



DEFEND YOUR  
COMMUNITY  
AND YOUR  
**V**  **OTE**  
★

FIGHT MISINFORMATION  
**WITH FACTS**

★ ★ ★  
Lead by example. Identify misinformation.  
**#PROTECT2020**



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# FAQs:

## Disinformation and Election Security: We're in This Together

Disinformation threatens to divide and confuse Americans during an election year, but Americans can help their fellow citizens find out the facts. We are in this together. Here are some frequently asked questions about disinformation related to election security and how to recognize it.



### What is foreign interference?

Foreign interference is defined as malign actions taken by foreign governments or foreign actors designed to sow discord, manipulate public discourse, discredit the electoral system, bias the development of policy, or disrupt markets for the purpose of undermining the interests of the United States and its allies.



### Why should I be concerned about foreign interference?

Foreign interference seeks to undermine our values, our strategic interests, and the core of our democracy: our elections. Foreign adversaries use interference in our elections, markets, and society in order to weaken trust in political processes and divide Americans so they can advance their own goals.

But foreign interference only works if each of us lets it. Each of us, as Americans, has the ability to stop this constantly evolving threat from harming America by staying determined and unified.



### What is the difference between disinformation and other kinds of false information?

False and/or inaccurate information falls into three broad categories:

- **Misinformation:** Information that is false, but not created or shared with the intention of causing harm.
- **Disinformation:** False information that is deliberately created to mislead, harm, or manipulate a person, social group, organization, or country.
- **Malinformation:** Information that is based on fact, but used out of context to mislead, harm or manipulate a person, organization, or country.

While all three categories are harmful, disinformation is especially worrisome for elections since this false information is produced specifically to have negative consequences.



## What methods do foreign adversaries use to spread disinformation online and how do I spot it?

Disinformation is commonly spread through social media accounts, and often through links to disinformation websites. Foreign actors use state media, official accounts, fake accounts, and social media bots to disseminate false information, innuendo, and rumor that push their narratives. These activities are coordinated to reach large audiences, and include foreign actors posing as Americans. Foreign interference through disinformation usually takes these steps:

- **Targeting divisive issues:** They don't want to win an argument—they just want to see division.
- **Manipulating accounts:** Accounts are renamed and reused, with one user controlling many accounts. You can often find out if an account is fake by looking at its history—genuine accounts have multiple interests and post content from multiple sources.
- **Raising tensions:** Foreign influencers with fake accounts often pick fights or troll other users, making positions grow more extreme.
- **Going mainstream:** Sometimes the controversy caused by foreign influencers and disinformation is shared in the mainstream media—which means success for them.



## What are social media bots?

Many of the accounts used for disinformation don't have a real person behind them. They are operated by social media bots, which are programs that mimic human behavior. Through big data analytics, artificial intelligence, and a variety of programs and databases, these bots can imitate legitimate social media users posting content.



## Is disinformation being spread now?

Disinformation is an ongoing threat. However, it will increase as Election Day grows closer and foreign adversaries try to influence American voters.



## Does disinformation only come from foreign influencers?

No. While foreign interference is a special concern, remember that mis-, mal-, and disinformation can be spread domestically as well. This is why it is important to think before you link, to avoid spreading bad information that can create confusion and division as we approach the election.



## How can I report disinformation?

You can report disinformation to the social media platform where you found it. Most social media companies have policies in place to help stop the flow of disinformation. You can also help your friends, family, and community members recognize disinformation.



## How did Russia try to interfere in the 2016 presidential election?

Russia's efforts to interfere in the 2016 election included cyber-targeting of state and local election infrastructure, hacking and leaking operations targeting partisan organizations, and propaganda operations that targeted the electorate through use of disinformation, including disinformation on social media platforms.



## What steps are being taken to improve the security of the 2020 election?

State and local governments are working with the U.S. federal government to make systems and processes more resilient. All 50 states and the District of Columbia now have intrusion detection sensors on parts of their election infrastructure. A team of federal agencies are mobilized and working with states to identify cybersecurity threats to election infrastructure systems and to political campaigns and are better able to warn them about threats today than ever before. Finally, Americans are more alert than ever about foreign interference and disinformation.



## How can I help?

You can learn about foreign interference and disinformation and take steps to stop it. This can be as simple as deciding not to share, or you can do more research to see whether sources are credible. You can talk to friends, family, and community members. Don't fall prey to disinformation about an election—such as when, where or how to vote—from untrusted sources. State and local government websites are the authoritative sources for this information.



## How do I find out where I can vote, or how to vote by mail?

You can visit your state or local election office website to find out where you can vote and how to get an absentee ballot. Eligibility for absentee ballots will vary from state to state. If you don't know the website, you can visit [www.usa.gov/election-office](http://www.usa.gov/election-office) to find it.



## How do I register to vote?

People should visit their state election website to register. If you don't know the website, you can visit [www.vote.gov](http://www.vote.gov) to register to vote. Each state has its own voter registration rules. Thirty-nine states and the District of Columbia allow people to register to vote online. More general information about registering to vote is found at [www.usa.gov/register-to-vote](http://www.usa.gov/register-to-vote).



## What are the voter registration deadlines?

Registration deadlines vary by state, and they can be as much as a month before the election. For more information, visit your state election office website or the U.S. Vote Foundation to obtain your state's registration deadline.