



Extremists Spread Disinformation to Manipulate Voters and Elections

During election cycles, voters are also bombarded with disinformation that is difficult to distinguish, false conspiracy theories and propaganda from illegitimate sources. Understanding the type and signs of disinformation is essential to combating its negative impacts.

Disinformation is:

- Purposefully false or misleading content created with the intent to deceive and cause harm.

Disinformation can even spread through less obviously biased sources like:

- Messaging app
- 'Fake' news sites
- Social media
- Streaming video outlets

Who's behind disinformation?

- Manipulative extremist actors, often associated with hate and antigovernment groups.

Extremists use disinformation to:

- Purposefully and wrongly seed doubt in democracy.
- Sow distrust in elections.
- Pass anti-voter laws.
- Spark violence.
- Achieve political and financial gain.
- Create chaos and confusion.

Disinformation content includes:

- False details about race and gender issues.
- Stereotypes.
- Contentious social and economic issues.

Targets of disinformation are:

- General public
- Communities of color
- Religious communities
- Voters in tightly contested districts

It is serious!

- Extremist actors' disinformation campaigns about elections led to the violence on Jan. 6, 2021, and in statehouses across the U.S. in 2020.
- Disinformation has led to targeted attacks against election workers.
- A SPLC poll found concerns levels of belief in false racist conspiracy theories and a willingness to support political violence.

Disinformation can:

- Come in the form of satire or parody.
- Be sensationalist/misleading headlines.
- Have error-filled poor journalism.
- Function as clickbait sales content.
- Be full of propaganda.

Signs of disinformation include:

- Making extraordinary claims.
- Using facts that are poorly sourced.
- Eliciting a strong emotion.
- Mixing fact and opinion in the same story.
- Using out-of-place pictures or graphics.

Ways to confirm the validity of information:

- Examining the source and author.
- Using other sources for the information.
- Maintaining a critical mindset.
- Researching the factual claims elsewhere on fact-checking sites.
- Confirm whether the source is known for satire.
- Reviewing the comments for clues of bias or critique.
- Inspecting images for flaws that show editing or manipulation.

Act to stop the spread of disinformation by:

- Being personally aware.
- Reporting disinfo by talking with your circle of friends, family and co-workers is the best defense to counter this harmful manipulation trend.
- Flagging and reporting disinformation on social media platforms at the **World Health Organization** (bit.ly/3CbKFo7).
- Reporting to organizations like **Common Cause** (reportdisinfo.org).

More information can be found at:

- **The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Disinformation Infographics** (bit.ly/3fOjA33)
- **The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) Information Manipulation Graphic** (bit.ly/3SF17qF)
- **World Health Organization “How to Report Misinformation Online” page** (bit.ly/3CbKFo7)

**Because disinformation is meant to incite a strong emotional response and action.
STOP — be suspicious and investigate!**