

**GLOBAL**

# Why a Foreign Influence Registry Act is necessary for Canada's national security

By [SZE-FUNG LEE AND BENJAMIN FUNG](#) JUNE 15, 2022

A foreign influence registry would increase the transparency needed for citizens, journalists, and others to track politicians' and lobbyists' activities, interests, budgets, and affiliations.

The [Trudeau government finally decided to ban Huawei and ZTE](#) from our 5G networks after three years of controversies around the China telecoms equipment-makers and long after the United States' [first ban through a national security order](#).

As a member of the Five Eyes, Canada is becoming one of the major targets for Beijing's grand strategy involving hybrid warfare. Indeed, Canada remains vulnerable to foreign influence—in particular, state-sponsored disinformation campaigns and foreign interference.

Chinese Canadians are one of the largest visible minority populations in the country. In the 2016 census, over 1.5 million people reported being of Chinese origin. The Chinese diaspora has always been [one of the 12 primary targets identified](#) by the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) United Front Work Department as they present a threat to the regime. That's in part due to the diaspora's command of local cultural codes and the probability they will import those liberal ideas, so controlling these communities by surveillance, intimidation and other operations is rather common. This implies that if (when) Beijing uses the Chinese diaspora to achieve its political agenda (for example, deploying a disinformation campaign [tailored to the community](#) to sway votes during an election, as happened to former Conservative MP Kenny Chiu in the 2021 federal election), huge impacts—including interfering with an electoral result and disrupting our democratic system—could result.

Therefore, banning Huawei and ZTE could be the first step to securing Ottawa's national security and liberal democracy. Implementing a Canadian version of the Foreign Influence Registry Act could be next.

## How would a Foreign Influence Registry Act change that?

The key idea behind a Foreign Agents Registry Act (in the United States), Foreign Influence Transparency Scheme (in Australia) and Anti-Infiltration Act (in Taiwan) is to combat foreign interference by increasing the transparency of any affiliated foreign entities or governments. It also boosts the public's resilience by strengthening their right to know, because the truth matters. It could impact a reader who happens across a Chinese propaganda piece on their local newspaper, or a regular citizen about to vote for a candidate whose background affiliation has not been disclosed.

In 2018, during the Huawei crisis, the co-founder of Canadian Chinese Political Affairs Committee (CCPAC), Karen Woods, wrote an op-ed in *The Toronto Star* stating that the Huawei incident “[has put a dark cloud shrouding the psyche of many Chinese Canadians](#)” and warned of “[a new wave of Sino-Phobia.](#)” While it may seem like an ordinary opinion piece, it neglected to note that Woods worked for [Solstice Public Affairs, a lobbying firm hired by the Chinese consulate to promote Sino-Canada economic and cultural relations.](#) In other words, the article was an attempt by Beijing intended to improve its image and to shift, if not manipulate, public opinion in Canada during the crisis.

Perhaps what's more noteworthy is that [The Toronto Star added a clarification on her article](#), disclosing her link to the Chinese consulate. Indeed, such disclosure, although honourable, is pragmatic for readers to identify if the writer has any relevant affiliation. For instance, if they work for, consult, own shares in, or receive funding from any government, institution, organization, or company that may benefit from the piece. From a strategic and psychological perspective, recognizing the source of news is a crucial step for fact-checking and countering fake news. Therefore, it would be effective for a Canadian version of the Foreign Agents

Registration Act to also include a scheme that requires the media, as well as any contributors, to disclose their foreign sponsorship (if there is any), helping decreasing the public's susceptibility to political propaganda or disinformation.

As for politicians and government officials, such an act's effectiveness is even clearer.

Transparency registration systems makes visible people's interests in a way that allows public scrutiny. The European Union Transparency Register, for instance, has revealed relations between Dick Roche, the Irish former minister of state for European affairs (2002-04 and 2007-11) and Huawei. According to the registry, Roche has been a consultant with European institutions, and that Huawei (one of the main clients), [has paid him more than €\\$100,000 in 2021, in addition to previous years](#). Ensuing such "political activism," some media started calling him a "Huawei lobbyist." However, Roche's case is believed to be the tip of the iceberg, as [there are others who are funded by or who have benefited from Chinese capital](#).

In fact, a foreign influence registry scheme would increase the transparency needed for citizens, journalists, and other parties to track politicians' and lobbyists' activities, interests, budgets, affiliations—especially if they are subjected to foreign influence—that may have a major impact on the country's future. Making this information visible immediately helps to counter foreign interference.

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