



Department for
Digital, Culture,
Media & Sport

Counter Disinformation Unit

Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport
(DCMS)

Counter Disinformation

Defining the Problem

“**Disinformation** is the **deliberate** creation and dissemination of false and/or manipulated information that is **intended to deceive and mislead audiences**, either for the purposes of **causing harm, or for political, personal or financial gain.**”

“**Misinformation** refers to **inadvertently** spreading false information”

Cross-Departmental Counter-Disinformation Unit

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The DCMS led-Counter Disinformation Unit works across Departmental boundaries and is mandated to provide the most **comprehensive picture possible about the extent, scope and impact** of disinformation during times of heightened risk by **bringing all the relevant information into one place**.

We've previously stood up an operational response to counter disinformation during the 2019 European elections, the 2019 UK General Election, and the local and devolved UK elections in May of this year.

We've been stood up since March last year in response to Covid-19.

The objectives of a dedicated coordination structure are to provide:



Fuller picture of disinformation threats than that provided by individual teams



A process which enables rapid sharing of information



Support formulation of a coordinated Government response

The CDU is a cross-Departmental system

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Home Office
 Disinformation
 Analysis Team (DAT)
*Analyses the domestic
 implications of
 disinformation*

**Foreign,
 Commonwealth and
 Development Office**
 Open Source Unit (OSU)
*Foreign disinformation
 activity*

**External Commercial
 Provider**
*Social media monitoring
 analysis*

Cabinet Office
 Rapid Response Unit
 (RRU)
*Monitoring & analysis on
 narratives gaining traction*

Monitoring and Analysis

Agencies



Reporting and Insight

Ministers

**Senior
 Responsible
 Owner**

**Cabinet Office
 National Security Unit**

**Other Government
 Departments**
 e.g. Health

**Cabinet Office
 National Security
 Communications
 Team (NSCT)**



May 2021 elections

Devolved and local elections across the UK

“Categories” of mis/disinformation used during May 2021 Election

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Intent is different, but impact on audience can be as great.

Disinformation

Misinformation

Risk to Democratic Processes

Risk to Public Order and Public Safety

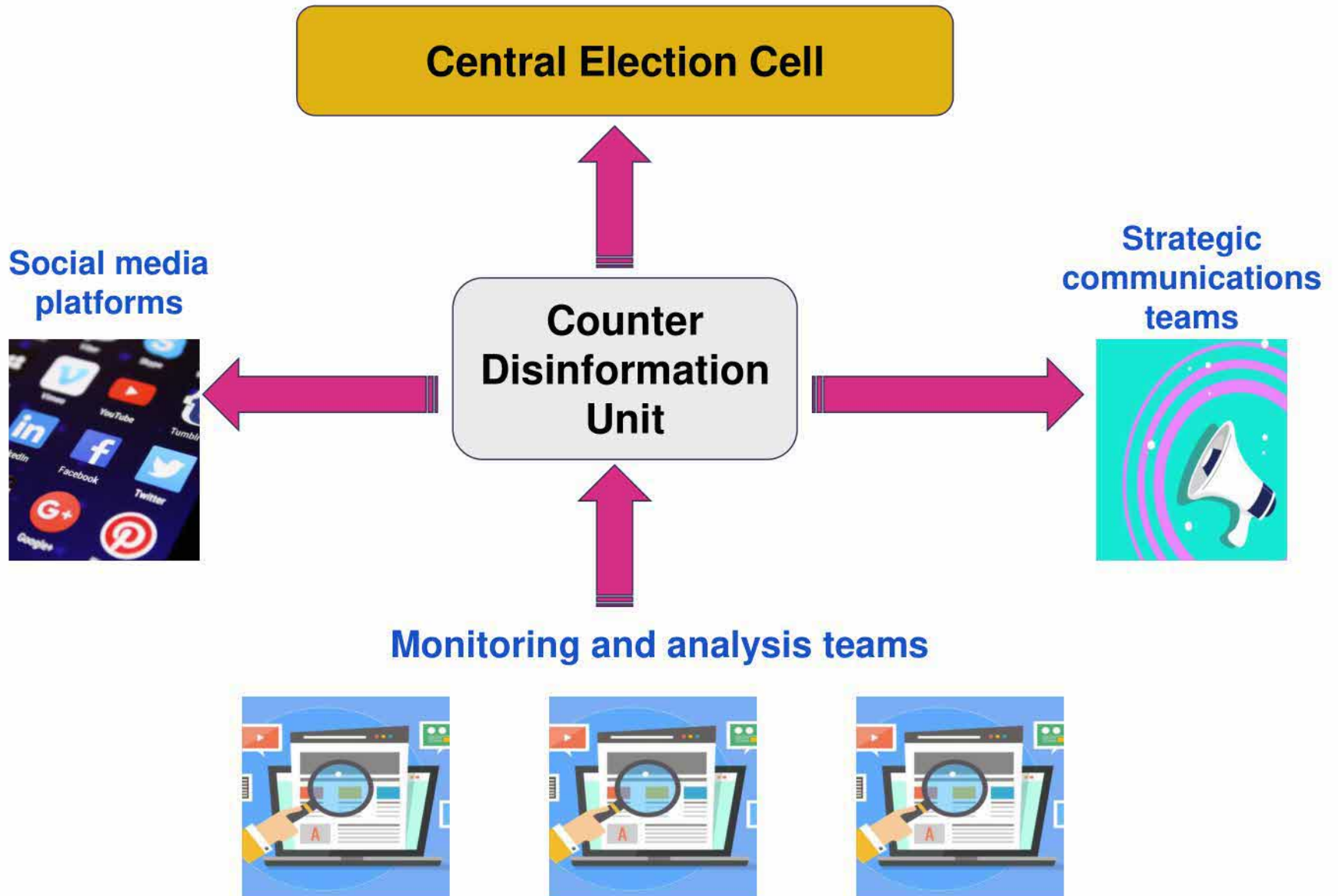
Risk to National Security

Suspected foreign interference

Covid-19

Targeting Minority and Vulnerable Groups

Coordinated structure working across Government during elections



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Alleged Iranian interference in Scottish election

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- Taken from a yet-to be published report from the Henry Jackson Society report;
- Didn't align with our monitoring;
- Discussed with social media platforms who found no evidence;
- Once we obtained the report, conclusions of active interference in May elections weren't supported by any current evidence but based on assumptions of past behaviour;
- Gained little traction on social, print or broadcast media;
- Prepared for possible 'unfair result' type narratives post election;
- No major impact.

Iran 'meddling in Scots election'

Voters targeted by fake accounts impersonating independence supporters, think tank claims

Iranian-backed think tank claims to have uncovered evidence of Iranian meddling in the Scottish parliamentary elections set for a "breathless" second Scottish independence referendum.

The report, shared with The Times, concludes: "Iran has shown itself to be a country that engages in Russian-style disinformation campaigns, repeatedly establishing fake websites and internet accounts in an effort to disrupt the political systems of liberal democracies."

"Judged within this context, Iran is almost certainly looking to disrupt our current elections, most likely those under way for the Scottish Assembly," Both Facebook and Twitter have stepped up efforts to identify and ban "coordinated inauthentic behaviour" by state actors. Most Iranian-related activity is targeted at Iran, Israel and Afghanistan.

The think tank's report said Iranian disinformation campaigns had been detected increasingly in Scotland over the past year.

The findings were part of a wider investigation into Iran's increasing attempts to interfere in foreign elections, it said, disinformation campaigns linked to Iran had gone under the radar compared with Russian interference but it was more afraid of Moscow when it came to digital interventions in other countries' elections.

The study claims that the disinformation campaigns are being coordinated by agents acting on behalf of the Guardian on page 4, set 2.

| IN THE NEWS | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
| Pressure on Johnson Douglas Ross, the Scottish Conservative, has said Boris Johnson should resign if he is found to have broken the ministerial code over his flat ownership. Page 4 | Clarke's Bafta links It has been suggested that the link between the Bafta chair and the film industry could have helped her to win the award, which she did. Page 7 | Apps against Isis British troops are fighting an information war with Islamic State in the northern Sahel as they try to counter jihadist propaganda. Page 14 | Le Pen sets out stall Marine Le Pen set the stage for a frenzied presidential election campaign next week in taking France towards chaos. Page 21 |
| Markets 'like casinos' Wall Street's volatile performance has led to a second trading day of "taking advantage of society's gambling instincts". Page 27 | Gerrymandering The House of Representatives is set to complete an ambitious campaign of redrawing the boundaries of US congressional districts, which are set to be in the hands of the House. Page 42 | | |



Department for
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Wider disinformation policy work

Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport
(DCMS)

Updates to UK legal approach: Online Safety Bill

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- The draft Online Safety Bill has now been published.
- The Bill delivers the government's commitment to make the UK the safest place in the world to be online whilst defending freedom of expression.
- The Online Safety regulatory framework includes a new legal duty of care on companies, which will be enforced by the appointed regulator, Ofcom.
- The duty of care will require companies to address harms to individuals on their online platforms, including misinformation and disinformation.

Online Safety Bill

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Measures

- The new laws will have **robust and proportionate measures** to deal with misinformation and disinformation that could **cause significant physical or psychological harm to an individual**, such as anti-vaccination content and falsehoods about COVID-19.

Category 1 Services

- Services with the largest audiences and a range of high risk features (known as 'Category 1 services'), including the **major social media platforms, will be required to set out what content**, including many types of misinformation and disinformation that harms individuals, **is and is not acceptable in their terms and conditions.**

Enforcement

- **Companies will need to enforce this effectively**, including removing content if they've made it clear it is not allowed on the platform. If what is appearing on their platforms doesn't match up with the promises made to users, **Ofcom will be able to take enforcement action.**

Online Safety Bill

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The Regulator

- This Bill will **give Ofcom the tools it needs to understand how effectively misinformation and disinformation is being addressed** through transparency reports, and to take action if needed. This will be the first time a regulator has been given these powers.

Additional Measures

- The regulatory framework will also include **additional measures to address disinformation**, including:
 - establishing an expert advisory committee;
 - provisions to boost people's resilience to disinformation through media literacy; and
 - supporting research on misinformation and disinformation.

Freedom of Expression & Democracy

- These legislative measures are **designed to uphold and protect freedom of expression online, and promote a thriving democracy**. Our approach is therefore proportionate to the risks mis/disinformation poses to users, whilst ensuring these protections are maintained.

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Counter-Disinformation Unit identifies harmful content



OPERATIONAL RESPONSE

Through trusted flagging relationships, flag content which violates terms of service or could be eligible for fact checking / labelling

BILATERAL APPROACH

This work also informs non-platform interventions, such as proactive and reactive communications.



STRATEGIC RESPONSE

Examination of platform policies and enforcement to determine whether they are fit for purpose and consideration of effectiveness other interventions such as promotion of authoritative information.

BILATERAL & MULTILATERAL APPROACH

Key Challenges

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Data access

There is currently an information asymmetry between the data that platforms hold and what we can access that needs to be addressed

Closed groups

Closed platforms and groups present a unique challenge, especially given the increased risk to minority groups

Ecosystem

New and emerging platforms such as Brand New Tube and Bitchute do not have explicit policies - users are exploiting loopholes to share videos on larger platforms

What is the Measuring Effective Interventions Framework?

- Developed in consultation with key stakeholders from industry, civil society and academia as part of the UK Government's COVID-19 Counter Disinformation Policy Forum.
- Platforms have introduced a range of interventions (e.g. increased fact checking and authoritative information centres) to respond to COVID-19 mis/disinformation.
- It is essential to understand how effective these measures are.
- Presently, platforms only provide limited data on content moderation, enforcement against accounts and fact-checking.
- There is little available to help us understand how user behaviour is changing, whether the risk posed to users is decreasing and which measures are driving this.
- The Framework is a solution. It seeks to build consensus on the best data and corresponding metrics for understanding whether platform interventions are working.

The benefits of the framework and an international approach...

- The framework is a crucial component in our multifaceted approach to tackling mis/disinformation.
- The data sought by the framework would enable large and small platforms to focus their resources in the right places, guiding a better targeted and more effective whole of industry response.
- There are also significant benefits to collaborating with international partners:
 - Clear message that the international community is prioritising this policy area, encouraging cooperation from platforms.
 - A consistent ask would support industry in efficiently implementing new systems and processes.
- ***So far, encouraging response from international partners. We would be pleased to share the framework with you and arrange a follow-up meeting to discuss this subject further.***



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Home Office Disinformation Analysis Team (DAT)

Home Office Disinformation Analysis Team

Home Office Disinformation Analysis Team analyses the domestic implications of disinformation:

- How it spreads online and offline;
- Which UK audiences are most vulnerable to it and why;
- If and how it is impacting attitudes and behaviours;
- and, which interventions are effective.

DAT has five main strands of activity:

1. Open source monitoring of domestic information environment to identify divisive narratives potentially exploitable by disinformation actors. Delivered in partnership with Oxford University's Oxford Internet Institute.
2. In-house open source investigations into emerging disinformation issues.
3. Primary research to identify domestic audiences most vulnerable to disinformation and potential interventions.
4. Working with academia and the private sector to develop innovative tools to better identify and analyse disinformation.
5. Discrete work with UKIC to understand disinformation activity targeted at the UK.



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Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

COUNTER DISINFORMATION AND MEDIA DEVELOPMENT

STRUCTURES IN THE FOREIGN, COMMONWEALTH &
DEVELOPMENT OFFICE TO TACKLE DISINFORMATION

STRUCTURES: Strategic communications, HMG Russia Unit



Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

OPEN SOURCE
UNIT

PROGRAMMES

INTERNATIONAL
ENGAGEMENT

CAMPAIGNS

INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

- International engagement with partners to counter disinformation.
 - Sharing ideas and open source intelligence
 - Building coalitions
 - Sharing lessons learned
- Exploring and delivering programmes and joint campaigns
- Multilateral cooperation to counter disinformation
 - IPCSD
 - CFI
 - G7 RRM

CAMPAIGNS



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

- Operate within a strategic communications framework creating outputs to:
 - Increase reputational cost to hostile states for conducting malign activity
 - Increase the resilience of audiences
 - Build support for cooperation
- Translate policy objectives into communications objectives
- Audience insight
- Counter brand approach to messaging
- The Response Options Playbook

Counter Disinformation and Media Development Programme



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

- Launched in 2016.
- FY 2021-22: £29.8m
- Supports NSC Russia Strategy objective to “protect national security by reducing the harm to democracy and the rules-based international order caused by Russia’s information operations”.
- Supports a whole-of-society approach aimed at changing Russia’s cost benefit analysis by
 - Strengthening the Information Environment
 - Increasing Resilience to Disinformation
 - Building a Strong UK and Western Response
- Operates across the Baltic States, Eastern Neighbourhood, Central Europe and the NATO space.
- Projects support partner governments, media organisations, civil society to promote independent media, collect open-source information and, where appropriate, to expose disinformation.

CDMD: Theory of Change Overview

Overall strategy – reduce disinfo impact on sovereignty, democracy and RBIS

Deter Hostile State Actors from using IO to:

- Undermine State Sovereignty
- Undermine faith in Western-style democracy
- Undermine adherence to the RBIS

Impacts

1. Consumption of disinformation is reduced in Programme Audiences

2. Consumption of quality, independent media is increased

3. Exploitable Social Fractures are Reduced

4. Increased support for liberal democratic values

5. Responses to Hostile State information operations are coordinated and impactful

Outcomes

1. General public more resilient to disinformation

5. Investigative journalism exposes corruption and stimulates debate

9. Audiences reduce identification with pre-existing social biases

11. Democratic events and processes more resilient to disinformation

15. Partner countries increase capacity and willingness to counter IO

2. Vulnerable audiences more resilient to disinformation

6. Increased engagement with content presenting gender equality

10. Alleviating groups' standing grievances with Partner governments

12. Support for free and fair elections increased

16. Partner countries have increased strat and crisis comms capability

3. Technology developed to reduce the spread of disinformation

7. Balanced, independent media available for vulnerable audiences

13. Support for gender equality in political processes increases

17. Strong partnerships and networks against disinformation supported

4. Partner governments take action against disinformation

8. Increased audience share amongst general public for independent media

14. Vulnerable audiences are meaningfully engaged in democratic discourse

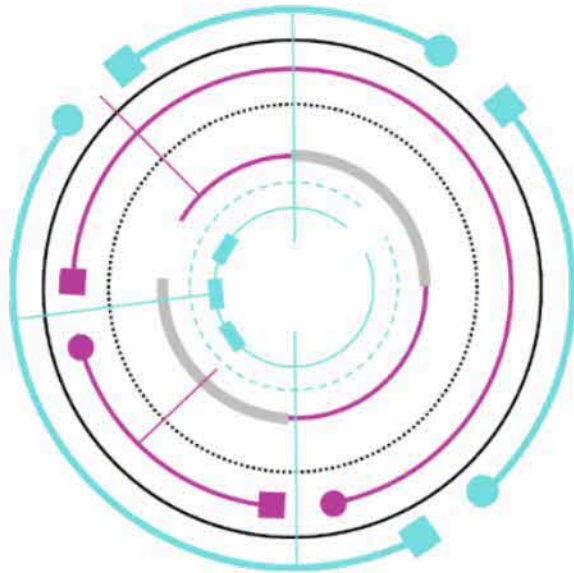
All-outcome enablers: *Understand, Campaigns, International Engagement, Security*



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office



Overview of the Open Source Unit (OSU)



Established in 2016 to transform how the FCDO does diplomacy through the better use of open source data

OSU brings together three specialisms to tackle foreign policy priorities:

- Data Science
- Behavioural Science
- Open Source Intelligence



Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office



What is the OSU?

- The OSU helps the FCDO and our partners make use of open source analysis to understand the world we operate in, develop policy, respond to international events, further UK National Security priorities by verifying Hybrid Threats, and evidence our impact.
- Policy agnostic capability unique in UK government and recognised by our allies and partners as at the cutting edge for the way the OSU brings together pillars of expertise with thematic and language specialism



NOV 2015
Strategic
Defence and
Security
Review [SDSR]

MAY 2016
Future
FCO
Review

AUG 2016
Open
Source Unit
Founded

Jan 2018
Salisbury
Attacks

Oct 2018
Expansi
on and
research

May 2019
Europe
an
Election

Dec 2019
UK
General
Election

March 2020
Covid
response



Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office



Objective Uphold Rule of Law and International Norms

State Agnostic

To understand the wider international threat
To remain aware of the domestic threat

Threat Agnostic

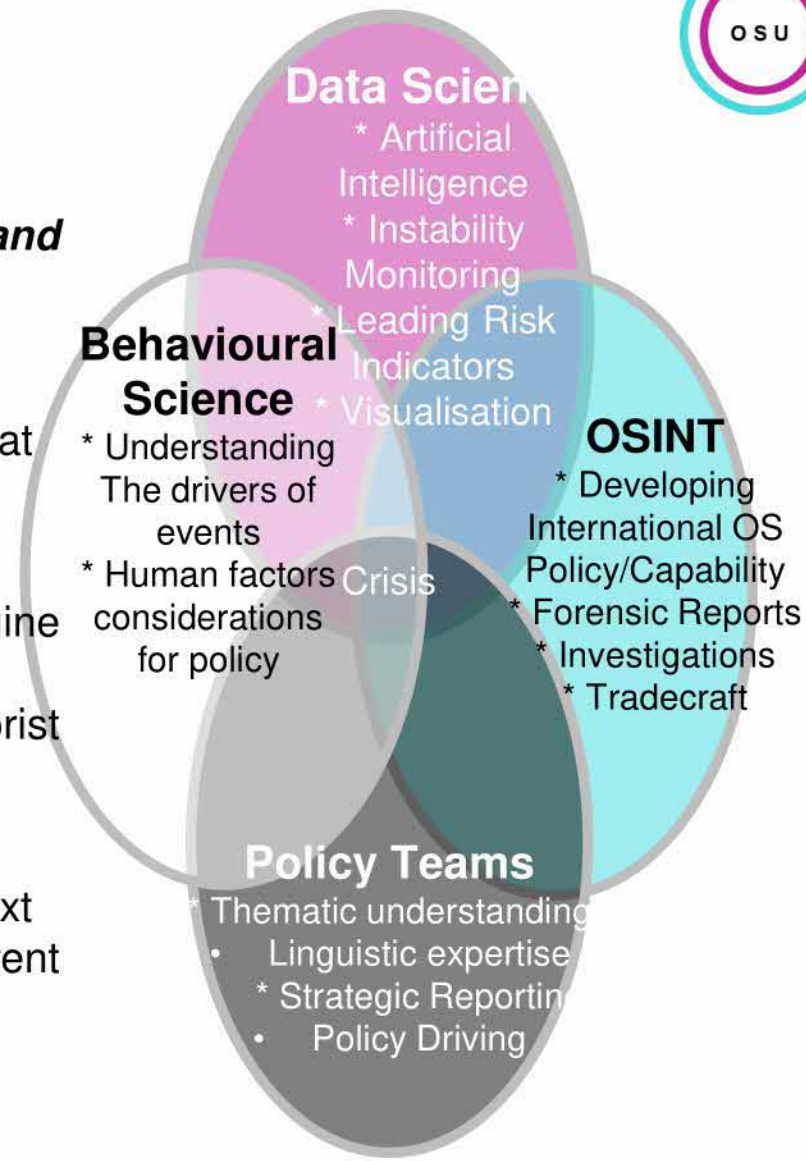
Disaggregate malign intent from genuine public voices
Incorporate evidence of extremist/terrorist networks

Hybrid Threats

Places disinformation within a wider context
Provide accountable and transparent assessments

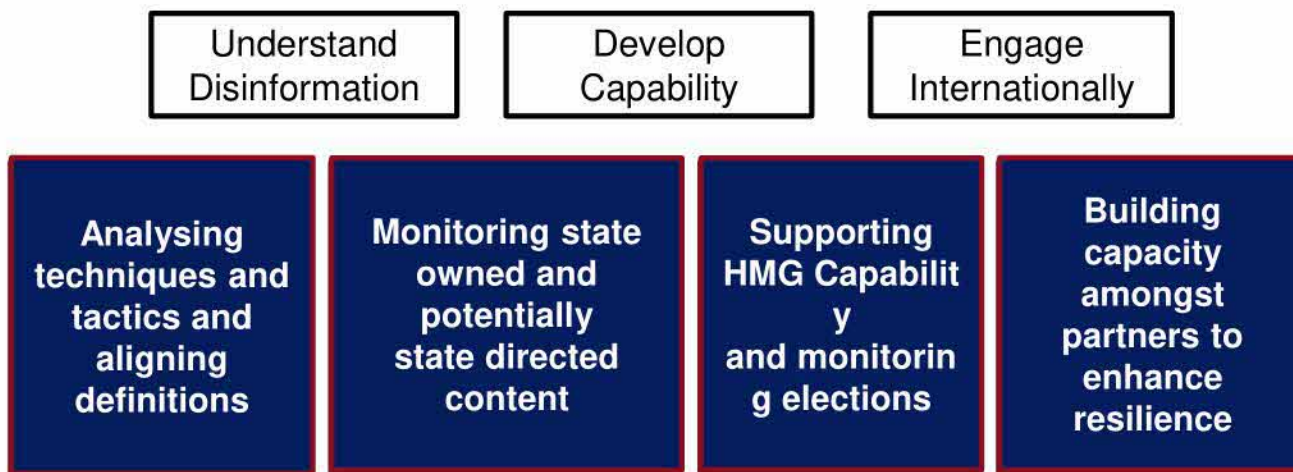
Capacity Building

UK and International



Understanding Disinformation

The **Counter Disinformation Cell** was established in November 2018. It is funded by the Conflict Stability, and Security Fund (HMG Russia Unit) with a specific mandate to analyse Hostile State Information Operations and disinformation with an international component.



Tactics: Using Influencers

Vaccine trials under political pressure to deliver

Published 2 years ago on September 23, 2020
By James Wilson



Source: EUReporter (EUReporter.co), 23 September. Archived screenshot from 25 September



Influencers Say They Were Urged to Criticize Pfizer Vaccine

A disinformation effort to reduce public confidence in Covid-19 vaccines tried to enroll social media commentators in France and Germany.



Техническое задание для блогера некоммерческая реклама

Что рекламируем?

Мы общественная организация по делам молодежи. Мы хотим предостеречь детей от участия в несогласованных акциях.

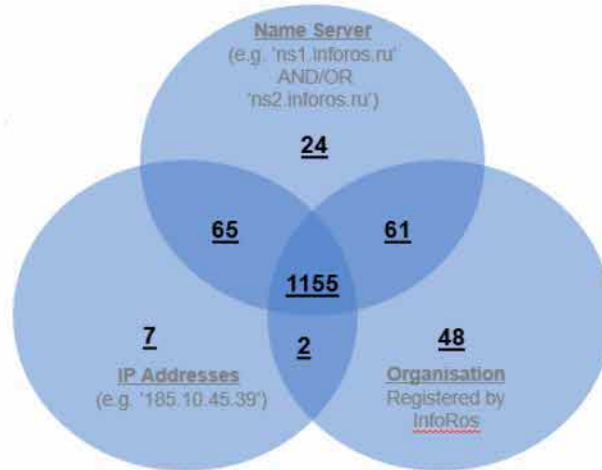
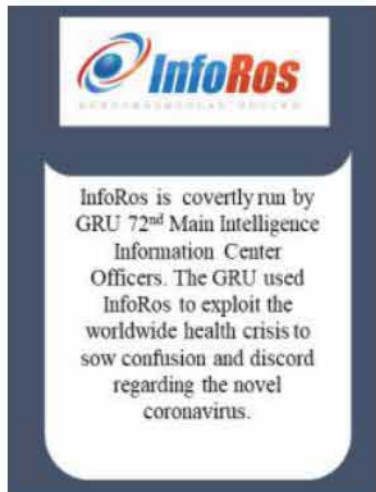
Что важно рассказать в видео?

1. В целом всё это надоело, очень устали от этого шума с Навальным. Невозможно сидеть в тиктоке, один Навальный!
2. Детей вытаскили и за ними прятались.
3. Провоцировали полицию, это было явно не мирное шествие
4. Собралось мало людей.

Один любой тезис надо использовать в рекламе. Можете сделать в шуточной форме. **НЕЛЬЗЯ ГОВОРИТЬ СЛОВО В СЛОВО!!!**

Tactics: Understanding Sources

InfoRos is a disinformation outlet, sanctioned on 15 April 2021 for ties to Russian intelligence.



In October 2019, four news outlets affiliated with the IRA announced that they had formed the Patriot Media Group



1 **Federal News Agency (FAN)**

2 **Nation News (Narodniye Novosti)**



3 **Politics Today (Politika Segodnya)**



4 **Economics Today (Ekonomika Segodnya)**

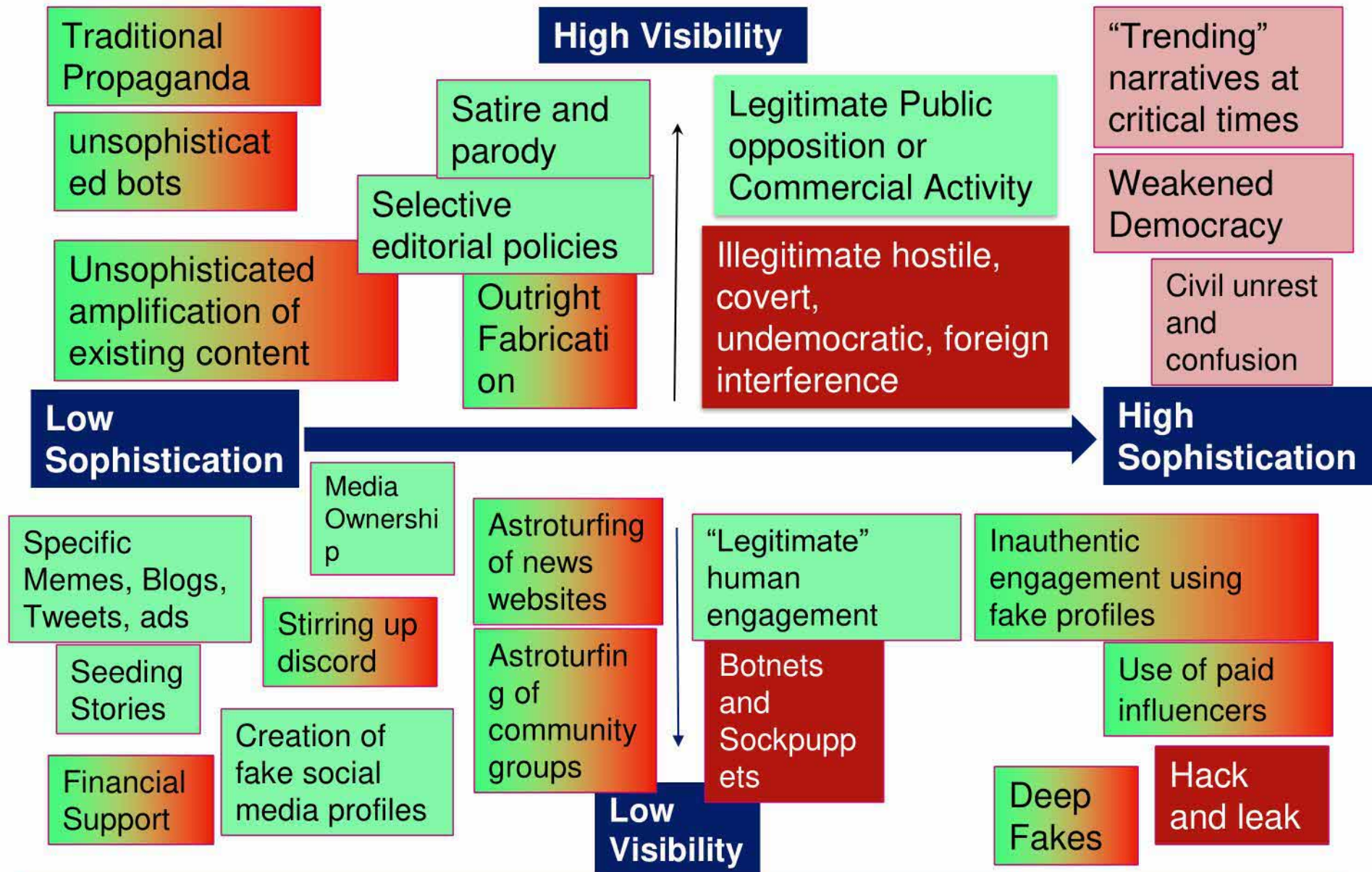


5 **PolitRussia**

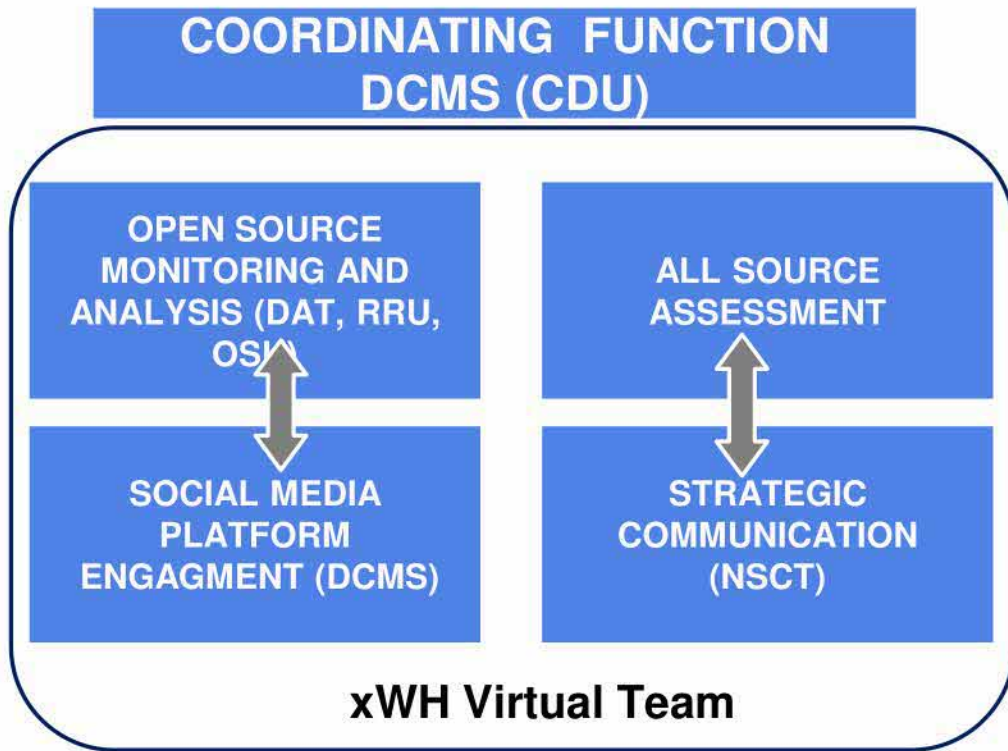


OSU has identified 1,362 domains linked to InfoRos based on forensic website infrastructure analysis

Understanding Other Tactics



Monitoring: Narratives, Elections and Events



WANT TO LEAVE THE EU ASAP?

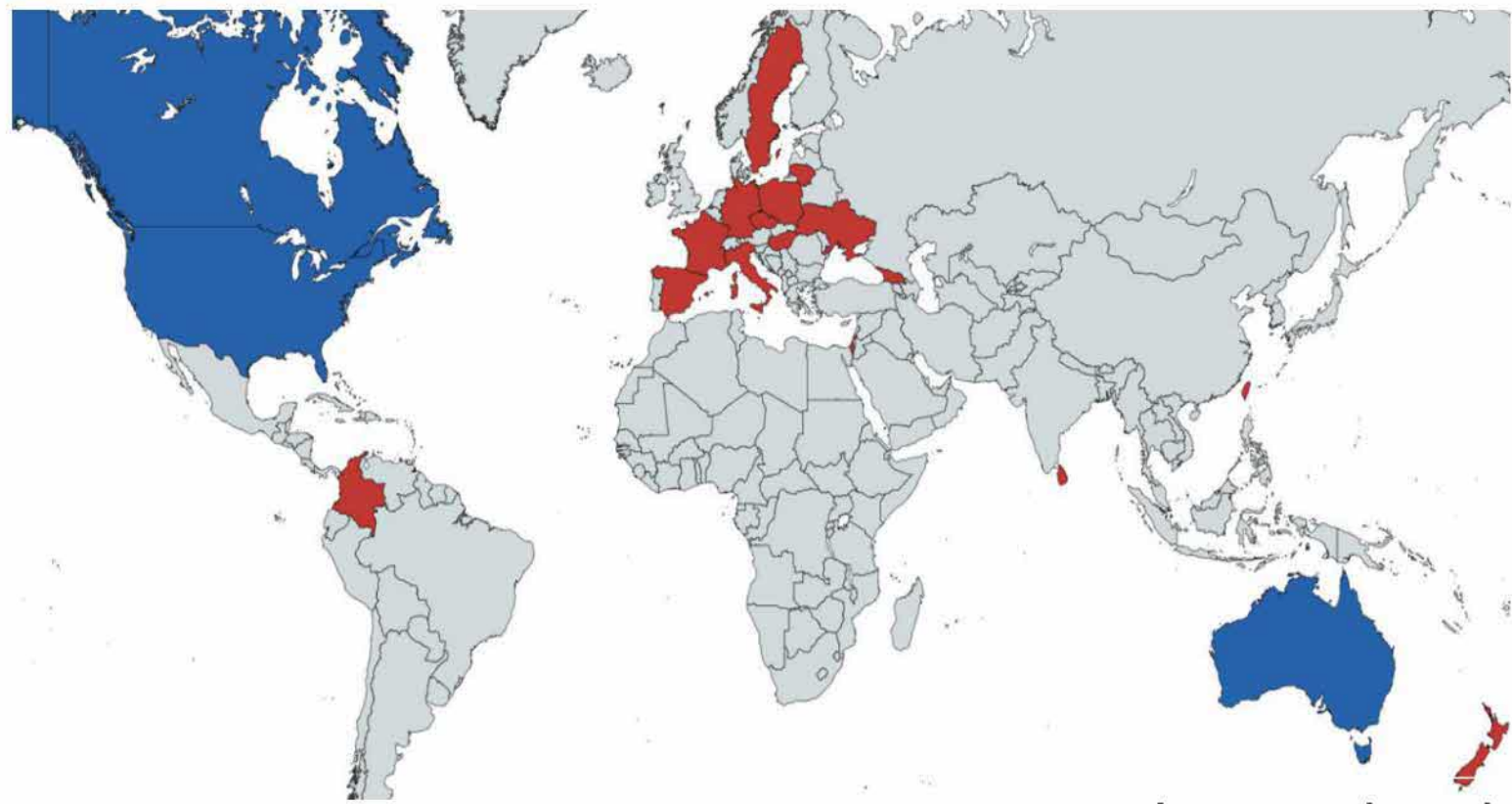
CAN'T DECIDE WHICH WAY TO VOTE?

PUT YOUR X IN BOTH THE CONSERVATIVE AND BREXIT PARTY BOXES

MAKE DAMN SURE WE LEAVE!



International Engagement



Joint working
With US,
Canada,
Australia

Bilateral
engagement with
20+ countries

International training
and capability



Training, report
sharing



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Digital, Culture,
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Any questions?