

Voters

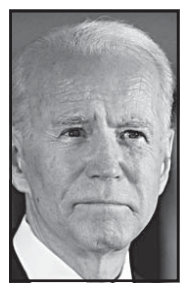
Growing threats to Dems

Wave of misinformation 'targeted' at the Latinos

WASHINGTON, Nov 29, (AP): Before last year's presidential election, Facebook ads targeting Latino voters described Joe Biden as a communist. During his inauguration, another conspiracy theory spread online and on Spanish-language radio warning that a brooch worn by Lady Gaga signaled Biden was working with shadowy, leftist figures abroad.

And in the final stretch of Virginia's election for governor, stories written in Spanish accused Biden of ordering the arrest of a man during a school board meeting.

None of that was true. But such misinformation represents a growing threat to Democrats, who are anxious about their standing with Latino voters after surprise losses last year in places like South Florida and the Rio Grande Valley in Texas.



Biden

Heading into a midterm election in which control of Congress is at stake, lawmakers, researchers and activists are preparing for another onslaught of falsehoods targeted at Spanish-speaking voters. And they say social media platforms that often host those mistruths aren't prepared.

"For a lot of people, there's a lot of concern that 2022 will be another big wave," said Guy Mentel, executive director of

Global Americans, a think tank that provides analysis of key issues throughout the Americas.

This month's elections may be a preview of what's to come.

After Democratic incumbent Phil Murphy won New Jersey's close governor's race, Spanish-language videos falsely claimed the vote was rigged, despite no evidence of widespread voter fraud - a fact the Republican candidate acknowledged, calling the results "legal and fair."

Campaigned

In Virginia, where Republican Glenn Youngkin campaigned successfully on promises to defend "parental rights" in classrooms, false headlines around a controversial school board meeting emerged.

"Biden ordenó arrestar a padre de una joven violada por un trans," read one of several misleading articles, translating to "Biden ordered the arrest of a father whose daughter was raped by a trans."

The mistruth was spun from an altercation during a chaotic school board meeting months earlier in Loudoun County that resulted in the arrest of a father whose daughter was sexually assaulted in a bathroom by another student. The father claimed the suspect was "gender fluid," which sparked outcry over the school's policy allowing transgender students to use bathrooms matching their gender identity.

In reality, the White House wasn't involved with the meeting. The man was arrested by the local sheriff's department. It's also unclear how the suspect identifies.

Loudoun County was already the epicenter of a heated political debate over how the history of racism is taught in schools - another issue that became fodder for misinformation and political attacks on Spanish-language websites this summer, said Maria Teresa Kumar, president and CEO of Voto Latino, a nonprofit that mobilizes Hispanics to become politically engaged.

"It has everything to do with trust in institutions. Trust in government," said Kumar, whose group works to combat the misinformation. "Eroding that trust will transfer not just to voting in the midterms, but just overall disengagement from your government."

Dominate

Stretched truths accusing some Democrats of being socialists or communists could also dominate the online narrative, said Diego Groisman, a research analyst at New York University's Cybersecurity for Democracy project.

During the 2020 election, Groisman flagged Facebook ads targeting Latino voters in Texas and Florida that described Biden as a "communist." The ads in Florida - where a majority of the country's Venezuelan population is concentrated - compared Biden to that country's socialist President Nicolás Maduro.

"There were clearly specific Spanish-speaking communities that were being targeted," said Laura Edelson, the lead researcher for NYU's program.

Evelyn Pérez-Verdía, a Florida Democratic strategist who watches Spanish misinformation patterns, says many online narratives intentionally stoke "fear in the Spanish-speaking communities."

One conspiracy theory mentioned on talk radio grew out of Lady Gaga's golden bird brooch at Biden's inauguration. Some spreading the claim noted a similar brooch once worn by Claudia López Hernández, the first openly gay mayor of Bogotá, Colombia, signaled the new president was working with foreign leftists.

"They're not going to stop. They're going to double down on it," Pérez-Verdía said of the misinformation.

Critics argue that social media companies like Meta, which owns Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, have placed outside attention on removing or fact-checking misinformation in English over other languages like Spanish.

Facebook's own documents, leaked by ex-Facebook employee turned whistleblower Frances Haugen earlier this year, echo those concerns. Haugen said the company spends 87% of its misinformation budget on US content - a figure that Meta spokesperson Kevin McAllister said is "out of context."

An internal Facebook memo, written in March, revealed the company's ability to detect anti-vaccine rhetoric and misinformation was "basically non-existent" in non-English comments.

Last year, for example, Instagram and Facebook banned "#plandemic," a hashtag associated with a video full of COVID-19 conspiracy theories. Yet users were spreading misinformation on the platforms using "#plandemia," the Spanish version of the hashtag, until just last month.

An analysis last year by Avaaz, a left-leaning advocacy group that tracks online misinformation, also found Facebook failed to flag 70% of Spanish-language misinformation surrounding COVID-19 compared to just 29% of such information in English.

McAllister said the company removes false Spanish-language claims about voter fraud, COVID-19 and vaccines. Four news outlets, including The Associated Press, also fact-check Spanish-language falsehoods circulating around US content on Instagram and Facebook.

Meanwhile, researchers at the nonpartisan Global Disinformation Index estimated that Google will make \$12 million this year off ads on websites that peddled COVID-19 disinformation in Spanish. Google has "stopped serving ads on a majority of the pages shared in the report," company spokesperson Michael Aciman said in an email.

Concern over new variant omicron

Biden pushes shots, not more restrictions

WASHINGTON, Nov 29, (AP): US President Joe Biden will urge Americans to get vaccinated and receive a booster shot as he seeks to quell concerns Monday over the new COVID-19 variant omicron, but won't immediately push for more restrictions to stop its spread, his chief medical adviser said.

Dr Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious disease expert and Biden's leading COVID-19 adviser, said Monday that there were as yet still no cases of the variant identified in the US but that it was "inevitable" that it would make its way into the country eventually.

Speaking on ABC's "Good Morning America," Fauci said scientists hope to know in the next week or two how well the existing COVID-19 vaccines protect against the variant, and how dangerous it is compared to earlier strains.

"We really don't know," Fauci said, calling speculation "premature."

Any omicron-specific vaccine probably could not begin to be produced for another two or three months, so getting boosters now is a "very important initial line of defense," said Dr Paul Burton, chief medical officer for the vaccine-maker Moderna, said Monday.

Biden is set to speak later Monday about the urgency of getting vaccinated against COVID-19 to protect against variants, especially as roughly 80 million Americans aged 5 and up haven't yet received a shot. But Biden was not expected to announce any new virus-related restrictions, beyond last week's move to restrict travel from South Africa and seven other countries in the re-

'Gifts from the Heart' is Biden WH Christmas theme

WASHINGTON, Nov 29, (AP): "Gifts from the Heart" is the theme of President Joe Biden's first White House Christmas.

First lady Jill Biden was scheduled on Monday to unveil decorations matching the theme, said to be inspired by people the couple met as they traveled the country this year.

"The things we hold sacred unite us and transcend distance, time, and even the constraints of a pandemic: faith, family, and friendship; a love of the arts, learning, and nature; gratitude, service, and community; unity and peace," the Bidens write in a commemorative 2021 White House holiday guidebook. "These are the gifts that tie together the heart

strings of our lives. These are the gifts from the heart."

The decor features a gigantic gingerbread White House that recognizes frontline workers who persevered through the coronavirus pandemic, while the official Christmas tree - an 18-foot-tall (5.5-meter tall) Fraser fir - celebrates the gifts of peace and unity, the White House said.

With the Bidens spending Thanksgiving week in Nantucket, Massachusetts, more than 100 volunteers set about decorating the executive mansion - including the Oval Office - with 41 Christmas trees, some 6,000 feet (2,000 yards) of ribbon and more than 10,000 ornaments. Twenty-five wreaths adorn the north

and south sides of the building, and nearly 79,000 lights illuminate the Christmas trees, garlands, wreaths and other holiday displays.

Jill Biden has invited a second grade class from Malcolm Elementary School in Waldorf, Maryland, to help her reveal the decorations, the White House said. PBS KIDS characters Martin and Chris Kratt from the program "Wild Kratts" will also be on hand.

Before a PBS puppet show for the schoolkids, the first lady will read her 2012 children's book, "Don't Forget, God Bless Our Troops," and deliver remarks thanking the team of volunteer decorators.

gion, effective Monday.

Other nations were also moving to close their borders or reinstate lockdowns amid a host of severe measures to prevent the omicron variant from spreading, but Fauci indicated that the US was not following suit.

Asked if more US restrictions were imminent, Fauci said, "I don't think so at all." Later, on "CBS Mornings," he said, "Let's not be talking about lockdowns."

Fauci said there was no need to panic about the new variant, but "We should be concerned, and our concern should spur us to do the things that we know work," such as vaccinations.

The move to limit most travel from the countries where omicron was first identified was meant to buy time for the US to learn more about the variant and to "intensify" the domestic vaccination campaign, Fauci said.

"It buys you a couple of weeks because if you can keep things out in force for a couple of weeks you can do a lot of things," he told CBS.

Still, he said omicron would eventually reach the US and could, like the delta variant before it, become the dominant strain, since omicron "has a transmissibility advantage" over other variants.

Pharmaceutical companies are already tweaking their existing COVID-19 vaccines

to better attack the omicron variant, but Fauci said Americans should make it a priority to get either their first shots or a booster dose now, rather than waiting for a newly formulated shot.

"I would strongly suggest you get boosted now," he said.

He added that depending on what scientists learn about the omicron variant in the coming weeks "we may not need" targeted boosters to contain that strain of the virus.

Burton said Moderna and other vaccine companies are testing existing COVID-19 vaccines to determine how effective they are against the omicron variant.

First to acquire DaaS solutions in the Kuwaiti market

solutions by stc launches DaaS in partnership with Virganet, further empowering its cloud portfolio for B2B customers

solutions by stc, the specialized business arm of Kuwait Telecommunications Company - stc, announced its partnership with local cloud and managed service provider, Virganet. Through the partnership, the two companies launched the first local Desktop as a Service (DaaS) solution targeting solutions by stc's B2B customers, as well as various sectors within Kuwait. This initiative falls in line with solution by stc's vision to provide SME customers with a wealth of innovative products and services all under one roof, especially in this case to support SME customers recover following the business slowdowns due to the pandemic, while fueling the local market with the latest technologies and innovations offered in the digital world.

solutions by stc indicated that offering the DaaS solution in collaboration with Virganet aims to support local SMEs, banks, as well as other businesses in Kuwait to secure their data and explore a range of added features at an affordable and cost-effective price. The solution comes equipped with AI technology that can enhance the productivity in organizational structures by streamlining operations, improving workflows, and cutting back on expenditures to positively impact the business. To ensure a seamless experience, the solution is supported by a dedicated team of experts who can provide guidance and assistance throughout the setup process, as well as address any issues or technical difficulties related to the service.

DaaS is known for its easy configuration and deployment, which can be applied to various business models to protect data while utilizing the full features of the platform. The solution has been designed with a customer-centric approach in mind that focuses on providing a premium user experience, while catering to the diverse needs of solutions by stc's B2B customers. DaaS is also compatible with several solutions currently offered by solutions by stc and is the first service of its kind to be offered in the local market. In terms of usability, businesses of all sizes can benefit from the remote work capabilities and seamless access to information, especially considering the ongoing pandemic.

Seeing as DaaS is a virtual desktop infrastructure hosted in the cloud, the solution will be able to deliver a high level of performance for users on any device and within minutes. The multi-tenancy architecture of DaaS solutions will enable multiple users to take advantage of the cloud-hosted service, reducing the need and cost of acquiring physical desktops. The solution also addresses common challenges faced by IT departments, while providing users with a personalized experience through self-service access to applications and desktops. Commenting on the new service, solutions by stc mentioned that the steps taken to introduce DaaS solutions in partnership with Virganet

for the first time in the local market coincides with the Company's strategy to offer an array of business solutions all under one roof. With a special focus on supporting the SME market in Kuwait, solutions by stc provides an array of cloud-based services such as Microsoft 365, Google products, and other solution that can assist companies in streamlining their operations efficiently and at minimal cost.

solutions by stc has taken great strides to partner with market leaders and introduce new solutions that cater to its diverse customer base. Through these partnerships and collaborations, its has extended its offering line to incorporate a range of cloud-based services, connectivity solutions, fixed or wireless services, 5G technology enabled by stc, ICT, IoT, AI, as well as other IT products and services. Moving forward, the Company will continue searching for innovative methods in both digital and cloud-based solutions that can be applied to existing applications to satisfy the growing demand for personalized solutions. Through its one-stop-shop business model, solutions by stc aims to leverage the latest technologies introduced in the tech-world to provide customers with solutions to their operational challenges while enabling digital innovation.

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