

Disinformation Repeat Offenders: Case of the 2020 US Election

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AAAS Panel: Narratives, Tech & Countering Disinformation, Feb 2022

@emmaspiro



CENTER FOR AN INFORMED PUBLIC

UNIVERSITY *of* WASHINGTON



Our Mission

Our mission is to marshal the collective resources of a world-class, **public** research university, embedded within local communities, to **resist strategic misinformation, promote an informed society, and strengthen democratic discourse.**

Misinformation Research

Rumors, misinformation, and disinformation are a significant part of our information landscape.

Not all misinformation is bad.

Mis/disinformation Research: What We Know

- **Language** for talking about these problems; words carry assumptions about how information spreads, who spreads it and why, and what solutions are possible, let alone desirable.
- We are **all vulnerable** to misinformation.
- We need to understand that both misinformation and disinformation are **participatory phenomena**.

I TOLD Y'ALL! Shark on the highway in New Jersey!!!!
@MaxTheWanted would appreciate this. #HurricaneSandy
pic.twitter.com/kaYMjWzT



29 Oct 12

← Reply ↻ Retweet ★ Favorite

I TOLD Y'ALL! Shark on the highway in New Jersey!!!!
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29 Oct 12

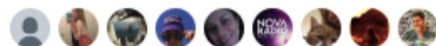
← Reply ↻ Retweet ★ Favorite

Believe it or not, this is a shark on the
freeway in Houston, Texas. #HurricaneHarvy



1:00 AM - 28 Aug 2017

88,866 Retweets 149,501 Likes





Lord Single Malt

@Singlemaltfiend

Follow



This shark has been in every major hurricane and flood for 5 years. How does he not have a job as a field reporter?



Maury Page @mopage19

A shark photographed on I-75 just outside of Naples, FL

This is insane.

3:17 PM - 10 Sep 2017

7,623 Retweets 18,940 Likes



@Singlemaltfiend / Twitter / Via Twitter: @Singlemaltfiend



Stephen Port

@realstephenport

Follow



Have we considered that this shark may just be trying to find its family? Matthew. Sandy. Harvey. Now Irma. [#GetHimHome](#)



Maury Page @mopage19

A shark photographed on I-75 just outside of Naples, FL

This is insane.

10:41 AM - 11 Sep 2017 from [Ohio, USA](#)

2 Likes



When and why are we vulnerable to misinformation?

We are especially vulnerable during crisis events.

- Uncertainty. Anxiety.
- Collective sensemaking can go awry.

“Exploiters” may target these events as opportunities.

**People share misinformation because
they are trying to help.**

INFORMATION DISORDER: TRUMPET OF AMPLIFICATION



Disinformation

False or misleading information that is **purposefully** seeded and/or spread for a specific objective -- e.g. financial, political, or reputational.

Disinformation

Often **built around a kernel of truth**, but layered with distortions or exaggerations.

Functions as a campaign -- as set of information actions -- rather than a single piece of content.

The Election Integrity Partnership



Stanford | Internet Observatory
Cyber Policy Center

Graphika



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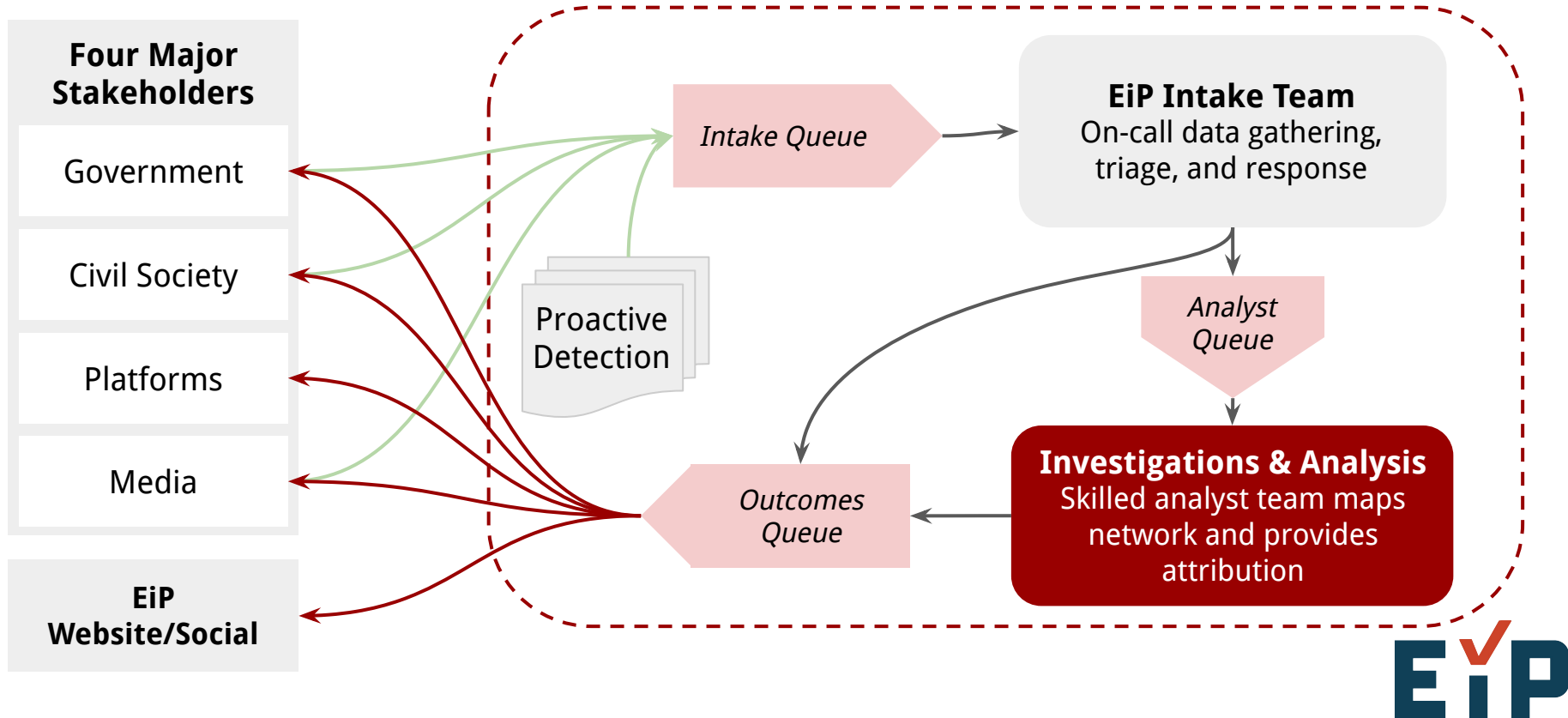
A coalition of research entities focused on supporting **real-time information exchange** between the research community, election officials, government agencies, civil society organizations, and social media platforms.

Our objective was to **detect and mitigate attempts to deter voting or delegitimize election results.**

<https://www.eipartnership.net/>



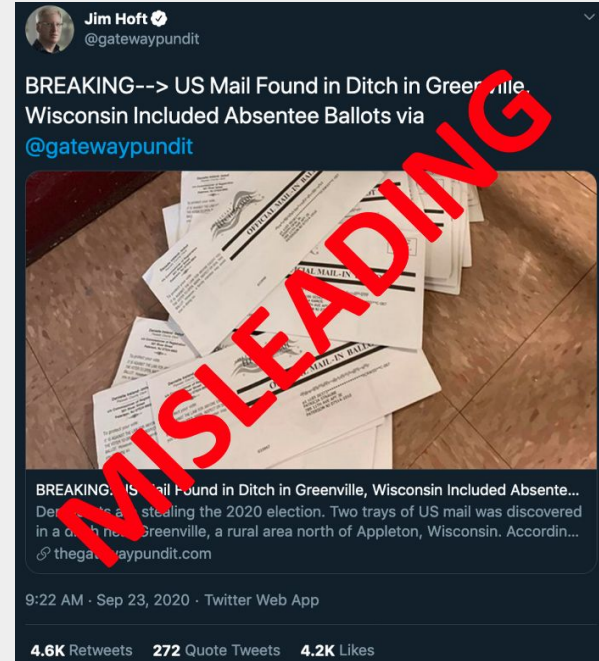
EiP Internal Workflow



What to Expect on Election Night and Days After

Election Day Challenges	Post-Election Uncertainty	Red Waves and Blue Shifts
Voters and Poll Observers Document Their Experiences	Attempts to Sow Confusion & Doubt about Results	Attempts to Delegitimize Shifts in Vote Share
Long Lines, Protests & COVID-19 Scares (Exploited to Deter Voting)	Assembling "Evidence" to Fit False Narratives of Voter Fraud	
Videos, Images, and Stories of Mistreated Ballots & Malfunctioning	Shaping & Amplification of Disenfranchisement Narratives	Missing/Found Ballots are Framed as Voter Fraud
Out of Context Images and Videos Mixed with Real Content	Bad Statistics & Premature Declarations of Victory (Used to Sow Doubt and Question Shifts)	
Minor Discrepancies Overemphasized Online and in the Media		Legal Complaints and Affidavits Filed
Foreign Interference Claims of Foreign Interference Used to Question Results		

Emerging Narratives Around ‘Mail Dumping’





A postal worker is under fire after video surfaced of her allegedly tossing mail into a Bond Hill dumpster.

Image from a mail-dumping incident from Bond Hill, Ohio, August 2014. ([Source](#))



Image from a mail-dumping incident in Petersburg, Virginia, February 2018. ([Source](#))

Contextualizing Mail Dumping

How Mail Dumping Incidents are Exploited

- Falsely assigning intent
- Exaggerate impact
- Falsely framing the date
- Altering locale
- Strategic amplification

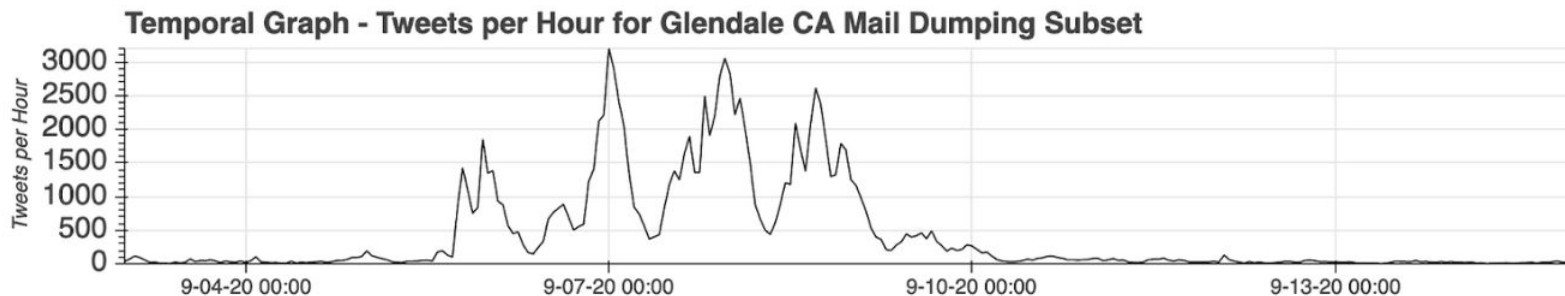


Figure 1. Temporal Graph of the Glendale CA Mail Dumping Subset

Case 1: Mail Dumping in Glendale, CA (9.3.2020)



Emerging Narratives Around ‘Mail Dumping’

Glendale, CA Mail Dump
September 4, 2020

Conservative Follow Networks

Mainstream
Liberal

•

Liberal Follow
Networks

Mainstream Conservative

Case 1: Mail Dumping in Glendale, CA (9.3.2020)



Case 2: Mail in a Ditch in Greenville, WI (9.232020)



Emerging Narratives Around 'Mail Dumping'

Greenville, WI Mail Dump
September 23, 2020

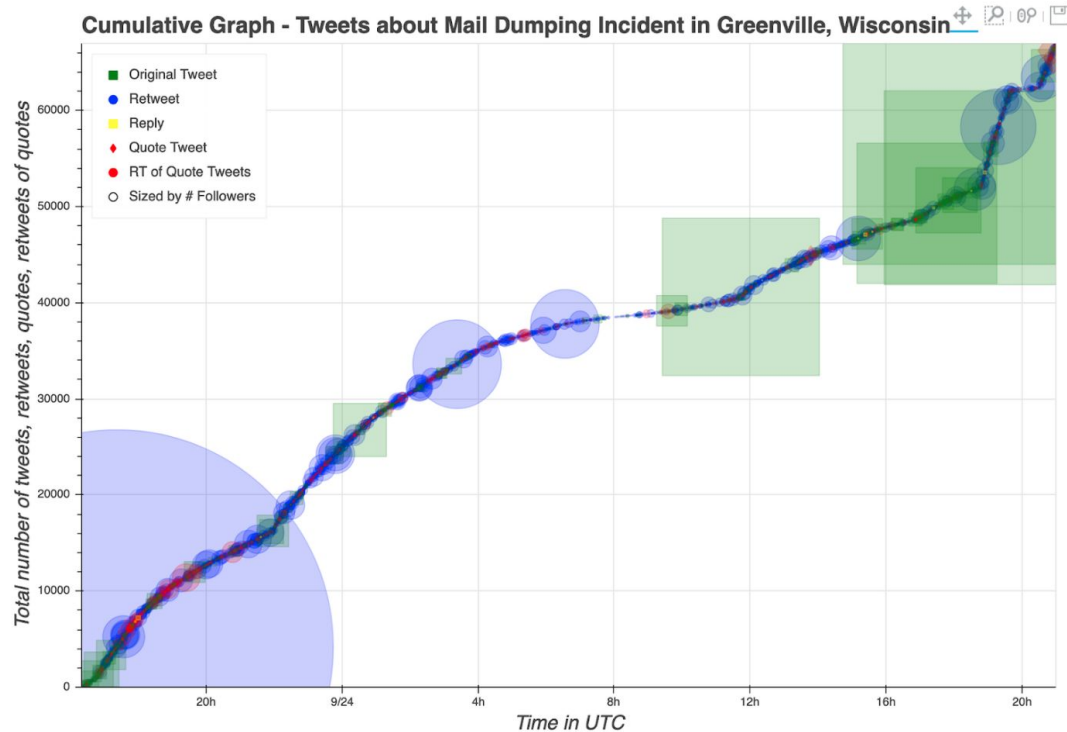
Mainstream
Liberal

Conservative Follow Networks

Liberal Follow
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Mainstream Conservative

Emerging Narratives Around 'Mail Dumping'



<http://faculty.washington.edu/kstarbi/DitchingMail-WI.html>

Emerging Narratives Around ‘Mail Dumping’

Website (Domain)	# Tweets linking to Domain
www.thegatewaypundit.com	24554
www.breitbart.com	13775
www.washingtonexaminer.com	10776
saraacarter.com	2098
www.westernjournal.com	946
www.msn.com	588
breaking911.com	585
www.foxnews.com	540
dailycaller.com	501
fox11online.com	479

Table 2: Most Tweeted Domains in the Greenville WI Mail Ditching Dataset

Repeat Offenders: Voting Misinfo on Twitter

User Name	Handle	Followers	Total RTs	Total Cases
Anonymized, Pro-Trump account	*****	391.7K	21609	8
Charlie Kirk	charliekirk11	1.8M	97328	6
Tom Fitton	TomFitton	1.2M	64018	6
Chuck Calleso	ChuckCalleso	304.9K	56530	6
Josh Caplan	joshdcaplan	83.5K	37949	6
Jim Hoft	gatewaypundit	340.6K	22442	6
Breitbart News	BreitbartNews	1.5M	29892	5
James Woods	RealJamesWoods	2.6M	27331	5
Donald J. Trump	realDonaldTrump	87.3M	195071	4
Breaking911	Breaking911	818.8K	26891	4
John Solomon	jsolomonReports	758.5K	9550	4
Anonymized, Pro-Trump account	*****	113.4K	5703	4
Sean Hannity	seanhannity	5.3M	32301	3
Benny	bennyjohnson	357.5K	31047	3
Eric Trump	EricTrump	4.3M	25448	3
Anonymized, Religious + Patriot account	*****	230.5K	12271	3
Omar Navarro	RealOmarNavarro	301K	5838	3
Anonymized, QAnon account, now suspended	*****	281.1K	5387	3
Anonymized, Pro-Trump account	*****	50.4K	5095	3
Anonymized, Pro-Trump account	*****	131.3K	4952	3

Table 1: Twitter accounts that repeatedly shared misleading information about mail-in voting and voter fraud. Non-verified users, with the exception of John Solomon (manager of Just The News), are anonymized.

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Repeat Offenders: Voting Misinformation on Twitter in the 2020 United States Election

James Woods
@RealJamesWoods

Ballot fraud on video...

Pennsylvania:
THOUSANDS OF SHREDDED PENNSYLVANIA MAIL-IN BALLOT APPLICATIONS FOR TRUMP DISCOVERED DISINTEGRATED IN TRAILER

Video evidence.
[@realDonaldTrump](#)

Correction but Breaking: Shredded Pennsylvania Mail in ballot Applications were discovered in a trailer.

The applications were for [@realDonaldTrump](#).

1:46 PM - Oct 7, 2020 - Twitter for Android

Shredded Pennsylvania mail in ballot applications found in back of trailer. The applications were for [@realDonaldTrump](#)

Correction but Breaking: Shredded Pennsylvania Mail in ballot Applications were discovered in a trailer.

The applications were for [@realDonaldTrump](#).

1:07 PM - Oct 7, 2020 - Twitter for iPhone

Correction but Breaking: Shredded Pennsylvania Mail in ballot Applications were discovered in a trailer. The applications were for [@realDonaldTrump](#). The video evidence was submitted by a fan to [redacted] from Old Row, a Barstool Sports Company This is not ok! Retweet

11:26 am - 7th October 2020

Take Aways

- Networks and platforms shape information flow.
- Attention dynamics and amplification matter.
- Cross-platform information spread is understudied.
- Do intervention work?
- How can we translate research methods for rapid-response?
- This work takes a significant toll on project participants.

Collaborators

Kate Starbird, Jevin West

Andrew Beers, Ian Kennedy, Joey Schafer, Joe

Bak-Coleman, Morgan Wack, Martin Zhang, Kolina Koltai

Paul Lockaby, Mike Caulfield, Michael Grass

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