

# 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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CENTER FOR  
TECH AND  
CIVIC LIFE

# Center for Tech and Civic Life (CTCL)

Harnessing the promise of  
technology to modernize the  
American voting experience

@helloCTCL

[www.techandciviclife.org](http://www.techandciviclife.org)



# Center for Democracy & Technology (CDT)

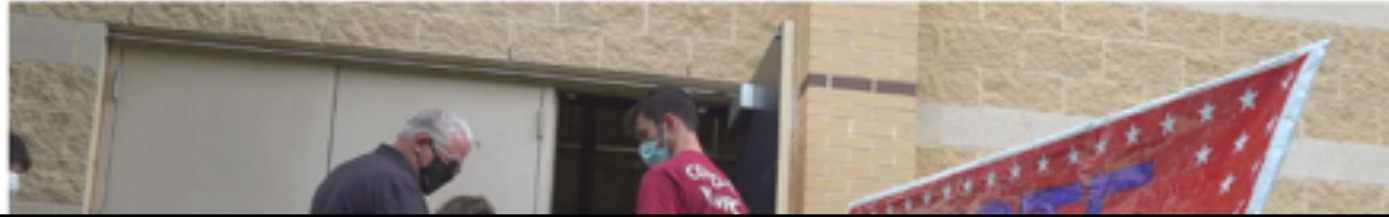
Working inclusively across sectors and the political spectrum to find tangible solutions today's most pressing internet policy challenges.

@CenDemTech  
[www.cdt.org](http://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





Donald J. Trump

@realDonaldTrump

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.....

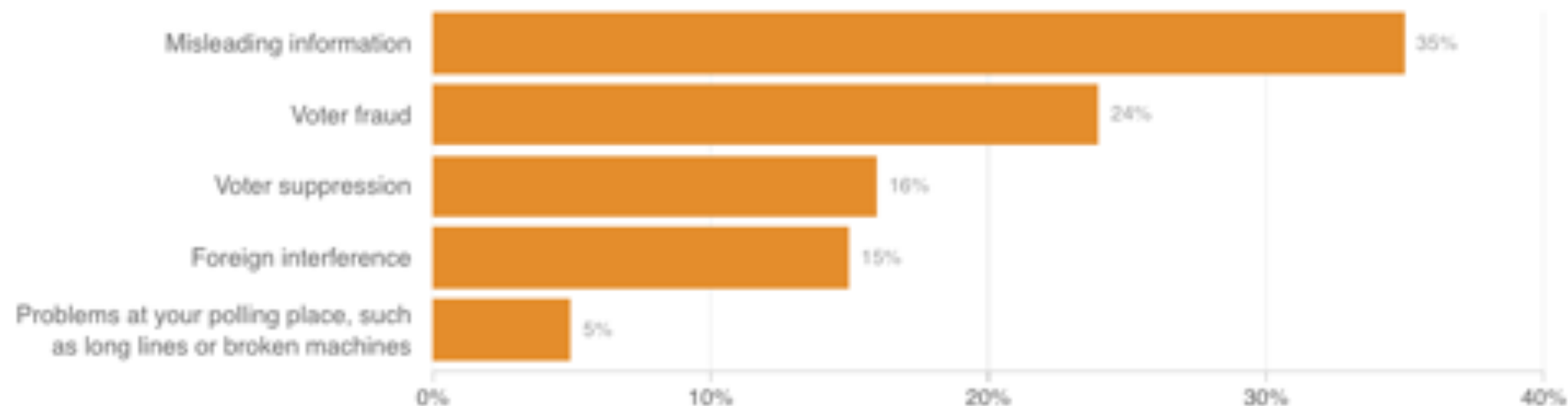


[Get the facts about mail-in ballots](#)

8:17 AM · May 26, 2020 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

**50K** Retweets and comments   **130.1K** Likes

## What is the **biggest threat** to keeping our elections safe and accurate?



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

	<b>Truthful?</b>	<b>Intended to cause harm?</b>
<b>Misinformation</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Disinformation</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Malinformation</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>





# False news/fake news:

Intentionally and verifiably false information presented as genuine news content

# 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

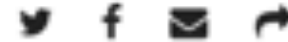


# Breaches and leaks

## 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 46021 0

SHARE



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

**Newsweek**

## Robocalls Spreading Super Tuesday Misinformation Throughout Texas

Alla Silsco · 3/4/2020



Texas voters reportedly received misleading robocalls Tuesday, wrongly informing them that the Democratic primary election would be taking place a day later.







Texas Secretary of State 

@TXsecofstate

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](#)

4:30 PM · Mar 3, 2020 from [Austin, TX](#) · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

**189** Retweets and comments **107** Likes

# Social media posts

1

 **Tom Fitton**  @TomFitton · Feb 2

BIG: Eight Iowa counties have more voter registrations than citizens old enough to register.



 **Tom Fitton**  @TomFitton · Jan 11

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...](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5dMs_H...)



 328  6.5K  8.7K 

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

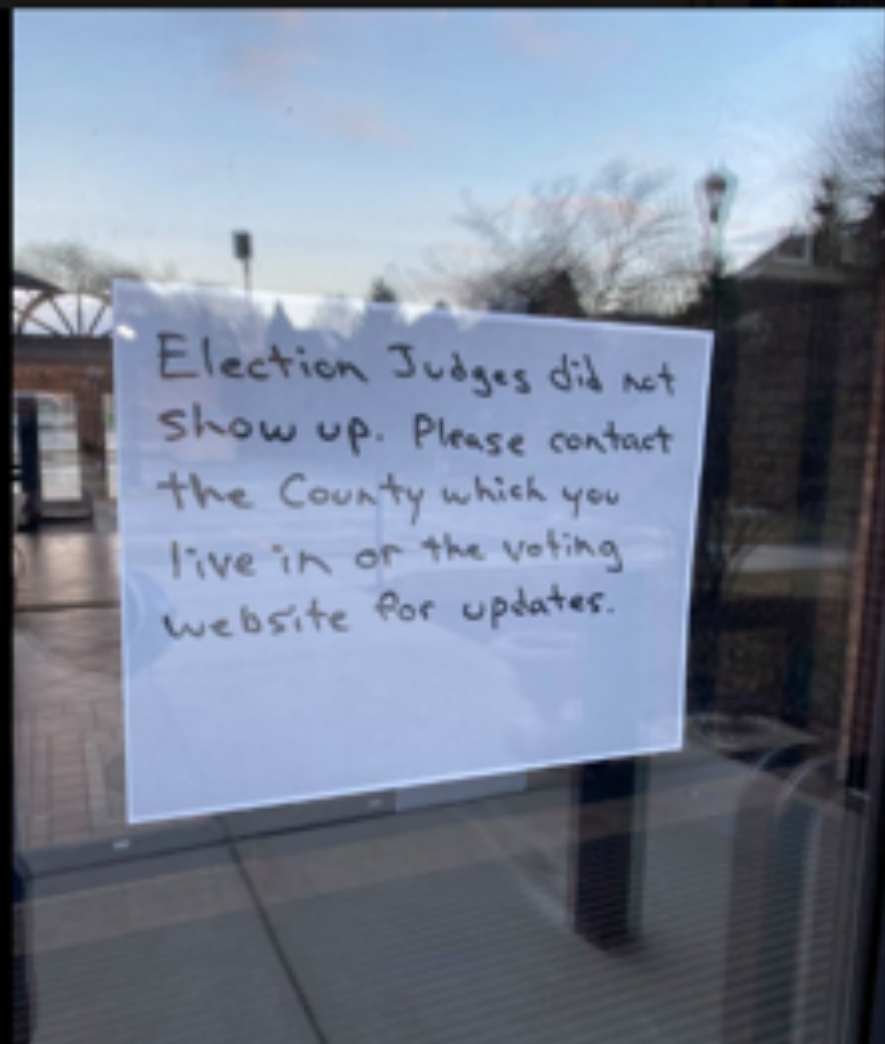
3

 **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...](https://sos.iowa.gov/elections/vote...)

 18  90  444 



- March 17 · 🌐

...

Check out this photo from Cook County, Illinois.

Today's primary results are not legitimate. (h/t Brian Prigge)

👍👎👏 136

15 Comments 229 Shares



Like



Comment



Share

View 4 more comments



The failure to delay these primaries is absolutely criminal in so many ways. We put people at risk and they in turn put more people at risk, which puts our entire society at risk. We tell people not to go out, then tell them to go out, thus assuring ... See More

Like · Reply · 16w



2



The Democrats are CROOKED. No way am I voting for Biden. #demexit!



**Brian Prigge** @brprigge · Mar 17

How's your Election Day going? #COVID19 #BarringtonIL @GovPritzker @cookcountyclerk



128

2.8K

6.5K



**Karen A. Yarbrough**

@cookcountyclerk

Replying to @brprigge and @GovPritzker

What is the township and precinct?

8:27 AM · Mar 17, 2020 · Twitter Web App

5 Retweets and comments 91 Likes



**Karen A. Yarbrough**

@cookcountyclerk

Replying to @HumanRaine @brprigge and @GovPritzker

Voting is taking place at this site.

Suburban voters can visit [cookcountyclerk.com/ElectionUpdates](https://cookcountyclerk.com/ElectionUpdates) or [cookcountyclerk.com/VoterInfo](https://cookcountyclerk.com/VoterInfo) to view any changes or updates to their Election Day precinct.

12:50 PM · Mar 17, 2020 · Twitter Web App

1 Like



How would you respond to an IO event?

# **BREAKOUT EXERCISE**

# Breakout

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!



Like



Comment



Share



2.8K · 380 Comments

# 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



**Don't be misinformed.**

Get official, nonpartisan **November 6, 2018** General Election information at [VoteSure.sos.ca.gov](http://VoteSure.sos.ca.gov).

#VoteCalifornia #VoteSure

★★★★ A PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE ★★★★★

The advertisement features a young woman with dark hair, smiling, wearing a denim jacket over a yellow top. She has a circular 'VoteSure' pin on her jacket. The background is a blurred indoor setting with warm lighting. In the top right corner, there is a faint watermark of the Great Seal of the State of California. The bottom of the ad has a blue banner with white stars and the text 'A PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE'.



**Don't be misinformed.**

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#VoteCalifornia #VoteSure

★★★★ A PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE ★★★★★

The advertisement features a young man with dark hair, smiling, wearing a dark jacket over a grey t-shirt. He has a circular 'VoteSure' pin on his jacket. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with greenery. In the top right corner, there is a faint watermark of the Great Seal of the State of California. The bottom of the ad has a blue banner with white stars and the text 'A PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE'.



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#VoteCalifornia #VoteSure

★★★★ A PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE ★★★★★

The advertisement features a woman with blonde hair, smiling, wearing a black top. She has a circular 'VoteSure' pin on her top. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees. In the top right corner, there is a faint watermark of the Great Seal of the State of California. The bottom of the ad has a blue banner with white stars and the text 'A PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT FROM THE CALIFORNIA SECRETARY OF STATE'.

# 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

Please select a problem to continue

 You can report the post after selecting a problem.

Nudity Violence Harassment

Suicide or Self-Injury False News Spam


Unauthorized Sales Hate Speech


Terrorism Voter Interference

Q Something Else

---

Other Steps You Can Take

 **Block**  
You won't be able to see or contact each other.

 **Unfollow**  
Stop seeing posts from this Page

Next

# 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**

# Introducing: an influence operations response framework

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



# 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 malinformation, 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](https://countyelections.gov)”

# A checklist to help

## AN ELECTION OFFICIAL'S CHECKLIST FOR COMBATING INFLUENCE OPERATIONS

For use with the participant guide accompanying CTCL's Combating Election Misinformation course. Questions? Email [courses@techandcivicle.org](mailto:courses@techandcivicle.org).

### GETTING AHEAD OF INFLUENCE OPERATIONS

See "Getting Ahead" section of the participant guide for details on each of these best practices:

- Be vocal about the problem of election misinformation and drive people to trusted sources
- Show that your election office is an official source of information about where and how to vote
- Publish accurate and useful information about voting processes regularly
- Create a rapid response program or telephone help line for voters' questions
- Secure your communication channels (website and social media)
- Build relationships with social media companies and your website publisher
- Learn how to report false content on social media
- Establish media monitoring to spot mentions or false info
- Strengthen relationships with local media and journalists
- Work with fact checking organizations
- Prepare your communications plans and procedures

### RESPONDING TO INFLUENCE OPERATIONS

See "Responding" section of the participant guide for details on this four-step framework



#### 1. Acknowledge

- Acknowledge the emotions and norms behind the falsehood you're responding to
- 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"



#### 2. Inform

- Provide correct (or additional) information to counter the original falsehood
- For mis- and disinformation (false information), provide correct information
- For misinformation (true but disruptive information), 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.



#### 3. Explain

- Offer an alternative explanation of narrative to fill the gap left by the original falsehood
- Explain why or how the original falsehood came about, suggest why the people who promoted it may not be credible, offer additional information to support your facts.
- Make sure your explanation isn't more complicated than the myth
- Ex.: "As recently as April, she updated her address and kept her registration as a Democrat"



#### 4. Empower

- Give people a way to gain further information and resolve any concerns that may linger
- 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.org](http://countyelections.org)"

Let's talk

# DISCUSSION



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# 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](mailto:hello@techandciviclife.org)

We've covered a lot of ground

# WRAPPING UP



# More free training content

<b>CTCL: Communicating Trusted Election Information Series</b>	<a href="https://techandcivicliflife.org/course/trusted-info">techandcivicliflife.org/course/trusted-info</a>
<b>CTCL: COVID-19 Webinars for Election Officials</b>	<a href="https://techandcivicliflife.org/covid-19-webinars">techandcivicliflife.org/covid-19-webinars</a>
<b>CTCL: Self-paced Election Cybersecurity 101, 201, and 301 courses</b>	<a href="https://learn.techandcivicliflife.org/library/by/category/cybersecurity">learn.techandcivicliflife.org/library/by/category/cybersecurity</a>
<b>Brennan Center and Microsoft: Virtual TTX (Aug. 21, noon Eastern)</b>	<a href="https://bit.ly/2xa1xfq">https://bit.ly/2xa1xfq</a>

# 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@techandcivicle.org](mailto:hello@techandcivicle.org)

Twitter: [@HelloCTCL](https://twitter.com/HelloCTCL)

Website: [www.techandcivicle.org](http://www.techandcivicle.org)