



*Voter at a polling station during the 2019 European Parliament elections in Parnu, Estonia. From Baltic News Network.*

## Defending the Vote in Estonia

Troubled by reports of disinformation and fake news in the United States and with regard to the United Kingdom's Brexit referendum vote, Estonia's State Electoral Office in 2016 created an interagency task force to combat the influence of false messaging on its democratic process. To guide its work, the small staff of the State Electoral Office adopted a network approach by engaging partners from other government agencies, intergovernmental organizations, civil society, social media companies, and the press to identify and monitor disinformation and to work with the press to correct false statements. It also developed a curriculum that would help high school students improve their ability to separate fact from fiction. The collaboration largely succeeded in checking foreign interference. However, considerations involving free speech and censorship hobbled the task force's efforts to restrain disinformation spread by *domestic* political parties and their supporters. **This case** illuminates how an electoral management body with limited staff capacity and a restricted mandate addressed a societywide disinformation challenge.


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