

5 Questions of the Election Process

Key to combating mis/disinformation is **early identification before it takes off in the public conversation.** Disinformation targeting elections, and resulting misinformation, typically falls into one of the five questions of how elections run—the who, what, when, where, and how of the election process.

As an election official, you can help counter mis/disinformation incidents by ensuring that you have provided clear, well publicized accurate information about each of these questions well in advance of election day. In addition, you can monitor and fact-check content shared online or by your constituents across any of these five categories. These efforts will enable you to identify mis/disinformation early and help you respond to it more effectively.

Who?

Mis/Disinformation incidents often focus on **the people that enable elections to run**. This effort may involve impersonating or disparaging elections-related groups or individuals through hacked or fake social media accounts, websites and articles.

The most prominent targets include:

- Election officials in your office, or in offices lateral to yours (e.g., county to county) or vertical to yours (e.g., county to state)
- Poll workers and other volunteers, such as signature checkers or ballot counters
- External staff, such as those who manage key external systems like Motor Voter
- Vendors, including companies or individuals
- Third party or special interest groups with access to large voter bases

What?

Mis/Disinformation incidents may spread false allegations of disrupted election **hardware, software, and infrastructure including vendor-managed systems**. This includes allegations of bias, malfunctioning, or hacking.

The most prominent targets include:

- Voter Registration Databases (VRDB)
- E-poll books
- Vote-casting Devices
- Vote Tally Systems
- Election Night Reporting Systems (ENR)
- Contentious Political Issues

When?

Mis/Disinformation incidents often misrepresent facts about **key times and dates for elections**. Elections can be catastrophically disrupted if voters do not know when they will occur, when to register to vote, or the times of other key events.

The most prominent targets include:

- When election day is
- When polls open and close
- When you register to vote
- When the deadlines are for early voting or absentee voting

Where?

Mis/Disinformation incidents can disrupt elections by reporting false information about **locations involved in the elections process**, including for voting, registration, or other events.

The most prominent targets include:

- Where you vote on election day (or early voting in states that offer it)
- Where you register to vote
- Where you return an absentee (or “mail-in”) ballot
- Where you vote on election day (or early voting in states that offer it)

How?

Mis/Disinformation incidents often misrepresent **how key election events like voting or registration occur**. This may involve suggesting that constituents can vote through a variety of unsanctioned methods (e.g., by Text Message, Twitter, Email).

The most prominent targets include:

- Voting day processes that can involve mechanisms or procedures to do with functions of elections like mail-in or provisional ballots, Polling place processes, or absentee voting.
- Voter registration processes like where to register, online or in-person registration or same day registration

For the full Information Operations Playbook, visit belfercenter.org/d3p