

Security and disinformation in the U.S. 2016 election: What we found

Ads

Political advertising on Google: Like other companies, we worked with parties across the political spectrum during the 2016 U.S. election cycle. This was the first cycle in which we offered political interest targeting and we limited our categories to two: advertisers could target “left-leaning” or “right-leaning” users. We put processes in place to limit access to these capabilities to U.S. advertisers with whom we had pre-existing relationships.

Throughout the campaign we required all political advertisers to comply with local campaign and election laws as well as our extensive ads policies that [prohibit](#), among other things, misrepresentation, harassment, exploitation of sensitive events, and [personalizing ads](#) based on sensitive categories like race or religion. Read our annual [Bad Ads Reports](#) to learn more about how we enforce these policies.

Investigation findings:

We reviewed political advertising on Google for indications of ads purchased by state-affiliated actors:

- We found that two accounts linked to the Internet Research Agency spent a total of \$4,700 on our platforms during the 2016 election cycle. This figure covers both search and display ads.
- These ads were not narrowly targeted to specific groups of users: for example, we found no evidence of targeting by geography (e.g., certain states) or by users’ inferred political preferences (e.g., right- or left-leaning).

YouTube

YouTube’s [community guidelines](#) prohibit things like hate speech, violent or graphic content, dangerous content, and scams. We review flagged videos to determine whether they violate our community guidelines. When they do, we remove them.

Investigation findings:

- We found 18 channels likely associated with this campaign that made videos publicly available, in English and with content that appeared to be political (These channels also posted non-political videos, e.g., personal travelogues).
- There were 1,108 such videos uploaded, representing 43 hours of content and totaling 309,000 U.S. views from June 2015 to November 2016. (Note: A single user may generate multiple views on a single video.)
- These videos generally had very low view counts; only around 3 percent had more than 5,000 views.
- These channels’ videos were not targeted to the U.S. or to any particular sector of the U.S. population.
- We have suspended the channels we identified.
- Some have raised questions about the use of YouTube by RT, a media service funded by the Russian government. Our investigation found no evidence of manipulation of our platform or policy violations; RT—and all other state-sponsored media outlets— remains subject to our standard rules.

Other products

- **Search & News:** We maintain extensive protections against spam, bots, and other attempts to game our search results. Even so, bad actors sometimes seek to artificially boost their rankings, for example through paid-link schemes. We found no evidence that state-linked or state-funded actors used [improper methods](#) to boost their rankings.
- **Gmail:** We've seen evidence that Gmail accounts associated with the campaign were used to open accounts on other platforms (we have been sharing these details with other platforms).
- **Google+:** We found no political posts in English from state-linked actors on Google+ (there were some posts in Russian and a very small number of non-political posts).
- **Publisher products:** We found less than \$35 in AdSense and Ad Exchange revenue from ads on associated sites.

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