



National Coordinator for
Counterterrorism and Security
Ministry of Justice and Security

Public survey on disinformation

Outcomes and initial
communication insights

October 2022

Fake news, disinformation and information manipulation: all these terms have quickly become commonplace in the Netherlands and the world as a whole. This phenomenon falls under the remit of the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (*Nationale Coördinator Terrorismebestrijding en Veiligheid* (NCTV)) because of the effect disinformation can have on our national security. Malicious parties like state actors use it to increase their influence. The impact that incorrect information has is particularly evident in crisis situations.

What is disinformation?

Disinformation involves the deliberate, often covert, dissemination of misleading information with the aim of damaging or disrupting public debate, democratic processes, the open economy or national security.

Public survey

The NCTV monitors how the general public experiences risks and threats to national security.

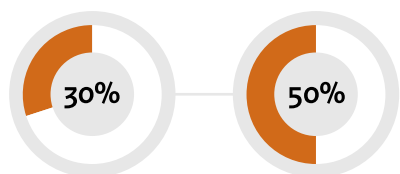
The NCTV conducted a public survey on the impact of disinformation in April 2022. The object was to ascertain what Dutch citizens know about disinformation and which concerns they have about it. Survey respondents were presented with a number of answer options.

Reading guide

The NCTV has put together this infosheet to present the outcomes of this public survey to professionals and other interested parties. It also shares a number of insights and actions on the basis of which communication can be used to limit the impact of disinformation.

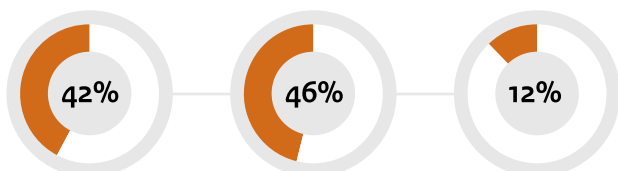
Results of the public survey

Based on the answers given to questions and statements, a number of results stand out:



Always follow the news and also developments in the Netherlands and beyond

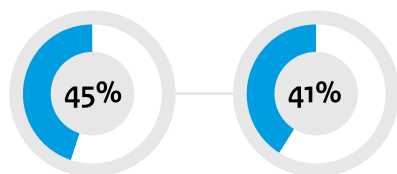
Often follow the news and also developments in the Netherlands and beyond



Check the accuracy of the news often to always

Check the accuracy of the news sometimes

Never check the accuracy of the news



Recognise disinformation often to regularly

Recognise disinformation sometimes



How Dutch citizens follow and check the news

Dutch citizens follow the news closely. Three in 10 (30%) follow the news and also developments in the Netherlands and beyond. Half of Dutch citizens (50%) say they follow the news often. Just 1% of Dutch citizens never follow the news

Dutch citizens do not simply assume that news reports are true. They regularly check the accuracy of the news, which they mainly do by seeing whether they can find the same information somewhere else as well. A total of 42% check the accuracy of the news often to always and 46% do this sometimes. Just 12% never check the accuracy of the news.

Dutch citizens primarily use mainstream news media to follow the news (94%). Four in 10 follow the news via search engines or the Dutch government. Social media is a relatively unpopular source of news: almost six in 10 Dutch citizens have very little trust in news reports on Facebook and other social media.



Is disinformation recognised as such?

Dutch citizens disagree on whether they recognise disinformation. Forty-five percent of Dutch citizens say they feel that they regularly to often recognise disinformation. However, 41% say they think they recognise it sometimes..

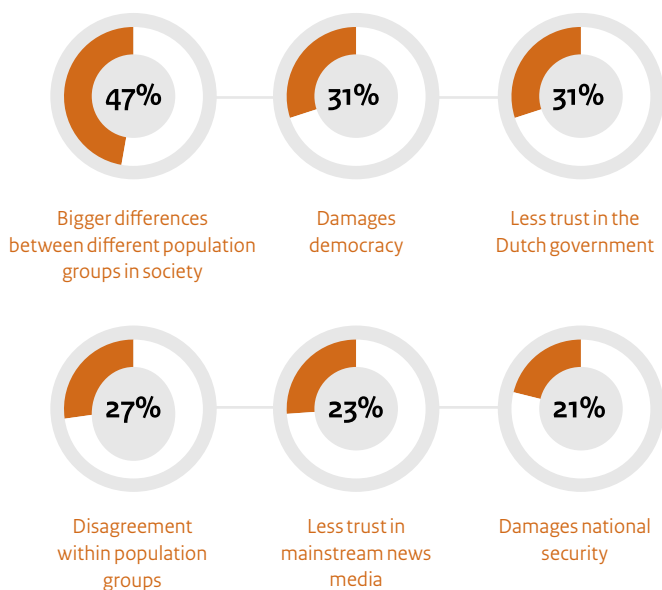
“We can’t ignore the fact that information has become an important weapon in hybrid warfare for some (state) actors. In recent years, there has been increasing recognition of the impact and potential consequences of disinformation and information manipulation. The subject is on the agenda of the NCTV because of its possible impact on national security.



Hester Somsen is the Deputy National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security and also the Director of Cybersecurity, Resilience to State Threats & Economic Security.

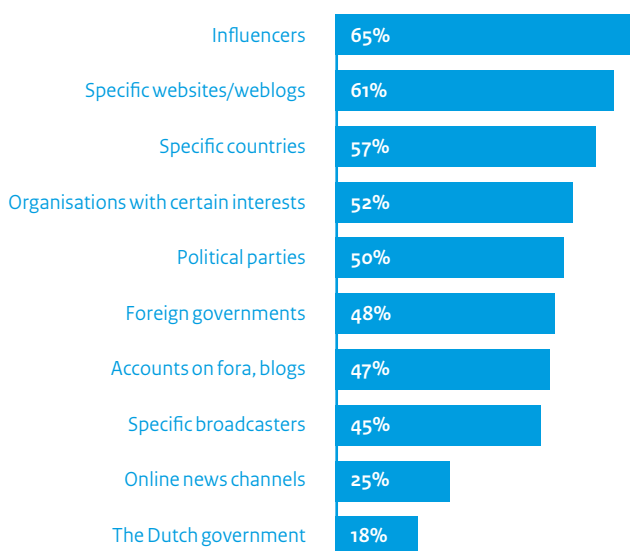
How important is this subject to the general public? What do people in the Netherlands believe are the possible causes of disinformation and its consequences for our society? The results of this recent public survey have shown how much people know about this complex subject and also how they respond to disinformation.

This enables us here at the NCTV to further refine our approach. We also want to share the knowledge we have gained so that other organisations can benefit from it as well.”



Concerns about the consequences

The effects of disinformation are a reason for concern for Dutch citizens. Almost half (47%) say they are very concerned about disinformation. Just 10% are not worried about disinformation at all. Disinformation can have a number of consequences. Six examples of consequences that Dutch citizens are concerned about are shown on the left here. The full answers can be seen in the report on the public survey on disinformation



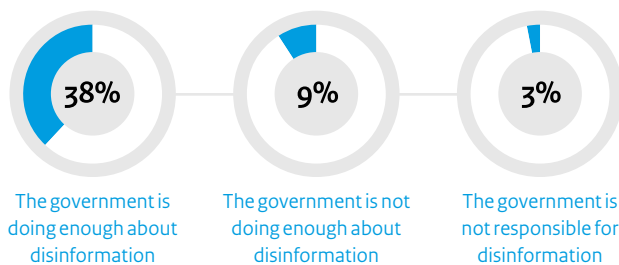
Where does disinformation come from?

Dutch citizens are divided about who they believe is sending or spreading (source) disinformation and how (channel). According to Dutch citizens, influencers spread disinformation most (65%), followed by websites with one clear point of view, goal or target group (61%), accounts on other social media channels (58%) and specific countries (57%). Traditional media like radio stations (15%), paper news media (18%) and TV stations (25%) are named less. Approximately one in five (18%) Dutch citizens believe that the Dutch government is spreading disinformation. Fifty percent say they believe that political parties are guilty of spreading disinformation.



Why disinformation?

People would seem to believe that most disinformation is deliberate and being used collectively. Dutch citizens believe that disinformation is mainly spread to cause more division in society (69%), create social unrest (67%) and strengthen the position of those spreading the misinformation (67%).



What to do about disinformation?

By far the majority of Dutch citizens believe the government is responsible for tackling disinformation. Four in 10 Dutch citizens (38%) believe the Dutch government is doing enough about disinformation. One in three (33%) neither agree nor disagree with this statement. Nine percent (completely) disagree. They do not believe the government is doing enough to tackle disinformation. Dutch citizens feel it would be less advisable to leave responsibility for this to the media (10%). Just 3% of Dutch citizens do not believe that responsibility for tackling disinformation lies with the government at all.



What can the government do?

What should the government do to combat the spread of disinformation? More than half (56%) of Dutch citizens feel the government should provide more education and information about disinformation in general, focusing particularly on the provision of tips on how to recognise disinformation. Slightly less than half of Dutch citizens feel the government should debunk disinformation (45%) and explain its choices and policy better (44%).

Survey justification

I&O Research conducted the survey between 22 April and 6 May 2022. A total of 4,500 members of the I&O Research Panel, aged 18 and older, were approached to take part. The survey response was 51%; in other words, 2,290 respondents completed the survey. This is more than enough to arrive at reliable conclusions about the results obtained.

The full survey is available to download via the following link: [Public survey on disinformation \(information only in Dutch\)](#).

To safeguard the representativeness of the survey data, a weighting has been applied to the background characteristics of the data (on marginals): age, gender, education, migration background, voting behaviour in the elections to the House of Representatives in March 2021 and region (based on Nielsen 4, Statistics Netherlands (*Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek* (CBS))). The weighting has been applied in accordance with guidelines for the gold standard (Gouden Standaard). As such, distribution in the background characteristics of the sample reflects actual distribution in the Dutch population aged 18 and older.

A government-wide approach

The Dutch government is taking active steps to tackle disinformation. The Ministry of the Interior is coordinating a government-wide approach and is acting as the first point of contact about policy on disinformation. It is promoting collaboration between governments in this respect and also has a knowledge function.

The Ministry of the Interior is also promoting awareness about disinformation in government organisations and among citizens and is ensuring that online platforms do more to increase their commitment to reducing the spread of disinformation on their platforms. Besides this, each individual ministry has its own role and responsibility in efforts to tackle disinformation. For more information about the government-wide approach (such as the latest letters to the House of Representatives), see [rijksoverheid.nl](#) (information only in Dutch).

Knowledge and insights

The disinformation phenomenon is developing at a rapid rate. There is much we do not yet know. The NCTV is in constant dialogue with various experts about the subject and gaining knowledge and insights as a result. We will share a number of initial insights from this dialogue below. Naturally, we will continue to engage in dialogue on the subject to acquire new knowledge and insights.

Disinformation and crises

A breeding ground for disinformation is particularly evident in times of crisis, when uncertainty abounds and there is often a lack of information. The Dutch National Crisis Centre (*Nationaal Crisiscentrum*) is part of the NCTV. Its remit includes the national coordination of crisis communication, in close collaboration with all the relevant government organisations. Consideration is given to the subject of disinformation in risk communication (before an incident happens) and when a crisis is actually happening.

[Crisis.nl](https://www.crisis.nl) (information only in Dutch) is the central location for government information about risks and can be used to provide the very latest information in a crisis situation. Crisis.nl now also gives information about the danger of disinformation during a crisis.

Clear communication is particularly vital when managing a crisis and disinformation can have disastrous consequences (for example, disinformation about a second gunman during an attack). This increases the lack of clarity about the situation, which causes unnecessary panic and impedes the work of the emergency services. By alerting people in advance to the possible spread of disinformation, there is less chance of them becoming victims of it. With this in mind, the idea of disinformation as an important point for attention is highlighted when preparing for crises (in plans and policy documents, for example).

Prebunking and debunking

There are various ways to stop the spreading of disinformation. Someone who is alert to disinformation will be less likely to become a victim of it. By warning someone that disinformation may be imminent (about a certain subject, for example), that person will be prepared. This is also referred to as a 'prebunking', which is a form of prevention because the recipients of disinformation become more resilient.

At the beginning of 2020, legal proceedings commenced against the individuals suspected of downing Malaysia Airlines flight MH17. The then Minister of Justice and Security, Ferd Grapperhaus, gave a warning prior to the legal proceedings, at a committee meeting of the Dutch House of Representatives. He said there was a big chance that efforts would be made to use disinformation to disrupt the proceedings and he urged everyone to keep the facts front of mind. This is an example of prebunking.

If disinformation is spread, the response could be to negate this information. This could be achieved by fact-checking and presenting proof to the contrary, etc. Organisations themselves can take steps to contradict specific information too. We also refer to this as 'debunking'. A great deal of experience with debunking was gained during the coronavirus crisis, for example.

Publication

Together with its partners from the security domain, the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security contributes to the security and stability of the Netherlands in a number of ways. This includes recognising threats and strengthening the resilience and protection of other citizens and companies. It is with this responsibility in mind that the NCTV has put together this infosheet.

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Want to know more?

- For tips about recognising disinformation, see [isdatechtzo.nl](https://www.isdatechtzo.nl) (information only in Dutch).

The [isdatechtzo.nl](https://www.isdatechtzo.nl) website has been set up to increase resilience to fake news. [Isdatechtzo.nl](https://www.isdatechtzo.nl) was developed by the Dutch Media Literacy Network (Netwerk Mediawijsheid) in collaboration with Sound and Vision The Hague (Beeld en Geluid Den Haag) and ECP | Platform for the Information Society (Platform voor de InformatieSamenleving). The website aims to educate visitors about how fake news works and also how to recognise whether a news report is reliable. The information provided includes information about filter bubbles, the editing of photos and videos and fact checkers. The Dutch Media Literacy Network programme was launched in 2008 and was an initiative of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science.

- The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport has produced the following guidelines: [Responding to disinformation in the workplace during the coronavirus crisis \(Omgaan met desinformatie in uw werk in coronatijd\)](#) (information only in Dutch). These guidelines give tips on how to recognise disinformation and discuss it with others.
- For more information, see nctv.nl/desinformatie (information only in Dutch). The Communication Department at the NCTV pools its disinformation-related expertise with others in order to protect national security. The department can be contacted via communicatie@nctv.minjenv.nl.