Combating Election Misinformation

Communicating Trusted Election Information
July 30, 2020
#TrustedInfo2020
Housekeeping

- Be gracious about work-from-home setups
- **Restart Zoom** if needed
- Slides, captioned recordings, and a participant guide will be available on the registration page
- Use the **chat panel** to say hello, chat with other attendees, and ask questions
Today’s objectives

● Get familiar with terms and concepts related to information operations
● Identify different forms of misinformation, malinformation, and disinformation and how to respond
● Develop resilience with a defensive communications strategy
Today’s agenda

- Introduction (10 mins.)
- Key terms and concepts (10 mins.)
- Common sources, goals, and themes (5 mins.)
- Common forms (10 mins.)
- Breakout exercise (10 mins.)
- Getting ahead of influence operations (15 mins.)
- Responding to influence operations (10 mins.)
- Discussion (15 mins.)
- Wrapping up (5 mins.)
Hello, there!

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Harnessing the promise of technology to modernize the American voting experience

@helloCTCL
www.techandciviclife.org
Center for Democracy & Technology (CDT)

Working inclusively across sectors and the political spectrum to find tangible solutions today's most pressing internet policy challenges.

@CenDemTech
www.cdt.org
Robocalls Aim Misinformation At Texas Voters On Super Tuesday

March 3, 2020 at 4:55 pm  Filed Under: Campaign 2020, Democrats, Election Day, primary election day, Republicans, Robocalls, Super Tuesday, Texas News, Texas Secretary of State's Office

Shawnee Co. Election Commissioner clears up election rumors

NC elections board looking into possible texting scam

Tags: fraud, voting, State Board of Elections
Posted March 19, 2020 8:45 p.m. EDT
Updated March 20, 2020 12:17 a.m. EDT
There is NO WAY (ZERO!) that Mail-In Ballots will be anything less than substantially fraudulent. Mail boxes will be robbed, ballots will be forged & even illegally printed out & fraudulently signed. The Governor of California is sending Ballots to millions of people, anyone.....

Get the facts about mail-in ballots
What is the **biggest threat** to keeping our elections safe and accurate?

- Misleading information: 35%
- Voter fraud: 24%
- Voter suppression: 16%
- Foreign interference: 15%
- Problems at your polling place, such as long lines or broken machines: 5%

Source: NPR/PBS NewsHour/Marist Poll of 1,259 U.S. adults conducted Jan. 7-12. The margin of error for the overall sample is 3.5 percentage points.

*Unsure* responses not shown.

Credit: Alyson Hurt/NPR
The basics of influence operations

KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS
Information operations and influence operations:
The distribution of information with the effect of misleading or disrupting people’s behavior or thinking

Belfer Center, 2018; Carnegie Endowment, 2020
Misinformation:
False information that is distributed without the intent to cause harm

Council of Europe, 2017; Cook and Lewandowsky, 2012
Disinformation:
False information that is distributed with the intent to cause harm

Council of Europe, 2017; First Draft, 2017 and 2020
Malinformation:
Truthful information that is distributed with the intent to cause harm

Council of Europe, 2017; First Draft, 2017
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Misinformation</th>
<th>Truthful?</th>
<th>Intended to cause harm?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disinformation</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malinformation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
False news/fake news:
Intentionally and verifiably false information presented as genuine news content

Brookings, 2017; Center for Information Technology and Society, 2018
Share your thoughts!

What worries you the most about misleading or false election information?
Who does it, and why?

COMMON SOURCES, GOALS, AND THEMES
Who distributes misleading or false election information?

• Nation-state actors (Russia, Iran, China, etc.)
• Domestic actors driven by partisanship
• Ordinary voters (often unintentionally)
Goal: to damage the appeal of democracy

Democracy is a sham. Democracy is no better than an authoritarian or autocratic system. All politicians are corrupt. The political parties are the same.
Goal: to discourage participation or disenfranchise

Don’t come out. Your mail ballot won’t be counted. Democrats vote on Tuesday and Republicans vote on Wednesday. Tomorrow’s election has been rescheduled. You can now vote online. You must show your birth certificate to vote. We’ll have people at the polls making sure nobody votes who isn’t eligible.
Goal: to boost turnout for a preferred candidate or party

Party X is trying to commit fraud, so it’s extra important for Party Y supporters to vote. Party Y is participating in voter suppression, so Party X supporters must turn out.
Goal: to delegitimize election results and transfer of power

Voter fraud is rampant. Election officials and poll workers don’t know what they’re doing. Equipment is switching votes. My friend got the wrong party’s ballot in the mail.
What do influence operations look like?

COMMON FORMS OF INFLUENCE OPERATIONS
A quick word about influence operations, politics, and emotion

• Influence operations use emotion to provoke a response and bypass readers’ reasoning
• Political conflict provokes a more emotional response than details of election administration do.
• So, election influence operations frequently exploit political loyalties and conflicts instead of just referencing how elections are run.
Website spoofing or manipulation
Breaches and leaks

Bladen counted early votes too soon in 2018. Witness alleges numbers were leaked.

BY BRIAN MURPHY
DECEMBER 10, 2018 05:47 PM, UPDATED DECEMBER 11, 2018 06:34 AM

Rough politics, and a black eye for North Carolina’s Mother County
False news story

BREAKING: “Tens of thousands” of fraudulent Clinton votes found in Ohio warehouse

By admin1 - September 30, 2016

SHARE

Facebook
Twitter

BALLOT BOX
BALLOT BOX
BALLOT BOX
BALLOT BOX
BALLOT BOX
Claims falsely challenging the integrity of the elections administration are taken seriously as public confidence in the electoral process is important. The Franklin County Board of Elections has numerous ballot and election security measures in place.

- The computer system used to create the ballot and tabulate results is not connected to an outside network and thus is not vulnerable to outside intrusion.

- Each ballot storage vault is maintained under a double lock requiring a Democrat and Republican to simultaneously unlock.

- A double lock system is used to secure the Vote Center and must be unlocked by a Democrat and Republican simultaneously.

- Both parties are required to sign a chain of custody for all mailed ballots delivered to or picked up from the USPS.

- Access to sensitive ballot storage areas are secured by keys that are maintained in storage containers requiring palm scan access.

- Votes are recorded in three ways (1) in a hard drive within the voting machine, (2) on the removable voting machine data card, and (3) on a paper tape inside the voting machine.

- When the vote is counted, it’s done in a public setting which can be observed by parties, any campaign, the media, and the public.
Deceptive emails, texts, robocalls

List-Owner <mailto:ANNOUNCE04-L-request@LISTSERV.GMU.EDU>
List-Subscribe <mailto:ANNOUNCE04-L-subscribe-request@LISTSERV.GMU.EDU>
List-Unsubscribe <mailto:ANNOUNCE04-L-unsubscribe-request@LISTSERV.GMU.EDU>
List-Help <mailto:LISTSERV@LISTSERV.GMU.EDU?body=INFO+ANNOUNCE04-L>

To the Mason Community:

Please note that election day has been moved to November 5th. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause you.

Peter N. Stearns
Provost
Texas voters reportedly received misleading robocalls Tuesday, wrongly informing them that the Democratic primary election would be taking place a day later.
Our office has received reports of robocalls stating misinformation about today’s primary election. To be clear, all eligible voters should vote today. Look to @VoteTexas as your source for accurate election information. #TrustedInfo2020
**Social media posts**

1. **Tom Fitton**
   - @TomFitton - Feb 2
   - **BIG:** Eight Iowa counties have more voter registrations than citizens old enough to register.
   - **VOTER FRAUD** Special Report: @JudicialWatch finds 2.5 MILLION extra names on nation’s voting rolls and warns 5 states to clean up rolls or face lawsuits. Dirty election rolls can mean dirty elections. JW doing heavy lifting that DOJ is not doing. youtube.com/watch?v=5dMs_H...

2. **Charlie Kirk**
   - @charliekirk11
   - **WOW:**
   - One day before the Iowa Caucus, it’s been revealed that EIGHT Iowa counties have more adults registered to vote than voting-aged adults living there
   - Don’t let voter fraud steal the 2020 election
   - RT for national Voter ID!
   - 3:35 PM - Feb 2, 2020 - Twitter for iPhone
   - 45.6K Retweets 61.3K Likes

3. **Iowa Secretary of State Paul Pate**
   - @iowaSOS - Feb 3
   - Replying to @charliekirk11
   - Not true. Here are the actual registration totals for all 99 counties in Iowa, that are updated monthly and posted on our website for everyone to see.
   - #FakeNews sos.iowa.gov/elections/vote...
Election Judges did not show up. Please contact the County which you live in or the voting website for updates.

Check out this photo from Cook County, Illinois.

Today’s primary results are not legitimate. (h/t Brian Prigge)
Brian Prigge @brprigge · Mar 17
How's your Election Day going? #COVID19 #BarringtonIL @GovPritzker @cookcountyclerk

Karen A. Yarbrough @cookcountyclerk
Replied to @HumanRaine @brprigge and @GovPritzker

Voting is taking place at this site.
Suburban voters can visit cookcountyclerk.com/ElectionUpdates or cookcountyclerk.com/VoterInfo to view any changes or updates to their Election Day precinct.
12:50 PM · Mar 17, 2020 · Twitter Web App

What is the township and precinct?
8:27 AM · Mar 17, 2020 · Twitter Web App

5 Retweets and comments  91 Likes
How would you respond to an IO event?

BREAKOUT EXERCISE
You are the Clerk of Court for Lafayette Parish, Louisiana, and today is the July 11, 2020 presidential primary. Your office has received many phone calls from voters complaining that they can’t vote for the candidate of their choice in the closed primary. You’ve also received a few calls from outside your community asking what’s going on. You discover there’s a viral Facebook video about the election that has received millions of views.
Wow
Could this be a trend? This better not keep happening! Everyone needs to see this!

Registered Republican Not Allowed to Vote!
Plan your response (3 mins.)

- How do you respond?
- What do you say?
- Where do you place your message?
- How can you encourage worried voters?
Report back (5 mins.)

Tell us about your response!

- How do you respond?
- What do you say?
- Where do you place your message?
- What questions came up?
Best practices to help you prepare

GETTING AHEAD OF INFLUENCE OPERATIONS
Be vocal about the problem and drive people to trusted sources
Show your election office is an official source of information

- Set up https and .gov for your election website
- Get verified on Twitter and Facebook (blue check)
- Make your social media accounts look and feel official
- Have contact information displayed prominently on your website and social media profiles
Publish accurate and useful information regularly

If you have a consistent history of posting information, it’ll be easier for people to trust you -- instead of the bad actor -- if misinformation circulates. Keep your site up to date!
Create a rapid response program or telephone help line

Make it easy for voters or journalists to bring their questions to you instead of posting about them on Twitter.
Secure your communication channels

- Review permissions for website and social media
- Improve passwords or use password manager
- Set up two-factor authentication
- Draft or revise a social media policy
Build relationships with social media and your website publisher

Know who to contact at Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and your website vendor
Learn how to report false content on social media.
Establish media monitoring to spot mentions or false info

- Set up Google Alerts for your election department name to find mentions
- Regularly check social media notifications and mentions
- Do regular Google searches to spot possible spoof sites
Strengthen relationships with local media and journalists

Establish lines of communication in case you need to issue counter pieces or correct the record
Work with fact checking organizations

• Tag them in social media posts with false content
• Report false content to them
• Review their resources to verify or debunk questionable information
Prepare your communications plans and procedures

Understand and review your emergency communications plan so that you’re ready in the event of an influence operation event
A framework to help you respond

RESPONDING TO INFLUENCE OPERATIONS

CENTER FOR TECH AND CIVIC LIFE
# Introducing: an influence operations response framework

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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Acknowledge</strong></td>
<td>Acknowledge the emotions behind the falsehood you’re responding to and affirm shared goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Inform</strong></td>
<td>Provide correct (or additional) information to counter the original falsehood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Explain</strong></td>
<td>Offer an alternative explanation or narrative to fill the gap left by the original falsehood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Empower</strong></td>
<td>Give people a way to gain further information and resolve any concerns that may linger</td>
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Acknowledge: affirm emotions and shared goals

• Emphasize shared feelings and goals
• Focus on visions shared across the political spectrum: civic participation, democracy, accountability, having your voice heard, security, integrity
• Ex.: “As County Clerk, my top priority is to ensure every eligible voter is able to participate as they intend”
Inform: provide facts to offset the falsehoods

• For mis- and disinformation, provide correct information
• For misinformation, provide additional information to reframe the misleading information
• Avoid repeating the falsehood. If you must mention it, include it in the text but not the headline.
Explain: give an alternative narrative

• Give an alternative causal explanation to fill in the gaps
  Ex.: “As recently as April, she updated her address and kept her registration as a Democrat”
• Make sure your explanation isn’t more complicated than the myth
Empower: help people learn more and resolve concerns

• Provide pathways to help voters take an action relevant to the topic at hand

• Ex.: “To double check which party you’re registered with, verify your registration at countyelections.gov”
A checklist to help
Let’s talk

DISCUSSION
Share your thoughts

- What resonated with you from today’s course? (Any “ah-ha” moments?)
- What are your next steps?
- What questions do you have about what we covered today?
- What questions do you have about what we didn’t cover today?
As questions come up for you...

- Reach out to CTCL
  - We’ll help out, or
  - We’ll find someone for you who can

hello@techandciviclife.org
We’ve covered a lot of ground

WRAPPING UP
# More free training content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>URL</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CTCL: Communicating Trusted Election Information Series</td>
<td>techandciviclife.org/course/trusted-info</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTCL: COVID-19 Webinars for Election Officials</td>
<td>techandciviclife.org/covid-19-webinars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTCL: Self-paced Election Cybersecurity 101, 201, and 301 courses</td>
<td>learn.techandciviclife.org/library/by/category/cybersecurity</td>
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</table>
What was your experience with today’s course?

- A brief survey is linked in the chat box
- Please complete the survey now to provide feedback and improve the course for future participants
Thanks!

Email: hello@techandciviclife.org
Twitter: @HelloCTCL
Website: www.techandciviclife.org