

RUSSIAN ELECTION INTERFERENCE: EUROPE'S COUNTER TO FAKE NEWS AND CYBER ATTACKS

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Russia's aggressive campaign targeting the 2016 U.S. election revealed not only the extent to which information and communications technologies are being used to undermine democratic processes but also the weaknesses of protection measures. The U.S. government was effectively caught off guard, once again highlighting that such interference presents a rising global threat. Comprehensive strategies and tools are clearly needed as part of a long-term, holistic approach to building resilience, but to be effective, they should be informed by the regular sharing of best practices and lessons learned between countries.

In reaction to Russia's disruptive campaigns in Europe and the United States, European governments took steps before and during their 2017 elections to better protect against disinformation campaigns and cyber attacks. Unsurprisingly, an examination of their efforts shows the importance of identifying risks at the local, regional, and national levels and actively engaging political parties and traditional and social media outlets. These lessons and others could provide the basis for a common, analytical framework to assess the different dimensions of risk and guide countries' preparatory actions.

Lessons From European Efforts

Consider electoral systems as part of critical infrastructure, institutionalize preparations to protect election processes, and broaden activities to the subnational levels.

Focus on resilience measures, for example, by conducting regular vulnerability analyses and developing contingency plans. Legal measures should be explored through an inclusive process.

Issue public statements to deter threat actors and educate voters about disinformation campaigns.

Train and educate political parties and campaigns to better protect against potential interference.

Conduct government-media dialogue, encourage media to take voluntary protective measures, and engage social media companies in mitigating potential threats.

Support international cooperation, particularly the sharing of lessons learned and best practices.

Preparing for the 2018 U.S. Midterm Elections

- Issue a clear warning that interference in the 2018 elections by Russia or any other actor will result in severe consequences.
- Coordinate government efforts to protect against cyber attacks and disinformation.
- Provide more training and support to state and local election officials.
- Regularly assess election infrastructure.
- Encourage states to reevaluate the use of electronic voting machines.
- Encourage political parties and their candidates, staff, and volunteers to follow basic cybersecurity practices.
- Encourage donors to require that political parties and campaigns implement basic cyber hygiene for their candidates, staff, and volunteers.
- Urge political parties and campaigns to explicitly state that they will not use or support social media bots.
- Increase society's resilience by clearly communicating the risks of foreign interference in U.S. democracy.
- Promote independent citizen fact-checking and investigative journalistic initiatives.
- Improve media literacy among the public.

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