

Russia's Campaign to Influence U.S. Elections

Office of the West Virginia Secretary of State

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Don't fall for it !

Who Is Behind It?

To Putin, the End Justifies the Means

In 2016, Russia spent **millions (\$)** distributing misleading & false info on social media to:

- **Disrupt** U.S. democratic election processes
- Cause U.S. citizens to doubt election systems & results
- Turn U.S. citizens against government
- Create distrust, **sow discord** & generate chaos
- Pit people against one another



What is the Goal?

- Divide, Discredit, and Distract the West
 - Have us not trust our own government
 - Degrade NATO cohesiveness
 - Turn us on ourselves
- Themes from Russian Attacks Overseas:
 - Western policy failures, setbacks, incompetence
 - Russia's successes
 - Unpredictability of the U.S.



Why Are They Doing It?



How are they doing it? **Information Operations**

Propaganda is as Old as War itself

- The **scale is new**, given the internet
- Russia has **weaponized the internet**
- Russia seeks **“Information Dominance”** vs US openness, security

Intensified by Artificial Intelligence (AI)

- Bad actors now run **mass influence campaigns** like never before
- AI--**efficient targeting** of people most vulnerable to manipulation



The “Great Game” Cyber Style

Today's Clash of Civilizations Takes Place on Social Media

Khrushchev

“You Americans are so gullible. You won't accept Communism outright; but we'll feed you small doses of Socialism until you finally wake up & find you already have Communism. We shall conquer you without firing a shot!”

- China's “Art of War” – **win without fighting**
- Russia's great chess tradition – **win by out-smarting opponent**
- America's “Spirit of '76” -- **win on ideas**, human freedom, liberal democracy
- North Korea, Iran/Terrorist Organizations also quite active
- Groundwork laid for **foreign & domestic** attacks



Transformative Commodities Throughout History

- **Stone Age:** Stones
- **Agricultural Revolution:** Land
- **Bronze Age:** Copper
- **Industrial Revolution:** Oil/Iron/Steel
- **Information Age:** **Data**



The New “Great Game”

“Data is the New Oil”

Clive Humby

- World powers now struggle for **data superiority** (5G, AI, machine learning, quantum computing)
- Data has **economic, political, & military** importance
- All data/information becomes strategic



IoT, Blockchain, AI

“...The Rising Philosophy of the Day, I'd Say it is Dataism.”

David Brooks, NY Times

- Internet of Things (IoT) – quantum leap in available data
- Blockchain - Unchangeable, **permanent data storage**
- AI - Unfathomable capacity to retrieve/process data
- Enhances “Dataism”
 - **Big Data**
 - “Universe consists of data flows”
 - Value is determined by contribution to data processing



AI, Algorithms, Bots

“AI is the New Electricity”

Andrew Ng

- AI turns data into **actionable intelligence**
- AI allows micro-targeting to influence decision-making
- Algorithms – set rules to get directed jobs done
- Bots – “**Web Robots**” run tasks on internet, social media
- Data-driven social media is key to public opinion



How Does This Apply to Us?



Using Our Strengths Against Us

Freedom is the American Spirit

In 2016, Russia's cost for meddling in U.S. Elections was less-than 1/2 the expense of a **single fighter jet**.

US Strengths = Freedoms

- Freedom of press
- Freedom of speech
- Freedom of religion
- Freedom of assembly

Russia has **leveraged all** of these via social media!



The Power of Social Media

Using Social Media it Was Easy for Russia to:

- Reach millions of voters with **minimal costs**
- Exploit divisive & heated issues within the U.S.
- Incite **opposition, division & protests**
- Focus was on whoever was in front, to sow discord
- **Publicly diminish front-runners**, generating mistrust



Russian Social Media Efforts in 2016

Statistics of known false/misleading activity

Twitter: 10 Million Tweets

Instagram: 116,000 posts

Facebook: 61,000 posts

Additional Videos: 1,000+



2016: Russia Scanned All 50 States

Over 20 had "Extra Penetrating Measures"

States Targeted by Russian Hackers

- 21 States Targeted According to DHS
- Every State Surrounding WV Except Kentucky



Foreign Interference is **everywhere**



Why You?

- You are 1 of over **4 billion** internet users.
- Your demographic is most likely to share posts
- Social media presence is highest among ages 18-24
- High school seniors are newest generation of voters
- First-time voters in 2020 Election – *be educated & prepared!*



Russia's Target: the American Spirit

5 Real-World Examples



1 Disinformation

Altered Candidate's Photo to Manipulate Public

Pro-Stacey Abrams



Anti-Stacey Abrams



2 Competing Rallies

Creation & Promotion of Competing Protests

Pro-Trump Rally



Nov. 12, 2016
4 days after
the election.

Anti-Trump Rally



3 Inciting Tensions

Advertised Competing Protests at Same Location & Date

Pro-Islam



Anti-Islam



4 Discouraging Voters

Targeting Race



All out assault on African American voters using social media!



5 Oppression

Social Media Ads that Divide American Society

Anti-Law Enforcement



Pro-Law Enforcement



Other Major Foreign Cyber Adversaries of U.S.



Misinformation vs Disinformation

- **Misinformation:** false/inaccurate info, **regardless of intent**
- **Disinformation:** **deliberately misleading**, incorrect, or biased info; manipulated narratives, facts, propaganda, **spread with intent** to deceive or mislead
 - *Examples:* deep fakes, altered or augmented videos, partial truths



Misinformation Is Everywhere: AI Failure

PowerPost

The Technology 202: Notre Dame cathedral fire reveals tech companies' struggle to combat misinformation

YouTube's defenses against misinformation just backfired in a big way -- and ended up contributing to baseless speculation online that the Notre Dame cathedral fire resulted from a terrorist attack.



Anyone Can Spread Misinformation



Ian Bremmer: American Political Scientist, founder of Eurasia Group consulting firm in NY, DC, London



“Half-Truths”

Covington High School Students Exploited by News & Social Media

There are always **two sides** to a story



1st reports made student appear as aggressor; yet, full video shows, in fact, the man with drum purposely confronted the students



Disinformation

Russia's new "Operation Infektion"

- Disinformation is like a **virus**
 - Russia plants fake news reports in 4 corners of world
 - They plant **secondary reports that cite first fake report**
 - Then, they watch it spread
 - Once circulated, hard to trace origin / "ground zero"
 - Soon, fake stories get into Western news outlets



Scope of the Operation



Impersonation of Political Figures

- Prime example of disinformation trying to divide U.S & U.K.
- Bad actors want us to **turn on ourselves**
- High profile figures impersonated easily



Edited/Augmented/Altered Videos

Deep Fakes – now extremely hard to spot

- **Super-imposing other peoples' faces onto real videos**
- Anybody can be impersonated on social media
- Completely falsified videos, can be made to **say anything**

Altered Videos

- Unlike deep fakes, **subject matter is not changed**
- Real video is slowed down, sped up, etc. to alter perception

Both are incredibly dangerous



Altered Videos



Facebook: “We don’t have a policy that stipulates the information you post on Facebook must be **true.**”



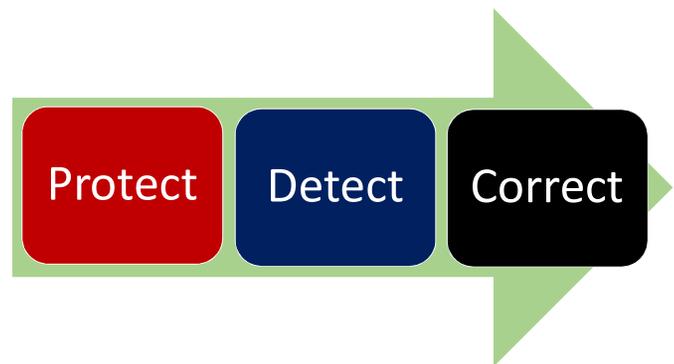
The Power of Fake News

Everybody Sees it, Not Everybody Knows it

- PEW: **23%** of adults had shared a made-up news story
- Youth particularly targeted as vulnerable to misinformation
- Bots & AI micro-targeting intensify effectiveness



What Can You Do?



First: Protect

- Be proactive
 - Question validity of social media posts
 - Verify information using reputable sources to fact-check
- Protect yourself, your devices, and internet accounts:
 - Always use multi-factor authentication & complex passwords
 - Use a different password for every account
 - **Think before you link**, click or share anything questionable



Second: Detect

- Identify phishing attempts & website impersonation
- Read all unauthorized access notices or alerts (email, texts, etc.)
- Don't ignore suspicious activity
- **Ransomware** – locks all data, pay \$ to regain access

IRAN cyber attacks after drone shot down!



Detect: Some Fact-Checking Resources

- **Opensecrets.org** – shows who receives \$ from Russia
- **Realorfake.org** – exposes fake news sites
- **Politifact.com** – fact checks US politics
- **Factcheck.org** – holds politicians accountable
- **Stopfake.org** – fact-check by Ukrainian profs & students
- **Polygraph.info** – fact check by Radio Free Europe, VOA
- **Sunlightfoundation.com** – nonprofit newsroom
- **Propublica.org** – nonprofit newsroom
- **Bellingcat.org** – distributed, collaborative investigating
- **WhatsApp** – new tip line for misinformation (India)



Detect: Suspicious Emails

Spear Phishing, Whaling
Specific Targets/Credential Harvesting

*Source: actual emails received by West Virginia officials



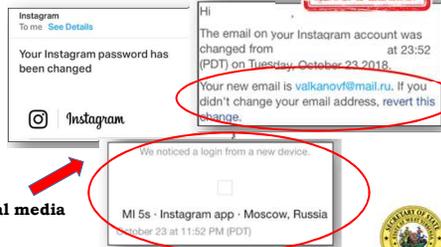
Detect: Anyone Can Be Hacked

HACKED



Source: Washington Post

U.S. Senator's campaign, national news



HACKED

WV resident's personal social media compromised by Russia



Third: Correct

If You Become a Victim of a Cyber Incident:

- Turn-off devices & disconnect from internet
- Change passwords to all accounts on a different device
- Report to internet/social media providers
- If asked for ransom (\$ or other value), report to police



American Voting Machines

IMPORTANT FACT:

NO EVIDENCE Any Votes Were Changed In a U.S. Election!

US voting machines are decentralized & maintained independently by *each state*.

In WV, voting machines:

1. Are **never** connected to internet
 - > 1,700 precincts managed independently by 55 counties
 - Very difficult to hack; requires physical security breach
2. Produce paper ballots verified by each voter
3. Pre- & post-election audits ensure security & accuracy



Media's Vital Role: They're a Target Too!

"It's not who votes that counts. *Today, it's Who Reports the Votes*"



Former Soviet Dictator Joseph Stalin

Food for thought

- What if a news agency is hacked & reports wrong winner?
- Can we trust reported outcomes today?
- Would public cry out for a recount or new election?
- Would public question legitimacy of results?



“What’s Going On?”

Marvin Gaye

3 Dimensional Chess

1. **Body** = Equipment, Ballots, Poll Books (*no problems*) **TRUTH**
2. **Mind** = Process, Tabulation, Voter Registration, Reporting (*some problems*)
3. **Spirit** = **American Psyche, Acceptance** (*real problems*) **TRUST**
This remains main **vector of Russian attack**

Need both **Truth AND Trust**

When we buy into
“America has never been so divided”
Russia wins!



Conclusion

Don't be a Russian Force Multiplier

1. Stay alert: be conscious, aware & protect against false info.
2. Anticipate Russia's tactics: < effectiveness by exposing antics.
3. **Minds, not machines**: Russia attacks our minds/spirit; hasn't succeeded in attacking our voting machines.
4. Race with no finish line: must always stay ahead of bad actors.
5. It starts with you: educating the public protects our democracy, & you are our first line of defense.



REMEMBER

***Russians Attacked Our Mind & Spirit,
Not Our Machines***

[Foreign Interference
Summary](#) (2 minutes)

[Foreign Interference
Video](#) (6 minutes)



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