Russia’s Campaign to Influence U.S. Elections

Office of the West Virginia Secretary of State

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.

Don’t fall for it!
Why Are They Doing It?

Can't compete with U.S. economically
Can't stand toe to toe with U.S. militarily
Only hope to stay competitive is to bring U.S. down from the inside

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
“Vous 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?**
Russia doesn’t have to break into data systems;
they achieve goals on softer targets using **AI, algorithms, bots, & micro targeting**
Using Our Strengths Against Us

**Freedom is the American Spirit**

In 2016, Russia’s cost for meddling in U.S. Elections was less-than \( \frac{1}{3} \) 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**!

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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
- **Publically diminish front-runners**, generating mistrust

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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+

That’s almost **28,000 social media actions per day**!

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2016: Russia Scanned All 50 States

**Over 20 had “Extra Penetrating Measures”**

- 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!*

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**Russia’s Target: the American Spirit**

5 Real-World Examples

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**1 Disinformation**

*Altered Candidate’s Photo to Manipulate Public*

- Pro-Stacey Abrams
- Anti-Stacey Abrams

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**2 Competing Rallies**

*Creation & Promotion of Competing Protests*

- Pro-Trump Rally
- Anti-Trump Rally

Nov. 12, 2016

4 days after the election.
3. **Inciting Tensions**

**Advertised Competing Protests at Same Location & Date**

- **Pro-Islam**
- **Anti-Islam**

![Pro-Islam Advertised Protest](image)

![Anti-Islam Advertised Protest](image)

4. **Discouraging Voters**

**Targeting Race**

- All out assault on African American voters using social media!

![Black Liberation Flag](image)

5. **Oppression**

**Social Media Ads that Divide American Society**

- **Anti-Law Enforcement**
- **Pro-Law Enforcement**

![Anti-Law Enforcement Ad](image)

![Pro-Law Enforcement Ad](image)

6. **Other Major Foreign Cyber Adversaries of U.S.**

![Map of Adversaries](image)
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

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Anyone Can Spread Misinformation

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“Half-Truths”

Covington High School Students Exploited by News & Social Media

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

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

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Misinformation Is Everywhere: AI Failure

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.
**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

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**Scope of the Operation**

Infiltrated far more than just Facebook & Twitter

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Targeted internet platforms across the world, posting in at least **6 languages**

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**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

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**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?

Protect  Detect  Correct
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

Detect: Some Fact-Checking Resources

• [Opensecrets.org](https://opensecrets.org) – shows who receives $ from Russia

• [Realorfake.org](https://www.realorfake.org) – exposes fake news sites

• [Politifact.com](https://www.politifact.com) – fact checks US politics

• [Factcheck.org](https://www.factcheck.org) – holds politicians accountable

• [Stopfake.org](https://stopfake.org) – fact-check by Ukrainian profs & students

• [Polygraph.info](http://polygraph.info) – fact check by Radio Free Europe, VOA

• [Sunlightfoundation.com](https://www.sunlightfoundation.com) – nonprofit newsroom

• [Propublica.org](https://www.propublica.org) – nonprofit newsroom

• [Bellingcat.org](https://www.bellingcat.org) – distributed, collaborative investigating

• [WhatsApp](https://www.whatsapp.com) – 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

U.S. Senator's campaign, national news

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!

*Today, it’s Who Reports the Votes*

**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!

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**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.

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**REMEMBER**

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

**Foreign Interference**
*Summary* (2 minutes)  *Video* (6 minutes)

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