



*LAŽNE NOVICE IN TEORIJE ZAROTE?  
OPOLNOMOČIMO (SE ZA) ZNANOST! (oooZnanost!)*



# MARIMUN 2025

FACULTY OF LAW, UNIVERSITY OF MARIBOR

# STUDY GUIDE

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL (HRC)

LOVRO BOBNAR, MARKO ČEH, LANA SIMONČIČ

“Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the European Research Executive Agency can be held responsible for them.”

»Financira Evropska unija. Za izražena stališča in mnenja odgovarja samo avtor (ali avtorji) in ne odražajo nujno stališč Evropske unije ali Evropske izvajalske agencije za raziskave. Niti Evropska unija niti Evropska izvajalska agencija za raziskave ne moreta biti odgovorna zanje.«

»Na vseh dogodkih projekta oooZnanost! poteka snemanje in fotografiranje z namenom promocije in poročanja o dogodku. Če vstopite na lokacijo (spletne) dogodka, boste lahko posneti in fotografirani. Z vstopom na to lokacijo, dajete dovoljenje organizatorjem in Evropski komisiji, da vas lahko snemajo, fotografirajo, zvočno snemajo in uporabijo vaše posnetke po lastni presoji. Obiskovalci zato ne boste uveljavljali nobene odgovornosti proti organizatorjem in Evropski komisiji v zvezi z zgoraj navedenim. V kolikor se z zgoraj navedenim ne strinjate, vljudno prosimo, da s tem seznanite organizatorje na: [ern@um.si](mailto:ern@um.si). E-sporočilu obvezno priložite visokokakovostni sken fotografije z osebnega dokumenta, da vas lahko organizator izloči iz vseh posnetkov in fotografij skupaj z navedbo, na kateri lokaciji in katerega dne bi lahko bili posneti s strani organizatorjev. Pooblaščen oseb za varstvo podatkov Univerze v Mariboru je izr. prof. dr. Miha Dvojmoč ([dpo@um.si](mailto:dpo@um.si)).«

“Photography and filming are taking place at all oooScience! project events to promote and report on the events. If you enter the event's (virtual) area, you may be filmed and have your picture taken. By entering this area, you are giving consent to the organisers and the European Commission to film, photograph, and make sound recordings of you and to use such recordings and images at their discretion. You hereby release the organisers and the European Commission from any liability concerning the above. If you disagree with the above, please inform the organisers at [ern@um.si](mailto:ern@um.si). Be sure to attach a high-quality scan of the photo from your ID to the e-mail so that the organiser can exclude you from all records and photos, including oooScience! event's location and the date on which you participated in the event. The authorised person for data protection at the University of Maribor is Assoc. Prof. dr. Miha Dvojmoč (PhD) ([dpo@um.si](mailto:dpo@um.si)).”

## Table of Contents

<b>About the committee.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Fake news, a global issue? .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>In what ways does fake news affect the outcome of elections? .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Polarization.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Manipulation of public opinion .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Foreign interference.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Historical examples of elections influenced by fake news .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>United States Presidential Elections 2016.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Brexit Referendum.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Brazilian Elections 2018 .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Fake news online as a tool for radical recruitment; understanding how fake news works in the digital age .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>The historical precedent for fake news .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>The migration of fake news online .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>An examination of mechanisms through which fake news spreads .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>The weaponization of online discussion as a vehicle for fake news and outrage .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>State Actions to Minimize the Impact of Fake News on Elections .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>The Threat of Disinformation.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Balancing Freedom of Expression and Counter-Disinformation Measures .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Legislative and Policy Responses.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>International and Multilateral Efforts.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Best Practices in Platform Accountability.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Challenges and Safeguards .....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Questions delegates in the committee should keep in mind while preparing for the debate .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Sources .....</b>	<b>17</b>

## About the committee

The Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is an intergovernmental body within the United Nations responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe and for addressing situations of human rights violations and making recommendations on them. It has the ability to discuss all thematic human rights issues and situations that require its attention throughout the year. It was established in March 2006 by the General Assembly and it meets at the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG). For a better understanding, a quick historical background; The Human Rights Council replaced the former United Nations Commission on Human Rights. The UN human rights program started as a small division at UN Headquarters in the 1940s. The division later moved to Geneva and was upgraded to the Centre for Human Rights in the 1980s. The growth in size and activities of UN Human Rights has paralleled the increase in the human rights machinery since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, that set social, economic, cultural, civil and political rights. Today, the body of international human rights law is expanding and building new human rights standards. In the 21st century, UN Human Rights has helped achieve greater protection of the rights of neglected population groups such as indigenous people, older people, people with disabilities, and people belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. The Human Rights Council adopts resolutions or decisions during regular sessions that express the will of the international community on given human rights issues or situations. Adopting a resolution sends a strong political signal which can prompt governments to take action to remedy those situations. However, it is ought to be emphasized that the decisions (resolutions) of the Council are **not** legally binding. Furthermore, it holds crisis meetings known as special sessions to respond to urgent human rights situations. The Human Rights Council holds no fewer than three regular sessions a year, for a total of at least ten weeks. They take place in February-March, June-July and September-October. Sessions can be three, four or five weeks long, depending on the program of work. If one-third of the Member States requests it, the Human Rights Council can decide at any time to hold a special session to address human rights violations and emergencies. The Council is composed of 47 Member States, which are elected by the majority of members of the General Assembly of the United Nations through direct and secret ballot. The General Assembly takes into account the candidate States' contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights, as well as their voluntary pledges and commitments in this regard. The term of each seat is three years, and no member may occupy a seat for more than two consecutive terms.

The Council's Membership is based on equitable geographical distribution. Seats are distributed as follows:

1. African States: 13 seats
2. Asia-Pacific States: 13 seats
3. Latin American and Caribbean States: 8 seats
4. Western European and other States: 7 seats
5. Eastern European States: 6 seats

The Human Rights Council is presided over by a rotating bureau. The Bureau consists of five people - one President and four Vice-presidents - representing the five regional groups. They serve for a year, in accordance with the Council's annual cycle. Council's current president is Omar Zniber.

## **Introduction**

**“Fake news”** is defined to be fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but not in organizational process or intent. Fake-news outlets, in turn, lack the news media's editorial norms and processes for ensuring the accuracy and credibility of information. It overlaps with other information disorders, such as misinformation (false or misleading information) and disinformation (false information that is purposely spread to deceive people). Stanford University provides the definition of fake news as: *“the news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false, and could mislead readers”*. Recently, fake news has mostly gained notice in a political setting.

A lot of attention has been focused upon the issue of fake news recently, the level and nature of activity, and the supposed risks and threats that come with it. Blame for the current fake news trends has been levelled at different scapegoats. Fake news as a manipulative tool of communication and a problem is not something that is new. President Thomas Jefferson complained in 1807 that someone who does not read a newspaper is better informed on events than someone that does read newspapers.

## **Fake news, a global issue?**

Threats to world security have changed a great deal in recent decades. All over the world one of these security threats is inching forward almost noiselessly. Nevertheless, its medium-term effects may prove to be devastating. This is an issue that jeopardizes information and the quality of democracy. This is disinformation. Although it is nothing new, this phenomenon has grown exponentially in recent years, irrespective of borders, ideologies or social strata. It is a threat looming over migration, citizen security, gender equity or LGBTQ+ issues, but it becomes more dire during election processes, when the dissemination of fake news and polarized discourse comes to a climax, threatening the quality of public debate and electoral integrity. The effects of disinformation go beyond the sphere of information. It can undermine the quality of democracy, and threaten a country's economic performance. It can enervate social cohesion and public trust, which in turn can exacerbate social polarization. As it distorts public opinion, erodes trust, and threatens social cohesiveness, fake news presents a serious threat to democratic processes, addressing it therefore ensures informed discourse, protects public trust, and upholds the integrity of societal and democratic processes.

## **In what ways does fake news affect the outcome of elections?**

### **Polarization**

Polarization is a social phenomenon characterized by the fragmentation of society into antagonistic factions with vehemently opposed values and identities that impede cooperation and the pursuit of a common good. The threat is significant, and democracies globally are under siege and reeling from the impact of polarized societies. According to the latest World Economic Forum study on global risks, societal polarization is not just one of the world's top 10 present concerns, but also a long-term threat over the next decade. One risk of fake news is its contribution to polarization, which reflects growing difference in slant between groups. Polarization is an important issue, because when polarization grows, group members become entrenched in their views, and become incapable of accepting or understanding out-group views. This happens because social media sites exacerbate social identification processes, in part through algorithmic suggestions, which leads to limited heterophily, animosity toward out-groups, and polarization. The limited heterophily is also captured by the concepts of "echo chambers" and "filter bubbles", which are metaphors describing how social media use might

limit the types of people and information people interact with, therefore it deepens ideological divides.

### **Manipulation of public opinion**

There are three types of manipulation. The most conventional consists in spreading disinformation to influence the vote, most often by denigrating a candidate. At the other end of the spectrum are operations that reveal personal information or internal data concerning a political party just before the ballot, leaving no time to verify the accusations, in the hope of instilling doubt and inducing a segment of the electorate to change their vote. For example, the ‘Macron Leaks’, which were published on the eve of the second round of voting in 2017. The third type of manipulation consists in multiplying online messages containing biased information. These operations are usually carried out anonymously, or under a misleading identity. Manipulating public opinion distorts voters' perceptions, sways decisions through misinformation, consequently altering election outcomes.

### **Foreign interference**

Efforts by foreign entities to influence domestic elections have shaken democracies around the world. The use of propaganda and misinformation to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries is not new, but events since 2016 have heightened awareness across the globe of how changes in social media platforms, political norms, and campaign financing rules have enabled foreign actors to influence elections on an unprecedented scale. Foreign interference in democratic processes, of which elections are the fundamental characteristic, can serve various goals: from the achievement of a certain preferred outcome to a more general aim to increase polarisation, breach information security, and ultimately undermine democratic institutions. The US National Intelligence Council differentiated between “election influence”, including overt and covert activities to affect the outcome of an election, and “election interference”, as a subset of election influence operations that is limited to the technical aspects of the voting process. Such a distinction tries to separate physical hostile actions, like the hacking of a candidate’s campaign, a supervision body or the voting system itself, from actions that are limited to the field of perceptions (i.e. aimed at influencing the voter’s choice). However, the effects of these attacks often overlap: tampering with an information system can potentially affect voters’ confidence in the voting process. A very well known example of external actors influencing elections would be the Russian government conducting foreign electoral

interference in the 2016 United States elections with the goals of sabotaging the presidential campaign of Hillary Clinton and boosting the presidential campaign of Donald Trump.

## **Historical examples of elections influenced by fake news**

### **United States Presidential Elections 2016**

In the 2016 U.S. presidential election, fake news emerged as a powerful force that shaped public opinion and possibly influenced the election outcome. Misinformation, including fabricated stories about Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, spread widely across social media platforms, particularly Facebook and Twitter. Of the known fake news stories that appeared in the three months before the election, those favoring Trump were shared a total of 30 million times on Facebook, while those favoring Clinton were shared 8 million times and just over half of average American adults who recall seeing fake news say they believed the stories. Some of the fabricated news include Pope Francis endorsing Donald Trump for president, Hilary selling weapon to ISIS and the famous “Pizzagate” conspiracy theory, claiming that the New York City Police Department had discovered a pedophilia ring linked to members of the Democratic Party while searching through Anthony Weiner's emails. There was a research study that said undecided voters were more likely to vote for President Trump in the last election if they believed the fake news about Hillary Clinton that they saw on social media. When elections are close, like it was in 2016, that’s when it is likely for fake news to impact the outcome of the election.

### **Brexit Referendum**

One of the major criticisms of the Brexit campaign was the number of misleading or false claims. Both sides were accused of running deeply flawed campaigns with spurious reports. One of the most prominent claims made by the Leave campaign was that the UK would take back £350m a week, that is being sent to the EU, once it had left the EU – with the sum going to the NHS (National Health service). Another example is that Turkey would be joining the EU imminently; and that migrants were overwhelming the UK because of the EU’s migration policies (via the infamous “Breaking Point” poster), etc. Social media platforms amplified these narratives, creating echo chambers that reinforced biases, consequently leading to 51,9%

of the voters voting to leave EU. These narratives have, without a doubt, influenced the narrow margin by which a referendum passed.

### **Brazilian Elections 2018**

The vast majority of false information shared on WhatsApp in Brazil during the presidential election favoured the far-right winner, Jair Bolsonaro. In a sample of 11,957 viral messages shared across 296 group chats on the instant-messaging platform in the campaign period, approximately 42% of rightwing items contained information found to be false by factcheckers. Much of the fake news shared on WhatsApp reflected the far-right values promoted by Bolsonaro's team during the two-month campaign. Bolsonaro relied heavily on social media, and his most potent weapon was his WhatsApp account. Brazil has around 120m WhatsApp users – 44% of the electorate is said to have used it during the elections for political purposes. Bolsonaro's followers created hundreds of WhatsApp groups to share text messages, images, videos and memes – most of which echoed and disseminated Bolsonaro's misinforming and misleading content against his political rivals and the minority groups he attacked. Fake news ranged from fabricated accusations of corruption against Haddad to misleading claims about his education policies, such as promoting a so-called "gay kit" in schools.

### **Fake news online as a tool for radical recruitment; understanding how fake news works in the digital age**

When it comes to fake news and the influence of its spread on political outcomes, traditionally the first to come to mind is propaganda in legacy media. To phrase this another way, most of us when we hear “fake news” imagine a TV news anchor or radio show host (representatives of so-called legacy media) platforming talking points that are openly biased, to the point of being exaggerated half-truths or even flat-out baseless lies. This has historically been employed by radical political groups to spread their views and recruit more people to their cause.

However, it is important to note that being biased itself does not make news “fake”, and it can also be said that most reasonably critical people can spot when a piece of news presented by legacy media crosses the line from being biased to being fake news propaganda, typically being propagated by news channels that are openly considered as being on extreme ends of the political spectrum. The problem that disinformation and fake news have presented in the last

decade is that they have evolved and migrated into a form, in which it is far harder for a person to recognize they are being feed fake news which is radicalizing them.

### **The historical precedent for fake news**

On this front we should look at the predecessor of fake news that was in the past commonly perpetrated by legacy media – the moral panic – to understand the goals of fake news in the modern age. Moral panics (such as the infamous “satanic panic” of the seventies and eighties) are created in large part by massive media corporations taking a story and blowing it out of proportion, morphing it into a narrative deliberately trying to invoke a feeling of mass hysteria. The goal is to create the perception that a community’s core values are being attacked by outside “devils”. This is commonly also employed as a political tool: by making voters afraid of a perceived threat, they are more likely to back certain types of legislation.

We see this still happening on a large scale even today, most recently and notably in the US presidential election, where we could hear that Haitians are “eating the cats, [they] are eating the dogs.” This is verifiably a fake news story, created by a racist hate group online and was simply repeated enough times to be accepted as fact. This inevitably and regrettably lead to a large amount of racially motivated hatred against the Haitian community. This also touches on an uncomfortable point closely related to any discussion on fake news – the fact that they are often originating in radical groups pushing a hateful agenda.

### **The migration of fake news online**

Around 2013, extremist hate groups went online. For example: hate groups had been growing in number since the nineties, but, between 2012 and 2014, they dropped by almost a quarter. However, hate crimes stayed about the same.

Dishonest and biased political media feeding viewers hate and bigotry are not shrinking but decentralizing. Still radical, still often violent, but now full of lone nomads unlikely to join a formal organization like they would in the past, but perfectly comfortable in an online echo-chamber, radicals propagating fake news have plenty of lucrative reasons to move their discourse to the web.

Firstly, today radical groups and their followers do not so much have members. They have hashtags, viewers, and subscribers. This insulates the fake news providers from their own audience. If a member of that audience were to go out and commit a hate crime on their behalf, there'd be little doubt they had a hand in radicalizing him, but it'd be very hard to claim they told him to do it.

Secondly, it requires very little work on the part of the parties trying to spread fake outrage. On some of these sites, where individuals can spend hours and hours of their day, they never create an account or leave a comment; the people radicalizing don't even know you're there. This disconnected nature is what makes online political fake news, and the movements connected to them, unique from traditional propaganda.

Lastly, doing almost everything online has, as compared with traditional radical movements dramatically increased the reach. Were someone to pledge to an old-school hate movement, there would be a recruiter to usher them into an existing community - that's the kind of formalized interaction modern extremists try to avoid.

### **An examination of mechanisms through which fake news spreads**

Online extremism has many points of entry, many of them not as obvious as traditional fake news propaganda, and everybody's journey is unique, so we will focus on one of the most common pathways: extremist ideology infiltrating a community people are already in.

For legacy media infiltration happens almost by accident: they do or say something controversial, a part of their audience reacts positively, and, facing no real consequence, they do it more; the news personality pushing the envelope further and further based on what flies with their increasingly radicalized audience.

Alternatively, individuals looking to radicalize more people and spreading fake news online can join a fandom and cause turmoil in it by starting arguments. Online fan communities are most susceptible to this during times in which there is an uproar in the community, e.g. a new movie came out in the fandom with the main character being a representative of a minority group.

## **The weaponization of online discussion as a vehicle for fake news and outrage**

These fan communities are created as safe spaces to discuss hobbies people are passionate about, therefore when these communities devolve into arguments, there is typically the need to remove “politics” from the conversation. Here, “‘political’ means anything on which the community disagrees.

As an example, we can look at the Lord of the Rings fandom and the controversy it experienced when a person of color was cast to portray an elf. In that community argument for instance, “Hate against actors based on their race is bad” is not a political statement because everyone in the community agrees. It’s common sense, and therefore neutral. But, paradoxically, “Hate against actors based on their race is good” is also not political; because “Hate against actors based on their race is bad” is the consensus, this must clearly be just a bad joke, someone being satirical. It is harmless and therefore tolerable.

However, “diversity in movie castings is good” is a political statement, because the community hasn’t reached consensus. It is debatable, and therefore political, and should thus not be talked about in the fan community. If the discussion is tolerated, that gives bad faith actors the perfect platform to spread fake news stories.

This inevitably leads to a concerning conclusion: a community that doesn’t tolerate or welcome nuanced discussions but does tolerate “jokes” about racially motivated hate crimes is going to start collecting misinformed, bigoted radicals, turning the community into a fake news echo chamber.

If it is acknowledged by older, original members of those communities that the community’s developing a radicalization problem, this drives a further wedge in the community, splitting it apart. Given a choice between leaving a community that has mattered to a person for years or simply adjusting to the community’s shifting politics, the assumption is that most will stay. Alternatively, if the people causing the tension get ousted for their opinions, they will simply create their own platform; for example, that is how the new streaming platform Kick got created.

What is true of all methods however is that people do not come nor stay for the radicalized and bigoted ideology. They are here for the community, the sense of being with people, of having feelings validated and enjoyment shared. The radical ideology is simply the price of admission.

## **State Actions to Minimize the Impact of Fake News on Elections**

The increasing prevalence of disinformation poses significant challenges to democratic processes, particularly during elections. The deliberate creation and dissemination of false or manipulated information intended to deceive audiences have profound implications for human rights, democratic participation, and the integrity of electoral processes. This document explores State-level actions to mitigate the effects of disinformation, drawing upon recent international examples and legal frameworks, and insights into information warfare tactics.

### **The Threat of Disinformation**

Disinformation undermines the enjoyment and realization of human rights, including the right to freedom of thought, privacy, and democratic participation. It distorts public discourse, suppresses political engagement, and engenders distrust in democratic institutions. As noted by the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), disinformation's negative impact extends beyond elections, amplifying anti-democratic narratives and exacerbating societal polarization.

The UN Human Rights Committee also emphasized the importance of elections free from interference in its General Comment No. 25. The Committee stated that elections must be conducted fairly and freely, within a legal framework that guarantees the effective exercise of voting rights. Voters must be able to cast their votes for any candidate or proposal without undue influence or coercion that distorts or inhibits the free expression of their will. They should form opinions independently, free from violence, compulsion, or manipulation. Reasonable limits on campaign expenditure may be justified to protect voters' free choice, and the results of genuine elections should be respected and implemented.

The 2016 United States presidential elections and subsequent campaigns globally have highlighted how disinformation can influence voter perceptions and outcomes. Research, including findings from the MIT Media Lab, underscores that false content spreads faster and more broadly than accurate information, further amplifying its impact.

Declining levels of trust have also contributed to the rapid spread and consumption of fake news by the public. Social media platforms enable disinformation to spread faster and reach a larger audience than other online platforms, often in real-time (e.g., X). Automated bot

accounts amplify this effect, disseminating false information at a faster and more frequent rate than individual users can achieve. Selective and repetitive exposure to disinformation reinforces its perceived validity, shaping and confirming targeted narratives.

Recent data from University of southern California highlights that nearly 60% of Americans are dissatisfied with the state of democracy, and 72% express concerns about the spread of misleading or false information. Disinformation narratives surrounding contentious issues like abortion, immigration, and voter fraud have sown doubt and distrust, exacerbating polarization. The advent of generative AI adds a new dimension to this threat, enabling rapid dissemination of convincing but false information. This technological development increases the risk of influence campaigns that could destabilize democracies globally, particularly in elections decided by slim margins.

### **Balancing Freedom of Expression and Counter-Disinformation Measures**

Freedom of expression is a cornerstone of democracy, as enshrined in Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). However, this right is not absolute. States may impose restrictions under specific circumstances to protect democratic processes and prevent harm. Such measures must align with human rights principles, avoiding overreach that could stifle legitimate expression.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Opinion and Expression emphasizes the need for States to promote digital and media literacy, intercultural understanding, and fact-checking initiatives. These efforts aim to build societal resilience against disinformation while respecting the rights to seek, receive, and impart information.

Experts argue that combating disinformation requires a systemic approach, as expecting individuals to bear sole responsibility is neither fair nor effective. Media outlets play a critical role in rebutting falsehoods and rehabilitating public confidence in elections.

The Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and »Fake News«, Disinformation, and Propaganda from 2017 provides further guidance, stressing that general prohibitions on vague and ambiguous concepts like »false news« are incompatible with international standards for restrictions on freedom of expression. Additionally, the Declaration warns against criminal

defamation laws and emphasizes the importance of protecting individuals from liability for merely redistributing unmodified content.

### **Legislative and Policy Responses**

Numerous States have implemented legal and policy measures to counter disinformation, particularly during election periods. In Canada, the Digital Citizen Initiative and the Critical Election Incident Public Protocol serve as notable examples of effective governance. These frameworks emphasize the importance of transparency in political advertising and include the establishment of independent panels to address disinformation. Similarly, France has enacted legislation allowing authorities to suspend broadcasters under foreign influence if they are found to spread false information that could undermine electoral integrity. In Uruguay, a collaborative approach was adopted in 2019 when political parties signed an agreement proposed by the national press association to combat disinformation during elections.

In the United States, misinformation disproportionately affects marginalized groups, discouraging their political participation and undermining their representation. Research reveals significant voter turnout disparities among racial and ethnic groups, weakening democracy by failing to reflect societal diversity.

Additionally, the United States Department of Homeland Security designated election infrastructure as part of its critical infrastructure following foreign interference in the 2016 elections. This designation includes voter registration databases, voting machines, and systems managing election results, recognizing their vulnerability to disinformation and cyberattacks.

### **International and Multilateral Efforts**

Recognizing disinformation as a transnational phenomenon, States have engaged in collaborative efforts through various multilateral platforms. Within the European Union, the Rapid Alert System (RAS) plays a crucial role by enabling real-time information sharing and coordination among member States. Furthermore, EU election observation missions have expanded their scope to include monitoring online political campaigns, aiming to address issues such as disinformation, manipulation, and hate speech. Complementing these efforts, the G-7

Rapid Response Mechanism provides additional tools to detect and counter hybrid influence operations, reinforcing the collective capacity to tackle the challenges posed by disinformation.

### **Best Practices in Platform Accountability**

Governments around the world have increasingly urged technology companies to adopt measures that enhance transparency and accountability in their operations. For example, countries like Canada and France have introduced requirements for social media platforms to maintain repositories of political advertisements. These repositories are designed to enable public scrutiny by ensuring that information about the funding, target audience, and content of political ads is accessible and transparent.

In the United States, coordinated efforts were evident in the lead-up to the 2020 elections, when technology companies worked closely with intelligence agencies to detect and remove instances of coordinated inauthentic behavior. This collaboration was aimed at mitigating the influence of misinformation campaigns and safeguarding the integrity of democratic processes.

Moreover, politically motivated groups have exploited social media features, such as »like« or »upvote« functions, to popularize ideologically loaded news items. This practice, known as »astroturfing«, manipulates user perceptions without necessarily publishing misleading information, further complicating the battle against disinformation.

Additionally, there is a growing emphasis on algorithmic transparency. Various States are advocating for clear disclosure of how algorithms operate, along with the adoption of editorial standards, to curb the spread of harmful or misleading content. These measures aim to strike a balance between fostering innovation in technology and protecting societal values, including democratic discourse and public trust in digital platforms.

### **Challenges and Safeguards**

While counter-disinformation measures are essential, their implementation must be approached with caution to avoid infringing on human rights. Overly restrictive laws or State-controlled narratives carry the risk of undermining trust and democratic freedoms. To address these challenges, governments should prioritize transparency in the development and enforcement

of counter-disinformation policies. Independent bodies should be engaged to provide oversight, ensuring that measures remain impartial and effective. Furthermore, fostering public-private partnerships is crucial to striking a balance between regulation and innovation, creating an environment where both societal needs and technological advancements can thrive.

State actions to combat disinformation during elections are crucial for preserving democratic integrity and protecting human rights. By fostering transparency, enhancing digital literacy, and promoting multilateral cooperation, States can mitigate the impact of disinformation while upholding the principles of free expression and democratic participation. These efforts must remain adaptable to evolving technological and geopolitical landscapes, ensuring resilience against future challenges. As noted by experts, systemic solutions are essential to restoring public trust in elections and addressing vulnerabilities exacerbated by technology and polarization.

### **Questions delegates in the committee should keep in mind while preparing for the debate**

- How does fake news influence public perception and decision-making during elections?
- What are the primary sources and mechanisms through which fake news spreads?
- How does fake news affect the right to freedom of expression and access to accurate information?
- Can combating fake news conflict with the right to free speech? If so, how can this conflict be balanced?
- How can international organizations support countries in combating fake news without infringing on sovereignty?
- What role should social media platforms and tech companies play in curbing the spread of fake news?
- Are there successful examples of combating fake news that other nations can replicate?

## Sources

*Pages 2-6;*

Lazer, D. M. J., Baum, M. A., Benkler, Y., Berinsky, A. J., Greenhill, K. M., Menczer, F., Metzger, M. J., Nyhan, B., Pennycook, G., Rothschild, D., Schudson, M., Sloman, S. A., Sunstein, C. R., Thorson, E. A., Watts, D. J., & Zittrain, J. L. (2018). The Science of Fake News. *Science*, 359(6380), 1094–1096. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aao2998>

Greg, S., & Goebbels, J. (n.d.). Соціокомунікативне середовище: теорія та історія Fake News: as the Problem or a symptom of a Deeper Problem? <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1181745/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

*Disinformation: Global Threat in the Twenty-first Century.* (n.d.). INFOSEGURA. <https://infosegura.org/en/blogs/disinformation-global-threat-twenty-first-century>

Vasist, P. N., Chatterjee, D., & Krishnan, S. (2023). The Polarizing Impact of Political Disinformation and Hate Speech: A Cross-country Configurational Narrative. *Information Systems Frontiers*, 26, 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10796-023-10390-w>

Turel, O. (2023). Polarized sharing of fake news on social media: the complex roles of partisan identification and gender. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929x.2023.2248282>

Stricot, M. (2022, March 24). *How social networks manipulate public opinion.* CNRS News. <https://news.cnrs.fr/articles/how-social-networks-manipulate-public-opinion>

Ringhand, L. A. (2016). *Foreign Election Interference: Comparative Approaches to a Global Challenge.* Digital Commons @ University of Georgia School of Law. [https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/fac\\_artchop/1495/](https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/fac_artchop/1495/)

*Foreign election interferences: an overview of trends and challenges.* (n.d.). EU DisinfoLab. <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/foreign-election-interferences-an-overview-of-trends-and-challenges/>

Georgacopoulos, C., & Mores, G. (2020, July). *How Fake News Affected the 2016 Presidential Election*. Faculty.lsu.edu. <https://faculty.lsu.edu/fakenews/elections/sixteen.php>

Lee, J. M. (2020, October 26). *How Fake News Affects U.S. Elections* | University of Central Florida News. University of Central Florida News | UCF Today. <https://www.ucf.edu/news/how-fake-news-affects-u-s-elections/>

Khan, S. (2018, July 28). Final Say: The misinformation that was told about Brexit during and after the referendum. *The Independent*. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/final-say-brexit-referendum-lies-boris-johnson-leave-campaign-remain-a8466751.html>

Parnell, T. (2023). Brexit and Disinformation. *Routledge EBooks*, 187–200. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003224495-15>

Avelar, D. (2019, October 30). *WhatsApp fake news during Brazil election “favoured Bolsonaro.”* The Guardian; The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/30/whatsapp-fake-news-brazil-election-favoured-jair-bolsonaro-analysis-suggests>

Bracho-Polanco, E. (2019, January 8). *How Jair Bolsonaro used “fake news” to win power*. The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/how-jair-bolsonaro-used-fake-news-to-win-power-109343>

*Pages 6 - 10;*

M. Alfano, J. A. Carter, M. Cheong (2018) *Technological seduction and self-radicalization*, Journal of the American Philosophical Association: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Technological-Seduction-and-Self-Radicalization-Alfano-Carter/72789500d71e2f7ed5cea70e363dd7f8eaa9e1de>

S. Hagen, A. Burton, J. Wilson, M. Tuters (2019) *An overview of 8chan*, Olab: <https://oilab.eu/infinitys-abyss-an-overview-of-8chan/>

M. Caulfield (2019) *The curation/search radicalization spiral*, Hapgood: <https://hapgood.us/2019/05/07/the-curation-search-radicalization-spiral/>

L. Munn (2019) *The Alt-Right pipeline*, First Monday: <https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/10108/7920>

J. M. Berger (2015) *How terrorists recruit online* Brookings institute: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-terrorists-recruit-online-and-how-to-stop-it/>

R. Lewis (2018) *The alternative influence network*, Data and Society: <https://datasociety.net/library/alternative-influence/>

*Pages 10 – 15;*

Brennan Center for Justice. (n.d.). Digital disinformation and vote suppression. Brennan Center for Justice. Retrieved January 14, 2025, from <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/digital-disinformation-and-vote-suppression>

European Parliament. (2021). Disinformation and electoral interference in the European Union: The challenges of regulation. EXPO-STU(2021)653635.

Human Rights Committee. (1996). CCPR General Comment No. 25: Article 25 (Participation in Public Affairs and the Right to Vote). Adopted at the Fifty-seventh Session, on 12 July 1996. CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.7.

International Foundation for Electoral Systems. (n.d.). Lessons on disinformation and election disputes: Applicable principles and international standards. Retrieved January 14, 2025, from <https://www.ifes.org/Election-Case-Law-Analysis-Series/Lessons-on-Disinformation-and-Election-Disputes/Applicable-Principles-International-Standards>

Joint Declaration on Freedom of Expression and "Fake News," Disinformation and Propaganda. (2017, March 3). FOM.GAL/3/17.

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (n.d.). Input for report on disinformation: Civil society organisations. Retrieved January 14, 2025, from <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Expression/disinformation/2-Civil-society-organisations/Input-for-report-on-disinformation-GPD-Submission.pdf>

Raffio, N. (2024, October 28). Trust in voting: How misinformation threatens democracy. USC Today. <https://today.usc.edu/trust-in-voting-how-misinformation-threatens-democracy/>

United Nations. (2024, January 11). Security Council condemns attacks on education facilities, urges enhanced protection for children in armed conflict, unanimously adopting resolution 2686 (2024) [Press release]. United Nations. <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15946.doc.htm>

United Nations Development Programme. (2023). Information integrity to sustain peace during electoral processes. UNDP. <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2023-07/undp-information-integrity-to-sustain-peace-during-electoral-processes.pdf>

United Nations Human Rights Council. (2022). Role of States in countering the negative impact of disinformation on the enjoyment and realization of human rights (A/HRC/RES/49/21).

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (n.d.). Information warfare, disinformation, and electoral fraud. Retrieved January 14, 2025, from <https://sherloc.unodc.org/cld/en/education/tertiary/cybercrime/module-14/key-issues/information-warfare--disinformation-and-electoral-fraud.html>

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (n.d.). Information warfare, disinformation, and electoral fraud. Retrieved January 14, 2025, from <https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/cybercrime/module-14/key-issues/information-warfare--disinformation-and-electoral-fraud.html>

United Nations Peacemaker. (n.d.). Digital technologies. United Nations. Retrieved January 14, 2025, from <https://peacemaker.un.org/en/thematic-areas/digital-technologies>