

AMERICA'S ADVERSARIES ALSO GET A VOTE



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ll eyes are now on next week's highly-anticipated, and hotly contested, national election.

In recent days, we've witnessed a flurry of media reports about how malign actors like Russia, China and Iran are seeking to shape U.S. political discourse ahead of that pivotal vote.

But what might happen after Americans go to the polls on November 5th? According to the U.S. intelligence community, we should be prepared for more of the same.

A [new report](#) from the National Intelligence Council (NIC), the analytical arm of the U.S.

intelligence community, has assessed the potential for foreign interference and influence in the period between election day and the next president's inauguration on January 20, 2025. Its conclusions are concerning. Today, "China, Iran, and Russia are better prepared to exploit opportunities to exert influence in the US" than in the past, the October 16th study says, and all three countries can be expected to do so after the November 5th vote.

In point of fact, post-election information operations targeting the U.S. are "highly likely," in the intelligence community's assessment. "Foreign adversaries will almost certainly conduct information operations after voting ends to create uncertainty and undermine the legitimacy of the election process," the NIC study lays out. This is liable to include the creation of "false narratives" or the amplification of claims of "election irregularities," all with the goal of undermining faith in U.S. democracy.

Moreover, those info ops are liable to be highly sophisticated. The NIC study notes that both Russia and Iran have relied on fake materials generated by artificial intelligence for propaganda and disinformation purposes in the past, and can be expected to do so in the future as well. Thus, the report notes, "[a] foreign actor could use AI-generated materials to amplify doubts about the election's fair conduct, such as false images of election officials taking part in activities to undermine the vote," or disseminate computer-aided propaganda via text, images or audio.

The objective isn't simply to advantage one candidate over another, although Moscow, Tehran and Beijing each seem to have clear preferences, for their own reasons (ranging from prospects for future aid to Ukraine to perceived backing of Israel to anticipated support of Taiwan). Rather, America's adversaries are united in a broader objective: to undermine trust in democratic institutions, sow

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discord among the American people, and deepen domestic distrust.

That, according to the NIC, is likely to entail generating misinformation and false narratives about election integrity. And here, the complicated nature of the U.S. political system works in their favor. “Complexities and variations across states – including voter demographics, how states process and count ballots, and when states start releasing unofficial results” can help actors like Russia, China and Iran to fuel conspiracy theories about electoral fraud and generate confusion among the general public, the study points out.

The bottom line, in other words, is that today’s authoritarians are already busy hacking American democracy – and they’re not liable to stop after Election Day. If anything, we can expect their activities to intensify, as they try to influence the next President’s foreign policy agenda, constrain his or her political options, and otherwise shape the global informational environment in their own favor.

In today’s hyper-partisan political environment, where trust is in distinctly short supply, that’s an important warning for the U.S. public to heed. It is also a topic that needs to become a clear priority for the next President, whoever ends up claiming that mantle after Tuesday. That’s because the informational threat to American democracy is very real, and a distinctly bipartisan issue.



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