

How to Defeat Disinformation | Foreign Affairs

By Nina Jankowicz

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The 2016 U.S. presidential election propelled the threat of disinformation to the forefront of public debate. Americans were shocked by Russian attempts to influence voters by spreading misleading narratives. They had never imagined that a foreign power might use social media and other modern technologies to interfere in their elections.

Four years later, it seems that foreign adversaries were not able to meaningfully disrupt the 2020 U.S. presidential election—the U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) declared this recent election “the most secure in American history.” But disinformation continues to circulate widely in the country as President Donald Trump refuses to concede to President-elect Joe Biden. Conspiracy theories about the legitimacy of the election’s outcome course through social media, fill the airwaves of certain partisan outlets, and spill from the White House itself. The current impasse is a reminder that disinformation is not just an inchoate foreign threat—it is also an American pathology.

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