

# Point: The United States Is Already Combating Foreign Interference in Elections

## Thesis

The United States is already protecting its elections from foreign actors, and a combination of private, state, and federal initiatives already reduced the potential for foreign influence approaching the 2020 election. More aggressive measures that might impact election interference risk infringing on the rights of free speech.

## Talking Points

- Congress has instituted more aggressive sanctions on Russia and has facilitated a national emergency declaration.
- Social media companies have committed to more aggressive policing of content shared through their networks.
- Government efforts to combat interference should not impinge on the right of free speech and social engagement.

## Summary

Although the election interference scandal of 2016 resulted in advantages for the Donald Trump campaign, the interference provided little benefit to Russia, some observers say. After the scandal began, *Washington Post* commentator Adam Taylor noted, Congress increased economic sanctions initiated under the Barack Obama administration and reported that by April 2019, seven hundred Russian people and companies had been targeted by US sanctions. Furthermore, in September 2018 the Trump administration issued a national emergency declaration over foreign interference in US elections and, the following September, announced that the emergency declaration would be extended. The administration of President Joe Biden then further extended the declaration in 2021 and 2022. Additionally, between 2020 and 2022, following the 2020 election, the Treasury continued to issue sanctions against multiple Russian individual and group actors accused of attempts at election interference.

Furthermore, efforts to stem the tide of election interference have extended into the private sector as well. Facebook and Twitter worked together in 2018 and early 2019 to remove thousands of accounts linked to foreign governments, including those in Russia, Iran, Venezuela, and Bangladesh, looking to influence the 2018 midterm congressional elections. Twitter announced in January 2019 that the company had eliminated 418 Russian

troll accounts, many of which were in an early stage of building an audience and were far less well developed than those used in the 2016 election interference effort. In addition, in October 2019 Facebook announced that it had suspended Instagram app accounts and Facebook accounts connected to Russian and Iranian troll farms. Both before and after the 2020 election, sites such as Facebook and Twitter highlighted continued efforts such as labeling posts containing potential misinformation or content meant to incite violence or interference as well as deleting several fake accounts.

More aggressive efforts than these to curtail electoral interference risks limiting free speech and expression. Under the United States Constitution, any individual visiting the United States, whether a citizen or not, is protected by the First Amendment protections of free speech and expression. Federal efforts to limit the speech of US visitors or citizens promoting misinformation has been seen by some critics as a violation of those protections. Prominent criminal defense attorney Marina Medvin, for instance, argued in *Forbes* in 2019 that it is unconstitutional to prohibit political speech, even if it is connected to a noncitizen.

## Ponder This

- The author has presented the fundamental positions for this perspective in the debate. Outline the strengths and weaknesses of each perspective.
- If asked to begin forming an argument for this position, what sources would you need to build your case? What fundamental information do you need? What opinion leaders in this debate would you look to in solidifying your argument?
- What are the weakest aspects of the position outlined by the author? How might those weaker arguments help you prepare a counterargument?
- What additional Talking Points could you add to support this position?

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