



## Foreign Media Influence on US Election

From October 6, 2020 to October 28, 2020, as part of its Election Protection Project, Alethea Group, in partnership with the [Global Disinformation Index](#), monitored English-language state media outlets in Iran, China, and Russia for references to the U.S. election to analyze overt influence attempts.

Between these dates, Alethea Group identified 185 articles published by eight outlets related to the US election, political system and discourse, or voting. Based on content analysis, we assess these media outlets are sharing five key narratives primarily aimed at diminishing trust in the U.S. election process and creating confusion around the general election process and Presidential candidates. The following are the top five narratives shared by these outlets, in order of most frequently published:

1. The US is not conducting free and fair elections and instances of voter suppression are being recorded;
2. Foreign election interference is not occurring, and mentions of “Russiagate”;
3. The US is politically unstable;
4. Vote-by-Mail is being used to commit fraud, and;
5. Post-election violence and chaos;

Of the five key narratives, the claim that the US is not conducting free and fair elections had the most reach on social media platforms. It was promoted by Russian, Iranian, and Chinese government-linked media. Russian media had the most articles and reach by any of the three countries, with 20 articles and over 9,000 shares, reactions, and comments on Facebook and Twitter. The narrative frequently focused on highlighting alleged instances of voter suppression, private funding of political campaigns, and alleged corruption of US government officials. This narrative had 41 total articles, which received 10,361 total engagements on Twitter and Facebook including shares, reactions, and comments.

The second most-widely shared narrative is that foreign election interference is not occurring. This narrative, pushed predominantly by Russia, had 40 total articles with 6,608 engagements on Twitter and Facebook.

The Election Protection Project also identified 11 less frequent narratives around the US election mentioned by the same media outlets at least once. In a total of 46 articles, these narratives received low to medium engagement on Facebook and Twitter, with interactions ranging from zero to approximately 700. These narratives are listed below, in order of most shared:

1. The expectation of a close Presidential race and learning of results later than November 3 (14 articles);
2. Reporting on the record turnout for early voting in the US (14 articles);



3. References to third-party candidates or candidates' policy platforms (6 articles);
4. The role of social media platforms in US elections (5 articles);
5. The US economy is unstable and not prepared for an election (2 articles);
6. Uptick of searches on Google on how to change your vote means voter remorse (2 articles);
7. Coronavirus and its impact on the US election and religious events in the US (2 articles);
8. Pros and cons of a Biden presidency for Iran (1 article);
9. US hegemony endangering global peace by meddling in other countries' internal affairs (1 article).

Of the 185 articles analyzed, 104 were published by Russian state-run media outlets RT, Sputnik, and Tass. Sixty-two of the articles were published by Iranian state-run media and 19 by Chinese state-run media. Russian state-run media published the most articles in every narrative except about post-election violence. Iranian state-run media published more than half of the articles related to election violence in the US.

During our monitoring period, these articles were predominately shared on state-media's official Facebook and Twitter accounts and by foreign and US individual users on each platform.

The Election Protection Project identified over 80 groups and pages on Facebook that these articles have been shared to. With RT and Sputnik's international reach, many of the articles were shared on foreign pages and groups. Of the 80 pages or groups, only 12 repeatedly shared foreign state-run media articles about the US election.