DISINFORMATION OVERVIEW

WHAT IS A DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN?

Disinformation is false information intended to <u>deliberately deceive or mislead individuals</u>. Criminals, terrorist or extremist groups, state-sponsored actors, and conspiracy theorists use disinformation as a tool to spread propaganda, disseminate conspiracy theories, incite distrust and confusion, or compel violence.

This isn't a new threat. Foreign powers have used disinformation to target enemies for hundreds of years. We used to call it "propaganda" or "information operations" – but social media has made it easier to spread and harder to detect while micro-targeting and artificial intelligence have intensified its impact.

WHO ARE THE BAD ACTORS?

- Russia
- North Korea
- China
- Iran
- Venezuela

WHO ARE THE TARGETS?

- African American Community
- Hispanic Community and other minority groups
- Conservative and Liberal Interest Groups
- Potentially any large or easily identified voting blocks

According to the bipartisan U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee report "(N)o single group of Americans was targeted by IRA [Russia's Internet Research Agency] information operatives more than African Americans<u>. By far, race and related issues were the preferred target of the information warfare campaign designed to divide the country in 2016."</u>

WHY TARGET MINORITY GROUPS?

- Disinformation campaigns are designed to exploit our grievances and incite feelings of paranoia or anger
- Build distrust and cynicism toward the voting process
- To discourage voter participation

- Spread misinformation about voter registration requirements
- Incite confusion on election day

In general, disinformation campaigns are intended to divide Americans against one another so that we aren't unified against our adversaries.

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WHERE AND HOW DOES IT HAPPEN?

Social media is the primary platform to conduct disinformation campaigns and Russia has been the most aggressive actor. The Internet Research Agency (IRA) is Russia's primary disinformation "factory."

- Social media bots can automatically post or re-post messages
- Shill accounts, which are run by real people, promote ideas and engage with others to promote a specific viewpoint
- Recruitment of unsuspecting Americans and organizing of in-person demonstrations through social media (Moe give black lives matter and white supremacy example here)
- Working to trick the news media into reporting on fake news
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HOW DO YOU DETECT A DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN?

- Understanding how foreign actors are trying to affect our behavior is key.
- Question the source, check the content, and question their intent.
    - Does this look like a credible source?
    - Is it verified by trusted and independent sources?
    - Is it designed to spur a negative emotional reaction and will reposting it improve the conversation?

WHAT TO REPORT?

If you see something that you believe to be disinformation, and it relates elections administration, please report it to our office at report@OhioSOS.Gov.

- Disinformation about voting hours, disruptions at polling locations, voter fraud or voter suppression are things that we want to proactively address so every eligible Ohioan has the opportunity and motivation to make their voice heard at the ballot box.