

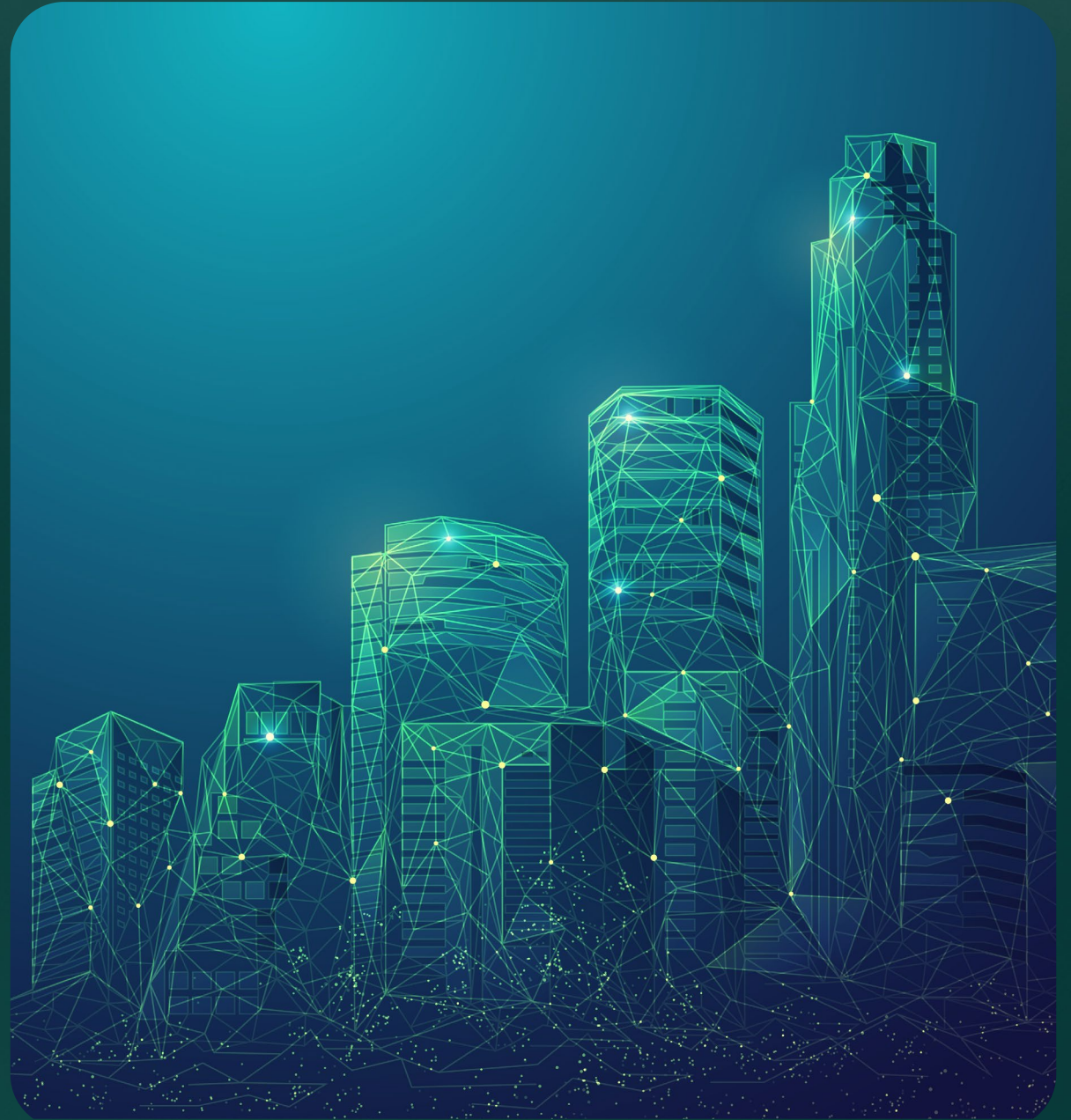
Run for Office, Not From Online Harassment

Trends in Online Harassment of Local Elected Officials and Municipal Staff

Eunhye Lee
Program Manager

**Strong Cities
Network**

September 2026





Agenda

- Introduction
- What is online harassment
- Causes of “Anti-Government Sentiment”
- Online threat landscape more broadly
- Online threat landscape for municipal officials
- Role of AI
- Offline impacts of online harms



Strong Cities Network

- A global network of 300+ municipalities committed to elevating the role of mayors and the local governments they lead in preventing and responding to all forms of hate, extremism and polarisation
- Committed to scaling inclusive, human rights-based, gender-sensitive, municipal-led efforts to promoting social cohesion and strengthening resilience through building municipalities of connection and cohesion
- Guided by the experiences and perspectives of municipalities across the world, we are able to connect municipalities across contexts for peer learning
- Driven by data, we support cities with translating good practice into local policy, programmes and partnerships

Strong Cities in Canada

Membership

- 14 members and 67 total engaged municipalities across 10 provinces

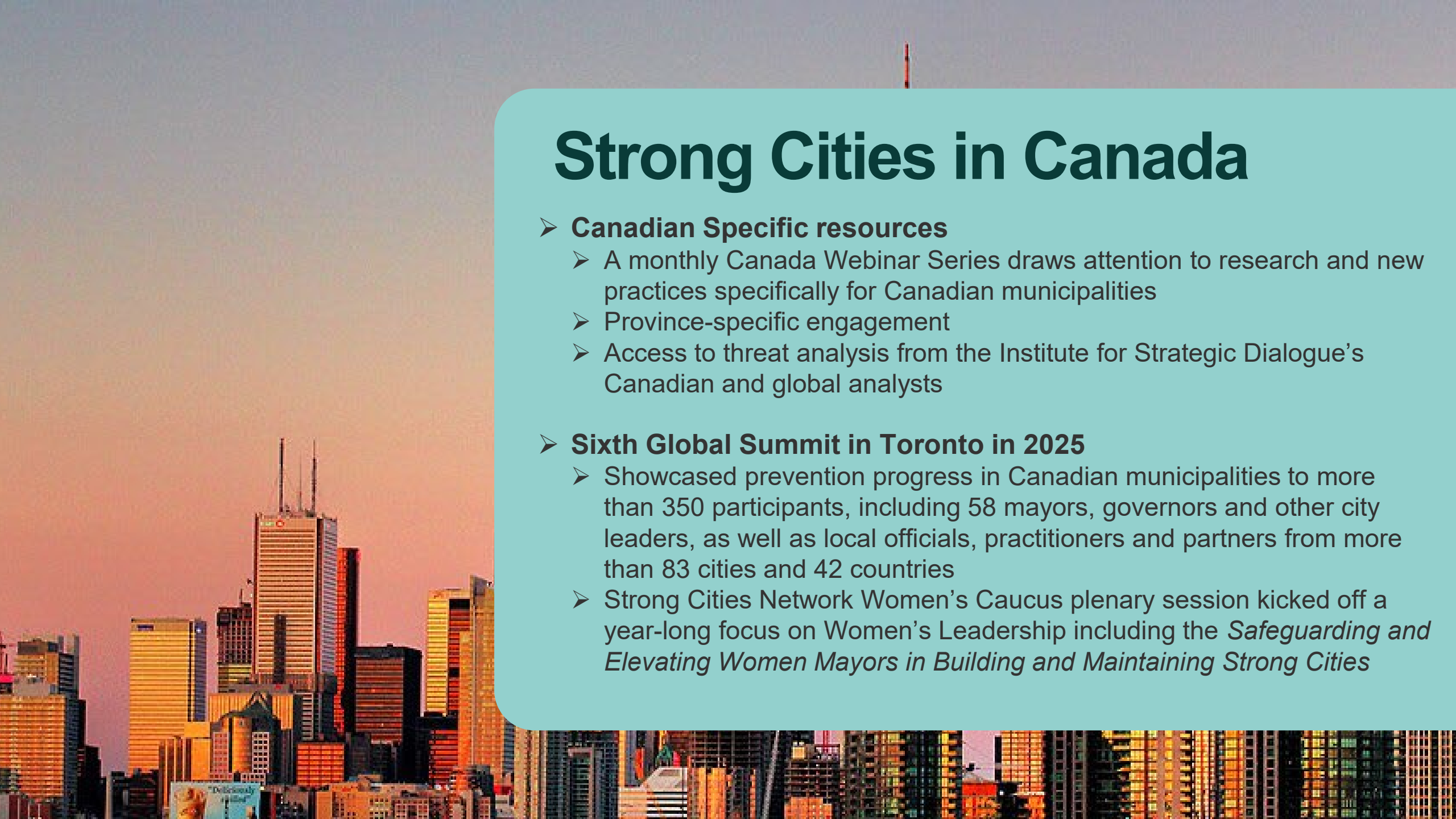
Prevention Academies

- Deep engagement with cohorts of municipalities to provide tailored learning modules with insights from Subject Matter Experts and peer dialogue sessions to facilitate cross-municipality relationship building and learning
- Prevention Academy Canada is currently in its second cohort
- Prevention Academy BC has openings for its General Track participation

The Connection, Community and Social Cohesion Academy

- In partnership with KPMG this Academy will cultivate cross-sector collaboration, drive community connection, and champion policy change for building resilient, caring, and socially cohesive cities across Canada



A photograph of the Toronto skyline at sunset, with the CN Tower and other skyscrapers visible against a warm, orange-hued sky. The image is partially obscured by a light blue rounded rectangle containing text.

Strong Cities in Canada

➤ **Canadian Specific resources**

- A monthly Canada Webinar Series draws attention to research and new practices specifically for Canadian municipalities
- Province-specific engagement
- Access to threat analysis from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue's Canadian and global analysts

➤ **Sixth Global Summit in Toronto in 2025**

- Showcased prevention progress in Canadian municipalities to more than 350 participants, including 58 mayors, governors and other city leaders, as well as local officials, practitioners and partners from more than 83 cities and 42 countries
- Strong Cities Network Women's Caucus plenary session kicked off a year-long focus on Women's Leadership including the *Safeguarding and Elevating Women Mayors in Building and Maintaining Strong Cities*



The Online Harassment Landscape for Municipal Officials in Canada

Strong Cities
Network

Online Harassment of Local Officials and Staff

Types of Online Harms

- Abusive language
- Character assassinations
- Doxing
- Swatting
- Email spam
- Violent rhetoric on social media
- Threats to self
- Threats to family
- Non-Consensual Intimate Imagery
- Organized targeting by groups



Online Harassment of Local Officials and Staff

The Role of Mis- and Disinformation

- Social media platforms have become hotbeds for both misinformation and disinformation targeting municipal governments with false or misleading information spreading rapidly through online networks
- Local policies, council decisions and official communications are frequently intentionally misconstrued, or in some cases fabricated in their entirety
- Much is deliberately designed to mislead residents and provoke anger or hostility
- National, regional, and international mis/disinformation campaigns drive broader anti-government narratives and hate that spill over into local political discourse



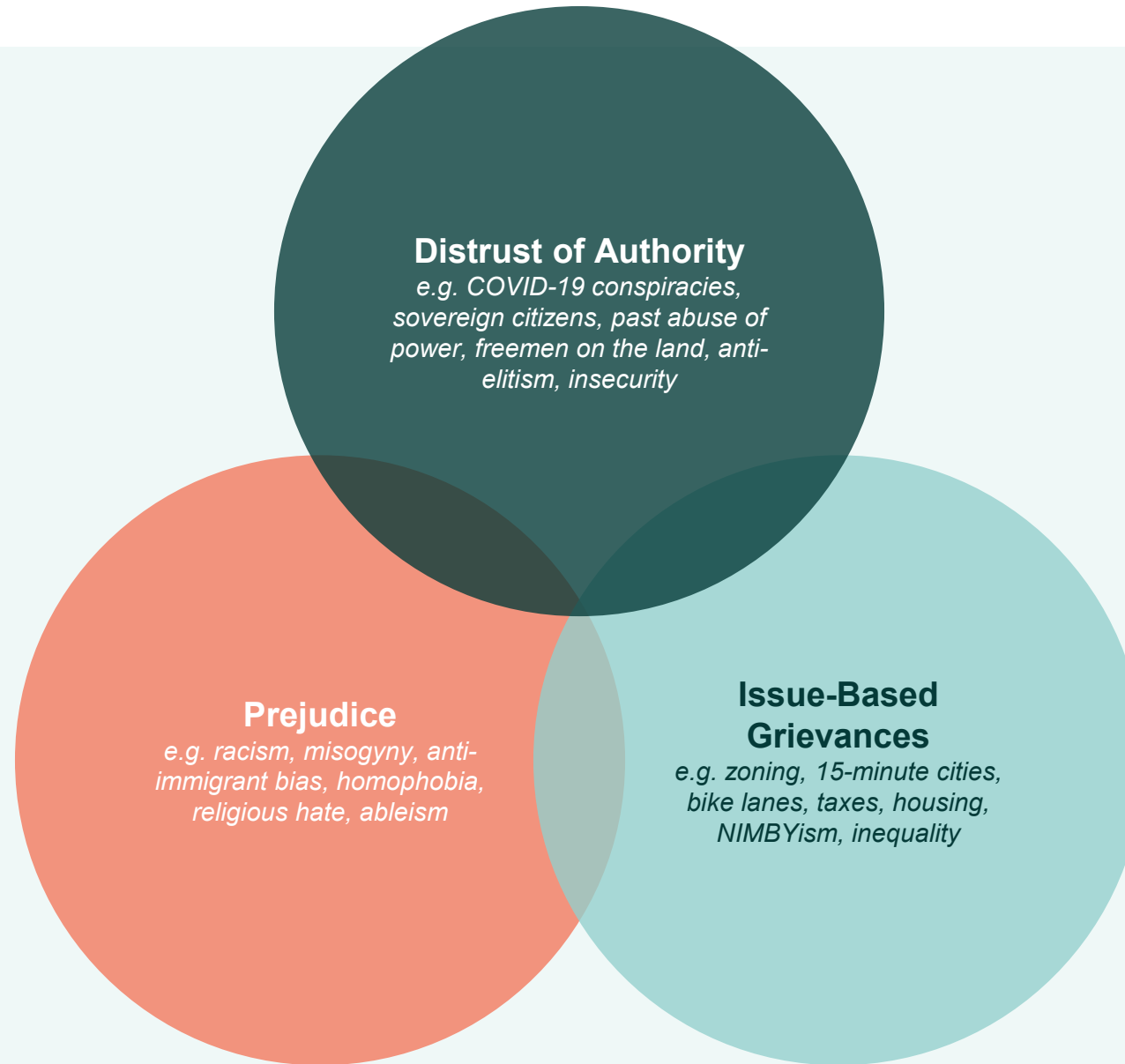
Online Harassment of Local Officials and Staff

Identity Based Harassment

- Municipal leaders and staff who belong to protected or historically marginalized groups experience hate and abuse at higher rates than their peers and intersectional identities can compound these risks
- University of Manitoba Centre for Social Science Research and Policy survey of Manitoba municipalities, 60% of elected officials reported being targeted due to

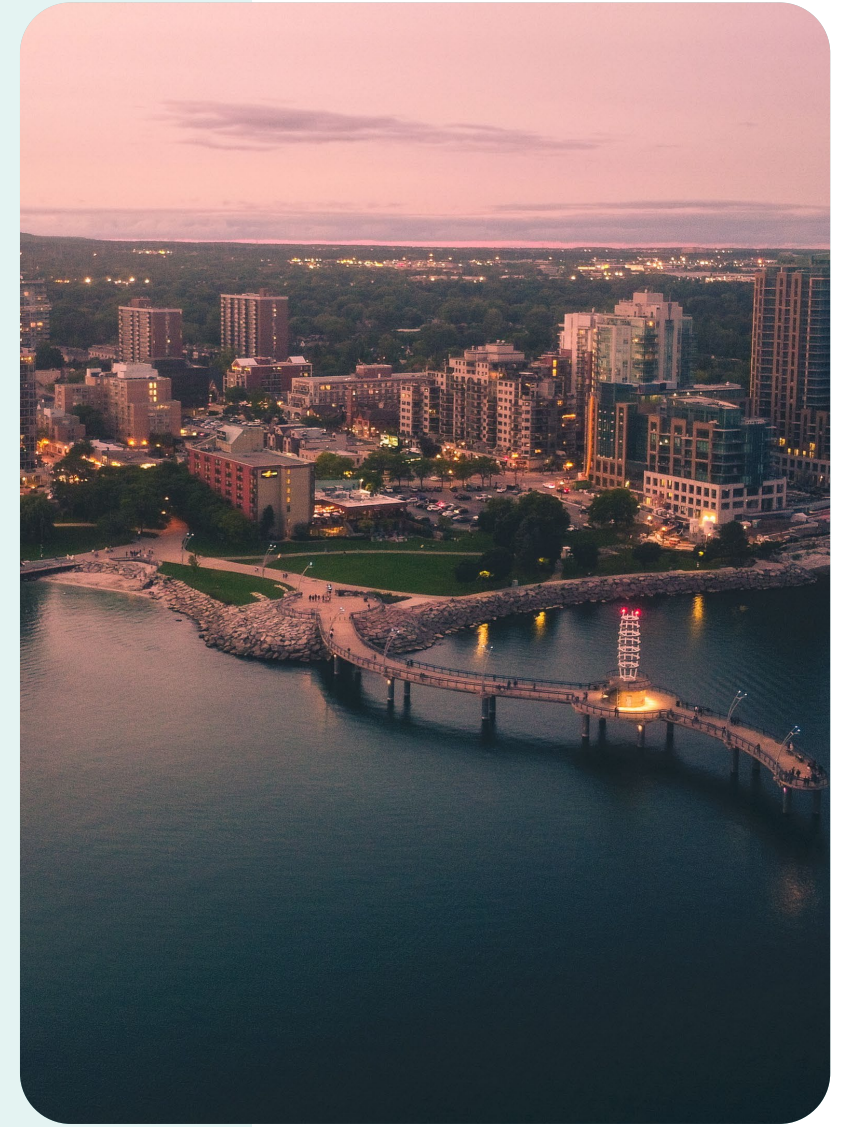


What is Anti-Government Sentiment?



What is Anti-Government Sentiment?

- Interconnected factors rooted in wider social, political, and technological change
 - Breakdowns in social cohesion within communities have eroded the trust and shared civic values that traditionally support constructive dialogue between residents and their elected representatives
 - Extremist content online has amplified anti-establishment narratives, providing platforms for conspiracy theories and hostile rhetoric to spread
 - Political polarization at international, national, and provincial levels has filtered down to municipal politics, transforming previously non-partisan local issues into ideological battlegrounds
- **Anti-government narratives offer simple explanations for complex problems**



Online Threat Landscape

Extremism Trends in Canada

Figure 13: Top ten most linked-to news outlets by Canadian domestic extremists (ranking in the previous quarterly briefing is shown in the Prev field)

Pos	Prev	Platform	References
1	1	Rebel News	13,245
2	2	Life Site News	3,341
3	3	True North	1,483
4	New	The Kingdom of Canada	1,056
5	4	CBC	607
6	10	MSN News	590
7	6	CTV News	569
8	New	Wikipedia	476
9	5	National Post	467
10	7	Global News	398

Figure from ISD (2025) "Data Briefing December 2024 to February 2025"

Responding to political events

- Trump, 51st state, and tariffs
- Ukraine-Russia war
- Israel-Gaza Conflict

Express Dissatisfaction with political leadership

- Trudeau, Carney, Liberal Party of Canada

Distrust of institutions

- Police, national security, legal systems
- Science (climate change and vaccines)

Gender and sexuality play key roles

- Parenting and gender roles
- Misogynistic and "manosphere" themes

Hate and Extremism Trends in Canada and BC



Mainstreaming of anti-migrant narratives

- Hostility towards migrants normalized in the US and growing in Canada and BC. Public figures and extremists alike stoking sentiments.
- Demonization of migrants often rooted in 'Great Replacement' conspiracy theory, which is used to justify extremist attitudes.



Increased hostility towards political enemies

- Hateful targeting of political opponents, especially liberals and the 'left', increasingly mobilizing extremists.
- Violent plots targeting political opponents on the rise in the US, with similar demonizing rhetoric increasingly visible in Canada and BC.



Rising nihilistic violence and online subcultures

- Extremism landscape is shifting, increasingly advocates of mass violence are not seeking to achieve an ideological objective.
- Subcultures of nihilistic violence are flourishing online and are attracting the interest of minors.

Online Threat Landscape

ISD's thematic online narratives

- **Targets of BC-based extremists differ from their national counterparts.** Between January to August 2024, domestic extremists in BC were more likely to engage in anti-Muslim hate speech. Between March and May 2025, South Asians and First Nations communities in BC were disproportionately targeted with hate speech.
- **Hate speech by BC extremists rose in reaction to offline events.** Spikes in hate speech were observed in reaction to pro-Palestine protests and the expulsion of a BC politician for comments about residential schools.
- **Hate speech is localized in BC.** Posts mentioned local politicians and officials, accusing them of supporting immigration policies which favor specific ethnic or religious groups (e.g., Sikhs). Posts were also directed at public policies promoting multiculturalism and diversity.

ISD | Powering solutions
to extremism, hate
and disinformation

FOUNDATION
FOR A PATH
FORWARD

ISD Research Briefing

Monitoring Online Hate Speech in British Columbia

Online Threat Landscape

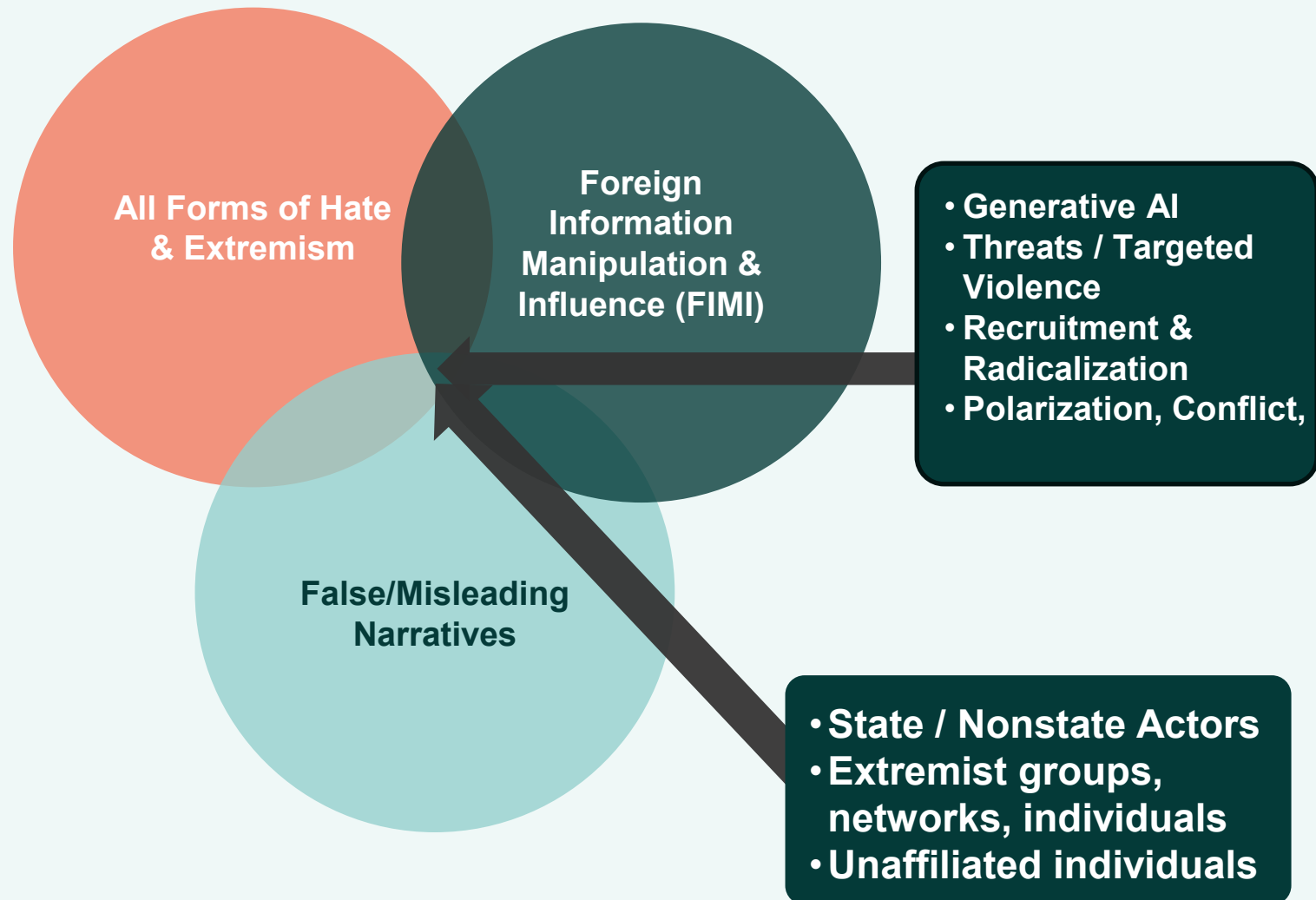
Online ecosystem favors inflammatory content.

Offenders do not necessarily fit into any ideological box.

Involves a combination of domestic and foreign actors.

Conspiracy theories and false/misleading information are motivating people to action.

Global events and news coverage is having local impacts.



Threat landscape for Municipal Officials

Public officials are being threatened – from the local to the federal levels.

Data suggests threats to public officials are increasing.

Nonpartisan

Credible threats of violence identified targeting public officials involved threats to both Liberals and Conservatives.

All Levels

Threats targeted all levels of officials, ranging from local to federal, including roles with no political affiliation.

Online & Offline

Officials and family members have reported being followed, swatted, harassed, verbally threatened, and receiving letters with white powder.

Mixed Motives

Motivations include violent extremist ideologies, news reporting or events, and/or perceived grievances.

Threat landscape for Municipal Officials



ISD Violent Rhetoric Tracking

- “Violent Rhetoric” includes explicit threats, implicit threats, and threatening language
- Violent rhetoric targeting public officials increased 241 percent when comparing October 2021–September 2022 with October 2024–September 2025
- **The violent rhetoric documented in this study stemmed primarily from partisan individuals, rather than members of, or sympathizers with, extremist movements**
- Public officials themselves often catalyzed violent rhetoric against their opponents or others.
- Data reveals an ecosystem in which threatening language has become normalized, alongside a rise in real-world violent incidents, some with devastating impact.



Inclusive Networking & Support for Public Officials in Rural Environments

ADDRESSING SYSTEMIC RACISM AND ONLINE HARMS IN LOCAL
GOVERNANCE ACROSS BC



Name | Date

www.foundation4ward.org | www.columbiainstitute.eco

Funded by the Law Foundation of BC

2025©

Threat Landscape for Municipal Officials

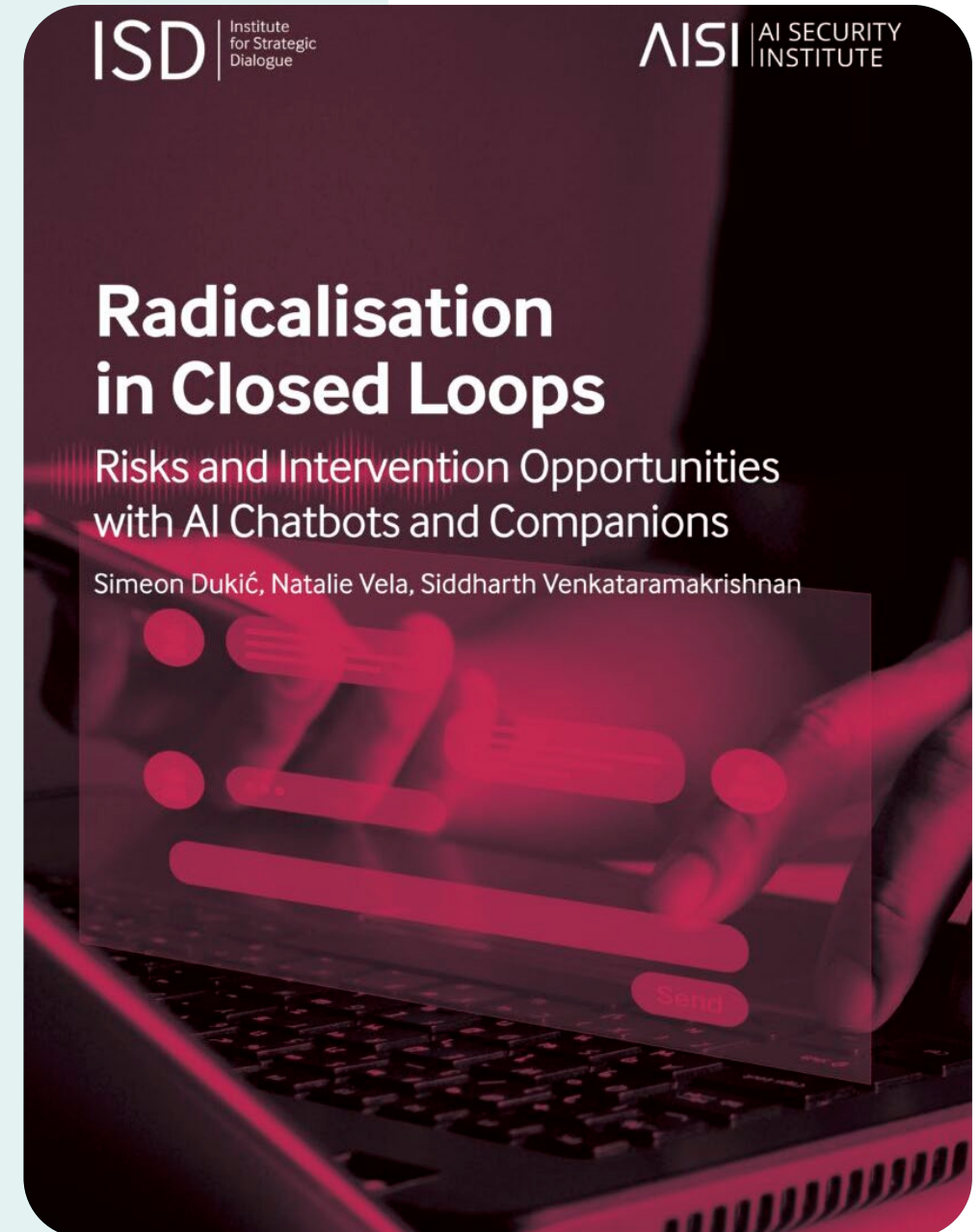
INSPIRE Report in British Columbia

- A mixed-method, trauma-informed study
- Officials in the study spoke of anxiety, burnout, and trauma-like symptoms from enduring constant hatred and doubt
- A strong majority of participants report encountering hate speech, microaggressions, and disinformation campaigns on social media

Impact of AI on Online Harassment of Officials

AI exacerbates current harms as well as introducing new threats

- **Misinformation:** Capable of exacerbating the impacts of mis and disinformation through hallucinations and assisting intentional disinformation campaigns
- **Radicalization:** Can accelerate radicalization dynamics through both uncritically validating users and reproducing harmful narratives
- **Cyber threats:** Makes it easier to find personal information online through jailbroken LLMs and design phishing attacks to target public officials
- **Non-Consensual Intimate Imagery:** Assists and enables new methods for the creation and dissemination of intimate images of a person without their consent



Impact of AI on Online Harassment of Officials

Misinformation and Foreign Interference

- Resident use of chatbots can proliferate misinformation about local council decisions, spurring anger and potential elected official targeting
- AI image generation can be used by campaigns to target opponents and create synthetic media designed to demean and delegitimize candidates

CANADA'S
**NATIONAL
OBSERVER**

NEWS OPINION ANALYSIS BUSINESS CLIMATE SOLUTIONS SPECIAL REPORTS PODCASTS NEWSLETTERS **Civic Searchlight**

Misinformation-laden website almost convinces Alberta town to abandon climate program

By Rory White | News | June 27th 2025

#2 of 26 articles from the Special Report: [Civic Searchlight](#)



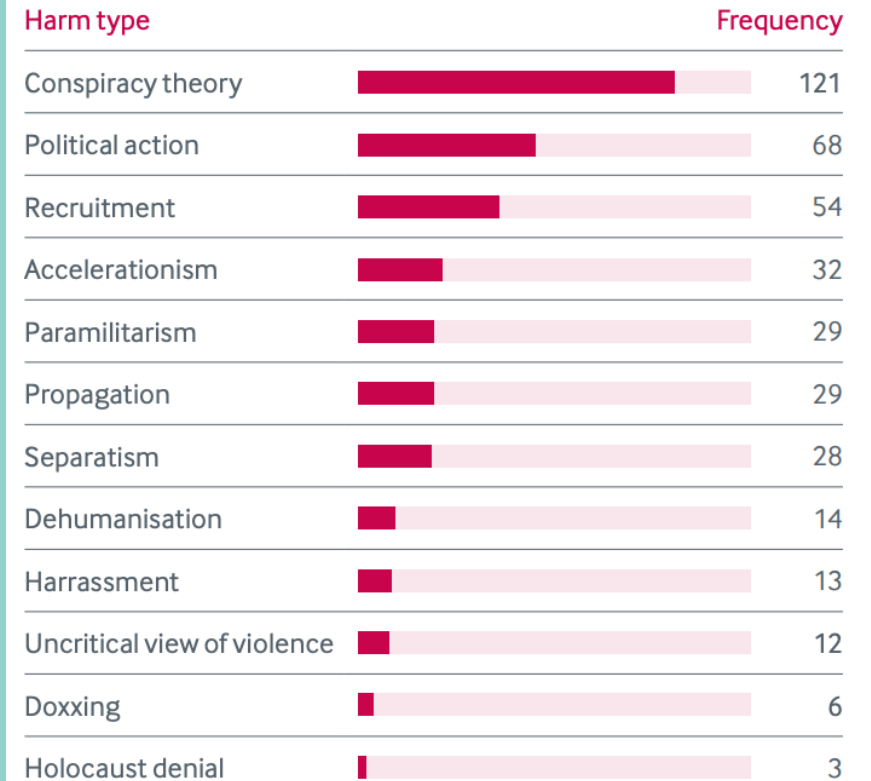
Photo by: Hardeep Singh / Unsplash

Patrick Wilson, a councillor in Cochrane, Alta., let a website he'd found do the talking for him.

Impact of AI on Online Harassment of Officials

AI increases the likelihood that individuals will be radicalized

- Within chatbots' "closed loop" environments, users can test ideas, share grievances, and engage on sensitive topics that can shape their identity, beliefs and behavior.
- Companion models are more likely to assist in radicalization than general models (ie. ChatGPT) by uncritically validating user beliefs and grievances in a conversational manner
- Fringe models designed to be "anti-woke" accounted for the vast majority of high-risk responses observed in testing
- Conversational harms were often cumulative rather than isolated, with repeated interactions reinforcing grievances and normalising harmful narratives in ways that may increase user vulnerability over time



Graph 10. List of harm types by volume.



The Future of Phishing

AI is increasing the scale and sophistication of phishing attacks, while dramatically lowering the cost of creating them.

Choose a Phishing Target



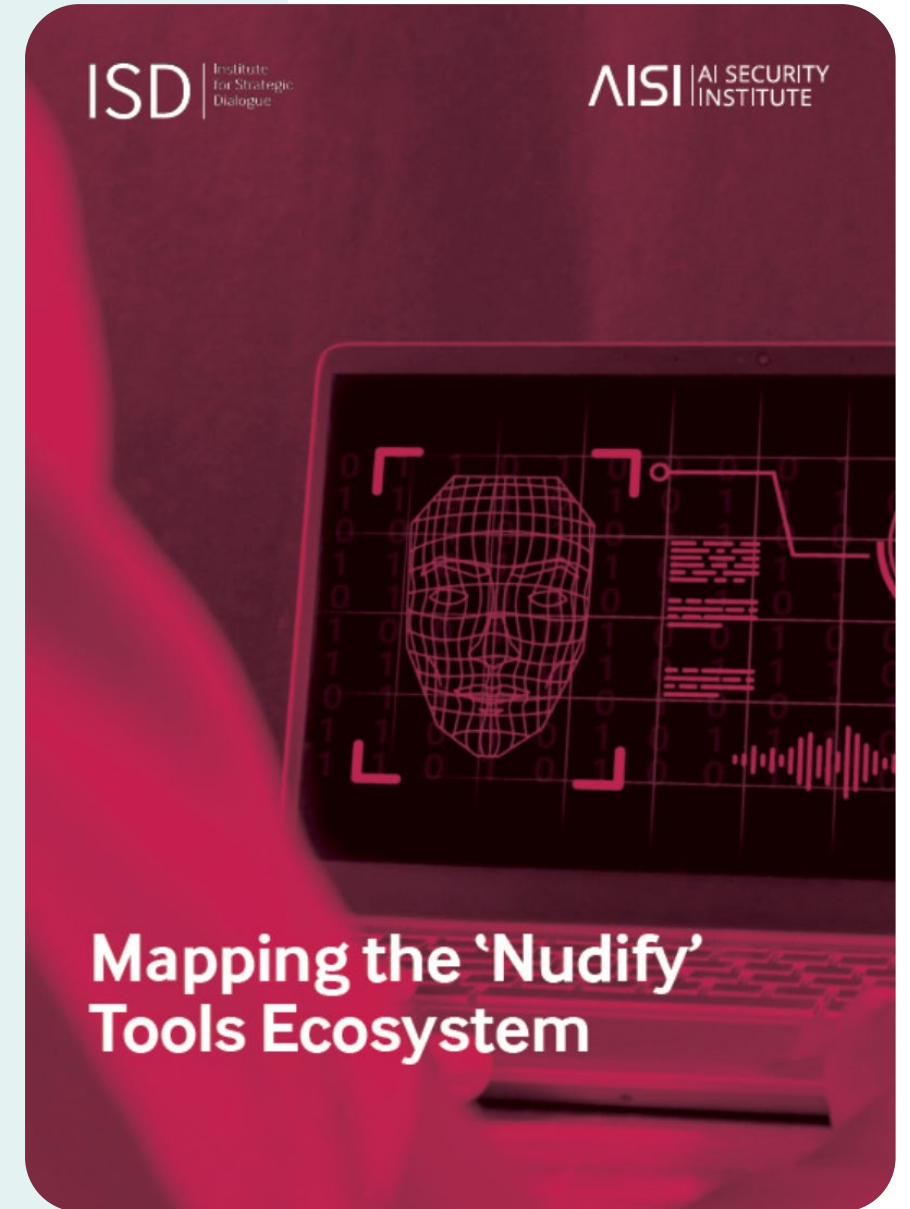
Enter the name of a **public** or **fictional** person and then click the button to plan a phishing attack.

[Reset](#)[Get Started](#)

Impact of AI on Online Harassment of Officials

Public officials are particularly at risk from new AI “nudify” tools

- Entry barriers to committing image-based abuse have lowered as [AI systems](#) and so-called [nudification](#) apps have become more readily available, require minimal technical expertise and allow for the creation of more realistic content
- Users on X for a period used Grok to create NCII at scale and “nudify” websites receive 40 million unique visitors per month
- The creation and sharing of gendered deepfakes are driven not only by sexual motives but by dynamics of power, control and public humiliation, reinforcing broader patterns of online misogyny



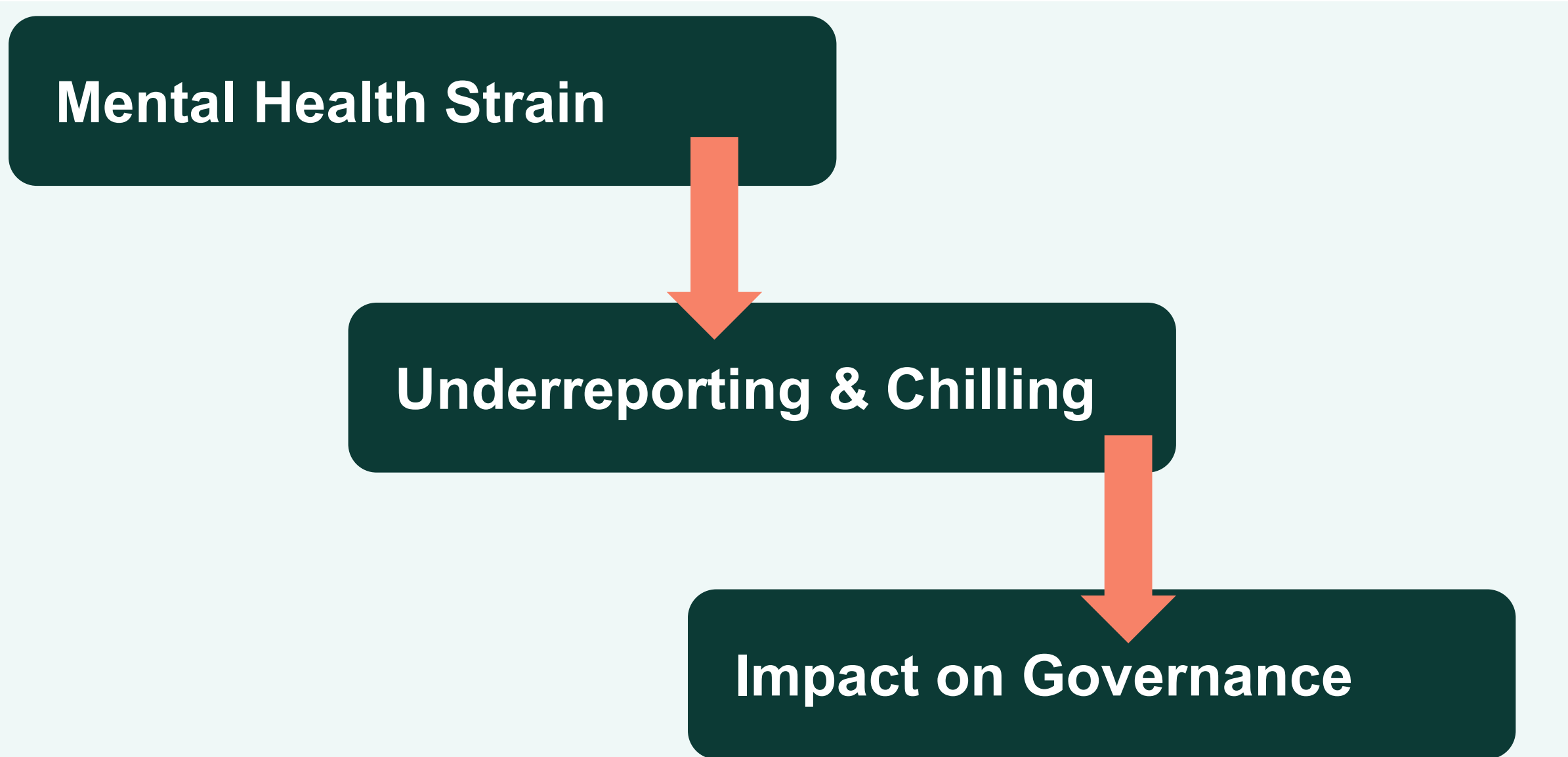
The Real-World Impacts of Online Harassment

- Digital hostility sometimes escalates to real-world confrontations (e.g., home visits, workplace intimidation). Tight-knit rural communities can amplify the personal risks that originate online
- Even when harm stays fully online it has a real impact of elected officials and their ability and willingness to serve thus impacting democratic governance as a whole



The Real-World Impacts of Online Harassment

Mental Health Strain



```
graph TD; A[Mental Health Strain] --> B[Underreporting & Chilling]; B --> C[Impact on Governance]
```

A flowchart illustrating the real-world impacts of online harassment. It consists of three dark green rounded rectangular boxes arranged vertically, connected by large orange downward-pointing arrows. The first box at the top is labeled 'Mental Health Strain'. An arrow points down from it to the second box, labeled 'Underreporting & Chilling'. Another arrow points down from the second box to the third box at the bottom, labeled 'Impact on Governance'.

Underreporting & Chilling

Impact on Governance

The Real-World Impacts of Online Harassment

I'm being sued right now, and I've spent \$70,000 out of my own pocket defending myself

All of his followers from across North America started to find my home address, and where my kids go to school

The threats that I get are because of things that I have no control over

I've had to basically cancel anybody from commenting unless I personally know them

Threatening to leave used needles in his home, in his car, find his children

And before I even finished the sentence, he said, "Oh, so you're telling me I should beat you up?" And he laughed.

A guy was going around his neighborhood with my picture on my election signs shooting a hole in my head in every single election sign

I have a kid who hasn't been in the grocery store for 20 months, because she got accosted in the grocery store, and in such a way that she won't go back...because she doesn't know what will happen, and that's all because I'm a Councillor

I was called racist, my intellect was questioned...said that I was a liar and couldn't be trusted, and the most unsettling part of all of this was all of these comments came from a fellow council member



Thank you!



Access resources
on our website

Strong Cities
Network

Extra slides

Addressing Anti-Government Hate and Harassment

- Strong Cities members from across North America and Europe reported that while **online and in-person harassment**, including discriminatory slurs or attacks and sharing of false information, were on the rise, **few measures have been taken to address these incidents**
- Strong Cities partnered with the Association of Manitoba Municipalities (AMM) to conduct listening sessions with members and produce a **toolkit with over 130 practical recommendations** for municipal officials
- Strong Cities hosted sessions to learn from officials and **share best practices** at the Association of Municipalities of Ontario's Annual Conference at the Strong Cities Sixth Global Summit
- Strong Cities has active proposals currently seeking funding to offer municipalities **more support**



A Toolkit for Manitoba Municipalities:

Toolkit

Addressing Anti-Government Hate and Harassment

Strong Cities
Network



Association of
Manitoba
Municipalities

December 2025

Understanding the harassment landscape



Threat Assessment 2024-2025

Institute for Strategic Dialogue’s categories of extremists and rhetoric across Canadian social media users/groups

- Accelerationists
- Anti-government extremists
- Anti-Muslim extremists
- Christian-nationalists
- Ethno-nationalists
- Male supremacists
- Neo-Nazis
- White supremacists

- Anti-2SLGBTQIA+ hate speech

	Report 3		Report 2		Report 1	
	%	Figure	%	Figure	%	Figure
Anti-Migrant	26.1%	2,478	29.7%	2,934	33.6%	4,382
Antisemitic	22.4%	2,127	28.7%	2,843	35.1%	4,577
Anti-LGBTQ	22.3%	2,117	21.7%	2,149	N/A	N/A
Anti-Asian	15.2%	1,446	13.7%	1,353	15.0%	1,957
Anti-Muslim	12.0%	1,139	20.3%	2,656	4.3%	421
Anti-Black	8.8%	872	9.8%	1,279	7.1%	671
Anti-First Nations	9.6%	1,252	2.4%	225	2.3%	232
Anti-Arab	1.7%	218	0.8%	72	1.7%	172

Figure from ISD (2025) “Data Briefing December 2024 to February 2025” p. 7

Gatineau mayor resigns, warns Quebec about 'exodus' of municipal politicians

By La Presse Canadienne

Updated February 22, 2024 7:39 PM



France Bélisle was elected Gatineau's first female mayor in 2021. Jean Levac *Ottawa Citizen* files

Incivility at the municipal level is a growing problem

- In a 2025 Canadian Municipal Barometer survey of elected officials, **63%** of respondents said they had experienced some form of **harassment**.
- In Quebec surveys, share of officials reporting **harassment up from 28% in 2017 to 39% in 2023**.
- Gatineau's mayor cited **death threats and misogyny** as reasons for stepping down in 2024.

Incivility...

- Makes it harder to recruit candidates and staff.
- Erodes trust between council, staff and citizens.
- Creates toxic work environments.
- Consumes a huge amount of time and resources with incivility investigations, staff firings or resignations.
- Harms municipal credibility when media/public attention is on internal conflicts.
- Makes it harder to reach compromise.
- Limits legitimate expression and erodes democracy.



Good Practices and Lessons Learned from across the Strong Cities Network

Strong Cities
Network

Potential Entry Points for City-Led Action

1

**The Causes of
Anti-Government
Sentiment**

2

**Candidates for
Local Office**

3

**Harassment of
Municipal
Officials**

4

**Online
Harassment**

5

**Online
Misinformation
and
Disinformation**

6

**Meeting
Disruptions**

7

**Identity-Based
Hate**

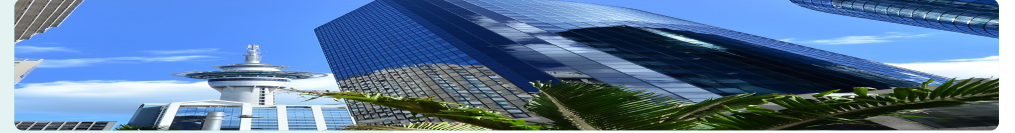
City Practice: Albuquerque (New Mexico, United States)

Local Prevention Framework

- local leadership group of community actors
- collaborative forums where community leaders and local government officials meet to discuss concerns regarding hate, targeted violence and polarisation and strategise collective responses
- promoting social cohesion through community-building efforts, particularly across particularly across demographic



City Practice: Auckland (New Zealand)



Staying Safe During Election Campaigns Webpage

- dedicated, non-partisan resource within the Vote Auckland website to help candidates access critical safety guidance separate from general election information
- addresses privacy risks from publicly available information including social media, election branding and personal details that could lead to phishing, unauthorised access or public sharing of family information
- provides practical security measures such as enabling privacy functions, creating separate campaign email and social media profiles, and using strong passwords with two-factor authentication
- links to national resources including the Electoral Commission, the National Cyber Security Centre and the Privacy Commission

City Practice: Cheshire (United Kingdom)

Councillor Safety Protocol

- establishes formal reporting pathways through a Nominated Officer for Councillor Safety who coordinates with dedicated police contact for serious incidents
- creates strategic oversight via a Member Champion for Councillor Safety who maintains partnerships with police and ensures protective measures remain prioritised
- establishes strategic partnerships through regular meetings between the Nominated Officer, the Force Elected Official Advisor from Cheshire Police and the Member Champion
- delivers targeted training on conflict prevention and wellbeing, reaffirming commitment to the Local Government Association's Debate Not Hate campaign



City Practice: Burlington (Ontario, Hamilton)



Elect Respect Campaign

- an online pledge inviting elected officials, candidates and citizens to commit to respectful behaviour, speak out against abuse and support those targeted by harassment
- council resolutions passed by municipalities across Ontario rejecting targeted harassment and personal attacks, focusing debate on ideas and policies rather than individuals
- cross-sector endorsement including by the Burlington Chamber of Commerce, recognising that respect underpins both strong democracy and thriving economies
- multi-level support with Halton Regional Council endorsing the campaign and local municipalities across the region bringing resolutions to their councils

City Practice: Calgary (Alberta, Canada)

Info Investigators Youth Initiative

- provides interactive online resources through a self-directed Kahoot quiz introducing lateral reading, critical observation, reverse image search and geolocation verification
- delivers school outreach programmes for grades 4-6 and grades 7-9, presented in person or virtually, focusing on teaching lateral reading skills to verify information



City Practice: Boulder (Colorado, United States)



Community and Council Forums

- dismantles hierarchies through roundtable seating arrangements that replace the traditional dais structure, fostering equal interaction between officials and residents
- promotes diverse participation by intentionally recruiting demographically balanced participants and randomly selecting from an open registration list
- facilitates dialogue through small breakout groups combining councillors, municipal staff and residents in facilitated discussions on specific topics early in the decision-making process
- builds trust by creating opportunities for nuanced conversation rather than rushed time-limited comment periods, with post-event evaluation to improve future forums



City Practice: Vancouver (British Columbia, Canada)

Workplace Restoration Programme

- repairs relationships through facilitated processes that focus on creating shared understanding of behaviour impacts rather than establishing fault or wrongdoing
- addresses disrespectful conduct by attending to root causes of conflict and building individual and collective capacity to respond to workplace harm
- complements formal processes by



Examples of Solutions

Code of Conduct

Outline standards of behaviour for elected officials and municipal staff, including guidelines for respectful communication, conflict resolution, and adherence to ethical principles.

Municipal Leadership

Mayor, Councillors, Senior Management must lead by example and set the tone for the entire organization.

Communication

Foster open lines of communication to build trust and mutual respect. Regularly engage in dialogue to address concerns before they escalate.

Public Meeting Design

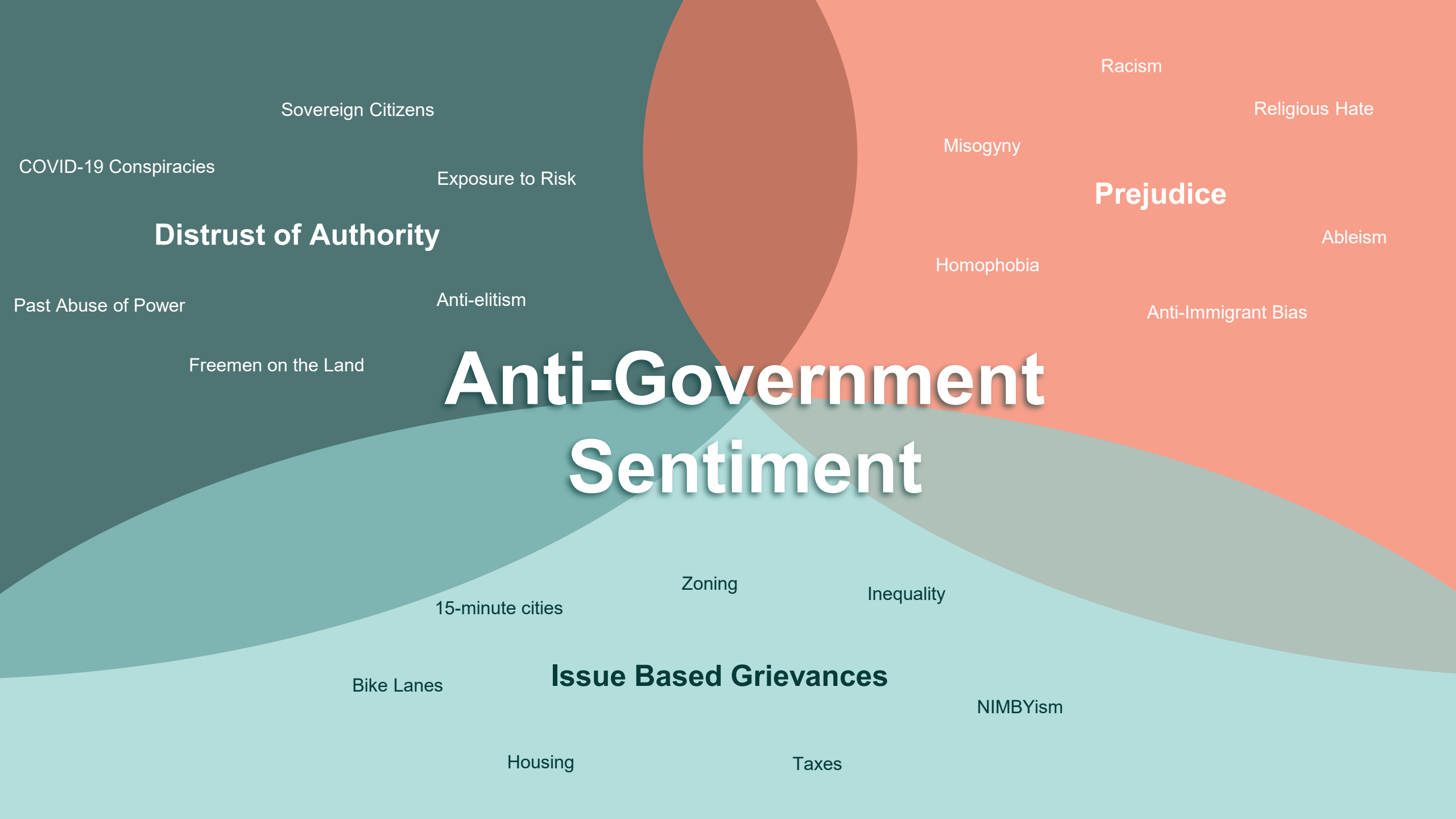
Be strategic in public meeting design. Articulate expectations regarding respectful engagement, meeting structure and rules, staff roles, how community feedback will be used.

Internal Collaboration

Use Council orientations or strategic planning sessions to create dialogue between Council and Administration about the shared challenges and solutions related to incivility

Guiding Questions

- What measures have municipalities implemented to prevent and mitigate hate, harassment and disruptions targeting municipal officials?
- How can municipal leaders build resilience and public trust (including during election periods) while addressing the spread of mis/disinformation and anti-government narratives?
- What lessons can be learned from other municipalities that have successfully navigated these challenges, and what additional resources or partnerships could strengthen local responses?



Anti-Government Sentiment

Distrust of Authority

Prejudice

Issue Based Grievances

COVID-19 Conspiracies

Past Abuse of Power

Freemen on the Land

Sovereign Citizens

Exposure to Risk

Anti-elitism

Racism

Religious Hate

Misogyny

Homophobia

Ableism

Anti-Immigrant Bias

Zoning

Inequality

15-minute cities

Bike Lanes

Housing

Taxes

NIMBYism

Online Ecosystem is Shaping the Offline Threat Landscape

Online ecosystem favors inflammatory content.

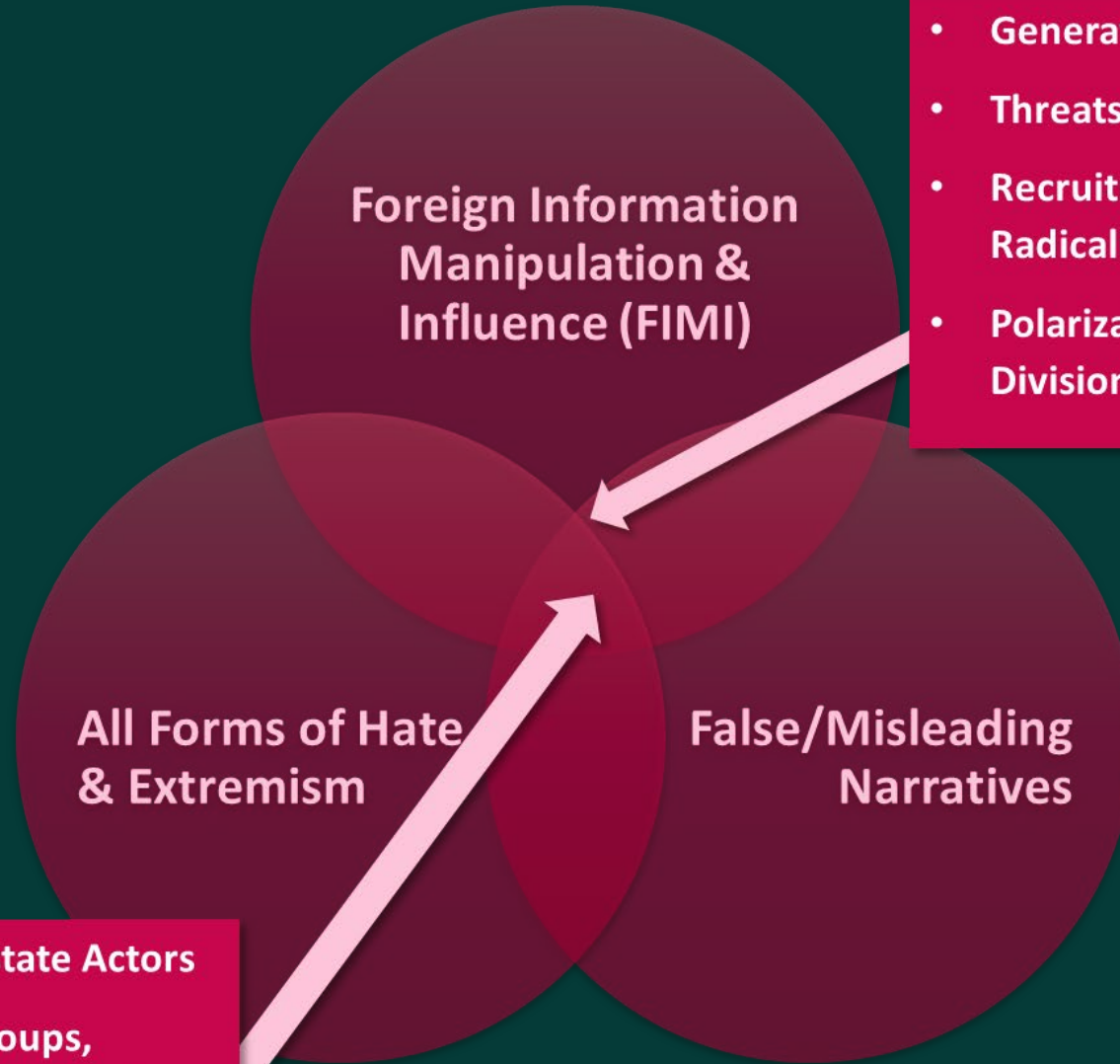
Offenders do not necessarily fit into any ideological box.

Involves a combination of domestic and foreign actors.

Conspiracy theories and false/misleading information are motivating people to action.

Global events and news coverage is having local impacts.

- **State / Nonstate Actors**
- **Extremist groups, networks, individuals**
- **Unaffiliated individuals**



- **Generative AI**
- **Threats / Targeted Violence**
- **Recruitment & Radicalization**
- **Polarization, Conflict, Division**



COMMON
GOOD UBCM
2026



Social Media: Strategies & Tools for Online Harassment

Sam Oliphant & Cathy Canil
September 14, 2026

Kirk&Co.

Our Session



1. Your voice and boundaries on social
2. Defending your digital space
3. Strategies for responding to online harassment
4. Key takeaways and resources



Your voice and
boundaries on
social

Social Media Isn't Just a 'Tool'

- Public performance of leadership
- Emotions, rumours, and misinformation travel at light speed
- Everything skews negative
- Expectations of 'always on'
- Filled with pressure traps:
 - Feeling urgency to respond to tags
 - Silence looks like avoidance
 - Volume creates feeling of urgency



Social media is the town square, and it is a critical element of how you show up to your constituents.

Your Approach To The Social Media World

Approach	Benefits	Downsides
Active	Visibility, connection, reach	Workload, stress, expectation
Moderate	Balance, more control	Less reach
Limited/none	Most personal control	Narrative risks



You have to find the approach that works best for you and recognize the tradeoff.

Finding Your Boundaries

You don't have to:

- Reply instantly
- Engage at all hours
- Address every post
- Address every issue

You should:

- Be timely
- Be authentic
- Be polite
- Address misinformation



Setting and consistently maintaining boundaries lets people know what to expect from you.

Defending your digital space



Protect Your Personal Perimeter

Tips to keep your personal information safe and prevent attacks

Separate Public and Personal Accounts

Keep a public-facing account separate from personal profiles. Tighten privacy on personal accounts. Don't accept friend requests from people you don't know.

Lock Down Account Security

Use strong passwords that are different for all accounts and enable two-factor authentication on all platforms that support it. Check your privacy settings across each platform you are active on

Search Your Name

Find out how much of your information is freely available and indexed by search engines. Request removal from public record sites where possible.

Loop in Family & Close Contacts

Make sure people close to you know not to share your personal contact information, location or schedule.

Prepare Your Profile

Tips for setting boundaries and filtering what gets through

Communicate Your Availability

- Display “Business Hours” on Your Profile
- Set “Away Messages”: use Auto-Reply and let users messaging you outside of your business hours know when you check your messages.

Comment Filters

- Set up comment filters to automatically filter out keywords and phrases before they appear in comments on your page.

Expectation Setting

- State who you are and what your role is on your profile/page
- Post a “Community Guidelines” note and pin it to let page visitors and followers know what will and won’t be tolerated on your page.

Tip: Set up filters before your next public appearance, don’t wait for a wave to hit.

Levers You Can Pull on Social

Major social media platforms give you a few levers for putting distance between you and other users



Restrict/Limit

Quietly reduces the visibility of a user's comments without alerting them



Mute

Hides their notifications and content from your feed, but they can still see and interact with yours. They have no way of knowing they've been muted.



Block

Cuts off all contact. The blocked account can no longer view or interact with your content in any way. Best reserved for repeat or serious offenders.



Report

Flags content that breaks platform rules for formal review

Strategies for responding to online harassment



Online Harassment Can Take Different Forms

Not all online harassment is the same and different types may require different approaches

One-Off Comment

A single negative or rude remark

Usually safe to ignore.

Coordinated Pile-On

Multiple accounts, same talking points

Pause replies, document, escalate.

Persistent Individual

One person, repeated contact

Block/restrict. Keep a record.

Threat or Doxxing

Threats or publishing private personal information

Escalate immediately and report them on the platform. Involve authorities if needed.

Make a Decision Before You Type

Tips to help you decide if a reply is worth sending

Worth a Response

- A genuine question or misunderstanding from a community member
- Misinformation about your record or work that could spread if left unaddressed
- A single critical but civil comment worth acknowledging publicly



Usually Better To Leave It Alone

- Personal insults, name-calling, or bad faith baiting
- Comments from accounts clearly created to provoke (created recently, no followers)

Ways Forward For The Reply Itself

When you decide to reply keep it concise, informative and neutral



Pause First

Take a breath, create a draft, re-read.
Never reply in the heat of the moment



Re-direct, Don't Debate

Point to a resource and do your best not to
argue in public replies



Stay Factual

Include verifiable information in your
response



Reply Once

State your position once



Keep it Neutral

Use a calm, even tone



Keep a Record

Gather evidence of all content before you
make a move

When to Escalate

1. Document

Screenshot with timestamps before anything is deleted or anyone is blocked

2. Report on the Platform

File a report for anything that violates the platform's terms of use

3. Loop in your Team

Notify staff, comms support or a trusted colleague about the situation

4. Involve Authorities

For direct threats escalate to your organization's security contact or contact law enforcement

5. Consult with an Attorney

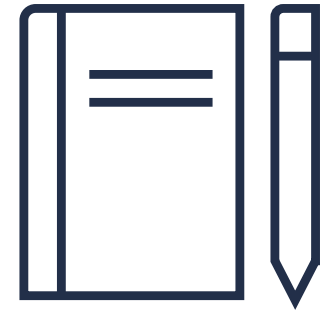
Contact a lawyer to see what your options are if you feel that major damage has been done



Protect your own wellbeing, too. Speak to trusted friends or family about what you are experiencing and remember that the attacks are about your visibility, not your worth

Key Takeaways

- Find the approach on social that works best for you and recognize the tradeoff
- Set your defenses and protect your personal perimeter before you're targeted
- Know what platform defenses are available and leverage them when necessary (restrict, mute, block, report)
- Pause before replying and consider if a reply is worth sending. Most comments don't need a reply
- When you do respond, keep replies factual and neutral and only reply once
- Escalate threatening activity and look after yourself



Resources

Protecting your Privacy

- [Facebook: Basic Privacy Settings and Tools](#)
- [LinkedIn: Understanding Your Privacy Settings](#)
- [Instagram: Privacy and Safety](#)
- [YouTube: Protecting Your Identity](#)
- [WhatsApp: Privacy](#)

Dealing with Online Harassment

- [Online Harassment Field Manual – PEN America](#)
- [Bullying and Cyberbullying - RCMP](#)
- [Responding to Cyberbullying – Cyberbullying Research Center](#)
- [Meta: Prevent bullying and harassment](#)



Thank You!

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Kirk&Co.



COMMON GOOD

UBCM
2026



Vancouver Food Runners

In appreciation of our speakers today and with thanks for your contribution, UBCM has made a donation to the Vancouver Food Runners. Building connections between local businesses, nonprofits, and volunteers to ensure surplus food reaches essential community food programs. Vancouver Food Runners believe in turning surplus food into meaningful change. They believe good food belongs to people, not landfills!