

## Russian Meddling in the 2018 Midterm Elections

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News about Russian meddling in the 2016 presidential elections is now common knowledge, however, the actors remain obscure. The [Internet Research Agency](#) (IRA) was first known for spreading propaganda online, including Twitter, to give the illusion of a robust pro-Kremlin supporter base. The people working for this agency are essentially internet trolls, whose job consists of spreading false information and amplifying favored narratives, such as anti-Obama sentiment. The IRA began focusing on U.S. politics through fake social media accounts in 2014 to further deepen the division between the opposing parties, which reached at least [146 million people](#) according to Facebook.

On the eve of the 2018 U.S. midterm elections, Facebook [removed 115 accounts](#), between Facebook and Instagram, because of a tip from U.S. enforcement stating that the accounts were possibly linked to foreign entities, like the IRA. Days later, a site alleging to represent the IRA claimed it ran the network of fake accounts attempting to meddle in the elections. This revelation highlighted a foreign actor's continued eagerness to shape U.S. politics through social media, likely fueled by similar success in the 2016 election. Appropriately, Facebook's head of cybersecurity policy, Nathaniel Gleicher, stated, "this is a timely reminder that these bad actors won't give up."

While the recent revelations of midterm meddling are unsettling, this does not mean there weren't security improvements since 2016 directed at combating such troll accounts. Since 2016, Facebook has made conserving the integrity of elections around the world a top priority. Its campus in Menlo Park, California set up a "war room" to monitor election manipulation tactics, including disinformation, voter suppression, and other security challenges. Facebook has also hired more people and improved its automated systems that monitor posts and tightened its rules on who can purchase political ads.

While it is necessary and crucial that agencies like Facebook, the platform used by such foreign actors, increase their security measures to prevent the spread of false toxic narratives, it is equally important that users of social media, and the internet at large, be attentive. As social media users and consumers of broader internet messaging, we need to remain vigilant about what we consume and, more so, what we accept as truth. Steps to become more mindful in our engagements with the internet are simple: always source check, consider underlying reasons for the post, look into the author, carefully examine the article, etc. This implores all of us to be critical consumers of information and make decisions for ourselves as opposed to following the recommendations that seem initially reliable.

