Though concerns over election security did not begin with the 2016 Presidential election, new and emerging threats coupled with an expanding attack surface have exacerbated what were already major security concerns for municipalities, states and the federal government.

**Why it matters:** There are multiple nation-state actors that might want to undermine US citizens’ confidence in our democratic institutions or influence our political thought and policies shift to shine more positively on foreign country.
Driving the News: Recent Alerts from CISA and FBI
Russian State-Sponsored Advanced Persistent Threat Actor Compromises U.S. Targets and the Iranian Advanced Persistent Threat Actors Threaten Election Related Systems

The Big Picture

- FBI Cyber is looking for cyberattacks on campaigns and election infrastructure in order to ‘detect every tremor’. This should actually provide comfort because there is so much attention being placed on monitoring activity from threat actors. We also might see many more alerts issued as a result of their vigilance.

- CISA is working with thousands of local election offices in all 50 states. CISA has asked local and state level systems to manage the risk to the outward facing system, i.e. voter registration, voter lookup tool, website, information tools where voters might seek out information. It is recognized that the county resources are understaffed and there are challenges patching systems, upgrading systems, multifactor authentication, etc. Cybersecurity professionals can help in their local jurisdiction.

- All US government agencies are trying to talk to voters, share what they know and provide transparency to help build confidence in the election system and process.

- Since the election is happening during a pandemic, there will be an increase of mail in ballots and this may result in delays in confirming the election results. The time between the end of the election and calling the results, which might take a week or more, provides an opening for narratives of disinformation and distrust in the final result.

Where it Stands

Election jurisdictions (8,800 across the US) should know how to report an incident or challenges on election day and where to get help. The government, with media’s help, needs to continue with ongoing messaging to election officials that we need to prepare for a safe and accurate election. The electorate needs to know that there is resilience in the system, they are safe and secure going to vote, and their vote will be counted as cast.

Social media has been given an outsized role and impact on elections as it provides a platform for spreading mis/disinformation. This undermines the value of transparency as what might stick isn’t necessarily true. Due to the ease of spreading misinformation, adversaries might use it to attempt to tarnish our faith in our election. This is something that needs to be addressed to ensure the integrity of democracy.

FBI Cyber strategy is changing with the new threats. How and why we are confronting the cyber threats. American people can have safety, security and confidence in our connected world.

- Safety: Criminal and Nation State Actors held accountable for targeting or compromising citizens or entities in US. Accountability can come in a lot of forms: indictment, red notices, sanctions, diplomatic pressure or cyber operations.

- Security: Receiving alerts – notifying target entities that they might be targeted and learning how to avoid it.

- Confidence: Information sharing with and between other government agencies as well as the private sector to create holistic cyber front to thwart and fend off adversaries of democracy.

Bottom Line

In an election, accuracy of the vote count is more important than speed in getting the results.

It will take longer than the evening of the election until we will have the results.

While there have been a myriad of improvements made over the past four years to protect our elections, we still have a ways to go. The RSAC community can be a part of that by joining the Voter Village and volunteering in your local jurisdictions.

How the RSAC community can help: Bring IT to local jurisdiction providing cyber hygiene, patching systems, upgrading systems, educating people not to click on links and look for only trusted sources for information. Join DefCon Voting Village https://twitter.com/VotingVillageDC. Follow CISA https://twitter.com/CISAgov & FBI https://twitter.com/FBI
The mission of RSA Conference is to help professionals stay on top of cybersecurity trends, issues and solutions through our global events and RSAC 365 library of online cybersecurity learning. Visit rsaconference.com today to watch webcasts, listen to podcasts, and read blogs from industry leaders, view Conference session videos and presentation slides, and receive exclusive offers on upcoming Conferences.