

Canadian Government Lambasted for Stifling Science and Dissent

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“In a culture of pervasive scare tactics and punishment, it can be easy to become paralyzed with fear, to accept the advocacy chill and give way to self-censorship.”(Photo: [Jennifer Moo/flickr/cc](#))

From muzzling watchdog groups to persecuting whistleblowers, from devaluing Indigenous voices to undermining labor unions, from defunding environmental charities to criminalizing peaceful protests, the Canadian government made civil society organizations “Public Enemy #1.”

So charges a new report released Tuesday by [Voices-Voix](#), a coalition of 200 organizations and 500 individuals who say Canada’s federal government has pursued a deliberate strategy to repress alternative views.

“Together, we feel neither secure nor valued,” the signatories write in [Dismantling Democracy: Stifling Debate and Dissent in Canada](#) (pdf). “In a culture of pervasive scare tactics and punishment, it can be easy to become paralyzed with fear, to accept the advocacy chill and give way to self-censorship.”

This “crude campaign to stifle dissent” has manifested in myriad ways, according to Voices-Voix, which includes Amnesty International Canada, Greenpeace Canada, and the Council of Canadians.

Such concerns have been [raised](#) several [times](#) before. But Voices-Voix’s analysis is perhaps the most comprehensive. Drawing heavily from more than 100 case studies, the report—which journalist Karl Nerenberg, [writing](#) at [Rabble.ca](#), said “should be compulsory reading for all Canadian voters before the next election”—documents dozens of examples of such silencing tactics.

Organizations that disagree with the government’s positions have had their funding threatened, reduced, or discontinued, the coalition says. What’s more, it adds, individuals have been fired or intimidated after speaking out on human rights or being critical of Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s administration.

And in a strongly worded [Declaration](#) that calls for transparency and civil liberties protections, Voices-Voix notes that “an unprecedented level of secrecy now shrouds a long list of government activities and decisions, making it increasingly difficult for the public to hold the government accountable across a range of fundamentally important issues.”

The report comes on the same day as the Canadian science advocacy group Evidence for

Democracy launched its [‘Science Pledge’ campaign](#), asking Members of Parliament, candidates, organizations, and citizens to “pledge their support for science and evidence-based government decision-making.”

Specifically, Evidence for Democracy—which was behind [last month’s call](#) for language on “scientific integrity” to be included in public science workers’ next contract—is recommending the implementation of a new government-wide communications policy to ensure that government scientists can speak publicly about their research, and the creation of a new federal science office to advise decision makers.

“The trends we’ve seen in recent years—funding cuts to science, government scientists not being able to speak about their work, and decisions that appear to play fast and loose with scientific evidence—are deeply troubling to many in the scientific community,” said Dr. Scott Findlay, associate professor of biology at the University of Ottawa and Evidence for Democracy Board member. “Their concerns are, in turn, giving rise to more widespread public concerns, about the science necessary to ensure to healthy bodies, healthy minds, healthy environments and healthy economies.”

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