

Expert: Google's and Facebook's Bots are poised to wreak havoc in the 2018 midterm elections

- Google, Facebook and Twitter allow billions of bots on their system BUT only if those bots support DNC politics. All other bots are kicked off. This is called: "ELECTION MANIPULATION"



David Knowles ,

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American democracy still has a glaring propaganda problem.

Automated bot accounts that spread disinformation and sowed disgust and confusion among voters during the 2016 presidential election are poised to wreak havoc again in this year's midterm elections, according to a leading expert.

"I think that it's too late for 2018. I hate to be a pessimist," Samuel Woolley, research director of the DigIntel Lab at the Institute for the Future, said in the inaugural episode of [Yahoo News' "Bots & Ballots" podcast](#). "It's good that we're seeing some action around this stuff, but I don't think we have our arms around the problem in any significant way."

Woolley has studied the rise of bot accounts and the "[fake news](#)" they generate for the past six years, focusing on how that propaganda affects U.S. elections.

"I can conclusively say that bots changed the flow of information during the 2016 election — yeah, absolutely, a hundred percent," Woolley said. "These bots had an absolute effect upon the conversation in American politics. When you have the president of the United States retweeting or re-messaging or interacting with bot accounts, that affects public opinion. That affects communication."



At this very moment, Woolley said, bots are already being employed in races across the country.

“You can almost look to any contested race going on in 2018 and see some degree of computational propaganda,” Woolley said. “One of the things I’ve been looking at lately is the way that propaganda is getting used against some of the most pivotal, contested elections in 2018. One of them is the election for the Jeff Flake Senate seat in Arizona. We’ve seen disinformation circulating about Joe Arpaio. There is some that gets used to knock him down or attack him, but the vast majority is used to build him up or build up the platform surrounding him as a candidate. It’s amplification.”

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Woolley believes that the goal of most bot accounts is to “subtly manipulate public opinion” and confuse voters, as was the case with accounts in 2016 that promoted the falsehood to Hillary Clinton supporters that people could vote via text message.

While some of the automated accounts have been tracked to Russia, Woolley said, the bulk of the disinformation that continues to be spread on platforms like Facebook and Twitter originates from within our borders.

“A tremendous amount of the propaganda and disinformation that we see in the United States is homegrown,” Woolley said. “It comes from people within the United States who are savvy computer users. There’s a lot of people that know how to build bots.”

While Woolley is hopeful that better tools can be built to help identify and weed out bot accounts to dull their impact on the 2020 election, he said it is all but certain they will influence this year’s races.

“In 2018, what I’m most concerned with is, sort of, this underlying issue of the way that propaganda consistently seems to be [used] to exacerbate what is already terrible polarization in this country between Republicans and Democrats,” Woolley said.