



Introduction

Welcome to the fifth edition of the Canadian Information Ecosystem Situation Reports! 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, X/ Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and Telegram), opinion tracking (a monthly survey of the Canadian population), and media monitoring.

Key findings:

- ◆ **TikTok increasingly dominates news engagement** — The last several months have seen comparable levels of engagement between TikTok and X/ Twitter for Canadian news outlets. In September, TikTok has taken its lead and shifted from attracting one-third to almost half of social media engagement (34% to 58%). X/ Twitter moves to second place with a 17% drop in engagement.
- ◆ **Elected officials lose trust** — We saw a 5% point drop in trust of elected officials in September month-over-month measures. While rankings of most to least trusted information gatekeepers remain the same, with journalists being the most trusted (54%), only 28% of Canadians trust elected officials to act in the best interest of Canadians, only narrowly ahead of last place, 'Big Tech' (25%).
- ◆ **Podcasts play an increasingly important role in Canada, particularly for the politically interested** — Production of politics and news podcasts has increased since January 2023, with the past six months seeing the most dramatic increase. These podcasts are consumed at least weekly by approximately 17% of Canadians, with important differences by gender, age, language, and political interest groups. While Canadian podcasts are on the rise, Canadians overwhelmingly favour American podcasts for both political and cultural content.
- ◆ **CBC surges in popularity, BlogTO enters the Top 5 and appetite for local news increases** — The CBC displaced CTV to become the top news outlet people engaged with in September. The CBC jumped almost 20%, driven by TikTok engagement and earned nearly a third of all news engagement in September among Canadians with all news outlets (from 12 to 30%). BlogTO also entered the top five for the first time, occupying third place. This is due to interest in the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) and is tied to a massive increase in proportional engagement with local news (from 20% to 34%).

Important note for this month:

Facebook data is not included in this situation report and our month-to-month measures, due to Meta's decision to shut down their research tool for platform monitoring.

Ecosystem Snapshot

Tuning in to the Canadian Podcast Ecosystem

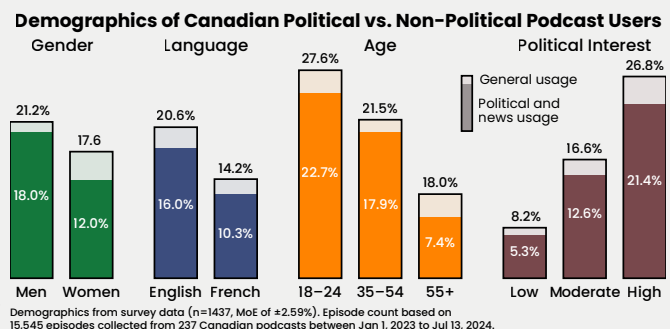
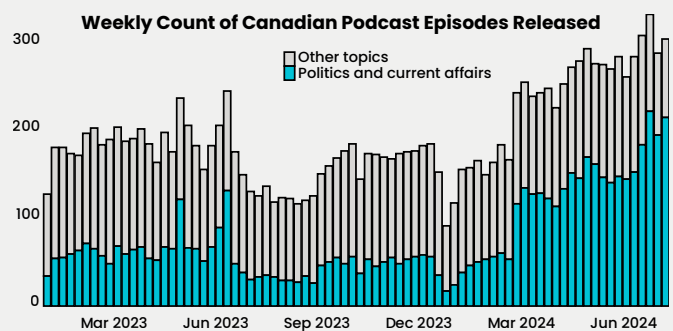
In September, a US indictment publicly unveiled a [Russian campaign to fund US and Canadian online political influencers](#), many of whom produce popular podcasts. We use this month's snapshot to investigate the role of political and news podcasts in the Canadian information ecosystem. Specifically, we ask: how has the landscape of the Canadian podcast ecosystem changed over time? Which Canadians listen to podcasts? And do Canadians pay more attention to Canadian or out-of-country podcasts?

Figure 1 shows the growth in Canadian news and politics podcasts since January 2023. We observe a sharp rise in the frequency of podcast episodes from March 2024 onwards.

As compared to the first week in January 2023 which saw 34 news and politics podcasts released, the week of July 7, 2024 saw a high of 214 podcast episodes released.

We observe interesting variations looking at gender, language, age, and political interest (see Figure 2). Men tend to listen to more podcasts in general than women, particularly political podcasts. The younger population (18-34) are the most frequent listeners of podcasts, where almost one quarter of individuals under the age of 34 report regular podcast usage and slightly under a quarter report listening to political podcasts. This younger population consumes more than double the senior population (55+). Those who are politically interested are also far more likely to listen to both political and non-political podcasts, with very low podcast uptake in respondents that report low interest in politics. English-speakers also tend to listen to more podcasts than French-speakers.

We also examined the top podcasts consumed by Canadians across podcast platforms. We find that the majority of podcasts listened to in Canada are from the US (71% with 12% being international). Less than 20% of the top podcasts are Canadian. This finding is consistent



for political podcasts, where only 4 among the top 20 political podcasts listened to in Canada are Canadian (20%). Overall, political podcasts are an important and growing part of the Canadian information ecosystem.

Listeners tend to be among the most politically interested Canadians, although Canadians generally strongly prefer American to Canadian content.

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 value) severely restricts information flows, which can lead to the faster spread and deeper penetration of misinformation.

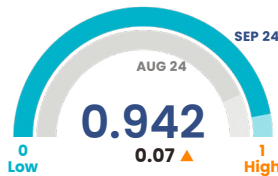
Findings

Inequality in the CIE has increased to a much higher value of 0.94 this

month versus the previous 0.87. The conversation remains highly skewed towards a small number of highly influential accounts.

Inequality

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



Polarization

Measurement

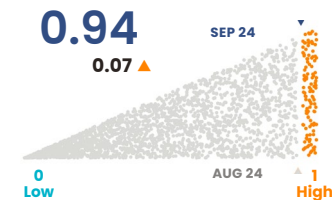
We evaluate polarization through **segmentation** (the extent a network is divided into distinct communities, 0=low segmentation and 1=high segmentation), **insularity** (the extent political party families engage with others outside their political party, with a higher number representing a more insular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

Findings

Polarization increased this month. Group segmentation is higher, with a score of 0.94 (+0.07 from August), but party insularity has decreased. The least insular party is the Conservatives and the most insular is the NDP. Overall, we see party groups becoming less insular than the previous month. Division towards political outgroups is a stable moderate, with a score of 22.9%. These moderate-to-high scores indicate that information flow does occur within and between communities but that the flow is quite unequal.

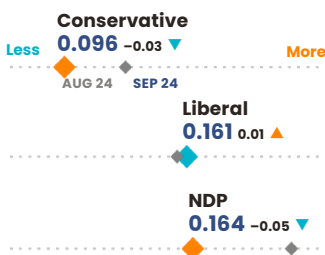
Segmentation

How divided into distinct communities is the CIE?



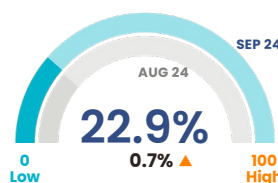
Insularity

How insular are parties relative to one another?



Division

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



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 1=high), and **news avoidance** (extent people avoid the news all together, 0=low to 1=high).

Findings

Toxicity is slowly increasing. Toxic speech in the CIE is very low, with a score of 0.02. 63.9% of Canadians are fairly hesitant to engage in politics online and/or refrain from sharing personal opinions on politics, and 30.5% 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.

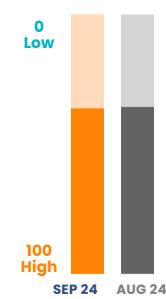
Toxic speech

How prevalent is toxic speech in the CIE?



Chilled speech

What extent do people avoid political discussion and opinion sharing?



News avoiding

What extent do people avoid the news?



Trust

Measurement

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

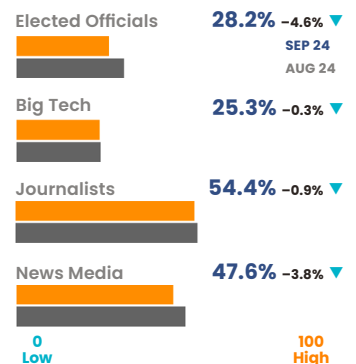
Findings

Trust has declined slightly. Information gatekeepers have an average trust level of 38.9%. The most trusted actors are journalists (54.4%), followed by news media (47.6%).

The actors with the least trust are big tech companies like Meta and Google (25.3%) and elected officials (28.2%), who experienced a drop of 4.6% approaching a tie with big tech. Low trust in information gatekeepers makes the CIE more vulnerable to external influence and misinformation.

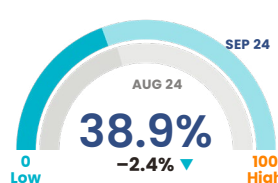
Trust by types of information gatekeepers

How much do people trust each type of gatekeeper?



Trust in information gatekeepers

How much do people trust each type of gatekeeper?



Health of the information ecosystem

THREATS

General

Measurement

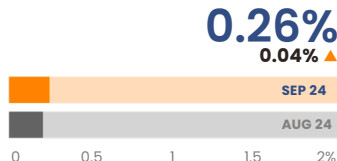
We evaluate the overall threat of misinformation and foreign influence by measuring public **discussion about misinformation and foreign interference** (0=low to 1=high discussion).

Findings

We find that 0.26% of posts reference the topics of misinformation, disinformation, foreign interference/influence, fake news, or deep fakes, slightly more than the previous month.

Discussion about misinformation and foreign interference

How often do people post about misinformation and foreign interference?



Misinformation

Measurement

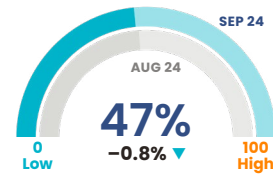
We evaluate the threat of misinformation by measuring Canadians' **concern** about misinformation (0=low to 1=highly concerned), and the extent **misinformation links** are shared and engaged with across social media platforms by politically influential voices (0=little to 1=high sharing)

Findings

We see a slight decrease this month around misinformation. 47.0% of Canadians are very concerned about misinformation (-0.8%). We find that 3.74% of links shared in posts by Canadian influential voices are to known misinformation websites (double from last month from 1.87%), garnering 10.63% of total engagement with links (a drop by half from August from 20%). Canadians continue to be 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.

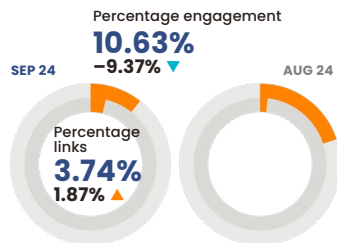
Concern about misinformation

How concerned are people about misinformation?



Linking to known misinformation websites

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



Foreign influence

Measurement

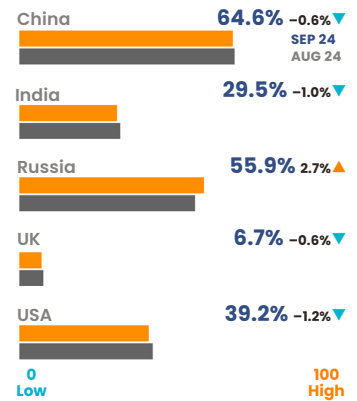
We evaluate the threat of foreign influence in the CIE by measuring **concern about foreign governments influencing Canadian media and politics** (in general and by country) and how **connected prominent news and political accounts** from countries with a record of interference (China, Russia and India) are to Canadian accounts

Findings

Concern about foreign influence remains stable while connectedness shifts slightly this month. 54.7% of Canadians are concerned about foreign governments influencing Canadian media and politics. By country, people are most concerned about China 64.6% and Russia 55.9% and the least with the UK 6.7%. Of all connections identified in our network, we observe that prominent Indian news and political accounts are most connected to the CIE (5.12% of connections, -9.58% less than the previous month). Russia follows with 0.55% (+0.34% from August), and China is relatively stable with just 0.54% of all connections.

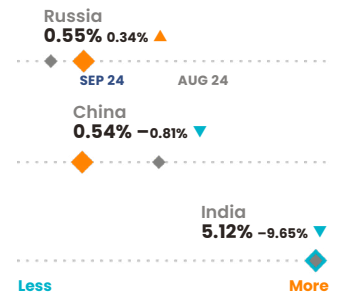
Concern about foreign influence by country

How concerned are people about the following countries conducting foreign influence?



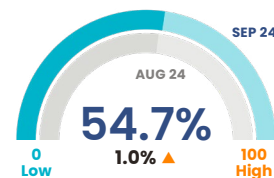
Directed foreign influence

To what extent are overt foreign influencers impacting the CIE?



Concern about foreign influence

How concerned are people about foreign influence?



Artificial intelligence

Concern about generative AI

How concerned are people about artificial intelligence?



Measurement

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

Findings

There is a slight increase in concern this month - 59.9% of Canadians feel that AI-generated content misleading the public is a serious problem (+1.5%).

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

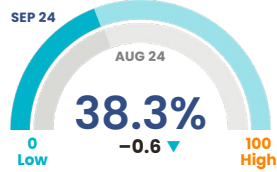
We evaluate engagement with political news and current events using six indicators: 1) **news seeking** (the extent Canadians seek out news); 2) **news sharing** (the frequency of sharing news and opinions on social media); and 3-6) **news consumption sources and mediums** (the proportion of Canadians that consume news from various sources and mediums weekly).

Findings

We observe that 38.3% of Canadians search for news and 12.2% share news and their political views at least once a week. Local news outlets became the most popular source of weekly news (41.0%), followed closely by National (40.8%) and then international news outlets (32.8%). About three quarters of Canadians use digital me-

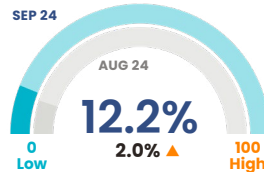
News seeking

How many Canadians seek out information about the news?



News sharing

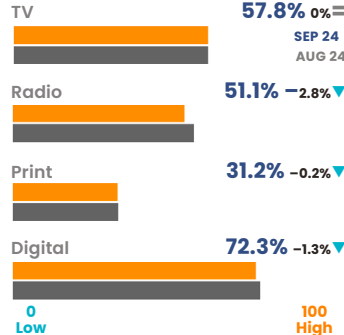
How much do Canadians actively engage in posting and sharing news on social media?



diums for news consumption weekly (72.3%), but only one third use social media for news (37.9%). TV is the most popular traditional medium for news (57.8%), followed by radio (51.1%), while print is the least used (31.2%).

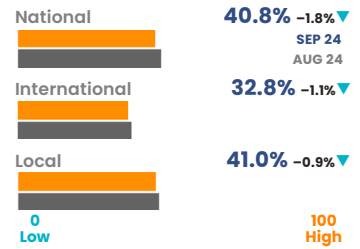
Mediums of weekly news (digital, print, radio and TV)

How many people use each medium weekly for news?



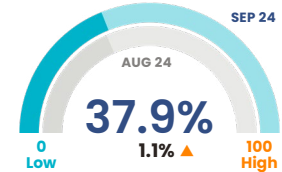
Sources of weekly news

How many people use each source for weekly news?



Social media for news

How many people use social media weekly for news?



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.

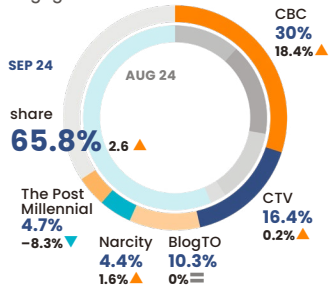
Findings

Engagement with Canadian news outlets is approximately as unequal as the overall ecosystem with a Gini coefficient of 0.958. We find the top 5 Canadian outlets that attract the most engagement are CBC (rose to the top this month +18.4% to 30%), CTV, BlogTO, the Post Millennial, and Narcity (BlogTO and Narcity saw a big increase this month). Collectively they receive 65.8% of all online engagement with Canadian news content (+2.6% from August). Local news outlets received significantly more engagement, 34.0% (+13.8% from last month) of all engagement with news content. This month TikTok became the platform with the most engagement with news outlets, making a drastic jump to 58.2% (from 33.8%). X/Twitter dropped significantly by

17.3% to 20.1% of engagement (from 34.4%) as well as Youtube 10.7% (-7.5%) while Instagram remained steady at 11%.

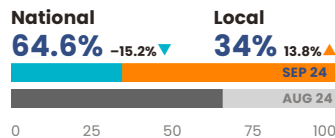
Top 5 Canadian news outlets

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



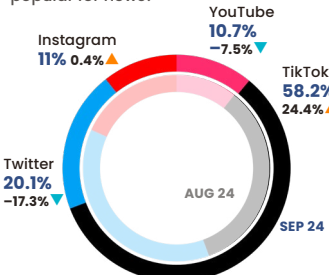
National vs. local news engagement

How skewed is preference for national versus local news?



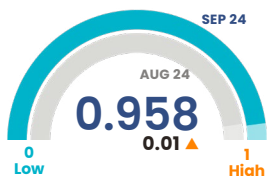
Social media platforms

Which social media platforms are most popular for news?



Inequality

How skewed is the CIE to a small number of news outlets?



Politicians

Measurement

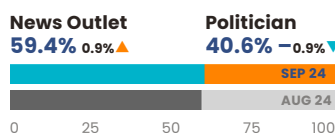
We evaluate the roles and characteristics of politicians in the information ecosystem using four measures: 1) the **top social media platforms** for engagement with Canadian politicians; 2) political engagement on social media (engagement with federal party leaders and elected party families); and 3)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

Findings

Politicians continue to receive the most engagement on Instagram (51.4% of engagement), closely followed by X/Twitter (40.1%). Once again, the leader and members of the federal opposition party (Conservatives) received significantly more engagement than other elected party leaders and members (65% leaders, 46.7% members). We see a slight increase in engagement with NDP leadership (8.8%, +2.3%) and larger decrease with Liberal leadership (26%, -9.3%). Members of the NDP received slightly less engagement than members of Liberal parties (21.7% versus 28.7%). Engagement with news outlets (59.4%) continues to be higher than engagement with politicians (40.6%).

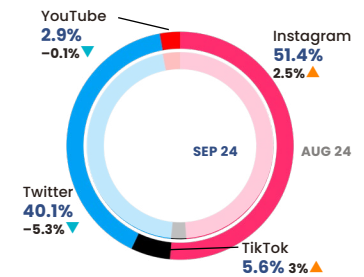
Politicians vs. news engagement

How skewed is preference for politician versus news content?



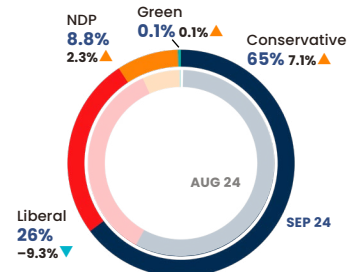
Social media platforms

Which social media platforms are most popular for Canadian politicians?



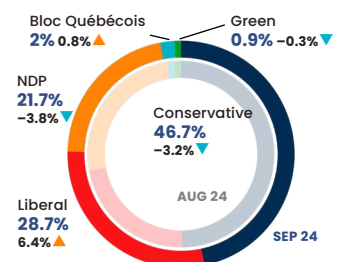
Engagement with party leaders

Which party leaders are most engaging with Canadians?



Engagement with elected party members

Which elected party members are most engaging with Canadians?



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 September, Canadians paid attention to a range of issues abroad and its impact in Canada. Canadians were particularly concerned about foreign influence. On September 4, the U.S. Department of Justice indicted two individuals involved with Russian state-sponsored propaganda tied to a Canadian-registered media company, Tenet Media. Right-wing media outlets distanced Tenet Media's right-leaning commentators from Russian state media, focusing on how the individuals were unaware of Tenet Media's connections to RT. Furthermore, there was a slight increase of interest in Chinese foreign interference in Canada. Right-leaning news outlets and Conservative

politicians criticized the Liberal government for not publicly naming the parliamentarians part of a meddling inquiry on foreign interference, while pointing to sustained foreign aid funding to China.

Looking south, online engagement on the US Presidential debate between former President Donald Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris focused on a statement made by President Trump regarding Haitian migrants eating pets in Ohio. Canadian right-leaning media outlets increasingly adopted this false narrative, focusing particularly on the supposed threats posed by illegal immigrants to local communities.

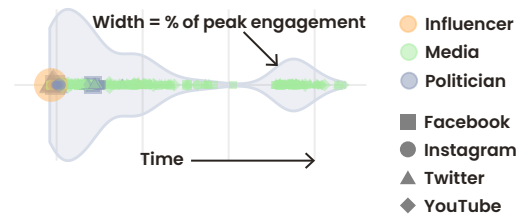
Closer to home, the end of the supply-and-confidence agreement between the NDP and the Liberals prompted concern over a potential

no-confidence vote and impending election. Online engagement focused on Conservative Leader, Pierre Poilievre, who critiqued NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh's inconsistent approach to carbon tax and lack of accountability as an opposition party. Discussions focused on economics and affordability, tied to the carbon tax, as a key topic for a potential upcoming election. Other notable issues included the threat of an Air Canada pilot strike, and the disbanding of the BC United Party ahead of the provincial election on October 19. Canadians also celebrated the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) and the back-to-school season.

Violin plots

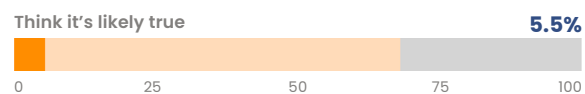
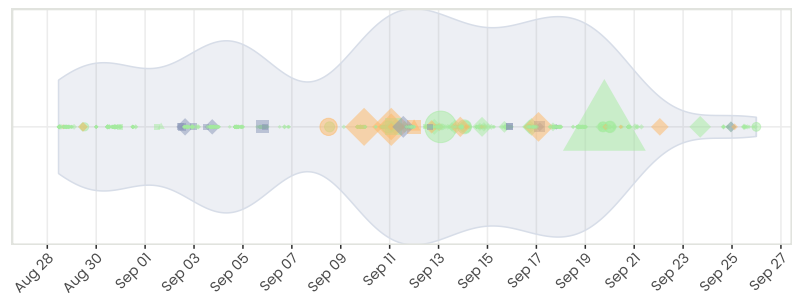
We depict the online discussion of these stories using violin plots. The 'violin' (the shape of the outline) indicates the distribution of engagement with each topic. The width of the plot is normalized against maximum engagement (when a story is being talked about the most) across the time period. A 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, X/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.



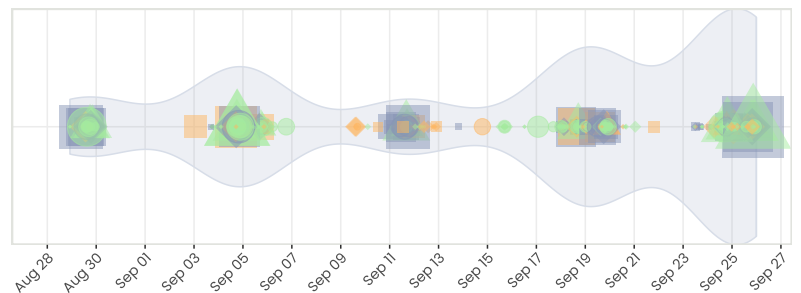
Harris-Trump Debate

On **September 10**, all eyes were on the U.S. Presidential debate between former President Donald Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris. Trump's statement regarding migrants eating pets in Springfield, Ohio gained widespread attention amongst news outlets and online influencers. Right-leaning media outlets, such as True North and the Post Millennial, focused particularly on this topic and promoted narratives and accounts of how a surge of illegal immigrants from Haiti to Ohio has generated safety concerns amongst the community. Left-leaning commentators focused on the pitfalls of Trump's running mate, JD Vance, who reportedly stated his willingness to engage in false narratives to increase his media engagement. 68% of Canadians had heard about Trump recalling Haitian immigrants eating pets in Ohio and 6% believed it to be true.



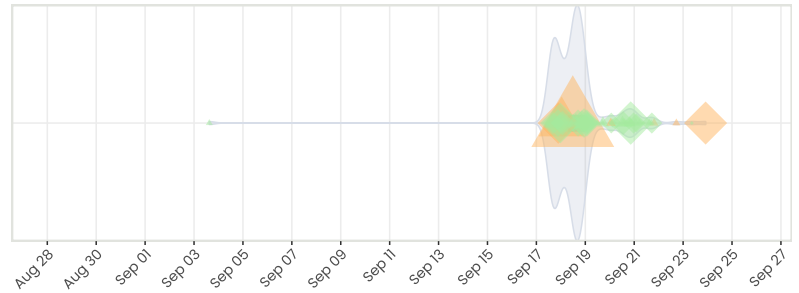
The End of the NDP-Liberal Confidence Agreement

On **September 4**, the NDP announced it would end its supply-and-confidence agreement with the Liberal government, prompting concern about the possibility of a no-confidence vote and subsequent election. Carbon tax became a central point of debate amongst news outlets and politicians. On **September 12**, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh stated that he was uncertain if the NDP policy plan would include a consumer carbon tax. While 73% of coverage on the carbon tax issue was by media outlets, Canadians engaged the most with Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre who argued that Singh lacked accountability as a viable opposition party to the Liberals under the supply-and-confidence agreement while misleading voters without a clear stance on carbon tax. Poilievre, and other right-leaning outlets and commentators called for a 'carbon tax election', stating that a carbon tax would further disrupt the economy and affordability. 77% of Canadians have heard about the NDP ending their deal with the Liberals, while 62% believe this happened.



Pager Attacks against Hezbollah

The conflict in the Middle East remained a sustained and consistent topic of conversation for Canadians. On **September 17**, thousands of pagers exploded in Lebanon in a targeted attack by Israel on Hezbollah. This resulted in thousands of injured individuals, including civilians and children. News outlets discussed the growing tensions in the Middle East and concern for the 45,000 Canadians living in Lebanon. Independent and former Liberal MP, Kevin Vuong, gained attention and criticism over his tweet which likened Lebanese civilians to combatants if they possessed a pager. 71% of Canadians heard about the pager explosions and 62% believe the incident occurred.



Recall story

70.9%



Think it's likely true

61.9%



ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Data for this report includes social media 575,183 posts from 2,684 distinct entities across four social media platforms (Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube) with a total of 4,581 unique and active social handles for the period of August 28th to September 25th, 2024 and survey responses from 1437 Canadian adults conducted from September 25th to 30th using a commercial survey panel provider. The margin of error for a comparable probability-based random sample of the same size is +/-2.59%, 19 times out of 20. Engagement totals include engagement from Canadian and international audiences, which cannot be distinguished from each other. Unlike previous ver-

sions, this report does not include data from Facebook due to Meta's decision to shut down Crowdtangle, a research tool we used to collect post data from the platform.

Our snapshot uses 15,534 podcast episodes released since January 1, 2023 by 237 different podcasts/programs. A podcast census was conducted in February 2024 to identify news, politics, culture, and business podcasts released in Canada.

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

Concern about GenerativeAI — Last month we reported Concern about Generative AI as 47.8% when it as actually 58.4% (we see a slight increase in 1.5% this month).



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