Foreign Actors and Cybercriminals Likely to Spread Disinformation Regarding 2020 Election Results

ic3.gov/media/2020/200922.aspx

September 22, 2020 (2020-09-22T11:00:00-04:00)

Alert Number

I-092220-PSA

Questions regarding this PSA should be directed to your local **FBI Field Office**.

Local Field Office Locations: www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) are issuing this announcement to raise awareness of the potential threat posed by attempts to spread disinformation regarding the results of the 2020 elections. Foreign actors and cybercriminals could create new websites, change existing websites, and create or share corresponding social media content to spread false information in an attempt to discredit the electoral process and undermine confidence in U.S. democratic institutions.

State and local officials typically require several days to weeks to certify elections' final results in order to ensure every legally cast vote is accurately counted. The increased use of mail-in ballots due to COVID-19 protocols could leave officials with incomplete results on election night. Foreign actors and cybercriminals could exploit the time required to certify and announce elections' results by disseminating disinformation that includes reports of voter suppression, cyberattacks targeting election infrastructure, voter or ballot fraud, and other problems intended to convince the public of the elections' illegitimacy.

The FBI and CISA urge the American public to critically evaluate the sources of the information they consume and to seek out reliable and verified information from trusted sources, such as state and local election officials. The public should also be aware that if

foreign actors or cyber criminals were able to successfully change an election-related website, the underlying data and internal systems would remain uncompromised.

Recommendations

- Seek out information from trustworthy sources, such as state and local election officials; verify who produced the content; and consider their intent.
- Verify through multiple reliable sources any reports about problems in voting or election results, and consider searching for other reliable sources before sharing such information via social media or other avenues.
- For information about final election results, rely on state and local government election officials.
- Report potential election crimes—such as disinformation about the manner, time, or place of voting—to the FBI.
- If appropriate, make use of in-platform tools offered by social media companies for reporting suspicious posts that appear to be spreading false or inconsistent information about election-related problems or results.

The FBI is responsible for investigating malign foreign influence operations and malicious cyber activity targeting election infrastructure and other U.S. democratic institutions. CISA is responsible for protecting the nation's critical infrastructure from physical and cyber threats. The FBI and CISA provide services and information to uphold the security, integrity, and resiliency of the U.S. electoral processes.

Victim Reporting and Additional Information

The FBI encourages victims to report information concerning suspicious or criminal activity to their local field office (www.fbi.gov/contact-us/field-offices). For additional assistance and best practices, and common terms, please visit the following websites:

- Protected Voices: www.fbi.gov/investigate/counterintelligence/foreign-influence/protected-voices
- Election Crimes and Security: www.fbi.gov/scams-and-safety/common-scams-and-crimes/election-crimes-and-security
- #Protect2020: www.cisa.gov/protect2020