

Is Democracy Broken? Disinformation Wants You To Think That It Is

Alexandra Cirone
Cornell University

"Yes, Social Media Really Is Undermining Democracy"

- Headline, Atlantic, July 28, 2022¹

"Don't Be So Certain That Social Media Is Undermining Democracy"

- Headline, Daily Beast, Aug. 11, 2022²

Social media has a complicated relationship with democracy. In 2022, Pew Research Center surveyed citizens in 19 advanced economies, to ask their opinions of social media. A majority (57%) said that social media has been more of a 'good thing' for democracy in their country, citing that social media has made users more informed about politics at home and abroad, and more accepting of people from different ethnic groups, regions, and races (Pew 2022). The rest responded that social media has been a "bad thing' for democracy, and in the US – which has had significant problems with disinformation in politics – the pattern is reversed. Meanwhile, all respondents report that access to social media and the internet has made people easier to manipulate with false information and rumors (84%), and divided in their politics (74%).³

Social media is neither democratic or undemocratic, however, it is an arena where different actors can both promote and undermine democratization (Theocharis et al 2017). Yet there is ample evidence that disinformation⁴ on social media is disrupting democratic elections all over the world (Persily and Tucker 2017). Democracy is also built on a foundation of norms and trust in democratic institutions, where elections

¹ <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/07/social-media-harm-facebook-meta-response/670975/>

² <https://www.thedailybeast.com/dont-be-so-certain-that-social-media-is-undermining-democracy>

³ https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/12/06/social-media-seen-as-mostly-good-for-democracy-across-many-nations-but-u-s-is-a-major-outlier/?utm_content=bufferbb1d1&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer

⁴ Misinformation is defined as false information that is unintentionally shared, while disinformation is false information that is deliberately shared (and fake news is disinformation that resembles journalism) (Tucker 2018).

are the defining characteristic of the democratic process. Increasingly we worry that disinformation campaigns can undermine democratic elections' ability to ensure fair competition, representation, and accountability. The extent to which disinformation on social media undermines democratic institutions also has severe implications for the 'success' of democratic backsliding (Margetts 2019).

This chapter outlines various ways disinformation can negatively impact democratic elections. First, disinformation narratives try to influence elections, by spreading false information about the voting process, or targeting voters, candidates, or parties to alter the outcome. Second, disinformation undermines trust in the integrity of the electoral process (from the ability to have free and fair elections, to expectations about the peaceful transfer of power), which can then erode trust in democracy. Further, this chapter also highlights threats to democracy that originate from within – namely, disinformation about democratic elections that is being created and shared by democratic leaders and elites, increasing the reach and false credibility of such false narratives. Finally, the chapter concludes by offering concrete steps to mitigate the impact of disinformation on elections.

I. Disinformation to Manipulate Elections

“We’re making a Woman’s Vote Worth more by Staying Home #LetWomenDecide #NoMenMidterm”

- Example of voter suppression post from the 2020 US Midterm Election⁵

“Even the Pope admires Duterte and so do the Filipino”

- Example of a fake endorsement in the 2016 Presidential Election in the Philippines ⁶

Democracy requires active participation in democratic elections by informed citizens (Manin 1997; Przeworski et al 1999). Fears that voters are too uniformed to meaningfully participate in democratic politics is as old as democracy itself, but now voters might be purposefully and strategically misinformed on a mass scale. McKay and Tenove (2021) also argue that disinformation threatens democracy by

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/04/us/politics/election-misinformation-facebook.html>

⁶ Original post: <https://www.facebook.com/papalvisitph/photos/a.321295728024881.1073741828.321279424693178/566912616796523/?type=3>; <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/03/24/1566269/papal-visit-organizers-deny-popes-endorsement-duterte>

undermining citizens' capability to communicate on the basis of "facts and logic, moral respect, and democratic inclusion." This is also in part because many core democratic institutions – such as parties, organized interests, and mainstream media – are being challenged by social media and digital platforms (Persily and Tucker 2020). Democratic election campaigns are now reliant on the use of social media, including Twitter (Jungherr 2015) and Facebook (Aral 2020), all of which are vulnerable to disinformation.

Disinformation is used to manipulate elections, namely in 1) the use of disinformation to target the voting process (election interference), and 2) disinformation that targets election outcomes, originating both domestically and from foreign actors (election influence).

The most direct attack on the democratic process is fake content created to disrupt political participation in the election – either by giving voters incorrect information about when, where, and how to vote, or engaging in voter suppression tactics designed to depress the turnout of specific groups in society. For example, in the United States, voter suppression posts and digital ads were documented in the 2016, 2018, and 2020 US elections (Howard et al 2018, DiResta et al 2019, Ashok 2019, Vandewalker 2020). Such attempts took many forms – some forms of disinformation were less sophisticated than others, and are more obviously fake to the casual viewer; for example, the hashtag #votenovember7th (Kim 2018), or posts encouraging men to stay home so women votes could "count more" (Roose 2018). But some sophisticated posts included incorrect information about voting, other posts encouraged minority groups to refrain from participating, and some posts even focused on voter intimidation using threats of violence.

Initially concerns about wide scale voter suppression related to foreign interference, thanks to the Russian IRA's efforts in using disinformation to influence the 2016 US presidential election. However, the IRA did not rely on explicit voter suppression. Cirone and Hobbs (2023) use automated text analysis and hand coding to construct a timeline of IRA messaging on Twitter during the 2016 US presidential campaign. They found that direct forms of voter suppression, especially tweets encouraging election boycotts or discouraging users to vote, by IRA accounts was rare. Instead, election interference campaigns are propagated by domestic actors, and we should be worried about the increase in use of such tactics. In particular, communities of color and other historically marginalized groups are being targeted by election falsehoods (Wooley 2022). These voters are under constant threat from disinformation, both online and via messaging apps. Disinformation is also being

presented in different languages, where there are fewer fact checking resources and reliable sources of information.

Disinformation campaigns to manipulate elections can also focus on discrediting candidates or parties, or presenting false information about policies or platforms. These are organized by domestic actors (including political elites, citizens, and even the media) within a country, to advance partisan interests (Benkler et al. 2018; Watts and Rothschild 2017). A recent Freedom House Report found that domestic digital interference affected 88% of countries that held elections or referendums from June 2018 through May 2020.⁷ Bradshaw and Howard (2019) similarly found evidence of organized social media manipulation campaigns in 70 countries as of 2019, where at least one party is using social media to shape domestic attitudes. In 52 of the countries, cyber troops used disinformation to mislead users, and in 45 of the countries activities were focused on elections. This involved building an army of government or partisan actors who use strategies such as bots, trolls, or the illegal harvest of data to bully political opposition or journalists online; such cyber armies can also be assembled with minimum investment in infrastructure or personnel. The authors noted that Facebook is the dominant platform for such activity, though other studies have found that disinformation via social media or messaging apps is now playing a disruptive role in elections in developing countries, such as Nigeria (Cheesman et al 2020) or India and Brazil (Melo et al 2020, Pereira et al 2022).

One example comes from the 2016 presidential campaign in the Philippines, which was considered the first 'social media election.' Then-candidate Rodrigo Duterte used an extensive media campaign to amplify his message and smear opponents on Facebook, the predominant social media platform (Quitzon, 2021). As a result of his systematic disinformation campaign, Duterte was the subject of 64 percent of all Philippine election-related conversations on the site the month before the election (Etter, 2017). Now as President, Duterte has created an organized digital army of trolls and bots who use disinformation to manipulate voters, attack his political opponents, undermine national newspapers, and intimidate voters, all using a network of real and fake Facebook pages. Fatima Gaw, assistant professor at the University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman, wrote that Duterte aims to "institutionalize disinformation at the state level" (Toquero 2022). The main opposition party has copied many of these strategies in response; thus disinformation narratives also helped to distort the 2022 presidential election (Grounds and Koff 2022). Politicians in Brazil and India have

⁷ See <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-on-the-net/2019/the-crisis-of-social-media/digital-election-interference>

adopted similar techniques to target voters with disinformation to win elections (Sen and Faris 2021).

Finally, election influence activities can come from foreign interference – meaning anti-democratic actors are using social media disinformation to attack and influence democratic elections in other countries. In the 2016 election, Russian IRA trolls tried to divide the American public via divisive, conspiratorial, and partisan content (Howard et al 2019), though this was for the most part unsuccessful.⁸ Since then, US has faced foreign interference attempts from Russia, China, Cuba, Iran, and Venezuela, among others (National Intelligence Council 2021). Recently, China has been found to be engaging in foreign influence campaigns using Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Such campaigns are wide ranging – in 2019, the Chinese government used social media to paint pro-democratic figures in Hong Kong as radical and dangerous (Lee Myers and Mozur 2019) in order to influence the 2020 elections in Taiwan (Quirk 2021). In the 2020 US Election, network of China-linked accounts on Twitter were posting negative political messages about Biden and Trump, claims of electoral fraud, and amplifying conspiracy related content about the Jan 6 insurrection (Crime and Security Research Institute 2021).

II. Trust in Democratic Elections

“#Wahlbetrug!”

- German hashtag meaning election fraud, used almost 5,000 times on twitter within 24 hours of the June 6, 2021 election in Germany⁹

Free and fair elections are a minimum requirement of a functioning democracy, but the health of the regime also requires faith in democratic institutions. Citizens must trust that elections are free and fair, and that the opposition will honor the outcome; this trust should also be non-partisan. Such democratic norms provide the foundation for citizens’ conception of democracy (Davis, Goidel, and Zhao, 2020). Public trust in elections is also vital for regime legitimacy (Norris, 2014), and if it erodes, the democratic compact can unwind (Anderson et al., 2005). Recently, many argue the commitment of leaders to democratic norms is also declining Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) and citizens may become desensitized to democratic norm violations (Arceneaux and Truex 2022).

⁸ A number of studies have found that exposure to IRA content on didn’t fundamentally change users’ political beliefs or attitudes (Tucker et al 2023, Eady et al 2023, Bail et al 2020).

⁹ <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-election-misinformation-afd-far-right-voters-social-media/>

The media – and now social media – has a direct impact on citizens' perceptions of democratic politics. If social media narratives paint politics as dysfunctional, and enable widespread disinformation about the legitimacy of elections, it erodes trust and confidence in the democratic process (Coleman 2012, Belanger 2017). Social media can also provide a platform for and reinforce norm violations regarding democracy. Here, I focus on a specific tactic of disinformation that undermines faith in democratic elections – narratives about electoral integrity. Narratives that sow doubt in the electoral process can be propagated by domestic actors (in particular, politicians who are losing and want to promote electoral fraud for political gain) or by coordinated, foreign interference campaigns (who seek to destabilize democracy).

One key example is the #StopTheSteal movement in the United States. The Trump president (2016-2020) embarked on a systematic campaign to undermine American democracy and discredit the electoral process (Lieberman et al. 2019, Donovan et al 2021), constantly pushing false statements in person voting machines and mail-in ballots were subject to fraud. These statements originated with then-President Trump (via statements, interviews, and social media posting) but were then amplified across Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms by the RNC, Trump's campaign, party elites, and partisan news outlets (such as Fox and Breitbart) (Benkler et al 2018). Stop the Steal was a disinformation and conspiracy-based narrative that claimed that the US was plagued by widespread electoral fraud, which laid a "justification" for Trump to refuse to concede the 2020 election; this was, of course, contrary to existing empirical evidence that there is no systematic voter fraud in the United States (e.g. Wu et al 2023).¹⁰ On social media, this false narrative was tagged by supporters using #StopTheSteal, and in the days following the election, its use exploded on Twitter and particularly Facebook; while social media platforms tried to moderate and remove thousands of pages and posts of false content, platforms struggled to contain the viral movement (Donovan et al 2022, Bond and Allyn 2021). This movement would culminate in the January 6th insurrection.

Why was Stop the Steal so prevalent? The Stop the Steal narrative went viral, for a number of reasons. The Stop the Steal narrative was highly partisan and confirmed preexisting beliefs and identity politics; we know from studies of disinformation that this helps fake news spread (Osmundsen et al 2021, Mason 2018, Bail 2016). There are a number of psychological reasons why people knowingly share misinformation, that aren't related to accuracy – content that is controversial, unexpected, or

¹⁰ Also see <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/politics/wp/2018/08/03/the-most-bizarre-thing-ive-ever-been-a-part-of-trump-panel-found-no-voter-fraud-ex-member-says/>

provocative is more likely to be shared (Altay, 2021, Rudat et al 2014, Chadwick et al 2017, Chen 2015). Notably, this narrative was put in place and reinforced by elites, which bolstered its spread reach and legitimacy. On social media, internet users rely on endorsement cues (such as likes and shares), which are fueled by engagement based algorithms that boost disinformation (Metzger et al 2010, Li and Sakamoto 2014). Stop the Steal demonstrates how a false narrative, with no basis in truth, can quickly reach large number of citizens and mobilize anti-democratic actors (Donovan 2021).

Disinformation about electoral integrity is not limited to the United States. The global reach of social media can also demonstrate to the world how successful electoral fraud narratives can be, taken directly from the US playbook. The Institute for Strategic Dialogue (Craig, Simmons, and Bhatnagar 2023) examined elections between January 2021 and January 2023 in France, Germany, Australia, Brazil, and uncovered numerous attempts to spread voter fraud narratives. Foreign actors are also using false narratives about voting integrity; Iran, Russia, and China both spread disinformation about voter fraud in the 2020 US presidential election and the 2021 Canadian federal election, often by amplifying and sharing existing voter fraud posts (National Intelligence Council 2021, Schafer 2020).

We worry such incidences undermine faith in democratic institutions. Prior research has show that, across the world, high levels of electoral fraud are associated with less satisfaction with democracy (Fortin-Rittenberger 2017). Norris (2019) does a comparative study using World Values Survey data to study perceptions of electoral integrity in established and new democracies, and finds that doubts about electoral integrity undermine general satisfaction with how democracy works. Recent work on disinformation in the United States has also shown that exposure to unfounded claims of voter fraud undermines confidence in democratic elections, especially among co-partisans. Clayton et al (2022) conducted a survey experiment during the 2020 US election, to study the effect of exposure to Trump's claims of voter fraud on attitudes towards democracy. They found that while attacks on election integrity don't affect support for democratic, exposure to such rhetoric decreases trust in elections and increases beliefs that elections are rigged among Trump supporters. In the 2016 presidential election, and the 2018 midterm elections, Albertson and Guiler (2020) and Berlinski et al (2021) found similar results, in that exposure to claims of manipulation and fraud reduces confidence electoral integrity but not democracy; however, Berlinski et al (2021) also found that corrective messages from mainstream sources do *not* measurably reduce the damage these accusations inflict, suggesting electoral fraud narratives can do lasting damage.

But the risk doesn't stop there. Even more dangerously, disinformation creates false narratives that can then be used by anti-democratic actors as justifications for further restrictions on media freedom or the democratic process. For example, in the the US the narrative of 'election security concerns' has led to the widespread introduction of state level laws making it harder for individuals to vote (Voting Rights Lab 2022, Brennan Center 2022). The active discussion and passage of these laws then reinforces the concept that the election is broken, further damaging democracy. Now both democratic and non-democratic leaders globally are executing disinformation campaigns, persecuting journalists, and using disinformation as an excuse to further restrict media access (Gunitsky 2017). Election integrity is a serious issue, as Sinan Aral writes in his recent book Hype Machine, "If our elections lack integrity, no amount of free speech or inclusion can save our democracies, because voting protects all other rights."

III. The Problem with Elites

"I'm more troubled by the fact that other Republican officials who clearly know better are going along with this, are humoring him in this fashion. It is one more step in delegitimizing not just the incoming Biden administration, but democracy generally. And that's a dangerous path"

– *Former President Obama, discussing Trump's false claims of widespread voter fraud*¹¹

Disinformation regarding elections can come from a variety of sources – trolls, bots, foreign agents, everyday social media users – but what's most concerning is that election disinformation is increasingly coming from democratic elites and leaders. Autocrats are well known for using social media as information control and to discredit political opposition (Gunitsky 2017). But what's alarming is this is now a problem for democracy. Elites can use disinformation to help win reelection, promote their policy agenda, or to avoid accountability for their performance in office (Fritz et al 2004, Flynn et al 2017), and democratically elected politicians, leaders, and partisan media networks with extensive reach are creating and disseminating information effectively designed to undermine trust in democracy. This is concerning, because generally, we know that citizens take cues from elites. Prior research has shown individuals are more likely to trust information that is presented by experts or political leaders (Brulle 2012, LaChapelle 2014). If elites are spreading disinformation, it is much more damaging than disinformation by the average social media user.

¹¹ <https://apnews.com/article/donald-trump-tweets-he-won-not-conceding-9ce22e9dc90577f7365d150c151a91c7>

Political parties have purposely spread or amplified misinformation during democratic elections in Brazil (Rio 2018), Nigeria (Hassan 2019), and India (Dwoskin and Gowen 2018). Here, disinformation surrounding elections can spread via messaging apps, like WhatsApp, WeChat, or Telegram; a recent report by the Computational Propaganda Project at Oxford University documents that messaging services hosted disinformation campaigns in India, Brazil, Pakistan, Zimbabwe, China, Iran, Thailand, and Mexico. In particular, India, the world's largest democracy, has witnessed democratic political parties engaging in large scale disinformation campaigns. Multiple parties, including the governing party the BJP, run large scale misinformation campaigns via coordinated WhatsApp groups that attack opponents and minorities, and spread fake news; Prime Minister Narendra Modi's own smartphone app was also a source of misinformation (Funke 2019). A series of voter hoaxes went viral, depicting pictures of rigged voting machines and electoral fraud, also coming from democratic elites. Eventually, targeted disinformation in India resulted in violence and deaths by lynching (Poona and Bansal 2019).

Elite rhetoric is already having consequences for citizens' beliefs. The 2020 US Presidential election was characterized by a wide scale disinformation campaign alleging voter fraud. False and misleading claims were promoted by the president himself (Kessler & Rizzo, 2020), and supported by party elites and conservative funded media empires (Benkler et al 2020, Darcy, 2020). As a result, a number of studies have found that supporters of Trump were much more likely to believe and support lies relating to electoral fraud. Rand and Pennycook (2021) used survey data during the election and found that a majority (>77%) of Trump voters in their sample falsely believed that there was election fraud and that Trump won the election (despite no meaningful evidence of voter fraud). Other studies have found similar results, that Trump supporters increased belief in false claims.

Finally, elite networks can coordinate and manipulate the media like never before. Billionaire elites are now influencing politics, constructing networks of wealthy donors and controlling media empires; the Koch network in the United States used disinformation to attack democracy (MacLean 2021). Such actors have an immense amount of reach – Goel et al (2015) studied a billion diffusion events on Twitter, and found that users with large audiences were the primary reason messages went viral, opposed to individual peer-to-peer transmissions. This can also be exploited by foreign actors – a key part of Moscow's strategy was using US media organizations and US officials to "launder" disinformation narratives in the US in 2020. Persily (2017) highlights the US case, and sums it up well in writing, "How does one characterize a campaign, for example, in which the chief strategist is also the chairman of a media

website (Breitbart) that is the campaign's chief promoter and whose articles the candidate retweets to tens of millions of his followers, with those tweets then picked up and rebroadcast on cable-television news channels, including one (RT, formerly known as Russia Today) that is funded by a foreign government?" If influential and domestic media personalities coordinate, to push the same disinformation narratives, this is dangerous.

IV. Going Forward

Social media is here to stay, but that doesn't mean it has to have a negative effect on democratic elections. We know disinformation presents a significant threat to electoral integrity, democratic legitimacy, and public trust. But knowing all the challenges laid in this chapter, we can start to consider solutions. First and foremost, countries need to develop comprehensive plans to address disinformation, particularly during elections. Countries like Canada, Sweden, and Denmark developed comprehensive national security plans to address foreign disinformation; these plans tackled both cybersecurity but also media literacy and public resilience campaigns (Tenove 2021, Cederberg 2018, Jeangène Vilmer et al. 2018). France and Germany have adopted forceful electoral policies to counter misinformation during elections (Couzighou 2021, Tworek and Leerssen 2019). Governments should also encourage political parties follow basic cybersecurity practices, and invest resources in combatting disinformation (Brattberg and Maurer 2018, Ohlin 2021).

Information campaigns can also counteract disinformation. One way to combat misperceptions is by the use of "prebunking," a new type of intervention that consists of preemptively warning and exposing individuals to misinformation narratives and strategies. Building on psychological inoculation theory, researchers argue that exposing people to weaker doses of misinformation can help them develop psychological resistance (or 'mental antibodies') against such tactics (Roozenbeek and van der Linden 2019). Pre-bunking initiatives can be simple information campaigns, and executed by governmental or trusted organizations. In the case of democratic elections, government or electoral officials can publish information campaigns with accurate information aimed at preventing election fake news (Brennan Center Report, 2022). Public information campaigns should be multilingual, and make sure to reach underrepresented groups that are often targeted by misinformation. Prebunking, and the use of social media more generally, should also be seen as a vehicle for pro-democratic narratives (Repucci 2019).

Mainstream media provides an important check against disinformation, and prior research has found an association between secure funding for public media systems

and well-informed political cultures with high levels of engagement with democratic processes (Neff and Pickard 2021). It's clear the level of societal 'resilience' to disinformation matters – cross national research indicates countries with high levels of audience fragmentation, weak public service media, and a large digital advertising market will face problems with disinformation undermining democracy (Humphrecht et al 2020). A long term election protection plan could include providing more public funding support for local mainstream print and digital news outlets.

Social media platforms will need to play a considerable role in regulating content during democratic elections. It is now clear platforms have played key role in fostering insurrections, violence, trafficking, and electoral fraud across the globe, and are struggling to define and consistently execute content moderation policies (Wall Street Journal: Facebook Files, 2022). In the long term, there will need to be more regulation of social media companies; in the short term, however, this is complex, for a number of reasons. Economic incentives rule platform activity –platforms are for-profit entities; algorithms used by these companies maximize engagement (to gain advertising revenue), not accurate information. The economic clout and lobbying capabilities of powerful tech companies also make it difficult to hold platforms to account. Media regulation is also sensitive in liberal democracies because of potential impacts on freedom of expression; this problem is exacerbated if political parties are sources of disinformation.

Large scale regulation revolves around to what extent to make platforms responsible for content. Debates in the US have been focused on modifying Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act (CDA), but this will be challenging and perhaps have adverse effects; instead, ancillary and independent regulation is more promising (Hwang 2020) and regulation can take many forms (Rochefort 2020). Meanwhile Europe is an example of innovation in social media regulation. Germany was notable for passing legislation that holds platforms accountable for unlawful content, and the EU GDPR establishes a comprehensive framework for consumer privacy and data protection (Fukuyama and Grotto, 2020) that applies to all member states. More generally, any regulation should be independent from both partisan actors and leadership of the dominant social media companies (Epstein, 2021)

While regulation is development, it is important for governments, journalists, and the public to keep pressure on social media firms (Margetts 2019). This should be focused on two dimensions. First, to incentivize platforms to hire more foreign language staff for developing countries, invest in content moderation, and develop strategies to protect democratic elections (Brennan 2022, Wall Street Journal Facebook Files). Second, to pressure social media firms for more transparency,

including the disclosure of platform data directly to the public or to researchers (Panditharatne 2022, MacCarthy 2022). Content aimed at voter suppression efforts can be moderated and removed by social media platforms. Facebook and Twitter in particular have already removed thousands of fake posts, ads, and accounts that relate to voter suppression and intimidation during US and elections worldwide; but platforms must continue to aggressively police election disinformation.¹²¹³

Conclusion

All this is not to say that social media is always bad for democracy or elections. It can be used to improve electoral participation, e.g. via voter turnout initiatives (Bond et al 2020) and electoral campaigns (Jungherr et al 2020), give underrepresented groups a voice in politics and it can foster large scale social movements, 'hashtag activism,' or regime protests (Jackson et al 2020). But disinformation during elections is here to stay. And it's clear that there are democratic norms that need to be slowly rebuilt. Politicians or parties that spread disinformation should be held accountable at the ballot box, and rhetoric that is both partisan and anti-democratic should not be mistaken for polarization. Given the challenges highlighted in this chapter, ultimately there must be consequences for spreading disinformation, particularly for democratic leaders and elites.

But forewarned is forearmed – by understanding the threats disinformation poses for democratic elections, we can better insulate ourselves from the negative effects of social media. Widespread information campaigns and digital literacy, more resources invested during elections to counteract cyber influence efforts, funding public media and professional journalism, and holding platforms accountable for disinformation are all ultimately achievable policy solutions to help protect democratic elections.

¹² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2018/11/02/how-facebook-twitter-are-rushing-stop-voter-suppression-online-midterm-election/>

¹³ April Glaser, *Twitter Removed 10,000 Bots Pretending to Be Democrats Telling Other Democrats Not to Vote*, SLATE (Nov. 2, 2018, 6:28 PM), <https://slate.com/technology/2018/11/twitter-removed-bots-pretending-democrats-discourage-voter-turnout.html>.

References

Albertson, Bethany and Guiler, Kimberly. 2020. Conspiracy Theories, Election Rigging, and Support for Democratic Norms. *Research & Politics* 7(3): 2053168020959859. CrossRefGoogle Scholar

Aral, Sinan. (2020). *The Hype Machine*. New York, NY: Penguin Random House,

Arceneaux, K., & Truex, R. (2022). Donald Trump and the Lie. *Perspectives on Politics*, 1-17. doi:10.1017/S1537592722000901

Ashok Deb, Luca Luceri, Adam Badaway, and Emilio Ferrara. 2019. Perils and Challenges of Social Media and Election Manipulation Analysis: The 2018 US Midterms. In *Companion Proceedings of The 2019 World Wide Web Conference (WWW '19)*. Association for Computing Machinery, New York, NY, USA, 237-247. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3308560.3316486>

Bail, Christopher A., Brian Guay, Emily Maloney, Aidan Combs, D. Sunshine Hillygus, Friedolin Merhout, Deen Freelon,, and Alexander Volfovsky. (2019). PNAS. Assessing the Russian Internet Research Agency's impact on the political attitudes and behaviors of American Twitter users in late 2017. 117 (1) 243-250. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1906420116>

Bail CA. Emotional Feedback and the Viral Spread of Social Media Messages About Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Am J Public Health*. 2016 Jul;106(7):1173-80. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2016.303181. Epub 2016 May 19. PMID: 27196641; PMCID: PMC4984751.

Belanger, Eric. (2017). Political Trust and Voting Behavior. Chapter in *Handbook on Political Trust*. Edited by Sonja Zmerli and Tom W.G. van der Meer. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Bayer, Judit. 13 October 2021. Policies and measures to counter disinformation in Germany: the power of informational communities. <https://eu.boell.org/en/2021/10/13/policies-and-measures-counter-disinformation-germany-power-informational-communities>

Benkler, Yochai, Robert Faris, and Hal Roberts, *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics* (New York, 2018; online edn,

Oxford Academic, 18 Oct. 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190923624.001.0001>, accessed 21 Mar. 2023.

Bennett, W. Lance, and Steven Livingston, eds. 2020. *The Disinformation Age: Politics, Technology, and Disruptive Communication in the United States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Berlinski, N., Doyle, M., Guess, A., Levy, G., Lyons, B., Montgomery, J., . . . Reifler, J. (2021). The Effects of Unsubstantiated Claims of Voter Fraud on Confidence in Elections. *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, 1-16. doi:10.1017/XPS.2021.18

Bond, Shannon and Bobby Allyn. (2021). NPR. "How the 'Stop the Steal' movement outwitted Facebook ahead of the Jan. 6 insurrection." October 22, 2021. <https://www.npr.org/2021/10/22/1048543513/facebook-groups-jan-6-insurrection>

Braddock, Kurt. (2022) *Vaccinating Against Hate: Using Attitudinal Inoculation to Confer Resistance to Persuasion by Extremist Propaganda, Terrorism and Political Violence*, 34:2, 240-262, DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2019.1693370

Bradshaw, Samantha and Howard, Philip N., "The Global Disinformation Order: 2019 Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation" (2019). Copyright, Fair Use, Scholarly Communication, etc.. 207. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/scholcom/207>

Brattberg, Erik and Tim Maurer. (2018). *RUSSIAN ELECTION INTERFERENCE: EUROPE'S COUNTER TO FAKE NEWS AND CYBER ATTACKS*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Brief. May 2018.

Brennan Center. *Voter Suppression Has Gone Digital*. November 20, 2018. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/voter-suppression-has-gone-digital>

Brulle Robert J., Carmichael Jason, Jenkins J. Craig. 2012. "Shifting Public Opinion on Climate Change: An Empirical Assessment of Factors Influencing Concern over Climate Change in the U.S., 2002-2010." *Climatic Change* 114:169-88.

Cheeseman, Nic, Jonathan Fisher, Jamie Hitchen, and Idayat Hassan. "Social Media Disruption: Nigeria's WhatsApp Politics". *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 31, no. 3, July 2020, pp. 145-59.

Cirone, A., & Hobbs, W. (2023). Asymmetric flooding as a tool for foreign influence on social media. *Political Science Research and Methods*, 11(1), 160-171. doi:10.1017/psrm.2022.9

Clayton, Katherine, Davis, Nicholas T., Nyhan, Brendan, Porter, Ethan, Ryan, Timothy J., and Wood, Thomas J.. 2021. "Elite Rhetoric Can Undermine Democratic Norms." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118 (23): e2024125118

Coleman, Stephen. 2012. "Believing the News: From Sinking Trust to Atrophied Efficacy." *European Journal of Communication* 27 (1): 35-45. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0267323112438806>.

Couzigou, Irène. "The French Legislation Against Digital Information Manipulation in Electoral Campaigns: A Scope Limited by Freedom of Expression." *Election Law Journal: Rules, Politics, and Policy* 2021 20:1, 98-115

Craig, Jiore and Cécile Simmons and Rhea Bhatnagar "How January 6 inspired election disinformation around the world ." 3 January 2023. Institute for Strategic Dialogue. https://www.isdglobal.org/digital_dispatches/how-january-6-inspired-election-disinformation-around-the-world/

Crime and Security Research Institute. (2021). China-linked influence operation on Twitter detected engaging with the presidential election. <https://crimeandsecurity.org/feed/china-linked-io-us-2020>

Darcy, O. (2020, November 5). Fox News hosts sow distrust in legitimacy of election. *CNN Business*. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/05/media/fox-news-prime-time-election/index.html>

Davis, Nicholas T. & Kirby Goidel & Yikai Zhao, 2021. "The Meanings of Democracy among Mass Publics," *Social Indicators Research: An International and Interdisciplinary Journal for Quality-of-Life Measurement*, Springer, vol. 153(3), pages 849-921, February.

DiResta, R., Shaffer, D., Ruppel, B., Sullivan, D., Matney, R., Fox, R., Albright, D. & Johnson, B. (2018), 'The tactics & tropes of the Internet Research Agency'. <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/senatedocs/2/>

Donovan, Joan; Emily Dreyfuss and Brian Friedberg (2022). *Meme Wars: The Untold Story of the Online Battles Upending Democracy in America*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Eady, G., Paskhalis, T., Zilinsky, J. et al. Exposure to the Russian Internet Research Agency foreign influence campaign on Twitter in the 2016 US election and its relationship to attitudes and voting behavior. *Nat Commun* 14, 62 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-022-35576-9>

Ecker, U.K.H., Lewandowsky, S., Cook, J. et al. The psychological drivers of misinformation belief and its resistance to correction. *Nat Rev Psychol* 1, 13–29 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s44159-021-00006-y>

Etter, Lauren. "What Happens When the Government Uses Facebook as a Weapon?" Bloomberg. December 7, 2017. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2017-12-07/how-rodrido-duterte-turned-facebook-into-a-weapon-with-a-little-help-from-facebook>

Funke, Daniel. May 23, 2019. "India's election ends this week. And at least one political party is spreading hoaxes about voter fraud." Pointer. <https://www.poynter.org/fact-checking/2019/indias-election-ends-this-week-and-at-least-one-political-party-is-spreading-hoaxes-about-voter-fraud/>

Fortin-Rittberger J, Harfst P, Dingler SC. The costs of electoral fraud: establishing the link between electoral integrity, winning an election, and satisfaction with democracy. *J Elect Public Opin Parties*. 2017 Jul 3;27(3):350-368. doi: 10.1080/17457289.2017.1310111. Epub 2017 Apr 10. PMID: 28824703; PMCID: PMC5546066.

Goel, Sharad and Ashton Anderson, Jake Hofman, and Duncan J. Watts. The Structural Virality of Online Diffusion. *Management Science* 2016 62:1, 180-196

Grounds, Kelly and Madelyn Goff. "Disinformation, Disruption, and the Shifting Media Ecosystem in the 2022 Philippines Election". Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada. May 5, 2022. <https://www.asiapacific.ca/publication/election-watch-philippines-dispatch-4-social-media-use>

Gunitsky, S. (2015). Corrupting the Cyber-Commons: Social Media as a Tool of Autocratic Stability. *Perspectives on Politics*, 13(1), 42-54. doi:10.1017/S1537592714003120

Hassan, I. 2019. "How fake news spreads, sowing distrust ahead of Nigeria's elections", African Arguments. Available at <https://africanarguments.org/2019/01/31/nigeria-fake-news-2019-election/>.

Howard, P. N., Ganesh, B., Liotsiou, D., Kelly, J. & Francois, C. (2018), *The IRA, Social Media and Political Polarization in the United States, 2012-2018*, University of Oxford.

Humprecht, Edda and Frank Esser and Peter Van Aelst. 2020. "Resilience to Online Disinformation: A Framework for Cross-National Comparative Research." *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 25:3, pages 493-516.

Hwang, Tim. "Amendment of Section 230," chapter in Persily, N., & Tucker, J. (Eds.). (2020). *Social Media and Democracy: The State of the Field, Prospects for Reform (SSRC Anxieties of Democracy)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/9781108890960

Jackson, Sarah J., Moya Bailey, and Brooke Foucault Welles. 2020. *#HashtagActivism: Networks of Race and Gender Justice*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Jeangène Vilmer et al. (2018). *Information Manipulation: A Challenge for Our Democracies*. Report by the Policy Planning Staff (CAPS, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs) and the institute for Strategic Research (IRSEM, Ministry for the Armed Forces). https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/information_manipulation_rvb_cle838736.pdf

Jungherr, Andreas (2016) Twitter use in election campaigns: A systematic literature review, *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 13:1, 72-91, DOI: 10.1080/19331681.2015.1132401

Kessler, G., & Rizzo, S. (2020, November 5). President Trump's false claims of vote fraud: A chronology. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/11/05/president-trumps-false-claims-vote-fraud-chronology/>

Kim, Young Mie and Jordan Hsu, David Neiman, Colin Kou, Levi Bankston, Soo Yun Kim, Richard Heinrich, Robyn Baragwanath & Garvesh Raskutti (2018) *The Stealth Media? Groups and Targets behind Divisive Issue Campaigns on Facebook*, *Political Communication*, 35:4, 515-541, DOI: 10.1080/10584609.2018.1476425

Lachapelle, E., Montpetit, É. and Gauvin, J.-P. (2014), Expert Framing and Political Worldviews. *Policy Stud J*, 42: 674-697. <https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12073>

Lee Myers, Steven, and Paul Mozur. 2019. China Is Waging a Disinformation War Against Hong Kong Protesters. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/13/world/asia/hong-kong-protests-china.html> (September 3, 2019).

Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2019. *How Democracies Die*. Harlow, England: Penguin Books.

Li, Huaye and Yasuaki Sakamoto. "Social impacts in social media: An examination of perceived truthfulness and sharing of information." *Comput. Hum. Behav.* 41 (2014): 278-287.

Lieberman, R., Mettler, S., Pepinsky, T., Roberts, K., & Valelly, R. (2019). The Trump Presidency and American Democracy: A Historical and Comparative Analysis. *Perspectives on Politics*, 17(2), 470-479. doi:10.1017/S1537592718003286

MacCarthy, Mark. "Transparency Recommendations for Regulatory Regimes of Digital Platforms." CIGI Report, published March 8, 2022. Source: <https://www.cigionline.org/publications/transparency-recommendations-for-regulatory-regimes-of-digital-platforms/>

MacLean, N. (2020). "Since We Are Greatly Outnumbered": Why and How the Koch Network Uses Disinformation to Thwart Democracy. In W. Bennett & S. Livingston (Eds.), *The Disinformation Age (SSRC Anxieties of Democracy)*, pp. 120-150. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/9781108914628.005

Manin, B. (1997). *The Principles of Representative Government (Themes in the Social Sciences)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511659935

Margetts, H. (2019), 9. Rethinking Democracy with Social Media. *The Political Quarterly*, 90: 107-123. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12574>

Mason, Liliana. (2018). *Uncivil Agreement. How Politics Became Our Identity*. University of Chicago Press.

McKay, S. And Tenove. C. (2021). Disinformation as a Threat To Deliberative Democracy. *Political Research Quarterly*, 74:3, 703-717

Melo Resende G, P, Reis JCS, et al. (2019a) Analyzing textual (mis)information shared in WhatsApp groups. In: Proceedings of the 10th ACM conference on web science - WebSci '19, Boston, July.

Metzger, M. J., Flanagin, A. J., & Medders, R. B. (2010). Social and heuristic approaches to credibility evaluation online. *Journal of communication*, 60(3), 413-439. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2010.01488.x

National Intelligence Council. (2021). Intelligence Community Assessment: Foreign Threats to the 2020 US Federal Elections. 10 March 2021. <https://www.dni.gov/files/ODNI/documents/assessments/ICA-declass-16MAR21.pdf>

Neff, T., & Pickard, V. (2021). Funding Democracy: Public Media and Democratic Health in 33 Countries. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612211060255>

Norris, Pippa. 2014. *Why Electoral Integrity Matters*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [CrossRefGoogle Scholar](https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=8Y8Y8Y8Y8Y&hl=en)

Norris, P. (2019). Do perceptions of electoral malpractice undermine democratic satisfaction? The US in comparative perspective. *International Political Science Review*, 40(1), 5-22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512118806783>

Osmundsen, M., Bor, A., Vahlstrup, P. B., Bechmann, A., & Petersen, M. (2020, March 25). Partisan polarization is the primary psychological motivation behind political fake news sharing on Twitter. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055421000290>

Panditharatne, Meleka. 2022. Brennan Center Report: "Law Requiring Social Media Transparency Would Break New Ground." Published April 6, 2022. Source: <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/law-requiring-social-media-transparency-would-break-new-ground>

Pennycook, G., & Rand, D. G. (2021). Research note: Examining false beliefs about voter fraud in the wake of the 2020 Presidential Election. *Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) Misinformation Review*. <https://doi.org/10.37016/mr-2020-51>

Pereira, G., Bueno Bojczuk Camargo, I., & Parks, L. (2022). WhatsApp disruptions in Brazil: A content analysis of user and news media responses, 2015-2018. *Global Media and Communication*, 18(1), 113-148. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17427665211038530>

Persily, N. & J. Tucker (2020), *Social Media and Democracy: The State of the Field, Prospects for Reform* (SSRC Anxieties of Democracy). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pew Research Center, December, 2022, "Social Media Seen as Mostly Good for Democracy Across Many Nations, But U.S. is a Major Outlier". URL: https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2022/12/06/social-media-seen-as-mostly-good-for-democracy-across-many-nations-but-u-s-is-a-major-outlier/?utm_content=bufferbb1d1&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter.com&utm_campaign=buffer

Poona, Snidga and Samarth Bansal. Misinformation is Endangering India's Election. *The Atlantic*, APRIL 1, 2019. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/04/india-misinformation-election-fake-news/586123/>

Protect Democracy Brief. Contending with Structural Disinformation in Communities of Color. <https://protectdemocracy.org/work/contending-with-structural-disinformation-in-communities-of-color/#section-2>

Przeworski, A., Stokes, S., & Manin, B. (Eds.). (1999). *Democracy, Accountability, and Representation* (Cambridge Studies in the Theory of Democracy). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139175104

Quirk, Dean. (2021). Lawfare in the Disinformation Age: Chinese Interference in Taiwan 2020 Elections. *Harv. Int'l L.J.* 525 (2021).

Quitzon, Japhet. (2021). Social Media Misinformation and the 2022 Philippine Elections. Center for Strategic and International Studies. November 22, 2021. <https://www.csis.org/blogs/new-perspectives-asia/social-media-misinformation-and-2022-philippine-elections>.

Repucci, Sarah. 2019. "Media Freedom: A Downward Spiral." *Freedom House Report: Freedom and the Media 2019*. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-and-media/2019/media-freedom-downward-spiral>

Rochefort, Alex. (2020). Regulating Social Media Platforms: A Comparative Policy Analysis, *Communication Law and Policy*, 25:2, 225-260, DOI: 10.1080/10811680.2020.1735194

Roozenbeek, J., & van der Linden, S. (2018). The fake news game: actively inoculating against the risk of misinformation. *Journal of Risk Research*, 22(5), 570-580. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13669877.2018.1443491>

Roose, Kevin. "We Asked for Examples of Election Misinformation. You Delivered." *New York Times*, November 4, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/04/us/politics/election-misinformation-facebook.html>

Schafer, Bret. (2020). Foreign Amplification of Voter Fraud Narratives: How Russian, Iranian, and Chinese Messengers Have Leveraged Post-Election Unrest in the United States. November 24, 2020. <https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/foreign-amplification-of-voter-fraud-narratives-how-russian-iranian-and-chinese-messengers-have-leveraged-post-election-unrest-in-the-united-states/>

Seo, Hyunjin & Faris, Robert. (2021). Comparative Approaches to Mis/Disinformation: Introduction. *International Journal of Communication*. 15. 1165-1172.

Tenove, C. (2020). Protecting Democracy from Disinformation: Normative Threats and Policy Responses. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 25(3), 517-537. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161220918740>

Theocharis, Yannis, Margaret Roberts, Pablo Barberá, and Joshua Tucker. "From Liberation to Turmoil: Social Media and Democracy". *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 28, no. 4, Oct. 2017, pp. 46-59.

Tucker et al, (2018). "Social Media, Political Polarization, and Political Disinformation: A Review of the Scientific Literature." <https://www.hewlett.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Social-Media-Political-Polarization-and-Political-Disinformation-Literature-Review.pdf>. Pages 1-29.

Toquero, Loreben. "Détente institutionalized disinformation, and paved the way for a Marcos victory." June 19, 2022. [rappler.com https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/duterte-institutionalized-disinformation-paved-way-marcos-jr-victory-2022/](https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/duterte-institutionalized-disinformation-paved-way-marcos-jr-victory-2022/)

Vandewalker, Ian. (2020). Digital Disinformation and Vote Suppression. Brennan Center for Justice Report. . URL: <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/digital-disinformation-and-vote-suppression>

Voting Rights Lab. "THE STATE OF STATE ELECTION LAW: A Review of 2021-22 and a First Look at 2023." December 2022, https://votingrightslab.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/VotingRightsLab_TheStateofStateElectionLaw2021_2022-1.pdf

Wall Street Journal. The Facebook Files Archive. 2022. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-files-xcheck-zuckerberg-elite-rules-11631541353>

Watts, D. J., Rothschild, D. M. & Mobius, M. Measuring the news and its impact on democracy. *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci.* 118 (2021).

Wittenberg, C., & Berinsky, A. (2020). Misinformation and Its Correction. In N. Persily & J. Tucker (Eds.), *Social Media and Democracy: The State of the Field, Prospects for Reform* (SSRC Anxieties of Democracy, pp. 163-198). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Woolley, Samuel. In Many Democracies, Disinformation Targets the Most Vulnerable. Center for International Governance Innovation. July 18, 2022. <https://www.cigionline.org/articles/in-many-democracies-disinformation-targets-the-most-vulnerable/>

Wu, Jennifer and Chenoa Yorgason, Hanna Folsz, Cassandra Handan-Nader, Andrew Myers, Tobias Nowacki, Daniel M. Thompson, Jesse Yoder, and Andrew B. Hall. Are Dead People Voting By Mail? Evidence From Washington State Administrative Records. Working Paper 2023. https://stanforddpl.org/papers/wu_et_al_2020_dead_voting/wu_et_al_2020_dead_voting.pdf