



RUSSIAN ELECTION MEDDLING AND PRO-KREMLIN DISINFORMATION

THERE IS NOW A LARGE BODY OF STRONG AND PUBLICLY AVAILABLE EVIDENCE THAT THE KREMLIN HAS ATTEMPTED TO INTERFERE IN A WIDE RANGE OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES AROUND THE WORLD IN RECENT YEARS.

THE KEY AIMS OF THIS MEDDLING ARE:

- to sow confusion and cynicism among voters, so they become more skeptical about the democratic processes or even don't participate in elections at all;
- to weaken or support particular stances or policies based on the extent to which they complement or support the Kremlin's agenda;
- to promote pro-Kremlin narratives that undermine Western values and democracy.

Russia's **disinformation** campaign is ongoing and goes beyond the election periods.

It is well-organised and funded. Russia spends 1 billion euros a year from its state budget to media companies like Russia Today, Sputnik and Russian-language TV channels, which are used to spread disinformation.

The Kremlin uses a variety of methods and narratives to try to influence your vote. Sometimes it's about playing on your emotions, while other times it's about manipulating your thinking about a specific issue by distorting facts. These are just a few of many examples.

If you don't want your brain or your vote to be manipulated, here's what you need to know...

HOW DOES IT WORK?

DIFFERENT EVERY TIME

Every case of meddling is different and tailor-made for the target country. Kremlin's methods differ depending on the political context and the aims it wants to achieve. Often not one, but several methods are used at the same time.

A LONG GAME

Many methods are applied long before the elections and only intensify during election campaigns.

→ **CYBER
DISRUPTION**
HACKS, LEAKS,
IDENTITY STEALING

→ **POLITICAL
GROOMING**
PARTY OR CAMPAIGN
FINANCING

→ **INFORMATION
MANIPULATION**
DISINFORMATION,
POLITICAL ADVERTISING,
PLAYING ON EMOTIONS

→ **EXTREME
INTERVENTION**

Information manipulation used consequently: a basic element in the Kremlin's textbook is to disinform and use divisive issues already present in debates. Different narratives or messages – texts, images, metaphors – are used to that end.

NARRATIVES

US VS THEM

Used to show conspiracies around you: bankers/big corporations/Jews/oligarchs/Muslims/Brussels bureaucrats. They are conspiring against us, the people. But there is only one person or one party that knows the truth, you should trust only them.

FEAR FOR YOUR VALUES

Used to condemn Western values. For example, those advancing rights of women, ethnic and religious minorities and

LGBTQ groups, are a threat to "tradition", "decency", and "common sense".

SOVEREIGNTY IS LOST

Used to convince that somebody else than you think is ruling your country: Ukraine is ruled by foreigners, Baltic States are not really countries, the EU is directed by Washington.

EVERYTHING WILL COLLAPSE

Used to convince that the end of the Western world is coming and there is

nothing you can do: the EU is dissolving, NATO is breaking down, Western economy is collapsing.

HAHAGANDA

Used when confronted with compelling evidence or arguments – the reaction is to joke and mock it. Usually used together with other disinformation narratives. The Kremlin has meddled in French elections in 2017? Haha, maybe the Kremlin is responsible for global warming and migration crisis, too?

HAS IT HAPPENED BEFORE?

→ CYBER DISRUPTION
→ POLITICAL GROOMING
→ EXTREME INTERVENTION



→ INFORMATION MANIPULATION

• 2014 UKRAINE

Presidential elections

Disinformation narratives spread mostly about Euromaidan that lead to the elections: Maidan was a coup, sponsored by the US/the West; After Maidan, Ukraine is ruled by Nazis or the West.

• 2016 THE NETHERLANDS

Referendum on EU-Ukraine association agreement

Fake video about Ukrainian far-right ultra-nationalist Azov battalion fighters threatening with terrorist attacks spread on social media.

• 2016 THE UNITED STATES

Presidential elections

Polarising the debate by exploiting existing fault lines and hot-button partisan issues; Hack-and-leak operation targeted at Democratic Party; Personal attacks on Hillary Clinton; Cyberattacks on voter databases; Hacks on think-tanks.

• 2017 GERMANY

Parliamentary elections

Bots and Russia-linked accounts get active in amplification of extreme messages; 2,840 pro-Kremlin accounts identified in the online discussion about German elections.

• 2018 ITALY

Parliamentary elections

Pro-Kremlin outlets amplify negative sentiments towards immigrants.

• 2016 THE UNITED KINGDOM

Brexit referendum

Anti-immigrant and pro-Brexit messages spread; Confusing (both pro- and anti) narratives spread by bots and accounts with links to the Kremlin; 18,500,000 anti-EU impressions created by accounts linked to Russia on Facebook and Twitter.

• 2016 ITALY

Constitutional referendum

RT spreads false narrative about the alleged protests against referendum.

• 2017 FRANCE

Presidential elections

Hacking of email accounts of Emmanuel Macron's aides; Personal attacks on Emmanuel Macron; 'Macron Leaks' – a mixture of real and fake emails exchanged between campaign employees; 'MacronGate' – fake information about Macron's offshore accounts.

• 2017 SPAIN

Unofficial referendum on Catalanian independence

Russia-linked bots and accounts increase activity on Twitter on the referendum day by 2,000%.

• 2019 UKRAINE

Presidential elections

Pro-Kremlin outlets spread well-known disinformation narratives ahead of elections: Election results will be determined outside of Ukraine; Legitimacy of the election outcome is not to be trusted; Electoral process is a 'carnival'; Ukrainians provoked conflicts in Donbass and the Kerch Strait, new provocations are cooking; Personal attacks on Petro Poroshenko.

US VS THEM

• 2016 USA

• 2017 FRANCE

• 2017 GERMANY

FEAR FOR YOUR VALUES

• 2017 NETHERLANDS

• 2016 ITALY

• 2018 ITALY

EVERYTHING WILL COLLAPSE

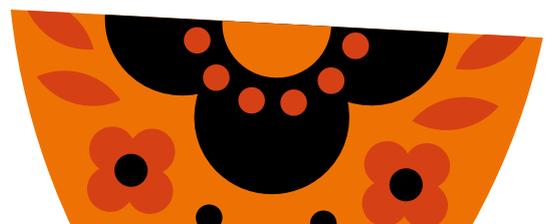
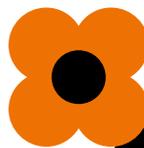
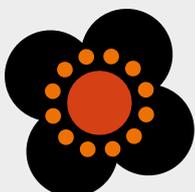
• BREXIT

• 2014 UKRAINE

• 2019 UKRAINE

SOVEREIGNTY LOST

• 2017 SPAIN



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

DISINFORMATION IS A BROAD, COMPLEX PHENOMENON, WITH MANY TRICKS UP ITS SLEEVE. NOBODY IS IMMUNE TO IT – BUT EVEN THOUGH THERE ARE NO VACCINES, THERE ARE WAYS TO BECOME MORE AWARE AND RESILIENT. HERE THEY ARE:

✔ CHECK THE CONTENT

- Are well-known media reporting about this issue? Does the news piece quote different sources and points of view? Check for typical pro-Kremlin narratives, too.

✔ CHECK THE OUTLET

- Do you know this outlet? If it only looks similar to a well-known medium, but is not quite the same, take it as a warning sign. Do the website name and URL look strange? Does the outlet have a significant presence in the [EUvsDisinfo database](#)?

✔ CHECK THE AUTHOR

- Do you know the author and his or her previous work? A well-respected journalist always has a track record. Does this person even exist?
- If nobody is signed under a news piece, it should make you cautious.
- Beware of bots! If you see posts from very active profiles on social media (who posts 200 times a day on Twitter?), you should be suspicious. Especially if those profiles are having trouble engaging in a real conversation on social media.

✔ CHECK THE SOURCES

- Check the expert's background. Sometimes people who claim to be "experts" are not what they seem, specializing for example in research on the «deep state» and ancient aliens. And foreign policy. And sometimes think-tanks that promise to spread

progressive ideas and critical thought are just good old pro-Kremlin proxies.

- If a story uses only anonymous sources or no sources at all, you should be cautious.

✔ CHECK THE PICTURES AND VIDEOS

- Sometimes old images and videos are used in new contexts or they are faked. Try to test suspicious pictures with Google Reverse Image Search or TinEye.

✔ THINK BEFORE YOU SHARE

- Sometimes a catchy headline doesn't reflect the story itself. Read the article before sharing! Jokes and satire have their own ways of expression and don't have to be factual. This is why they are jokes or satire. Have a laugh and don't treat them as the truth revealed.

Look for the warning signs of common pro-kremlin narratives

⚠ WHATABOUTISM

An attempt to change the subject by redirecting attention. "Sure, Russia's presence in Ukraine may be problematic, but it's no worse than what the US has done in Iraq, Libya and Syria!"

⚠ "TRUST ME, I'M SMART!"

Unfounded claims are still unfounded, no matter how clever their claimant appears to be. If someone tells you to trust them (just) because they're smart, that's probably a very good reason not to trust them.

⚠ THE TRUTH IS SOMEWHERE IN THE MIDDLE AND CANNOT BE KNOWN FOR CERTAIN

While this narrative may be valid in some cases, it is often misused to obscure obvious truths. Remember: sometimes, the truth is black and white and can be reliably discovered.

⚠ KREMLIN WHITEWASHERS

Someone who is sympathetic to the Kremlin and seeks to justify or excuse its bad behaviour at all costs, typically by blaming the West for alienating Russia and destroying the relationship.

⚠ THE CONSPIRACY

"Don't be naïve; the Deep State/the Establishment/the Corporations/the Jews/the Gay Lobby rules the world!" Conspiracy theories incorporate evidence that speaks against them, and thus become a matter of faith rather than fact.

⚠ BLAMING FASCISM

Russia is still trying to keep its WW2 glory alive, and sees mythical fascists everywhere.

All data gathered in this factsheet is based on publicly available research and information. Sources of all information and a reading list can be found on the EUvsDisinfo website.

[HTTPS://EUVSDISINFO.EU/EUROPEAN-ELECTIONS-2019/](https://euvsdisinfo.eu/european-elections-2019/)