



# Americans Deserve to Know Who is Trying to Influence Their Political Beliefs

## The For the People Act's Honest Ads Requirements

Foreign agents and bad actors have interfered in the last three federal elections, beginning in 2016, through the internet and social media in many ways, including ad spending. Despite federal law requiring that broadcast advertisement sponsors identify themselves since at least 1970, Congress has never updated these transparency laws to include the internet.

The For the People Act incorporates the introduced Honest Ads Act, and will apply existing campaign laws prohibiting election interference by foreign nationals to the internet, closing the loophole that has allowed for paid, online advertising to undermine the integrity of our elections.

DECLARATION FOR  
**AMERICAN  
DEMOCRACY**





# The Challenge

**Both the House and Senate Intelligence Committees, and the Intelligence Community Assessment, concur that foreign actors interfered in the 201 U.S. election with the intention of dividing Americans and putting President Trump in office. The reach of large internet platforms has greatly increased the effectiveness of disinformation campaigns and the ability of foreign actors to interfere in our democracy, with the nation's largest social media platform disclosing that between June 2015 and May 2017 Russian entities purchased over 100,000 in political advertisements online. Facebook posts by agents of the Kremlin, disguised as Americans, promoted paid advertising that reached 12 million Facebook users, and resulted in 131,000 messages on Twitter and over 1,000 videos on YouTube – all in the months prior to the 201 election.**

What happened in 2016 was not a one-time event. A joint statement from DOJ, DOD, DHS, DNI, FBI, NSA, and CISA on Ensuring Security of 2020 Elections stated: "Russia, China, Iran, and other foreign malicious actors all will seek to interfere in the voting process or influence voter perceptions. Adversaries may try to accomplish their goals through a variety of means, including social media campaigns, directing disinformation operations or conducting disruptive or destructive cyber-attacks on state and local infrastructure." Congress must respond to this national security crisis in order to protect and preserve the sanctity of free and fair elections.

While it is already illegal for foreign nationals to make contributions or donations in connection with a political party or an election, the lack of transparency surrounding paid internet ads makes it difficult, and sometimes impossible, to know if a foreign national has broken that law. Concerningly, paid, online political advertising is an influential component of campaigning, with estimates as high as 1.3 billion dollars spent on online advertising for local, state, and national campaigns during the 201 election cycle.

The vulnerabilities regarding online election spending compromise the integrity of U.S. elections because the general public does not know the source trying to influence their vote. Since the early 2000s, disclosure rules have overseen political advertising in print, radio, and television, in a bid to improve transparency and accountability. While these rules have successfully prevented foreign interference through these mediums, they have left internet users vulnerable to foreign attacks.

# The Solution

**The bipartisan Honest Ads Act was introduced in both the House and Senate before it was incorporated into the For the People Act of 2019.**

**The Honest Ads Act is a bill that would modernize campaign finance laws by subjecting internet ads to the same rules as TV and radio ads. This bill would also require the purchaser of an ad to be displayed, increasing transparency.**

The Honest Ads Act will close the current loophole allowing for foreign interference in our elections through online political ads by prohibiting ads purchased directly indirectly by a foreign national. It will also strengthen the integrity of American democracy and national security by reaffirming the belief that the electorate "bears the right to be fully informed."

The Honest Ads Act will expand disclosure rules to include any online ads that mention a candidate, preventing foreign actors from creating ads that attack or commend a specific candidate without explicitly saying voters should vote for or against them. Additionally, it would require online ad vendors and platforms to maintain databases of all online political advertisements – something both television and radio companies already do, by maintaining purchase records of political ads.

**For all of these reasons, Congress should implement the For the People Act to ensure the transparency and accountability that restoring public faith in our democracy requires.**

