

How fringe candidates use misinformation to gain outsized online influence | First Draft

By Bethan John and Lydia Morrish

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Their misleading, attention-grabbing campaign videos are viewed by thousands — sometimes hundreds of thousands — of voters. But just how much influence falsehood-posting fringe candidates have online is often skewed. This was on full display in London's mayoral elections last week.

Several candidates used misinformation to gain status online, tapping into conspiracy theory communities and challenging the existence of Covid-19 and the safety of vaccines. Their Facebook and Twitter followings vastly exceed their offline support.

"These types of figures know how to get audience attention, so [they] rely on mechanisms like social media to gain attention," said [Aliaksandr Herasimenka](#), a researcher at the Oxford Internet Institute who investigates how political groups use social media to manipulate. "They provide new opportunities for new figures as they overcome traditional gatekeepers quicker and reach attention faster."

[...]

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