

Racial tensions at the heart of disinformation campaigns targeting U.S. voters — just like in 2016 | The Washington Post

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August 27, 2020

Four years after Russian operatives used social media in a bid to exacerbate America's racial divisions and suppress Black voting, such tactics have spread to a wide range of disinformation ahead of the 2020 presidential election.

The potency and persistence of this playbook was on display this week as Twitter deleted an account that claimed to belong to a former Black Lives Matter protester who had switched allegiances to the Republicans.

The account, @WentDemtoRep, offered an online testimonial Sunday — the eve of a Republican convention featuring prominent African Americans challenging allegations of racism against President Trump — and was retweeted 22,000 times. Disinformation researcher Marc Owen Jones, of Hamad Bin Khalifa University in Qatar, found the tweet had 39,000 likes just 19 hours after it was posted.

Twitter removed the account Tuesday for policy violations after it had amassed 15,000 followers despite tweeting just a few times, all this month. The rapid spread of the tweet underscored how easily deceptive messages spread online — and how far they can get before social media companies are able to curb them.

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