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Minority Communities: Targets for Disinformation Ahead of 2020 Election

In the run up to the 2020 Presidential Election, state-sponsored disinformation campaigns will likely feature racially and culturally divisive content targeting minority communities—tactics that were employed successfully in 2016. These disinformation campaigns are designed to exploit the grievances of minority communities to incite feelings of paranoia or anger. In 2016, Russian disinformation campaigns targeted blacks on social media more than any other group to amplify existing social tensions and discourage blacks from voting.

- On October 21, Facebook announced it removed 50 Instagram accounts, nine of which posed as supporters of “black activism” and some which targeted specific 2020 candidates. The accounts were believed to be linked to the Internet Research Agency (IRA), Russia’s disinformation “factory” that was exposed in 2016.
- In 2017, IRA advertisements on social media focused heavily on immigration issues—including topics such as deportation and mistreatment of migrants—to provoke anger among supporters on both sides of the debate. The campaign also tried to dissuade Hispanic American voters by building distrust and cynicism toward the US political system.



Screenshot of post from an IRA-operated Instagram account recently removed (Source: Graphika)

It is uncertain if we can attribute the decline in black voter turnout in 2016—for the first time in 20 years in a presidential election—to Russia’s racially-focused disinformation campaign. However, of the 81 Facebook pages the IRA operated, 30 targeted black audiences and the majority of the 133 IRA-operated Instagram accounts also targeted the black community.

- One popular IRA-run account that called itself, “Blacktivist,” on Facebook and Twitter promoted voter disengagement, advocated for votes directed toward third-party candidates, and included content discouraging voting such as, “not voting is a way to exercise our rights.” The account received 4.6 million likes and 4.8 million shares on Facebook alone.

Members of the public are encouraged to exercise caution when online—particularly when it comes to information regarding elections and voting. Check out tips on [how to detect disinformation campaigns](#) and learn more about disinformation at ncrintel.org.