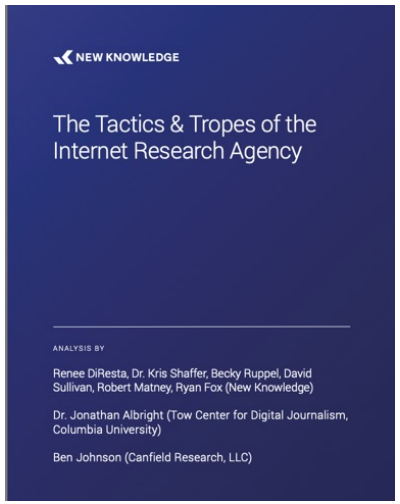
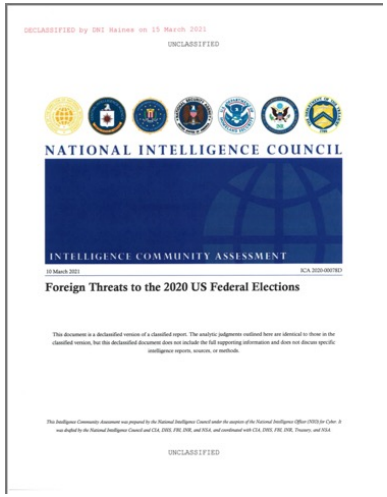
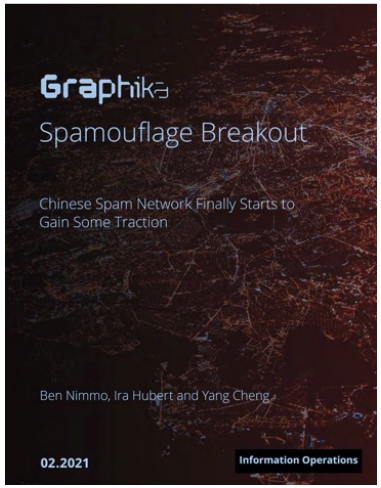
A Compendium of Recommendations for Countering Russian and other State-Sponsored Propaganda

Todd C. Helmus

Numerous Reports Document Growing Propaganda Threat from Russia, China and Iran

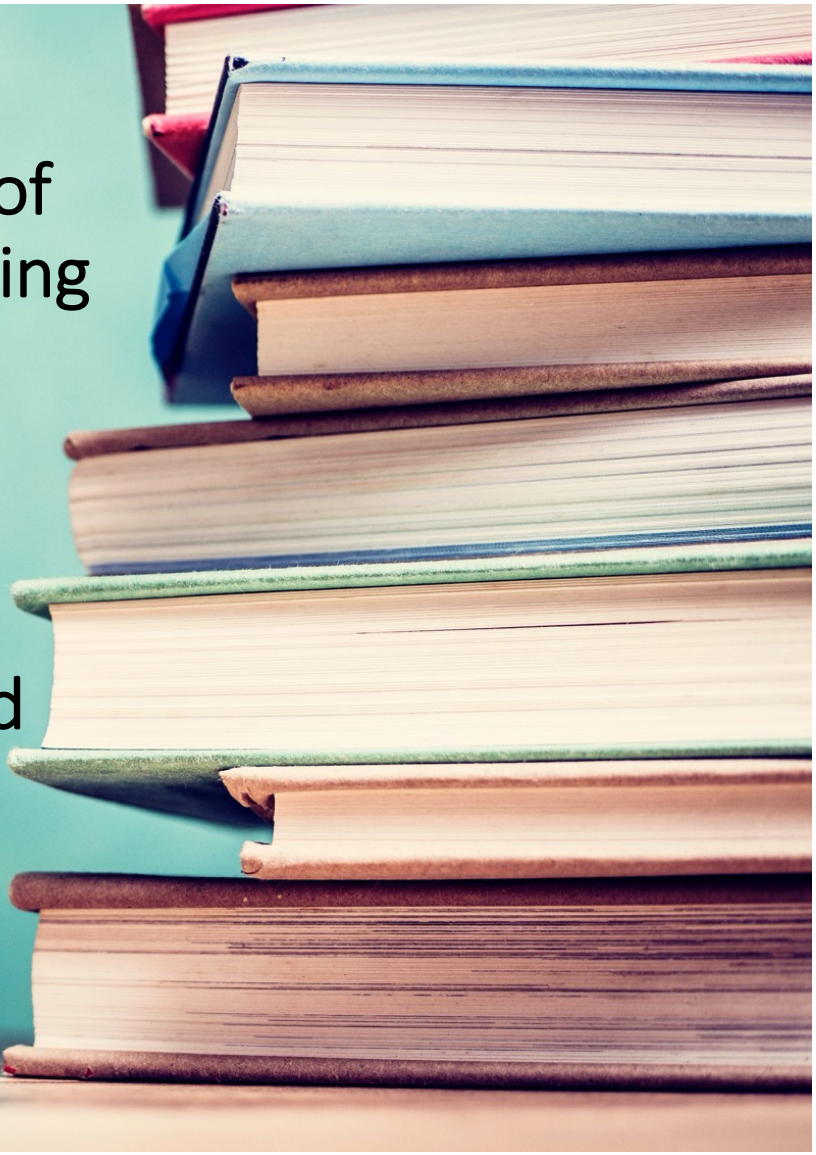






Scholars have offered a litany of recommendations for countering foreign propaganda

This study used a ”systematic review” approach to code and analyze these recommendations



We systematically searched for think-tank reports that offered recommendations on Russian propaganda

46 studies qualified for review

Most studies focused on propaganda, were published in 2018/19 and originated from U.S based institutions

FIGURE 3
Major Focus Areas for Qualifying Studies

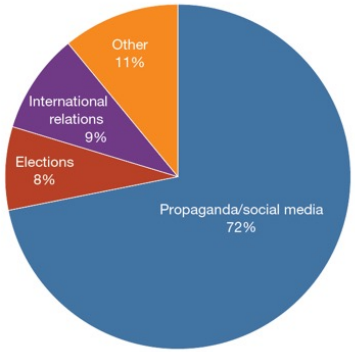


FIGURE 1
Year of Publication for Qualifying Studies

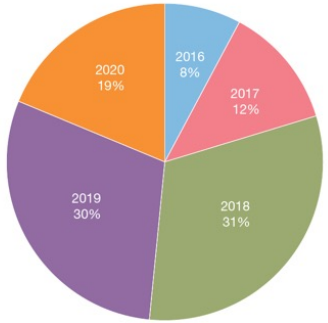
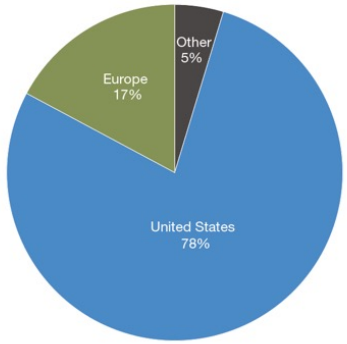


FIGURE 2
Institutional Origin for Qualifying Studies



We Identified 5 Categories of Recommendations

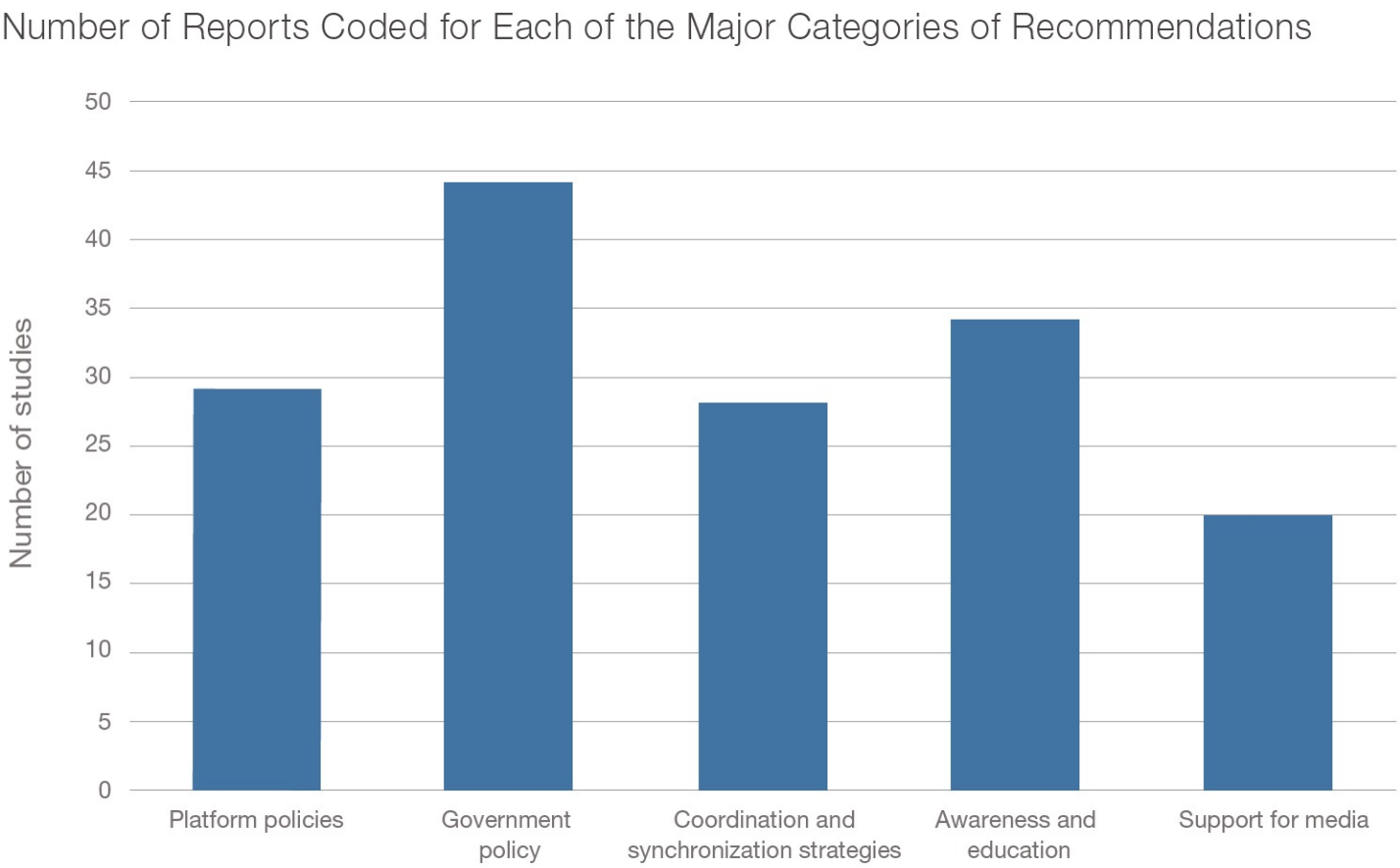
Platform policies

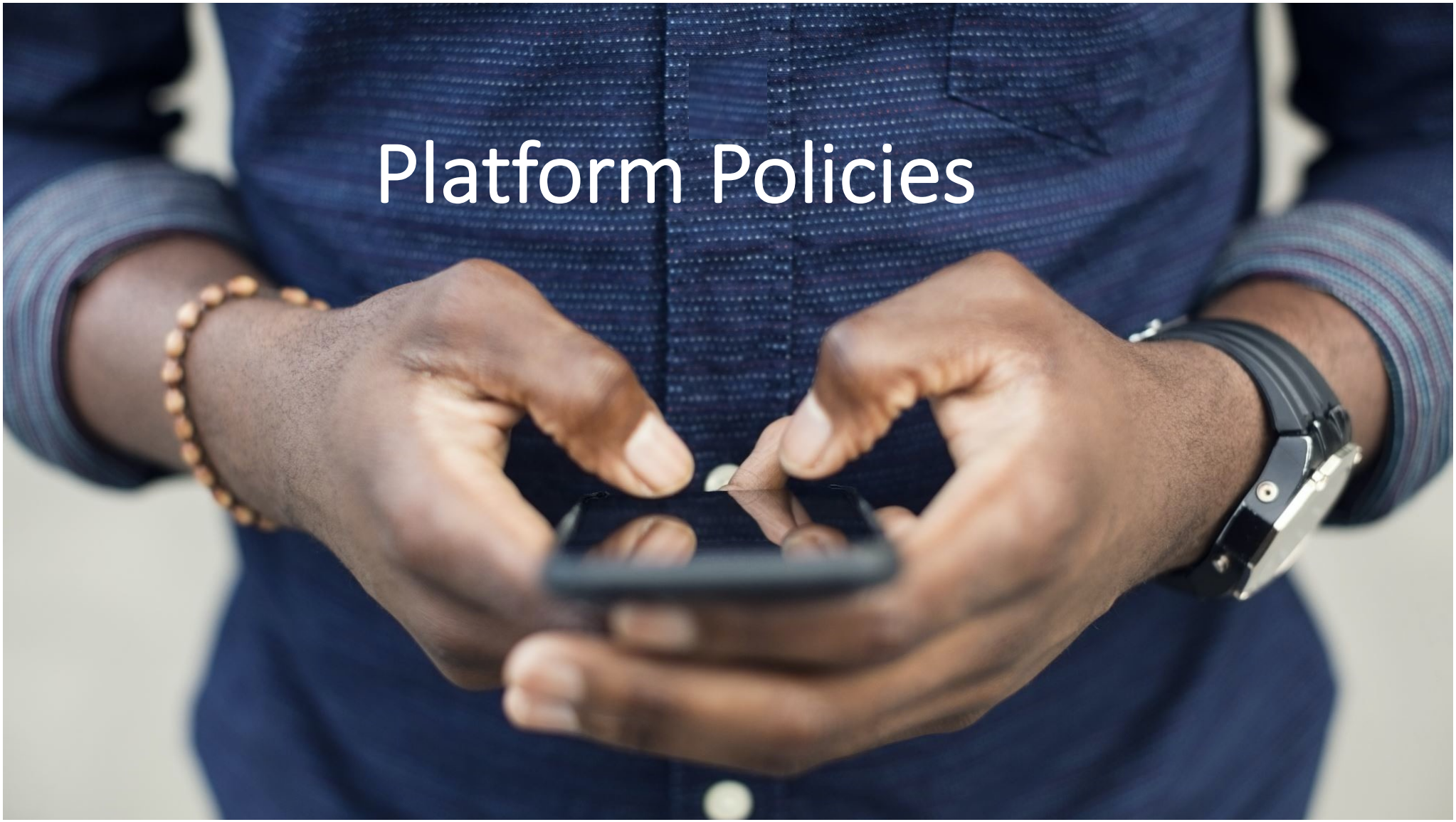
Government Policies

Coordination Policies

Awareness/Education

Support for Media




Platform Policies

Revise Platform Policies

Improve detection/removal of inauthentic content (26 studies)

Revise advertising policies (16)

Improve user privacy controls (10)

Adjust the algorithms (8)

Revise membership policies (5)

Improve information sharing among platforms (4)

Revise Platform Policies

Improve detection/removal of inauthentic content (26 studies)

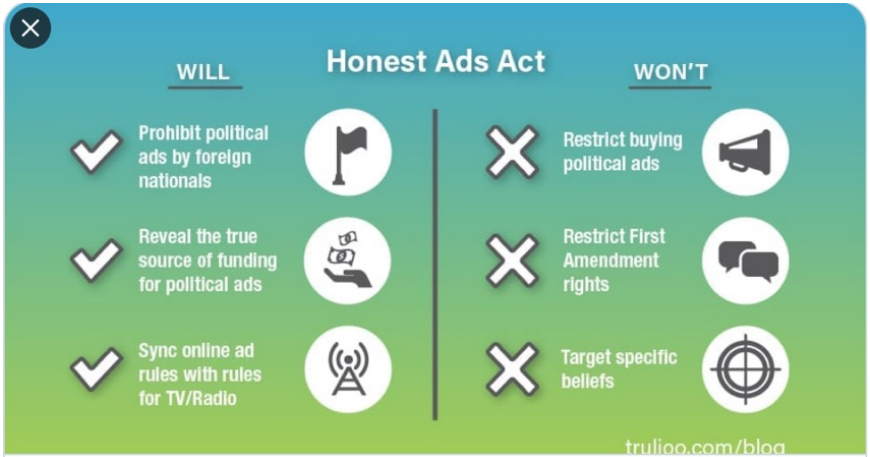
Revise advertising policies (16)

Improve user privacy controls (10)

Adjust the algorithms (8)

Revise membership policies (5)

Improve information sharing among platforms (4)



Honest Ads Act — Know Your Advertiser

The proposed Honest Ads Act in the U.S. aims to prohibit political advertising by foreign nationals and reveal the true source of funding ...

trulioo.com

Revise Platform Policies

Improve detection/removal of inauthentic content (26 studies)

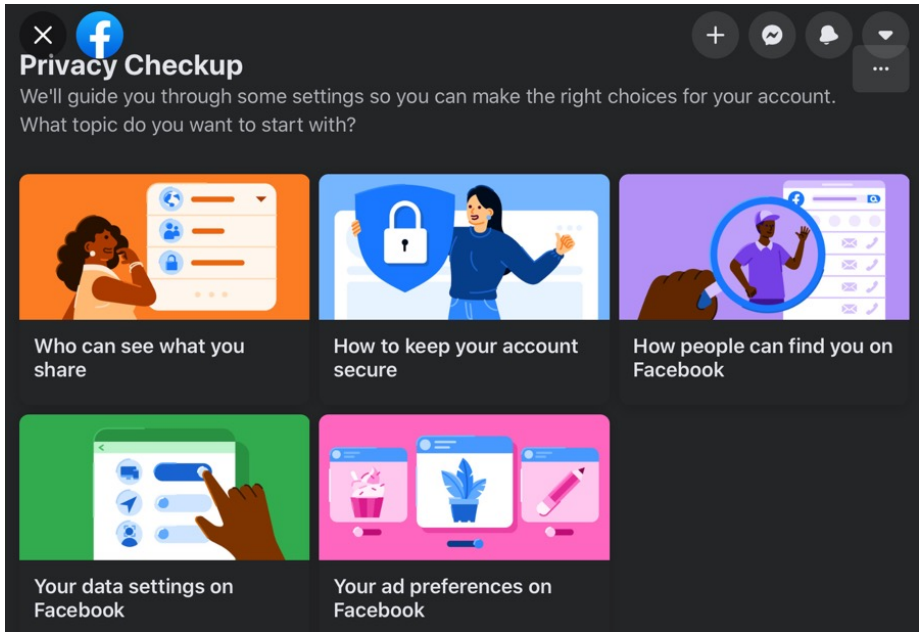
Revise advertising policies (16)

Improve user privacy controls (10)

Adjust the algorithms (8)

Revise membership policies (5)

Improve information sharing among platforms (4)



Revise Platform Policies

Improve detection/removal of inauthentic content (26 studies)

Revise advertising policies (16)

Improve user privacy controls (10)

Adjust the algorithms (8)

Revise membership policies (5)

Improve information sharing among platforms (4)

How Facebook got addicted to spreading misinformation
The company's AI algorithms gave it an insatiable habit for lies and hate speech. Now the man who built them can't fix the problem.
technologyreview.com

Revise Platform Policies

Improve detection/removal of inauthentic content (26 studies)

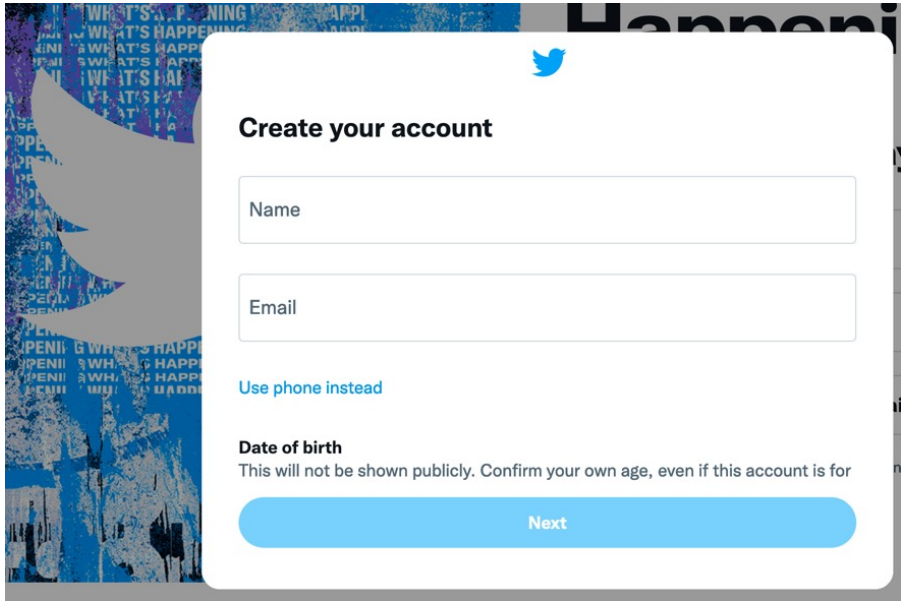
Revise advertising policies (16)

Improve user privacy controls (10)

Adjust the algorithms (8)

Revise membership policies (5)

Improve information sharing among platforms (4)



Platform Policies

Improve detection/removal of inauthentic content (26 studies)

Revise advertising policies (16)

Improve user privacy controls (10)

Adjust the algorithms (8)

Revise membership policies (5)

Improve information sharing among platforms (4)

Government Policies

Government Policies

Support at-risk countries **(13 studies)**

Deterrence (12)

Implement Sanctions (12)

Improve Intelligence (12)

Improve info dissemination & public diplomacy (10)

Improve cyber policy & capabilities (10)

Create national strategy (4)

Russian Social Media Influence

Understanding Russian Propaganda in Eastern Europe

Todd C. Helmus, Elizabeth Bodine-Baron, Andrew Radin, Madeline Magnuson, Joshua Mendelsohn, William Marcellino, Andriy Bega, Zev Winkelman

Government Policies

Support at-risk countries (13 studies)

Deterrence (12)

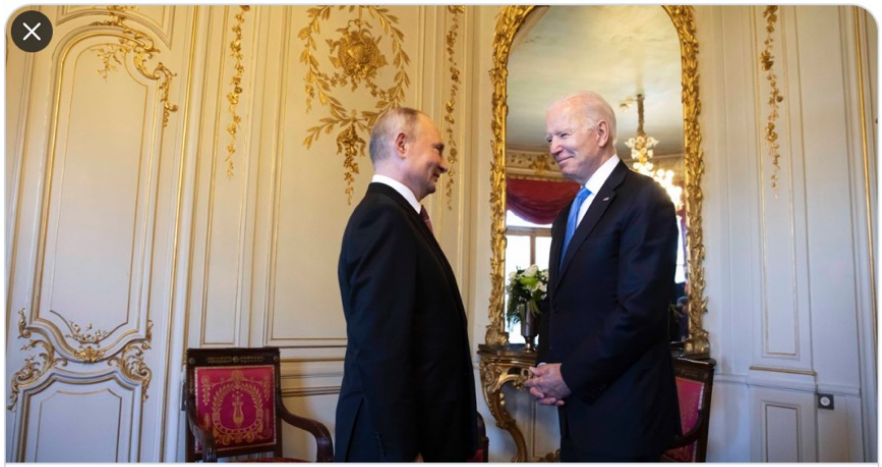
Implement Sanctions (12)

Improve Intelligence (12)

Improve info dissemination & public diplomacy (10)

Improve cyber policy & capabilities (10)

Create national strategy (4)



Biden wants Putin to behave. So why not go after his money?
Kremlin critics say the U.S. president needs to do more than take incremental measures. But insiders warn that aiming for Putin's ...
politico.com

Government Policies

Support at-risk countries (13 studies)

Deterrence (12)

Implement Sanctions (12)

Improve Intelligence (12)

Improve info dissemination & public diplomacy (10)

Improve cyber policy & capabilities (10)

Create national strategy (4)

Practical Open Source Intelligence Methodology
What is OSINT?
medium.com

Government Policies

Support at-risk countries (13 studies)

Deterrence (12)

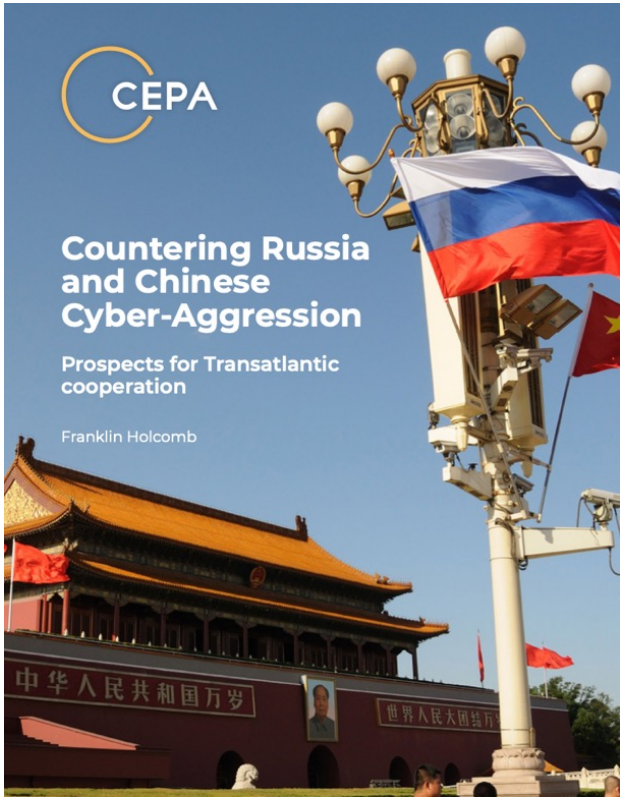
Implement Sanctions (12)

Improve Intelligence (12)

Improve info dissemination & public diplomacy (10)

Improve cyber policy & capabilities (10)

Create national strategy (4)



Government Policies

Support at-risk countries (13 studies)

Deterrence (12)

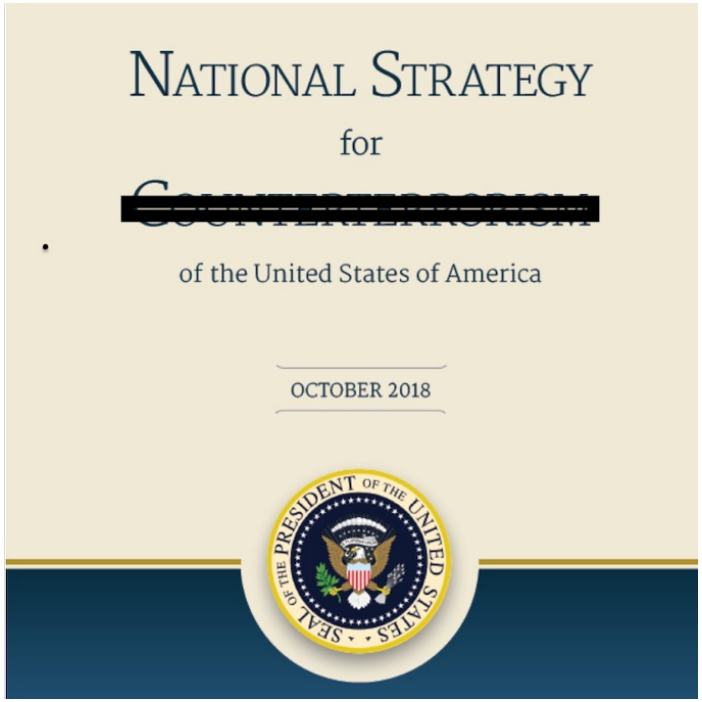
Implement Sanctions (12)

Improve Intelligence (12)

Improve info dissemination & public diplomacy (10)

Improve cyber policy & capabilities (10)

Create national strategy (4)



Coordination

Improving Coordination

Interagency (15 studies)

Inter-government (14)

Public Private (12)

Civil Society (12)

Improving Coordination

Interagency (15 studies)

Inter-government (14)

Public Private (12)

Civil Society (12)

Improving Coordination

Interagency (15 studies)

Inter-government (14)

Public Private (12)

Civil Society (12)

Improving Coordination

Interagency (15 studies)

Inter-government (14)

Public Private (12)

Civil Society (12)

This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY

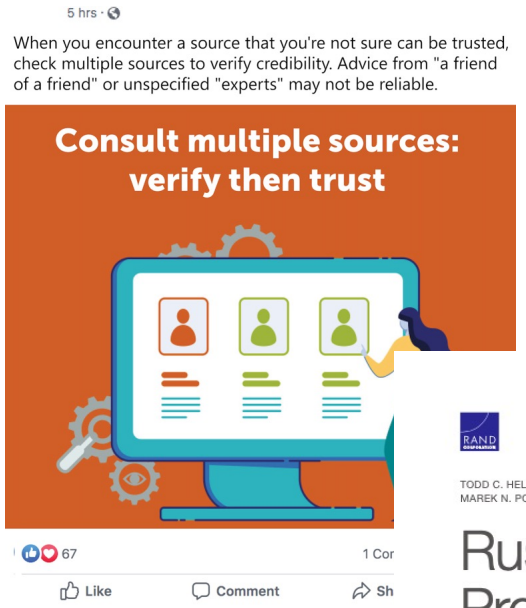
Awareness &
Education

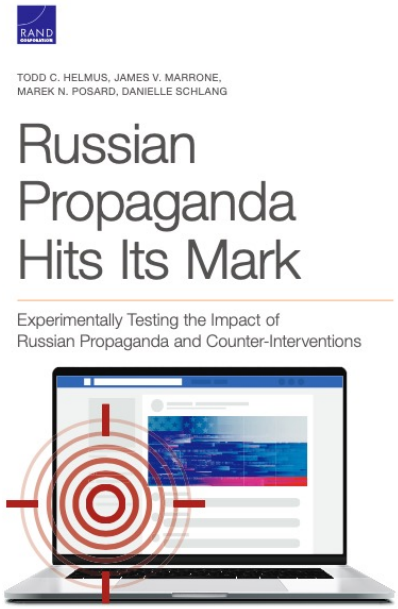
Awareness & Education

Media Literacy (24 studies)

Public warnings about propaganda (19)

Fact Checking (14)



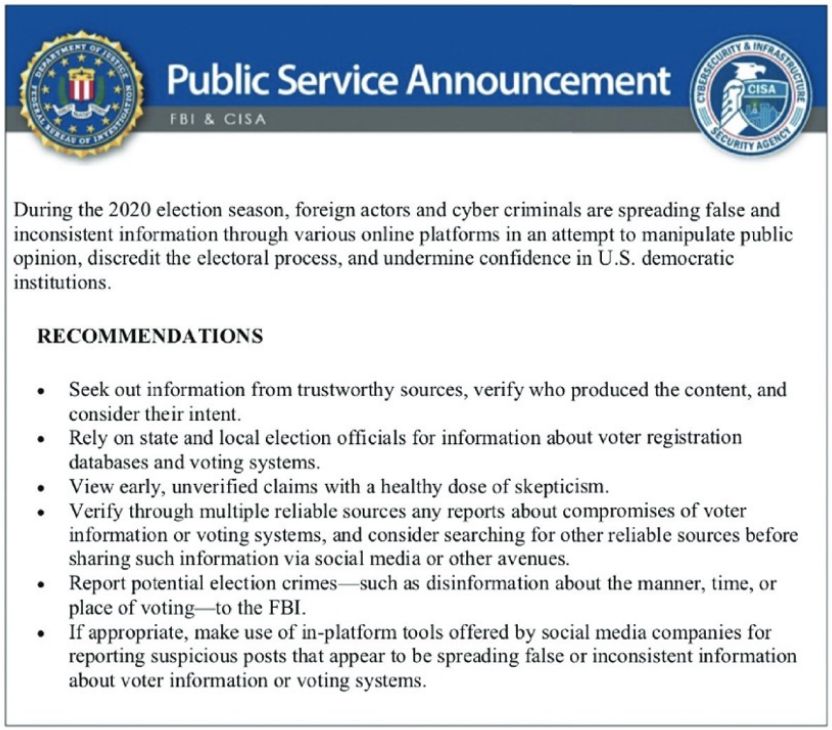


Awareness & Education

Media Literacy (24 studies)

Public warnings about propaganda (19)

Fact Checking (14)



Public Service Announcement

FBI & CISA

During the 2020 election season, foreign actors and cyber criminals are spreading false and inconsistent information through various online platforms in an attempt to manipulate public opinion, discredit the electoral process, and undermine confidence in U.S. democratic institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

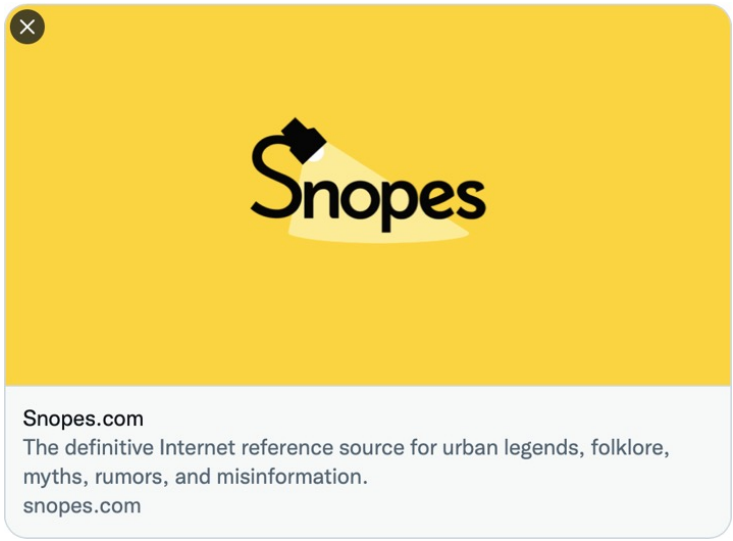
- Seek out information from trustworthy sources, verify who produced the content, and consider their intent.
- Rely on state and local election officials for information about voter registration databases and voting systems.
- View early, unverified claims with a healthy dose of skepticism.
- Verify through multiple reliable sources any reports about compromises of voter information or voting systems, and consider searching for other reliable sources before sharing such information via social media or other avenues.
- 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 voter information or voting systems.

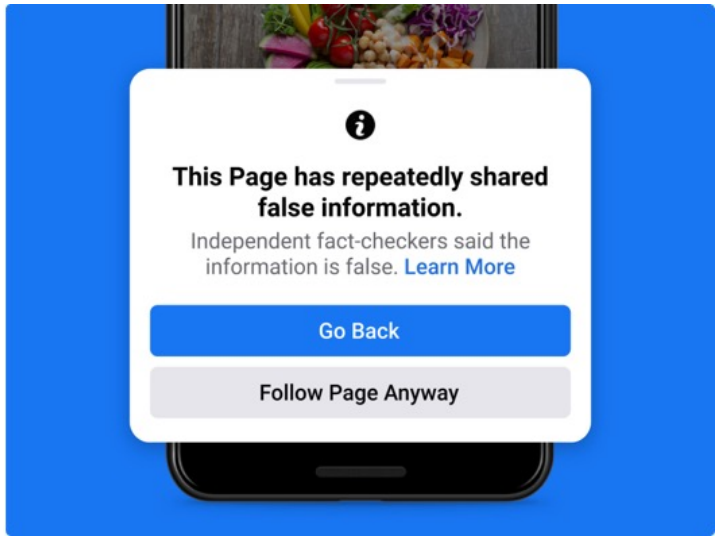
Awareness & Education

Media Literacy (24 studies)

Public warnings about propaganda (19)

Fact Checking (14)





Support Media

Support Media

Support Journalism (14 studies)

Support Foreign Broadcasts (11)

Support Online Content Creators (6)

Support Media

Support Journalism (14 studies)

Support Foreign Broadcasts (11)

Support Online Content Creators (6)

Support Media

Support Journalism (14 studies)

Support Foreign Broadcasts (11)

Support Online Content Creators (6)

RAND CORPORATION

Research Report

TODD C. HELMUS, KRYSTYNA MARCINEK, JULIA NETHING, DANIELLE SCHLANG, RYAN ANDREW BROWN

Tweeting Out Surveys to Pro-Ukraine Influencers

Exploring the Potential for Enlisting Support in the Information Fight Against Russia

Ukrainian populations that speak the Russian language or hold Russian heritage might be appealing targets for Russian propaganda. Previous RAND Corporation research from 2018 analyzing Russian-language Twitter feeds emanating from Eastern Europe identified two large and influential communities: one group of seemingly "pro-Ukraine activists" who oppose Russian influence and support Ukrainian democracy and another group of seemingly "pro-Russia activists" who disseminate Russian social media content and oppose an independent Ukraine. At the time, RAND researchers recommended that Ukraine and Western organizations work to enlist the pro-Ukraine activists in efforts to counter Russian propaganda.

The study outlined in this report used Twitter advertisements to solicit survey participation from the most-influential members of this pro-Ukraine activist community, influential members of the

KEY FINDINGS

- This study used Twitter advertisements to solicit survey participation from the most-influential members of pro-Ukraine and pro-Russia communities of Twitter users identified in an analysis of 25 million Russian language tweets emanating from Eastern Europe.
- Survey results suggest that pro-Ukraine activists are eager to counter Russian influence. Large percentages of respondents reported using Twitter to help counter Russian influence, and they take this activism to other social media accounts and offline channels, including talking to family members or friends and—to a lesser extent—participating in advocacy groups.
- At least half of the sample reported being open to receiving additional social media training, and most did not seem opposed to taking this support from the European Union, United States, or Ukraine. However, a hypothetical agreement to receive funding or participate in training does not mean that participants actually would do so.
- Following a brand ambassador model would help connect influential users with training and content. This model would involve reaching out, building an initial relationship, and establishing trust with these activists. It might be possible to help such users join together to advocate for a unified and democratic Ukraine, increase awareness of particular Russian influence campaigns, disseminate memes or video content addressing media literacy, or identify Russian bots and trolls.

Conclusions & Current Status

Platforms have made significant strides in fight against propaganda but more is needed

USG works to support overseas allies & has levied sanctions but has struggled in developing a coherent deterrence policy; A counter-propaganda strategy is noticeably absent

Only 14 states have mandated media literacy education into school curriculum

RAND
National Security Research Division
Questions?
Todd C. Helmus
helmus@rand.org