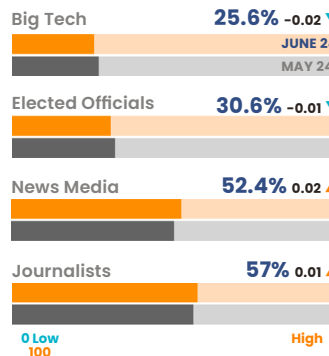
Findings

41.4% of Canadians possess a fair amount or a lot of trust in the gatekeepers of our online information ecosystem. The most trusted actors are journalists (57%), followed by news media (52.4%). The actors with the least trust are elected officials (30.6%) and big tech companies like Meta and Google (25.6%). Low trust in information gatekeepers makes the CIE more vulnerable to external influence and misinformation.
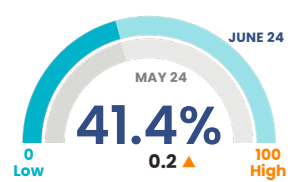
Trust

How much do people trust each type of gatekeeper?

Big Tech **25.6%** −0.02 ▼
JUNE 24
MAY 24

Elected Officials **30.6%** −0.01 ▼

News Media **52.4%** 0.02 ▲

Journalists **57%** 0.01 ▲

0 Low 100 — High

Trust in Information Gatekeepers

How much do people trust the information gatekeepers?

JUNE 24
MAY 24
41.4%
0.2 ▲
0 Low — 100 High

Health of the Information Ecosystem
THREATS

We assess threats to the CIE by evaluating the presence of and concern regarding misinformation, foreign influence, and AI-generated content. Each of these threats can distort the online conversation, mislead and manipulate Canadians, and decrease our collective ability to understand and respond to challenges and opportunities.
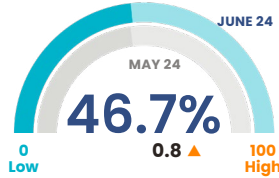
Misinformation

Measurement

We evaluate the threat of misinformation by measuring Canadians' **concern about misinformation** (0=low to 100=highly concerned), the extent **misinformation links are shared** across social media platforms by politically influential voices (0=little to 100=high sharing), and **public discussion about misinformation** and associated information phenomena (0=low to 100=high discussion).

Findings

46.7% of Canadians are very concerned about misinformation. We find that 1.94% of links shared in posts by Canadian influential voices are to known misinformation websites, garnering 12.9% of total engagement with links. This is a slight decrease from the previous month of -2.78%. We find that 0.46% of posts reference the topics of misinformation, disinformation, foreign interference, fake news, or deep fakes — a slight increase from the previous month (+0.13%). Canadians are deeply concerned about the role misinformation plays in our political discourse. This concern is appropriate, as significant engagement with the CIE goes to posts sharing links to known misinformation websites.
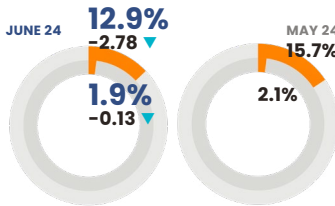
Concern about misinformation

How concerned are people about misinformation?

JUNE 24
MAY 24
46.7%
0.8 ▲
0 Low   100 High

Linking to known misinformation websites

How common and popular are web links to known misinformation websites?

JUNE 24
12.9%
-2.78 ▼
1.9%
-0.13 ▼

MAY 24
15.7%
2.1%

Discussion about misinformation

How often do people post about misinformation and foreign influence?

0.46%
JUNE 24   0.13 ▲
MAY 24   0.34

0   0.5   1   1.5   2%
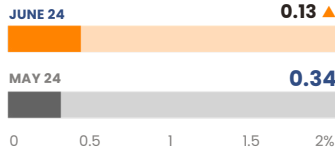
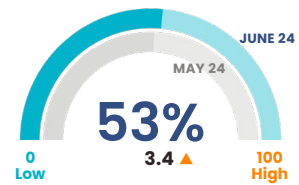## Foreign Influence

Measurement

We evaluate the threat of foreign influence by measuring Canadians' **concern about foreign influence** on media and politics and **the extent overt foreign entities** (China, Russia, and India) **are influencing the Canadian conversation**.

Findings

53% of Canadians are concerned about foreign influence, an increase of +3.4% from last month. Of all connections identified in our network, we observe that Indian accounts continue to influence Canadian accounts the most (1.58%) with an increase this month of +0.43%. China followed with 0.37%, and Russia with just 0.10% of all connections. While Canadians believe foreign influence is being generally attempted, for this month we continue to observe low overt information influence on the overall Canadian conversation.
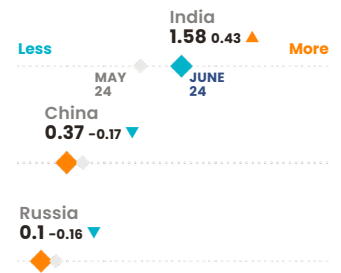
Concern about Foreign Influence

How concerned are people about foreign influence?

JUNE 24
MAY 24
53%
3.4 ▲
0 Low   100 High

Directed foreign influence

To what extent are overt foreign influencers impacting the CIE?

Less   More

India
1.58 0.43 ▲
MAY 24   JUNE 24

China
0.37 -0.17 ▼

Russia
0.1 -0.16 ▼

Artificial Intelligence

Concern about AI

How concerned are people about artificial intelligence?

JUNE 24
MAY 24
59.6%
0.9 ▲
0 Low   100 High
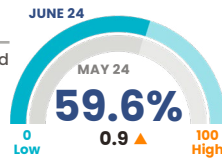
Measurement

We assess the threat of generative AI by measuring **concern about AI** generated content misleading the general public.

Findings

59.6% of Canadians feel that AI-generated content misleading the public is a serious problem.

Health of the Information Ecosystem
STATE OF ENGAGEMENT WITH NEWS & POLITICS

We report on the state of engagement with news and politics to provide insight into social media preferences and behaviours for news and politics consumption and dialogue. We evaluate news by looking at news-seeking and sharing to capture the appetite for news, regional preferences for news consumption, and engagement in online political conversation. Second, we characterize engagement with news outlets by assessing inequality, top outlets, and platform preferences to identify dominant news sources and the main mechanisms for digital news engagement. Finally, we examine online engagement with politicians by looking at relative engagement with party leaders and politicians, as well as platform preferences. We do so to identify where most of the political discussion takes place (on which platform) and who leads this conversation. In a healthy ecosystem, we would expect to see a high level of news seeking across a variety of sources and the free flow of ideas and commentary on the political and media landscape.
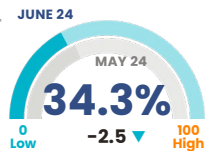
News

Measurement

We evaluate engagement with news using six indicators: 1) **news seeking** (the extent Canadians seek out news); 2) **news sharing** (the frequency of sharing news and opinions on social media); and 3-6) **news consumption types** (the extent Canadians consume news from social media, local, national and international news outlets.)

Findings
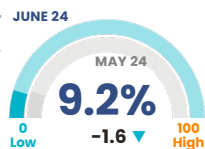
We observe that 34.3% of Canadians search for news and 9.2% share news and their political views at least once a week. Local news is the most reported source for Canadians to receive information (41.9%), followed by social media (34.2%), national (36.1%), and international news sources (28.6%). There is a slight decrease this month in news consumption across all sources, with social media affected the most (-5.4%). About one third of Canadians are attentive to political information, and fewer than a quarter engage in the online political conversation.

News Seeking

How many Canadians seek out information about the news?

JUNE 24
MAY 24
34.3%
-2.5 ▼
0 Low   100 High

News Sharing

How much do Canadians actively engage in posting and sharing news on social media?

JUNE 24
MAY 24
9.2%
-1.6 ▼
0 Low   100 High

News Consumption

Where do Canadians get their news?

Local News   **41.9%** -3.5 ▼
JUNE 24
MAY 24

National News   **36.1%** -3 ▼

International   **28.6%** -1.4 ▼

Social Media   **34.2%** -5.4 ▼

0 Low   100 High
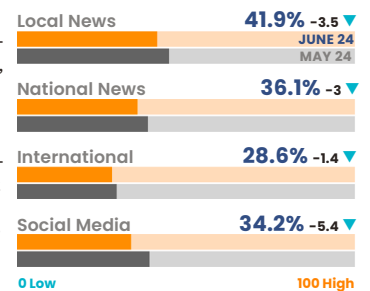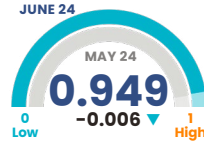
News Outlets

Measurement

We evaluate four characteristics of Canadian news outlets: 1) **inequality of engagement** with Canadian news outlets; 2) **top outlets** (the scale and nature of engagement with Canadian news outlets); 3) **national versus local news engagement** (preferences for local versus national news providers); and 4) **social media platform usage trends** of Canadian news outlets.

Findings

Engagement with Canadian news outlets is more unequal than the overall ecosystem with a Gini coefficient of 0.948 vs. 0.87. We find the top-5 Canadian outlets that attract the most engagement are CTV, CBC, Rebel News, The Post Millennial, and La Presse. Collectively the top-5 receives 50.3% of all online engagement with Canadian news content. Local news outlets receive 35.9% of all engagement with news content (an increase of +11.3% this month) in comparison to National engagement (64.1%,). Overall, the most engagement with news occurred on TikTok (35.9%), a decrease of -9.7% this month, followed by Twitter/X (30.1%) which remained stable.
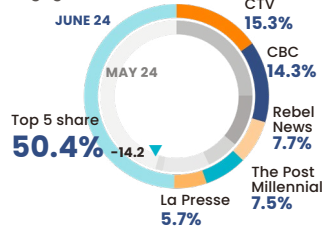
Inequality of news outlets
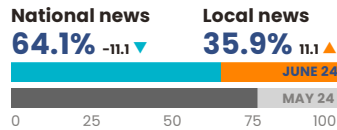
How skewed is the CIE to a small number of news outlets?

JUNE 24
MAY 24
0.949
−0.006 ▼
0 Low   1 High

Top 5 Canadian News Outlets

What are the top 5 Canadian news outlets? What is their share of total engagement?

JUNE 24
MAY 24

Top 5 share
**50.4%** −14.2 ▼

CTV **15.3%**
CBC **14.3%**
Rebel News **7.7%**
The Post Millennial **7.5%**
La Presse **5.7%**

National vs. local news engagement

How skewed is preference for national versus local news?

National news
64.1% −11.1 ▼

Local news
35.9% 11.1 ▲

JUNE 24
MAY 24
0   25   50   75   100

Social media platforms

Which social media platforms are most popular for news?

Instagram **3.7%**
Facebook **14.8%**
YouTube **15.5%**
Twitter/X **30.1%**
TikTok **35.9%**

MAY 24
JUNE 24
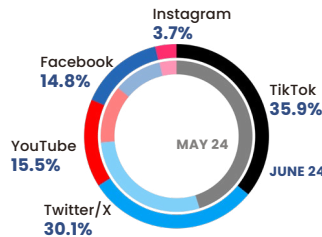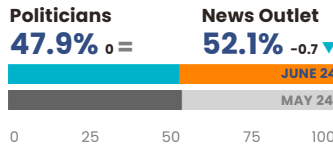
Politicians

Measurement

We evaluate the roles and characteristics of politicians in the information ecosystem using four measures: 1) **the top social media platforms** for engagement with Canadian politicians; 2) **political engagement on social media** (engagement with federal party leaders and elected party families; and 3) **news versus politician engagement** (comparing engagement between politicians and news outlets).

Findings

Politicians received the most engagement on Twitter/X (39.9%) followed by Facebook (30.4%) and Instagram (23.8%). Engagement with politicians declined significantly with TikTok this month (-14.3%) and increased on Twitter (+12%). The leader and members of the Conservative party continue to receive more engagement than other elected party leaders and members. However, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau increased his share of engagement with federal party leaders significantly by +12.6% (22.4% to 35.0%), while Pierre Poilievre saw his share decrease by -12.5% (67.9% to 55.4%). Interestingly, the Conservative and Liberal parties appear to have gained much of their engagement via Twitter, while the NDP primarily benefits from a strong presence on TikTok. Engagement with news outlets (52%) is slightly higher than engagement with politicians (48%).
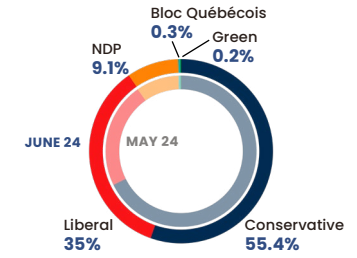
Politicians vs. news engagement

How skewed is preference for politician versus news content?

Politicians
47.9% 0 =

News Outlet
52.1% −0.7 ▼

JUNE 24
MAY 24
0   25   50   75   100

Engagement with party leaders

Which party leaders are most engaging with Canadians?

Bloc Québécois **0.3%**
Green **0.2%**
NDP **9.1%**
Liberal **35%**
Conservative **55.4%**

JUNE 24
MAY 24

Engagement with elected party members

Which elected party members are most engaging with Canadians?

Bloc Québécois **2.4%**
Green **0.9%**
Liberal **20.5%**
NDP **21.5%**
Conservative **54.8%**

JUNE 24
MAY 24
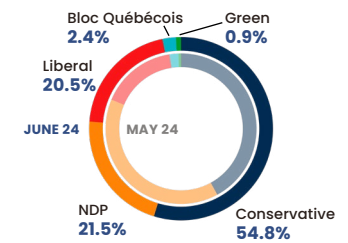
Social media platforms

Which social media platforms are most popular for Canadian politicians?

YouTube **3.1%**
TikTok **2.8%**
Instagram **23.8%**
Twitter/X **39.9%**
Facebook **30.4%**

JUNE 24
MAY 24
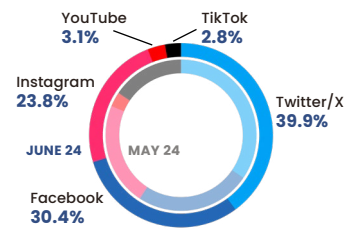
TOP STORIES

Each month, we identify the top topics that were discussed online by prominent voices in the Canadian information ecosystem. We also analyze certain elements of the conversation: when and where it occurred, who drove it, and what the nature of the discussion was.

This Month's Topics

In June, we found that the climate was a prominent topic of discussion. This was largely driven by news coverage of the heat wave that hit the eastern side of the country in mid-June, as well as discussion about the growing threat of wildfires. The majority of posts were shared on X/Twitter and Facebook and generated the most engagement with the topic, although some TikTok videos and Instagram posts about the heat wave and inclement weather (particularly one TikTok about a man in Manitoba caught between two tornadoes) also received many views, likes and comments.

Other trending topics included the instructure-related Calgary water shortage and the Bank of Canada's announcement regarding interest rate cuts. We observed high engagement with National Indigenous History Month in June and National Indigenous People's Day on June 21 (mostly by members of the NDP), the 80th anniversary of "D-Day" on June 6 (mostly by prominent politicians, such as Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Manitoba Premier Wab Kinew), Pride Month, and the Edmonton Oilers performance in the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

The most substantial political discussion driven by politicians and commentators was the ongoing war in Palestine. The conversation continued across the political spectrum, but largely has been taking place on Twitter/X. Other top political topics were largely driven by right-wing voices: Conservative politicians and commentators frequently discussed the housing crisis and affordability on Twitter/X and Facebook. Both NDP and Conservative voices were critical of the current federal government on the recent report from NSICOP that revealed some Members of Parliament may be aiding foreign powers.

We also ask our survey respondents if they have heard and believe a variety of major stories in Canada, allowing us to gauge attentiveness to current events and trust within the CIE.

Violin Plots

We depict the online discussion of these stories using violin plots. The 'violin' (the shape of the outline) indicates the distribution of engagement with each topic. The width of the plot is normalized against maximum engagement (when a story is being talked about the most) across the time period. A small violin indicates a burst of attention whereas a large violin indicates a longer drawn out conversation). Shapes are used to depict different platforms (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube). Colours are used to identify the type of source (influencer, media, and politician). Combined, this analysis provides insight into engagement with news stories and misinformation across given news stories or events.

Width = % of peak engagement

Time

- Influencer
- Media
- Politician
- Facebook
- Instagram
- Twitter
- YouTube
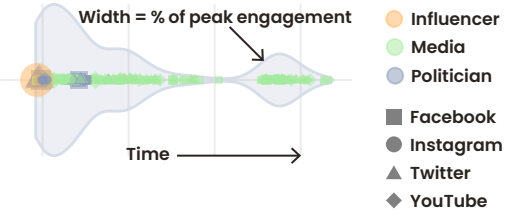
The Edmonton Oilers have been eliminated from the Stanley Cup Playoffs after losing to the Florida Panthers in 7 games.

Much of Canada rallied around the Edmonton Oilers as they reached the Stanley Cup Finals against the Florida Panthers. We see a surge in conversation, largely driven by news coverage, about the Oilers in early June when they won the Western Conference and a burst of excitement on June 18 when they won Game 5, sending the series back to Edmonton for Game 6. News outlets and politicians across the country (not just in Alberta!) expressed support for the Oilers, in the hopes that they would bring the Cup back to Canada for the first time since 1993.

Edmonton Oilers

Recall story — **76.7%**

Think it's likely true — **70.3%**
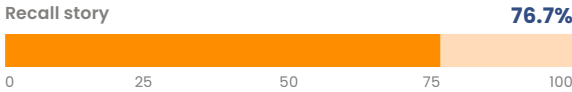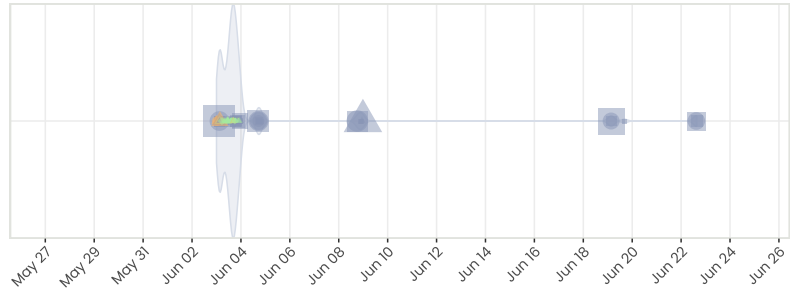
A recent report on foreign interference accuses Canadian Parliamentarians of 'wittingly' helping foreign state actors.

We observed a high volume of posts about foreign interference at the beginning of the month, when a NSICOP report was given to high-level Canadian government officials alleging that some Parliamentarians have helped foreign powers. The beginning of this conversation was driven by news coverage about the report and the subsequent responses of federal party leaders, but within days the discussion was dominated by politicians. The most popular posts came from members of the Conservative Party criticizing the Trudeau government's response to the allegations of foreign interference and calling for the release of the names of the Parliamentarians identified in the report.

NSICOP and Canadian Parliamentarians helping foreign state actors

Recall story — **50.6%**

Think it's likely true — **37.6%**
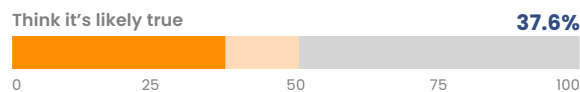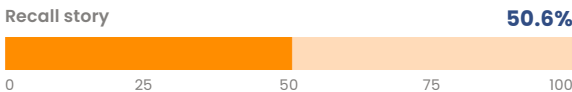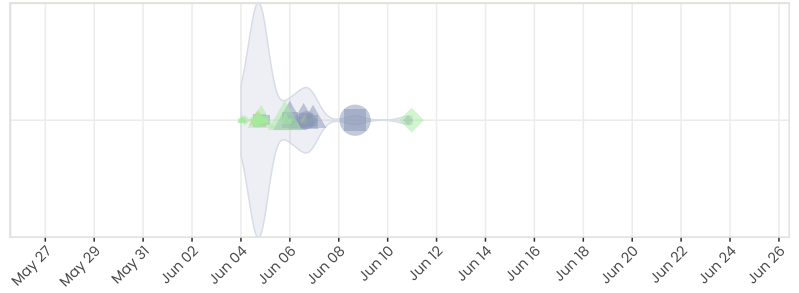
The Bank of Canada has lowered its key interest rate to 4.75 per cent, marking the bank's first rate cut since March 2020.

On June 4th, the Bank of Canada announced a cut to interest rates, inspiring a flurry of media coverage across platforms. Various politicians also weighed in, using the rate cut to provoke discussion about affordability and the cost of living in Canada. Notably, much of this political conversation was driven by Liberal politicians, applauding national efforts to address inflation and calling attention to the federal government's economic plans.

Bank of Canada rate cut

Recall story — **67.1%**

Think it's likely true — **59%**
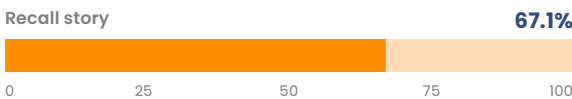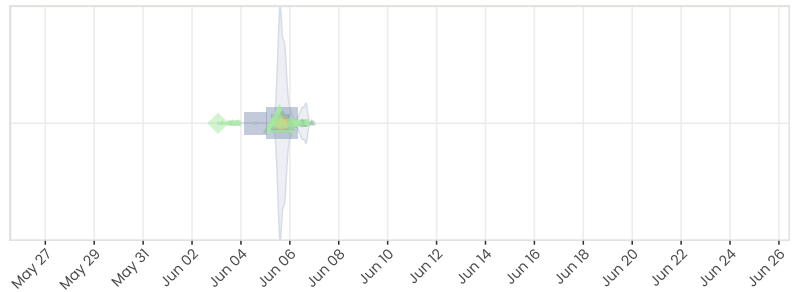
ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Data for this report includes social media 451,857 posts from 1,866 distinct entities with a total of 3,871 unique and active social handles for the period of May 27th to June 24th, 2024 and survey responses from 1404 Canadian adults conducted from June 26th to July 1st using a commercial survey panel provider. The margin of error for a comparable probability-based random sample of the same size is +/-2.6%, 19 times out of 20.

Engagement totals include engagement from Canadian and international audiences, which cannot be distinguished from each other.

For a link to our detailed methodology **click here**. To sign up for our month situation reports, **click here** . Please provide any comments you have on these reports to **info@cdmrn.ca**.

ABOUT THE CDMRN

The Canadian Digital Media Research Network (CDMRN) is a pioneering initiative committed to fortifying and fostering resilience within Canada's unique information ecosystem. Our mission is to understand the dynamics of information production, dissemination, and consumption across digital media with the goal of empowering Canadians to navigate the complexities of the modern digital age.

CORRECTIONS

The survey measure of division reported in the May Situation Report had a coding error. It has been corrected and all numbers in this report are accurate.

Media Ecosystem Observatory

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