

Can the election be hacked? Here are the most talked about ways to disrupt next week's results

A look at how hackers could (and could not) interfere on November 8th

Method	Details
Continued leaks	In an election season that's been dominated by constant document dumps from WikiLeaks, Guccifer 2.0 and DCLeaks.com, there are still concerns of a final surprise before voters head to the polls, particularly one that would impact the outcome of the presidential race
Voter registration databases	States' voter registration systems have become a popular target for hackers. In August the FBI released a flash alert after two states' election databases were breached, and FBI Director Comey confirmed "some bad actors have been poking around." More than 20 states' systems have reportedly experienced what DHS classifies as "probing of concern." The threat here is that hackers delete or alter voters' registration, impacting their ability to vote. Provisional ballots provide a backup but could lead to chaos at the polls
Tampering with vote counts	It would be difficult for hackers to target voting machines, but they could potentially manipulate the vote counts that are conveyed to news outlets and then announced to the public. If hackers alter the tallies gathered by those on the ground, it could lead to misinformation or states being unofficially called for the wrong candidate. That in turn could suppress the vote and fuel claims of a "rigged" election. A pro-Moscow hacking group, CyberBerkut, took this approach in 2014, launching a DDoS attack on Ukraine's Central Election Commission website in an effort to disseminate fake results on election day. The site was restored, but the cyberattack demonstrated the importance of maintaining the legitimacy of the websites and organizations that report election results, particularly in a contested race, as it was in Ukraine in 2014 and will be for the U.S. next week
Hack the voting machines	Government officials have sought to reassure voters that the decentralized, "clunky" nature of the U.S. voting system, with more than 9,000 jurisdictions, provides a strong defense against hacking. And while voting machines are riddled with problems, most are not connected to the internet and would require physical access to manipulate. Plus, over 75% of Americans will vote by paper ballots or on machines that produce a paper trail

Sources: David E. Sanger, "Five possible hacks to worry about before election day," NYT, November 3, 2016; Tal Kopan, "No, the presidential election can't be hacked," CNN, October 19, 2016; Jeff Stone, "Meet CyberBerkut, the pro-Russian hackers waging anonymous-style cyberwarfare against Ukraine," IBT, December 17, 2015; Darren Samuelsohn and Hadas Gold, "Media vulnerable to election night cyber attack," Politico, October 19, 2016