

## Case study 2: The 2016 US election – division and foreign interference

Foreign interference which utilises social media is continuing to occur, and it is important to consider whether young people in New Zealand are aware that it can occur here. During the 2016 US election, there is substantively documented evidence from government and non-government sources that foreign interference occurred, with a strategy to promote division and call into question democratic institutions.<sup>88</sup> The interference was two-fold. There was a clear preference of the foreign entity for one of the candidates in the presidential election and a broader goal of undermining trust in the electoral system itself.<sup>88</sup> State-sponsored Twitter accounts operated during the 2016 election, sharing polluted information and seeking to stoke division.<sup>89</sup> Although there is some debate about the extent to which state-sponsored trolls influenced the election,<sup>90</sup> there is evidence that foreign interference occurs within democratic elections.<sup>89,91</sup>

The foreign interference campaign happened in the broader landscape of declining trust in democratic institutions and increasing division.<sup>88</sup> The second objective of undermining trust has arguably been more successful than altering an election's outcome. The technique used by a foreign entity is not new and reflective of information warfare that occurred throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>92</sup> Social media has allowed information warfare and foreign interference to occur at a large scale with minimal cost.<sup>92</sup>

## References

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