



Rumors, Lies and Attacks on Truth

Do's and Don'ts for Protecting Election Security
from Malicious or False Information

A message from Hart InterCivic

Thank you for taking steps to safeguard the security of your election process. As the provider of the most advanced election system available, Hart works tirelessly to support our core value, Advancing Democracy. **Together.**

For Hart, that also means taking on leadership roles in national organizations and councils supporting election security. Since 2020, I have served on the executive committee of the Department of Homeland Security's Elections Infrastructure – Sector Coordinating Council (EI-SCC), a group of election technology providers that advises DHS on issues of election security. Additionally, I am the co-chair of a DHS working group on disinformation in elections. I am proud to represent the needs of Hart's customers at this level.

We believe the tips in this whitepaper are an excellent resource for election officials and their jurisdictions protecting secure votes. Contact me anytime if you need more information.



Sam Derheimer
Director of Government Affairs, Hart InterCivic

Sadly, we know all too well that **election integrity is easily attacked.**

Bad actors create falsehoods and spread rumors that undermine confidence in the election process. Well-meaning citizens often share inauthentic stories through social media and word-of-mouth without realizing they are amplifying misinformation.

Foreign and domestic sources have targeted American voters with mis-, dis- and mal-information (MDM) in order to create doubt in the integrity of our national election system and build divisions among the American population.

Recognizing Threats and Falsehoods

- **Misinformation:** Falsehoods not created or shared to cause harm.
- **Disinformation:** Deliberately created to mislead, harm or manipulate.
- **Mal-information:** Based on fact, but used out of context to mislead, harm or manipulate.

Source: Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA)

When the truth is under attack, the result can be **chaos, confusion, and disruption** on a local, state, or national scale.

“It’s escalated to an unhealthy and dangerous level. We are trying to talk over others who have a further reach, more money, more power and basically are more interested in winning elections than American democracy, even though they know what they’re saying is not true.”

— Natalie Adona, Assistant Registrar of Voters in Nevada County, CA

This whitepaper will provide some first steps in understanding and **protecting election integrity** and provide current, credible and actionable resources.

“The better we understand disinformation and how it spreads, the better able we’ll be to respond.”

— Sam Derheimer, Director of Government Affairs, Hart InterCivic.

DON'T WAIT!

Today is the **best time** to plan and prepare your strategy for identifying, evaluating, and responding to MDM.

Don't feel compelled to respond to every incident. **Direct frequent questions to your FAQ**, previous statements, or Rumor Control page if you have prepared that groundwork.

When responding to disinformation, **never lead with the false claim**, or you may inadvertently amplify the disinformation. Instead, always lead with the truth, and then follow-up with the specific false claim you intend to refute.

Don't go it alone. **Help is available.** Contact Hart with questions, **800.223.4278.**

BE PROACTIVE

Start today to stop MDM and the harm it can cause. CISA recommends the TRUST Model strategy. Dig deeper [here](#), or navigate to this page www.cisa.gov/mdm-resource-library and search for “**MDM Planning and Incident Response Guide for Election Officials**”

Make **voter and public education a priority**. State and local officials should position themselves as accessible, reliable resources.

The [Election Integrity Partnership](#) recommends you:

- Establish trusted channels of communication with voters, such as a .gov website and use of both traditional and social media.
- Ensure that all votes cast are on auditable paper records and that efficient, effective, and transparent [post-election audits](#) are conducted after each election.

Develop trusted information-sharing channels. **Cultivate relationships with local journalists and media**. Invite them to learn more about your processes and make sure they know with whom to talk and how to contact your office when questionable information or rumors pop up.

Always **report MDM** and escalate to appropriate authorities. This might be local authorities, regional CISA offices, or other federal agencies. If you have questions, Hart can help you escalate.

Report MDM: Misinformation@cisecurity.org

If you or your staff receive threats against your physical safety, immediately notify local law enforcement. While Federal agencies like DHS should also be notified, they may not be able to respond instantly to local emergencies.

Consider a [Rumor Control](#) or FAQ page. By making transparent and authoritative information available, you provide a trusted resource to counter inaccurate narratives. Point to this resource proactively instead of reacting to every rumor.

CISA's [Rumor Control Page Start-Up Guide](#) is a good source with simple tips for your jurisdiction.

Real Life Rumor Control, examples

Rumor control can and should happen at all levels from local to state to national. Here are a few examples of the many approaches to fighting election-related MDM.

LOCAL

Maricopa County, AZ, officials created an Election Facts and Myth Busters page called [Just the Facts](#) to provide true election information in the face of widespread disinformation surrounding the 2020 vote.

STATE

In Kentucky, the Secretary of State's office maintains a straightforward Rumor Control page to "pre-bunk" some common election misconceptions and rumors.

General Disinformation

On the national level, CISA's Resilience Series graphic novels are a great example of a resource aimed at developing media literacy and critical thinking to counter disinformation on many topics.

The [Real Fake graphic novel](#) demonstrates how organized campaigns capitalize on political and social issues (especially around [election cycles](#)) to plant doubt in the minds of targeted audiences and steer opinions.

In the first of a series, protagonists Rachel and Andre find that a command center in Russia is using a network of troll farms to spread false narratives about elections to American voters. With the elections coming up, Rachel and Andre follow the trail of synthetic media and stop the cyber assailants from causing chaos, confusion and division.

More Help is Available

Don't be overwhelmed by MDM. Rely on the work that has already been done on behalf of the truth and election integrity. This list of resources provides a wealth of ideas and contacts to support you.

Hart InterCivic [election readiness](#) page.

CISA MDM Information: [MDM | CISA](#). For example, recently released [Disinformation Stops With You infographics](#) include five proactive steps you can use to stop the spread of disinformation.

[Election Integrity Project](#)

Report MDM email: Misinformation@cisecurity.org

Media Literacy help: [The National Association for Media Literacy Education](#) has members in every state that can work with election officials to develop media literacy content.



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