

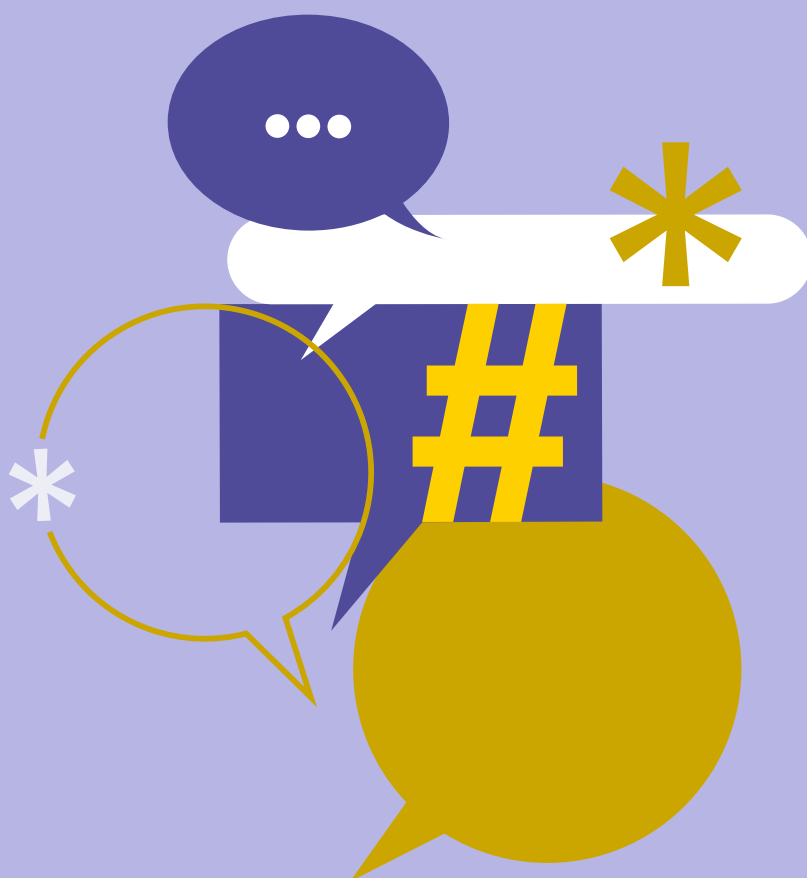
Safe during elections



A GUIDE TO ELECTORAL DISINFORMATION

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Introduction

Disinformation is no trivial matter but a genuine threat that looms over us all. Where do these pervasive disinformation narratives originate, and why do they surge, particularly during election seasons? How can you protect yourself from falling prey to them? Our guide provides the answers.

What is disinformation?

Disinformation is the intentional spread of false or misleading information.

What is the purpose of disinformation?

Its aim is to sow confusion, manipulate public opinion, and secure political, social, or economic advantages.

Though disinformation may seem like a modern issue, its roots stretch far back. Following Julius Caesar's death in ancient Rome, Octavian Augustus orchestrated a disinformation campaign against his rival, Mark Antony, accusing him of betraying Roman values like loyalty and respect for authority due to his affair with Cleopatra, and branding him unfit for leadership because of his alleged fondness for alcohol. Through songs, poetry, and slogans on coins – akin to ancient tweets – these discrediting narratives were spread.

Our guide focuses on contemporary disinformation, with a special emphasis on its prevalence during election campaigns.

The aim of the guide

We aim to equip you with the tools to recognise manipulation, avoid traps, and make informed choices during elections. An informed voter is the strongest voter!

What is electoral disinformation?

Electoral disinformation involves the deliberate spread of false, manipulated, or misleading information targeting elections and democratic processes.

What is the purpose of electoral disinformation?

It seeks to manipulate voters, sway their decisions at the ballot box, and destabilise the electoral process itself.

What is the real impact of disinformation?

Disinformation undermines public safety, jeopardizes the integrity of elections, and erodes trust in public institutions and democratic processes.

For instance, baseless claims of fraud, forgery, or electoral irregularities – such as fake ballot papers, pens with disappearing ink, predetermined election results, or deliberate vote-counting ‘mistakes’ – are used to instil fear during election campaigns.

Disinformation reinforces social and political divisions

Rural versus urban, higher education versus basic education, Catholic versus atheist, right-wing versus left-wing – these divides often fuel tense discussions. Many of us have experienced, or perhaps initiated, a heated political debate with friends, partners, or family, wishing it could have been avoided. Such conversations are frequently sparked by false reports or ‘revelations’ from unreliable sources.

Disinformation creates information chaos

How should you vote correctly? What are the rules for voters living abroad? How can you vote outside your place of residence or beyond the electoral commission's opening hours? On these and similar issues, you have likely encountered – or may yet encounter – disinformation that muddies the waters.

Disinformation gives external actors the opportunity to interfere in the internal affairs of countries

Would you want Russia, China, or another country deciding who represents you? Foreign actors often seek to influence domestic affairs, using disinformation and manipulation as tools to achieve their goals.

In our guide, we will equip you with the knowledge to resist manipulation. An informed choice is a free choice – choose wisely!

Techniques, tactics, and examples of electoral disinformation

Progress is evident all around us – cars are increasingly eco-friendly, video games boast superior graphics, athletes shatter records, and our collective knowledge appears to grow. Yet, progress has a darker side: recent years have witnessed a sharp rise in disinformation, particularly during elections.

In this chapter, we explore the manipulative techniques employed by disinformers and their impact on democracy.

False information, also known as fake news

Fake news consists of fabricated content disguised as credible journalism, often crafted as ‘sensational discoveries’ to shock the public.

EXAMPLE During elections, false narratives aim to undermine candidates’ credibility through baseless accusations, such as claims of addiction to psychoactive substances or mental disorders, spread without reliable evidence. These messages often appear as memes, manipulated videos, or anonymous social media posts.



A satirical, manipulated image from the US presidential campaign period displays a fake Fox News headline, misleadingly claiming that Donald Trump is donating \$1,300 to support hurricane victims.

Source: Reddit

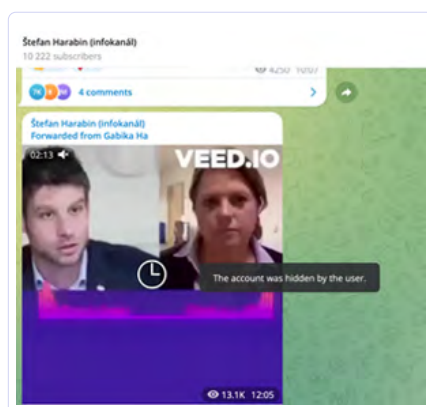


A post from the American presidential campaign period features a slow-motion video of Kamala Harris, falsely implying that the candidate is under the influence of alcohol.

Source: X

Deepfakes

Advanced technologies enable the creation of highly realistic videos and audio recordings that depict public figures saying things they never said, with manipulated images and sounds becoming increasingly lifelike and harder to detect without specialised tools each year.



A post sharing a deepfake recording of a conversation about alleged vote buying by Slovak candidate Michal Šimečka.

Source: Telegram

EXAMPLE Before the elections in Slovakia, a fabricated audio recording surfaced, purporting to capture a conversation between Michal Šimečka, leader of the liberal Progressive Slovakia party, and Monika Tódová, a journalist from the daily newspaper *Denník N*, discussing methods to rig the elections, including buying votes from the Roma minority.

Fake context

This technique involves using authentic content – such as images, quotations, or video recordings – presented out of context to distort its original meaning, misleading audiences by placing the material in a new, deceptive framework.

EXAMPLE Following the annulment of Romania's 2024 presidential election due to alleged Russian interference, demonstrations erupted in support of Călin Georgescu, the first-round winner. In early March 2025, some social media users in Greece shared a video falsely claiming it depicted a massive Bucharest demonstration supporting Georgescu and Russia, when in fact, it showed thousands protesting in Thessaloniki, northern Greece, on 28 February 2025, marking the second anniversary of a deadly train crash.



A post in Greek misrepresenting protests in Greece as demonstrations following the election in Romania.

Source: X

Bots and fake accounts

Bots, automated accounts that disseminate content en masse, create the illusion of widespread support for a particular opinion. Fake accounts, often masquerading as ordinary citizens, are typically controlled by interest groups or foreign actors to advance specific agendas.

EXAMPLE Bot networks are frequently integral to broader disinformation campaigns. Ahead of the German parliamentary elections in February 2025,

the Russian **Operation Overload** was uncovered, aiming to overwhelm fact-checkers, media, and institutions by mass-tagging them in posts containing AI-generated fake content.

In January 2025, a coordinated network of 48 accounts on platform X posted 33 videos questioning the integrity of the elections and targeting politicians. These were amplified by over 6,000 bots, which shared the content synchronously within a minute of publication, exemplifying the large-scale use of bots to propagate disinformation.

Manipulating emotions

Disinformation campaigns often exploit strong emotions—such as fear, anger, disgust, or a sense of injustice—to amplify their message, increase its reach, and undermine critical thinking. This technique is particularly effective online, where emotionally charged content spreads more rapidly than neutral facts.

EXAMPLE Anti-Ukrainian narratives frequently employ emotive language to depict Ukrainians as threats to public safety, baselessly attributing crimes or road accidents to them without evidence.



A post in Polish using vulgar language towards Ukrainians to provoke strong emotions and polarise the audience.

Source: X

Cherry-picking

The term 'cherry-picking' originates from selecting only the most appealing cherries from a tree while ignoring less desirable ones. It describes the practice of selectively presenting information that supports a specific viewpoint while disregarding the broader context.

EXAMPLE: During an election campaign, a candidate might highlight a single poll showing high support while ignoring more recent polls indicating a decline in popularity, thereby creating a misleading impression of growing support contrary to the actual trend.

Main trends in electoral disinformation

The growing role of social media

Platforms such as Facebook, X, TikTok, YouTube, and Telegram have emerged as primary arenas for information dissemination. Their ease of content sharing and algorithms that prioritise emotionally engaging material often amplify disinformation.

A 2024 European Parliament survey¹ revealed that 42% of Europeans aged 16 to 30 primarily rely on platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube for political and social news. This shift away from traditional sources towards fast, accessible content increases younger generations' vulnerability to disinformation.

Increased activity of bots and fake accounts

TIP How to recognise a bot? To identify a potentially inauthentic account, watch for these indicators:

- **Suspicious profile:** The account is newly created or has been dormant for an extended period, often featuring a random username with a mix of letters and numbers (e.g. @u1o2kt345). It may lack a profile photo or use a stock image, such as one available from a photo bank for purchase or free download in lower quality. The profile description is typically vague or overloaded with hashtags.

1 <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3392>

- **Unusual activity:** The account posts excessively (e.g. over 100 posts daily), shares content at odd hours (e.g. during the night), or predominantly reposts others' content (e.g. retweets) rather than creating original posts.
- **Content and style:** Posts are often emotionally charged, provocative, and may include memes, shortened links (e.g. bit.ly domains), or excessive hashtags. The account's content may appear in multiple languages or cover unrelated topics, often written in an unusual or inconsistent style.
- **Network of connections:** The account primarily interacts with a small group of similarly suspicious profiles and follows accounts with comparable traits. It may belong to a botnet, a coordinated network of bots working in unison.

PLEASE NOTE A single indicator does not confirm an account is a bot. However, the presence of multiple signs significantly increases the likelihood that the account is not human-operated.

Microtargeting and political advertising

Political parties and interest groups leverage online behaviour to deliver personalised content to specific individuals, facilitated by platforms like Facebook Ads, which enable tailored advertisements for different voter groups.

EXAMPLE The Cambridge Analytica scandal exposed how Facebook data was exploited to target US voters, including through the dissemination of manipulated or false information.

TIP Be aware that much of the content you encounter online is carefully curated to align with your preferences and demographics. Social media content is not inherently neutral or accurate and may form part of a deliberate influence strategy. Approach advertising messages critically and verify information sources independently.

Influence on democratic processes

Disinformation, by misleading individuals, permeates society and erodes the core principles of democracy. Its presence in the public sphere triggers numerous negative consequences that undermine confidence in public institutions.

Manipulation of public opinion

Disinformation deliberately distorts facts, events, and the reputations of public figures, often employing emotional language, fabricated authorities, or manipulated images and quotes to shape citizens' attitudes on issues such as migration, vaccination, climate change, or elections.

EXAMPLE Ahead of elections, false claims may surface about prominent individuals endorsing a candidate or fabricated poll results.

EFFECT Voters base their decisions on manipulated narratives rather than reliable information.

Polarisation of society

Disinformation narratives frequently divide society into 'us' versus 'them', intensifying ideological, religious, or political conflicts. Rather than fostering dialogue, they cultivate hostility and mistrust.

EFFECT Public debates are stifled, compromises become unattainable, and social tensions escalate.

Erosion of trust in democratic institutions

Many disinformation campaigns aim to erode citizens' confidence in state institutions, such as courts, parliaments, public media, and electoral systems, by portraying them as corrupt, ineffective, or externally controlled.

EFFECT Voter turnout declines, support for anti-establishment movements grows, and belief in conspiracy theories increases.

Undermining trust in electoral processes

False narratives about electoral fraud, illicit campaign financing, or ‘foreign interference’ can erode confidence in the integrity of elections.

EFFECT Citizens may be discouraged from voting or may be more inclined to reject election results.

Facilitating influence by external actors

Foreign actors may exploit disinformation to destabilise a country’s political landscape, amplifying extreme narratives or backing specific groups to influence election outcomes and political decisions.



CHAPTER SUMMARY

TECHNIQUES, TRENDS, AND IMPACT OF ELECTION DISINFORMATION:

TECHNIQUES:

- **Fake news consists:** Fabricated or false content designed to resemble credible news reports.
 - **Deepfake:** Advanced technology used to produce realistic videos or voice recordings, falsely depicting public figures saying or doing things they never did.
 - **Fake context:** Authentic content presented in a manner that distorts its original meaning by removing its true context.
 - **Bots and fake accounts:** Automated or fraudulent accounts posing as ordinary citizens, sharing content en masse to create the illusion of widespread support for a particular opinion.
 - **Manipulating emotions:** Exploiting strong emotions, such as fear, anger, disgust, or a sense of injustice, to amplify a message's impact.
 - **Cherry-picking:** Selectively presenting information that supports a specific viewpoint while ignoring the broader context.
-

- TRENDS:**
- The growing role of social media.
 - Increased activity of bots and fake accounts.
 - Microtargeting and political advertising.

INFLUENCE:

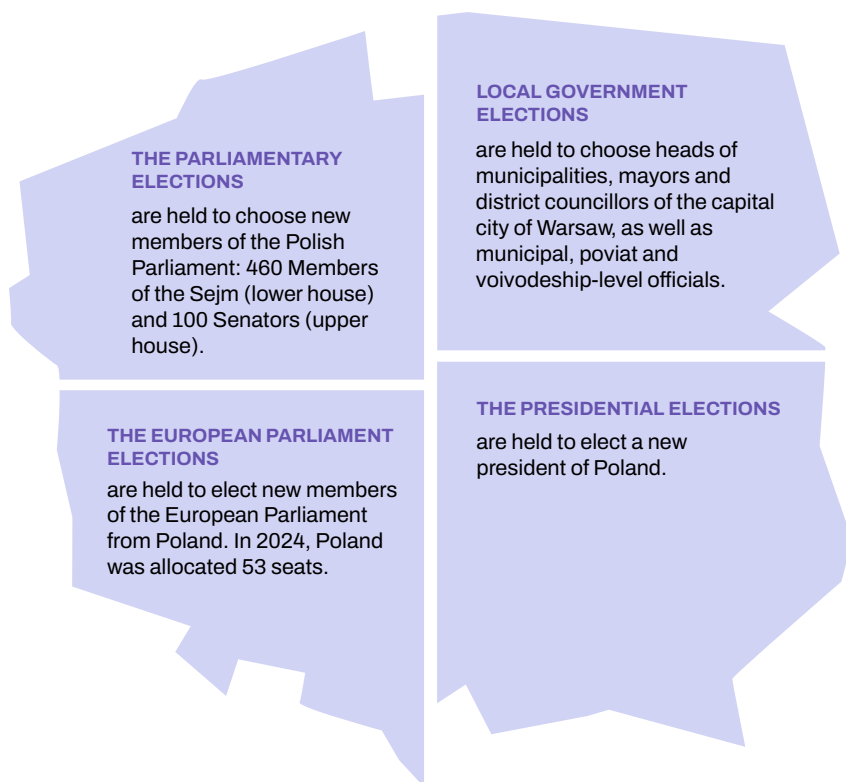
- Manipulation of public opinion.
- Polarisation of society.
- Erosion of trust in democratic institutions.
- Undermining trust in electoral processes.
- Facilitating influence by external actors.

Examples of electoral disinformation: a case study based on the elections in Poland, 2023-2025

ELECTION CALENDAR IN POLAND, 2023-2025

- **Parliamentary elections:** Held on 15 October 2023, these elections recorded an unprecedented turnout of 74.38%, the highest in Poland's recent history.
- **Local elections:** Conducted in two rounds on 7 April 2024 and 21 April 2024, with turnouts of 51.94% and 44.06%, respectively.
- **European Parliament elections:** Held on 9 June 2024, these elections saw the lowest turnout among the four elections, at 40.65%.
- **Presidential elections:** The first round was held on 18 May 2025, followed by the second round on 1 June 2025, with turnouts of 67.31% and 71.63%, respectively, marking the second-highest turnout in the recent history of Poland and the highest for presidential elections.

In Poland, within less than 24 months, i.e. between October 2023 and June 2025, citizens elected their representatives in four distinct voting cycles.



Elections encompass more than just campaign programmes, debates, discussions with family and friends, or marking a ballot paper. As voters deliberate on their choices, some actors seek to manipulate the decisions made at polling stations. The following examples highlight instances of electoral disinformation across all four Polish election campaigns from 2023 to 2025.

Election fraud and vote rigging

Imagine investing time, energy, and emotion into an endeavour, only to discover that your efforts were undermined by deliberate deception. This sense of betrayal was precisely what malicious actors sought to instil during the elections outlined in this guide. The following details reveal the nature of these manipulative tactics.

During the 2023 parliamentary election campaign, claims emerged suggesting widespread errors on ballot papers, such as missing mandatory stamps or the issuance of pre-filled ballots.

In April 2024, during the first round of local elections, as Poles deliberated over local authority candidates, social media campaigns attempted to persuade voters that ballots across the country would prevent voting for two nominated committees.

By June 2024, during the European Parliament elections, disinformation efforts escalated, asserting that voting was merely recreational since election results were allegedly predetermined. A promoted narrative claimed that servers responsible for counting Polish votes were located in the Caribbean, furthering this falsehood.

The 2025 presidential elections followed a similar pattern, with suggestions of fraud and falsification. One particularly imaginative theory alleged that electoral commissions were equipped with pens containing erasable ink, supplied by Polish authorities to facilitate manipulation.

While individual errors by election commission staff or mistakes on ballot papers may occur – human error being inevitable – attributing these to organised, top-down conspiracies by national or European authorities constitutes a distinct disinformation narrative.

Personal attacks on candidates

Elections, often likened to popularity contests, bear similarities to show business, where a politician's image can be tarnished through the spread of false information.

The 2025 presidential election saw the most significant volume of such content, unsurprising given its focus on individual candidates rather than parties or groups. Disinformation included false or unverified claims about candidates' alleged criminal pasts, accusations of supporting illegal or morally questionable behaviour, and reports of candidates engaging in DUI and crashing vehicles, such as an SUV into a tree.

During the European Parliament election campaign, one candidate employed a notable tactic, claiming to be the target of underhanded attacks. He portrayed a street poll and interviews with passers-by – conducted for an online news portal and featuring both positive and negative opinions about various politicians – as a smear campaign funded by the European Parliament. Whether this depiction of himself as a victim of conspiracy

aided his campaign is unclear, but he ultimately secured a seat in the European Parliament.

These examples illustrate the varied forms of disinformation targeting candidates, ranging from absurd accusations to strategic attempts to present oneself as a victim of attacks.

Ukrainian citizens and elections in Poland

On 24 February 2022, global attention turned to Ukraine as the Russian Federation launched a full-scale invasion, prompting a significant influx of Ukrainian war refugees into Poland. This sudden demographic shift fuelled various forms of disinformation, which were exploited during Poland's election cycles.

During the 2023 parliamentary elections, false claims surfaced alleging that Ukrainian war refugees, who did not speak Polish, were serving on electoral commissions. This accusation is unfounded, as Polish citizenship is a prerequisite for commission membership, and non-citizens must demonstrate certified proficiency in Polish to qualify for citizenship – a process requiring at least two years of residency in Poland, rendering the timeline implausible.

In a more imaginative instance during the local elections, internet users claimed a Ukrainian woman was running for office in a Polish city, misled by her Eastern-sounding surname and the blue and yellow colours on her election posters. A quick investigation revealed she was a Polish citizen who had taken her Ukrainian husband's surname, and the colours were those of Częstochowa, the city where she was a candidate.

Issues concerning Ukrainian citizens in Poland or Polish aid to Kyiv were repeatedly manipulated to generate false and harmful online content, a tactic predictably employed during the election periods.

Other noteworthy cases

The electoral landscape is rife with unexpected disinformation tactics, as illustrated by several distinctive narratives that defy easy categorisation.

During the April 2024 local elections, a narrative emerged suggesting that secondary school leaving exam pass rates in various provinces correlated with election results. This theory was supported by an image of unknown origin containing random percentages, which had previously been used in May 2019, shortly after the European Parliament elections, to promote similar disinformation. Notably, the figures in the graphic did not correspond to any actual exam results from that period.

In 2024, during the European Parliament election campaign, a controversy arose involving a claim that State Electoral Commission employees unlawfully barred politicians from one electoral committee from attending the draw for electoral list numbers, allegedly breaking the arm of a candidate's two-year-old son during a scuffle. In 2025, this politician was also one of the presidential candidates. Subsequent investigations clarified that the politicians were not entitled to participate due to the absence of their committee's election representative, and the child's injury resulted from an accident caused by his carers' negligence.

In the 2025 presidential election campaign, a peculiar trend gained traction encouraging voters to bring wax candles to polling stations to 'grease' empty ballot fields, supposedly to prevent fraudulent marking of other candidates' boxes. While not prohibited, this practice could lead to votes being invalidated if the candle marks resembled an 'X', as per Polish electoral law, potentially undermining the very votes it was intended to protect. While this original idea was promoted as a means of preventing fraud, it could actually lead to someone's vote being rejected.

Reflections and conclusions

Between 2023 and 2025, Poland experienced an intense electoral period, with four distinct voting cycles – parliamentary, local government, European Parliament, and presidential – within less than two years. While this concentration of elections celebrated democratic engagement, it also created fertile ground for disinformation.

The diverse nature of these elections spawned a wide array of false narratives, ranging from absurd to deeply harmful, with the potential to sway electoral outcomes. A recurring theme across campaigns was accusations of fraud, deception, and attempts to manipulate results, which erode public trust in the integrity of the electoral process. These claims, often rooted

in insinuations and conspiracy theories rather than facts, can discourage voting by fostering sentiments such as, 'If they're going to cheat, why bother?' This risks lower turnout and deepened social divisions. However, the record-high participation in Poland's parliamentary and presidential elections suggests that these disinformation efforts were not entirely successful.

Nevertheless, the volume and variety of fabricated reports, suggestions, and insinuations signal that future elections may also face accusations of fraud, alongside unpredictable content shaped by current events, public sentiment, and the ingenuity of those seeking to deceive and influence voters.

While this chapter focuses on Poland, the phenomena described are not unique to it. The US presidential election demonstrated that narratives targeting candidates can vary widely and be applied to opposing sides, as seen in fraud accusations levelled at both Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. Similarly, topical issues resonate differently by region: in Poland, disinformation heavily targeted Ukrainian war refugees, while in Austria, anti-immigration and anti-Islamic narratives dominated during the 2024 European elections.

Disinformation transcends borders, languages, and nationalities, impacting politicians and candidates irrespective of their views or backgrounds. Yet, the intent to cause harm and the potential damage of such actions remain consistent.



CHAPTER SUMMARY

EXAMPLES OF ELECTORAL DISINFORMATION

ELECTION FRAUD AND VOTE RIGGING:

- Widespread distribution of unstamped or pre-filled ballot papers.
 - Ballot papers designed to prevent voting for certain candidates.
 - Claims of predetermined election results.
 - Allegations of electoral commissions using pens with disappearing ink.
-

PERSONAL ATTACKS ON CANDIDATES:

- Portraying election candidates as criminals, drunk drivers, or immoral individuals.
 - Candidates presenting themselves as victims of attacks and conspiracies.
-

UKRAINIAN CITIZENS AND ELECTIONS IN POLAND:

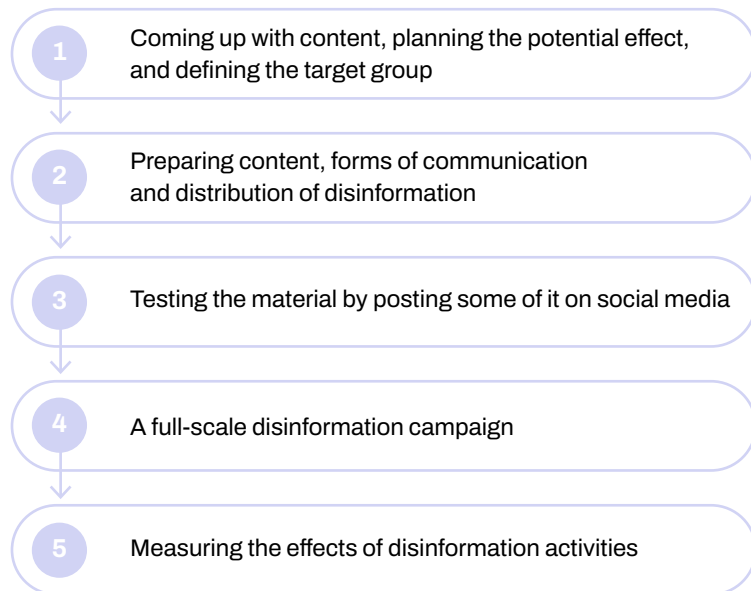
- Assertions that Ukrainian war refugees, unable to speak Polish, served on electoral commissions.
 - Claims that a Ukrainian woman, who is actually Polish, ran for councillor.
-

OTHER NOTEWORTHY CASES:

- Suggestions that secondary school leaving exam pass rates in specific provinces mirrored election results.
- Allegations that members of the National Electoral Commission broke a two-year-old's arm during a scuffle with politicians.
- Claims that using a wax candle could safeguard against vote rigging.

Good practices to limit the spread of disinformation

Disinformation operates much like a product launched in the marketplace, crafted to persuade us to act or think in a specific way, just as advertising seeks to influence purchasing decisions. The process of its creation and dissemination can be illustrated using the following diagram:



As citizens, our responsibility is to resist disinformation and disrupt its carefully orchestrated spread.

The following good practices empower anyone seeking to combat disinformation effectively.

What can you do to avoid being misled by disinformation?

Train your critical thinking

Adopting a critical perspective is invaluable in countering disinformation. When encountering potentially controversial content, consider asking yourself key questions about:



The source and credibility of the information

- Who is the author of the information?
- Is this person or organisation credible?
- Who stands to gain, and who might lose, from this statement?
- Is the source of the information reliable?
- Is the original source provided? Can I verify it?
- Do other independent sources corroborate this data, information, or report?



Content and form of information

- Is the information a fact, or is it an opinion, assumption, or conjecture?
- Can the data, figures, and examples be verified?
- Is the evidence reliable and accurately interpreted?
- Is any potentially relevant information omitted?
- How might this issue appear from a different perspective?
- Does the news seem overly sensational?



Reactions and impact on the target audience

- Does the statement use emotional language that may steer me towards a specific interpretation?
- Does it evoke strong emotions such as fear, anger, or disgust?
- Am I inclined to believe it solely because it aligns with my views?
- Am I open to the possibility that I might be mistaken?

STOP and think before you share

Before sharing content on social media, pause, take three deep breaths, and evaluate whether the author is credible and if the content is overly emotional, provocative, or implausible. Give yourself some time to verify whether other sources confirm the information and consider the potential consequences of sharing it. Ensure you are not disseminating content merely because it has upset you. Failing to take these steps risks contributing to the spread of misinformation².

Keep your feed clean

Maintaining a clean social media feed is crucial. Unfollow accounts that frequently share unverified content and instead follow pages or profiles of experts and trusted sources providing reliable analysis. Avoid clicking on clickbait³ headlines or links to unfamiliar pages or profiles. If you regularly encounter posts that provoke strong emotions without citing sources, it is time to clean up your feed.

Be the voice of reason among your family and friends

- Promote educational profiles, portals, fact-checking sites, and platforms dedicated to combating disinformation.

² False content disseminated without malicious intent.

³ Clickbait – attention-grabbing content on a website link that encourages users to click on it.

- Encourage family and friends to refrain from sharing unverified information in your group chats.
- Recommend installing browser plug-ins, such as the EU-funded InVID Verification Plugin, which aids in verifying visual content on social media, or KnowNews, which classifies news sites based on their credibility.
- Engage with empathy and foster dialogue when responding, avoiding condescending or mocking tones. Instead of dismissing disinformation with remarks like, ‘God, more nonsense that someone has fed you’, gently present your perspective, supported by credible data, verifications, or information from reliable sources.

What is the government doing to help you avoid disinformation

You are not alone in the fight against disinformation, as the national administration has implemented several initiatives to support citizens. Below are some examples.



Creation of a platform for knowledge exchange between the state and citizens

Check whether your country offers a publicly accessible platform designed to enhance election security. Such platforms serve as a hub for reporting election-related incidents and provide a knowledge base on democratic processes.

One notable example is Poland’s BezpieczneWybory.pl website, designed to combat electoral disinformation online. The portal offers:

- Verified information about elections, including updates on upcoming votes.
- Best practices in cybersecurity.
- Reports on electoral disinformation from past elections.
- A dedicated tab for reporting election-related disinformation encountered online.



Educational and media campaigns

Well-planned and executed campaigns can reach a broad audience, raising public awareness about disinformation, particularly its electoral impact. By creating materials for traditional and online media and promoting these in public spaces, such campaigns enhance citizens' understanding of disinformation and its effects.



Cooperation and education

To combat electoral disinformation, training programmes are conducted for public administration employees, election committees, journalists, and influencers, equipping trusted individuals with the knowledge to recognise and prevent the spread of disinformation.

Additionally, collaboration with platforms like X and Facebook establishes shared standards and procedures to maintain the quality of public debate and counter disinformation, especially significant given that nearly 64% of people worldwide actively use social media⁴.

What can you do?

As a citizen, resident, and member of your local community, you can take proactive steps:



Get involved in your children's school life

As a parent, you can influence your children's school by advocating for the inclusion of critical thinking, disinformation recognition, and source analysis in the curriculum for relevant subjects. If integrating media literacy into lessons is not immediately feasible, consider organising workshops where pupils, teachers, and parents can participate together.



Act in your immediate environment

Beyond schools, consider engaging with local councils, community centres, community halls, or libraries, which often have public funds available

to raise awareness about combating disinformation. You could propose organising meetings with experts or training courses on verification and fact-checking, offering free admission to local residents.



Encourage others to act

Are local officials and councillors equipped to counter false information, communicate clearly to prevent manipulation, and engage effectively with residents while moderating online discussions, such as comments on municipal social media profiles? If uncertain, reach out to inquire and articulate your needs, motivating local authorities to take proactive steps.



Be an informed voter

Take time to understand the electoral process and the regulations specific to your country. Identify the location and operating hours of your local polling station, learn how to cast a valid vote, and determine what identification or documents are required. Additionally, clarify the steps needed to vote outside your place of residence if necessary. Be vigilant about claims regarding changes to election dates or voting methods, as such changes are extremely rare.



CHAPTER SUMMARY

GOOD PRACTICES TO LIMIT THE SPREAD OF ELECTION DISINFORMATION

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO AVOID BEING MISLED BY DISINFORMATION:

- Train your critical thinking.
 - STOP and think before you share.
 - Keep your feed clean.
 - Be the voice of reason among your family and friends.
-

WHAT THE GOVERNMENT IS DOING TO HELP YOU AVOID DISINFORMATION:

- A platform is available for knowledge exchange between the state and citizens.
 - Educational and media campaigns.
 - Cooperation and education.
-

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Get involved in your children's school life.
- Act in your immediate environment.
- Encourage others to act.
- Be an informed voter.

Tips for first-time voters

Check if you are eligible to vote



AGE

In most European countries, the voting age is 18, though in countries like Austria and Malta, it is 16.



CITIZENSHIP

Voting typically requires citizenship of the country, but for local and European elections, registered residency may suffice in some cases.



REGISTRATION

Some countries automatically register voters, while others require you to register in advance. Verify the process using reliable sources, such as government websites.



VOTING ABROAD

If you are in another country on election day, you can often still vote. Procedures vary, but many countries require registration on the foreign electoral roll well in advance, typically weeks before the election, with voting usually conducted at embassies or consulates.

Find out when and how to vote



ELECTION DATE

Official announcements are made by each country. Consult trusted sources, such as government or electoral commission websites, which often use distinctive 'government' domain endings like 'gouv.fr' for France or 'gob.es' for Spain.



VOTING LOCATION

Your assigned polling station can typically be found in online electoral rolls, linked to your registered address.



FORMS OF VOTING

Voting is generally in person at polling stations on election day. Estonia is the only country offering electronic voting. Some countries permit postal or proxy voting for those unable to vote in person due to health reasons.

How to prepare?

- **LEARN THE VOTING RULES:** Understand whether you can put only one 'X' or select multiple candidates. Instructions are usually provided on the ballot paper.
- **PREPARE YOUR ID:** Bring a passport, identity card, or, in some countries, a driving licence, depending on the country's requirements.
- **RESEARCH CANDIDATES AND PARTIES:** familiarise yourself with their election programmes, relying on credible sources rather than memes or viral videos.

What to do on election day?

- Attend your designated polling station at the specified time.
- Bring your identification document.
- Collect your ballot paper and check whether it is stamped.
- Enter the voting booth and follow the instructions to cast your vote.
- Place your ballot paper in the ballot box to complete the process.

What happens after the election?

- Election results are publicly announced and should be followed through trusted sources.

- Remember: Democracy extends beyond election day. Your ongoing civic engagement contributes to its strength.

Sudden events often trigger intense emotions, which can cloud judgement and make individuals susceptible to incomplete, misleading, or entirely false information. Fortunately, everyone can take effective steps to protect themselves against disinformation.



HERE ARE PRACTICAL MEASURES TO IDENTIFY AND RESPOND TO SUSPICIOUS CONTENT:

- **Pause:** Resist the urge to share content immediately and verify its accuracy first.
- **Examine the source:** Identify the publisher and assess whether it is a credible outlet.
- **Check for corroboration:** Look for the same information across multiple independent sources.
- **Be wary of emotions:** Exercise caution if content evokes strong emotions such as shock, fear, or anger.
- **Verify dates and context:** Ensure the information is current and not presented out of its original context.
- **Scrutinise photos and videos:** Images can be manipulated or misrepresented, so verify their authenticity.
- **Read beyond the headline:** Headlines may be exaggerated or misleading, so review the full content.
- **Think critically:** Question whether the information is logical and supported by facts.
- **Report harmful content:** Report hate speech, incitement to violence, or content violating platform rules to contribute to a safer online environment.

