



Election series: Combating misinformation and disinformation during elections



ONTARIO NONPROFIT NETWORK



Nonprofits are an important actor in leading the way in combating misinformation and disinformation during elections, leveraging their role as trusted local sources in communities.

Increasingly, democratic processes and activities, including elections, are being influenced by misinformation and disinformation as people rely heavily on information circulated online for their knowledge about the world.



Extreme views built on a global ecosystem of misinformation and disinformation fueled by astroturfing and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are seeding divisiveness, distrust of institutions, and democratic apathy. According to the [2026 Edelman Trust Barometer global report](#), 20 per cent of respondents reported that “the increasing prevalence of misinformation and fake news” has impacted their level of trust in other people and institutions. A [2025 survey](#) from the Canadian Journalism Foundation (CJF) found that 88 per cent of Canadians expressed concern about AI-generated deception in the news, with nearly half (47 per cent) of Canadians reporting that they encounter misleading or false information daily or several times weekly.

Fighting misinformation and disinformation is increasingly important for protecting and activating a healthy democracy.

Key definitions

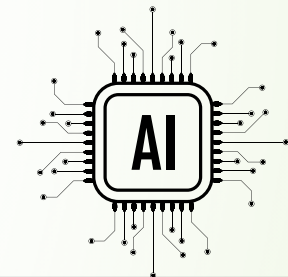
Misinformation: Inaccurate, misleading or false information spread without malicious intent.



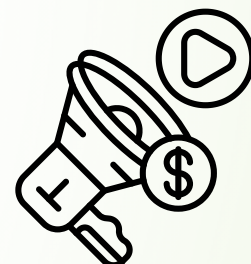
Disinformation: Deliberately false information intended to deceive, and is spread in order to do serious harm.



Generative AI:
A subset of AI that creates new content - such as text, images, audio, and/or code - based on training data and user prompts.



Astroturfing:
When individuals, companies or organizations try to make it look like there is a natural grassroots movement supporting their ideas or product, but have actually planned and paid for a campaign with specific messaging.



There are many different types of misinformation and disinformation:

- Satire or parody
- Error
- False context
- False connections
- Misleading content
- Imposter content
- Manipulated content
- Fabricated content
- Sponsored content
- Propaganda

The rise of misinformation and disinformation

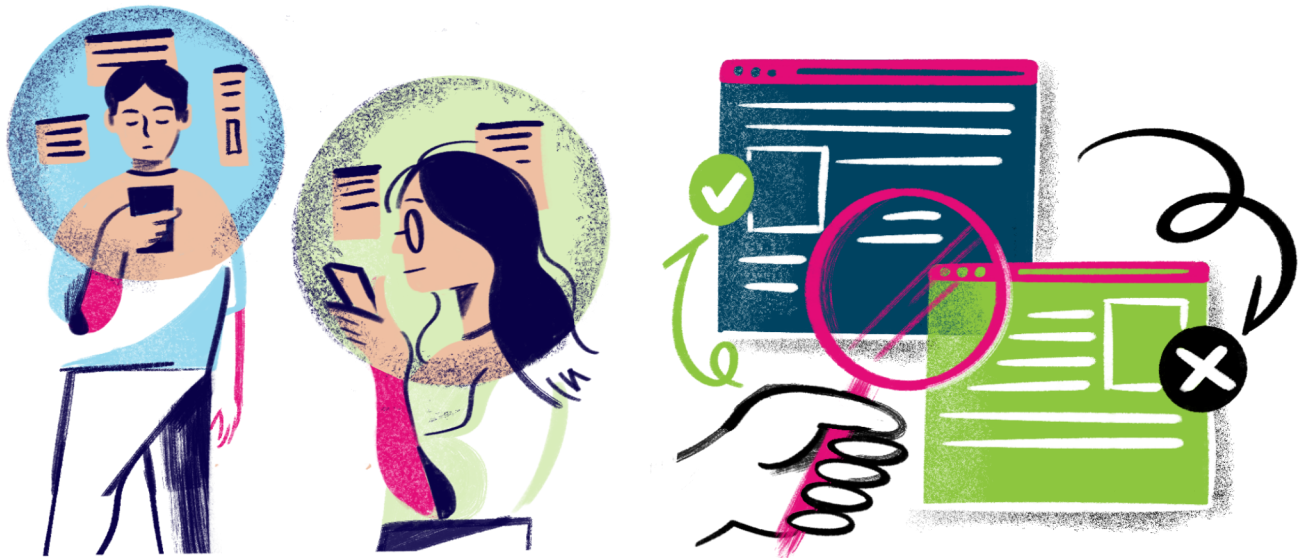
In an era where news and information are no longer exclusively communicated through traditional outlets, people are easily susceptible to misinformation and disinformation from uncredited sources.

During elections, people tend to have more discussions about issues impacting them, such as housing affordability, cost of living, transportation, immigration, education, and more. At the same time, there can be a lot of voices competing for attention via new media, such as podcasts and social media, and traditional media, such as newspapers and broadcast news, making it even harder to get at the truth of what's really going on.

Algorithms curate most of the content people see online, which tend to show only what people want to see rather than diverse perspectives or a transparent picture. This ends up creating echo chambers that reinforce existing values and perspectives, deepening polarization, misinformation, and disinformation.

The rise of misinformation and disinformation (cont'd)

The rise of artificial intelligence and its ability to rapidly spread misinformation and disinformation is becoming increasingly concerning during election seasons. Social media and AI can be used to spread false or misleading information about voting procedures, ballot counting, candidacy withdrawals, and voter privacy.



For example, in 2021, social media posts impersonated Elections Alberta during the province's municipal elections, disseminating deceptive information. This raised public concerns about Elections Alberta's reputation and credibility. With the rapid development of generative AI, deceptive images, audio, videos, and other content are even more challenging to detect.

The prevalence of astroturfing with the intention of influencing public opinions erodes democracy. Through the creation of fake social media accounts and the use of bots to manipulate online discussions, astroturfing creates the illusion of a mass movement behind an idea or an attitude. It can sway public opinion about certain policies or particular election candidates. Astroturfing can lead to public distrust and create a feeling of hopelessness, further discouraging people from participating in politics and democracy.

Why should nonprofits care about misinformation and disinformation?

Ecosystems of misinformation and disinformation are politicizing and threatening progressive social policy gains made possible by movements spearheaded by nonprofits -led-by, -serving, and -focused on equity-denied communities, including Black, Indigenous, women, queer, non-binary and trans, and immigrant communities.

Increasingly nonprofits, their workers, and the communities we serve are victims of misinformation and disinformation campaigns. The campaigns are often targeted and reproduce problematic narratives about nonprofits and the communities we serve, creating a deeply intolerant climate for nonprofit workers to deliver care in.

Nonprofits can combat misinformation and disinformation by:

1 Creating tools and resources to help voters understand and recognize misinformation and disinformation, and educating them on how to find accurate sources of information, how to fact check, and how to identify bots.

2 Actively debunking misinformation and disinformation through communications, resources, and publications. When doing so, combine data and empathy where the facts provide evidence to support your case, and the story connects to your audience. Disinformation often gets the facts wrong, but the feelings right. Do not reply to, share, or retweet misinformation or disinformation. Instead, fill data voids with accurate content.

3 Providing accurate information in multiple languages, when possible. For example, the nonprofit Refugee 613 operates an [online info bank](#) that provides a wide variety of resources in multiple languages. The language used to communicate information matters - sometimes it can make people consume the information or completely ignore it.

Traditional, established media

- [CBC News](#)
- [CTV News](#)
- [Global news](#)
- [Post media outlets](#)
- [The Globe and Mail](#)
- [The Toronto Star](#)
- [TVO Today](#)

Additional resources

- [Astroturfing: Paid to Protest? \(TVO\)](#)
- ['Growing Mistrust': An Immigration Expert on Misinformation and How Our System Needs to Change \(TVO\)](#)
- [How Charities Can Tackle Misinformation \(The National Council for Voluntary Organisations\)](#)
- [Online Misinformation Is Adding to the Administrative Burden of Community Organizations - What Can They Do About It? \(Future of Good. Note: email address required to access.\)](#)
- [The War Against Misinformation is over. The Lies Won \(The Walrus, 2026\)](#)

About ONN

ONN is the independent nonprofit network for the 58,000 nonprofits in Ontario, focused on policy, advocacy, and services to strengthen the sector as a key pillar of our society and economy. We work to create a public policy environment that allows nonprofits to thrive. We engage our network of diverse nonprofit organizations across Ontario to work together on issues affecting the sector and channel the voices of our network to government, funders and other stakeholders.

