

## Preventing Foreign Influence in Democracy

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Foreign influence in democracy through the use of misinformation on social media has been a widely discussed topic since Russia's interference in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election. One prominent tactic used by Russia in 2016 was to use fake social media accounts to spread misinformation with the goal of tilting the election in favor of Trump. Social media companies were caught off-guard and were unprepared for such a campaign. Yet, social media companies have not made enough progress to halt such activities, which have a corrosive effect on the integrity of democracies.

Recently, Russian [misinformation campaigns aimed at influencing African politics](#) have been uncovered. The campaign spread misinformation about local elections and promoted policies that were favorable to Russia. The platforms used in Russia's efforts were Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and Telegram. The targeted countries included Sudan, Libya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Cameroon, and Côte d'Ivoire. In response, Facebook suspended the related accounts for foreign interference. It is important to note that these Russian misinformation efforts have evolved in sophistication as they partly relied on authentic domestic accounts in conjunction with their efforts. Although Facebook has added fact-checking features, it is unlikely that the feature itself will be enough to protect the integrity of democratic elections and prevent the spread of misinformation.

Russia's and other countries' use of social media misinformation campaigns is a troubling trend. Social media companies have created security teams to prevent against election meddling through misuse of their networks. Further, data gained from these efforts will help the companies develop stronger defense mechanisms. However, the number of countries engaged in disinformation campaigns has increased and will continue to do so. Although social media companies have made [some progress](#) in trying to prevent and uncover these campaigns, it will not be an easy task for these companies to maintain the integrity of their networks given that foreign [influence tactics will evolve](#) as a result of any defensive mechanisms that tech companies put in place.

