Google affiliate offers tools to safeguard elections

March 21 2017, by Anick Jesdanun

In this Monday, Feb. 1, 2016, file photo, electronic screens post prices of Alphabet stock at the Nasdaq MarketSite in New York. An organization affiliated with Google is offering tools for news organizations and other election-related sites to protect themselves from hacking. Jigsaw, a research arm of Google parent company Alphabet Inc., says that free and fair elections depend on access to information, and to ensure such access, news, human rights and election-monitoring sites need to be protected from cyberattacks. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan, File)

An organization affiliated with Google is offering tools that news organizations and election-related sites can use to protect themselves from hacking.

Jigsaw, a research arm of Google parent company Alphabet Inc., says that free and fair elections depend on access to information. . To ensure such access, Jigsaw says, sites for news, human rights and election monitoring need to be protected from cyberattacks.

Jigsaw's suite of tools, called Protect Your Election, is mostly a repackaging of existing tools:

— Project Shield will help websites guard against denial-of-service attacks, in which hackers flood sites with so much traffic that legitimate visitors can't get through. Users of Project Shield will be tapping technology and servers that Google already uses to protect its own sites from such attacks.

— Password Alert is software that people can add to Chrome browsers to warn them when they try to enter their Google password on another site, often a sign of a phishing attempt.

— 2-Step Verification helps beef up security beyond passwords by requiring a second access code, such as a text sent to a verified cellphone. Though Jigsaw directs users to turn this on for Google accounts, most major rivals offer similar protections, too.

"This is as much an occasion to have a conversation about digital security as it is putting all the tools in one place," Jigsaw spokesman Dan Keyserling said.

While the tools can be useful to a variety of groups and individuals, Jigsaw says it is focusing on elections because cyberattacks often

increase against news organizations and election information sites around election time. In particular, Jigsaw wants to help sites deploy the tools ahead of the French presidential elections, which begin April 23.

The tools are free, though Project Shield is limited to news organizations, individual journalists, human-rights groups and election-monitoring organizations.

It's not known whether the tools might have prevented some of the high-profile attacks in the past, including the theft of emails from Democratic Party computers during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign. The tools do not directly address such break-ins, but they could help guard against password stealing, a common precursor to break-ins.