Foreign Interference and Disinformation: Protecting democratic debate

CHV2O, Unit 2: Democratic Values in Action, Lesson 3. 75 minutes. Teacher lesson plan.

Lesson at a glance

Countries try to influence each other openly all the time. Foreign interference is different: it is secret, deceptive or threatening, and it targets voters, communities and debate in Canada. Knowing the methods is the best defence.

What students do: Students sort four scenarios into open influence and interference, learn key terms, study five methods of foreign interference and the institutions that defend against them, learn about Canada's Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference (2023–2025), watch the teacher check a fake voting post, sort methods and defences, and analyse an invented by-election case to judge its effect on democratic values and the responses to it.

Curriculum expectations

Code	Students will…
B1.3	analyse the methods and influence of foreign actors on democratic values in Canada, elections, and political discourse, including through the use of social media
A1.3	apply critical-thinking skills to assess the credibility and biases of relevant sources from a wide variety of media forms, including social media

From The Ontario Curriculum: Civics and Citizenship, Grade 10, Open (CHV2O), Revised Course, 2022. A = Political Inquiry and Skill Development; B = Civic Awareness; C = Civic Engagement, Service, and Action.

Learning goals and success criteria

Learning goals	Success criteria
• We are learning the difference between foreign influence and foreign interference. • We are learning methods foreign actors use to interfere, including on social media. • We are learning how Canada and citizens defend democracy against interference.	• I can explain the difference between open influence and interference. • I can identify methods of foreign interference. • I can name institutions that defend Canada's democracy and what they do. • I can judge the credibility of a suspicious election post.

Materials and preparation

- **Slides:** Foreign Interference and Disinformation deck.
- **Handouts:** Methods and Defences (page 1), Case File: Lakeshore Centre (page 2).
- **Teacher reading:** The public summary of the final report of the Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference (2025) and current information from Elections Canada and CSIS.

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Lesson sequence

Time (min)	Part	Teacher	Students	Look for
0–8	**Hook**	Influence or interference? Four scenarios.	Vote and explain.	Secret, deceptive or threatening named.
8–25	**Methods and defences**	Terms; five methods; defences; the public inquiry.	Take notes.	Can name methods and defenders.
25–33	**Model**	Check a fake voting post.	Follow.	Uses the four moves.
33–45	**Methods and Defences**	Guided practice.	Sort scenarios (page 1).	Correct sorting with reasons.
45–67	**Case File**	Conference.	Analyse the case (page 2).	Judgement on values and responses.
67–75	**Check and exit**	Quick check; self-check; exit ticket.	Answer.	

Differentiation

- **Support:** Give a one-line definition card for each method. Students may answer questions 1 to 3 on page 2 in point form.
- **ELL:** Pre-teach foreign, secret, threaten, hack and fake account; use the icons on the methods slide as visual cues.
- **Challenge:** Explain how a defence against interference could itself threaten a democratic value (for example, removing posts and freedom of expression), and how to balance them.

Assessment

Type	Tool	Purpose
Assessment for learning	Methods and Defences; Case File; exit ticket	Analyses methods and influence of foreign actors on democratic values, elections and discourse (B1.3); assesses credibility of sources, including social media (A1.3)

Interference: answers

- **Open influence (1):** The ambassador speaks publicly and openly, so people know who is speaking and why.
- **Disinformation (2):** A secret network of fake accounts spreads false claims about a candidate.
- **Intimidation (3):** Threats against relatives abroad aim to silence a person living in Canada.
- **Cyber attack (4), covert funding (5):** Hacked and altered emails; secret foreign money passed to a local group.

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- **Defences (6, 7, 8):** A platform removes fake accounts; CSIS warns a target; a student checks before sharing.
- **Case, methods:** Disinformation and fake accounts (week 1); intimidation of community members (week 2); hack-and-leak cyber attack (week 3).
- **Case, responses:** CSIS briefing, platform removals, a fact-check and police contact. Strong answers judge which worked fastest and what citizens could add.

Teacher notes

- Keep this lesson factual and general. Canada held a federal Public Inquiry into Foreign Interference in Federal Electoral Processes and Democratic Institutions from 2023 to 2025; its final report was released in early 2025. It examined interference in the 2019 and 2021 federal elections, found that foreign interference is a real and ongoing threat, and made recommendations to strengthen Canada's defences and protect targeted communities. Read the public summary yourself before teaching.
- The inquiry's public reports name specific foreign states. If you discuss them, quote the reports directly. Never link a community in Canada to the actions of a foreign government. Diaspora communities are often the main targets of interference, not its source.
- Methods include disinformation (often through fake or inauthentic accounts and, increasingly, AI-generated content), covert funding, intimidation of diaspora communities (sometimes called transnational repression), and cyber attacks such as hacking and leaking. CSIS describes foreign interference as activity by or for a foreign state that is covert, deceptive or involves threats, and is harmful to Canada's interests.
- Defences: Elections Canada runs federal elections and gives voters official information; the Commissioner of Canada Elections enforces the Canada Elections Act, which allows only Canadian citizens and permanent residents to donate to federal parties and candidates and bans the use of foreign funds for election advertising. CSIS investigates threats and can warn targets. The Canadian Centre for Cyber Security, part of the Communications Security Establishment (CSE), protects government and election systems. Platforms, journalists and fact-checkers, and citizens' media literacy are also defences.
- Federal elections in Canada use paper ballots, and there is no voting by text or online. That is why the model post is clearly false.
- Some students or their families may have experienced intimidation connected to another country. Don't ask students to share. If a student discloses a threat, follow your school's procedures and connect them with administration and the guidance team.
- Lakeshore Centre, Amira Shah, the Lakeshore Ledger and every event in the case file are invented.

Coming up

Lesson 4, Parties and the Political Compass.

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