Report

Investigation into foreign informational influence

An analysis of the Norwegian municipal administration and county authority elections in 2019

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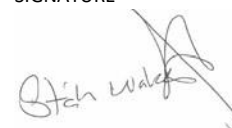| VERSION	DATE
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SUMMARY

The report describes a systematic investigation into possible targeted attempts at informational influence by foreign actors on various digital platforms in connection with the Norwegian municipal administration and county authority elections held on 9 September 2019. The study builds on quantitative and qualitative analysis of data collected from a selection of public Facebook pages, Twitter, mainstream media and alternative media. No clear signs of foreign influence have been found, despite the fact that in many ways the debate climate is ideal for actors with these kinds of intentions. However, it has been proven that actors who in our data material appear to be Norwegian users also participate in more covert, extremist online forums, and that some of them are involved in networks that systematically transfer content from extremist websites. These actors deliberately moderate their language when posting on media that reach a broader audience and make efforts to camouflage this type of activity. This illustrates that it can be extremely difficult to distinguish between foreign influence and other suspicious activities online. Although no influence has been demonstrated in the limited material we have studied, more research-based knowledge is needed in this important area. A methodological basis has been developed that ought to be further developed for future elections and processing of larger volumes of data.

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