

# The democratic dialogue

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The Swedish Government appointed the **Commission for Media and Information Literacy and Democratic Dialogue**. Together with other actors, we collaborate on initiatives that strengthen people's resilience to disinformation, propaganda and online hate. It is a question of how we in Sweden can maintain an open, inclusive and respectful democratic dialogue where all citizens feel willing and able to participate.

[www.demokratiskasamtalet.se/english/](http://www.demokratiskasamtalet.se/english/)

# Question



**How can *you* contribute to an open, inclusive and respectful democratic dialogue where all citizens feel willing and able to participate?**

# What is disinformation?

Disinformation is the **intentional spreading** of untrue and misleading information with the aim of causing harm or influencing people's attitudes, standpoints and behaviour. Getting other people to unintentionally spread disinformation further is often a **strategy** used by those who want to cause harm.

# Disinformation and democracy

Disinformation is not a new phenomenon. It has existed in many forms for many years. But today's **digital environments** enable the rapid spread of information to many people, and all of us risk spreading untrue and misleading information further. There is a danger of decisions being based on **false grounds**, which is a challenge for democracy.



# Facts



During the Swedish general election in 2018, **disinformation** and attempts to influence the outcome came from a **wide range of sources**, including right-wing extremist groups in the United States to nationalist politicians in Poland, Russian interests, and an Islamist group operating in Sweden.

Source: Smearing Sweden, Institute for Strategic Dialogue

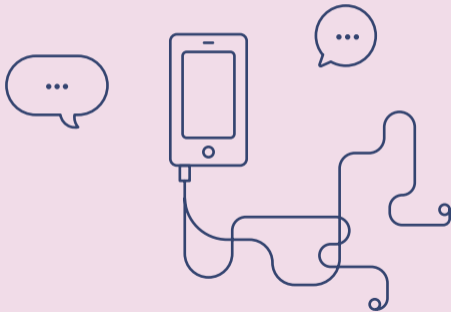
# Questions



**Have you, or someone you know,  
shared false or misleading information?**

**What can it lead to?**

## Tips & advice



## Simple questions for source criticism:

- **Who?** Who is behind the source?
- **What?** Does the content seem reasonable and are different perspectives compared?
- **Why?** Why was the information published and who does it target?
- **When?** Is the content up-to-date?

# What is propaganda?

Propaganda can be described as any message intended to **change the perception and behaviour** of recipients. It includes marketing and political influencing by, for example, political parties and lobby groups. But propaganda often has a narrower definition. It concerns misleading messages that are spread by unethical methods, such as fake senders and/or fake content, with **the aim of manipulating recipients.**



# Propaganda and democracy

Propaganda, in a negative sense, harms democratic dialogue by **manipulating** people's opinions and actions, for example, by provoking strong **negative feelings**. Propaganda has been around for a long time, but it is particularly challenging today as **social media** channels favour content that plays on feelings and arouses emotions. And these actors do not take the same responsibility for content as traditional media.

# Facts



In his report, US special counsel **Robert Mueller** established that there was widespread **Russian propaganda** in social media in connection with the US presidential election in 2016. One aim of the propaganda was to **increase polarisation** between different groups in society.

Source: United States Department of Justice

# Questions



**What type of propaganda do you think  
might exist in Sweden?**

**What do you need to know to recognise  
that someone is trying to fool you?**

## Tips & advice



## Think twice before sharing

- Be particularly wary of anyone offering simple solutions.
- If it sounds 'too good to be true', it probably is.
- Who benefits if you share the information?
- Who is behind the information? A researcher, government agency or organisation?



# What is online hate?

The term 'online hate' is often used to describe hateful, threatening, offensive or nasty comments on the internet. Sometimes it is **illegal**, sometimes it is not. Nevertheless, the offence caused to those affected can be **very serious**.

# Online hate and democracy

Threats, hate and offensive material on the internet can result in fewer people **daring** to speak their minds. When voices that want to influence the development of society fall silent, it is a **threat to democracy**.

# Facts



“It’s election time again. The threats, hate and offences against me escalate every time I’m out campaigning and appear in the media. My inbox gets filled with naked pictures, **grown men who wish me dead**, want me to film my own suicide, be raped, jump in front of a train, shoot myself or hang myself.”

-Female elected representative in 2019

# Facts



# 1 out of 3

**elected representatives say they were  
subjected to harassment,  
threats or violence in 2018.**

**Of those affected, three out of ten have censored  
themselves by not speaking about or engaging in a  
certain issue.**

Source: The Politicians' Safety Survey 2019,  
Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå)



# Facts



# 30%

**of Swedish journalists have received threats over the past year. More than four out of ten journalists affected have refrained from covering certain subjects or people because of the risk of receiving threats.**

Source: JMG, University of Gothenburg, 2019

# Questions



**Have you experienced  
online hate?**

**How did it feel?**

## Tips & advice



## If you witness online hate, do the following:

- Post a supportive comment to the person attacked.
- Offer to help.
- Report the post to the platform.
- Report it to the police if you suspect a crime has been committed.
- If you are young – talk to an adult you trust.

Read more on [nathatshjalpen.se/en/](https://nathatshjalpen.se/en/)

**Our feelings influence what  
we like and share online.**

# Research shows that we are fooled by our feelings

- We seek confirmation of what we already think or believe.
- We think in the same way as other people in our group.
- We believe we are right more often than we are right.
- We are not very good at listening to counter evidence.
- We get a thrill from sensational or provocative material.

Source: Internetkunskap.se Så luras vi av våra känslor  
(How we are fooled by our feelings)



**Many actors want to create a debate climate that is objective, open and respectful. We must all help one another to build the kind of society we want.**

## Some actors that can help include:

Statensmedierad.se

Internetstiftelsen.se

Brottsoffermyndigheten.se

MakeEqual.se

Find more at: [www.demokratiskasamtalet.se](http://www.demokratiskasamtalet.se)

**If you would like to print more copies of these cards, go to [www.demokratiskasamtalet.se](http://www.demokratiskasamtalet.se) to download the digital files (PDFs).**

You will also find information about the sources mentioned and tips for additional reading.

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