



United States Senate

Chairman Richard Burr • Vice Chairman Mark Warner

Senate Select Committee on Intelligence

New Reports Shed Light on Internet Research Agency's Social Media Tactics

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, third-party experts released two independent analyses of social media tactics used by Russia's Internet Research Agency (IRA) in their attempts to influence U.S. political discourse. The reports are the first comprehensive analyses of their kind conducted by entities other than social media companies themselves, and are based in part on data provided by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI).

The reports, titled "[*The Tactics and Tropes of the Internet Research Agency*](#)" and "[*The IRA and Political Polarization in the United States, 2015-2017*](#)," were authored by New Knowledge, and University of Oxford and Graphika, respectively.

Statement from Committee Chairman Richard Burr (R-NC):

"Increasingly, we've seen how social media platforms intended to foster open dialogues can be used by hostile foreign actors seeking to manipulate and subvert public opinion. This newly released data demonstrates how aggressively Russia sought to divide Americans by race, religion and ideology, and how the IRA actively worked to erode trust in our democratic institutions. Most troublingly, it shows that these activities have not stopped. As we work to address these threats, these reports are proof positive that one of the most important things we can do is increase information sharing between the social media companies who can identify disinformation campaigns and the third-party experts who can analyze them."

Statement from Committee Vice Chairman Mark Warner (D-VA):

“These reports demonstrate the extent to which the Russians exploited the fault lines of our society to divide Americans in an attempt to undermine and manipulate our democracy. These attacks against our country were much more comprehensive, calculating and widespread than previously revealed. This should stand as a wake up call to us all that none of us are immune from this threat, and it is time to get serious in addressing this challenge. That is going to require some much-needed and long-overdue guardrails when it comes to social media. I hope these reports will spur legislative action in the Congress and provide additional clarity to the American public about Russia’s assault on our democracy.”

Background:

The third-party reports released today are based in part on data provided by the Committee under its Technical Advisory Group, whose members serve to provide substantive technical and expert advice on topics of importance to ongoing Committee activity and oversight. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions presented within are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Senate Intelligence Committee or its Membership.

Separate from the Technical Advisory Group, the Committee is conducting an ongoing investigation into the extent of Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. elections. As part of its investigation, the Committee has held several [open hearings](#) on the use of social media by foreign influence campaigns, including recent hearings with third-party experts in [August 2018](#) and social media company officials in [September 2018](#). The Committee will release its own report on social media with its findings as an installment of its investigation.

To read New Knowledge’s report, “*The Tactics and Tropes of the Internet Research Agency*,” [click here](#).

To read University of Oxford and Graphika’s report, “*The IRA and Political Polarization in the United States, 2015-2017*,” [click here](#).

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The Tactics & Tropes of the Internet Research Agency

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Document Purpose and Overview

Upon request by the United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI), New Knowledge reviewed an expansive data set of social media posts and metadata provided to SSCI by Facebook, Twitter, and Alphabet, plus a set of related data from additional platforms. The data sets were provided by the three primary platforms to serve as evidence for an investigation into the Internet Research Agency (IRA) influence operations.

The organic post content in this data set has never previously been seen by the public. Our report quantifies and contextualizes Internet Research Agency (IRA) influence operations targeting American citizens from 2014 through 2017, and articulates the significance of this long-running and broad influence operation. It includes an overview of Russian influence operations, a collection of summary statistics, and a set of key takeaways that are then discussed in detail later in the document. The document includes links to full data visualizations, hosted online, that permit the reader to explore facets of the IRA-created manipulation ecosystem.

Finally, we share our concluding notes and recommendations. We also provide a comprehensive slide deck accommodating a wide array of selected images directly from the data set illustrating our observations, and, as an appendix, a comprehensive summary of relevant statistics related to the data set.

This publication and its conclusions are in part based on the analysis of social media content that the authors were provided by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence under the auspices of the Committee's Technical Advisory Group, whose members serve to provide substantive technical and expert advice on topics of importance to ongoing Committee activity and oversight. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions presented herein are those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent the views of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence or its Membership.

Russian Interference Background and Context

Data Set Provenance and Analysis Parameters

Broadly, Russian interference in the U.S. Presidential Election of 2016 took three distinct forms, one of which is within the scope of our analysis:

1. Attempts to hack online voting systems (as detailed by a United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence [report](#))
2. A cyber-attack targeting the Democratic National Committee, executed by the GRU, which led to a controlled leak via Wikileaks of email data related to the Clinton Presidential campaign team
3. A sweeping and sustained social influence operation consisting of various coordinated disinformation tactics aimed directly at US citizens, designed to exert political influence and exacerbate social divisions in US culture

This last form of interference, a multi-year coordinated disinformation effort conducted by the Russian state-supported Internet Research Agency (IRA), is the topic of this analysis.

The United States Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) began an investigation into the IRA's social media activities following the 2016 election around the same time that investigative journalists and third-party researchers became aware that IRA's campaign had touched all major platforms in the social network ecosystem. In March 2018, some of the social platform companies misused by the IRA (Twitter, Facebook, and Alphabet) provided the SSCI with data related to IRA influence operations. Facebook's data submission includes Facebook Page posts and Instagram account content. Alphabet's data submission includes

Google AdWords and YouTube video and channel data. The data set reveals that Alphabet's subsidiaries YouTube, G+, Gmail, and Google Voice were each leveraged to support the creation and validation of false personas.

Evidence provided by these companies to SSCI ties the IRA operation to widespread activity on other popular social platforms including Vine, Gab, Meetup, VKontakte, and LiveJournal. Several complete websites were created to host original written content, and to provide source material for related social accounts and personas. The breadth of the attack included games, browser extensions, and music apps created by the IRA and pushed to targeted groups, including US teenagers. The popular game Pokémon Go was incorporated into the operation, illustrating the fluid, evolving, and innovative tactical approach the IRA leveraged to interfere in US politics and culture.

Several platforms that confirmed the presence of IRA interference operations (Reddit, Tumblr, Pinterest, and Medium) were **not** part of the formal SSCI investigation or data requests, and that content was not included in the SSCI data set. They have cooperated with law enforcement, and their information has been incorporated into a parallel Department of Justice investigation; the Mueller indictment of Russian nationals, Netyksho et al, dated 07/13/18, specifically references Tumblr-based interference operations. In the interest of thorough analysis, New Knowledge took initiative to **also** analyze relevant data from Reddit, Tumblr, and Pinterest in addition to the data set provided by SSCI.

The data set provided to the SSCI for the purposes of this analysis includes extensive amounts of data previously unknown to the public; it is the first comprehensive analysis by entities other than the social platforms themselves.

None of the platforms (Twitter, Facebook, and Alphabet) appears to have turned over complete sets of related data to SSCI. Some of what was turned over was in PDF form; other data sets contained extensive duplicates. Each lacked core components that would have provided a fuller and more actionable picture. For example:

- The platforms didn't include methodology for identifying the accounts; we are assuming the provenance and attribution is sound for the purposes of this analysis.
- They didn't include anonymized user comments, eliminating a key path to gauge impact.
- They didn't include any conversion pathway data to elucidate how individuals came to follow the accounts, eliminating another key path to gauge impact.
- There was minimal metadata.

- One data set did not include any user engagement data at all.

Regrettably, it appears that the platforms may have misrepresented or evaded in some of their statements to Congress; one platform claimed that no specific groups were targeted (this is only true if speaking strictly of ads), while another dissembled about whether or not the Internet Research Agency created content to discourage voting (it did). It is unclear whether these answers were the result of faulty or lacking analysis, or a more deliberate evasion.

IRA Background

The IRA began its operations in mid-2013 in St. Petersburg, Russia. Run like a sophisticated marketing agency in a centralized office environment, the IRA employed and trained over a thousand people to engage in round-the-clock influence operations, first targeting Ukrainian and Russian citizens, and then, well before the 2016 US election, Americans. The scale of their operation was unprecedented – they reached 126 million people on Facebook, at least 20 million users on Instagram, 1.4 million users on Twitter, and uploaded over 1,000 videos to YouTube. As Department of Justice indictments have recently revealed, this manipulation of American political discourse had a budget that exceeded \$25 million USD and continued well into 2018. IRA documents indicate the 2017 operational budget alone was \$12.2 million US dollars. Independent researchers and social platforms were aware of the IRA as early as 2015, and its activities on Facebook are well-documented and discussed in detail in Adrian Chen’s “The Agency”. Subsequent glimpses into the operational structure and strategy of the IRA can be found in the February 2018 [indictment](#) of 13 Russian nationals by Special Counsel Robert Mueller, and the September 28, 2018 [criminal complaint](#) of United States of America v. Elena Alekseevna Khusyaynova.

The September 2018 indictment reveals that “[t]he Conspiracy has sought to conduct what it called internally ‘information warfare against the United States of America.’” (p.6 of DOJ Khusyaynova Complaint). The data provided to SSCI clearly illustrates that for approximately five years, Russia has waged a propaganda war against American citizens, manipulating social media narratives to influence American culture and politics.

We hope that this analysis of the IRA information warfare arsenal – particularly the discussion of the influence operation tactics – helps policymakers and American citizens alike to understand the sophistication of the adversary, and to be aware of the ongoing threat to American democracy.

Key Takeaways

Statistical Highlights

- The comprehensive dataset included:
 - ~10.4 million tweets (of which ~6 million were original) across 3841 twitter accounts
 - ~1100 YouTube videos across 17 account channels
 - ~116,000 Instagram posts across 133 accounts
 - ~61,500 unique Facebook posts across 81 Pages
- There were ~77 million engagements on Facebook, ~187 million engagements on Instagram, and ~73 million engagements on original content on Twitter. Precise summary statistics are presented later in this report.

Key Observations

- **The Threat Persists**
 - Active and ongoing interference operations remain on several platforms.
- **Unpublicized Prominence of Instagram Operations**
 - Instagram was a significant front in the IRA's influence operation, something that Facebook executives appear to have avoided mentioning in Congressional testimony.
 - There were 187 million engagements on Instagram. Facebook estimated that this was across 20 million affected users. There were 76.5 million engagements on Facebook; Facebook estimated that the Facebook operation reached 126 million people. It is

possible that the 20 million is not accounting for impact from regrams, which may be difficult to track because Instagram does not have a native sharing feature.

- In 2017, as media covered their Facebook and Twitter operations, the IRA shifted much of its activity to Instagram.
 - Instagram engagement outperformed Facebook, which may indicate its strength as a tool in image-centric memetic (meme) warfare. Alternately, it is possible that the IRA's Instagram engagement was the result of click farms; a few of the provided accounts reference what appears to be a live engagement farm.
 - Our assessment is that Instagram is likely to be a key battleground on an ongoing basis.
- **Extensive Operations Targeting Black-American Communities**
 - The most prolific IRA efforts on Facebook and Instagram specifically targeted Black American communities and appear to have been focused on developing Black audiences and recruiting Black Americans as assets.
 - The IRA created an expansive cross-platform media mirage targeting the Black community, which shared and cross-promoted authentic Black media to create an immersive influence ecosystem.
 - The IRA exploited the trust of their Page audiences to develop human assets, at least some of whom were not aware of the role they played. This tactic was substantially more pronounced on Black-targeted accounts.
 - The degree of integration into authentic Black community media was not replicated in the otherwise Right-leaning or otherwise Left-leaning content.
 - **Voter Suppression Operations**
 - Despite statements from Twitter and Facebook debating whether it was possible to gauge whether voter suppression content was present, there were three primary variants of specific voter suppression narratives spread on Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.
 - ◆ Malicious misdirection (Twitter-based text-to-vote scams, tweets designed to create confusion about voting rules)
 - ◆ Candidate support redirection ('vote for a 3rd party!')
 - ◆ Turnout depression ('stay home on Election Day, your vote doesn't matter')

- **Sowing Literal Division: Secession**
 - The IRA sowed both secessionist and insurrectionist sentiments, attempting to exacerbate discord against the government at federal, state, and local levels.
 - Content focused on secessionist movements including Texas secession (#texit) and California (#calexit). These were compared to #Brexit.
- **Pro-Trump Operations Commence During Primaries**
 - The IRA had a very clear bias for then-candidate Trump's that spanned from early in the campaign and throughout the data set.
 - A substantial portion of political content articulated pro-Donald Trump sentiments, beginning with the early primaries.
 - Aside from an extremely small set of early posts supporting Rand Paul, this preference was consistent throughout the Right-leaning IRA-created communities.
 - Some of the pages targeting traditionally Left-leaning audiences, such as United Muslims, very occasionally broached the idea that their members might consider Trump as well.
- **Comprehensive Anti-Hillary Clinton Operations**
 - A substantial portion of political content articulated anti-Hillary Clinton sentiments among both Right and Left-leaning IRA-created communities.
 - There was no pro-Clinton content on Facebook or Instagram, aside from a single United Muslims Facebook Event promoting a rally encouraging Muslims to publicly demonstrate in support of Clinton's candidacy. However, the bulk of the content on that same page was anti-Clinton, and the anti-Clinton motive behind this ostensibly pro-Clinton post is transparent.
 - There were some pro-Clinton Twitter posts (tweets and retweets), however, the developed Left-wing Twitter personas were still largely anti-Clinton and expressed pro-Bernie Sanders and pro-Jill Stein sentiments.
 - These tactics and goals overlapped with the pro-Trump portion of the operation.
- **Operations Targeting Prominent Figures**
 - IRA operations targeted a wide range of Republican leaders, including Sens. Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, Lindsay Graham, John McCain, and Dr. Ben Carson.
 - There were significant IRA mentions that aimed to increase or erode support for

prominent political figures, including Julian Assange, Robert Mueller, and James Comey. These mentions were largely an attempt to shape audience perception during a relevant news cycle.

- Given the recent news regarding a pending indictment of Mr. Assange, it is perhaps notable that there were a number of posts expressing support for Assange and Wikileaks, including several on October 4th, 2016, the day before Roger Stone's text message history indicated Mr. Stone believed hacked email data would be made public via Wikileaks.
- These tactics and goals overlapped with the pro-Trump portion of the operation.

Themes

Based on publicly available open-source research, Twitter's release of 10 million IRA tweets, and the United States House of Representatives' release of the Facebook ad data, there is a prevailing narrative that the Internet Research Agency was focused on dividing Americans, and that the operation's focus on elections was merely a small subset of that activity. While accurate, this narrative misses nuance and deserves more contextualization in light of the additional material contained in the Google and YouTube data set, and the collection of the hundreds of thousands of non-ad "organic" memes and posts provided to SSCI.

The IRA had a roster of themes, primarily social issues, that they repeatedly emphasized and reinforced across their Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube content.

- Black culture, community, Black Lives Matter
- Blue Lives Matter, pro-police
- Anti-refugee, pro-immigration reform
- Texas culture, community, and pride
- Southern culture (Confederate history)
- Separatist movements and secession
- Muslim culture, community, and pride
- Christian culture, community, and pride
- LGBT culture, community, and pride
- Native American culture, community, and pride
- Meme and "red pill" culture
- Patriotism and Tea Party culture
- Liberal and feminist culture
- Veteran's Issues
- Gun rights, pro-2nd Amendment
- Political Pro-Trump, anti-Clinton content
- Pro-Bernie Sanders and Jill Stein content
- Syria and ISIS, pro-Assad, anti-U.S. involvement
- Trust in media

These recurring topics were grouped thematically on Facebook Pages and Instagram accounts designed to reinforce community and culture and to foster feelings of pride. The material can be classified into three broad groups: Black-targeted, politically Left-targeted, and politically Right-targeted. While other distinct ethnic and religious groups were the focus of one or two Facebook Pages or Instagram accounts, the Black community was targeted extensively with dozens; this is why we have elected to assess the messaging directed at Black Americans as a distinct and significant operation for purposes of this report.

The themes selected by the IRA were deployed to create and reinforce tribalism within each targeted community; in a majority of the posts created on a given Page or account, the IRA simply reinforced in-group camaraderie. They punctuated cultural-affinity content with political posts, and content demonizing out-groups. Partisan content was presented to targeted groups in on-brand ways, such as a meme featuring Jesus in a Trump campaign hat on an account that targeted Christians. A few traditionally hot-button issues, such as abortion, did not get their own dedicated thematic accounts but appeared sporadically across a few hundred posts on pages that generally focused on other things.



Two themes were disseminated nearly identically across all targeted communities: narratives to erode trust in mainstream media, and narratives to convey Russian's state-sanctioned talking points on the Syrian conflict.

On Twitter, where communities are amorphous, the IRA personas discussed the themes listed above but also included many others. The activity was driven by local and current events; the

themes appeared, but the accounts additionally worked in popular culture references, including emerging conspiracy theories.

While media narratives around the Russian/IRA Twitter activity have often focused on automation and bots, the agency ran human-operated precision personas that roughly mapped to the same Black, Left, and Right clusters observed on Facebook and Instagram. The personas were spontaneous and responsive, engaging with real users (famous influencers and media as well as regular people), participating in real-time conversations, creating polls, and playing hashtag games. These personas developed relationships with American citizens. They were designed to influence individuals and to shape narratives; the IRA appears to have attempted to solidify the positioning of well-developed Twitter accounts as influencers by alluding to them by name or screenshot in their posts on other platforms (i.e., TEN_GOP's Twitter content shared on the Facebook account Stand for Freedom). The Twitter personas regularly retweeted content by prominent and influential public figures; they were occasionally retweeted by influencers in return. The automated accounts were primarily news-focused, and largely limited to tweeting headlines and retweeting other accounts.

In addition to memetic content and tweets, the IRA pushed narratives with longform blog content. They created media properties, websites designed to produce stories that would resonate with those targeted. It appears, based on the data set provided by Alphabet, that the IRA may have also expanded into think tank-style communiques. One such page, previously unattributed to the IRA but included in the Alphabet data, was GI Analytics, a geopolitics blog with an international masthead that included American authors. This page was promoted via AdWords and YouTube videos; it has strong ties to more traditional Russian propaganda networks, which will be discussed later in this analysis. GI Analytics wrote articles articulating nuanced academic positions on a variety of sophisticated topics. From the site's About page:

“Our purpose and mission are to provide high-quality analysis at a time when we are faced with a multitude of crises, a collapsing global economy, imperialist wars, environmental disasters, corporate greed, terrorism, deceit, GMO food, a migration crisis and a crackdown on small farmers and ranchers.”

And, finally, in service to these themes, the IRA co-opted the names of real groups with existing reputations serving the targeted communities - including United Muslims of America, Cop Block, Black Guns Matter, and L for Life. This was perhaps an attempt to loosely backstop an identity if a curious individual did a Google Search, or to piggyback on an established brand.

Summary Statistics: A Cross-Platform Operation

Internet Research Agency-attributed domains

- blackvswhite.info
- dntshoot.com
- donotshoot.us
- blackmattersusa.com
- blackmattersus.com
- blacktivist.info
- blacktolive.org
- blacksoul.us
- proudtobeblack.org
- black4black.info
- patriotsus.com
- butthis.com
- dudeers.com
- imsanbernardino.info
- blackfist.pro
- reportsecret.com

**USAREally.com, another IRA-attributed site, launched during the SSCI investigation*

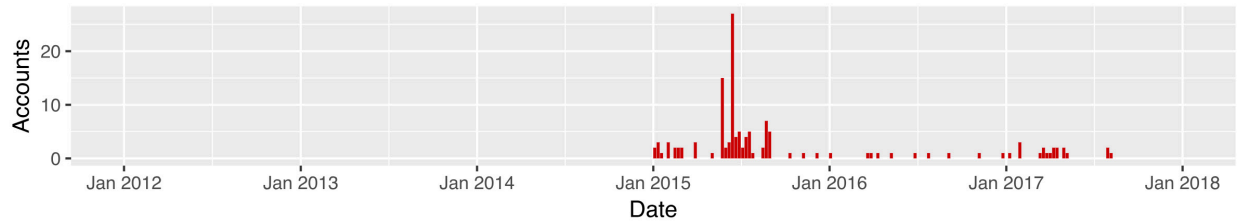
Dates of First Posts

The dates of first posts (see graphs on next page) suggest that the IRA was active on Twitter for several years prior to their efforts commencing on Facebook and Instagram; however, given that the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence requested data from January 1, 2015 on, it is possible that some IRA content that appeared on Facebook or Instagram was simply not included in the data provided.

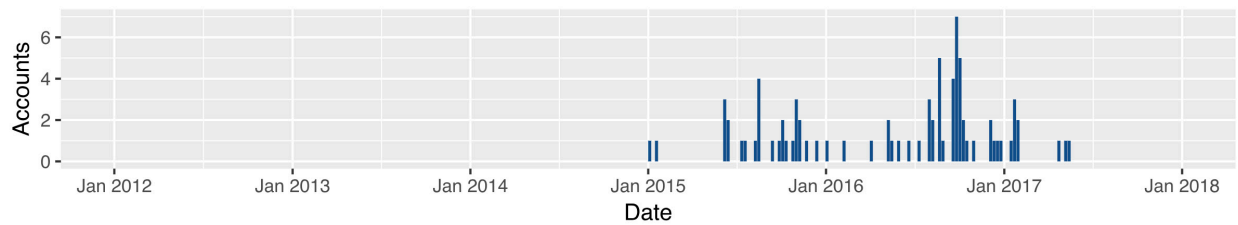
Interestingly, it appears that a majority of the Instagram accounts were created relatively early in the operation, then increasingly leveraged as the operation continued (Instagram activity

increased over time, including in 2017). Facebook Pages appear to have been created or leveraged later, with a wave of Pages that began to post leading into Election 2016.

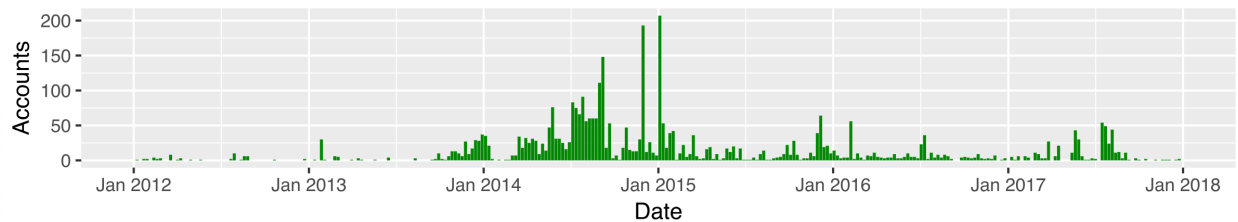
INSTAGRAM



FACEBOOK



TWITTER

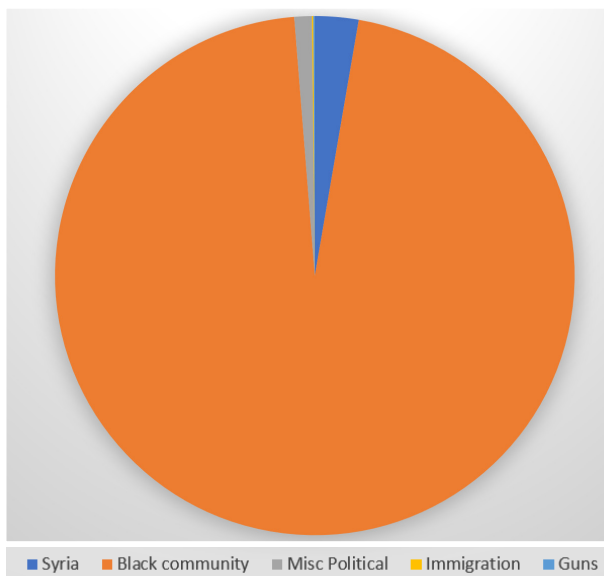


Full summary statistics with charts and graphs highlighting platform activity, domains shared, ad spend, and more can be found in the accompanying slide deck analysis of the IRA data set.

Organic Activities

Organic Activity: YouTube

The IRA appears to have begun making YouTube videos in Sept 2015, producing 1107 videos across 17 channels. A few channels were active until July 2017. Several aggregated or repurposed Vine content. Two channels were specifically political, focused on the 2016 election. Three channels (30 videos) were devoted to Syria & related Near East conflicts. One was affiliated with GI Analytics, which also ran AdWords, and the others were both variants of the name “New Inform” (related to a site of the same name).



By far the most content was related to Black Lives Matter & police brutality: 1063 videos split across 10 different channels (59% of the channels, 96% of the content). 571 had title keywords related to the police and focused on police abuses. In light of this, YouTube’s statement before the first Senate tech hearing – “These channels’ videos were not targeted to the U.S. or to any particular sector of the U.S. population” – is perhaps using ‘target’ in the paid sense, but appears disingenuous.

INTERNET RESEARCH AGENCY YOUTUBE CHANNEL LIST

- A Word of Truth (Williams & Calvin)
- [Backyard of the White House](#)
- Black Matters
- BlackToLive
- Cop Block US
- Don't Shoot
- Global Independent Analytics
- GUNS 4LIFE
- Hong Zi
- New Inform
- Newinform Newinform
- Paul Jefferson
- PoliceState
- Starling Brown
- STOP A.I.
- Stop Police Brutality

**Backyard of the White House content is still aggregated and accessible online at the link*

Across all channels, 25 videos had election-related keywords in the title (candidate names, “vote”/“voting”, “election”, etc). These videos were all anti-Hillary Clinton. One of the political channels, Paul Jefferson, solicited videos for a #PeeOnHillary video challenge (the hashtag appeared on Twitter and Instagram) and shared submissions that it received. Videos on the “A Word of Truth” channel – the YouTube channel of Williams & Calvin Facebook page and @williams.and.kalvin_ Instagram account – included voter suppression tactics targeting African-American voters – advocating Black voters stay home, or vote for Jill Stein. Titles included “The truth about elections”, “HILLARY RECEIVED \$20,000 DONATION FROM KKK TOWARDS HER CAMPAIGN”, “A Word Of Truth: Dr. Alveda against fu**in’ Hillary”.

YouTube provided some account metadata to SSCI. Several of the email addresses attached to the YouTube accounts were affiliated with Google Plus pages; the remainder were Gmail accounts. Several email addresses confirmed links between accounts, and across platforms. Addresses williamsjohnsonhiphop@gmail.com and copblock1@gmail.com were both affiliated with the “A Word of Truth” channel; copblock1@gmail.com was also attached to the “Cop Block US” YouTube channel. One of the email addresses linked to the “Don’t Shoot” YouTube account appears to also have been linked to a Tumblr post that advocated that players of Pokémon Go name their Pokémon with a police brutality victim’s name.

The two “New Inform” channels had Russian-language sites associated with them, and content related to Syria, Turkey, and the Middle East. They appear to be related to the site newinform.com.

Organic Activity: Twitter

An extensive amount of writing has been dedicated to the various facets of the IRA's Twitter operation as researcher-acquired data sets, such as the one released by Clemson University and FiveThirtyEight, have emerged since Election 2016. In October 2018, Twitter itself released a data set of IRA tweets to the public. In light of this, we did a brief analysis of the Twitter data provided to SSCI during this investigation.

The IRA developed a collection of over 3841 persona accounts on Twitter; approximately [1.4 million people](#) engaged with their tweets. They generated 72,801,807 engagements on their original content (not including retweets that they amplified, but which were written by others). The tweets from the 3841 persona accounts were delivered to SSCI in two batches; it appears that a couple of real accounts were [misidentified](#) as Russian, while other IRA were missed and discovered later.

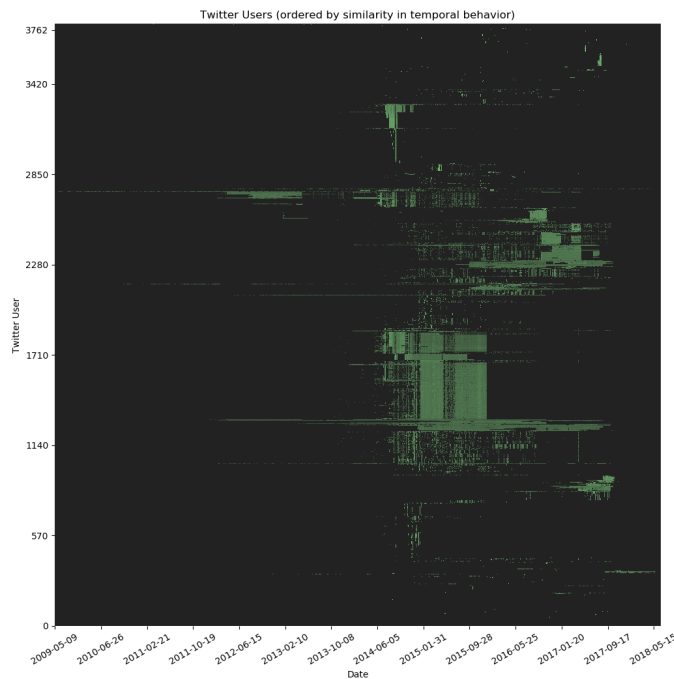
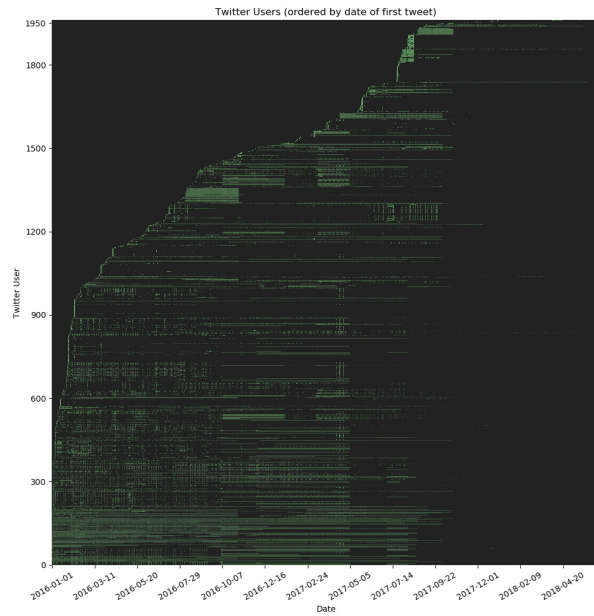
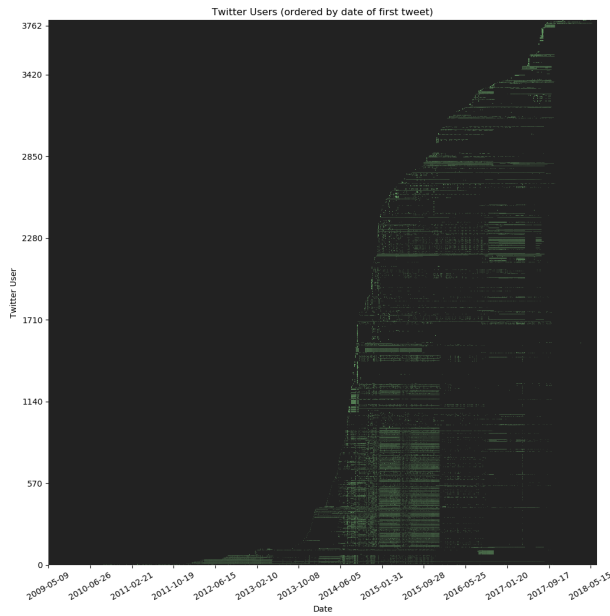
Our investigation into the Twitter accounts corroborates the findings of other researchers and media over the past 18 months, and suggests that the English-language activity appears to have taken four primary forms:

- Repurposed accounts from a commercial botnet
- Newsbots: accounts that tweeted news articles focused on the regions they were purportedly from (including Russian-language newsbots targeting Russians); this is discussed later in this document in the Media Manipulation section
- “Right-leaning” accounts that participated in conversations or created political content designed to be resonant with right-of-center individuals on the American political spectrum
- “Left-leaning” accounts that did the same thing for Left-leaning audiences.

Our perception of the account personas has been confirmed by outside researchers from Clemson University and Five Thirty Eight, which released a collection of IRA tweets (a subset of the ones provided to the committee) during the period of this investigation. That coding [can be found in an easily-searchable interface here](#); by that classification, there were 1280 Russian language accounts, 630 Right-leaning, 233 Left-leaning, 54 Newsfeed. As noted elsewhere, automation played a role: many of the accounts tweeted at the same time. We visualized users clustered by similarity in temporal behavior on page 19.

In the course of a similarity analysis we discovered still-active bots that were likely part of a commercially acquired or repurposed botnet.

These charts look at Twitter account posting patterns over time. Each row is an individual Twitter account, green indicates tweets. Concentrated blocks of color in this plot represent users who posted at exactly the same time, and may indicate the use of automation. More extended color blocks indicate more intense coordination over a longer period of time.



Based on the metadata provided by Twitter, most of the IRA twitter accounts were registered through various proxy services in the United states and Europe. Accounts intended to pass as American were registered from U.S. IP addresses, and accounts intended to pass as Germans were registered from German IP addresses. A significant number of IRA twitter accounts however, were registered from either a single IP address in Venezuela or the IRA building's real IP address in St. Petersburg.

Our impression of the IRA's Twitter operation is that it was largely opportunistic real-time chatter; a collection of accounts, for example, regularly played hashtag games. There was a substantial amount of retweeting. By contrast, Facebook and Instagram were used to develop deeper relationships, to create a collection of substantive cultural media pages dedicated to continual reinforcement of in-group and out-group ideals for targeted audiences. Twitter was, however, a part of the cross-platform brand building tactic; several of the Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, and Reddit pages had associated Twitter accounts.

One interesting facet of the Twitter operation was the IRA site "Report Secret" – dozens of the IRA Right-wing persona accounts used ReportSecret.com as their bio URL. This site did not appear in the content for Facebook or Instagram. Looking at the Twitter bio URLs also revealed personas who linked themselves to Gab.ai, to LiveJournal, and to VKontakte. Some of the accounts in the bios are still active, although dormant.

One additional observation of note is an observation of absence: the data provided by Twitter did not include accounts, thought by many observers to be Russian, that were discovered to have engaged in narrative manipulation in 2017. One example of this is @umpire43, which [engaged in spreading disinformation](#) during the Roy Moore campaign; this account does not appear in the SSCI data set. It is still possible that such accounts were Russia-owned, but operated by a non-IRA entity. Alternately, they may have belonged to a different adversary.

Organic Activity: Facebook

The IRA leveraged the majority of Facebook's features, including Ads, Pages, Events, Messenger, and even Stickers. Over the past two years, Facebook has undergone a significant transformation in how it discusses influence operations on the platform, and it deserves commendation for that evolution in thinking. However, the earliest public comments by the platform attempted to diminish the IRA operation as just 'a few hundred thousand dollars of ads'. This inaccurate assessment has stuck among people who remain skeptical of the IRA operation's significance; we hope that this report on the reach of the hundreds of thousands of organic posts puts that to rest.

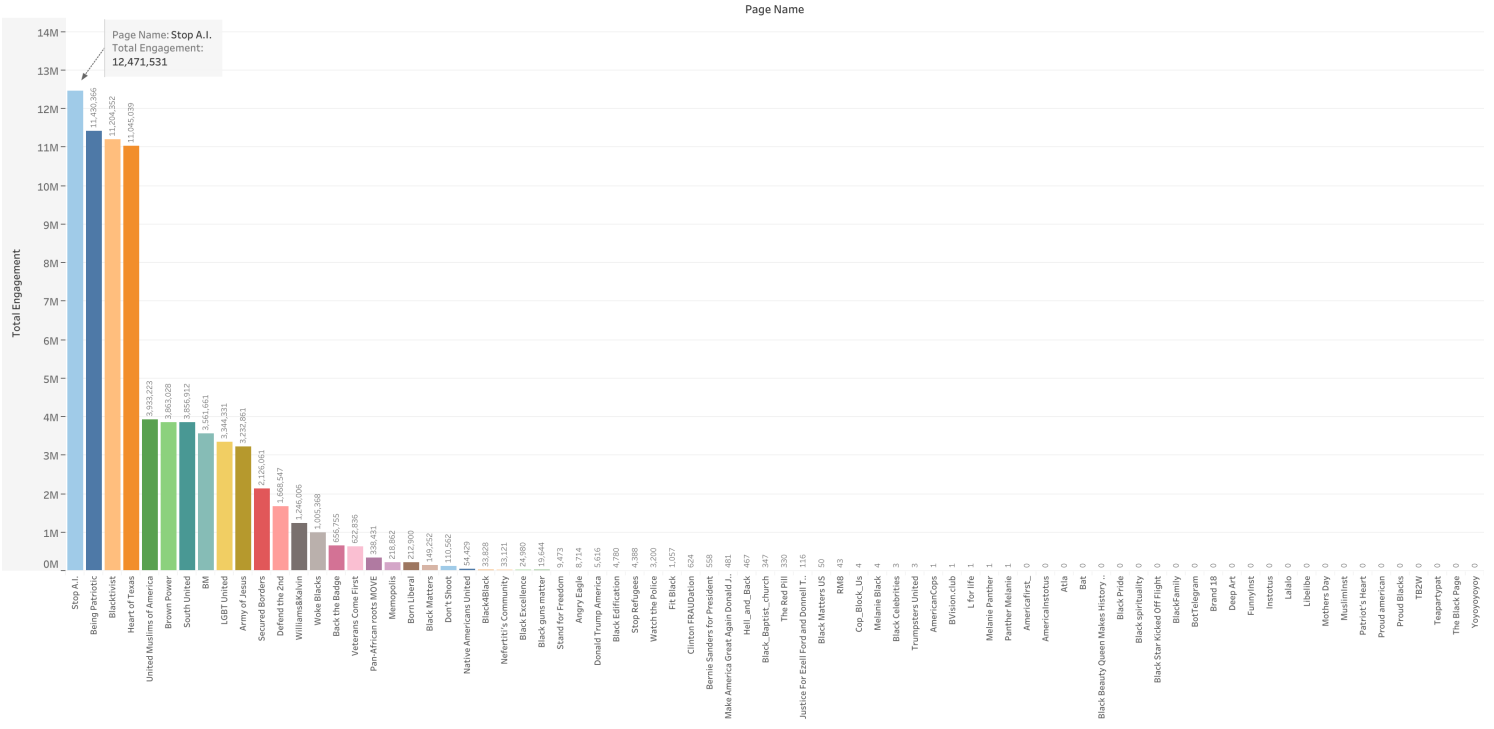
The Facebook data provided included posts from 81 unique Pages, of which 33 had over 1000 followers. Of these 33, fourteen major pages focused on Black audiences, five were aimed at Left-leaning audiences, one was a travel-focused older page, and thirteen targeted Right-leaning audiences. Overall, 30 targeted Black audiences and amassed 1,187,810 followers; 25 targeted the Right and amassed 1,446,588 followers, and 7 targeted the Left and amassed 689,045 followers. The remaining 19 were a sporadic collection of pages with almost no posts and approximately 2000 followers across them.

As mentioned in the opening section of this report, there were 76.5 million engagements across 3.3 million Page followers. These included 30.4 million shares, 37.6 million likes, 3.3 million comments, and 5.2 million reactions across the content. Since Facebook did not provide data about any sockpuppet accounts involved in the distribution of the content or the existence of "fake Likes" from these accounts, we are operating under the assumption that this engagement was from real people, and that this content was pushed into the Newsfeeds of their Friends as well.

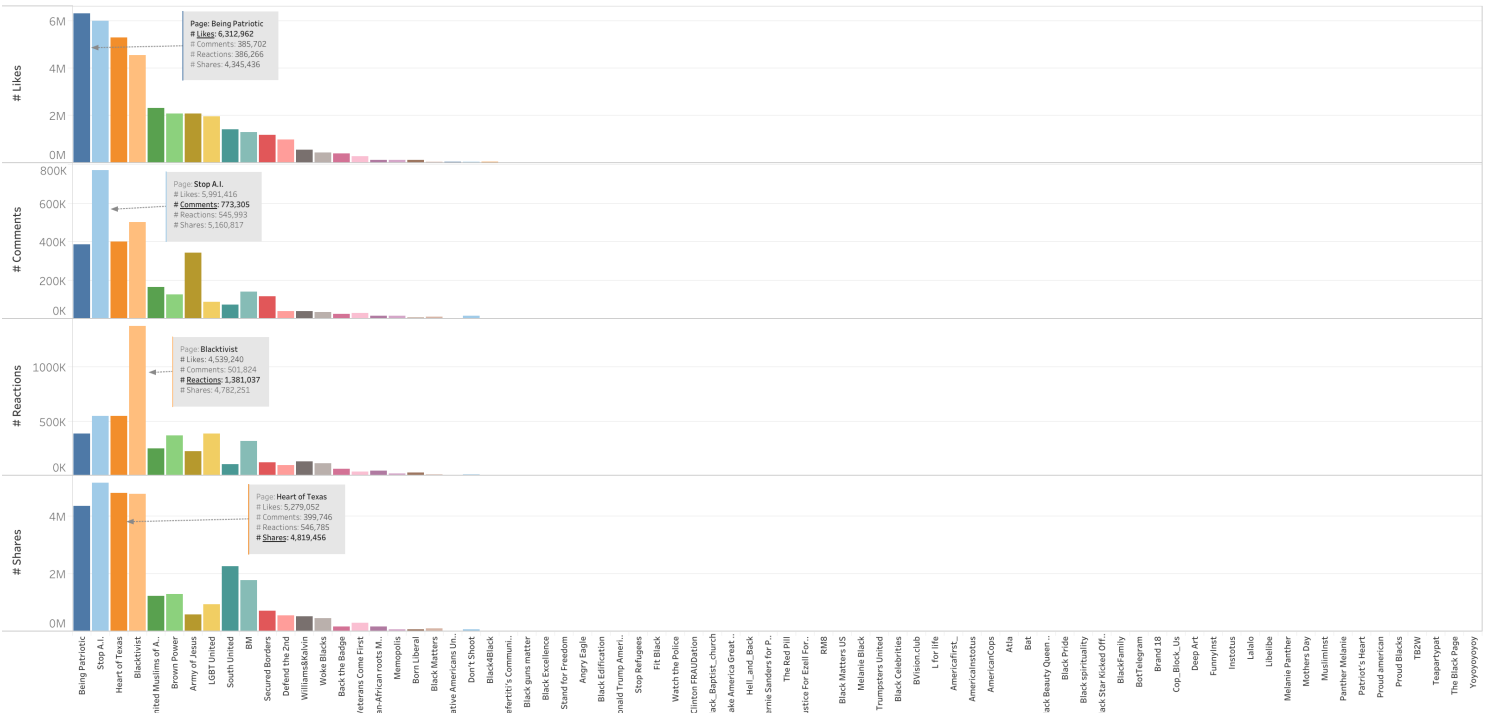
There was a long tail of failed attempts and weak engagement. The Top 20 Pages show substantially more success across the four types of engagement (likes, shares, comments, reactions) than the remaining 61. Of the top ten Pages by engagement, 50% focused on Right-leaning audiences; despite the significant efforts made to target the Black community on Facebook, only two Black-targeted pages cracked the top 10 by engagement.

The Page with content that garnered the most Likes was Being Patriotic (Right-targeted; 6.3 million Likes). The most comments appeared on Stop All Invaders (Right-targeted, 773,305 comments), most reactions on Blacktivist (Black-targeted, 1.4 million reactions), most shares from Heart of Texas (Right-targeted, 4.8 million shares)

Total Engagement

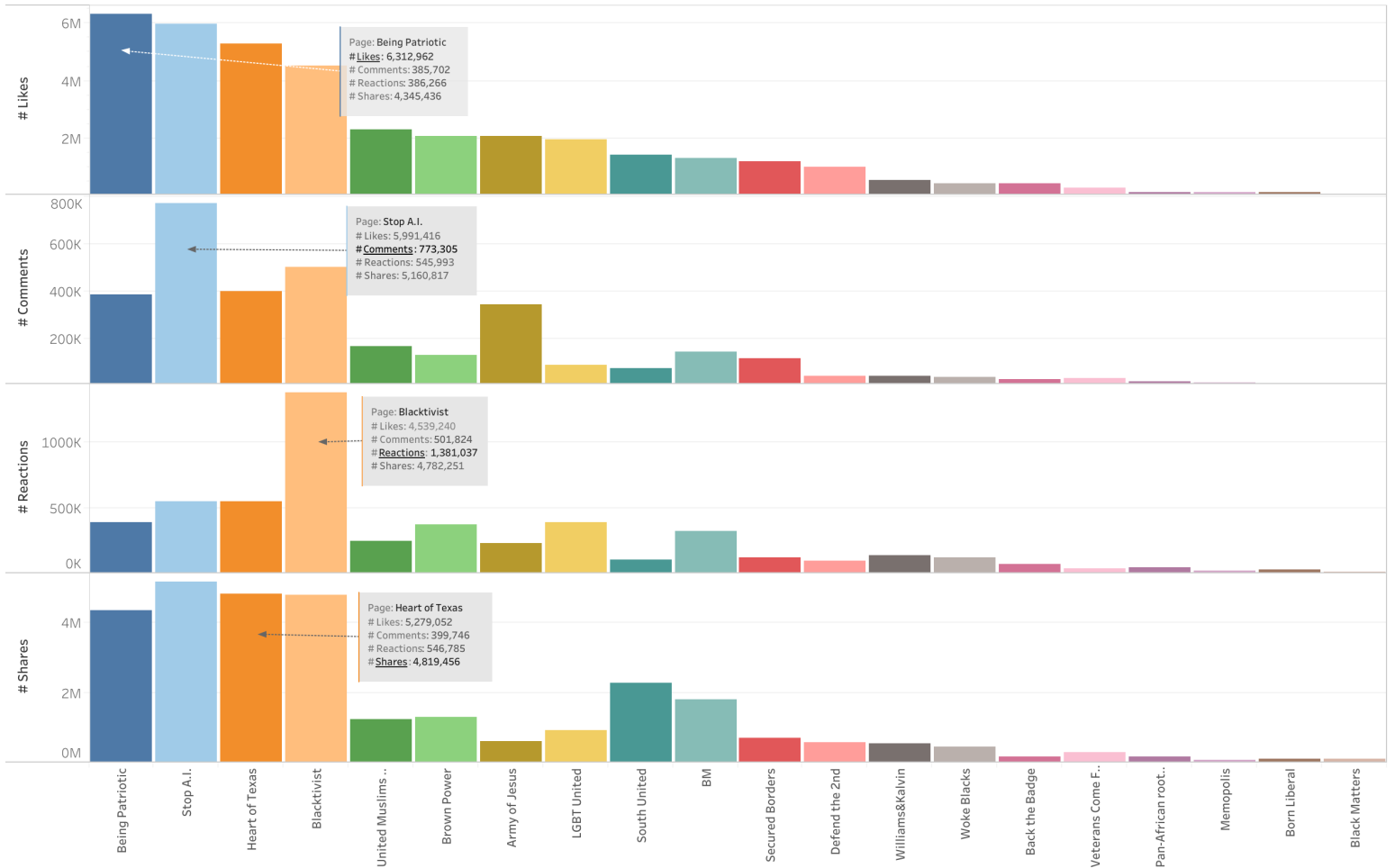


IRA Facebook Pages - Comparative Engagement Overview (ALL)



Engagement Metrics for IRA Facebook Pages, illustrating the long tail in engagement.

IRA Facebook Pages - Comparative Engagement Overview (Top 20)



Close-up of figure highlighting engagement types across the top 20 accounts

Political content appeared in the IRA accounts on Facebook. The post with the most engagement that featured Donald Trump emerged after the election, on January 23, 2017. It was a conspiracy theory about President Barack Obama refusing to ban Sharia Law under the 1952 McCarran-Walters Act, encouraging President Trump to take action. It received 312,632 organic shares from the Stop All Invaders page. Searching for the meme on Facebook today, in November 2018, reveals that it was shared into several large Groups and Pages, presumably by authentic accounts, where it received hundreds of additional shares, comments, and engagements.



"On June 27, 1952, American government passed a law, called '1952 McCarran Walters act', that actually outlawed Sharia, but Obama never intended to enforce it or even let you know about it at all. Instead he started to import thousands of aggressive Muslim 'refugees', who refused to integrate and demanded to be allowed to live under sharia law instead of American constitution. Now it's within Donald Trump's authority to enforce that law and ban Sharia in every state across America. Do you want him to do that?" – Stop A.I., posted 1/23/2017

# Likes	# Comments	# Reactions	# Shares	Total Engagement
162850	93231	11014	312632	579727

The top post featuring Hillary Clinton was a conspiratorial post asserting a myriad of grievances related to theoretical voter fraud and alluding to an armed uprising. It was posted a month before the election.



"As I've said before, I'm really concerned if victory will go to Hillary Clinton due to voter fraud. If we can't trust the State Department, if we can't trust DOJ, if we can't trust the FBI, if we can't trust the DHS, hell we can't trust any division of our Federal Government, so it seems logical we can't put much trust in today's elections system. And we see that Hillary is exhibiting the same cockiness that Obama did before he won in 2008/2012. As if she knows in advance that the results will put her in the White House. POTUS administration shamelessly exploit the rigged system, Democrats already have a great experience at this. Illegal aliens, dead people, incarcerated criminals or refugees who can't even speak English... They ALL work together to get Democrats over the top in these elections!! Are you outraged by this as much as I am? No wonder they trying to take away our guns - because Americans have had enough of this BS and if Killary wins there will be riots nationwide, not seen since the times of Revolutionary war!!" – posted on Secured Borders, 10/7/2016

# Likes	# Comments	# Reactions	# Shares	Total Engagement
19433	4543	871	77406	102253

The organic Facebook posts reveal a nuanced and deep knowledge of American culture, media, and influencers in each community the IRA targeted. For example, Turning Point USA and Pepe the Frog memes appear among the youthful alt-Right-targeted Memopolis and Angry Eagle Pages but don't appear on the boomer-conservative focused pages. The IRA was fluent in American trolling culture.



Right-leaning organic Facebook posts denigrated the U.S. media and intelligence community as untrustworthy, and diminished longstanding Conservative leaders such as Sen. Lindsay Graham and Sen. John McCain while elevating Donald Trump. Left-leaning pages similarly criticized mainstream, established Democratic leaders as corporatists or too close to neo-cons, and promoted Green Party and Democratic Socialist themes.

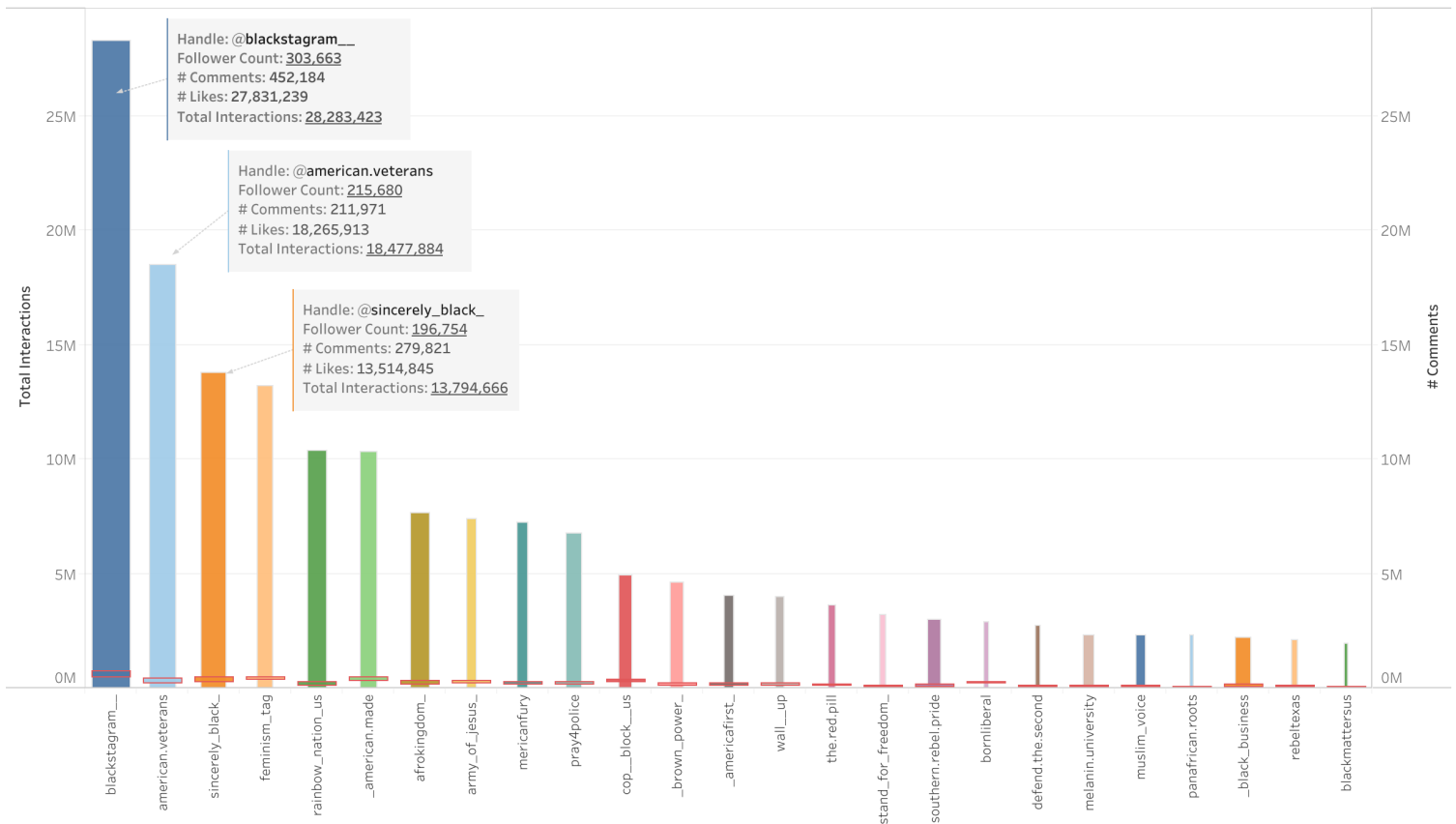
Organic Activity: Instagram

The Instagram accounts followed similar Group alignments targeting Black, Left, and Right leaders. Many of the Facebook pages had associated Instagram accounts as part of the cross-platform co-branding strategy described earlier. Instagram was perhaps the most effective platform for the Internet Research Agency. Approximately 40% of its accounts achieved over 10,000 followers (a level colloquially referred to as “micro-influencers” by marketers); twelve accounts had over 100,000 followers (“influencer” level).



The top Instagram accounts had millions to tens of millions of interactions each.

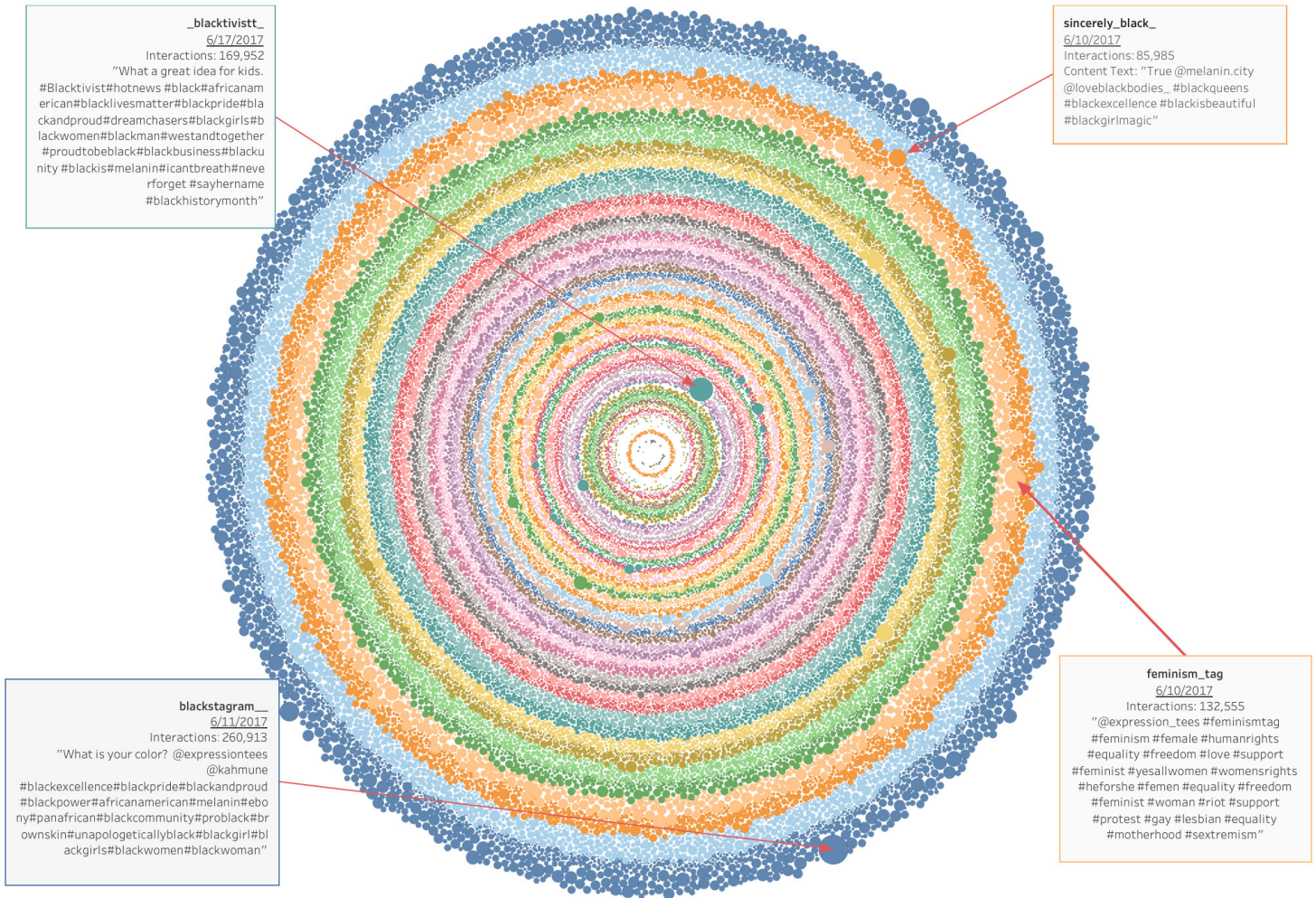
IRA Instagram Engagement - Total Interaction for Top 25 Accounts



Total interactions (sum of likes and comments) for each Instagram account. The number of comments are shown as line on each bar for perspective. Color shows details about account name (@handle). Bar width shows the relative size of follower count. This graph shows the top 25 of 133 accounts ordered by decreasing total interactions.

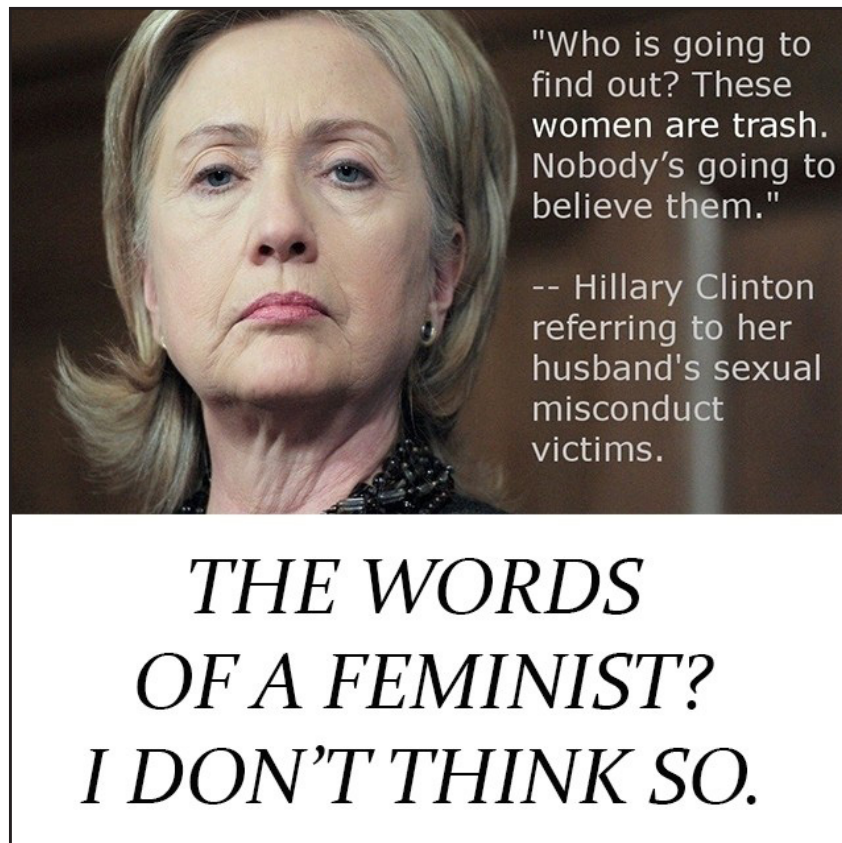
Below, a visualization of engagements for individual posts.

IRA Instagram by Individual Post Engagement



Circular mosaic graph of all individual Instagram posts, colored by @handle. Circle size shows the relative number of total interactions for posts. Circle rings are sorted starting on the outside based on account total interactions.

One unique account on Instagram that targeted a micro-group that was not segmented out separately on Facebook was the account @feminism_tag. It was the IRA's version of an intersectional feminist account, and posted extensively about feminism and social justice. The @feminism_tag account is unique in that it did not logo-brand its content; instead, it largely – perhaps entirely – repurposed other accounts' memes from the #feminism hashtag. For example, it drew extensively from the Instagram content of an inspirational t-shirt company, @expression_tees, mentioning it 136 times. The IRA may have co-opted the brand to run its own version of expressiontees as well; there is a dormant Twitter account here: https://twitter.com/expression_tees with some pro-Trump shares that seem incongruous with the Instagram account's content. On the political front, @feminism_tag – although perhaps the most likely to support Secretary Clinton based simply on the persona demographics – was a staunch supporter of Bernie Sanders, vehemently opposed to Hillary Clinton. The account actively worked to undermine traditional feminist narratives underpinning support for Secretary Clinton.



Another feature of Instagram platform activity was merchandise. Some of the merchandise promotion appeared to be with the goal of partnership building for audience growth, particularly in the Black community-targeted accounts. The hashtags #supportblackbusiness and #buyblack appeared frequently. Sometimes the IRA pages offered coupons in exchange for sharing content.



34301 @black4black

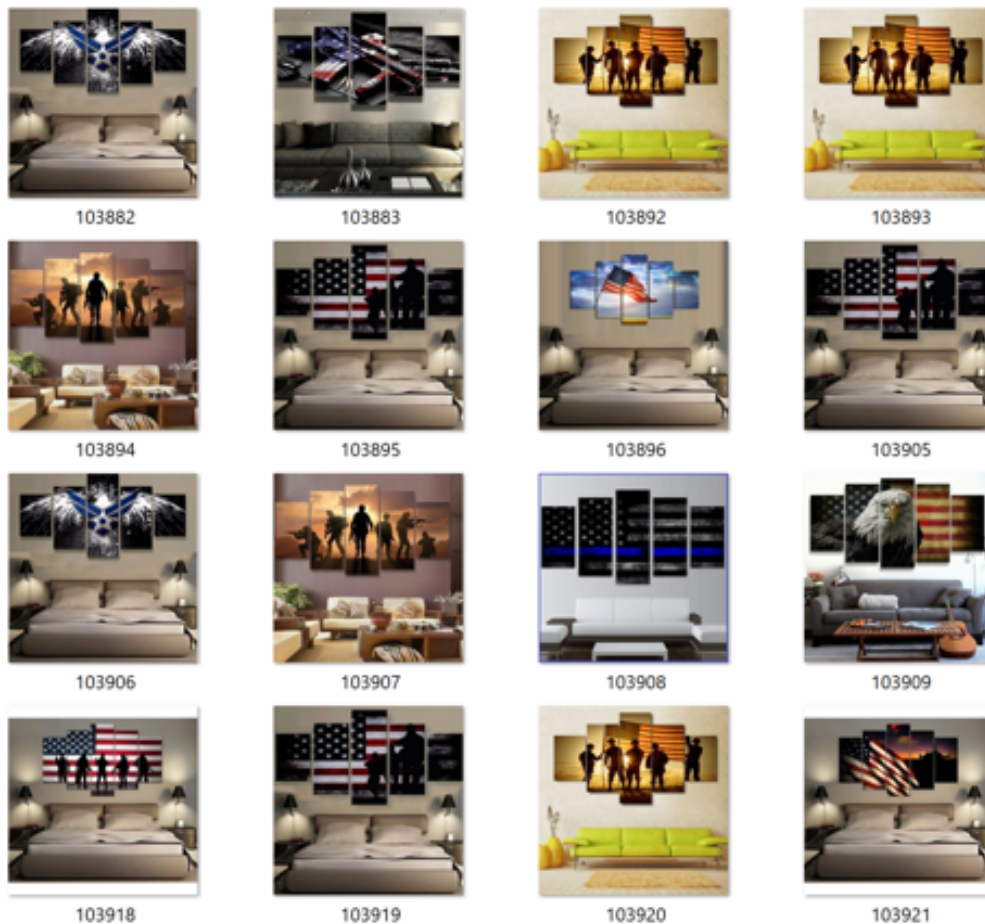
<http://www.chloeandchad.com/>

"We are happy to present you our partner Chloe and Chad . These products are all made by hand; they are all natural and are made when ordered, so they are as fresh as possible. Using natural skin care is a great way to treat your skin right! Enjoy a good discount with our promo! Just DM us!

(on FB: "Enjoy a good discount with our promo code after you share 3 posts from Black4Black or BM.")

Beyond promoting others' products, the IRA's own "merch" sites and products appeared in Instagram profile URLs as well as in their posts. Some of the merch, such as t-shirt sites for brand promotion, were similar to Facebook. Several of these t-shirt operations featured contentious political messaging likely designed to spark controversy in the real world. However, based on the image data provided there appear to have been other offerings unique to Instagram such as LGBT-positive sex toys and many variants of triptych and 5-panel artwork featuring traditionally conservative, patriotic themes.

Merchandise perhaps provided the IRA with a source of revenue – we have no sales data. Regardless, there are two other reasons to run merch sites: first, transactions enable the gathering of personal information: names, addresses, email address and phone numbers, potentially payment information. Second, time spent shopping on highly partisan sites could help identify committed audiences for Custom or Lookalike Facebook ad targeting.



Comparative Engagement: Understanding Facebook vs. Instagram

Summary statistics comparing Facebook and Instagram reveal that although the Facebook operation received more attention in the mainstream press, more content was created on Instagram, and overall Instagram engagement exceeded that of Facebook (including on a per-post basis) despite Facebook offering several additional ways to engage.

	First Post	Last Post	Number of Posts	Followers
Facebook	1/10/2015	8/28/2017	61,483	3,334,202
Instagram	1/7/2015	10/26/2017	116,205	3,391,116*

	Facebook	Instagram	Total
Likes	37,627,085	183,246,348	220,873,433
Likes/Post	612	1,568	
Comments	3,339,752	4,017,731	7,447,483
Comments/Post	54	34	
Reactions	5,188,182	N/A	5,188,182
Shares	30,350,130	N/A	30,350,130
Total Engagements	76,505,149	187,264,079	263,769,228

The Instagram and Facebook engagement statistics belie the claim that this was a small operation – it was far more than only \$100,000 of Facebook ads, as originally asserted by Facebook executives. The ad engagements were a minor factor in a much broader, organically-driven influence operation. While a majority of IRA activity was unsuccessful, the top Facebook and Instagram accounts achieved hundreds of thousands of followers and millions of engagements. Instagram account @blackstagram_, perhaps their most successful property, was regularly getting upwards of 10,000 Likes on its posts by 2017.

Facebook estimated that the content was seen by 126 million users on Facebook, and 20 million Instagram users. This is because Shares on Facebook would have pushed the content into the feeds of other users on Facebook, and there is no comparable virality engine on Instagram. However, as researchers on our team have previously pointed out, [the Instagram number is likely lower than it should be](#). Additionally, it is worth investigating whether Instagram users were substantially more likely to engage with the content to better understand how this material influenced and is likely to influence in the future.

The preceding statistics and themes roll up from the various tactics deployed by the IRA. The tactics vary in sophistication and volume and together manifest a complex effort. Below, we break out a variety of key tactics, the understanding of which must inform any successful attempt to remedy interference operations.

Tactic: Targeting Americans

Propagandists need an audience, and paid advertising helped the Internet Research Agency facilitate audience growth. 73 different IRA-affiliated Pages and Instagram accounts were part of an ads operation that consisted of 3519 ads (video as well as still images). Ads were used to drive users to Like Pages, follow Instagram accounts, join Events, and visit websites. One ad appears to have linked to a music-related [browser extension](#) (also shared to Reddit) that may have captured access to browsing behavior and Facebook data.

The Facebook and Instagram ads, which were run by both Right and Left-leaning pages, as well as Black community-targeted pages, reinforced themes and messages to clearly-defined audiences. There were 1,852 ads that used interest-based targeting; of those, 808 included geographical targeting. The data set included mentions of three custom audiences – named “tr”, “tesy”, and “newtestaudit” – used in 31 ads, as well as Lookalike audiences that were used to find people similar to audiences who liked United Muslims of America, Defend the 2nd, and Being Patriotic. Most of the interest-based targeting focused on African American communities and interests.

Geographical targeting split into two strategies: first, targeting communities for local events and rallies. Second, targeting them with race- and police-brutality related content timed

following officer-involved shootings.

Some ads incorporated job titles. For example, one ad set in late Sept - early October 2016 geotargeted several regions in Pennsylvania, then added additional interest targeting to reach 18 to 65-year-olds with the interest “Donald Trump for President, Job title: Coal Miner”. The goal was to galvanize support for then-candidate Trump and to hold a rally for miners. It secured 1225 impressions and 77 clicks with 876 RUB in spend.

key	content	count
Interests	Martin Luther King	52
Interests	African-American Civil Rights Movement (1954–68)	43
Interests	African-American history	31
Interests	Black Power	18
Interests	Gun Owners of America	18
Interests	Behaviors: African American (US)	17
Interests	Right to keep and bear arms	17
Interests	Black Panther Party	16
Interests	National Rifle Association	16
Interests	Black history	15
Interests	2nd Amendment	14
Interests	Black History Month	13
Interests	Pan-Africanism	12
Interests	Concealed carry in the United States	12
Interests	African-American history or Malcolm X	11
Interests	Black is beautiful	10
Interests	Second Amendment to the United States Constit...	10
Interests	Pan-Africanism	10
Interests	My Black is Beautiful	10

Interest-based Facebook targeting

Of the 1,852 ads that included Interest, 122 were targeted by gender, split into 32 female and 90 male. Women interested in “Black Economic Empowerment” and “Black Enterprise” were targeted with one set of ads; men in these categories were not targeted. Age was also a component in targeting: men starting at 15 were targeted with meme-related pages, men over 17 interested in the NRA and AR-15s were targeted with 2nd Amendment and gun rights content. Men over 45 were targeted specifically with pro-police Pages in support of law enforcement.

The only gender-specific political targeting was also focused on men, aged 18+ interested in “breitbart or conservative daily” and “Donald Trump for President”.

domain	currency	spend	impressions	clicks
blackmattersus.com	RUB	163459.60	1327862	87837
petitions.whitehouse.gov	RUB	22451.55	48563	8109
donotshoot.us	RUB	20578.50	125179	2305
meetup.com	RUB	18671.31	36217	1114
musicfb.info	RUB	7023.96	21703	80
represent.com	RUB	4199.40	56317	4690
black4black.info	RUB	1735.75	8121	308
dudeers.com	RUB	1701.46	8227	274
eventbrite.com	RUB	1500.00	3880	151
hilltendo.com	RUB	1449.04	1143	34
youtube.com	RUB	1270.00	3703	184
bonfirefunds.com	RUB	399.98	596	29
theguardian.com	RUB	100.00	306	22
edition.cnn.com	RUB	88.92	164	9

IRA ads targeting standalone, non-social-network domains

The ads cross-promoted IRA Pages – for example, Instagram accounts @_born_black_ and Facebook Page Blackluive promoted Black Matters content, likely with the goal of increasing the perception of legitimacy and popularity for the media properties, and further encompassing targeted groups within the IRA's media mirage.

The ads also directed users to outside sites owned by the IRA. Blackmatters.us, Donotshoot.us, black4black.info, dudeers.com, hilltendo.com, musicfb.info were IRA-created domains.

Bonfirefunds, another outside site, is a custom t-shirt making platform that was used by Black Matters. Represent.com sold custom shirts for BM, Black4Black, Fit Black, Nefertiti's Community, Pan-African Roots, Williams & Calvin, Blacktivist, and Woke Blacks. The merchandise strategy, discussed in the Instagram section in this report (that is where it was most prevalent), enabled fundraising, brand building, and the collection of addresses and potentially credit card information.

Meetup.com was used to organize black self-defense classes for the Fit Black/Black Fist IRA accounts.

The vast majority of the ads achieved substantially higher clickthrough rates (CTR) than typical Facebook ads; according to Wordstream Advertising Benchmarks, the average CTR for Facebook across all industries in .9% (as of August 2018). Although the IRA ran its ads earlier, from 2015-2017, 1182 of the 1306 unique ads in the dataset provided by Facebook (90%) that had documented spend achieved a CTR higher than .9%. This suggests that the Internet Research Agency had well-defined audiences, and reached them with resonant content. This perception is reinforced by the October 2018 Department of Justice indictment, which highlights the degree to which the IRA prioritized understanding the interests and communication styles of groups it targeted.



A simple ad for the Back the Badge page had the highest spend and obtained the most clicks

Despite having high CTRs, however, the overall ad spend was small. Approximately two dozen Facebook and Instagram accounts achieved audience sizes over 100,000 followers; however, no data was provided to indicate what percentage of followers came from ad conversions, engagement with organic content, or suggestions from the recommendation engine. Back the Badge, for example, had 110,912 followers per the data provided (and, in Figure 10, we see that at some point it appears to have had more Likes); it had one successful high-spend ad (Figure 11) but overall only 73,151 clicks across its ad portfolio. It did, however, have 155,514 Shares and an additional 500,392 social engagements across its posts, some of which we can reasonably assume were served up in the News Feed of those users' friends.

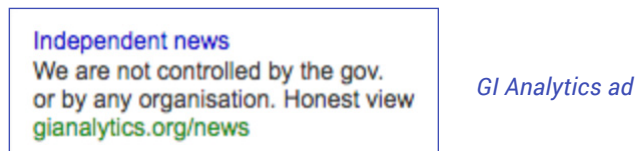
As a counter-example, Brown Power displayed the opposite: 694,633 clicks across its ads account, 1,300,901 shares and 2,601,004 additional social engagements...but only 204,331 followers on the Facebook Page per the data provided. High CTRs often indicate effective ad content and targeting, but one metric can't tell the whole story. Facebook acknowledged that the recommendation engine had promoted IRA pages, but [noted in a response to a Senate inquiry](#) that the recommendation engine was "not the primary way" that people found the pages.

Ad Copy	Impressions	Clicks	CTR	Spend	Currency
Community of people who support our brave Police Officers. Back The Badge	1,334,544	73,063	5.5%	110,588.00	RUB
Together we are a shining beacon of faithfulness! Join us and light your way to Jesus! Army Of Jesus	368,065	28,137	7.6%	89,081.10	RUB
Heritage, not hate. The South will rise again! South United	511,224	40,134	7.9%	78,357.30	RUB
They fought for our freedom, now its our time to fight for their rights!	112,737	15,163	13.4%	72,735.10	RUB
Join us if you know it's just a car, NOT A SYMBOL OF HATE South United	300,815	16,587	5.5%	65,705.80	RUB
Brown Power is a platform designed to educate, entertain and connect Chicanos in the US.	968,768	56,405	5.8%	59,571.40	RUB
A page to unit all Muslim people living in the USA!	103,079	4,491	4.4%	59,453.80	RUB
Staying Woke,building-up our communities,uplifting our people. Join us! Woke Blacks	752,179	33,444	4.4%	58,193.60	RUB
We are proud to be black and stand for our community! Join to end the racism in the US.	371,295	16,442	4.4%	55,609.60	RUB
We are not against police, we against police brutality!	226,262	9,657	4.3%	54,729.50	RUB

Top ten IRA ads by spend, and associated click-through rates. Using 67.07 RUB = 1 USD (average 2016 exchange rate), that is \$1649 USD spent on highest-spend ad.

Alphabet also provided a collection of ads data in the form of 38 folders, each for what appears to be an Adwords account number, containing a total of 655 ads. It is unclear from the data provided how Alphabet made their attribution. Given the shared management and the proximity of the Internet Research Agency to the Federal News Agency (FAN), which at the time of the operation was headquartered in the same building at 55 Savushkina, there is a possibility that the ads that promoted long-form sites were actually the purview of FAN's pro-Kremlin propaganda operation rather than the IRA. (This may be a distinction without a difference.)

Regardless of whether the IRA attribution was correct, AdWords accounts were used to promote blogs and news-type sites that offered opinion and analysis pieces in line with Kremlin agenda. The text of the ads featured headlines about President Barack Obama’s perceived poor performance and the media’s purported hiding of it, Russia’s positions on Syria, European migrant concerns, and crises of democracy (e.g. messages about rethink democracy, anarchy is another way, etc).



GI Analytics was the most-promoted site, with 199 ads touting their unbiased coverage of civil rights, global security, and regional analysis. OnePoliticalPlaza.com (46), Blackmattersus (31), and Russia-direct.org (15) were the other 3 domains featuring more than 10 ads. The Black Matters ad content focused on race relations, and Russia-direct.org content included ads on Syria.

The Twitter-provided data set contained text ads for RT (Russia Today), which Twitter has since barred from advertising on its platform. The data did not indicate spend, nor suggest that any other IRA Twitter accounts leveraged Promoted Tweets.

Tactic: Asset Development

A few press investigations have alluded to the IRA’s job ads. The extent of the human asset recruitment strategy is revealed in the organic data set. It is expansive, and was clearly a priority. Posts encouraging Americans to perform various types of tasks for IRA handlers appeared in Black, Left, and Right-targeted groups, though they were most numerous in the Black community. They included:

- Requests for contact with preachers from Black churches (Black_Baptist_Church)
- Offers of free counseling to people with sexual addiction (Army of Jesus)
- Soliciting volunteers to hand out fliers
- Soliciting volunteers to teach self-defense classes
- Offering free self-defense classes (Black Fist/Fit Black)
- Requests for followers to attend political rallies
- Requests for photographers to document protests

- Requests for speakers at protests
- Requests to protest the Westborough Baptist Church (LGBT United)
- Job offers for designers to help design fliers, sites, Facebook sticker packs
- Requests for female followers to send photos for a calendar
- Requests for followers to send photos to be shared to the Page (Back the Badge)
- Soliciting videos for a YouTube contest called “Pee on Hillary”
- Encouraging people to apply to be part of a Black reality TV show
- Posting a wide variety of job ads (write for BlackMattersUS and others)
- Requests for lawyers to volunteer to assist with immigration cases

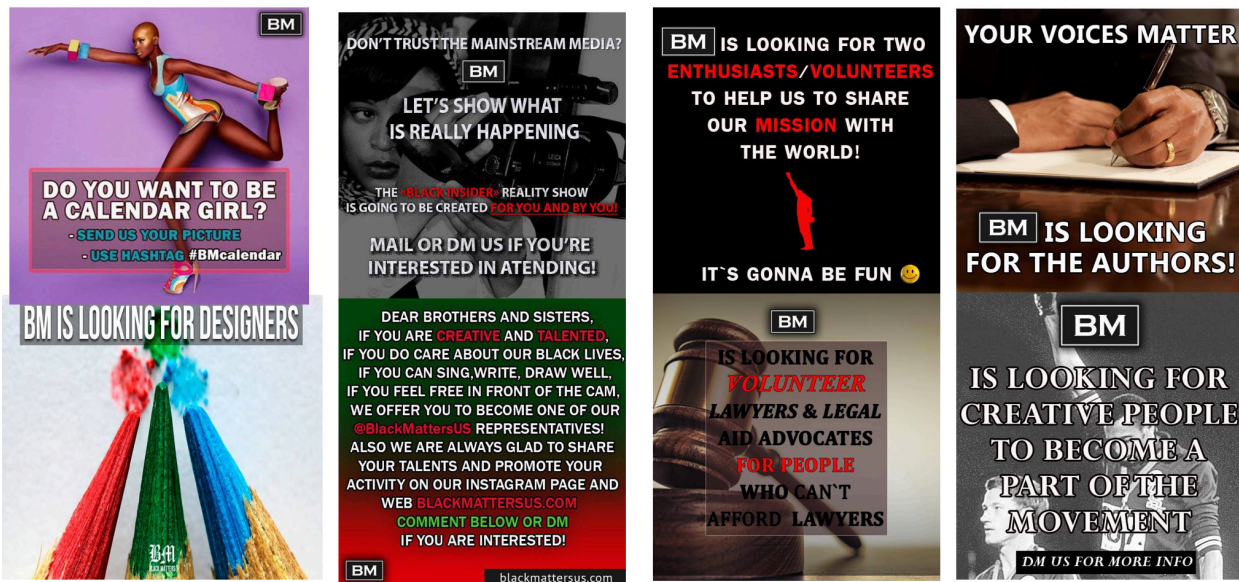
Recruiting an asset by exploiting a personal vulnerability – usually a secret that would inspire shame or cause personal or financial harm if exposed – is a timeless espionage practice. So is the tactic of infiltrating protest movements. The IRA attempted both, even going so far as to create help hotlines for people struggling with sexual behavior, creating an opportunity to blackmail or manipulate these individuals in the future.



Figure on the left posted 3x by Army of Jesus on Facebook, and 3x on Instagram, with slightly different visuals, in March and April of 2017. Received 5436 Likes and 284 comments. Figure on the right in LGBT United.

Investigative reporting and Department of Justice indictments show that the IRA had some success with several of these human-activation attempts. The comment and engagement numbers in the data indicate that people did respond to these posts, and shared the posts to their networks as well. We have no information beyond the numbers, though; there's no text to clarify the direction the comments went. It's unclear if investigative agencies or the platforms themselves reached out to the people who did comment and likely engaged.

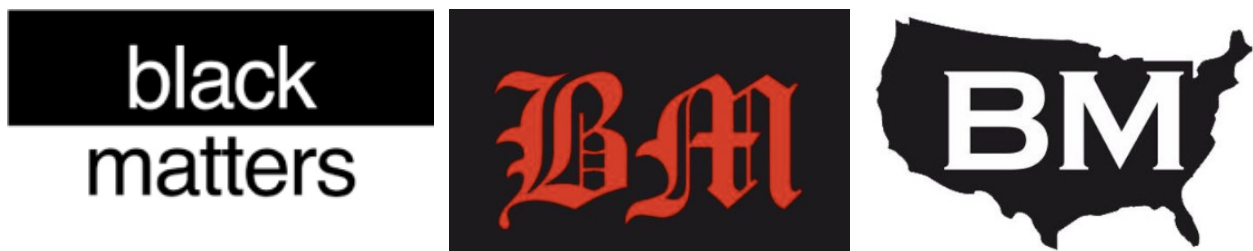
This tactic will be increasingly common as platforms make it more difficult to grow pages and buy ads with fake personas. It will be extremely difficult to detect. The number of organic posts that reveal attempts to engage with Americans reinforces our conviction that influence operations are unlikely to be managed without information sharing between the public and private sector.



Tactic: Cross-Platform Brand Building

The Internet Research Agency operated like a digital marketing agency: develop a brand (both visual and voice), build presences on all channels across the entire social ecosystem, and grow an audience with paid ads as well as partnerships, influencers, and link-sharing. They created *media mirages*: interlinked information ecosystems designed to immerse and surround targeted audiences. The IRA developed their content using digital marketing best practices, even evolving their Facebook Page logos and typography over time. The degree of these efforts has not previously been understood from the scattered discovery of ads and memes; this data set of organic content reveals it.

To illustrate the commitment to a social ecosystem-wide presence, consider one of their midsize efforts, Black Matters.



Black Matters consisted of a website and an extensive network of linked social profiles. The IRA launched the property on June 8, 2015 with a post on a Facebook Page they initially called “BM” (facebook.com/blackmatters). Other social presences for Black Matters included:

- Google+: Blackmatters
- Google Ads: 31 ads for blackmattersus.com
- YouTube: 95 videos
- Facebook: fb.com/blackmatters as well as fb.com/blackmatters.mvmt
- Facebook Ads
- Facebook Stickers
- Instagram: @blackmattersus, 28,466 followers and 1,929,855 engagements
- Twitter: 5841 followers
- Soundcloud: “SKWAD 55” podcast
- Tumblr: SKWAD55

The Black Matters Facebook Page explored several visual brand identities, moving from a plain logo to a gothic typeface on Jan 19th, 2016. On February 4th, 2016, the person who ran the Facebook Page announced the launch of the website, blackmattersus.com, emphasizing media distrust and a desire to build Black independent media. Black Matters ran ads; some directed people to follow them on social media, others linked out to the site. On February 12, 2016 the admin announced they'd reached 100,000 subscribers to the site. We examined CrowdTangle data for Black Matters (not included in the provided data set). That data reveals that influencers with large followings, such as Color of Change, Unapologetically Black, and YourAnonNews, shared Black Matters articles to their own Facebook Pages. The articles were also shared into popular subreddits.

The Internet Archive's oldest capture of blackmattersus.com shows the gothic BM logo, and links to an Instagram account: @blackmattersus. The Instagram account amassed 28,466 followers and 1.9 million engagements. The first Instagram post appears to have been in 2016, based on mentions of the account by a more established and popular IRA Instagram property, @blackstagram_, although the Facebook-provided data set shows a first post date in 2017.

The @blackmatters Twitter account was relatively small, with 5841 followers, but the IRA leveraged other Twitter accounts, as well as IRA accounts on Reddit and Pinterest, for SEO, discovery, and audience-growth purposes. The brand maintained presences on all primary social networks and created multimedia content such as YouTube videos and a Soundcloud podcast.



The blackmattersus.com launch announcement banner

On August 19th, 2016 the original Black Matters Facebook Page ceased posting, and on August 23rd, 2016 appears to have rebranded and renamed itself again, changing the URL to facebook.com/blackmatters.mvmt, with a new logo featuring the letters inside the US map. BM continued to post on the .mvmt Page until June 28, 2017, when it ceased posting for two months before switching back to the Black Matters name and resuming posts on August 23, 2017. Press coverage suspecting the Page of being a Russian propaganda operation did not emerge until October 2017, so it's unclear why the Page managers made these changes.

Black Matters content focused on building community – and sowing division – in real life as well as online. Many posts solicited protestors, writers, activists, lawyers, and photographers to attend the property's numerous events. They posted job ads for real American writers to create content for blackmattersus.com – a clear example supporting the hypothesis that the IRA engaged in narrative laundering.

The goal of working with real Americans is to eliminate the detection and exposure risk of inauthentic personas.

Black Matters created numerous posts to push for 1:1 engagements with people who followed its accounts, looking for everything from designers to immigration lawyers. They asked for user-submitted photos of Black women, purportedly for a calendar. They posted about the creation of a reality show on November 17, 2016, looking for contestants: "All that is required of you is to send us a video, depicting the problems facing our people."



Black Matters job ad

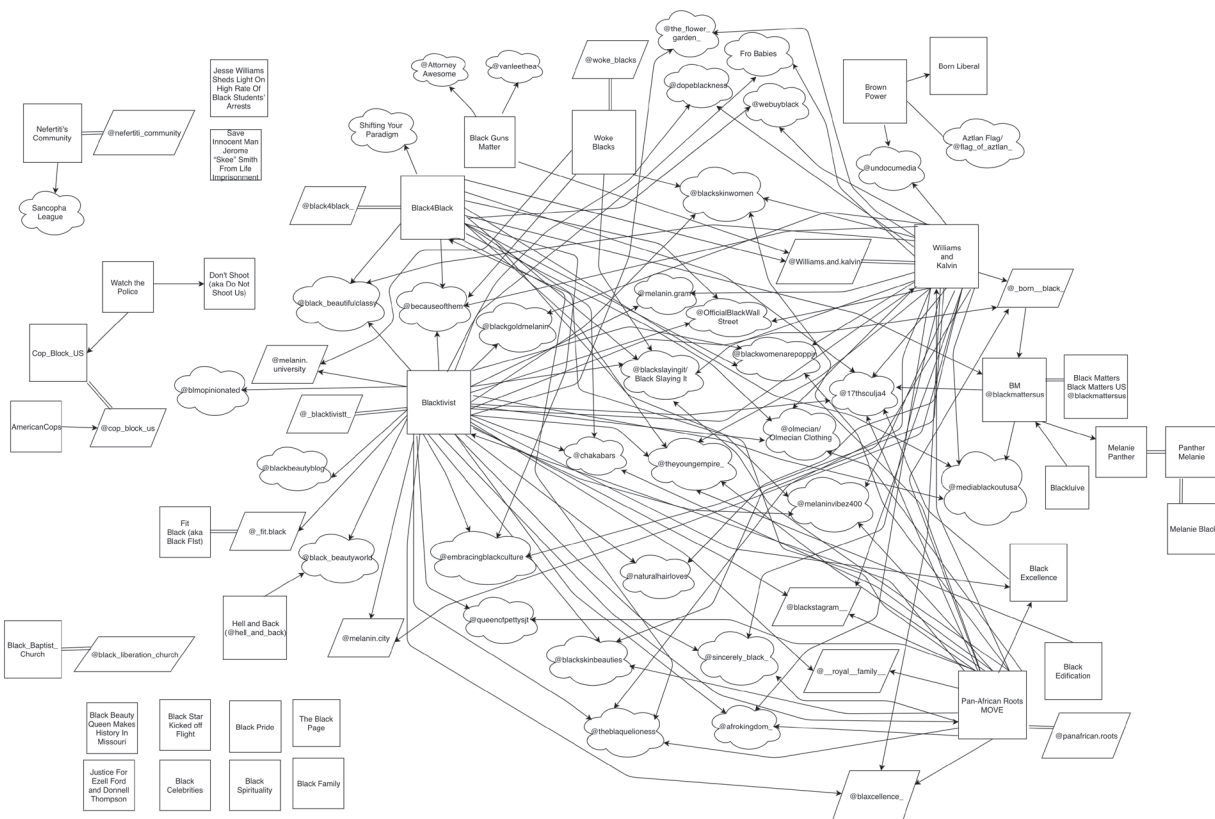


*Black Matters Facebook stickers by IRA
Facebook persona "Melanie Panther",
still available for download*

Tactic: The Media Mirage

The case study of Black Matters illustrates the extent to which the Internet Research Agency built out *one* inauthentic media property, creating accounts across the social ecosystem to reinforce its brand and broadly distribute its content. To further contextualize this, Black Matters was one property among 30 Facebook Pages that targeted the Black community. Using only the data from the Facebook Page posts and memes, we generated a map of the cross-linked properties – other accounts that the Pages shared from, or linked to – to highlight the complex web of IRA-run accounts designed to surround Black audiences.

An individual who followed or liked one of the Black-community-targeted IRA Pages would have been exposed to content from dozens more, as well as carefully-curated authentic Black media content that was ideologically or thematically aligned with the Internet Research Agency messaging.

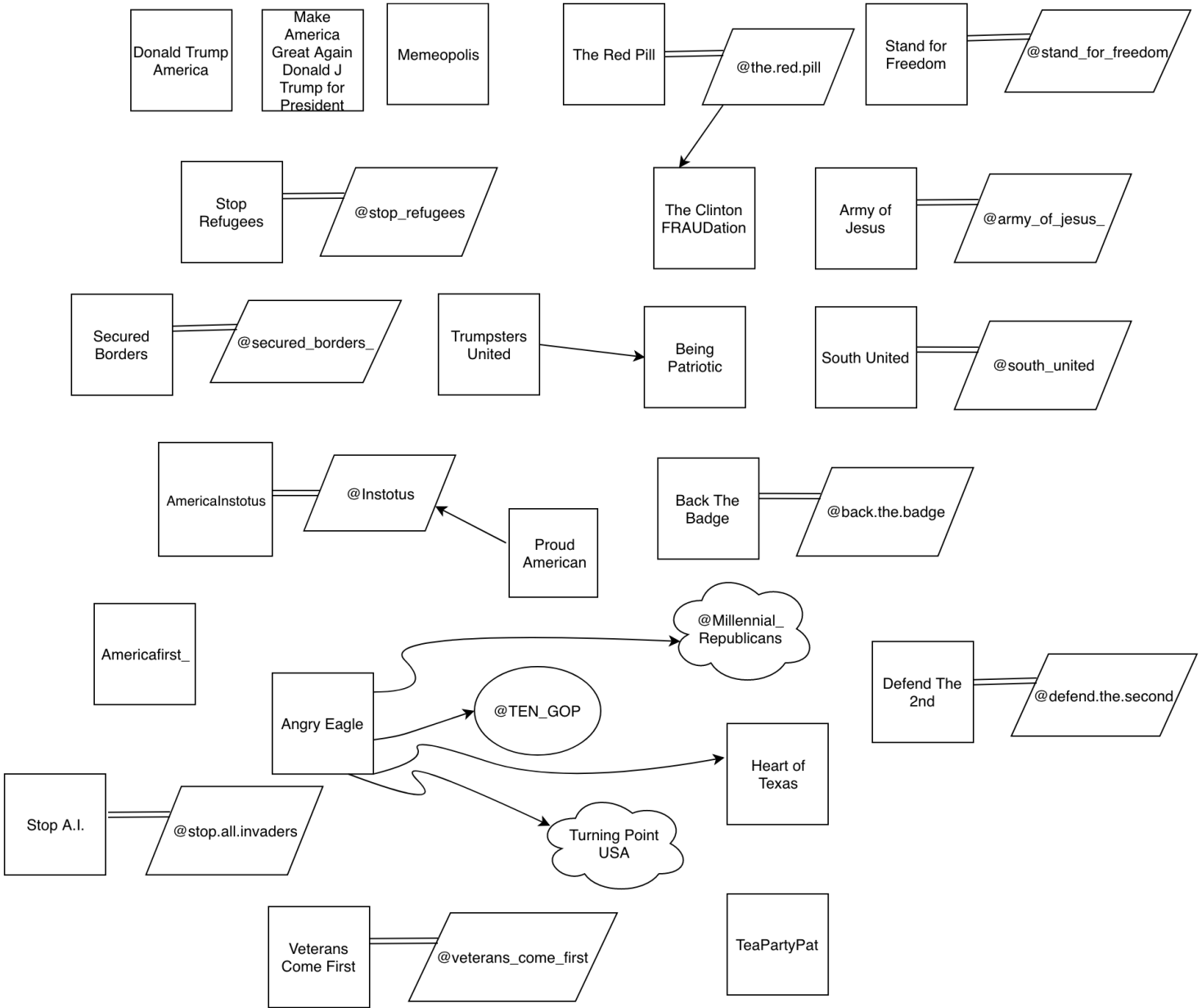


A “media mirage” of interlinked Facebook Pages and Instagram accounts targeting Black Americans. Squares are IRA-owned Facebook Pages, parallelograms are IRA-owned Instagram accounts. Cloud shapes indicate non-IRA-attributed accounts including authentic Black media. A larger version with easily-readable page names is available online at newknowledge.com/IRAfigures

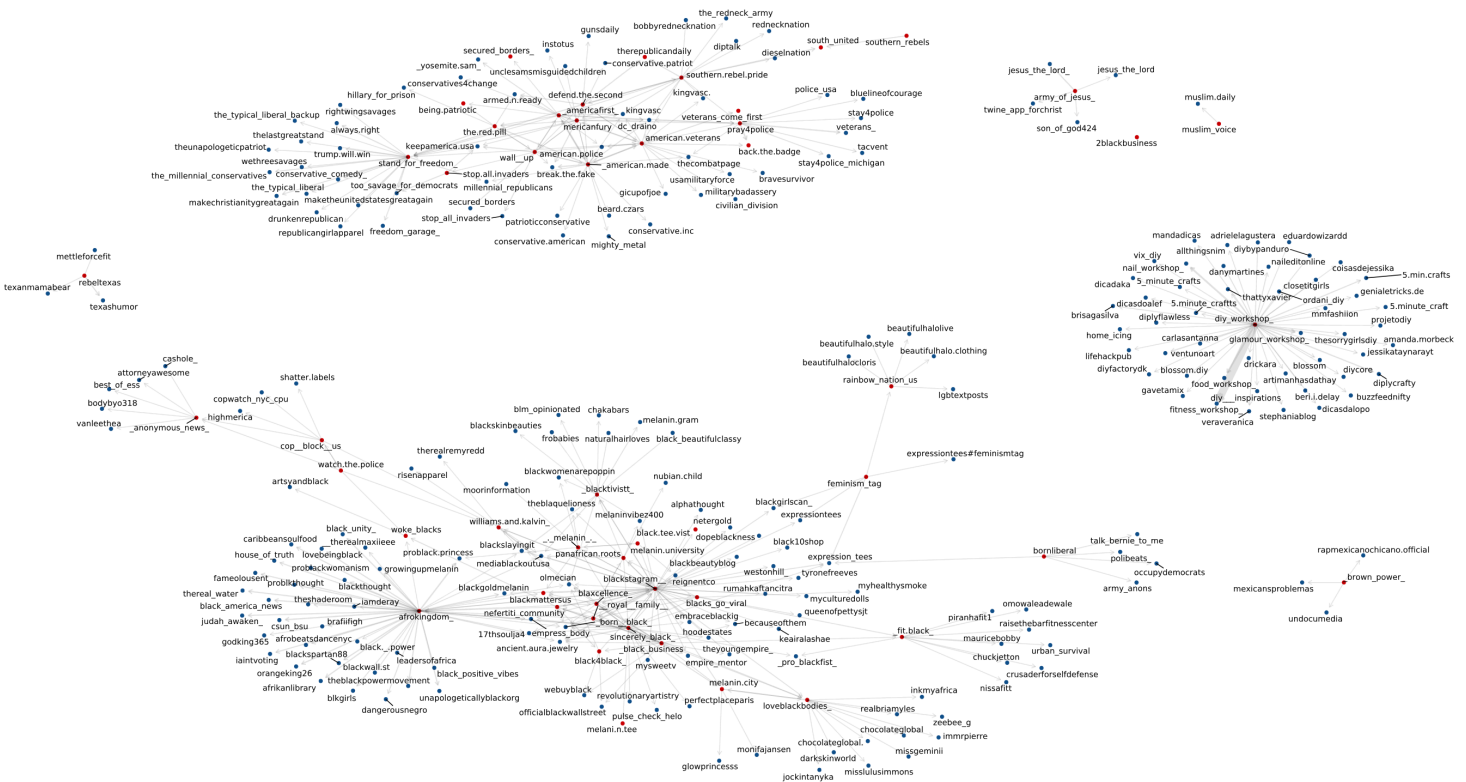
In the diagram on the previous page, IRA Facebook Pages are represented as squares, IRA-associated Instagram accounts are represented as parallelograms, and the arrows pointing from the squares to other shapes indicate that the Page shared that account's content. The 'cloud' shapes represent other Black Media accounts that have never been formally attributed to the Internet Research Agency; they appear in the diagram if they were shared more than 10 times by known IRA accounts. Many of them appear to be real, authentic Black Media properties. However, several of the most interlinked, such as @17thsoulja4, appear to have been deleted or taken down by Instagram. Significant memetic content overlap on those accounts (discovered via the Internet Archive, regram services, and Pinterest) suggests that they may have been unacknowledged IRA creations as well.

There is only minimal interlinking among the Facebook Pages targeting the Right and Left-leaning audiences. The diagram on the next page shows the Right-leaning Facebook Pages (squares), their associated Instagram accounts (parallelograms), and one notable Twitter account (oval) that was leveraged on Facebook. There is far less cross-promotion of IRA-created media brands, and far less active, attributed sharing of authentic Right-leaning media content. Turning Point USA was one exception; the IRA shared brand-marked Turning Point memes. It also took memes that originated on Turning Point and rebranded them with IRA Facebook Page brand marks.

Ultimately, the purpose of the Black community-targeted media mirage appears twofold: first, to grow audiences across all of their Black-targeted accounts simultaneously, so that users who followed one of their accounts would follow others and therefore be exposed to repetitive messaging. Second, to ingratiate their Pages with the authentic Black media community so that they in turn were promoted by legitimate Black cultural entities; this would have helped the IRA increase the perception of their accounts as trusted brands. That strategy was not replicated in the Left or Right-leaning Facebook Page clusters.



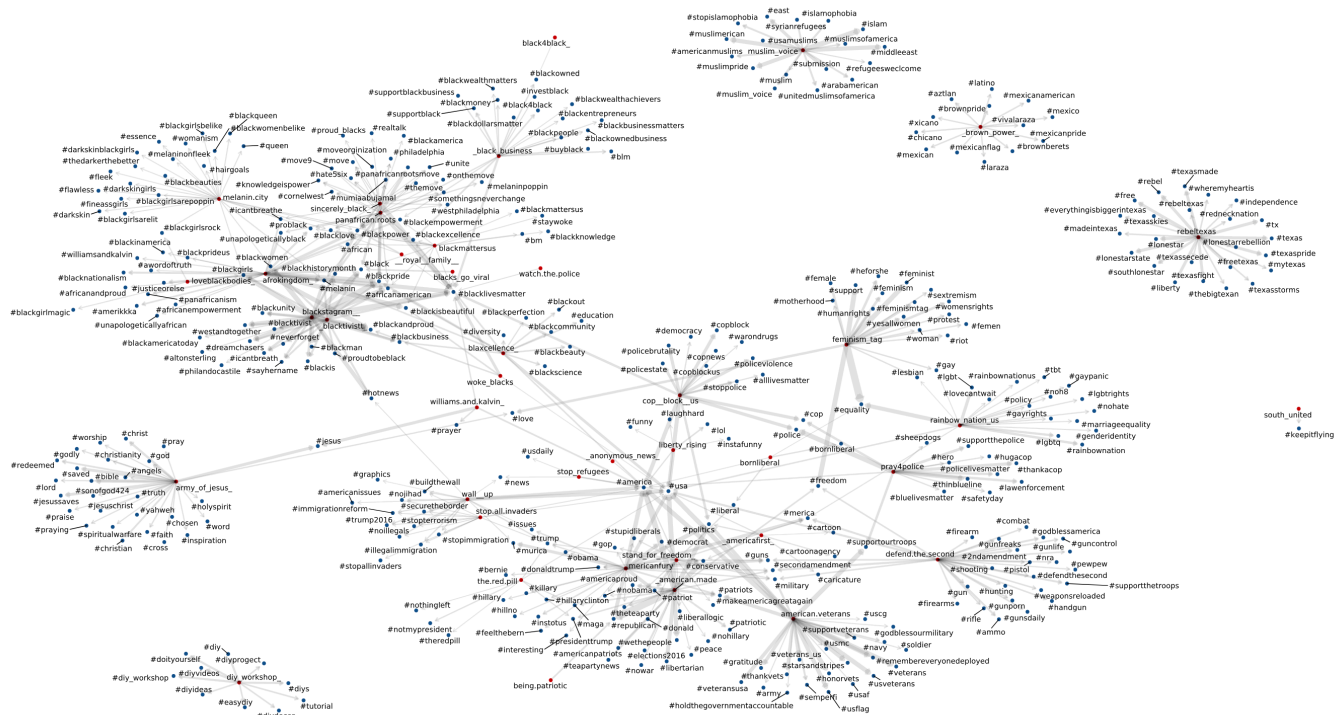
We conducted a similar analysis starting from the Instagram accounts, to get a sense of how users might have been exposed to other IRA narratives and properties after following one Instagram account. Using the text mentions in the Instagram post copy, we explored relationships between accounts that regrammed or mentioned each other at least 10 times. Distinctive clusters emerge here as well, including a far deeper commitment to interlinking Right-targeted accounts than was observed on Facebook. The IRA used terms such as “partners” in copy on Right-targeted accounts, suggesting that their account’s followers should follow a broader ring. Occasionally they would include what appear to be authentic Right-oriented Instagram accounts in these partner rings. It is unclear to what extent these partners knew what they were participating in. In at least one case, a domestic Facebook Page related to an Instagram account that was regularly regrammed by the IRA (@unclesamsmisguidedchildren) was taken down for inauthentic distribution; there is no indication that USGC’s owners knew of their Instagram account’s longstanding history of being promoted by Russian trolls.



A visualization of the network graph obtained by examining mentions and regrams by IRA Instagram accounts. Red dots indicate a known, attributed IRA account, blue dots indicate accounts mentioned or regrammed more than 10 times.

Finally, we conducted a third mapping of the media mirage by analyzing the #hashtag topics that the IRA Facebook and Instagram Pages mentioned most frequently. The IRA Instagram accounts deployed hashtags prolifically, beginning with “#followback” appeals when an account was first created. They frequently used dozens of hashtags per post, a standard digital marketing tactic to improve discoverability and facilitate audience growth. These hashtag networks reveal the terms that bridge communities: #jesus linked Black community content to Right-leaning Army of Jesus, #love was used by both Army of Jesus and Left-leaning Instagram account @feminism_tag. They also show the topics that are clear points of contention, as they were keyword links between communities but deployed in opposition to each other. The Right, Black, and Left-leaning Instagram accounts all used #police and #cop, for example, with diametrically opposed content.

None of the data sets provided by the Facebook, Twitter, or Google included comments, and it is impossible to gauge how many followers the pages attracted – or how many disagreements they provoked – through the strategic use of either interlinking, or divisive hashtags. We still know very little about what audience acquisition methods were most effective.



A visualization of the network graph obtained by examining hashtags leveraged by IRA Instagram accounts. Red dots indicate a known, attributed IRA account name, blue dots denote hashtags mentioned at least 1000 times.

Tactic: Memetics

The Internet Research Agency's content relied extensively on memes, a popular format for the transmission of information – and propaganda – across the social ecosystem. Memes can take the form of pictures, icons, lyrics, catchphrases; they are a sort of 'cultural gene', part of the body of society, transmitted from person to person, often mutating. While many people think of memes as "cat pictures with words", the Defense Department and DARPA have studied them for years as a powerful tool of cultural influence, capable of reinforcing or even changing values and behavior.

Memes turn big ideas into emotionally-resonant snippets, particularly because they fit our information consumption infrastructure: big image, not much text, capable of being understood thoroughly with minimal effort. Memes are the propaganda of the digital age. The IRA extensively studied its American targets. It both created and appropriated highly relevant memes for each target audience, sharing from other pages and encouraging its own audiences to reshare to their personal accounts as well.

Memes are powerful because they can be easily recontextualized and reshared, and act as "in-group" cultural signifiers. In the image on the following page, IRA Facebook Pages Secured Borders and Stop A.I. shared a meme branded with their own page logo. Image search traces the meme as far back as a forum post from 2014 (presumably from a real American participant). This ease of repurposing makes it harder to identify malign pages; the content looks – and in fact is – largely identical to content shared by real people who hold a common point of view. A large part of the 100,000+ pieces of IRA visual content in the data set provided to SSCI were repurposed popular memes.

Posted by Dee on November 7, 2014 at 5:23am in Illegal Alien Invasion

[View Discussions](#)



Secured Borders



Stop A.I.

Our research team carried out both textual extraction using OCR as well as clustering of visually similar images to understand messaging and identify memetic tactics. We examined the shift in visual themes weekly across the 2016 Twitter data (helpful for insights into what topics they were sharing, since many of the t.co links did not properly unroll) and Facebook Page images. A thorough manual review of the approximately 67,000 Facebook Page memes and 100,000+ Instagram memes was also conducted.

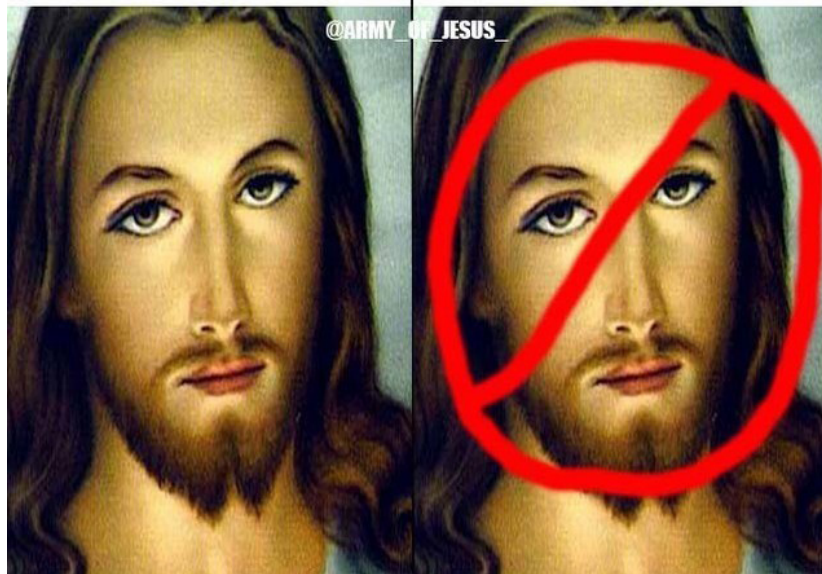
This March 9, 2016, South United meme was the most-shared post on Facebook and had 986,203 total engagements, the most for a single piece of content.



This Being Patriotic homeless veterans meme on September 8, 2016 had 723,750 total engagements on Facebook.

**LIKE
IF YOU BELIEVE**

**KEEP
SCROLLING
IF YOU DON'T**



The IRA recycled memes within Pages and accounts, reusing top performers and thematically-relevant content. The Jesus image above was the most-Liked Instagram content created by the IRA prior to Election 2016. Posted on March 2, 2016 by @army_of_jesus_, it garnered 87,750 likes. The second most-Liked post is the exact same image from the same account – this time with 84,469 likes, shared 3 months later on June 13, 2016. This Jesus meme also had the greatest number of comments of IRA pre-election Instagram content, with 1,989 and 2,177 comments, respectively.

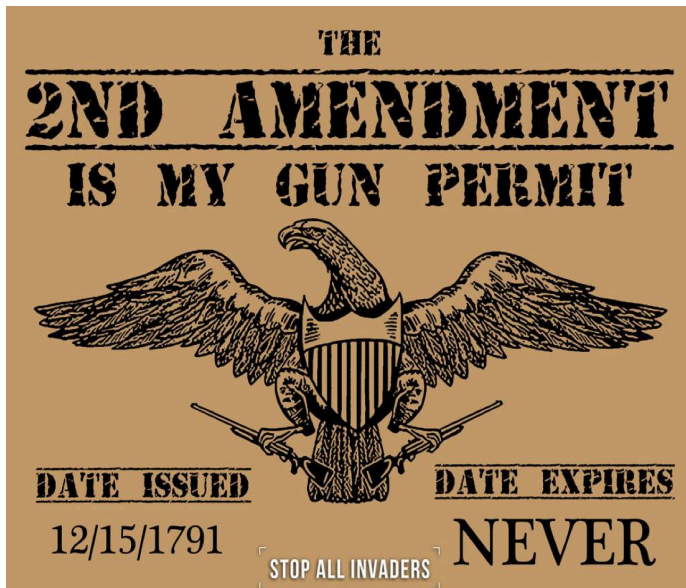
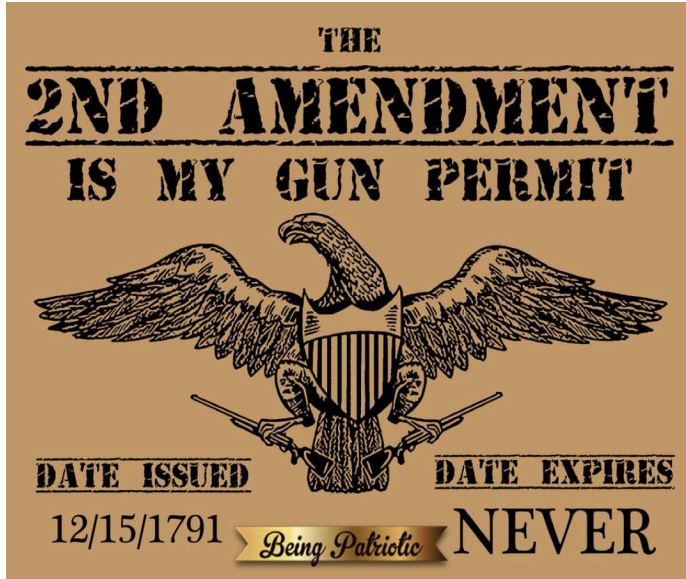
All the tones are nude! Get over it!



This meme, originally created as an advertisement for a Black-owned leather goods company named Kahmune, appears to have been reposted by @blackstagram__ (303,663 followers) with the text “What is your color? @expression_tees @kahmune #blackexcellence #blackpride #blackandproud #blackpower #africanamerican #melanin #ebony #panafrican #blackcommunity #problack #brownskin #unapologeticallyblack #blackgirl #blackgirls #blackwomen #blackwoman”

It had the highest total engagements on Instagram as well as the most likes (254,179) and comments (6734). It was posted on June 11, 2017, per the Instagram data set; the @kahmune account posted it as part of what appeared to be a product launch, branded with their own handle, on June 12, 2017. It is possible that this was a time zone or other issue with the data set. It is also possible that this was one of what appear to be many examples of the IRA promoting real businesses that engaged with them. @blackstagram__ went on to mention @kahmune products as an example of Black-owned, pro-Black businesses on three other occasions, including the next day (June 12, 2017).

The IRA pages and Instagram accounts rebranded memetic images for their own unique Page. Sometimes they also used identical text content in the posts across pages.



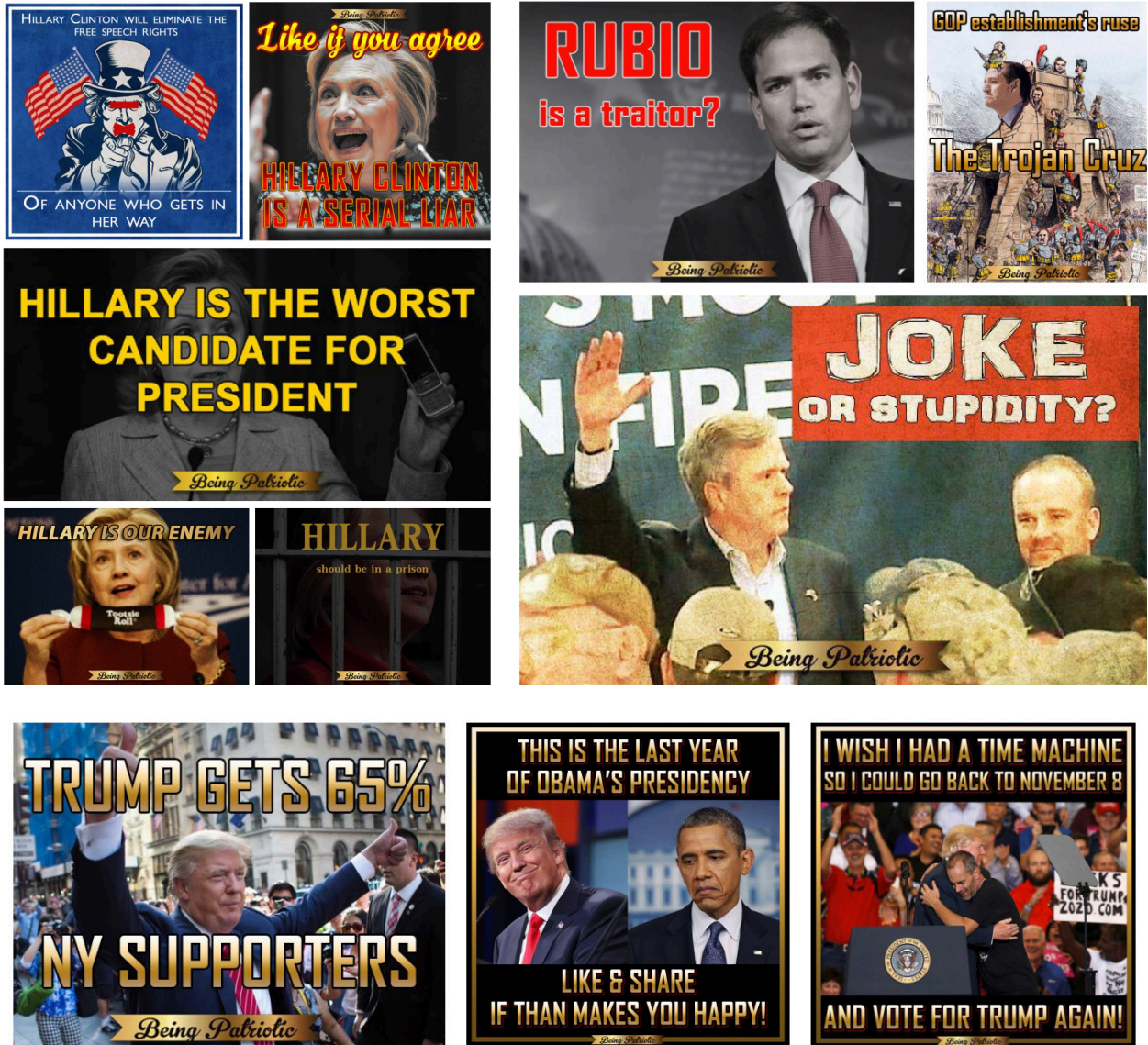
It is unclear whether the Pages that repurposed the same base memes were run by the same IRA employee; file system images from an IRA hack reveal that they had a content management infrastructure and folders of image files, much as a digital agency would.

The Pages also shared each other’s memetic content, particularly from Instagram in the form of regrams, sometimes from Tumblr, to crosslink audiences and increase follower growth. This was done very regularly on the Pages targeting the Black community (see mentions network graph earlier in this report).

Pages stuck to themes, incorporating visuals that reinforced in-group dynamics. This is an example of visual image clustering applied to the Facebook Page “Heart of Texas”. Heart of Texas visual clusters included a wide swath of shapes of Texas, landscape photos of flowers, and memes about secession and refugees. Further examination of the memes surfaced a collection of 2nd Amendment and anti-immigration memes.

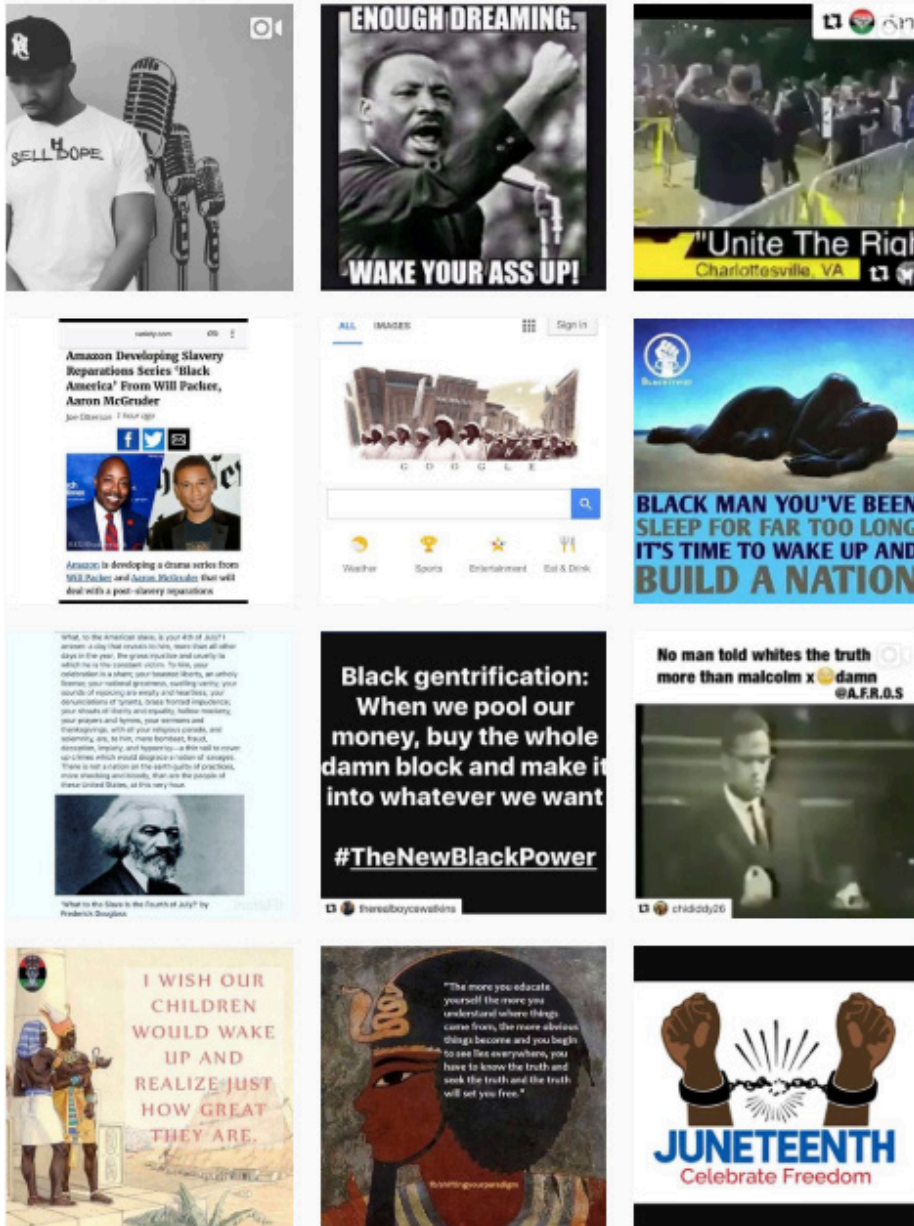


In another example, the more explicitly political Page “Being Patriotic” featured many memes containing photos of candidates. There was a cluster of Hillary Clinton memes, a cluster of Donald Trump memes, and other memes related to GOP politicians.



Impact: Memetic Spread

When memetic warfare experts examine the success of a meme campaign, they look at its [propagation, persistence, and impact](#). Propagation is how far it spreads – does the meme move into new communities? Does it spread to new channels, platforms, or forms? Persistence is how long the meme is part of community conversation – does the meme stick in the popular zeitgeist for a long period of time, or is it short-lived? And finally, impact – does the meme change hearts and minds?



IRA memes from Blacktivist (2nd row, right) and Nefertiti's Community (bottom left) on a non-IRA account

When we talk about the “impact” of the Russian influence operation, most conversations focus on whether the IRA operation *swayed voters* and swung the Presidential Election in 2016. The answer is, we can’t tell from this data.

But in terms of whether or not the operation was a success: thousands of the memes propagated far and wide, and they continue to persist in the targeted communities to this day. The extent to which they *changed*, rather than merely reinforced, minds is difficult to answer. Facebook and Instagram have additional data that could help answer that question. They know how engaged the Page audiences were, what the comments said, and to what extent user behavior changed after engaging with the content.

Evaluating this operation purely based on whether it definitively swung the election is too narrow a focus. The operation started prior to 2015 and the explicitly political content was a small percentage.

These memes do continue to spread within the communities they were targeting, particularly content by lesser-known or quietly-removed pages. One type of impact that merits further research is the extent to which these memes continue to shape culture and conversation in targeted communities.

Tactic: Inflecting a Common Message for Different Audiences (Syria)

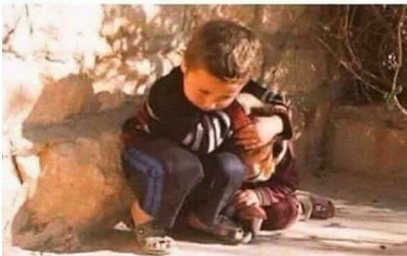
We see with content about Syria a tactic to persuade audiences similarly by tailoring details of the messaging to align with disparate and ideologically diverse audiences. Regarding Syria, everyone got a similar take, but the nuance was tailored for each group.

There were over three thousand posts about Syria in the Instagram and Facebook data sets alone, beginning in early February 2015 and continuing through the duration of the operation – including, based on our assessment of 2018 election activity, into the present day. The narratives support Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, and frame Russian operations in the country as a defense of the legitimate president and a determination to avoid the country collapsing into the hands of ISIS. The Russian government’s foreign policy talking points on the Syrian conflict appear in English language content targeting their U.S. audiences; their Russian-language and Arabic-language accounts, such as the account AsdiqaRussiya, targeted audiences outside of the U.S. as well. They also amplified aligned personalities; on YouTube, one of the accounts featured a video from the SyrianGirlPartisan channel.

The IRA's focus on Syria began years ago. Adrian Chen wrote about it in his June 2015 article "The Agency", describing the narrative as one that was so important that it leapt from the realm of troll Facebook pages to an IRL photojournalism exhibit called Material Evidence, promoted with the #MaterialEvidence hashtag. In the collection of pages targeting Americans, material about Syria was presented to all groups in the ways that would be most relevant to their other interests. For the Left-leaning accounts, the narratives about Syria were framed as antiwar opposition, objections to U.S. involvement in another country's affairs.

The Instagram account @feminism_tag was one of the most prolific pushers of this narrative, running with Syrian stories dozens of time, racking up half a million Likes. The posts focused on a combination of appealing to the human element – the suffering of Syrian mothers and children – and reinforcing the idea that the cause of the suffering was U.S. government air strikes.

A child protecting his younger sister during firing in Syria. A picture where words can't express one's feelings.



4 year-old Syrian child surrendering, mistaken camera for a weapon



Some of @feminism_tag's popular images, pulled from other popular accounts

The Black-targeted pages presented very similar narratives, advocating that the U.S. stop paying attention to Syria so that it could solve its own domestic problems. "Who really thinks that American attacks will stop the use of gas in Syria in the future? It sounds ridiculous. In fact, the U.S. threats increase, rather than reduce, the chances of a new chemical weapons attack. They bomb the other country for no reason and don't pay attention to their own problems, for example, in #Flint."

Several Black-targeted Instagram accounts shared the same memes of Syrian children as @feminism_tag; they chose to focus on the similarities between Black and Syrian children, using the hashtags #blacklivesmatter and #syrianlivesmatter alongside each other.

"I go to school every day, to be able to help rebuild my country"



On the Right-leaning pages, the content ranged from false political narratives (Barack Obama and/or Hillary Clinton founded ISIS) to refugee stories. Citizens of the United States should advocate for the U.S. to get out of Syria, the posts suggested, so that the Syrian refugee floods would stop. There were also posts advocating for more attention to ISIS and less to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad:



ISIS is our real enemy! Not the legitimate leader of Syria Bashar al-Assad. Not a single Syrian has ever done any harm to the US. We should fight the real threat - ISIS. It seems someone just wants Assad to lose power, so Syria gets taken by ISIS and these jihadists become even stronger than now. There's a lot of dirty shit going on here! What do you think?

#veteranscomefirst #veterans_us #Veterans #Usveterans #veteransUSA #SupportVeterans #Politics #USA #America #Patriots #Gratitude #HonorVets #thankvets #supportourtroops #semperfi #USMC #USCG #USAF #Navy #Army #military #godblessourmilitary #soldier #holdthegovernmentaccountable #RememberEveryoneDeployed #Usflag #StarsandStripes

When President Donald Trump took office but continued to order air strikes on Syria, the IRA accounts that were traditionally supportive of the President blamed the offense on General McMaster and began to darkly hint at a Republican-establishment conspiracy.



Conservative journalist Mike Cernovich says Current National Security Adviser Herbert Raymond "H. R." McMaster is manipulating intelligence reports given to President Donald Trump. McMaster is plotting how to sell a massive ground war in Syria to President Trump with the help of disgraced former CIA director and convicted criminal David Petraeus, who mishandled classified information by sharing documents with his mistress. As NSA, McMaster's job is to synthesize intelligence reports from all other agencies. President Trump is being given an inaccurate picture of the situation in Syria, as McMaster is seeking to involve the U.S. in a full-scale war in Syria. The McMaster-Petraeus plan calls for 150,000 American ground troops in Syria. General McMaster is a man who worked closely all his life with such odious figures as John McCain, Lindsey Graham and David Petraeus. There was a big intrigue at the headquarters of Donald Trump's supporters, and now Trump himself is a victim of a large-scale conspiracy: in the beginning, General Michael Flynn was dismissed, then Steve Bannon was ousted from the National Security Council, then Trump unexpectedly announces that he will strike Syria with missiles. I'm sure Trump is a victim of cunning and dirty manipulations from the political establishment that wants to draw America into another senseless military campaign. Trump promised to "drain the swamp", I hope he himself has not yet drowned in it.

Tactic: Narrative Repetition and Dispersal

The repurposing of the same story across accounts in the media mirage was a deliberate tactic, deployed to reinforce key themes and create the perception that certain messages or opinions were widespread and worthy of attention. This tactic was especially common in the IRA-created media mirage surrounding the Black community. The posts below show one example in which the IRA used the real human-interest story of an inspirational young Black American who made the national news for a device he invented, and his accompanying GoFundMe. The story was promoted at both the start and completion of the GoFundMe. The Black community-targeted Facebook pages and Instagram accounts repurposed the story, each putting a slightly different tone on the content to make it fit their brand (“these are stories of Black children the media don’t want you to see”, “White people invent tools for killing, this Black child is inventing a tool for saving lives.”) BM went so far as to create their own article about it for the blackmattersus website, and Williams & Calvin made a YouTube video to tell the story. We have elected not to show the associated memes because these, like thousands of other images in the data set, feature real Americans unwittingly used as propaganda collateral in a foreign influence operation. However, we wanted to call attention to this tactic to illustrate the co-opting of emotionally resonant human-interest stories as well as the coordinated dispersion of chosen narratives.

Page Name	Share URL	Content Text	# Shares	# Likes	# Reaction	# Comments	Post Date/Time
@afrokingdom_		The kid is only 10 years old, but he is a genius! Let me introduce you Meet Bishop Curry V, outstan	NA	1587		32	2017-02-02 01:03:18 PDT
Williams&Kalvin		"The kid is only 10 years old, but he is a genius! Let me introduce you Meet Bishop Curry V, outstar	165	207	60	14	2017-02-02 07:24:51 PDT
Woke Blacks		"Meet Bishop Curry V from Texas, he's working on a device that could help prevent children from c	223	299	87	13	2017-02-03 02:37:07 PDT
@woke_blacks		Meet Bishop Curry V from Texas, he's working on a device that could help prevent children from d	NA	531		10	2017-02-03 03:02:45 PDT
Black Excellence		"10-year-old Bishop Curry V was saddened by the death of a baby of his neighbors. The child was le	4	6	3	0	2017-02-06 03:06:55 PDT
@blaxcellence_		10-year-old Bishop Curry V was saddened by the death of a baby of his neighbors. The child was left NA		169		6	2017-02-06 07:49:14 PDT
Nefertiti's Community		"A brilliant 10-year-old black boy is trying to prevent hot car baby deaths with his new invention.	4	1	2	0	2017-02-17 07:24:11 PDT
@nefertiti_community		A brilliant 10-year-old black boy is trying to prevent hot car baby deaths with his new invention. T NA		347		5	2017-02-17 08:36:17 PDT
Williams&Kalvin		"White people can easily invent tools for killing, but black people can invent something really usef	5	11	1	0	2017-02-22 02:33:53 PDT
Blacktivist		"10-YEAR-OLD BISHOP CURRY RAISED \$20,000 TO HELP DEVELOP HIS DEVICE TO STOP HOT-CAR DEA/	65	144	46	0	2017-06-16 04:21:54 PDT
@_blacktivistt_		10-YEAR-OLD BISHOP CURRY RAISED \$20,000 TO HELP DEVELOP HIS DEVICE TO STOP HOT-CAR DEA/ NA		146		6	2017-06-17 09:04:39 PDT
@blaxcellence_		Little inventor appeared to be successful! He raised over \$20,000 via GoFundMe page. His patent i NA		635		8	2017-06-18 11:56:05 PDT
BM	https://blackmattersus.com	"As the hot summer months are rapidly approaching, a 10-year-old from McKinney, Texas, wants t	61	155	24	7	2017-06-18 14:52:33 PDT
@_black_business		The Oasis would respond to rising temperatures by emitting cool air and use an antenna to signal p NA		1689		21	2017-06-27 01:02:43 PDT

Tactic: Repurposing and Re-Titling Pages and Brands

One entirely new finding, based on the organic Instagram data set, is that the IRA appears to have pivoted existing accounts to focus on new topics. One example of this is can be seen in the data set that Facebook attributed to @army_of_jesus_, which appears to be one of the earliest Instagram accounts created (first post date January 7, 2015). Based on the content and dates, it appears that @army_of_jesus_ was originally created as first a Kermit the Frog, and then The Simpsons, meme account. The Instagram data set attributed a large collection of Kermit memes with a brand mark reading “@naughtykermit” to the account @army_of_jesus_. The @naughtykermit Instagram account no longer exists, and NaughtyKermit was the name of [an IRA tumblr account](#) (which at some point was repurposed to be “skulofjustice”).

A large collection of Simpsons images is similarly attributed to @army_of_jesus; there is a transitional post on August 27, 2015 that reads, “Hey guys! I, Homer Simpson, am taking Kermit’s page. He was messing with cops too much and finally he got some... punishment, ke-ke! Okay let’s have some fun! WOO-HOO! #Simpsons #Homer #HomerSimpson #HomerSays #News #FunnyNews #Politics #USA”.

Army of Jesus’ Instagram operator did not find Jesus until 915 posts in: on January 15, 2016 the account rebooted yet again with a collection of posts simply featuring the hashtags “#freedom #love #god #bible #trust #blessed #grateful”; the data for the related Facebook page indicates a first post date of September 23, 2016. It’s likely that the IRA decided that the audience engagement on Simpsons and Kermit content just wasn’t there, but didn’t want to abandon the followers it had amassed; the data set did not include follower growth over time, nor comments, so we have no insight into the audience response.



It’s possible that the Instagram team that provided the data made an incorrect account attribution, or that @army_of_jesus_ was simply repeatedly sharing @naughtykermit content. However, this happens elsewhere in the data set as well. Another instance is an account called @liberty_rising that spent over a year sharing humor and anti-Clinton meme content branded with “@dummy_news” and “facebook.com/NewsOfTheStupid” before switching to a very different brand mark with new Ron Paul memes, and a strong Libertarian alignment reflective of the attributed name.

The early efforts on the @army_of_jesus_ account, whatever its name was at the time, provide a glimpse into the use of hashtags for early audience-building. The accounts were already getting dozens of Likes, so it is also possible that these accounts were older and the data provided began in early January 2015 because that’s precisely what SSCI asked for and the platforms didn’t volunteer earlier content.

army_of_jesus_	There is no shortage of products in the US, there is a huge amount of the population that doesn't have the means to purchase food in the quantities that would ensure their normal functioning.	54	0	2015-01-13
army_of_jesus_	Gustav Klimt - The Kiss #kermit #kermitthefrog #fun #lol #themuppets #themuppeshow #follow #followforfollow #followback #instantfollowback #follow4follow #followforfollow #likeforlike #li	72	4	2015-01-13
army_of_jesus_	Everyone should know #kermit #kermitthefrog #fun #lol #themuppets #themuppeshow #follow #followforfollow #followback #instantfollowback #follow4follow #followforfollow #likeforlike #li	88	1	2015-01-13
army_of_jesus_	#kermit #kermitthefrog #fun#lol #themuppets #themuppeshow #follow#followforfollow #followback #instantfollowback#follow4follow #followforfollow #likeforlike #like #usa#american #amer	73	1	2015-02-11
army_of_jesus_	#kermit #kermitthefrog #fun#lol #themuppets #themuppeshow #follow#followforfollow #followback #instantfollowback#follow4follow #followforfollow #likeforlike #like #usa#american #amer	74	2	2015-02-11
army_of_jesus_	#kermit #kermitthefrog #fun#lol #themuppets #themuppeshow #follow#followforfollow #followback #instantfollowback#follow4follow #followforfollow #likeforlike #like #usa#american #amer	62	0	2015-02-12
army_of_jesus_	#kermit #kermitthefrog #fun#lol #themuppets #themuppeshow #follow#followforfollow #followback #instantfollowback#follow4follow #followforfollow #likeforlike #like #usa#american #amer	92	8	2015-02-13
army_of_jesus_	#kermit #kermitthefrog #fun#lol #themuppets #themuppeshow #follow#followforfollow #followback #instantfollowback#follow4follow #followforfollow #likeforlike #like #usa#american #amer	110	10	2015-02-14
army_of_jesus_	#kermit #kermitthefrog #fun#lol #themuppets #themuppeshow #follow#followforfollow #followback #instantfollowback#follow4follow #followforfollow #likeforlike #like #usa#american #amer	57	0	2015-02-14
army_of_jesus_	#kermit #kermitthefrog #fun#lol #themuppets #themuppeshow #follow#followforfollow #followback #instantfollowback#follow4follow #followforfollow #likeforlike #like #usa#american #amer	58	3	2015-02-15
army_of_jesus_	#kermit #kermitthefrog #fun#lol #themuppets #themuppeshow #follow#followforfollow #followback #instantfollowback#follow4follow #followforfollow #likeforlike #like #usa#american #amer	114	8	2015-02-15
army_of_jesus_	#kermit #kermitthefrog #fun#lol #themuppets #themuppeshow #follow#followforfollow #followback #instantfollowback#follow4follow #followforfollow #likeforlike #like #usa#american #amer	124	4	2015-02-16
army_of_jesus_	#kermit #kermitthefrog #fun#lol #themuppets #themuppeshow #follow#followforfollow #followback #instantfollowback#follow4follow #followforfollow #likeforlike #like #usa#american #amer	79	0	2015-02-16
army_of_jesus_	#kermit #kermitthefrog #fun#lol #themuppets #themuppeshow #follow#followforfollow #followback #instantfollowback#follow4follow #followforfollow #likeforlike #like #usa#american #amer	57	1	2015-02-17
army_of_jesus_	#kermit #kermitthefrog #fun#lol #themuppets #themuppeshow #follow#followforfollow #followback #instantfollowback#follow4follow #followforfollow #likeforlike #like #usa#american #amer	63	0	2015-02-17

Another example of what appears to have been an account repurposing is the @_anonymous_news_ Instagram account. This account’s repurposing pattern is of note because it may indicate that the IRA had yearly reviews or yearly metrics goals. For almost exactly one year, May 28, 2015 to May 27, 2016, the account posted local news about Jackson, Mississippi. On May 27, 2016, it went dormant. On November 9, 2016, it respawned as a Black Guns Matter account; there was an IRA-run Black Guns Matter Facebook page (as well as a real Black American gun rights advocate who currently runs a business with the same brand name), and the data set did not include any other attributed “@blackgunsmatter” Instagram accounts. The content attributed to @_anonymous_news_ during the period from November 9, 2016 to May 31, 2017 is extremely similar to the Black Guns Matter Facebook content.

On May 31, 2017 the account went dormant again until July 13, 2017, when it appears to have respawned yet again as a Guy-Fawkes-mask-branded account posting content that included

hashtags such as #truther, #hactivist, and #sheeple. The turnover on the account at nearly the exact date each year is curious and indicates they may have purchased the account the first time, or potentially that it was considered a failure upon annual review and changed up.



Tactic: Manipulating Journalism

The IRA impersonated state and local news enterprises on Twitter and Instagram. There were approximately 109 Twitter accounts masquerading as news organizations. The 44 U.S.-focused Twitter accounts amassed 660,335 followers between them, with an average of 15,000 followers each. Many of these accounts were automated and behaved nearly identically, posting links to articles and local content dozens of times per day. The incorporation of local news into their strategy was possibly undertaken because [Pew](#) and others have found that Americans have a higher degree of trust in local news.

A look at the metadata associated with the Twitter newsbots reveals that despite their names, they were created with obviously Russian device information (beeline_russia as the carrier) and were tweeting from overseas IPs. Several others (not pictured) used Google Voice accounts.

			IP	User-Defined Geolocation	Carrier	
BaltimoreOnline	online.baltimore@gmail.com	Eastern Time (US & Canada)	125.25.121.120	Thailand	beeline_russia	Breaking news, weather, traffic and more for Baltimore. DM us anytime. RTs i
Atlanta_Online	atlanta.online1@gmail.com	Eastern Time (US & Canada)	108.174.63.166	United States, NY	beeline_russia	Breaking news, weather, traffic and more for Atlanta and Georgia. DM us any
OaklandOnline	online.oakland@gmail.com	Pacific Time (US & Canada)	181.72.249.129	Chile	beeline_russia	Breaking news, weather, traffic and more for Oakland. DM us anytime. RTs nc
OnlineCleveland	cleveland.online1@gmail.com	Central Time (US & Canada)	113.170.100.132	Vietnam	beeline_russia	Breaking news, weather, traffic and more for Cleveland. DM us anytime. RTs
OnlineMemphis	memphis.online1@gmail.com	Central Time (US & Canada)	178.90.86.28	Kazakhstan	beeline_russia	Breaking news, weather, traffic and more for Memphis and Tennessee. DM u
StLouisOnline	online.st.louis@gmail.com	Eastern Time (US & Canada)	125.207.173.241	Japan	beeline_russia	Breaking news, weather, traffic and more for St. Louis. DM us anytime. RTs nc
WashingtonOnline	online.washington@gmail.com	Eastern Time (US & Canada)	113.190.174.116	Vietnam	beeline_russia	Breaking news, weather, traffic and more for Washington. DM us anytime. RT

A handful of Instagram accounts similarly tried to present news and images as if they were local U.S. news agencies: @my_baton_rouge and @new_york_live and @baltimore.blackvoice presented current events and information about the cities and communities they purported to be from.

This tactic was not limited to U.S. audiences; of the 109 news-related Twitter accounts, 58 were “Novosti” accounts that tweeted news related to regions in Russia. One of the most popular was @NovostiCrimea, which had 107,011 followers. In addition, Russian-language news and propaganda sites such as Sputnik embedded tweets from different IRA-linked Twitter accounts. This is not unexpected given the IRA’s early mission of propagandizing to Russian citizens.

Despite their dedication to impersonating media, the IRA simultaneously worked hard to undermine trust in *real* media across Black, Left, and Right-targeted accounts. This took two forms. The first tactic was to advocate for the creation of niche community media, which was positioned in opposition to unrepresentative (across a myriad of axes) mainstream media. The second approach was to actively undermine trust in journalism.



A sub-thread of note was the dozens of posts extolling the virtues of Wikileaks and Julian Assange that the IRA placed across Black, Left, and Right-leaning audiences on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The Instagram accounts and Facebook pages produced memes teasing new Wikileaks drops (such as via IRA account @therepublicandaily, which positioned itself as a Republican news source) and reinforcing Assange's reputation as a whistleblower with a commitment to journalistic freedom. The Twitter accounts joined in as well. There were a small number of Facebook and Instagram posts about Assange, reinforcing his reputation as a freedom fighter, on October 4th, 2016 – a few days before the major Podesta email dump occurred. Given the GRU involvement in the DNC hack with Wikileaks, it is possible that the IRA was tasked with socializing Wikileaks to both Right and Left audiences. Prior to October 4th, the last post about Assange had been in early September 2016. Once the emails were released, there were many more tweets and Facebook posts about them.

HILLARY WHEN WIKILEAKS WRITES ABOUT REPUBLICANS: THEY ARE FREEDOM FIGHTERS!



Being Patriotic

HILLARY WHEN WIKILEAKS WRITES ABOUT DEMOCRATS: WE MUST DRONE ASSANGE!



ASSANGE, MANNING AND SNOWDEN HAVE MADE OUR SOCIETY MORE OPEN THEY MUST BE AWARDED NOT PROSECUTED

"Clinton leaks could come as early as next week," Assange says



RD THE REPUBLICAN DAILY



55 SKYAS

Tactic: Amplify Conspiratorial Narratives

The Internet Research Agency amplified a myriad of conspiracy theories on all platforms they prioritized. The greatest breadth and repetition of these narratives was on Twitter. Thousands of conspiratorial tweets were predominantly advanced or amplified by the right-wing personas, and included topics such as pseudoscience conspiracies (vaccines, chemtrails), paranormal activity and aliens, the “globalist” agenda (explicitly anti-Semitic angles were present), and domestic political conspiracies such as QAnon, Pizzagate, and the murder of Seth Rich.

With the exception of one anti-vaccine Instagram post, Facebook and Instagram had no pseudoscience conspiracy content, no QAnon, and no Pizzagate. There are, however, dozens of posts blaming George Soros for a myriad of complaints across dozens of the Right-targeted Instagram accounts and Facebook Pages; these do not display the degree of explicitly anti-Semitic vitriol or harassment that appeared in the tweets. Domestic political conspiracies were present on Facebook and Instagram – the Seth Rich murder conspiracy was presented to both Right and Left-leaning audiences. On the Left, it was accompanied by an appeal to trust Julian Assange.



The Black-targeted groups were presented with distinct historical conspiracies – ones intended to reinforce cultural identity as well as create discord. Three that appeared repeatedly (all debunked on Snopes) were the idea that Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was Black, that Shakespeare’s plays had been written by a Black woman, and that the Statue of Liberty had originally been made in the likeness of a Black woman that the U.S. government rejected, prompting France to send the current Lady Liberty as a whiter-looking replacement. These posts generated enough audience engagement that they were reposted multiple times by the same accounts across the duration of the operation.



Tactic: Sow Literal Division

The Internet Research Agency has been implicated in the promotion of secessionist and insurrectionist movements in several countries; there is no sowing of division quite so pronounced as attempting to create a literal territorial split. In Europe, this took the form of involvement in Brexit and Catalanian independence efforts. In the United States, it was #Texit and #Calexit, as well as active support for the Bundy ranch and Malheur Reserve standoffs.

The vote in favor of Brexit, which happened on June 23, 2016, was subsequently used by the IRA to promote its Texas Secession initiatives. Brexit narratives were shared on the Instagram account @rebelTEXAS as a justification for #Texit, as well as on @_americafirst_ and @americanfury to encourage American isolationism and a retreat from involvement in global affairs. The Facebook Page Heart of Texas posted about secession with some regularity, and coordinated real-world pro-secession demonstrations across the state using Facebook Events.

The #Calexit hashtag was pushed hundreds of times by @americanfury beginning on Feb 2, 2017 – that account's content was reposted by @wall_up, @_americafirst, @_american.made, and @defend.the.second; the @southern.rebel.pride account used it a few dozen times as well. The narrative around Calexit was somewhat convoluted; on Twitter it was presented as liberals trying to leave after the election of Trump; one of the Right-wing twitter personas got involved, tweeting "Calexit leader discovered to have ties to #Russia - communists attempting to take #California". The #Calexit presence on Facebook was virtually nonexistent; it consisted of two posts, both by Angry Eagle, suggesting that California liberals were whiny and should leave. The second post is an example of the way in which the IRA tied controversial recent news (in that case, an anti-Milo Yiannopoulos protest in Berkeley) to the broader narrative:

"The fucking lefty scumbags seeded destruction around at UC Berkeley overnight in response to the planned speech by a right-wing firebrand Milo Yiannopoulos who's an actual gay! Who's intolerant now? They broke windows, set fire, surrounded occasional passersby and beat them with their 'antifa' flags. Fucking animals. Soros wants to spark civil war 2.0. Police are told to stay away. Cabel news networks cover up what's going on there. Is this the cost of free speech? Btw Trump threatens to cut UC Berkeley's federal funding. I think he'd better completely cut the entire funding of California since they're so worried about keeping illegals inside. Let them pay for all that shit themselves, they're boasting so much about Cali being a donor state, so let's see how they can handle all this shit! Or maybe... support #calexit?"



At a local level, the IRA promoted riots and rallies to call attention to a myriad of issues and grievances. At the state level, the IRA promoted secession (#textit, #calexit) and amplified regional cultural differences. And at a national level, the IRA promoted armed insurgency, through exhortations to violence over issues ranging from the Bureau of Land Management to Black Lives Matter, from protesting Confederate monument removal to threatening riots over election legitimacy (if Hillary Clinton were to steal the election).

Armed insurrection and the Bundy standoff were talking points on Stand for Freedom, Defend the 2nd, Heart of Texas and Being Patriotic – all in favor of it. LaVoy Finicum was hailed as a hero and martyr in memes following his death; in addition to the Facebook pages mentioned, Instagram accounts @stop_refugees, @army_of_jesus_, @_american.made, @stand_for_freedom, @rebeltexas, @_americafirst_, @wall_up, and @defend.the.second weighed in with the opinion that he had been murdered by the government.

Blacktivist and United Muslims of America, meanwhile, used the Bundy story to point out that Black or Muslim individuals who had occupied government land would not have been treated so graciously by Federal officers.

Tactic: Dismiss and Redirect

Soon after the November 2016 election, investigative journalism began to uncover evidence of both the IRA's social influence and the GRU's hacking operations. As articles began to emerge about election interference – pointing the finger at Russia – the IRA didn't shy away or ignore it. It used derision and disparagement in content targeting the Right-leaning pages, to create and amplify the narrative that the whole investigation was nonsense, that Comey and Mueller were corrupt, and that the emerging Russia stories were a “weird conspiracy” pushed by “liberal crybabies”. As facets of the investigation trickled out over 2017, the Right-targeted accounts justified, dismissed, normalized, and redirected.

the.red.pill	93228	Everything is Russians' fault! #Killary#Clintonfraudation#fraud#elections2016#Clinton#Clintonforprison#HillNo#HillaryClinton#Hitlary#pres	2016-11-29
the.red.pill	93053	Oh these nasty Russians #Killary#Clintonfraudation#fraud#elections2016#Clinton#Clintonforprison#HillNo#HillaryClinton#Hitlary#presidenti	2016-12-12
the.red.pill	93075	BREAKING: According to CNN aliens kidnapped Democratic voters in key states to make Donald Trump win the election! A huge relief for Russia	2017-01-12
the.red.pill	93094	The Russians did it #Killary#Clintonfraudation#fraud#elections2016#Clinton#Clintonforprison#HillNo#HillaryClinton#Hitlary#presidentialelec	2017-01-16
the.red.pill	93577	Don't forget to blame Russia when you run out of arguments. Our education system is totally occupied by perverted liberal crybabies who teac	2017-02-07
The Red Pill	55686	"I just hate when Russian do this..."	0 2017-02-22
the.red.pill	93289	I just hate when Russian do this... #Killary#Clintonfraudation#fraud#elections2016#Clinton#Clintonforprison#HillNo#HillaryClinton#Hitlary#	2017-02-26
the.red.pill	93313	Oh nasty Russians #liberal#Killary#Clintonfraudation#fraud#elections2016#Clinton#Clintonforprison#HillNo#HillaryClinton#Hitlary#presiden	2017-02-28
The Red Pill	55537	"Oh these nasty Russians"	0 2017-02-28
the.red.pill	93410	Repost @eddie_loves_elsa_ Republicans are under a friggin microscope and it's SO HYPOCRITICAL! 1.Democrats thought misleading congress w	2017-03-03
The Red Pill	55547	"Liberal logic: there was no voter fraud but the Russians hacked the election"	0 2017-03-06
the.red.pill	93434	Liberal logic: there was no voter fraud but the Russians hacked the election #liberal#Killary#Clintonfraudation#fraud#elections2016#Clinton#	2017-03-06
the.red.pill	93382	Everyone I Don't Like Is a Russian Agent: In desperate attempt to promote his weird conspiracy narrative John McCain made another idiotic stat	2017-03-16
the.red.pill	92550	The Russians for sure #liberal#Killary#Clintonfraudation#fraud#elections2016#Clinton#Clintonforprison#HillNo#HillaryClinton#Hitlary#presic	2017-03-25
the.red.pill	92651	Al Jazeera Arabic's Facebook coverage of the terror attack in St. Petersburg, Russia was flooded with positive comments and happy emoticons a	2017-04-04
the.red.pill	92465	RUSSIANS RUSSIANS RUSSIANS #liberal#Trump#MAGA#PresidentTrump#NotMyPresident#USA#theredpill#nothingleft#conservative#republica	2017-05-11
The Red Pill	55581	"RUSSIANS RUSSIANS RUSSIANS"	0 2017-05-11
the.red.pill	92886	Lol is it real? These Russians are savage #liberal#Trump#MAGA#PresidentTrump#NotMyPresident#USA#theredpill#nothingleft#conservative#re	2017-05-17
the.red.pill	92900	Do you remember the Russians kidnapping Democrat voters in order to prevent them voting for Hillary? Me neither. #liberal#Trump#MAGA#Pr	2017-05-22
the.red.pill	92860	Traitor McCain is in the news again saying Russia (specifically Putin) is the bigger threat than ISIS. You know it's funny cause I'vent heard of Russi	2017-05-30
the.red.pill	92747	A peaceful transition of power is impossible in a country full of terrorists. It was the mistake made in Libya when the legitimate government wa	2017-06-20
the.red.pill	92701	Or maybe the Russians... Credits @massachusettstrumpster #liberal#Trump#MAGA#PresidentTrump#NotMyPresident#USA#theredpill#nothin	2017-06-21
the.red.pill	92708	CNN Senior Producer John Bonifield caught on tape admitting the Trump-Russia story is “bullsh*t” for “ratings.” Bonified admits CNN CEO Jeff Z	2017-06-27
the.red.pill	93633	NY Times are so hysterical they can't even remember how the president of Russia looks like. Russia everywhere and everyone is Russian. #liberal	2017-07-12
the.red.pill	93641	Skittles hacked by Russians #liberal#Trump#MAGA#PresidentTrump#NotMyPresident#USA#theredpill#nothingleft#conservative#republican#lib	2017-07-13
the.red.pill	93616	I think Donald Trump Jr had every right to meet with a Russian lawyer. First of all, she might have got really important information about Hillar	2017-07-14
the.red.pill	93647	You've lost and don't know what to do? Just blame it on Russian hackers #liberal#Trump#MAGA#PresidentTrump#NotMyPresident#USA#thered	2017-07-21
the.red.pill	93661	Russia Russia Russia #liberal#Trump#MAGA#PresidentTrump#NotMyPresident#USA#theredpill#nothingleft#conservative#republican#libtard#	2017-07-28
the.red.pill	93726	Also he helped the economy, lowered taxes, reduced the use of welfare and food stamps, he struck fear into the Russians and kept American out	2017-08-16
the.red.pill	93714	Trump is NO Racist just like he never colluded with Russia. It's all #fakenews bull shit. Check out my friends: @wall__up @Being.patriotic @sta	2017-08-18



BOOM=> New NSA Expert's Report Says There Was "No Russian Hack" of DNC Computers - It Was a "Leak"

Jim Hoff Aug 10th, 2017 2:37 pm - Leave a Comment



IRA accounts created dozens of posts throughout 2017, attempting to frame the Russian election interference investigation as a paranoid fantasy of the Establishment and the Left.

Don Jr. replied to an email and went to a pointless meeting.

Chelsea stole donations for Haiti to pay for her wedding.

Nice comparison. 🤔



I think Donald Trump Jr had every right to meet with a Russian lawyer. First of all, she might have got really important information about Hillary Clinton. If the information is true I don't care where it comes from Russia or China or wherever. If the Russians are able to expose Clinton's lies then let them do it. I want to know the truth. Secondly, Donald Trump Jr published all the emails in order to be transparent and there is nothing outrageous in them. Not like he has deleted 33,000 of classified emails of smth. Third, this lawyer is a really suspicious figure who according to some news sources was spotted at an anti-Trump rally and has connections with the Democratic Party. Moreover, she has no proven connections with the Russian government. So the whole story looks like another provocation dedicated to resurrecting the dead Russian collusion story. They tried to defame the president and they lost now they are trying to use this weak ace in the sleeve against his son. Good luck with that!" #liberal#Trump#MAGA#PresidentTrump#Not-MyPresident#USA#theredpill#nothingleft#conservative#republican#libtard#regressiveleft#makeamericagreatagain#DonaldTrump#mypresident#buildthewall#memes#funny#politics#right-wing#blm#snowflakes

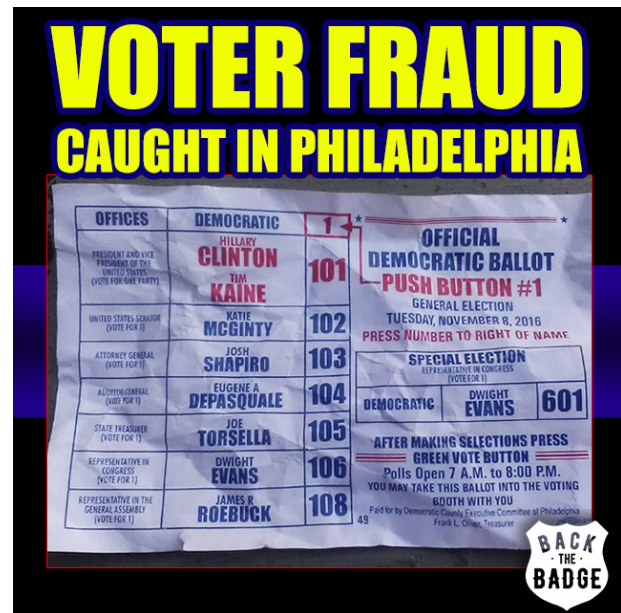
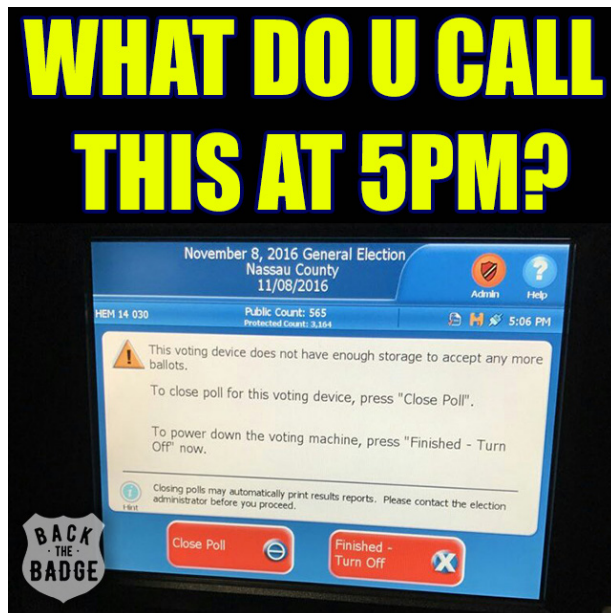
Quantitative

Summary statistics examining mentions of “Trump” and “Clinton” appear to confirm the consensus across researchers and experts that the Internet Research Agency’s influence operations were minimally about the candidates. Roughly 6% of tweets, 18% of Instagram posts, and 7% of Facebook posts mentioned Trump or Clinton by name. Trump was mentioned roughly twice as often as Clinton on most platforms. The text of the Instagram posts contained a much higher proportion of insult names like “Shillary” or “Hitlery”.

	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter
Total posts	61,483	116,205	10,401,029
Clinton posts	1,777	7,915	198,123
% mentioning Clinton	2.9%	6.8%	1.9%
Trump posts	2,563	13,106	430,185
% mentioning Trump	4.2%	11.3%	4.1%

There were 1777 political posts on Facebook that mentioned Hillary Clinton (or a nickname). 268 appeared on pages that targeted Left-leaning and Black community pages, generating 49,635 engagements; the remainder, generating 1.7 million engagements, were on Right-leaning pages. They were all negative.

There were 109 posts devoted to creating and amplifying fears of voter fraud; the overwhelming majority of them targeted right-wing audiences. 71 were created in the month leading up to election day, and made claims that certain states were helping Sec. Clinton win, that militia groups were going to polling places to stop fraud (called for volunteers to participate), that civil war was preferable to an unfair election or the election of Sec. Clinton, that “illegals” were overrepresented in voter rolls in Texas and elsewhere, or were voting multiple times with Democratic Party assistance. The Being Patriotic page created a 1-800 number hotline for tips about voter fraud, which prominent accounts such as @March_for_Trump promoted on Twitter as well. The narrative was also disseminated on Twitter via the popular @TEN_GOP account.

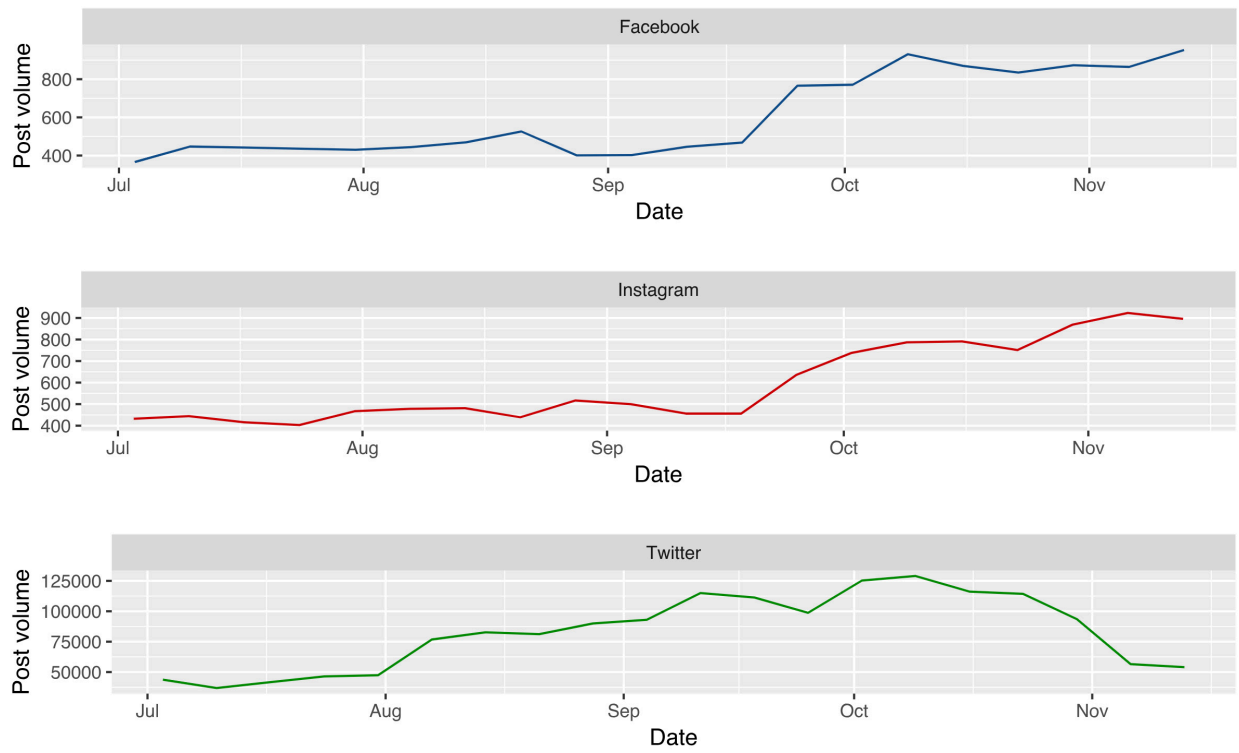


The prevalence of this narrative suggests they may not have expected Trump to win; regardless, they intended to incite violence if he did not.

There was one post alluding to voter fraud targeting a left-wing audience on the page @cop_block_us; it conveyed a conspiracy theory that someone with evidence that the Democratic Party primary had been rigged in Hillary's favor had been found dead.

This data set does not include enough information to make a strong assessment about the extent to which the IRA operation had a significant influence on the election. However, the organic content does offer insights into the extent to which the IRA's memes and messages resonated with its target audiences, and the ways in which they evolved their political messages in some ways and remained remarkably consistent in others. As stated earlier, the Internet Research Agency's operation was not focused entirely on the political, but the election of 2016 did figure significantly in the content. There were approximately 6.5 million posts not related to the election, and approximately 686,000 posts that focused on it. In engagement terms, there were 246 million non-election-related engagements, and 82 million election-related. Put another way, 11% of the total content was related to the election and 33% of the engagement was related to the election. This indicates that overall the IRA did receive higher engagement on election-related content. However, this effect was dominated by the volume of Twitter posts; Facebook and Instagram had similar engagement rates between election and non-election-related posts. Overall, Instagram's engagement rates were higher after the election because of the increase in activity in 2017.

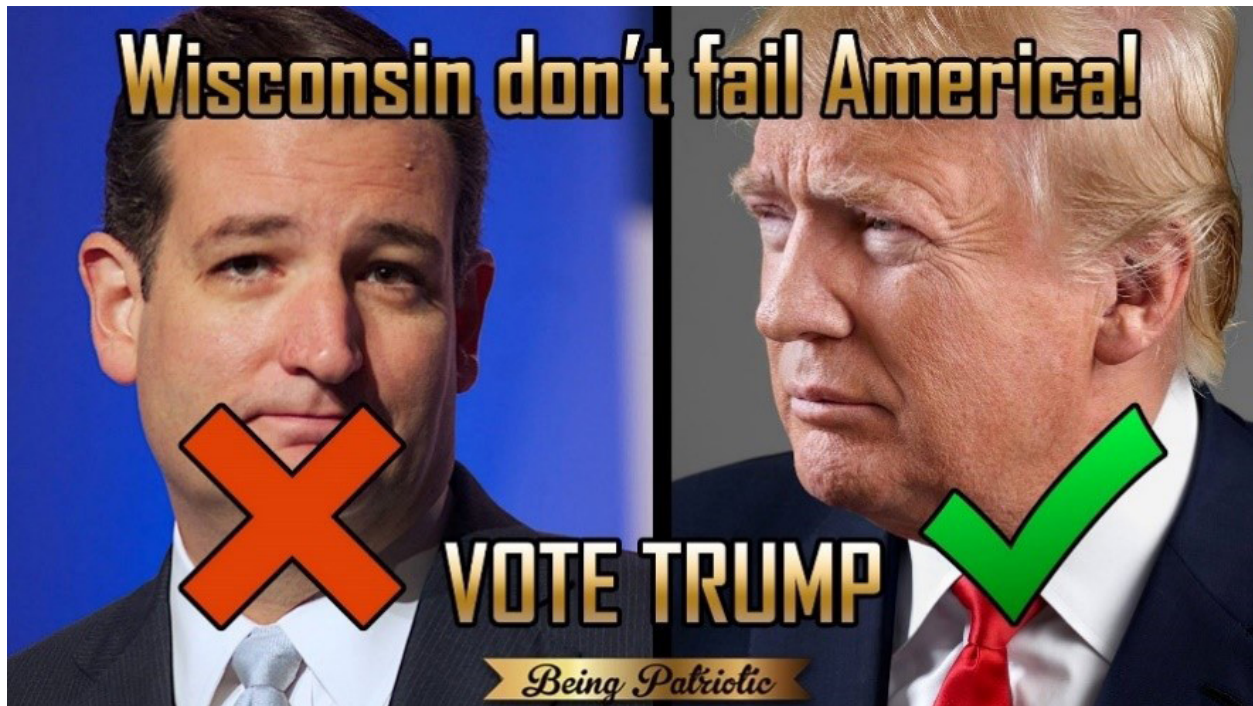
Weekly Post Volume Through Election 2016



Posting patterns for five months leading into the election show increases on Facebook and Instagram, but a drop-off in mid-October on Twitter. By November 2016, journalists were already writing about the presence of Russian Twitter bots. The drop-off may have been related to the IRA losing some of its accounts; we do not have account deletion dates in the data provided.

Qualitative

First, it is our assessment that aside from a handful of early-2015 posts expressing support for a Rand Paul candidacy, the Right-targeted IRA pages aligned to display a clear and consistent preference for then-candidate Donald Trump from July 2015 onward. They actively disparaged Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, and Jeb Bush on Facebook and Instagram.



Saying that the IRA expressed strong and consistent support for then-candidate Trump does not imply that there were no negative posts about President Trump; there *were* negative posts among the Left-targeting and occasionally Black-targeting Facebook groups. It also makes no claim about whether the campaign was in communication with the IRA in any way, as any determination about that topic is outside of the scope of this data set. However, the IRA consistently supported his candidacy throughout the primary in Right-leaning groups, keeping their memes and content positive with the exception of a few posts expressing strong disapproval and disappointment that then-candidate Trump was in favor of a hard line on Edward Snowden.

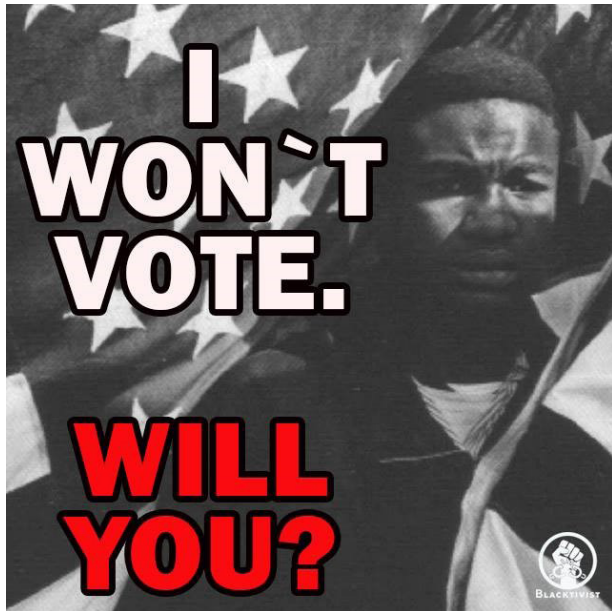
Kremlin-aligned narratives appeared in a handful of posts, including this one from Dec. 18, 2015 that expressed the conviction that Trump was going to have a very sensible Russia policy.



(Above left) @stop_refugees #91323 12/18/2015 Trump said that he is honored by Putin had called him an absolute leader, and expresses his support for Russian president. His dislike for President Obama - and it's a mutual thing - is terrible. That's why you see all the conflict, all the problems, all the hatred. If we can't work with Russia, that's not a good thing, Trump said. Well to my mind we need Russia on our side, not on the opposite, what's your point? #usdaily #news #hotnews #newspaper #coffee #reading #local #cnn #foxnews #nbc #nytimes #morning #politics #usa #america #americannews #followme #trump #russia #putin - 314 Likes

Second, it is our assessment that the IRA was similarly strong and consistent in their efforts to undermine the candidacy of then-candidate Hillary Clinton throughout all of their pages – Black, Left, and Right-targeting. The one purportedly positive Clinton post was an event (and ad) promoting a Muslim community march to support Sec. Clinton (above right). It is likely that the IRA saw a high-profile march by Muslims as a way to create social tension, and as a negative for Sec. Clinton's candidacy. The remainder of the United Muslims of America page content actively opposed Sec. Clinton, primarily promoting further-left candidates but at one point going so far as to broach the idea that Muslims might vote for then-candidate Trump.

In the days leading up to the election, the IRA began to deploy voter suppression tactics on the Black-community targeted accounts, while simultaneously fearmongering on Right-targeted accounts about voter fraud and delivering ominous warnings that the election would be stolen and violence might be necessary. The suppression narratives were targeted almost exclusively at the Black community on Instagram and Facebook; there appeared to be a concerted effort to keep the conversation on other topics, such as alienation and violence, and away from politics.



Election Week 2016

Election week at the IRA: Content analysis, November 5 – November 9, 2016

Based on the data set provided by the social platforms, the IRA made approximately 32,000 posts across Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram between 11/5/2016 and 11/9/2016. We removed duplicates, revealing 29,040 unique pieces of content. For tweets that included “RT” in the content text, Twitter provided the number of retweets, but not favorites. (The number of replies were not included in the Twitter data set.)

The reason that we isolate this detailed study of the IRAs cross-platform efforts during election week is to illustrate the distinctive ways in which they attempted to manipulate the Black, Left-leaning, and Right-leaning groups over the same timeframe. The strategy for Right-leaning groups appears to have been to generate extreme anger and suspicion, in hopes that it would motivate people to vote; posts darkly hinted at conspiracy theories, voter fraud, illegal participation in the election, and stated the need for rebellion should Hillary Clinton “steal” the election. The Black-targeted content, meanwhile, largely ignored the election until the last minute, instead continuing to produce posts on themes about societal alienation and police brutality. As the election became imminent, those themes were then tied into several varieties of voter suppression narratives: don’t vote, stay home, this country is not for Black people, these candidates don’t care about Black people. Left-targeted content was somewhat political, with an anti-establishment slant. It focused primarily on identity and pride for communities such as Native Americans, LGBT+, and Muslims, and then more broadly called for voting for candidates other than Hillary Clinton.

In summary, the goal appears to have been to generate extreme anger and engagement for those most likely to support then-candidate Donald Trump, and to create disillusionment and disengagement on the Left-leaning and Black communities.

November 5, 2018

Leading into election week, the IRA Twitter newsbots, notably NBAHawks_Fans, rapidly tweet-ed out miscellaneous news headlines; these had very low engagement. Many of the 3841 IRA persona twitter accounts appeared to be focused exclusively on retweeting. They primarily amplified the #SpiritCooking and #RememberWhenTrump hashtags, the latter of which appears to have begun with the goal of bumping up unfavorable moments in Donald Trump's campaign and prior public life. According to an archived thread on Reddit from November 4th, 2016, the two hashtags were part of a battle for attention. Some pro-Trump online communities had alleged that that Twitter was censoring #SpiritCooking; several IRA accounts amplified or produced unique pro-Trump #RememberWhenTrump contributions that incorporated #SpiritCooking, likely with the goal of keeping it trending and redirecting attention. Of the 60 IRA contributions to the hashtag on 11/5, all but five retweets amplified or created negative Hillary Clinton-related content; their twenty-three original tweets generated 642 engagements. Other retweeted topics included Pizzagate and pedophilia, Sec. Clinton's alleged involvement in funding ISIS, and former President Bill Clinton's past.

The IRA personas' online conversations managed to be consistently divisive, and yet nearly entirely separate across target audiences. Among the Right-wing persona group, multiple accounts, particularly @GreatKublaiKahn, retweeted @realDonaldTrump and trolled real Twitter users, occasionally mentioning alt-right activists such as Baked Alaska and Microchip. Others retweeted @wikileaks' tweets about Sec. Clinton's finances, the Clinton Global Initiative, spirit-cooking emails, the private email server, Benghazi, and sex scandals; amplification of Wikileaks was observed across all social platforms throughout the campaign. Some IRA Twitter personas promoted conspiratorial rumors by authentic influential accounts such as @LatestAnonNews, which claimed "Clinton Underground Child Sex Scandal to break in a couple hours. Happy 5th of November!", and @KimDotCom, who wrote, "FBI now has deleted Clinton emails." They amplified misspelled-name hoax and satire accounts such as @HILLARYCLINTON (spelled with a zero), which were subsequently shut down by Twitter. They amplified Donald Trump campaign insiders such as @MichaelCohen212, @DonaldJTrumpJr and @DiamondandSilk, as well as conservative influencers such as @charliekirk11, @gatewaypundit, and @AmyMek.

Several “shitposter”-style accounts, including @Based_Plissken, @TheeFash, @George-Prescottt, @30PiecesofAG_, @drtywhiteboy68, and @harrykleinfeld, produced original content, tweeting racist and anti-Semitic political remarks, and harassing regular users. Account @Chris__Tegner ran a voter suppression strategy, repeatedly @-messaging individual Twitter users, including several famous influencers, to post “Heads Up: If you voted for Bernie in the Primaries, the Election Board will NOT let you vote for Hillary on Nov 8.” The IRA frequently engaged with influencers, presumably an attempt to achieve wider viewership by appearing in the replies to prominent accounts. Meanwhile, the Texas-secession focused social media accounts on all platforms pushed a #Texit rally.

The accounts that appeared to be targeting and engaging with Black audiences focused on an entirely different conversation, almost entirely absent any mention of “Trump” or “Clinton”. On Twitter as well as Facebook, they were talking about Dillard university protesting David Duke, and about police brutality. The highest-engagement tweet by an IRA Black persona account on November 5th came from @Crystal1Johnson: “St. Louis mother wants answers after ‘hideous’ photo of officer posing with her dead son surfaces. <https://t.co/I9pO8QhEgz>”. It received 2497 retweets and 1365 likes; the copy, although it was presented as original, was pulled verbatim from a KTLA headline. This is a tactic observed many times in IRA content; it likely allowed them to mask language fluency shortcomings. Accounts such as @BLK_Voice talked about men and youth killed by police. On Instagram, a substantial portion of the content focused on Black culture with no mention at all of the upcoming election. @BlackToLive asked where black people were mentioned in textbooks, @Blacktivist asked where black people were on television. The sparse political content (~5 posts) included commentary about the Jay Z-Beyonce concert for Hillary.

Overall, 75 unique accounts produced 802 pieces of original content, generating 117,255 engagements spanning the full 24 hours. Instagram account @blackstagram__ secured the most engagement (18,250 likes and comments). Of the original Twitter content, TEN_GOP dominated in engagement, with 9296 RTs and 8800 favorites across its 12 tweets. The account tweeted claims that Rand Paul had said Hillary Clinton would go to prison for 5 years, and that “Hillary is the first candidate in American history to be labeled a threat by American troops”.

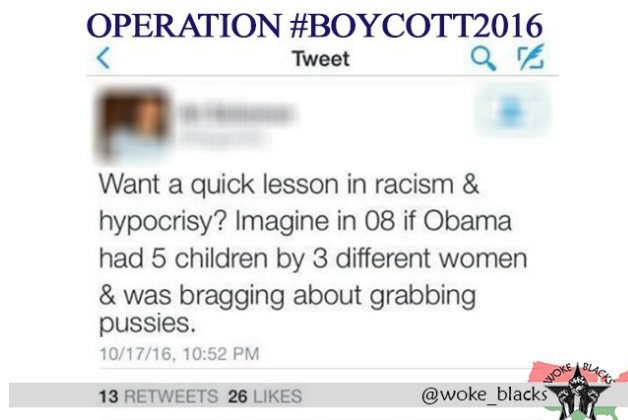
November 6, 2018

Once again, a lot of the Twitter content focused on amplification via retweets. The Right-leaning persona accounts retweeted and amplified Wikileaks, #SpiritCooking, and Jill Stein, as well as Donald Trump and the celebrities and media personalities supporting him (James Woods,

Clint Eastwood). The accounts also repeated a myriad of accusatory theories about the Clinton Foundation funding, who provided it, and what it was used for. The Black community-targeted accounts retweeted commentaries on black female beauty, and a school bus bullying incident. Nonpartisan accounts retweeted radio station-related content.

Original content from TEN_GOP repeatedly attacked James Comey's investigation into Hillary Clinton's emails, earning 38,000 engagements across the collection of tweets. Facebook posts on the Right-targeted Pages focused on allegations that illegal immigrants were committing voter fraud. Once again, the original content on the left focused nearly exclusively on themes of Black culture, police brutality, and Black erasure – the election was barely mentioned. One representative Black-focused Instagram account discussed the election, with @woke_blacks presenting a range of voter suppression/depression narratives:

**F*CK THE ELECTIONS
I WON'T SUPPORT 'CORRUPT'
IF I CAN'T SUPPORT A
'SEXIST' ON THE OTHER SIDE!**



*I say it as it is. When you decide to choose between two evil, you are somehow condoning to whatever comes afterwards. The excuse that a lost Black vote for Hillary is a Trump win is bs. It could be late, but y'all might want to support Jill Stein instead. Trust me, for a presidential candidate to have so much scandals before election and still be the no. 1 candidate should tell you how things will get more f*cked up after the elections. Should you decide to sit-out the election, well done for the boycott. However if you decide you are still going to vote, then don't choose any of the major ones. I remind us all one more time, anyone who wins can literally change less about the state of Black people, we are on our own, esp. after Obama. Wise up my people!*

November 7, 2018

There were 2,457 pieces of content put out on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram on November 7th, not including retweets. The trend from the prior two days continued: the Black and the handful of Left-leaning persona accounts rarely tweeted about political issues. Instead, they continued to focus on supporting Black businesses, praising Black beauty, and talking about the challenges faced by Black boys. @Crystal1Johnson weighed in on twitter 18 times; she contributed to the #ElectionFinalThoughts hashtag with “So we’re screwed either way”. Instagram accounts @woke_blacks and @afrokingdom_ incorporated election-related hashtags as well as “#boycott” into content that was focused on black culture and police-brutality related content.

The apolitical content targeting the Left and Black communities may have been intended as a distraction; there were also more overt suppression narratives. Williams8kalvin, the Williams & Calvin Facebook Page’s Twitter account, tweeted a link to their YouTube video: “The truth about elections,” which explained why Black people should not vote. They also posted to Facebook: “Hillary Clinton is a traitor! Hillary Clinton is a liar! Hillary Clinton is insane! I know that many black people support this old dirty bitch. I don’t know why they do this, still it’s their personal choice and we are a free country yet. But, listen to my word of truth and don’t let them fool you.”



@afrokingdom_ advocated that Black people not vote: “Students from St. Augustine’s University and Shaw University, two historically Black colleges, expressed their frustration with Clinton’s tendency to lie. Almost every student doesn’t believe that Hillary is the best candidate, but said that they have to “settle” for Clinton! But I say that this is the BIG mistake! Black people don’t have to vote for Hillary because she is liar! Black people are smart enough to understand that Hillary doesn’t deserve our votes! DON’T VOTE! #williamsandkalvin#a-wordoftruth #PanAfricanism #BlackNationalism #BlackEmpowerment #AfricanEmpowerment #AfricanAndProud #BlackAndProud #BlackPride #BlackPower #BlackLivesMatter #Amerikkka #UnapologeticallyBlack #UnapologeticallyAfrican #BlackInAmerica #BlackIsBeautiful #JusticeOrElse #ProBlack #dontvote #boycottelection #election2016” The post got 453 engagements.

Meanwhile, the Right-leaning collection of accounts continued to amplify political conspiracy theories (i.e., that Clinton and the Podestas had ties to the Madeline McCann disappearance), and posted inflammatory content about James Comey’s investigation into Hillary Clinton’s emails. @TEN_GOP tweeted 22 times, talking about patriotism and arguing that Hillary Clinton was receiving special treatment on the emails issue, and should not be above the law; the tweets received 12,383 favorites and 16,058 retweets. At one point, Right-targeted persona @TEN_GOP engaged with Black-targeted persona @Crystal1Johnson: “@Crystal1Johnson Wake up! This will happen if Hillary wins. Stop being slave of Democrat plantation!”

The Right-leaning troll account, @Based_Plissken, tweeted 392 times, largely arguing directly with real users. Another troll account – one that had several names across its existence but was reported as @CovfefeNationUS in the data set – tweeted a poll about the election repeatedly at influencers, and pushed a narrative that Barack Obama did not trust Hillary Clinton. (@CovfefeNationUS, which used a Gab presence as its profile URL, would go on to become a prominent voice in the #boycottKeurig campaign and a promoter of QAnon conspiracy theories.)

Both Right- and Left-targeted IRA personas participated in the hashtag conversation #2016electionin3words dozens of times, with contributions ranging from “Clinton Spirit Cooking”, “better stay home”, “Hillary for Prison”, and “Drain the Swamp” to “Fuck Donald Trump”, “Both equally terrible”, and “America is done”.

Right-leaning IRA Facebook and Instagram pages featured dozens of posts about the corruption of Hillary Clinton and allegations that President Barack Obama was complicit in helping her orchestrate voter fraud by illegal voters. Secured Borders was particularly committed to riling up its user base, posting that President Barack Obama himself was illegal, and therefore treasonous. A post to that effect secured 4,891 engagements, including 1,478 shares.



I can't believe this. Our so-called President, Kenyan illegal bastard Barack Hussein Obama encourages illegal aliens to vote – because as you know law breaking comes naturally to both Democrats and Illegal aliens! "This is not a surprise at all to me" - says Obama. What the hell are you talking about Barry?? This is a CRIME, a VOTER FRAUD! And you just saying that you're not surprised?? Are you encouraging this? You're illegal. You cannot vote. And the President of the United States is saying, 'Don't worry, no one will be spying on you, or catching you.' Why President Obama says so? Apparently because he himself is illegal and cares nothing for this country!! When maybe whether you're for the president, against the president, whether you're pro-immigration reform, anti-immigration reform – you are ignoring the fact that you've been questioned about illegal voting, which you can't do. Why? Because you're not a citizen of this country! Isn't that true, Mr. Obama? I cannot stand the level of corruption that surrounds this administration. Obama and Hillary have committed treasonous acts against our country. They both belong behind bars, not in the White House! Do you agree?

November 8, 2018

The amount of original content produced by the IRA operation jumped to approximately 4316 posts on Election Day 2016 (this number varies a bit depending on the time zone chosen).

The Right-wing persona Twitter trolls @Based_Plissken, racist_paul, and @jemalhudso12111 produced the most posts (~100 each), primarily arguing with other users and journalists. @Based_Plissken mocked the idea of Russian hacking, and a myriad of smaller accounts participated in #HillaryForPrison chatter. @CovefefeNation played in the hashtag #ImVotingBecause, offering up anti-Clinton reasons. Once again, the highest engagement account was @TEN_GOP, which also participated in #ImVotingBecause, as well as tweeted inspirational quotes about Donald Trump (and against Hillary Clinton) by other political figures such as Rudy Giuliani, Marine LePen, etc. @Ten_GOP earned 65,751 retweets and 56,906 favorites.

On the Left-leaning and Black-targeted account side, @Crystal1Johnson debated whether Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump was “the lesser evil”, but once again the content targeted at these groups was far less focused on the Election; @Crystal1Johnson wrote content about the Black suffragists that “history forgot”.

Several accounts, such as @MikeMikej344, active on both November 7th and 8th, mentioned pro-Clinton hashtags in their tweets, but primarily tweeted URLs (the Twitter-provided data set did not unroll the URLs; in the slide deck associated with this report we use the Twitter images to gauge the topics in the links) Others, such as @MRNyc2015, a persona that pretended to be a liberal gay man, participated in pro-Clinton hashtags with active voter suppression messages, dropping calls to vote online: “@lauren_koontz @smrtgrls @HillaryClinton SKIP THE LINE #ImWithHer Lets do this! #Gays4Hillary #HillYes #Hillary #StrongerTogether <https://t.co/R3806jcKgH>,” @SOMEXICAN YAAS QUEEN. Everyone needs to vote ONLINE #ImWithHer #HillYes #Hillary #StrongerTogether <https://t.co/YVotzfS1CO>”. He appeared to get little uptake, but tweeted these messages dozens of times. Curiously, the persona account also participated in anti-Clinton conversations.

On Facebook, the Right-leaning pages posted repeatedly about voter fraud, stolen elections, conspiracies about machines provided by Soros, and rigged votes. One made a slight error, alleging that a voting machine in PA was not accepting votes for Clinton; it quickly corrected the post, which went on to receive 983 shares.

A voting machine in Pennsylvania refuses to accept a vote for Clinton. Like & share to spread the information! Trump must win despi	0	0	0	0 2016-11-08 17:29:59+0
A voting machine in Pennsylvania refuses to accept a vote for Trump. Like & share to spread the information! Trump must win despit	983	261	191	133 2016-11-08 17:36:47+0



Left-leaning Facebook Page Muslims United discussed whether Muslims would be boycotting elections. The Black-targeted pages discussed Black beauty, unity, women, and culture. On Instagram, the Black-targeted accounts discussed Eric Garner, pointing out that his daughter was not voting in the election. They lobbied for votes for Jill Stein, and discussed kneeling, the National Anthem, and police brutality. And they repeatedly discussed boycotting...as @blackstagram_ put it, “Think twice before you vote. All I wanna say is that they don’t really care about us. #Blacktivist #hotnews”

November 8-9th

One data set was in GMT+0, so citing U.S. Election Day content involves two dates.

As voter returns began to come in, the IRA joined millions of Americans in tweeting them out. The highest engagements were again by @TEN_GOP and @Pamela_Moore13 (who complained about voter fraud as states reported results). They called out mainstream media as being the real loser of the night. Prolific troll account @CovefefeNationUS gleefully predicted that Hillary Clinton was going to prison, and accused CNN of being biased (demanded a boycott). The troll account @racist_paul, popped up again, with dozens of tweets harassing a variety of Jewish reporters and other (real) Twitter users with content about how Trump was “warming up an oven” for them.

Black Twitter personas @BleepThePolice and @BlackToLive became far more political and wondered how Trump had won. @Crystal1Johnson account immediately called for a #NotMyPresident protest (that the IRA promoted on its Facebook Events). Aside from the incorporation of #NotMyPresident, however, much of the Black-targeted content remained the same: stories of police brutality and a reiteration that the country was not for Black people. Some of the accounts merged the two themes: @BlackToLive's Twitter account posted "I don't wanna hear from anyone that this country is not racist. Don't you even dare. #PresidentElectTrump". (@williams.and.kalvin_, interestingly, reposted a religious meme by IRA Right-targeted Instagram account @army_of_jesus_)

And, of course, the hashtag gamer accounts came out: #CelebrateTrumpWith closed out the evening, with trolls posting pro as well as anti-Trump responses.

Ultimately, the trolls closed out Election Week by extending their election-related political outrage playbook to the Black and Left audiences, as those groups now had a new grievance to be upset about. However, they kept pushing angry narratives to their Right-wing audiences...the narratives just evolved.

Post-Election 2016 Activity: 2017 Instagram Ramp-Up

Following Election Day, the Right-targeting narratives about how voter fraud would deliver the election to Hillary Clinton immediately shifted to narratives claiming that President Trump would have won the popular vote, too, were it not for voter fraud.

This narrative and related memes appeared on four different Instagram accounts and two Facebook Pages on November 10th, generating 7,117 engagements;

on Nov 28th, the narrative was updated to state that President-elect Trump himself had tweeted that he would have won the popular vote were it not for illegal voters (this tweet attracted a substantial amount of controversy in the press at the time because the claim was made absent any supporting evidence).

The Left-targeted narratives, meanwhile, immediately called for protests of the concept of the electoral college. There were extremely immediate posts that attempted to pre-empt calls for impeachment – an interesting choice, given that the President had not yet been inaugurated – by framing Vice President Mike Pence as an even worse option. A post by LGBT United on November 10th read, “In case anyone forgot, Mike Pence in the White House would mean disaster for queer people!! I heavily disagree with his policies regarding church and state and his lgbtq policy. I see alot of leftist calling for impeachment or assassination on trump but truely Trump is worlds better than Pence when talking about equal rights for all...”



I CLINCHED THE POPULAR VOTE



THANK YOU, ILLEGALS, MACHINES AND EVERYONE ELSE

BM shared their event. Sponsored · 43

The choosing of the President must be left to the popular vote. Trump won the Electoral College but is behind by nearly 840,000 votes nationally! This is just wrong!
The Electoral College is an outdated, undemocratic system that does not reflect our modern society, and it needs to be changed immediately. Every American should be guaranteed that their vote counts.
California Sen. Boxer has recently filed a long-shot bill to abolish the Electoral College which undoubtedly does NOT represent the true voice of US.

DEC 3 NY Against KKK
Sat 12 PM - Union Square - 14th & Broadway, N.Y.
1,424 people interested · 295 people going

★ Interested

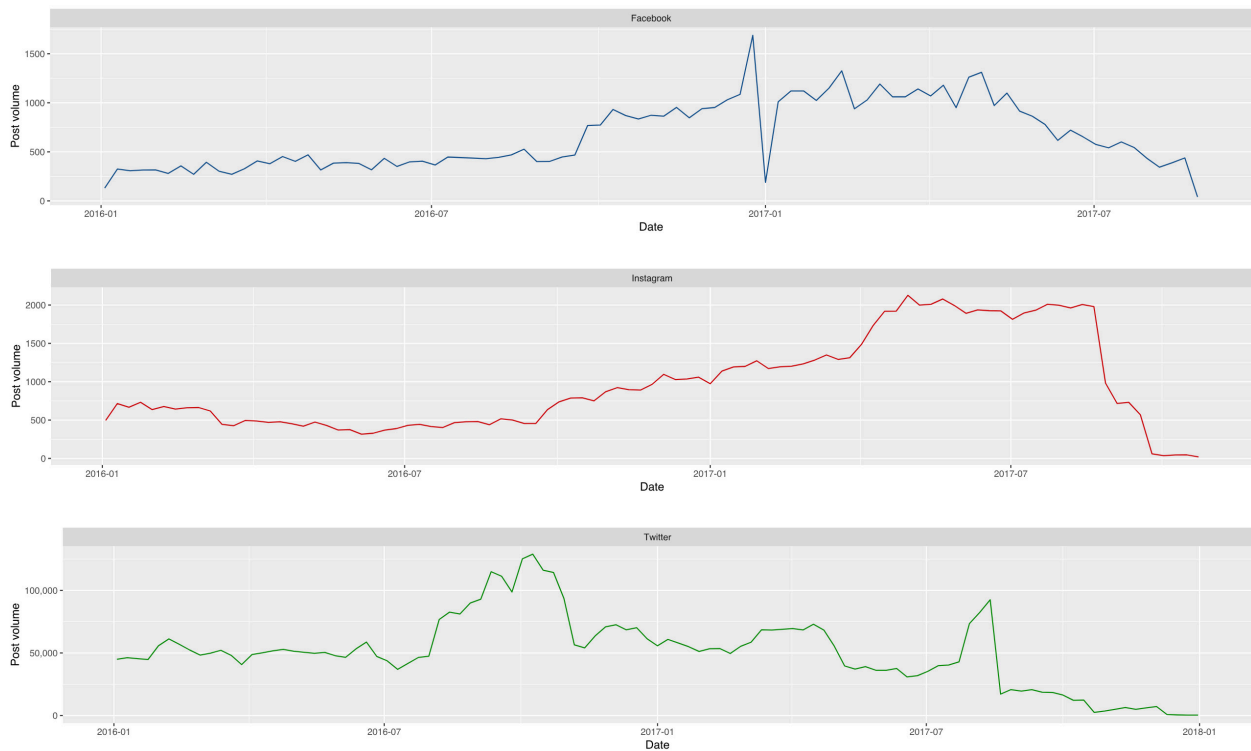
And, as investigative journalists began to uncover their operation, the IRA narratives began to actively mock the idea that Russians had interfered in the U.S. election (as described earlier in this report). Facebook and Instagram accounts targeted James Comey after President Trump fired him, and targeted the Robert Mueller investigation.



While the evidence of Russian interference was beginning to be made public, Facebook appears to have begun to moderate at least one of the pages, although it is unclear exactly why. At least one moderation-related post alludes to a page being accused of a Community Standards violation. Dissatisfaction about being moderated appears to have led the IRA to spread the narrative that Facebook was censoring conservative voices as early as March 2017.



Despite the moderation challenges on Facebook, the IRA ramped up activity on Instagram in 2017.



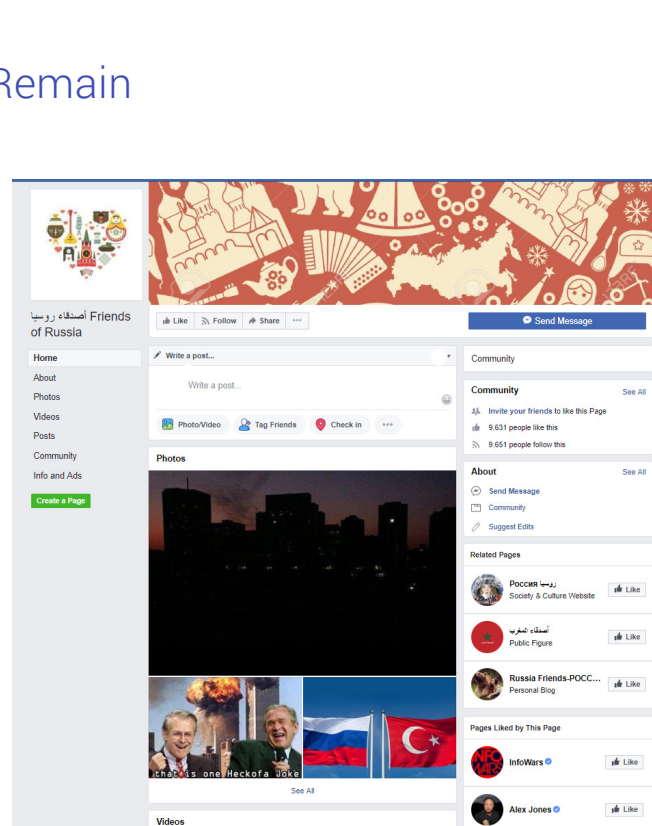
Posts per week on social platforms, 2016-2018. Facebook is in blue, Instagram in red, Twitter in green.

Ongoing Effort: Live Accounts Remain

Although the platforms have been making a stronger effort toward uncovering influence operations, the data sets provided by Facebook and Twitter led to the discovery of additional IRA pages.

For example, an Arabic-English bilingual Facebook Page called “Friends of Russia” was discovered through the tweets of IRA-attributed Twitter account @AsdiqaRussiya (roughly translated as “Friends of Russia”). AsdiqaRussiya’s tweets had been embedded in Russian-language propaganda articles – an example of IRA’s ongoing history of inwardly-focused propagandizing to the Russian people. One of these articles linked to a video on the Friends of Russia Facebook page. The page last updated on May 12, 2018 and had approximately 9,600 Likes.

Similarly, an analysis of the profile URLs in the Twitter data set revealed active profiles on Gab, ai, VKontakte, and LiveJournal. In addition, some of the IRA accounts appear to have been bots that were purchased or repurposed from several different existing botnets. As we looked back



at the account behavior over time, we found tweet histories in 2013 that revealed commercial spam content. Bots from the same botnets appear to still be active and are relatively easy to find with the Twitter public API. These accounts, for example, have similar patterns to bots that are in the provided data:

- https://twitter.com/Elsa_Aben - dormant
- https://twitter.com/Florrie_Schamel - dormant
- https://twitter.com/fitness_craving - active
- <https://twitter.com/besttattooing> - active
- <https://twitter.com/becca51178> - active

Although these bots are not doing anything malicious now, they are available to be repurposed for future malicious use.

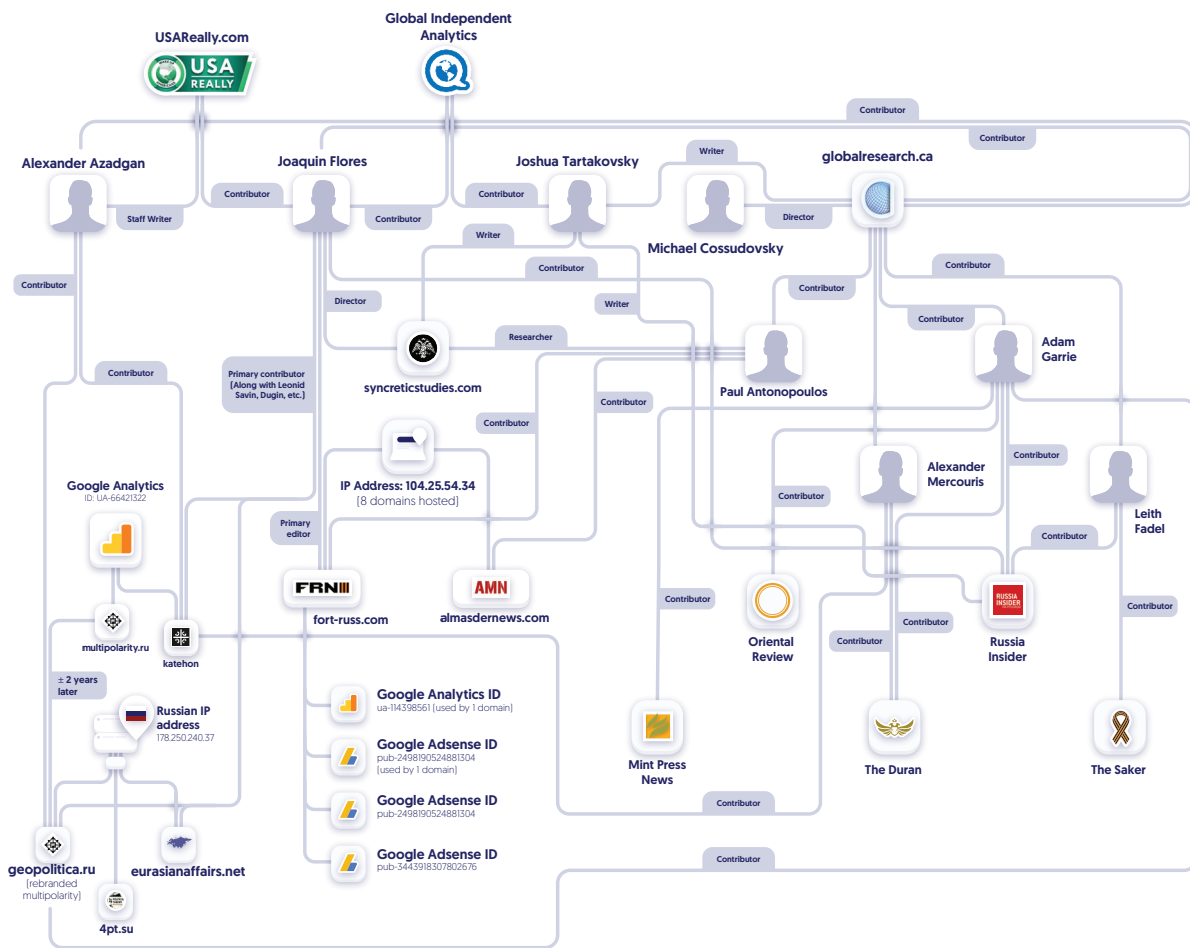
Ongoing Effort: The Broader Propaganda Ecosystem

If the Alphabet data set was correctly attributed, there are dozens of Russian-linked propaganda pages promoted by IRA-linked ad accounts; at a minimum, they are promoted by FAN. As noted above in the Ad Targeting section of this report, one of the largest of these was GI Analytics. Purportedly a global analysis property with an international masthead, GI Analytics was active from 2015 until Aug 31, 2016, when editor Joshua Tartakovsky announced it was “on hold”. The site’s [About page](#) positions it as a voice of integrity in opposition to mainstream media: “We are in a desperate need of truth and of hard-cutting analysis, especially now, when we are being betrayed by our elected representatives and the corporate media.”

The site’s content is repurposed on other properties around the web, including Russia News Now, Russia Insider, The Russophile, and NovoRussia Today. It has links to other known Russian propaganda sites by way of authors, AdWords accounts, and repurposed content. The masthead of authors shows several Americans. Several of these USA-affiliated authors, such as Joaquin Flores, have personal blogs or appointments at other Russia-linked think tanks. Others, such as Stefan Paraber, have almost no social presence aside from their writing on the site. It is unclear whether they knew they were writing for an IRA entity. The [Twitter account](#) still exists, dormant but visible. GI Analytics also appears in the YouTube data set provided to SSCI, with a channel that promoted the account ‘SyrianGirlPartisan’.

Propaganda and content from IRA-linked think tank GI Analytics remains prevalent on Facebook’s platform, although the GI Analytics Facebook page itself was taken down while our investigation was underway; it had approximately 7000 likes and was taken down sometime after May 30, 2018.

It is unclear whether still-active Facebook pages (for example, “Russia Truth”) and Groups that regularly shared GI Analytics content did so knowingly, or whether those pages have been investigated for possible IRA links. Since GI Analytics contributors include Americans, it is unclear whether they knew who they were writing for. Several individuals on the masthead were recently identified as authors for newly-launched IRA propaganda property USAReally; a few contribute to known Russian propaganda outlets and think tanks such as Katehon.



In Conclusion

This investigation of the Internet Research Agency's activities and tactics highlights complex technological, social, and cognitive vulnerabilities.

Throughout its multi-year effort, the Internet Research Agency exploited divisions in our society by leveraging vulnerabilities in our information ecosystem. They exploited social unrest and human cognitive biases. The divisive propaganda Russia used to influence American thought and steer conversations for over three years wasn't always objectively false. The content designed to reinforce in-group dynamics would likely have offended outsiders who saw it, but the vast majority wasn't hate speech. Much of it wasn't even particularly objectionable. But it was absolutely intended to reinforce tribalism, to polarize and divide, and to normalize points of view strategically advantageous to the Russian government on everything from social issues to political candidates. It was designed to exploit societal fractures, blur the lines between reality and fiction, erode our trust in media entities and the information environment, in government, in each other, and in democracy itself. This campaign pursued all of those objectives with innovative skill, scope, and precision.

With at least some of the Russian government's goals achieved in the face of little diplomatic or other pushback, it appears likely that the United States will continue to face Russian interference for the foreseeable future; as the September 2018 Department of Justice indictment makes clear, they continued to budget for ongoing operations. The September 2018 DoJ indictment also illustrates that Americans were systematically developed as assets by the IRA. Most, it appears, were recruited via Facebook Messenger, tapped to perform on behalf of an entity that misrepresented itself as someone just like them. Now that automation

techniques (e.g. bots) are better policed, the near future will be a return to the past: we'll see increased human-exploitation tradecraft and narrative laundering. We should certainly expect to see recruitment, manipulation, and influence attempts targeting the 2020 election, including the inauthentic amplification of otherwise legitimate American narratives, as well as a focus on smaller/secondary platforms and peer-to-peer messaging services.

Over the past five years, disinformation has evolved from a nuisance into high-stakes information war. Our frameworks for dealing with it, however, remain the same -- we discuss counter-messaging and counter-narratives, falling into the trap of treating this as a problem of false stories. Our deeply-felt national scruples about misidentifying a fake account or inadvertently silencing someone, however briefly, create a welcoming environment for malign groups who masquerade as Americans or who game algorithms. Ironically even Internet Research Agency trolls laid claim to these principles, complaining publicly about being censored when Facebook moderated or banned them. When tech platforms or regulators strive to take meaningful action to suppress abuse of their platforms and our American polity, there are waves of outrage over censorship. We have conversations about whether or not bots have the right to free speech, we respect the privacy of fake people, and we hold Congressional hearings to debate whether YouTube personalities have been unfairly downranked. More authoritarian regimes, by contrast, would simply selectively firewall the internet. It is precisely our commitment to democratic principles that puts us at an asymmetric disadvantage against an adversary who enthusiastically engages in censorship, manipulation, and suppression internally.

Looking Forward

There remains much to be done. With regard to the Internet Research Agency specifically, further investigation of subscription and engagement pathways is needed; and only the platforms currently have that data. Understanding the reactions of targeted Americans, and attempting to gauge the impact that the repeated exposure to this propaganda had, is also a key area for ongoing investigation; only the platforms have the comment data. We hope that platforms will provide more data that can speak to the impact and uptake among targeted communities.

More broadly, we must promote a multi-stakeholder model in which researchers, tech platforms, and government work together to detect foreign influence operations that attempt

to undercut public discourse and democracy. The United States government has departments with decades of experience managing foreign propaganda and espionage. But because these influence operations are happening on private social platforms, there has been minimal information sharing. Robust collaboration between government agencies, platforms, and private companies is key to combatting this threat.

Finally, we hope that additional sections of this data set will be released to the public for further research. There are millions of posts, hours of video, and hundreds of thousands of memes, and additional eyes will undoubtedly continue to provide valuable insights into this operation.

We hope that our work has resulted in a clearer picture for policymakers, platforms, and the public alike and thank the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence for the opportunity to serve.

SSCI Research Summary

December 1, 2018

**An assessment of the Internet Research Agency's U.S.-directed activities in 2015-2017
based on platform-provided data**



Internet Research Agency Content Analysis

For years, Russia has leveraged social media to wage a propaganda war. Their information operations initially targeted their own citizens and immediate geographical sphere of influence. In 2014, they increased the breadth of those operations to include sowing societal and political divisions in the United States. The scale of their operation was massive—they reached 126 million people on Facebook, posted 10.4 million tweets on Twitter, uploaded 1,000+ videos to YouTube, and reached over 20 million users on Instagram. This manipulation of U.S. political discourse continues in 2018.

The Internet Research Agency disinformation campaign touched all major players in the social network ecosystem: the presence of manipulated content on Facebook, Twitter, and Google is now well-documented. In the case of Google, YouTube, G+, Gmail, and Google Voice were all leveraged to either host content or to support personas. Reddit, Tumblr, and Medium have publicly confirmed that their platforms were misused as well. Evidence in this data set confirms activity on Vine and Meetup. Games and music apps were created and pushed to teenagers to download. Even popular game Pokemon Go was incorporated into the operation. Outside of social platforms, a number of sites were created to host original written content and articles. Social network manipulation for the purposes of disseminating propaganda and conducting influence operations is a systemic problem.

In late 2017, ahead of a series of hearings, Facebook, Twitter, and Google (YouTube) gave Congress data sets of tweets, images, and other content determined to be linked to the Internet Research Agency. This analysis is an investigation of what was provided in the data set to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

Themes

The IRA had a roster of social issues that they emphasized and reinforced across their Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube content. On Twitter they discussed these topics but included many others – they participated in real-time conversations and hashtag games focused on unfolding events. There was also longform blog content with a geopolitical focus, such as the GI Analytics page promoted via Google AdWords, that laid out nuanced positions on a variety of topics:

"Our purpose and mission are to provide high-quality analysis at a time when we are faced with a multitude of crises, a collapsing global economy, imperialist wars, environmental disasters, corporate greed, terrorism, deceit, GMO food, a migration crisis and a crackdown on small farmers and ranchers. We are in a desperate need of truth and of hard-cutting analysis, especially now, when we are being betrayed by our elected representatives and the corporate media." – GI Analytics

- Black culture/community issues
- Police brutality/Black Lives Matter
- Pro-police/Blue Lives Matter
- Anti-refugee/immigration & border issues
- Texas culture
- Southern culture (Confederate history)
- Separatist movements
- Muslim issues
- LGBT issues
- Meme culture/Red Pill
- Gun rights/2nd Amendment
- Pro-Trump/Anti-Clinton
- Pro-Bernie or Stein/Anti-Clinton
- Patriotism/Tea Party
- Religious rights
- Native American issues
- Veterans Issues
- Local News/Journalism/Media

Key Takeaways

- The comprehensive dataset included 10.4 million tweets, 1107 YouTube videos, 116,205 Instagram posts, and 61,483 unique Facebook posts.*
- There is still what appears to be active content and ongoing efforts on several platforms.
- The majority of the content focused on societally divisive issues, most notably race.
- The greatest effort on Facebook and Instagram appears to have been focused on developing Black audiences. There was significant and extensive integration into the Black community, particularly on Facebook, via the creation of a dedicated media ecosystem, the sharing and cross-promotion of legitimate media content, and ongoing attempted development of human assets. The degree of integration was not replicated in the Right-leaning content.
- Substantial portions of the political content was anti-Hillary Clinton on both the right and left-leaning pages. There was no pro-Clinton content aside from a public rally in which Muslims were asked to support her. The bulk of the Muslim page content was still anti-Clinton.
- There appeared to be a strong and consistent preference for then-candidate Donald Trump, beginning in the early primaries. There was unfavorable content about a wide range of Republican candidates and leaders, including Sens. Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, Lindsay Graham, John McCain, and then-candidate Dr. Ben Carson.

**there was a substantial amount of cleaning and de-duping required to prepare the data sets*

Key Takeaways II

- Messaging tactics and topics varied by platform: Facebook and Instagram focused on creating persistent messaging and reinforcing themes. They created strong ties by posting a majority of content designed to generate in-group approval and camaraderie, then posted occasional content that was either designed to sow division from out-groups, explicitly partisan and election-related, or focused on a theme that Russia cared about (Syria). Twitter content, meanwhile, was much more reactive to current events and topics, and less focused on group dynamics.
- Gun rights (including a dedicated page for Black audiences) and immigration received extensive attention.
- There were instances in which the same article was shared to two different Pages simultaneously, with each taking the opposite point of view.
- There were several variants of **suppression narratives**, spread both on Twitter and on Facebook. These included malicious misdirection (text-to-vote scams deployed on Twitter), support redirection ('vote for a 3rd party!'), and turnout suppression ('stay home on Election Day!').
- The IRA shifted a majority of its activity to Instagram in 2017; this was perhaps in response to increased scrutiny on other platforms, including media coverage of its Twitter operation.
- Instagram engagement outperformed Facebook; this may be an indicator of the platform being more ideal for memetic warfare (it offers features and a culture that are a hybrid of Facebook and Twitter). It may also indicate the IRA used click farms to boost their numbers.

IRA: run like a digital marketing shop

The Internet Research Agency created media mirages – interlinked ecosystems that surrounded targeted audiences. They built their content using digital marketing best practices, even evolving Page logos and typography over time. Here's an example of the social-ecosystem-wide effort for one of their midsize media “brands”, Black Matters.

Website: Blackmattersus.com

Tumblr: SKWAD55

Google+: Blackmatters

Google Ads: 31 ads

YouTube: 95 videos

Facebook: 2 pages, fb.com/blackmatters, fb.com/blackmatters.mvmt

Facebook Ads: Yes.

Facebook Stickers: Yes, of little panthers.

Instagram: Yes. 28,466 followers.

Twitter: Yes. 5841 followers. Promoted by many accounts.

Soundcloud: Yes, “SKWAD 55”

Meetup: Yes

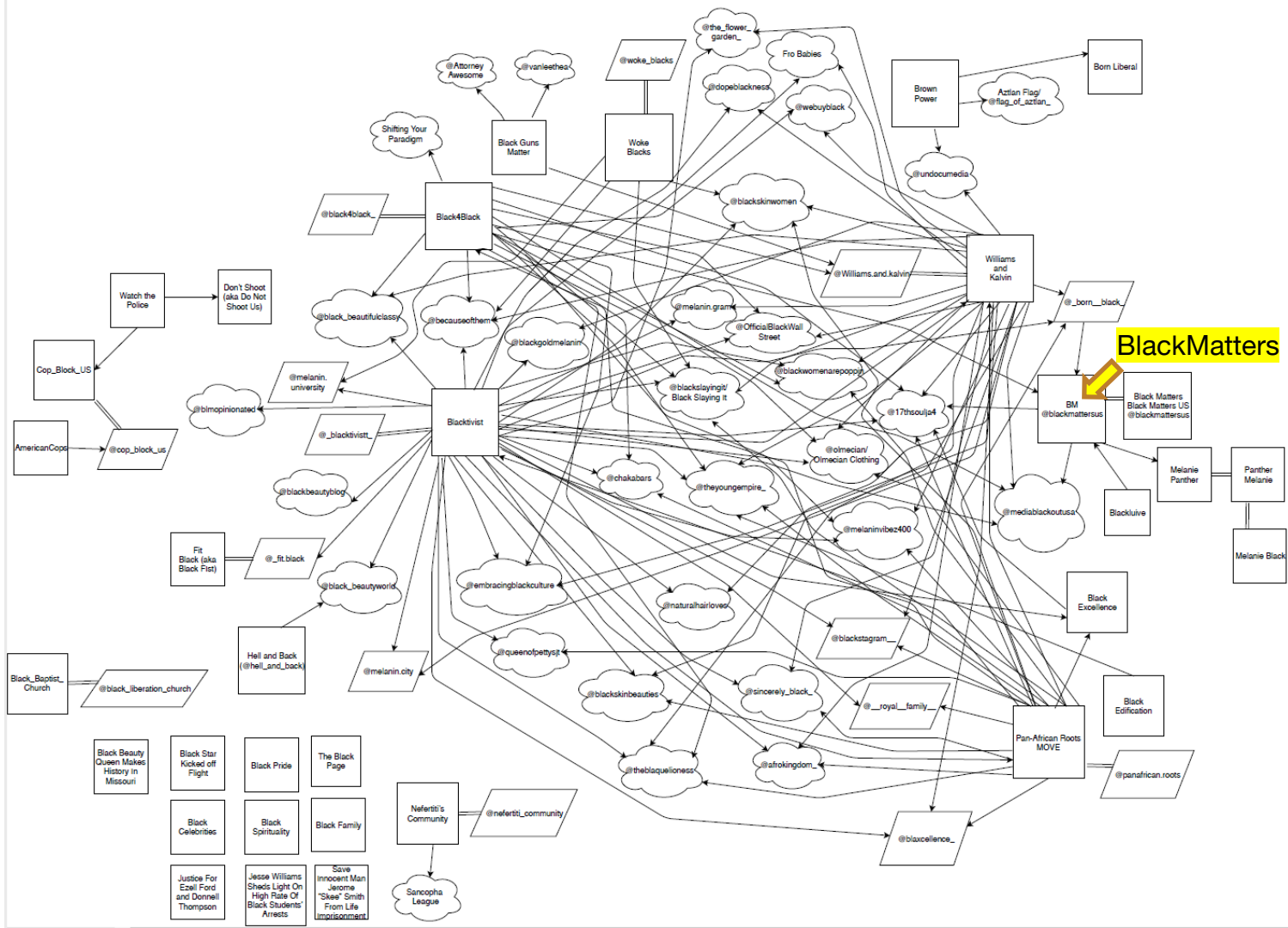
Content was posted to Reddit and Pinterest by other IRA accounts for SEO, discovery, and audience growth purposes.



The Media Mirage

Contextualizing the prior slide: Black Matters was a multi-platform effort and yet still a very small part of the black-targeted IRA operation. This is a connections diagram of the media ecosystem created by links and shares that appeared on the black-targeted Facebook pages (squares). This shows the extent to which the Black community IRA accounts were interlinked with each other, and with authentic Black media. This degree of interconnection is not reflected in the left or right-targeted Facebook content.

The parallelograms are IRA Instagram accounts. The clouds are unattributed, though mostly legitimate, Black media accounts that had >10 shares. Several were suspended but not acknowledged by Facebook.



The Media Mirage

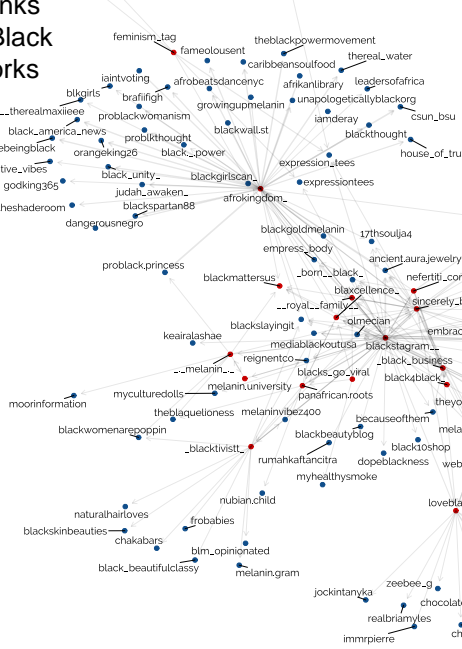
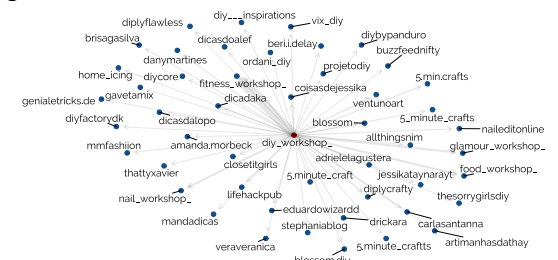
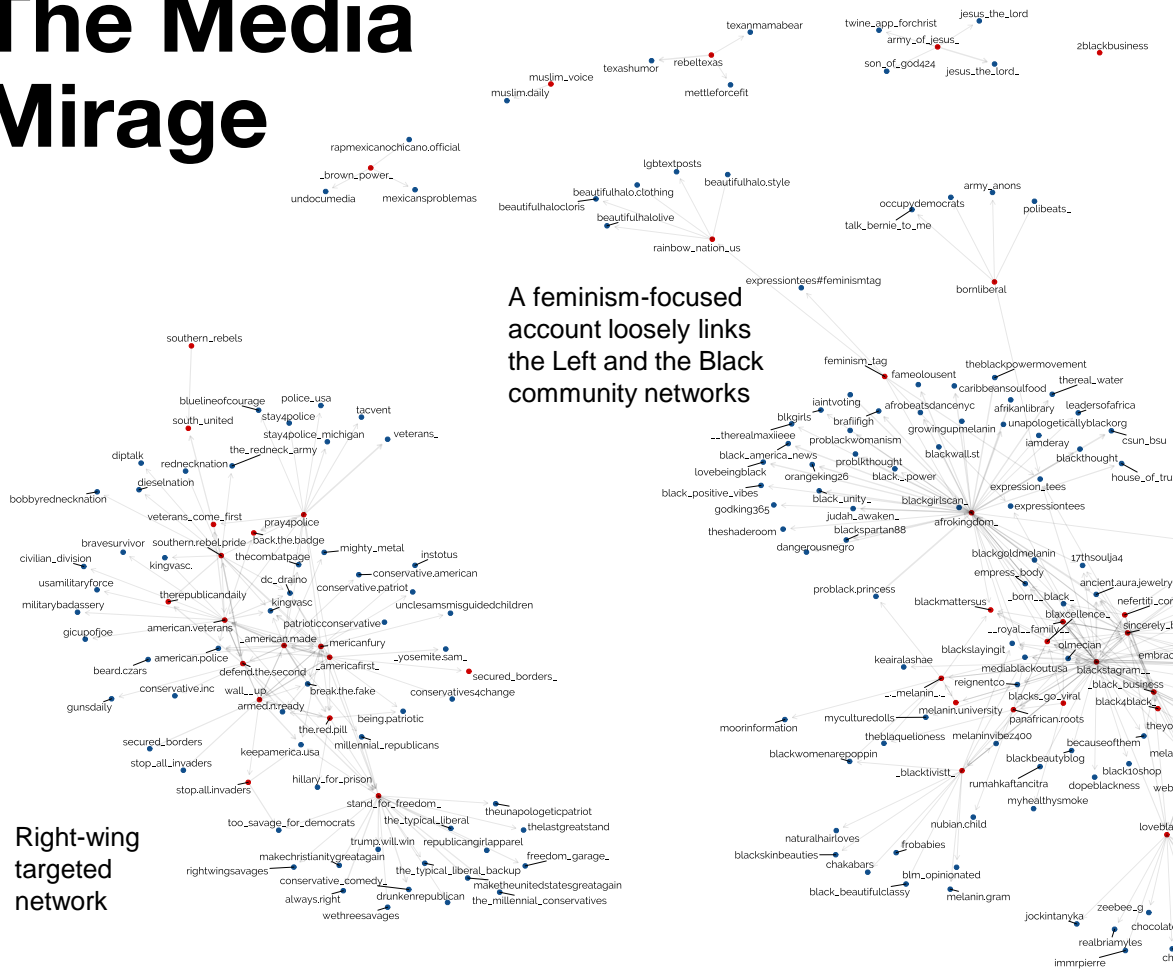
This analysis is a network of Instagram account mentions or regrams (>10), and reveals the distinct communities. There was more interlinking of right-wing content on Instagram than Facebook.

A feminism-focused account loosely links the Left and the Black community networks

Black community network

This was a Russian-English bilingual cluster of DIY craft content. It may have been a troll's personal interest, caught up in the data collection.

Right-wing targeted network



- IRA account name
- Non-IRA account mentioned

Currently Visible or Active Content



Recently-Active Content: Facebook

Friends of Russia is [a FB page that is still active](#). The page was found when we observed that an IRA-linked Twitter handle, AsdiqaRussiya, had been cited numerous times in Russian language articles [such as this one](#).

The article not only links to tweets (since deleted) but to a video posted to a FB page with the same name (AsdiqaRussiya roughly translates into "Friends of Russia", the same title as the page).

The Facebook Page last posted on May 12 and has 9,000 Likes.

Update 9/24/18: the page was suspended in August.

Friends of Russia أصدقاء روسيا

Like Follow Share ...

Send Message

Write a post...

Write a post...

Photo/Video Tag Friends Check in ...

Photos

that is one Heckofa Joke

See All

Videos

global economic inequality

Community

Community See All

9,631 people like this

9,651 people follow this

About See All

Send Message

Community

Suggest Edits

Related Pages

Россия روسيا Society & Culture Website Like

أصدقاء المغرب Public Figure Like

Russia Friends-POCC... Personal Blog Like

Pages Liked by This Page

Die Verschwörungsth... Like

Alex Jones Like

InfoWars Like

Still-Active Content: Twitter

Some of the IRA accounts provided appear to have been bots purchased/repurposed from several different existing commercial botnets, suggesting that the IRA procures or rents accounts at times rather than creating their own from scratch. Some had 2013 tweet histories full of spam content. Many bots from the same botnets appear to still be active, and are relatively easy to find w/ the Twitter public API. These accounts, for example, have similar patterns to bots that are in the provided data:

- https://twitter.com/Elsa_Aben - dormant
- https://twitter.com/Florrie_Schamel - dormant
- https://twitter.com/fitness_craving - active
- <https://twitter.com/besttattooing> - active
- <https://twitter.com/becca51178> - active

Though these bots are not doing anything malicious now, they are available to be repurposed for future malicious use.

Still-Visible Content: Facebook & Twitter

Shares of content from IRA-linked domains remain on Facebook and Twitter. The Facebook Page for GI Analytics (7,000 Likes) itself came down recently, sometime after May 30th. The Twitter handle for the account remains active at <https://twitter.com/gianalytics>.

It is unclear whether still-active Facebook pages (for example, “Russia Truth”) and Groups that regularly shared GIAnalytics content did so knowingly, or whether those pages have been investigated for possible IRA links.

GI Analytics contributors include Americans; it is unclear whether they knew who they were writing for. Several individuals on the masthead were recently identified as authors for newly-launched IRA propaganda property USAreally. A few contribute to known Russian propaganda outlets and think tanks such as Katehon.

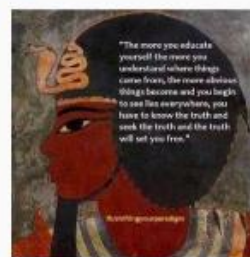
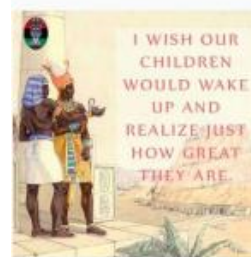
The screenshot displays three Facebook posts. The top post is from 'The Liberty Pledge 2.0', dated December 16, 2017, at 4:49 PM. It features a link to a GI Analytics article titled 'http://gianalytics.org/en/1037-what-will-happen-when-brainwashed-middle-class-americans-lose-it-all' and a sub-headline 'What will happen when brainwashed middle class Americans lose it all?'. It has 3 likes and 1 comment. The middle post is from 'SyrianGirl', dated June 6, 2016. It contains a video link 'https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKZqu61lBFI' and a sub-headline 'The Race to Raqqa - Why Syria Must crush I-S-I-S before Kurdish & US Forces do'. It includes a video player thumbnail and a description: 'Most of what i say in this video is referenced in this article https://gianalytics.org/690-why-a-kurdish-enclave-in-syria... have a read if you want more details.' Below the video is a text box with the title 'The Race to #Raqqa - Why Syria Must crush ISIS before Kurd & US Forces do' and the text 'The Syrian army must defeat ISIS and hold Raqqa before the...'. It has 230 likes and 38 comments. The bottom post is from 'Vladimir Golstein', dated April 8, 2016, at 3:55 AM. It contains a link to a GI Analytics article 'Dostoevsky on how the myopic sympathy for the underprivileged and slavish following of the shallow slogans of multiculturalism prevents us from...' and a sub-headline 'Angela Merkel – the Angel of Political Correctness: Part Two'. It has 78 likes and 43 comments.

Sharing of IRA-attributable memes in targeted communities is ongoing

When we talk about “impact”, most conversations focus on whether the IRA operation swayed voters and impacted Election 2016.

That is a somewhat narrow definition, since the operation started prior to 2015 and since the explicitly political content was a small percentage.

These memes continue to be spread within the communities they were targeting, particularly the content by the lesser-known or quietly-removed pages. A type of impact that merits further research is the extent to which the memes continue to shape culture and conversation.



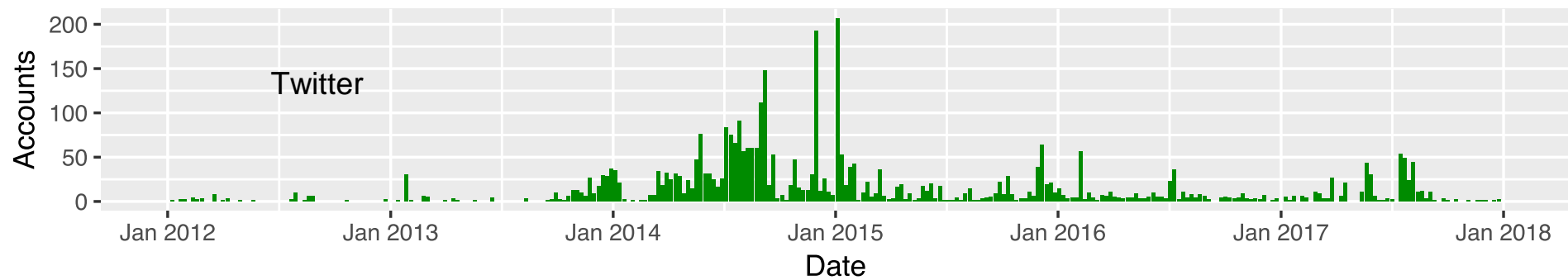
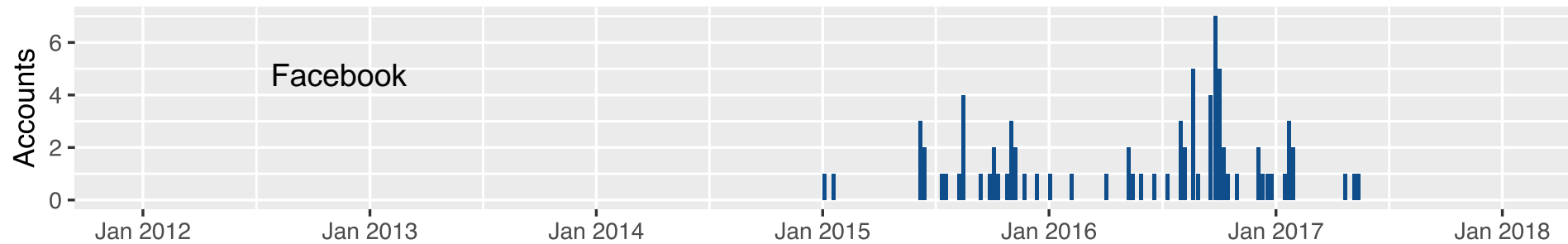
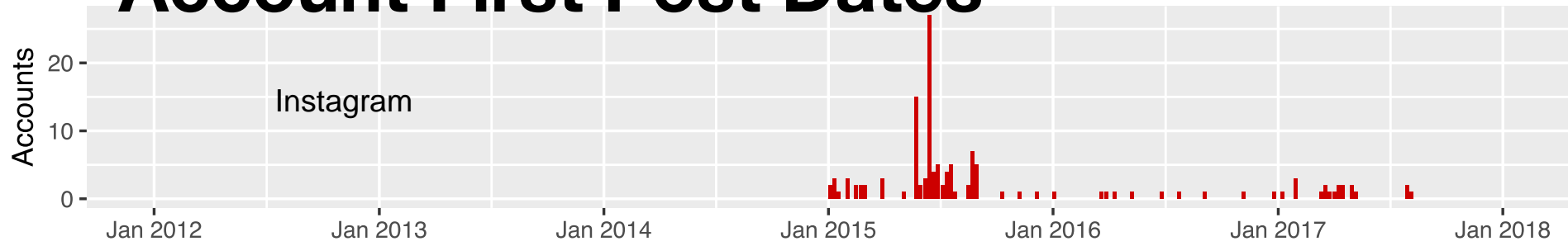
Summary Statistics



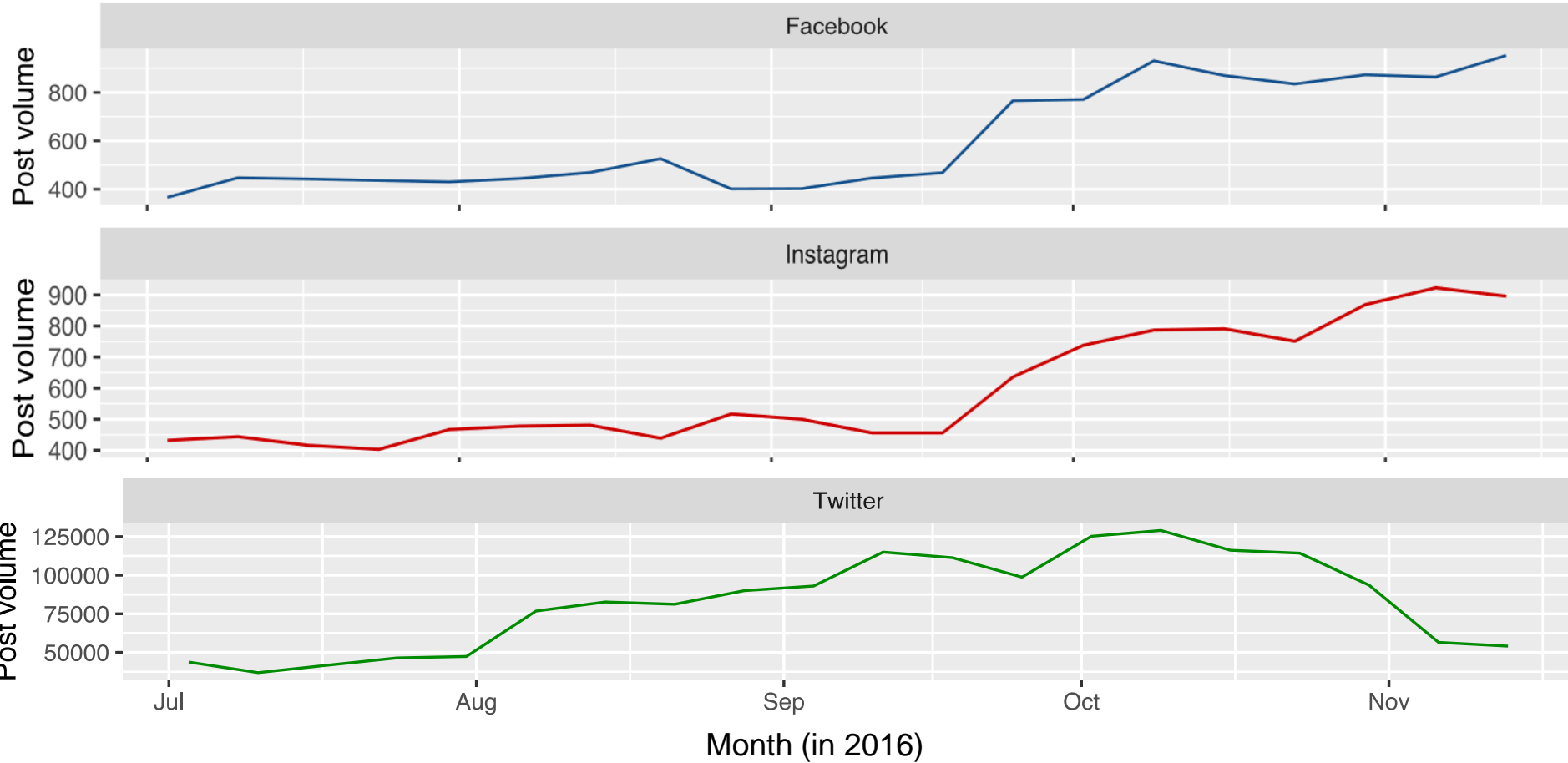
Attributed Domains

- blackvswhite.info
- dntshoot.com
- donotshoot.us
- blackmattersusa.com
- blackmattersus.com
- blacktivist.info
- blacktolive.org
- blacksoul.us
- proudtobeblack.org
- black4black.info
- patriotsus.com
- butthis.com
- dudeers.com
- imsanbernardino.info
- blackfist.pro
- reportsecret.com

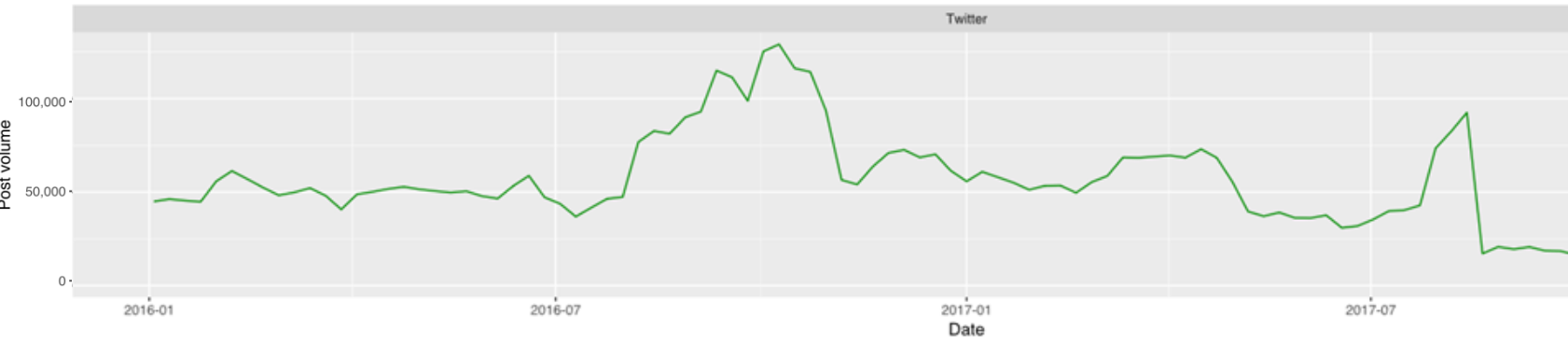
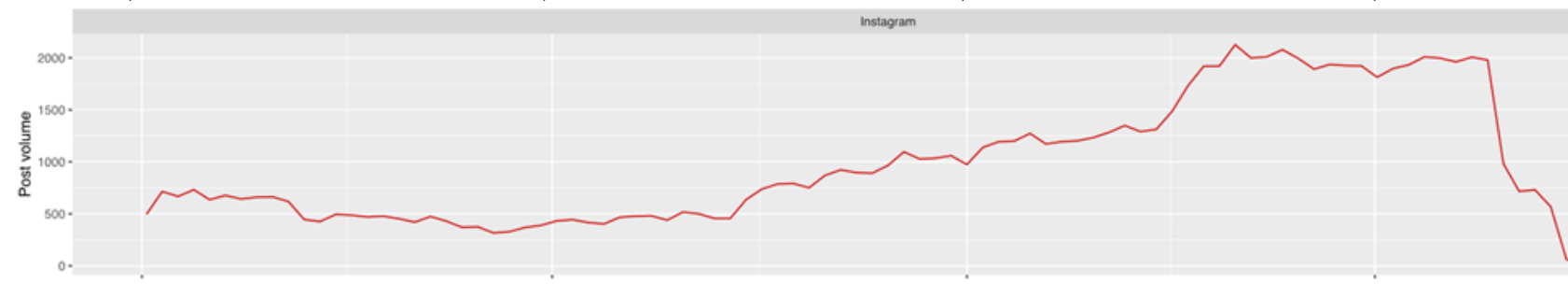
Account First Post Dates



Weekly Post Volume, Through Election 2016



Post Volume, 2016-2017 (2017 Instagram increase)



Summary statistics: Clinton & Trump mentions

- Roughly 6% of tweets, 18% of Instagram posts, and 7% of Facebook posts mentioned Trump or Clinton by name (including nicknames like “Shillary”, which the IRA often used to reference Clinton).
- Trump was mentioned roughly twice as often as Clinton on most platforms.
- Instagram contained a much higher proportion of insult names like “Shillary” or “Hitlery”.

	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter
Total posts	61,483	116,205	10,401,029
Clinton posts	1,777	7,915	198,123
Clinton share	2.9%	6.8%	1.9%
Trump posts	2,563	13,106	430,185
Trump share	4.2%	11.3%	4.1%

Summary statistics: external sites and engagement

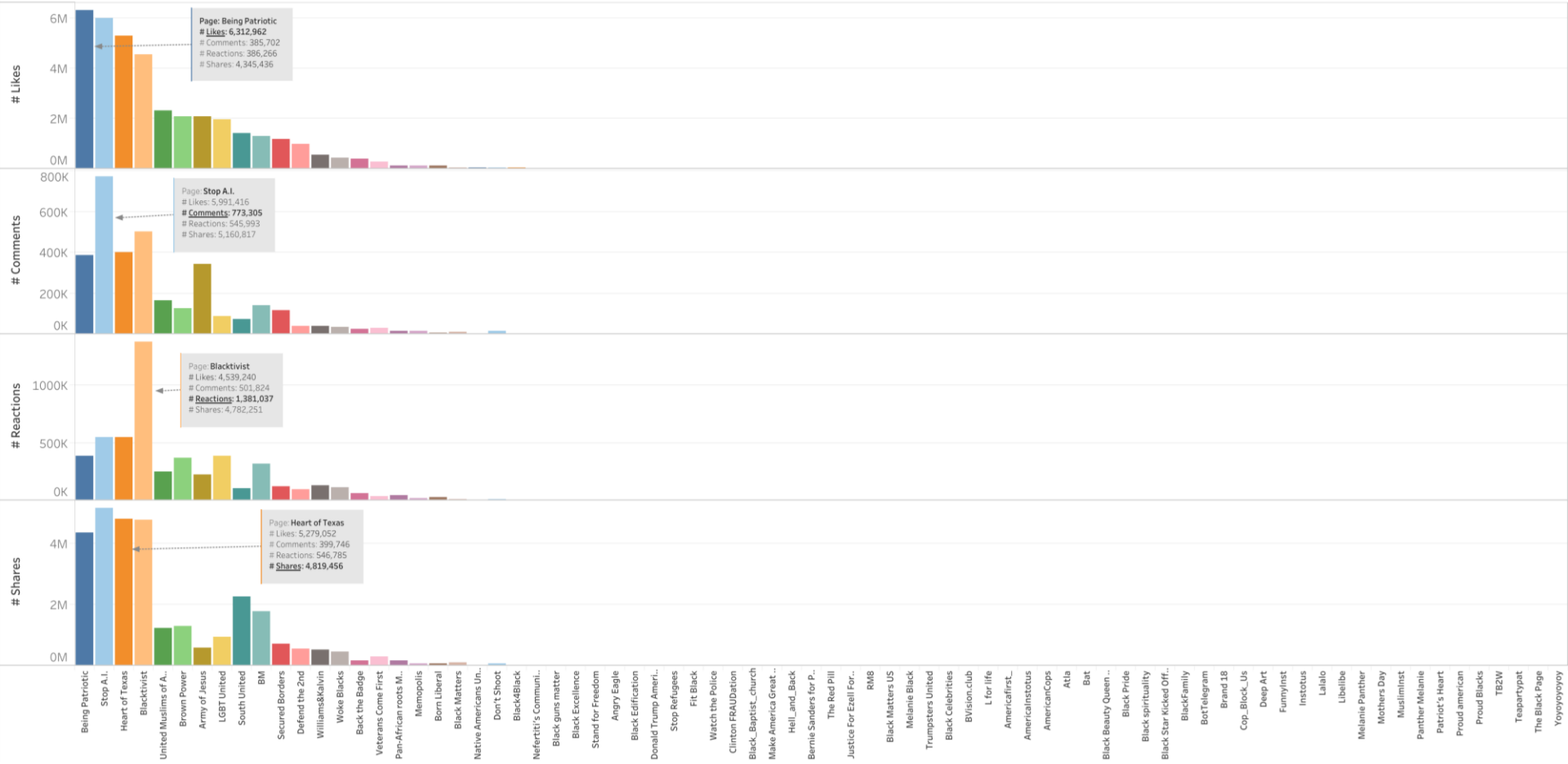
- The most-posted domains in the IRA content on [Facebook](#) were their own sites; these also generated the most engagement.
- The highest share count was blackmattersus.com, which targeted African-Americans.
- A second popular cluster of shares featured both real right-wing partisan news sites and an IRA creation, patriotsus.com. There were more engagements per share on the right-wing content.
- The IRA shared Whitehouse.gov petitions on topics including gun rights and whether Hillary Clinton should be allowed to run for President.

Domain	Posts	Engagements
blackmattersus.com	1219	301484
patriotsus.com	92	48300
breitbart.com	64	17317
dailymail.co.uk	13	16176
petitions.whitehouse.gov	8	5268
dailycaller.com	16	3299
ny1.com	1	2734
usherald.com	2	2616
youtube.com	100	2513
salamerica.com	3	2510
angrypatriotmovement.com	2	2398
represent.com	13	2215
ihavethetruth.com	1	2166
pinknews.co.uk	11	2097
yesimright.com	1	1983
bluelivesmatter.blue	3	1800
washingtonexaminer.com	10	1780
americanmilitarynews.com	6	1596
conservativedailypost.com	3	1595
ktxs.com	1	1583

Top 20 Domains Shared, by Engagement (Facebook)

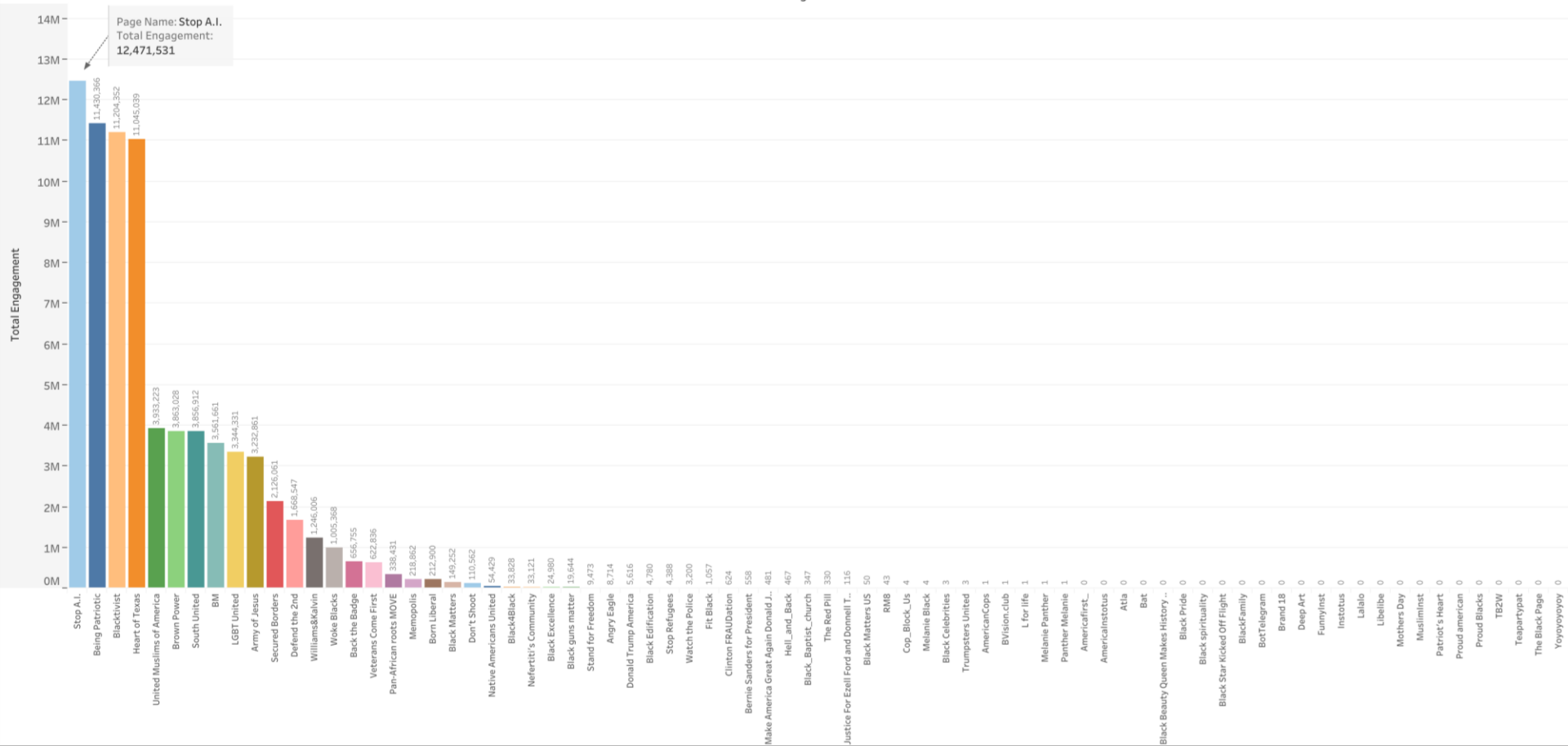
Domain	Shares	Likes	Reactions	Total Engagements
blackmattersus.com	100092	142923	58469	301484
patriotsus.com	6577	33296	8427	48300
breitbart.com	3554	9790	3973	17317
dailymail.co.uk	4694	10054	1428	16176
petitions.whitehouse.gov	532	4395	341	5268
dailycaller.com	742	1898	659	3299
ny1.com	638	1918	178	2734
usherald.com	617	1663	336	2616
youtube.com	629	1352	532	2513
salamerica.com	0	2286	224	2510
angrypatriotmovement.com	503	1670	225	2398
represent.com	265	1775	175	2215
ihavethetruth.com	622	1456	88	2166
pinknews.co.uk	204	1046	847	2097
yesimright.com	431	1385	167	1983
bluelivesmatter.blue	134	1154	512	1800
washingtonexaminer.com	354	1009	417	1780
americanmilitarynews.com	269	1186	141	1596
conservativedailypost.com	296	1015	284	1595
ktxs.com	0	1406	177	1583

Comparative Engagement: Facebook Accounts by Engagement Type

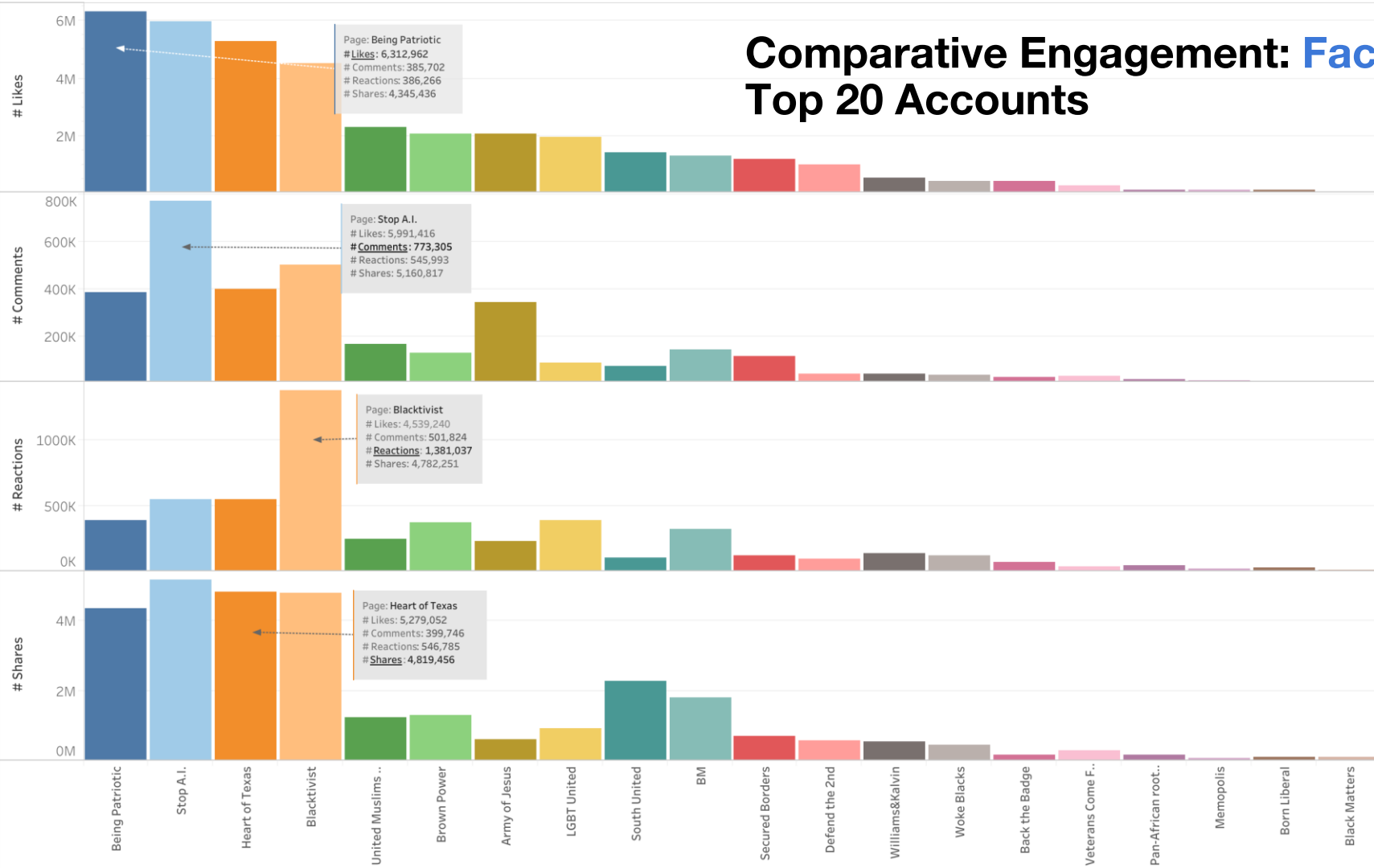


Comparative Engagement: Facebook Total Engagement, All Accounts

Page Name

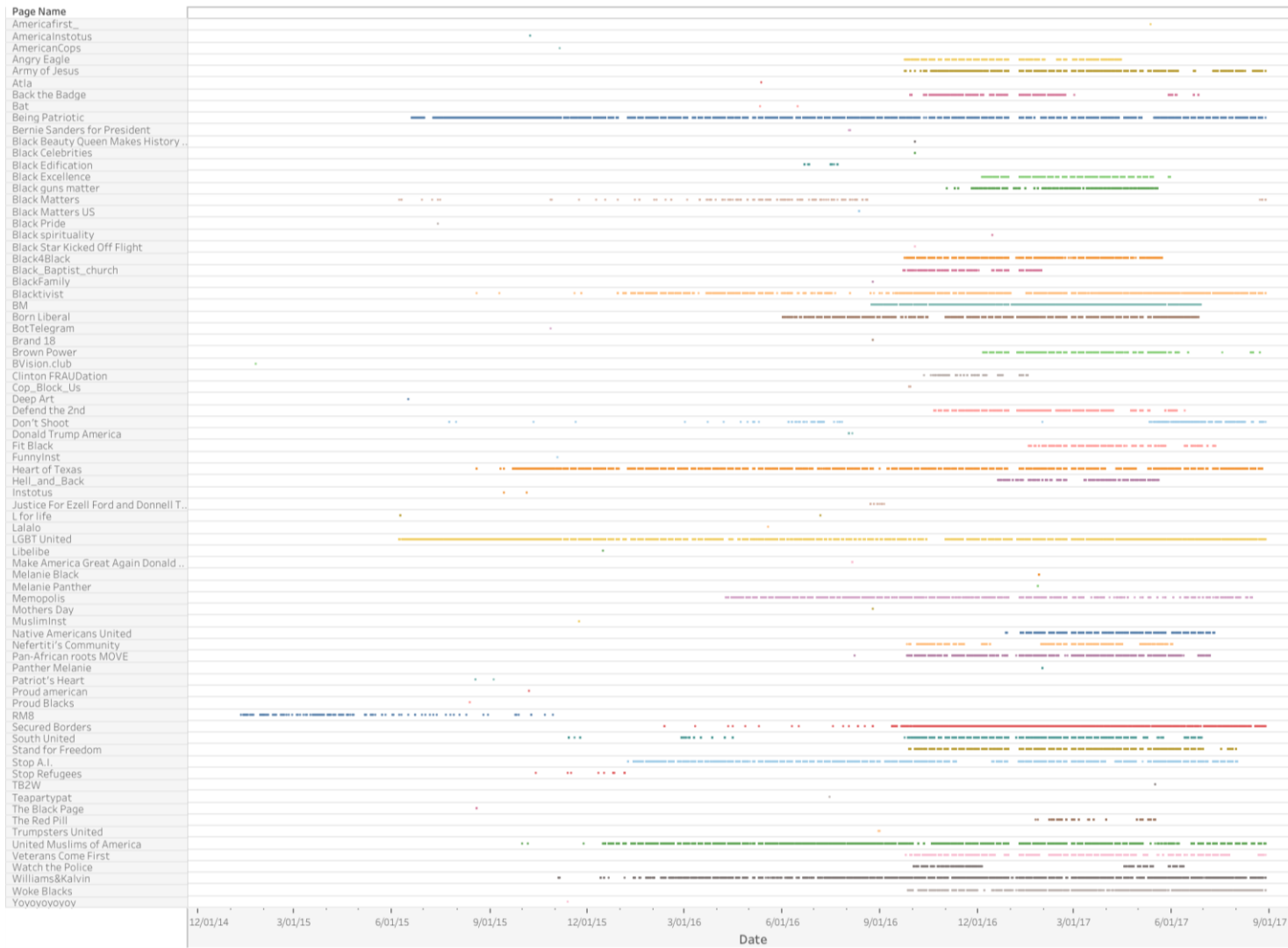


Comparative Engagement: Facebook Top 20 Accounts



Top Performers: Facebook Timing of Posts, by Page

Each line represents a distinct IRA Facebook page, and each dot is a post. The Y axis represents time.



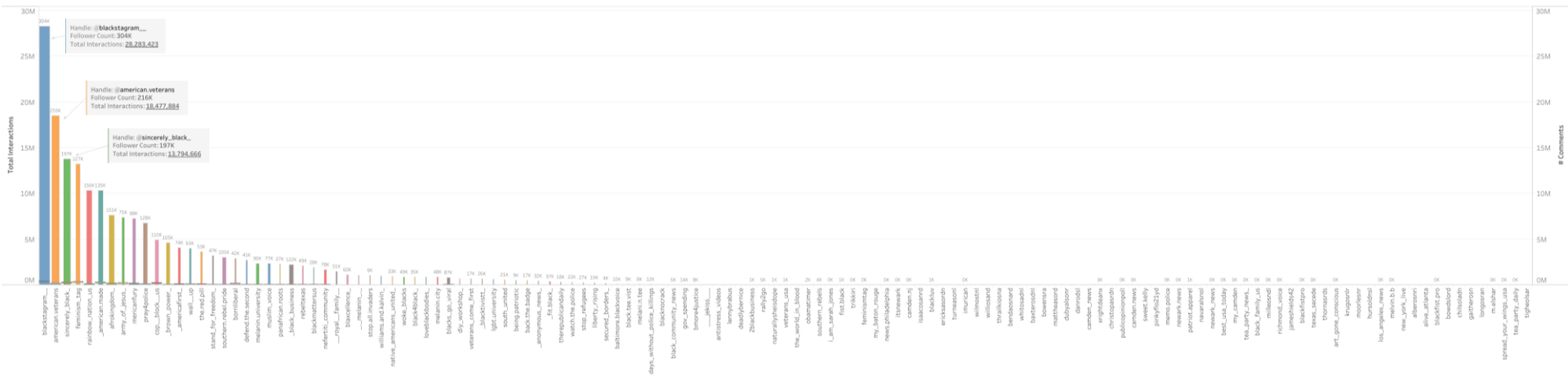
Top Performers: Instagram Account Follower Counts

This chart shows
all 133 IRA
Instagram
accounts, sized
by follower count

*The colors are
consistent across all
charts throughout the
Instagram section*

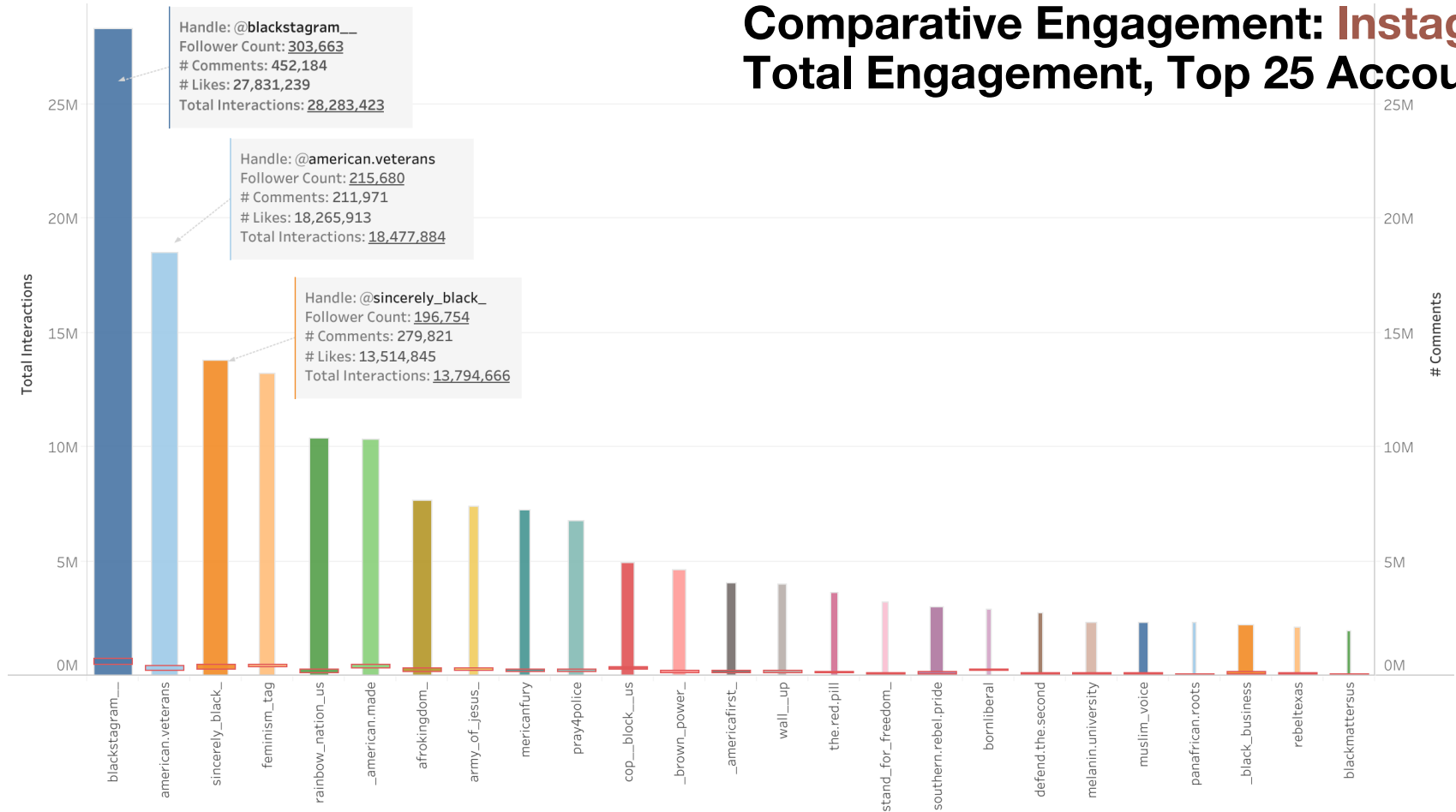


Comparative Engagement: Instagram Total Engagement, All Accounts



Total interactions (likes + comments) for each Instagram account. The relative # of comments are shown as line on graph for comparison. Colored by handle (account name). Bar width shows relative size of account follower count size. Numbers of followers in thousands are displayed at the top of graph.

Comparative Engagement: Instagram Total Engagement, Top 25 Accounts



Total interactions (sum of likes and comments) for each Instagram account. The number of comments are shown as line on each bar for perspective. Color shows details about account name (@handle). Bar width shows the relative size of follower count. This graph shows the top 25 of 133 accounts ordered by decreasing total interactions.

Top Performers: Instagram Post Engagement

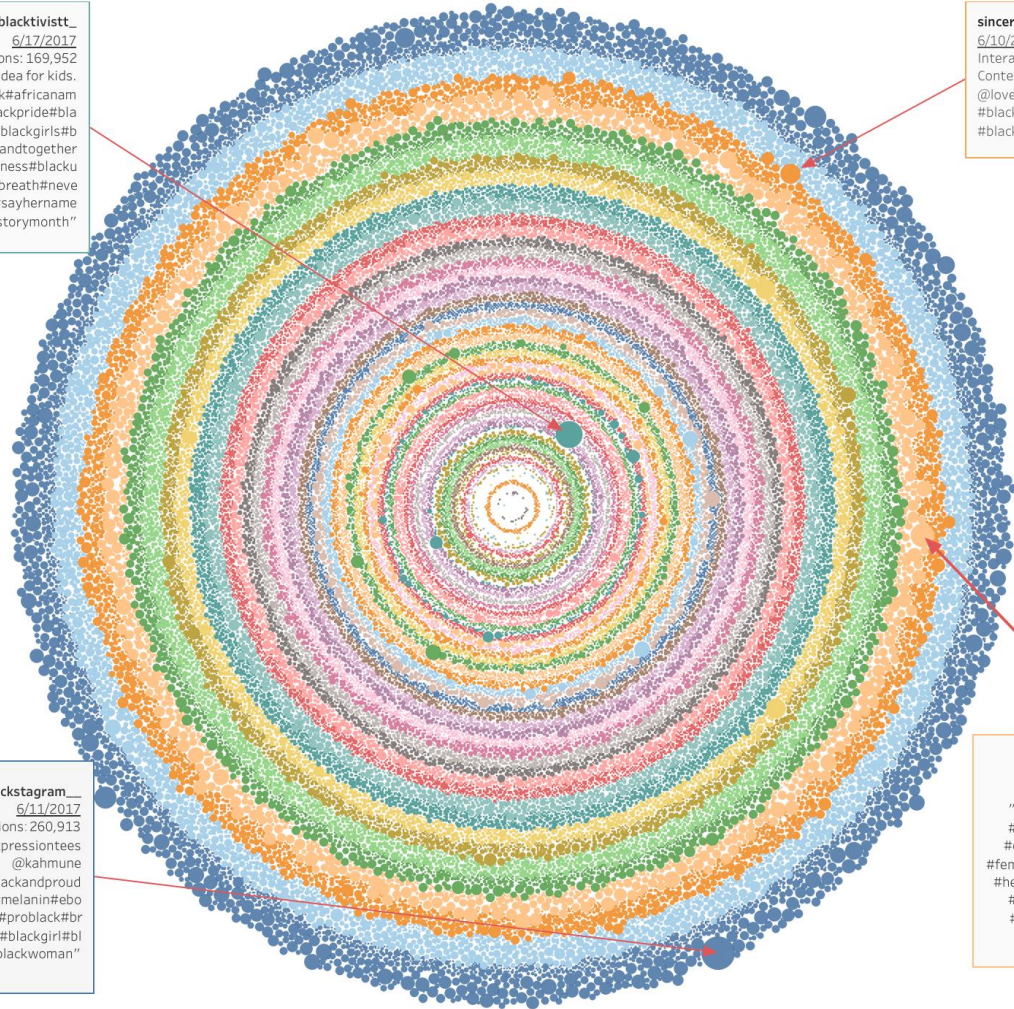
Each colored ring is a distinct IRA Instagram account page, and each circle represents one post. The size of the circle reflects the relative number of total interactions for the post.

blacktivist
[6/17/2017](#)
Interactions: 169,952
"What a great idea for kids.
#Blacktivist#hotnews #black#africanamerican#blacklivesmatter#blackpride#blackandproud#dreamchasers#blackgirls#blackwomen#blackman#westandtogether#proudtobeblack#blackbusiness#blackunity #blackis#melanin#icantbreathe#neverforget #sayhername #blackhistorymonth"

sincerely_black_
[6/10/2017](#)
Interactions: 85,985
Content Text: "True @melanin.city @loveblackbodies_ #blackqueens #blackexcellence #blackisbeautiful #blackgirlmagic"

blackstagram__
[6/11/2017](#)
Interactions: 260,913
"What is your color? @expressiontees @kahmune
#blackexcellence#blackpride#blackandproud #blackpower#africanamerican#melanin#ebony#panafrican#blackcommunity#problack#brownskin#unapologeticallyblack#blackgirl#blackgirls#blackwomen#blackwoman"

feminism_tag
[6/10/2017](#)
Interactions: 132,555
"@expression_tees #feminismtag #feminism #female #humanrights #equality #freedom #love #support #feminist #yesallwomen #womensrights #beforshe #femen #equality #freedom #feminist #woman #riot #support #protest #gay #lesbian #equality #motherhood #sextrémism"



Facebook vs. Instagram Stats

	Earliest Post	Last Post	Posts	Followers
Facebook	1/10/2015	8/28/2017	61,483	3,334,202
Instagram	1/7/2015	10/26/2017	116,205	3,391,116*

	Likes	Likes/ Post	Comments	Comments / Post	Reactions	Shares	Total Interactions
Facebook	37,627,085	612	3,339,752	54	5,188,182	30,350,130	76,505,149
Instagram	183,246,348	1,568	4,017,731	34	n/a	n/a	187,264,079
Total	220,873,433		7,447,483		5,188,182	30,350,130	263,769,228

**Facebook does not appear to have provided follower counts for 52 Instagram accounts from the 2nd batch of data provided (the Instagram Addendum). This figure is therefore lower than it should be. "Unique" followers were not provided; this is a simple summation of all followers across all Pages and likely includes individuals who followed multiple pages.*

Memetics Analysis



Meme Analysis

There were several hundred thousand visual images included in the IRA data set. A majority of them were memes, which contain both images and text. Our team did both textual extraction using optical character recognition (OCR) as well as clustering of visually similar images to understand messaging and identify memetic strategies. We examined the shift in visual themes weekly across the 2016 Twitter data. A manual review of ~62,000 Facebook Page and ~100,000 Instagram memes was also conducted.

- The Pages recycled memes within their own organic content, repurposing images regularly.
- The Pages posted identical memetic images rebranded for their own unique Page. Sometimes they also used identical text content in the post.
- The Pages shared each others' memetic content, particularly from Instagram, sometimes from Tumblr, to cross-pollinate audiences and improve audience growth. This was done very regularly on the Pages targeting the Black community. There was no acknowledgement that the Pages shared common authors; occasionally there was a mention of "friends".
- The memes included content promoting events, as well as businesses.

The following slides highlight some examples of Page clusters. More can be found in the Appendix.

Repurposing & rebranding existing memes

Memes are powerful because they can be easily recontextualized and reshared. There's often a degree of familiarity and recognition in popular memes, which act as "in-group" cultural signifiers.

In this case, both Secured Borders and Stop A.I. used a portion of this meme, which appears elsewhere online but can be easily traced as far back as a forum post from 2014 (presumably from a real American participant). Repurposed existing memes makes up a large part of the IRA visual content in the data set.

This makes it harder to identify hostile pages; the content looks – and in fact is – largely identical to content shared by real people with a particular point of view.



Secured
Borders



Stop A.I.

Posted by Dee on November 7, 2014 at 5:23am in Illegal Alien Invasion

[View Discussions](#)



Focus by Page: Heart of Texas

Heart of Texas visual clusters focused on shapes of Texas, landscape photos of flowers, and memes about secession and refugees. There was also an undercurrent of 2nd Amendment and anti-immigration memes.

SECESSION=SUCCESS
@TIMETOSECEDE

TEXAS IS NOT JUST A STATE

TIME TO SECEDE
UNITED STATES
REPUBLIC OF TEXAS

ECONOMIC GROUNDS FOR TEXAS SECESSION

IF TEXAS SECEDES, IT WILL
BECOME THE 13-TH ECONOMY IN THE WORLD
SAVE 20 % OF ITS CITIZENS' INCOME
GET RID OF US NATIONAL DEBT
WIN ADDITIONAL \$100 BILLIONS FROM EXPORT

Don't Tread On Me

IT'S A STATE OF MIND

NO MORE REFUGEES IN TEXAS RALLY
NORTH SIDE OF THE CAPITAL
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 6 AT 12 PM IN CST

SHOULD TEXAS ACCEPT SYRIAN REFUGEES?
-NO!-

GOOD MORNING, Y'ALL!

TEXAS SUNSET
IS AMAZING

GOD BLESS TEXAS!

TEXAS WILDFLOWERS
ABSOLUTELY STUNNING

TimMcKennoC

Focus by Page: Being Patriotic

Anti-Hillary Clinton

HILLARY CLINTON WILL ELIMINATE THE FREE SPEECH RIGHTS



Being Patriotic

Like if you agree

HILLARY CLINTON IS A SERIAL LIAR

OF ANYONE WHO GETS IN HER WAY

HILLARY IS THE WORST CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT



Being Patriotic

HILLARY IS OUR ENEMY



Being Patriotic

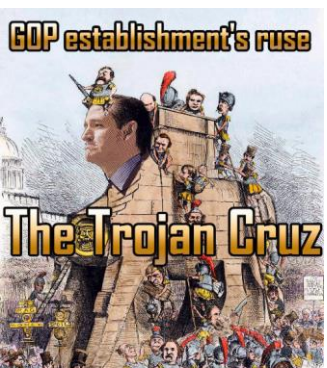
HILLARY

should be in a prison

Being Patriotic

Anti-"Establishment" Candidates

GOP establishment's ruse



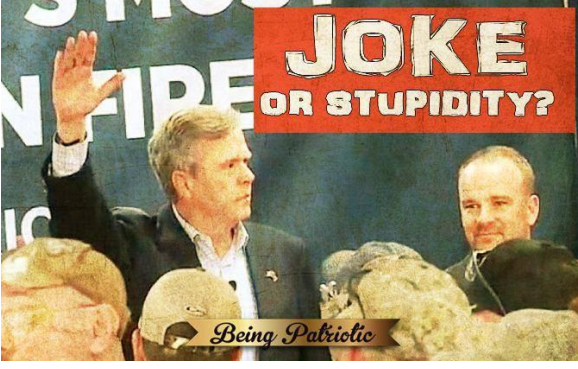
The Trojan Cruz

RUBIO

is a traitor?



JOKE OR STUPIDITY?



Being Patriotic

Pro-Donald Trump

TRUMP GETS 65%



NY SUPPORTERS

Being Patriotic

THIS IS THE LAST YEAR OF OBAMA'S PRESIDENCY



LIKE & SHARE IF THAT MAKES YOU HAPPY!

I WISH I HAD A TIME MACHINE SO I COULD GO BACK TO NOVEMBER 8

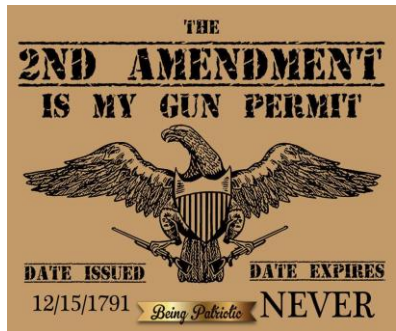


AND VOTE FOR TRUMP AGAIN!

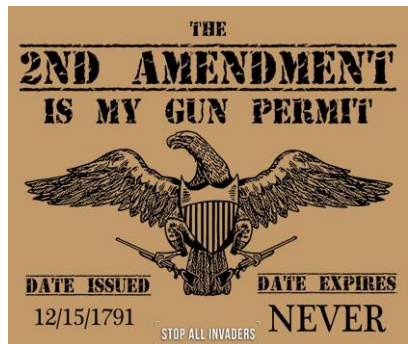
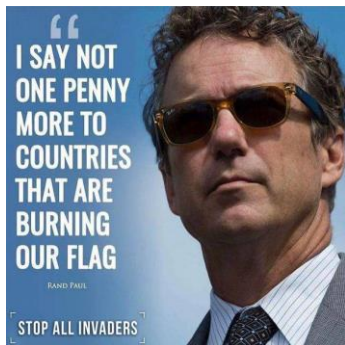
Being Patriotic

Rebranding Memes Across Pages

Being Patriotic



Stop A.I.



Rebranding Memes Across Pages

This is powerful and is an image our children need to see and process. 🩺💉



BM (Black Matters)

"When you love another Black person, you have to love each other through 500 years of broken promises, pain, and oppression. When we say Black love, it's not just about some Black people being in love; it's the most revolutionary thing you can do." 💜👊



There're way too many talented, intelligent, artistic, and impressive black kids for you to just pretend we only play basketball & get shot.



This is powerful and is an image our children need to see and process. 🩺💉

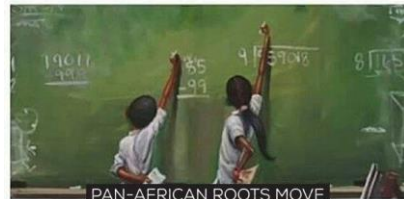


Pan-African Roots MOVE

"When you love another Black person, you have to love each other through 500 years of broken promises, pain, and oppression. When we say Black love, it's not just about some Black people being in love; it's the most revolutionary thing you can do." 💜👊



There're way too many talented, intelligent, artistic, and impressive black kids for you to just pretend we only play basketball & get shot.



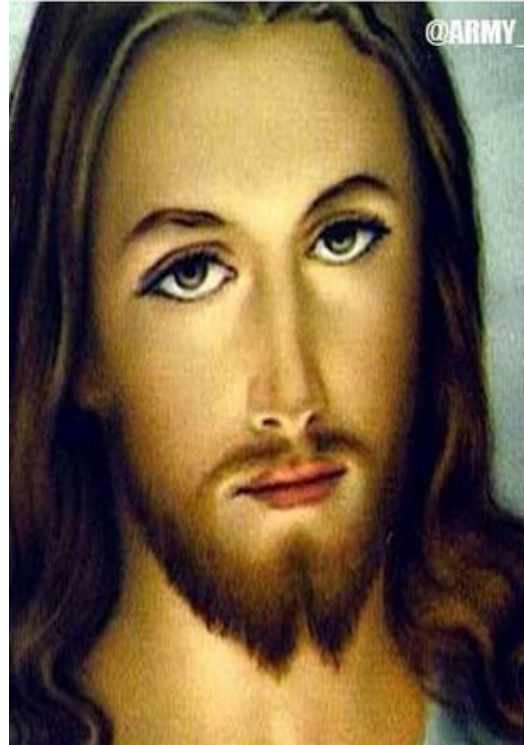
Recycling top performers

This image was the most-Liked content created by the IRA on Instagram before Election 2016. Posted on March 2, 2016 it was from @army_of_jesus and garnered 87,750 likes.

The second most-liked is the same image from the same account, this time with 84,469 likes -- posted 3 months later on June 13, 2016.

These images also had the most comments of IRA pre-election Instagram content, with 1989 and 2177 comments, respectively.

**LIKE
IF YOU BELIEVE**



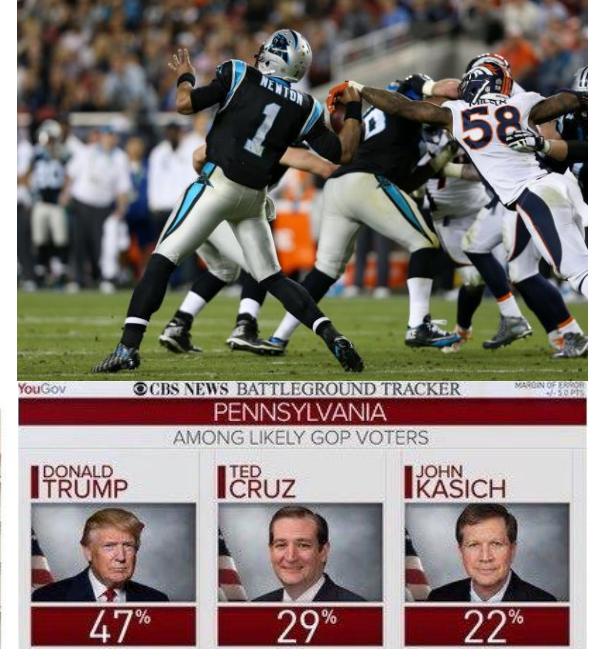
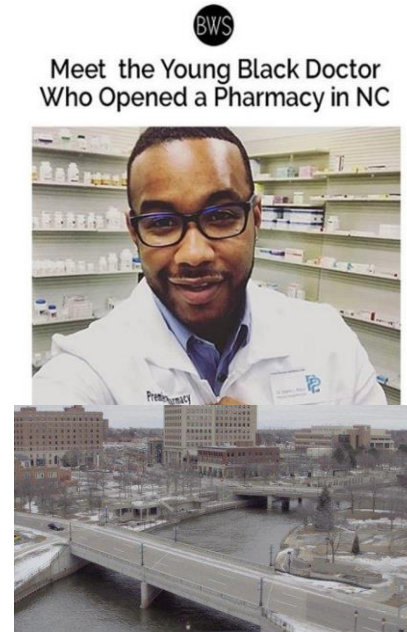
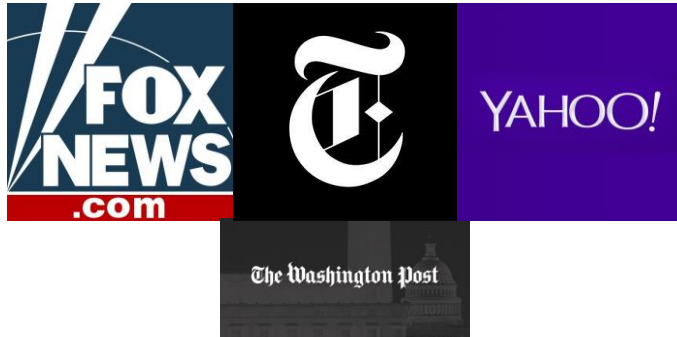
**KEEP
SCROLLING
IF YOU DON'T**



Timeline: Visuals on Twitter

April 2016

Because the Twitter data set URLs were often difficult to resolve, we evaluated IRA themes as reflected in image content attached to what appeared to be news shares. Here we include some examples leading into Election 2016. In April 2016 the shares were fairly uncoordinated – there were some clusters of activity around stories about Black empowerment and the primaries, and some content about the Flint water crisis. We can identify the publications they shared from based on the news logos that appear in the image data.



July 2016

For July, IRA themes as estimated by image content suggest they again focused primarily on sharing news stories. There was a higher concentration of shares focused on Black Lives Matter.



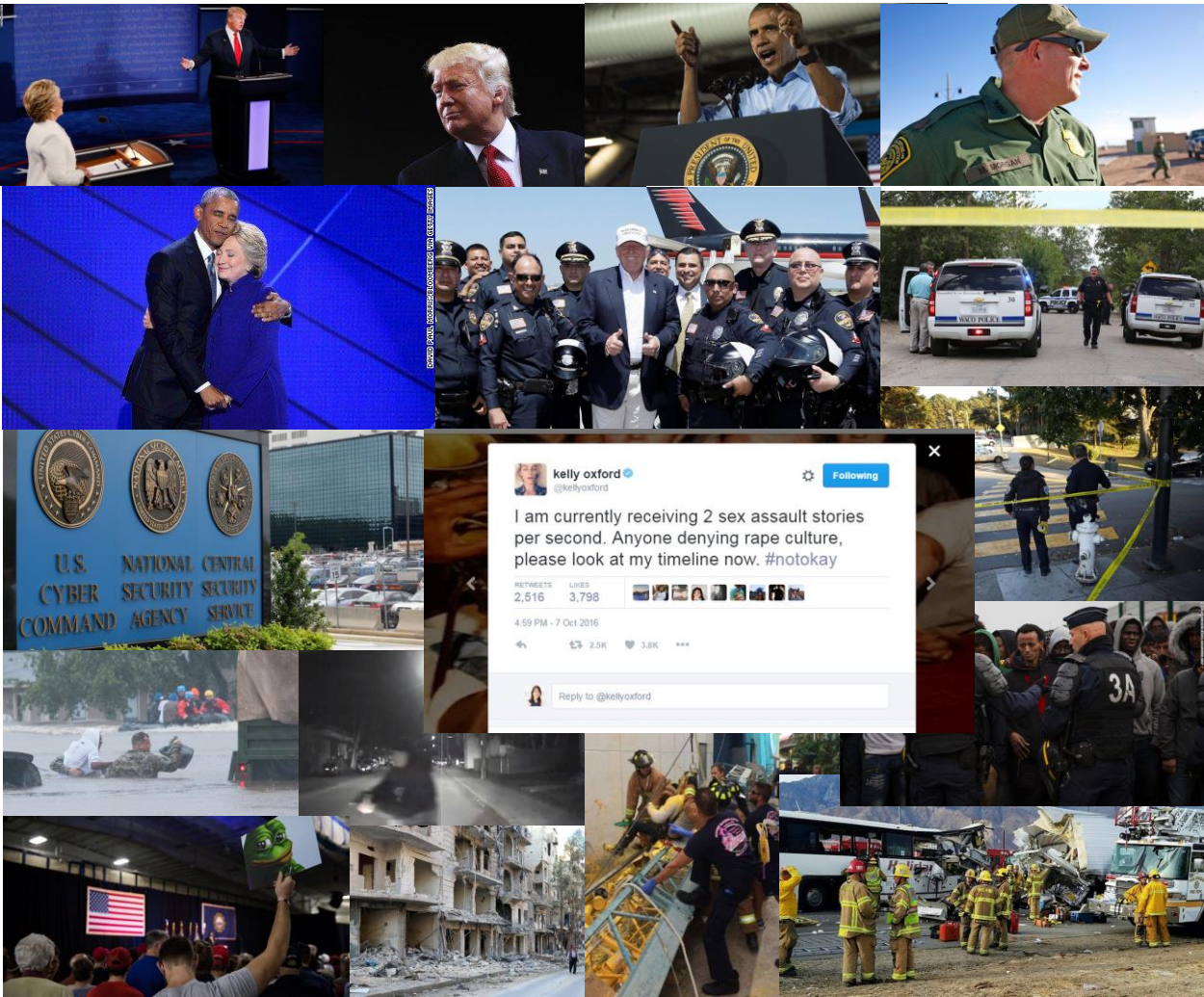
September 2016

September 2016 indicated an increase in the diversity of news sources they shared articles from (based on image logos). The “deplorables” comment, kneeling football players, and Syria bombings occupied an increasing percentage of the content during this month.



October 2016

Even greater increase in the diversity of news sources shared; most notable is the presence of more local papers. The Access Hollywood “Pussygate” tape, Hurricane Matthew, an NSA contractor leaking secrets, stories about shootings were dominant themes.

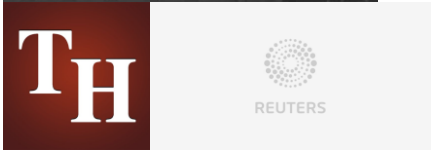


The Boston Globe

November 2016

Week 1

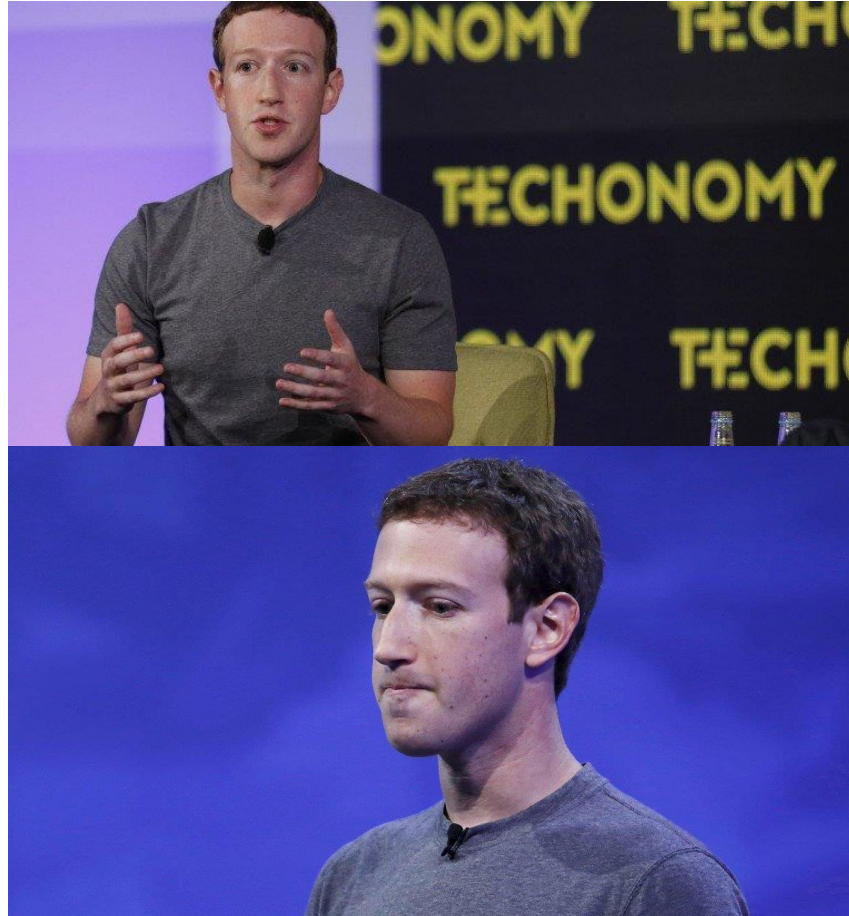
Many more small local news sources – i.e., “Newton Kansan”. All of the news appeared to focus on the U.S. election, including Trump’s commentary on whether he would accept the result.



November 2016

Week 2

Immediately post-election there was a dramatic drop-off in volume of content. There appeared to be very little coordination in messaging (as estimated by visual images). One new narrative was a cluster of images that tied to stories about Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg denying that people sharing things on Facebook could have had any impact on the result of the election.



Top Individual Performers: Facebook Memetic Content

This March 9, 2016, **South United** meme was the most-shared post on Facebook and had 986,203 total engagements, the most for a single piece of content.



This **Being Patriotic** homeless veterans meme on September 8, 2016 had 723,750 total engagements on Facebook.

Top Individual Performers: Instagram Memetic Content

This meme had the highest total engagements on Instagram as well as the most likes (254,179) and comments (6734). It was posted on June 11, 2017.

All the tones are nude! Get over it!



@blackstagram__

Top Individual Performers: Twitter Content



This photo of **Harold Ekeh** posted on November 25, 2016, was favorited or retweeted 109,518 times. The original story was about his acceptance into all eight Ivy League schools, in April 2015.

This photo also had one of the highest rates of engagement. It was posted on October 10, 2016, and was favorited or retweeted 91,029 times. It also amplifies the themes of #BlackLivesMatter and racially-based mistreatment.

So I'm at work at a customers house, the police show up guns drawn tell me to put my hands up, I refuse and they tell me I'm accused of walking around the property and trying to open doors and looking thru windows trying to get in to steal stuff. Meanwhile in the real world I'm looking for some Comcast wiring that is underground nowhere near any houses, in a bright red comcast shirt, in big white comcast truck!!! My bad are you using my truck as your desk?! I'm so sorry America didn't realized working was a crime?!?!? #blackslivesmatter



Top Facebook post by Engagement referencing Donald Trump



"On June 27, 1952, American government passed a law, called '1952 McCarran Walters act', that actually outlawed Sharia, but Obama never intended to enforce it or even let you know about it at all. Instead he started to import thousands of aggressive Muslim 'refugees', who refused to integrate and demanded to be allowed to live under sharia law instead of American constitution. Now it's within Donald Trump's authority to enforce that law and ban Sharia in every state across America. Do you want him to do that?" – Stop A.I., posted 1/23/2017

# Likes	# Comments	# Reactions	# Shares	Total Engagement
162850	93231	11014	312632	579727

Top Facebook post by Engagement referencing Hillary Clinton



"As I've said before, I'm really concerned if victory will go to Hillary Clinton due to voter fraud. If we can't trust the State Department, if we can't trust DOJ, if we can't trust the FBI, if we can't trust the DHS, hell we can't trust any division of our Federal Government, so it seems logical we can't put much trust in today's elections system. And we see that Hillary is exhibiting the same cockiness that Obama did before he won in 2008/2012. As if she knows in advance that the results will put her in the White House. POTUS administration shamelessly exploit the rigged system, Democrats already have a great experience at this. Illegal aliens, dead people, incarcerated criminals or refugees who can't even speak English... They ALL work together to get Democrats over the top in these elections!! Are you outraged by this as much as I am? No wonder they trying to take away our guns - because Americans have had enough of this BS and if Killary wins there will be riots nationwide, not seen since the times of Revolutionary war!!" – posted on Secured Borders, 10/7/2016

# Likes	# Comments	# Reactions	# Shares	Total Engagement
19433	4543	871	77406	102253

Ads & Targeting



Targeting Americans: Facebook

- 73 different IRA-affiliated Pages and Instagram accounts ran ad targeting operations featuring 3519 ads (videos and images) that drove users to Like Pages, follow Instagram accounts, join Events, and visit websites.
- These ads cross-promoted Pages, creating a web of content and the illusion of legitimacy and popularity.
- The ads reinforced simultaneous messages to defined audiences. The majority of the targeting focused on African American communities.
- A majority of the ads achieved substantially higher clickthrough rates than most Facebook ads; according to Wordstream Advertising Benchmarks, the average CTR for Facebook across all industries in .9% as of August 2018. 1182 of the 1306 unique ads in the dataset provided by Facebook - 90% - that had some spend had a CTR higher than .9%.
- Ad accounts ran ads for both right and left-leaning pages (not separated by Page or Instagram handle)



Blacktivist Sponsored · 

This video may bring tears to your eyes. Make it go viral. We need this unity in our communities.



 **black_fist.10k**

25K Reactions 1K Comments 35K Shares

 Like  Comment  Share

Targeting Americans

- Facebook interest-based ad targeting predominantly focused on issues related to race and Second Amendment issues.
- Targeting users by race is not allowed by Facebook, but ads targeted closely related categories like *African American (US) Behaviors* and *Pan-Africanism*.
- Ads were often timed and geographically targeted around significant events (ie, a shooting or racial unrest/riots).
- Events ads often promoted local rallies. There were 81 unique events.
- The goal of ads was primarily to drive users to Facebook Pages and IRA websites (which may have enabled subsequent tracking).
- One of the ads led to a Chrome music extension that captured access to browsing behavior and Facebook data once installed.

key	content	count
Interests	Martin Luther King	52
Interests	African-American Civil Rights Movement (1954–68)	43
Interests	African-American history	31
Interests	Black Power	18
Interests	Gun Owners of America	18
Interests	Behaviors: African American (US)	17
Interests	Right to keep and bear arms	17
Interests	Black Panther Party	16
Interests	National Rifle Association	16
Interests	Black history	15
Interests	2nd Amendment	14
Interests	Black History Month	13
Interests	Pan-Africanism	12
Interests	Concealed carry in the United States	12
Interests	African-American history or Malcolm X	11
Interests	Black is beautiful	10
Interests	Second Amendment to the United States Constit...	10
Interests	Pan-Africanism	10
Interests	My Black is Beautiful	10

Ads Strategy: Audience Types

- Custom audiences were limited to 31 ads - appears that there were approximately 3 custom audiences named and stored that were unrelated to the Pages owned by IRA (tr, tesy, newtestaudit).
- Lookalike audiences were used to find people similar to the audience who liked United Muslims of America, Defend the 2nd, and Being Patriotic.
- 1852 ads were targeted by Interest. Of those, 808 included **geographical targeting**; 691 of those were the full United States.
- One ad set in late Sept - early October 2016 geo-targeted Allentown, Erie, Harrisburg, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Scranton Pennsylvania focused on 18-65 year olds with the interest “Donald Trump for President, Job title: Coal Miner”. The goal was to galvanize support for candidate Trump and to hold a rally for miners. It secured 1225 impressions and 77 clicks with 876 spend in Rubles.
- A subset of male-focused + geographical targeting included 2 ad sets specifically targeting “Alabama, Georgia, New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas” with additional interests “Right to keep and bear arms, The Second Amendment, Stop Illegal Immigration, National Rifle Association or Donald Trump for President”, aged 17-65. These ads ran in early 2016 on the Stop All Invaders page and were thematically about securing the border.
- 12 ads targeted at both the United States and the United Kingdom, and ran in Jan 2016. Additional interests for those ads included “Syria, Republican Party (United States) or Politics” and “Immigration or Conservatism”. They were thematically concerned with stopping illegal immigration, and telling the truth about refugees (anti-refugee content). 3429 in Rubles was spent, delivering 12334 impressions and 391 clicks.

Ads Strategy: Interests, Gender, Age

- 1852 ads were targeted by Interest. Of those, 122 were targeted by **gender**, split into 32 female and 90 male.
- The Interests targeted ads had age bounds reflective of demographic interests. Men starting at age 13 and women age 14 were targeted for music and free software; these ads were pushing an app and were purchased on Instagram.
- Women from 18+ with interests in “Black Economic Empowerment” and “Black Enterprise” were targeted; these categories did not exist for men.
- Men starting at age 15 with meme-related interests (Imgur, 9GAG, Meme, iFunny) were targeted for ads.
- Men starting at age 17 were targeted with gun-related interests, including Gun Owners of America, National Rifle Association, Second Amendment, AR-15).
- Men starting at age 45 were targeted specifically with pro-officer “Support Law Enforcement” pages.
- The only gender-specific political targeting was also focused on men, age 18+, “breitbart or conservative daily” and “Donald Trump for President”.
- The vast majority of engagement on all of the Pages came from the organic content, not the paid ads. The top Black Matters organic post had 200,000+ engagements.

Facebook / Instagram Ad Spending, per Target Landing Page (top 20)

1 through 10

url	currency	spend	impressions	clicks
blackmattersus	RUB	411652.13	2014881	120976
patriototus	RUB	407369.54	784119	104770
blacktivists	RUB	314195.12	4383292	444902
timetosecede	RUB	276639.32	418468	42248
lgbtun	RUB	252417.96	626425	49569
BlackJourney2Justice	RUB	240632.11	490246	29458
WilliamsandKalvin	RUB	215347.77	1546052	127939
MuslimAmerica	RUB	192874.45	386658	21657
Army-of-Jesus-1195795607160174	RUB	191500.06	965584	71686
South-United-1777037362551238	RUB	187805.82	1073281	74964

Across the three Blackmatters properties: 684,529.25 ₺
Equivalent of \$10,206 (using avg exchange rate 2016)

11 through 20

url	currency	spend	impressions	clicks
blackmattersus.mvmnt	RUB	180329.51	2132134	271550
savethe2a	RUB	146163.65	687849	52732
Secured-Borders-757183957716200	RUB	144186.59	157981	22258
brownunitedfront	RUB	135419.95	6010786	726984
Woke-Blacks-294234600956431	RUB	128750.43	2075533	172313
copsareheroes	RUB	111224.07	1335208	73141
Veterans-Come-First-1757336424535312	RUB	93099.96	168223	20202
Black-Matters-1579673598947501	RUB	92547.61	612532	63295
PanAfrootsmove	RUB	89813.57	671342	41374
StopAllInvaders	RUB	76478.14	166759	30559

Facebook / Instagram Ad Spending, per External Target Domain

domain	currency	spend	impressions	clicks
blackmattersus.com	RUB	163459.60	1327862	87837
petitions.whitehouse.gov	RUB	22451.55	48563	8109
donotshoot.us	RUB	20578.50	125179	2305
meetup.com	RUB	18671.31	36217	1114
musicfb.info	RUB	7023.96	21703	80
represent.com	RUB	4199.40	56317	4690
black4black.info	RUB	1735.75	8121	308
dudeers.com	RUB	1701.46	8227	274
eventbrite.com	RUB	1500.00	3880	151
hilltendo.com	RUB	1449.04	1143	34
youtube.com	RUB	1270.00	3703	184
bonfirefunds.com	RUB	399.98	596	29
theguardian.com	RUB	100.00	306	22
edition.cnn.com	RUB	88.92	164	9

Blackmatters.us, Donotshoot.us, black4black.info, dudeers.com, hilltendo.com, musicfb.info were IRA-created domains.

Bonfirefunds is a site for creating custom t-shirts used by Black Matters. Represent.com sold custom shirts for BM, Black4Black, Fit Black, Nefertiti's Community, Pan-African Roots, Williams & Calvin, Blacktivist, and Woke Blacks. The merchandise rings enabled fundraising, brand building, and the collection of addresses and potentially credit card information.

Meetup.com was the site used to organize black self-defense classes for Fit Black/Black Fist.

Facebook / Instagram Ad Spending, Clickthrough Rate (CTR)

The average CTR for Facebook ads across all industries was .9% in 2018. These are the top 10 IRA ads sorted by spend, and their associated clickthrough rates -- which are many times better than industry average. The IRA appears to have been adept at understanding Facebook's ad targeting tools and strategies.

Ad Copy	Impressions	Clicks	CTR	Spend	Currency
Community of people who support our brave Police Officers. Back The Badge	1334544	73063	5.5%	110588.00	RUB
Together we are a shining beacon of faithfulness! Join us and light your way to Jesus! Army Of	368065	28137	7.6%	89081.10	RUB
Heritage, not hate. The South will rise again! South United	511224	40134	7.9%	78357.30	RUB
They fought for our freedom, now its our time to fight for their rights!	112737	15163	13.4%	72735.10	RUB
Join us if you know it's just a car, NOT A SYMBOL OF HATE South United	300815	16587	5.5%	65705.80	RUB
Brown Power is a platform designed to educate, entertain and connect Chicanos in the US.	968768	56405	5.8%	59571.40	RUB
A page to unit all Muslim people living in the USA!	103079	4491	4.4%	59453.80	RUB
Staying Woke,building-up our communities,uplifting our people. Join us! Woke Blacks	752179	33444	4.4%	58193.60	RUB
We are proud to be black and stand for our community! Join to end the racism in the US.	371295	16442	4.4%	55609.60	RUB
We are not against police, we against police brutality!	226262	9657	4.3%	54729.50	RUB

Simple Ads promoted Pages

Suggested Page

 **Back the Badge**
Sponsored

Community of people who support our brave Police Officers.



Back the Badge
Community
111,113 people like this.

[Like Page](#)

73,063 clicks

Suggested Page

72,043 clicks

 **Being Patriotic**
Sponsored


United We Stand! Welcome every patriot we can reach. Flag and news!




Being Patriotic
Community
219,810 people like this.

[Like Page](#)

Suggested Page

 **Brown Power**
Sponsored

Brown Power is a platform designed to educate, entertain and connect Chicanos in the US.



Brown Power
Community
203,148 people like this.

[Like Page](#)

56,405 clicks

Targeting Americans: Google Ads

- Attribution in the AdWords data provided by Google was questionable; there was a folder of Canadian ads supporting Justin Trudeau that seemed entirely separate from the IRA operation.
- GI Analytics was the most-promoted site in the data set, with 199 ads about unbiased news, civil rights, global security, and regional analysis.
- OnePoliticalPlaza (46), Blackmattersus (31), and Russia-direct.org (15) were the 3 other domains with more than 10 ads.
- All ads for these pages emphasized that they offered “independent news”. Blackmatters ads focused on race relations, and Russia-direct included ads on Syria.

Independent news

We are not controlled by the gov.
or by any organisation. Honest view
gianalytics.org/news

Platform Activity Summaries

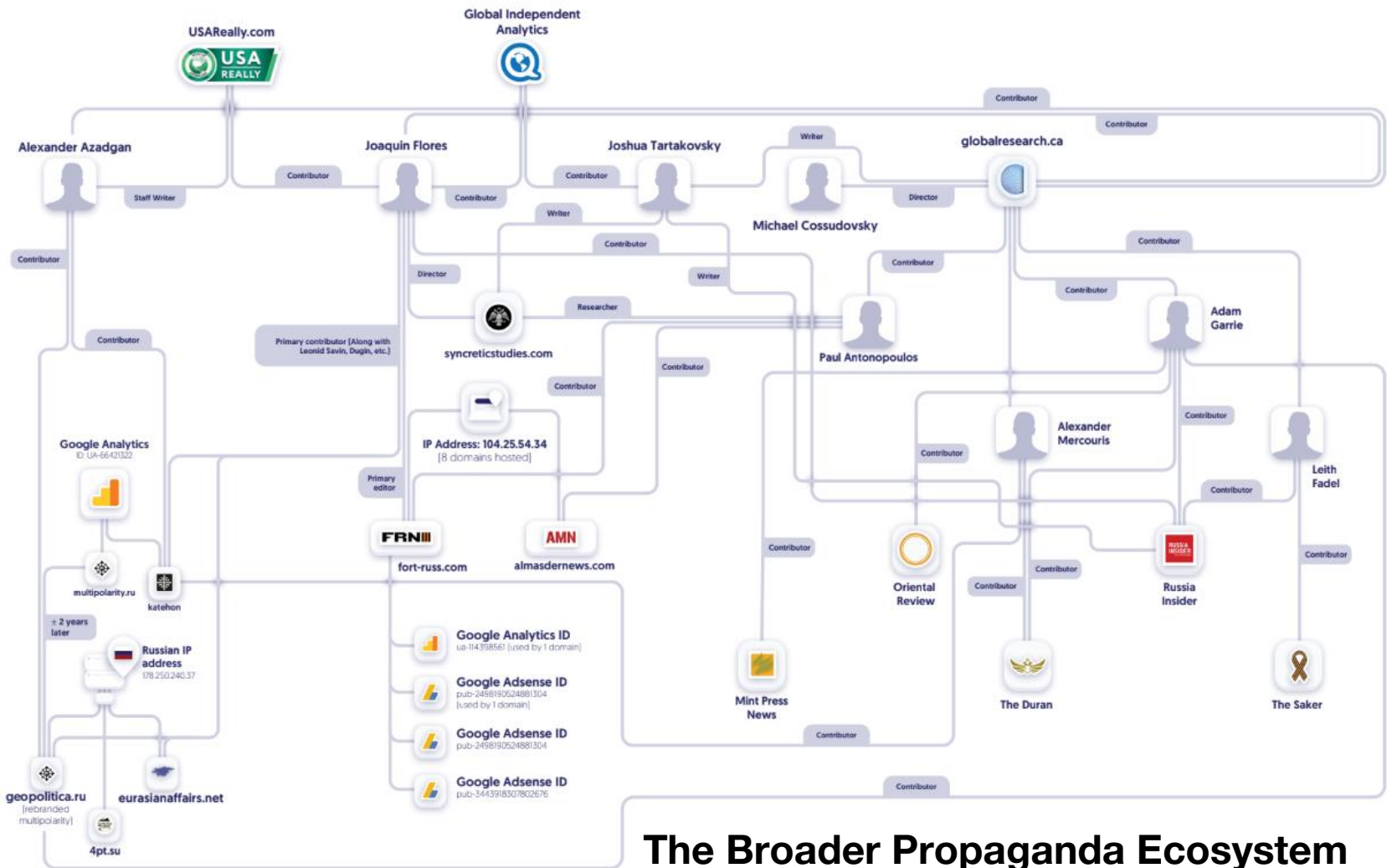


Platform Activity: Google AdWords

- The data set included 38 folders, each for what appears to be an AdWords account number, containing a total of 655 ads. One of the folders featured 263 ads dedicated to electing President Trudeau, and seems likely to have been attributed in error.
- Of the remainder, ads link to known Internet Research Agency websites (31 for blackmattersus.com) as well as an extended network of Russian websites featuring think tank content and propaganda.
- It appears that the AdWords accounts were used to promote sites that offered longer-form aligned content such as opinion and analysis pieces in line with Kremlin agenda. Given this, it is perhaps more likely that they were affiliated with FAN, which shared office space with the IRA, rather than the Internet Research Agency itself. This may be a distinction without a difference.
- The content promoted in the ads includes material on Obama's ostensible poor performance and the media's purported hiding of it, Russia's positions on Syria, European migrant concerns, and crises of democracy (rethink democracy, anarchy is another way, etc.)
- Russia-linked propaganda sites with domains that appeared in the Adwords content include onepoliticalplaza.com, katehon.com, russia-direct.org, russiacouncil.ru, russiainsider.com, nelar.ru, mepfoundation.org, rethinkingrussia.ru.
- The largest of the Adwords accounts (by number) promoted Global Intelligence Analytics (gianalytics.org), 199 times. GI Analytics is a think-tank/analysis-style publication with an international masthead (writers include Americans) that is presently dormant.

Platform Activity: AdWords: GI Analytics

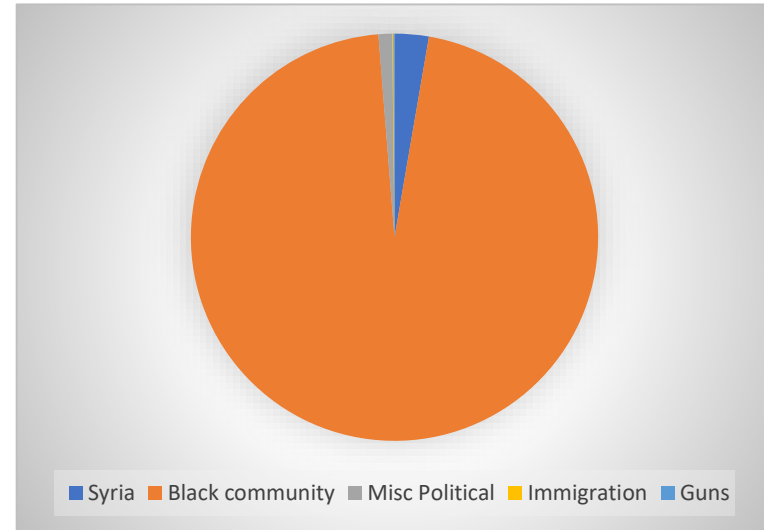
- GI Analytics was active from 2015 until Aug 31, 2016, when editor Joshua Tartakovsky announced it was “on hold”. <https://gianalytics.org/about/> - defines the topics the collective of authors writes about: “Our purpose and mission are to provide high-quality analysis at a time when we are faced with a multitude of crises, a collapsing global economy, imperialist wars, environmental disasters, corporate greed, terrorism, deceit, GMO food, a migration crisis and a crackdown on small farmers and ranchers. We are in a desperate need of truth and of hard-cutting analysis, especially now, when we are being betrayed by our elected representatives and the corporate media.”
- The site’s content is repurposed on other properties around the web, including Russia News Now, Russia Insider, The Russophile, NovoRussia today. It has links to other known Russian propaganda sites by way of authors, AdWords accounts, and repurposed content.
- The masthead of authors shows several Americans. Several of these USA-affiliated authors, such as Joaquin Flores, have personal blogs or appointments at other Russia-linked think tanks. Others, such as Stefan Paraber, have almost no social presence aside from their writing on the site. It is unclear whether they knew they were writing for an IRA entity.
- <https://twitter.com/gianalytics> – Twitter account still exists, dormant but still visible.
- GI Analytics appears in the YouTube data set with a channel promoting the account ‘SyrianGirlPartisan’.
- <https://www.facebook.com/Global-Independent-Analytics-1507879509510336> - The Facebook page was active as of May 30, 2018 but was deleted sometime before July 2, 2018 during the course of this investigation. It had approximately 7000 followers.



The Broader Propaganda Ecosystem

Platform Activity: YouTube

- The IRA started making videos in Sept 2015, producing 1107 videos across 17 channels. A few channels were active until July 2017.
- By far the most content was related to Black Lives Matter & police brutality: 1063 videos split across 10 different channels (59% of the channels, 96% of the content). 571 had title keywords related to the police and focused on abuses.
- Three channels (30 videos) were devoted to Syria & related Near East conflicts. One was related to GI Analytics, which ran AdWords. The others were both variants of the name “New Inform”.
- Two channels were specifically political, focused on the 2016 election.
- Several of the channels aggregated or repurposed Vine content.
- “These channels’ videos were not targeted to the U.S. or to any particular sector of the U.S. population” – while they may have meant this specifically in the context of paid targeting, YouTube’s statement before the first tech hearing appears disingenuous now.



Platform Activity: YouTube Channel List

- A Word Of Truth (Williams & Calvin)
- [Backyard of the White House](#)
- Black Matters
- BlackToLive
- Cop Block US
- Don't Shoot
- Global Independent Analytics
- GUNS 4LIFE
- Hong Zi
- Calvin Johnsonh
- New Inform
- Newinform Newinform
- Paul Jefferson
- PoliceState
- Starling Brown
- STOP A. I.
- Stop Police Brutality

Backyard of the Whitehouse content is still aggregated and viewable online at the link.

Platform Activity: YouTube

- 25 videos had election-related keywords in the title (candidate names, vote/voting, election, etc). These videos were entirely anti-Hillary Clinton.
- 571 videos had keywords related to police (police*, cop, officer, trooper, etc) in the title; these all focused on police abuses.
- Videos on the “A Word of Truth” channel – the YouTube channel of Williams & Calvin Facebook page and @williams.and.kalvin_ Instagram account - included voter suppression tactics targeting African-American voters. Titles included “The truth about elections”, “HILLARY RECEIVED \$20,000 DONATION FROM KKK TOWARDS HER CAMPAIGN”, “A Word Of Truth: Dr. Alveda against fu**in' Hillary”.
- One of the political channels, Paul Jefferson, solicited videos for a #PeeOnHillary video challenge, and shared submissions that it received. The hashtag was incorporated into Twitter activity.
- Several of the email addresses attributed to the YouTube accounts had Google Plus pages; the remainder were Gmail accounts.
- Several email addresses confirmed links between accounts across platforms; williamsjohnsonhiphop@gmail.com and copblock1@gmail.com were affiliated with the “A Word of Truth” channel. Copblock1 was also attached to the Cop Block US YouTube channel, which ran an Instagram account as well. ([Cop Block](#) is a real activist organization.)
- One of the email addresses linked to the Don't Shoot YouTube account appears to have been [linked to a Tumblr post](#) advocating that users play Pokemon Go and name Pokemon after U.S. police brutality victims.

Platform Activity: YouTube

- The two “New Inform” channels had Russia-language sites associated with them, and content related to Syria, Turkey, and the Middle East.
 - politexpert.net - Whois exists, newinform.co@yandex.ru,
 - Company: OOO "Novinfo" (Yurij Krasnov)
 - Address: [REDACTED]
 - Phone: [REDACTED]
 - Email: newinform.smi@gmail.com,
 - 42k daily unique visitors, 257k daily pageviews.
 - <https://newinform.com/>

Platform Activity: **Twitter**

- The IRA developed a collection of over 3841 persona accounts on Twitter; approximately [1.4MM people](#) (per Twitter's estimate) engaged with their 10.4MM tweets.
- The tweets from 3841 persona accounts were delivered to SSCI in two batches; it appears that several were [misidentified](#) while others were missed and discovered later.
- Our investigation into the Twitter accounts suggests that the English-language activity appears to have taken 4 primary forms:
 - Repurposed accounts from a commercial botnet
 - Newsbots - accounts that tweeted news articles focused on the regions they were purportedly from (including Russian-language newsbots targeting Russians); this is discussed later in this document in the Media Manipulation section
 - “Right-leaning” accounts that participated in conversations or created political content designed to be resonant with the American right wing political spectrum
 - “Left-leaning” accounts that did the same thing for left-leaning audiences.
- This perception of account types has been confirmed by outside researchers from Clemson University and Five Thirty Eight, which released a collection of IRA tweets (a subset of the ones provided to the committee) during the period of this investigation. That coding [can be found in an easily-searchable interface here](#); by that classification, there were 1280 Russian language accounts, 630 Right-leaning, 233 Left-leaning, 54 Newsfeed.
- As noted above, there are residual accounts from related botnets that have not been taken down; several of these are dormant.

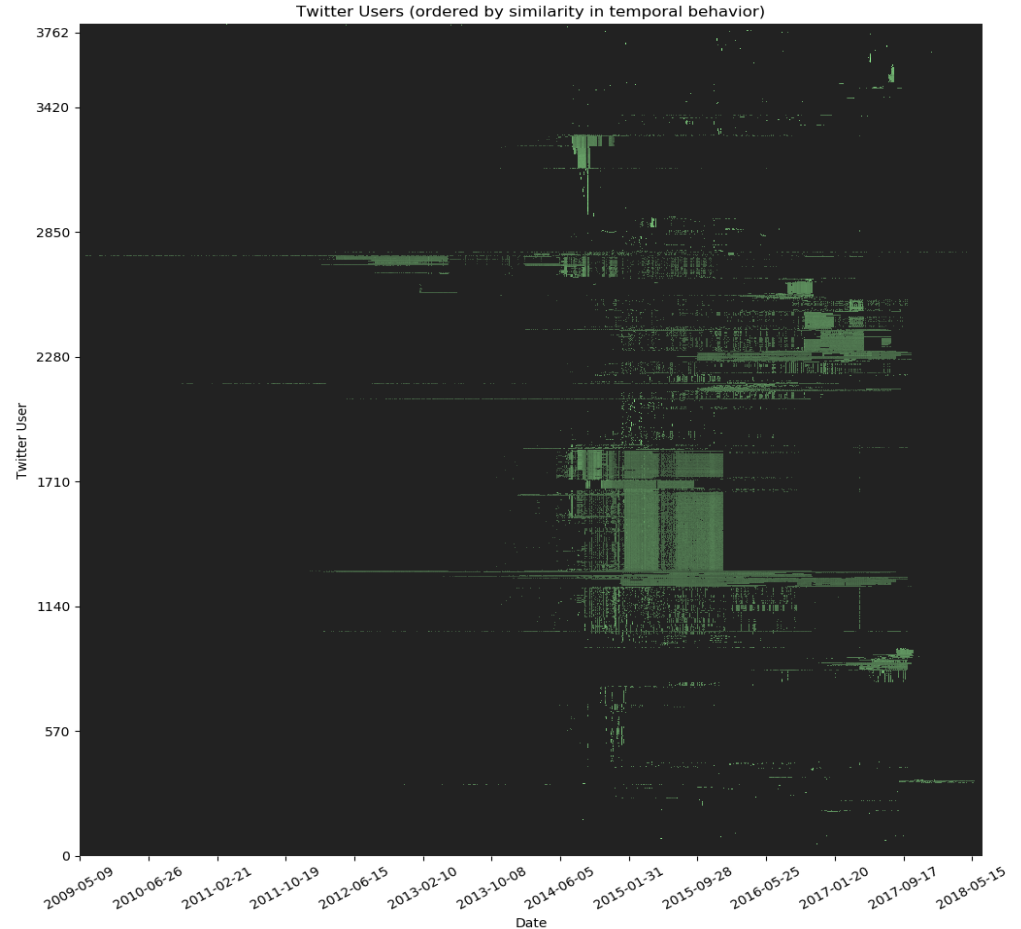
Platform Activity: Twitter

- The breadth of topics covered by the IRA on Twitter appears to have exceeded the topics discussed on Facebook and Instagram. There was, for example, a collection of conspiratorial content targeting the American right wing on Twitter that was not replicated in the topics discussed on Facebook. This ranged from pseudoscience content (anti-vaccine) to political conspiracies (QAnon).
- Our perception is that Twitter accounts focused was largely opportunistic real-time chatter; a collection of accounts regularly played hashtag games. By contrast, Facebook was used to develop deeper relationships, to create a collection of substantive media-type pages dedicated to continual reinforcement of in-group and out-group ideals for targeted audiences. As noted above, several of the Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, and Reddit pages had associated Twitter accounts.
- Something of note is that the data set provided by Twitter did not include some of the accounts that were exposed as manipulative personas during the 2017 special elections, such as @umpire43. We have no capability for conclusive attribution without metadata and other information currently known only to Twitter. It is entirely possible that some of these accounts were still Russian-run, but out of a different branch of the Russian intelligence or military services. It is also possible they were created by a different adversary replicating tactics.
- Most of the IRA twitter accounts were registered through various proxy services in the United states and Europe. For example, accounts intended to pass as American were registered from U.S. IP addresses, and accounts intended to pass as Germans were registered from German IP addresses. A significant number of IRA twitter accounts however, were registered from either a single IP address in Venezuela or the IRA building's real IP address in St. Petersburg.

Platform activity: Twitter Bots & Coordination

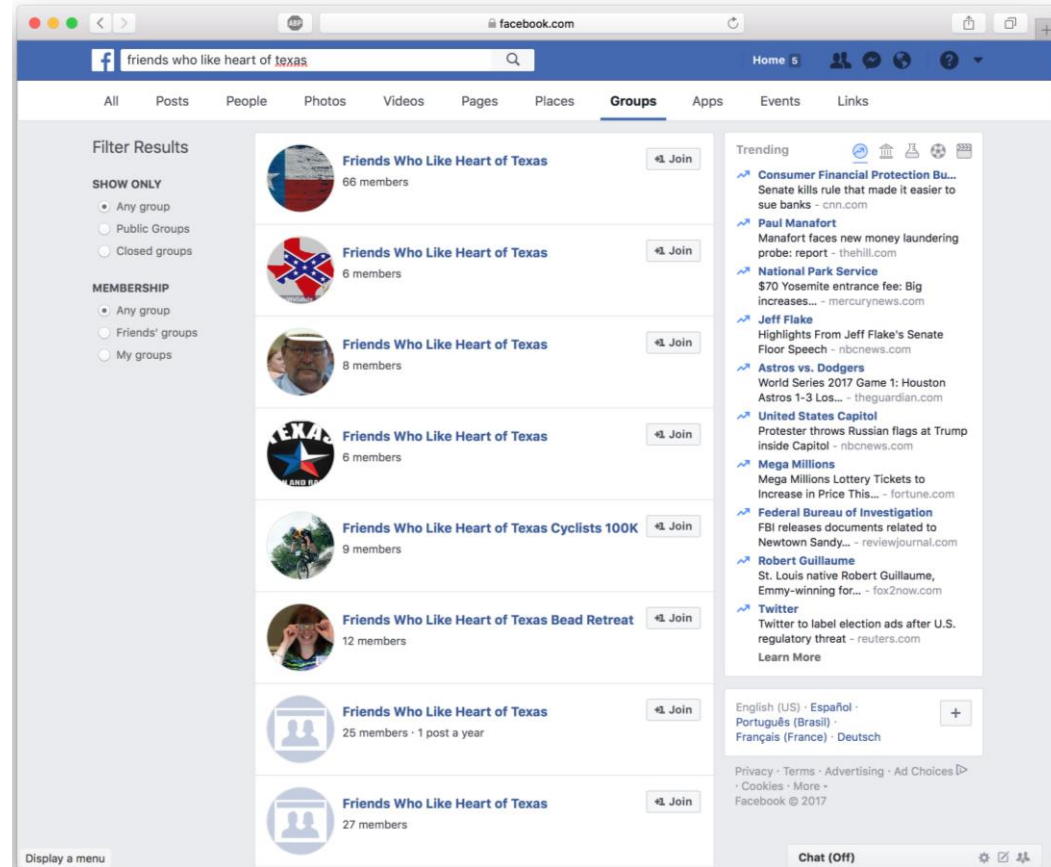
Each row represents the Twitter activity of one individual account over time. The rectangular structures show evidence of coordinated activity - tweeting in unison.

Date is the x-axis, each individual account is represented as a "Twitter User" (y-axis).



Platform Activity: Facebook

- Facebook provided data on 81 IRA Pages. 32 focused on the Black community. 25 were right-leaning. 6 were left-leaning. One each were dedicated to Latino and Native American communities. The rest were tiny. More Latino, Left, Black, and Native American-targeting pages have since been discovered.
- The IRA leveraged the majority of Facebook's features, including Ads, Pages, Events, Messenger, and even Stickers.
- Small groups of individual users who appreciated the Pages went on to create fan Groups. (This activity was likely prompted by a Facebook interface designed to increase Group creation and activity among friends who Liked the same Pages.)



The screenshot shows a Facebook search results page for the query "friends who like heart of texas". The search bar at the top contains the text "friends who like heart of texas". The navigation bar includes "All", "Posts", "People", "Photos", "Videos", "Pages", "Places", "Groups", "Apps", "Events", and "Links". The "Groups" tab is selected, displaying a list of search results. Each result includes a profile picture, the group name "Friends Who Like Heart of Texas", and the number of members. The groups listed are:

- Friends Who Like Heart of Texas (66 members)
- Friends Who Like Heart of Texas (6 members)
- Friends Who Like Heart of Texas (8 members)
- Friends Who Like Heart of Texas (6 members)
- Friends Who Like Heart of Texas Cyclists 100K (9 members)
- Friends Who Like Heart of Texas Bead Retreat (12 members)
- Friends Who Like Heart of Texas (25 members · 1 post a year)
- Friends Who Like Heart of Texas (27 members)

On the right side of the page, there is a "Trending" section with several news items, including "Consumer Financial Protection Bu...", "Paul Manafort", "National Park Service", "Jeff Flake", "Astros vs. Dodgers", "United States Capitol", "Mega Millions", "Federal Bureau of Investigation", "Robert Guillaume", and "Twitter". At the bottom right, there is a language selection menu with options for English (US), Español, Português (Brasil), and Français (France) / Deutsch. The footer includes "Privacy · Terms · Advertising · Ad Choices" and "Facebook © 2017".

Platform Activity: Facebook

- Organic posts reveal a deep knowledge of American culture and demographically-relevant influencers. For example, Turning Point USA and Pepe the Frog memes appear among the youthful far-right-targeted Memopolis and Angry Eagle Pages but don't appear on the boomer-conservative focused pages.
- Right-leaning posts targeted the U.S. media and intelligence community as untrustworthy and diminished popular Conservative politicians in favor of Donald Trump. Left-leaning pages criticized mainstream Democratic leaders as corporatists or too close to neo-cons and promoted Green Party and Democratic Socialist themes.
- Syria appears sporadically as a recurring theme in narratives targeting the Right-leaning, Left-leaning, and Black community pages.

LEFTY CAN'T ENJOY DRINKING MILK



BECAUSE IT PROMOTES WHITE SUPREMACY

Political Narratives: Facebook

There were 1777 political posts on Facebook that mentioned Hillary Clinton. 268 appeared on pages that targeted liberals, generating 49,365 engagements; the remainder were on right-leaning pages (1.7 million engagements). They were all negative.

The one purportedly positive Clinton post was an event (and ad) promoting a Muslim community march to support Sec. Clinton. It is highly likely the IRA saw a high-profile march by Muslims as a way to create tension, and as a negative for Sec. Clinton's candidacy. The United Muslims of America Page's regular post content actively opposed Sec. Clinton.

 **United Muslims of America** shared their event.
Sponsored · 

The time has come to understand one simple thing: we the American muslims are as American



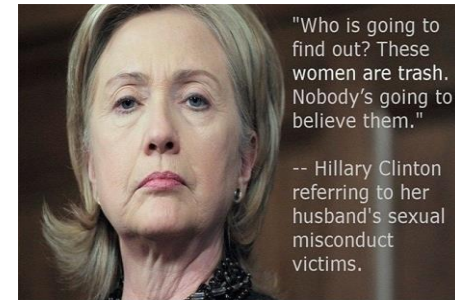
JUL 9 **Support Hillary. Save American Muslims!**
Sat 1 PM EDT · The Obama White House · Wash...
150 people interested · 47 people going

174 Reactions 36 Comments

 Like  Comment

Political Narratives: Instagram

- Opposition to Hillary Clinton's candidacy among the right-wing Instagram accounts was a given.
- @feminism_tag (which ran the memes pictured to the right, gathering 500 and 624 Likes respectively) was the IRA's intersectional feminist account and the most likely to support Clinton based on persona. The account posted extensively about feminism and social justice. It was a staunch supporter of Bernie Sanders and vehemently opposed to Hillary Clinton.
- Black community-targeted Instagram pages were similarly anti-Hillary Clinton.



*THE WORDS
OF A FEMINIST?
I DON'T THINK SO.*

Platform Activity: Instagram e-commerce

Merchandise (“merch”) played a key role in the IRA’s Instagram activities (to a much lesser extent, Facebook). Some of this took the form of cross-promotion of small businesses. This was a core component of the Black community messaging; #supportblackbusiness / #buyblack was a recurring popular theme.



34301 @black4black

<http://www.chloeandchad.com/> "We are happy to present you our partner Chloe and Chad . These products are all made by hand; they are all natural and are made when ordered, so they are as fresh as possible. Using natural skin care is a great way to treat your skin right! Enjoy a good discount with our promo! Just DM us!

(on FB: “Enjoy a good discount with our promo code after you share 3 posts from Black4Black or BM.”)

Platform Activity: Instagram e-commerce

The IRA ran several of its own merchandise sites as well. They primarily sold t-shirts.

- Some featured their Page or Instagram handle logo, for audience-growth and brand awareness purposes.
- Some featured contentious political messaging perhaps designed to spark controversy and highlight division in the real world.

Merchandise likely provided the IRA with a source of revenue, but there are two more important reasons to run merch sites: first, transactions enable the gathering of personal information: names, addresses, email address and phone numbers, and potentially payment information. The second thing it provides is indications of strong topical affinity, which is useful for the construction of Facebook Custom Audiences for further online message targeting.



Facebook & Instagram: repetition and cross-posting of sustained narratives

This is one of many examples of reuse of stories and memes across pages. This was especially common in the IRA-created media mirage surrounding the Black community. This is the story of an American 10-year-old who made the national news for an invention of his (and an accompanying GoFundMe) that aimed to reduce infant hot-car deaths. The Black community-targeted pages and Instagram accounts told the story, each repurposing it and putting a slightly different spin on the content (“these are stories of Black children the media don’t want you to see”, “White people invent tools for killing, this Black child is inventing a tool for saving lives.”) BM created an article about it for their website, and Williams & Calvin made a video to tell the story.

Content ID	Page Name	Share URL	Content Text	# Shares	# Likes	# Reaction	# Comments	Post Date/Time
23003	@afrokingdom_		The kid is only 10 years old, but he is a genius! Let me introduce you Meet Bishop Curry V, outstan	NA	1587		32	2017-02-02 01:03:18 PDT
62735	Williams&Kalvin		"The kid is only 10 years old, but he is a genius! Let me introduce you Meet Bishop Curry V, outstar	165	207	60	14	2017-02-02 07:24:51 PDT
66359	Woke Blacks		"Meet Bishop Curry V from Texas, he's working on a device that could help prevent children from c	223	299	87	13	2017-02-03 02:37:07 PDT
101230	@woke_blacks		Meet Bishop Curry V from Texas, he's working on a device that could help prevent children from d	NA	531		10	2017-02-03 03:02:45 PDT
12810	Black Excellence		"10-year-old Bishop Curry V was saddened by the death of a baby of his neighbors. The child was le	4	6	3	0	2017-02-06 03:06:55 PDT
45031	@blaxcellence_		10-year-old Bishop Curry V was saddened by the death of a baby of his neighbors. The child was left	NA	169		6	2017-02-06 07:49:14 PDT
45217	Nefertiti's Community		"A brilliant 10-year-old black boy is trying to prevent hot car baby deaths with his new invention.	4	1	2	0	2017-02-17 07:24:11 PDT
72156	@nefertiti_community		A brilliant 10-year-old black boy is trying to prevent hot car baby deaths with his new invention. T	NA	347		5	2017-02-17 08:36:17 PDT
62191	Williams&Kalvin		"White people can easily invent tools for killing, but black people can invent something really usef	5	11	1	0	2017-02-22 02:33:53 PDT
18700	Blacktivist		"10-YEAR-OLD BISHOP CURRY RAISED \$20,000 TO HELP DEVELOP HIS DEVICE TO STOP HOT-CAR DEA	65	144	46	0	2017-06-16 04:21:54 PDT
13448	@_blacktivistt_		10-YEAR-OLD BISHOP CURRY RAISED \$20,000 TO HELP DEVELOP HIS DEVICE TO STOP HOT-CAR DEA	NA	146		6	2017-06-17 09:04:39 PDT
43980	@blaxcellence_		Little inventor appeared to be successful! He raised over \$20,000 via GoFundMe page. His patent i	NA	635		8	2017-06-18 11:56:05 PDT
4265	BM	https://blackmattersus.com	"As the hot summer months are rapidly approaching, a 10-year-old from McKinney, Texas, wants t	61	155	24	7	2017-06-18 14:52:33 PDT
11522	@_black_business		The Oasis would respond to rising temperatures by emitting cool air and use an antenna to signal f	NA	1689		21	2017-06-27 01:02:43 PDT

Facebook / Instagram voter fraud allegations

- There were 109 Facebook and Instagram posts devoted to creating and amplifying fears of voter fraud, all but one of which targeted Right-leaning audiences. 71 of these were created in the month leading up to election day and made claims that certain states were helping Sec. Clinton win, that militia groups were going to polling places to stop fraud (they called for participants), that civil war was preferable to an unfair election or the election of Sec. Clinton, that “illegals” were overrepresented in voter rolls in Texas and elsewhere, or were voting multiple times with Democratic Party assistance. The page Being Patriotic created an 800-number hotline for tips about voter fraud, which prominent accounts such as @March_for_Trump promoted on Twitter as well. The priority they gave to this narrative suggests they may not have expected then-candidate Trump to win; either way, the narrative would ensure acrimony and suspicion.
- Following Election Day, the right-targeted voter fraud narrative changed to posts suggesting that President Trump would have won the popular vote, too, were it not for voter fraud. And, as stories broke, the accounts began to actively mock the idea that Russians had interfered in the U.S. election.
- There was one post alluding to voter fraud targeting a left-wing audience on the page @cop_block_us; it conveyed that a person who had evidence that the Democratic primary had been rigged in Hillary’s favor had been found dead.

Platform Activity: Tumblr

The Tumblr data set was not provided to the SSCI. It was mentioned in the Mueller indictment and so we will briefly summarize it here.

In March 2018, Tumblr announced that it had identified 84 accounts linked to the Internet Research Agency, which it provided to law enforcement and shut down. The list of those accounts indicate cross-pollination with a number of Instagram and Facebook Pages and Twitter personas.

Tumblr was used to disseminate memes and reblog existing content – particularly those found on Instagram – as well as links to contests such as the Pokemon Go “police brutality” campaign that dontshootus is pictured promoting here.

There were [extensive efforts](#) to target Black communities on Tumblr, particularly youth and urban communities.



Platform Activity: Reddit

The Reddit data set was not provided to the SSCI. In the interest of providing a more complete picture of IRA operations, we summarize it here.

In April 2018, Reddit released its 2017 annual transparency report [with a special post](#) noting that it had uncovered 944 accounts linked to the Internet Research Agency. It provided the data to law enforcement and shut the accounts down, but was unique among companies in that it allowed them to remain visible.

The list of those accounts indicates cross-pollination with a number of Instagram and Facebook Pages and Twitter personas. Karma ranged from -16 for BlackToLive (which had an Instagram account) to 99493 for Rubinjer (active in r/TheDonald, r/HillaryforPrison, and r/blackpeoplegifs).

Reddit was used to disseminate memes as well as links to the IRA's own sites. The accounts made 14,000 posts, focusing on meme groups and political humor as well as racism and police issues. The top 10 subreddits by post, as reported by Reddit, are to the right.

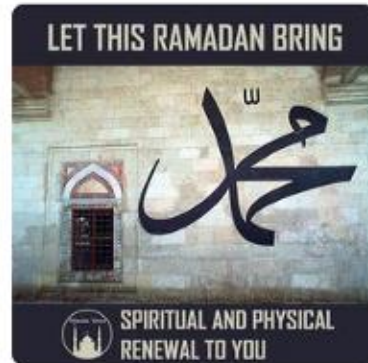
- funny: 1455
- uncen: 1443
- Bad_Cop_No_Donut: 800
- gifs: 553
- PoliticalHumor: 545
- The_Donald: 316
- news: 306
- aww: 290
- POLITIC: 232
- racism: 214

Platform Activity: Pinterest

Pinterest never provided a data set to researchers or the SSCI. In the interest of providing a more complete picture of IRA operations, we chose to briefly summarize activities on Pinterest.



Speaking of the government hypocrisy - Nobel Peace...



O Allah, on this day, show me the way to win Your



And We will surely test you with something of fear and...



You are not your success or failures. Don't let them to make...

Pinterest appears to have served largely as a repository of content, perhaps for purposes of search engine optimization (SEO). Meme boards were created by IRA-linked accounts, including LGBT United, United Muslims, and Heart of Texas, but the content does not appear to have been actively disseminated through these accounts on Pinterest. Although the IRA did not pursue Pinterest audience engagement directly, other users frequently pinned IRA memes to their own boards, creating a public historical record of IRA content.

Media Impersonation & Media Diminishment Strategy



Impersonating Media: **Twitter** Newsbots

There were approximately 109 Twitter accounts masquerading as news organizations, including U.S. local news organizations. The 44 U.S.-related accounts had amassed 660,335 followers between them, with an average of 15,000 followers. Many of these accounts behaved similarly, posting links to articles and local content dozens of times per day. A look at the metadata associated with them reveals that despite their names, they had obviously Russian device information and were tweeting from overseas IPs. Several others (not pictured) used Google Voice accounts.

			IP	User-Defined Geolocation	Carrier	
BaltimoreOnline	online.baltimore@gmail.com	Eastern Time (US & Canada)	125.25.121.120	Thailand	beeline_russia	Breaking news, weather, traffic and more for Baltimore. DM us anytime. RTs i
Atlanta_Online	atlanta.online1@gmail.com	Eastern Time (US & Canada)	108.174.63.166	United States, NY	beeline_russia	Breaking news, weather, traffic and more for Atlanta and Georgia. DM us any
OaklandOnline	online.oakland@gmail.com	Pacific Time (US & Canada)	181.72.249.129	Chile	beeline_russia	Breaking news, weather, traffic and more for Oakland. DM us anytime. RTs nc
OnlineCleveland	cleveland.online1@gmail.com	Central Time (US & Canada)	113.170.100.132	Vietnam	beeline_russia	Breaking news, weather, traffic and more for Cleveland. DM us anytime. RTs
OnlineMemphis	memphis.online1@gmail.com	Central Time (US & Canada)	178.90.86.28	Kazakhstan	beeline_russia	Breaking news, weather, traffic and more for Memphis and Tennessee. DM u
StLouisOnline	online.st.louis@gmail.com	Eastern Time (US & Canada)	125.207.173.241	Japan	beeline_russia	Breaking news, weather, traffic and more for St. Louis. DM us anytime. RTs nc
WashingtOnline	online.washington@gmail.com	Eastern Time (US & Canada)	113.190.174.116	Vietnam	beeline_russia	Breaking news, weather, traffic and more for Washington. DM us anytime. RT

Impersonating Media: Instagram News

Masquerading as American media was not limited to Twitter. A handful of Instagram accounts presented news and images as if they were local press: @my_baton_rouge, @camden_news, @news.philadelphia, and @new_york_live pretended to be regional; others, such as @baltimore.blackvoice, pretended to be coverage for local communities.

Facebook has [stated that they want to surface and prioritize local news](#) because it is more trusted; the IRA appears to agree, as they began delivering “local news” back in 2015. Most of the posts featured snippets of local interest stories, and beautiful shots of the target region.



Impersonating Media: Syria Focus

Of the ~109 news-related accounts, 58 were “Novosti” accounts that tweeted news related to regions in Russia. One of the most popular was NovostiCrimea, which had 107,011 followers. In addition, Russian-language news sites embedded tweets from different IRA-linked Twitter accounts, suggesting the possibility that the IRA propagandizes to their own people as well.

 <https://rs.sputniknews.com/rusija/201706121111535955-Sirija-palmira-vatromet121/>

أرسل صديقنا السوري فيديو لألعاب نارية تم إطلاقها في حقول الغاز قرب [#بتدمر](#) على شرف عيد يوم روسيا 12 يونيو <https://t.co/9RzTms6G4I> [pic.twitter.com/9UlrKyLAte](https://t.co/9RzTms6G4I)

— [@AsdiqaRussiya](#) (أصدقاء روسيا) 12 июня 2017 г.

Данас се на друштвеним мрежама појавио видео ватромета који су Сиријци организовали у част Дана Русије и сведочења о празничном ватромету који је осветлио сиријско небо у подручју гасног поља Палмире објавила је група „Пријатељи Русије“ на Фејсбуку и на Твитеру.

[pic.twitter.com/rDFIH1YURr](https://t.co/rDFIH1YURr) ألعاب نارية أخرى – تحفل سوريا عيد يوم روسيا

— [@AsdiqaRussiya](#) (أصدقاء روسيا) 12 июня 2017 г.

Eroding Support for Mainstream Media

Advocating for the creation of niche media, and attempting to erode trust in existing mainstream media, was a strategy deployed by the IRA across all of the major community groups they targeted (Black, Left-leaning, Right-leaning). Wikileaks was discussed positively in narratives promoted among all three communities as well.



CNN: disparaged on Right-targeted pages



THEY DECEIVE



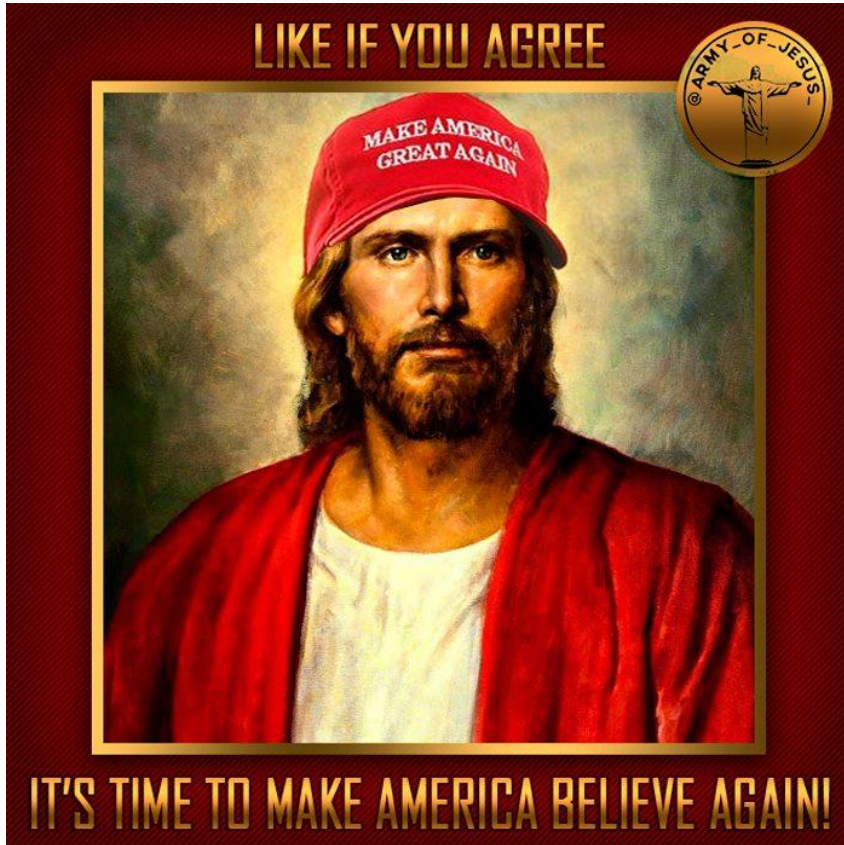
DON'T BELIEVE



Observations

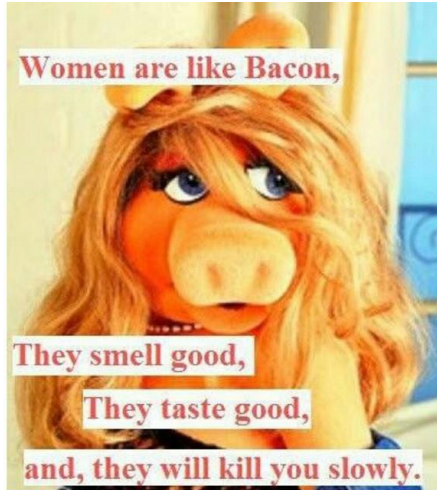


Reinforcing In-Group Identity



Growing Audiences: @army_of_jesus_

First post, Jan 9, 2015: account is a Kermit meme page



My tasty morsel #kermit #kermitthefrog #fun #lol #themuppets #themuppetsshow #follow #followforfollow #followback #instantfollowback #follow4follow #followforfollow #likeforlike #like #usa #american #america #theusa

Aug 27, 2015: page shifts to The Simpsons



Hey guys! I, Homer Simpson, am taking Kermit's page. He was messing with cops too much and finally he got some... punishment, ke-ke! Okay let's have some fun! WOO-HOO! #Simpsons #Homer #HomerSimpson #HomerSays #News #FunnyNews #Politics #USA

Jan 5, 2016: page becomes Jesus-focused



Jesus love for you never expires. #freedom #love #god #bible #trust #blessed #grateful

Creating Confusion: Co-opting Activism

The IRA co-opted existing organization names, or set themselves up as “offshoots” of the main group. United Muslims of America was/is a real group. So are Cop Block, Black Guns Matter, and L for Life. The Cop Block IRA account presented itself as a chapter of the decentralized group.

The IRA’s Black Guns Matter, curiously, appears to have worked with the real activist behind the real organization of the same name. It’s unclear to what extent the activist was aware of the provenance of the Page. He has indicated in public comments on Twitter that he thinks the Russian election interference story is a distraction but does not appear to have discussed their co-opting of his brand.

Cop Block



copblock.org

Cop Block is a decentralized police accountability project formerly working to make police accountable for their actions. [Wikipedia](#)

Founded: January 1, 2010

Motto: Because Cops Aren't Your Friends

Purpose: Promote [law enforcement](#) accountability and abolishment, expose alleged [police misconduct](#)

Founders: [Pete Eyre](#), [Adam Mueller](#), [Jason Talley](#)

Key people: [Pete Eyre](#), [Adam Mueller](#)

Direct Outreach: Asset Development

The IRA frequently engaged in direct outreach and recruitment of American citizens. These touches included attempts to drive people to the streets for events, attempts to get people to perform jobs, and more insidious attempts to connect with people around very personal challenges.

- Requests for contact with preachers from Black churches (Black_Baptist_Church)
- Offers of free counseling to people with sexual addiction (Army of Jesus)
- Soliciting volunteers to hand out fliers
- Soliciting volunteers to teach self-defense classes
- Offering free self defense classes (Black Fist/Fit Black)
- Requests for people to attend political rallies (myriad of pages on the left as well as the right)
- Requests for photographers to document protests
- Requests for speakers at protests
- Requests to protest the Westborough Baptist Church (LGBT United)
- Job offers for designers to help design fliers, sites, Facebook sticker packs
- Requested followers send photos for a calendar
- Requested followers send photos to be shared to the site (Back the Badge)
- Solicited videos for a YouTube contest
- Encouraged people to apply to be part of a Black reality TV show
- Posted a wide variety of job ads (write for BlackMattersUS and others)
- Requests to connect with lawyers to help with immigration cases

Direct Outreach: Asset Development

The sin of masturbation has infiltrated millions of homes all across our country, turning us away from God and torturing our youth. The enormous harm this wrongful activity is doing to our society is hard to overestimate. More and more people are getting dragged into the vicious circle of habitual sinning, which is constantly destroying the sacred bond with God. Captivates get deeply isolated both psychologically and socially. Masturbation pumps faith out of our community and replaces it with dirt and vicious lust. Such an evil substitution provokes further sinning and drives the entire families off the Godly path of love and redemption. Masturbation does lead to emotional depravation and damages health causing mental problems. If you care about yourself and your family, you have to cease sinning! But not only for the sake of your earthly well-being but for the future life. Remember God calls masturbation a sin many times directly (Matthew 5:28, Leviticus 15:16-17, 1 Corinthians 10:13 etc). If you are an addict, you must stop! You must flee from lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace! You can turn to God today and we want to help you in doing that. We are now starting a support line for everyone who is struggling with masturbation-related problems. Each case is individual, tell us your story and show you are determined to leave this ungodly activity behind. Admit you have a problem. Our therapy has helped many Christians who gave up this miserable activity and managed to turn to Jesus again. You will not be the exception! PM us and share your pain so that we can help you make the first step on the way of God's guidance and Christian love. Don't lose heart and we will break the bonds of evil together!

Posted 3x by Army of Jesus on Facebook, and 3x on Instagram, with different memes, in March and April of 2017. Received 5436 Likes and 284 comments.



**"STRUGGLING WITH
THE ADDICTION TO
MASTURBATION?
REACH OUT TO
ME AND WE WILL
BEAT IT TOGETHER."
-JESUS**

**YOU CAN'T HOLD HANDS
WITH GOD WHEN YOU
ARE MASTURBATING.**

USE OUR HOTLINE IF YOU NEED HELP

Direct Outreach: Asset Development

5567 BM Don't trust the mainstream media! We are working on the first in history independent black reality show. This is your chance to take an active part and portray the naked truth about life in your community. All that is required of you is to send us a video, depicting the problems facing our people. If you face oppression in your daily lives, film it. If you are still an object of racist jokes at your school, film it. If you are not appreciated for your natural melanin appearance, film it. If you face harassment and fall a victim of unlawful police behavior, film it. If your colleagues at work are so backward and keep offending you because of your skin color, film it. If you are a single parent and are facing various life challenges, film it to raise awareness. If racism is a reality for you and isn't just a chitchat, this is the show that you've been dreaming about. This reality show is going to be created for you and by you! Let's break these social barriers and show what is really happening. Send your hot entries for our maiden edition of BLACK INSIDER series to admin@blackmattersus.com 2016-11-17 06:13:42 PDT



DON'T TRUST THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA?

BM

**LET'S SHOW WHAT
IS REALLY HAPPENING**

**THE «BLACK INSIDER» REALITY SHOW
IS GOING TO BE CREATED FOR YOU AND BY YOU!**

**MAIL OR DM US IF YOU'RE
INTERESTED IN ATENDING!**

Direct Outreach: Always Be Recruiting



BM

DO YOU WANT TO BE A CALENDAR GIRL?

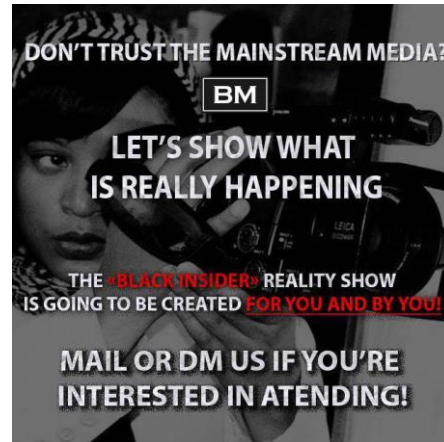
- SEND US YOUR PICTURE
- USE HASHTAG #BMcalendar



BM IS LOOKING FOR DESIGNERS



BM
BLACK MATTERS



BM

DON'T TRUST THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA?

LET'S SHOW WHAT IS REALLY HAPPENING

THE «BLACK INSIDER» REALITY SHOW IS GOING TO BE CREATED **FOR YOU AND BY YOU!**

MAIL OR DM US IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN ATENDING!

DEAR BROTHERS AND SISTERS,

IF YOU ARE **CREATIVE** AND **TALENTED**,
IF YOU DO CARE ABOUT OUR BLACK LIVES,
IF YOU CAN SING, WRITE, DRAW WELL,
IF YOU FEEL FREE IN FRONT OF THE CAM,
WE OFFER YOU TO BECOME ONE OF OUR
@BlackMattersUS REPRESENTATIVES!
ALSO WE ARE ALWAYS GLAD TO SHARE
YOUR TALENTS AND PROMOTE YOUR
ACTIVITY ON OUR INSTAGRAM PAGE AND
WEB **BLACKMATTERSUS.COM**
COMMENT BELOW OR DM
IF YOU ARE INTERESTED!

BM

blackmattersus.com

BM IS LOOKING FOR TWO **ENTHUSIASTS/VOLUNTEERS**
TO HELP US TO SHARE
OUR **MISSION** WITH
THE WORLD!



IT'S GONNA BE FUN 😊



BM

IS LOOKING FOR **VOLUNTEER**
LAWYERS & LEGAL
AID ADVOCATES
FOR PEOPLE
WHO CAN'T
AFFORD LAWYERS



YOUR VOICES MATTER

BM IS LOOKING
FOR THE AUTHORS!



BM

IS LOOKING FOR
CREATIVE PEOPLE
TO BECOME A
PART OF THE
MOVEMENT

DM US FOR MORE INFO

Direct Outreach: Asset Development

33344 LGBT United Hi there! We are looking for volunteers from New York to help us to organize the events in order to bring awareness to the topics such as bigotry, spreading hate and ignorance, the infringement of our rights and freedoms... If you care about the future of LGBT community, we are waiting for you! The future of our community is in your hands?? PM us please! 2016-11-10 07:39:07 PDT



Leveraging Whitehouse.gov Petitions

Internet Research Agency accounts either created or promoted White House petitions. This is a tactic increasingly leveraged by troll campaigns more generally. The malign actors create petitions on Change.org and other activism platforms. Social network algorithms can be gamed to help the petitions go viral. Once the petitions gather real signatures from aligned individuals, the petition hosts are reluctant to take them down even if they were started under inauthentic premises. Most petition platforms are not attuned to the threat.

<https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/petition/disavow-support-clinton-political-dynasty-disqualify-and-remove-hillary-clinton-2016-presidential-ballot>

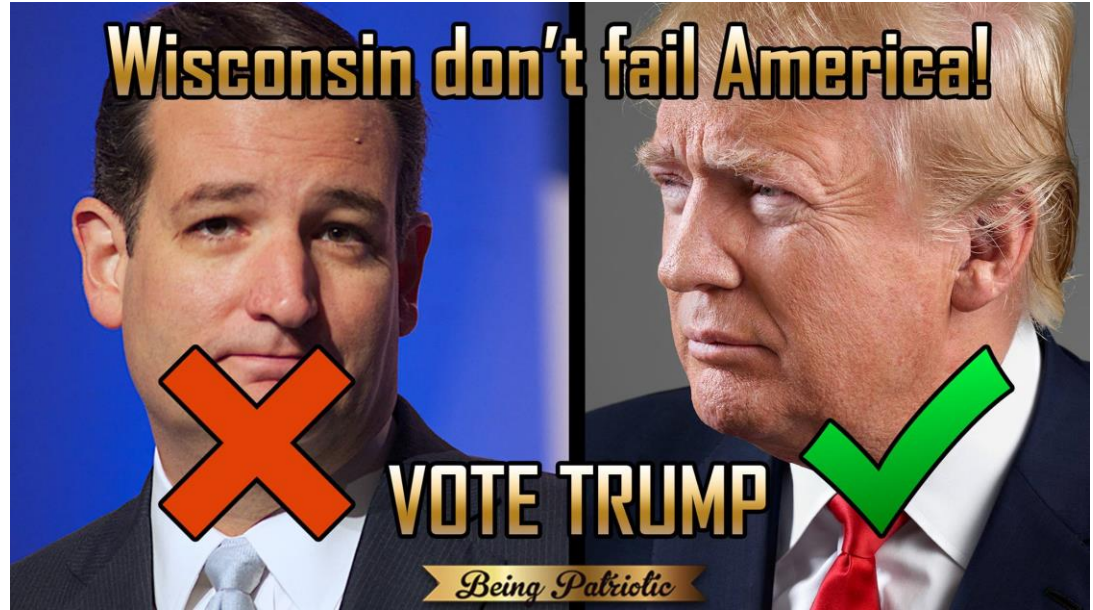
<https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/petition/no-guns-criminals>

<https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/petition/investigate-death-india-cummings-and-change-federal-laws-allowing-pds-conduct-internal-inquiries>

<https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/petition/repeal-nfa>

<https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/petition/repeal-all-unconstitutional-gun-laws-state-new-jersey-laws-banning-mag-capacity-stocks-barrel-length-etc>

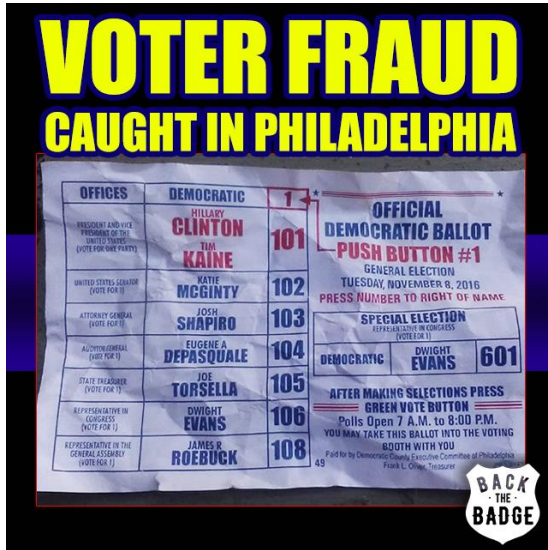
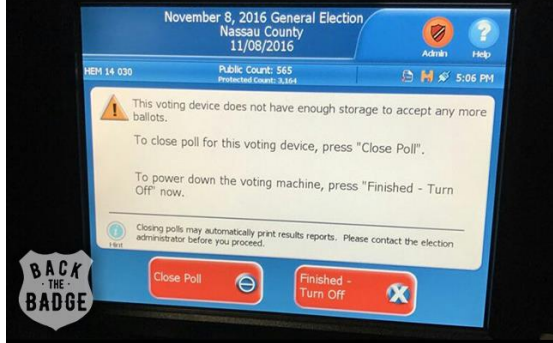
Attempting to influence Republican Primary: Anti-Cruz, Anti-Rubio



Alleging voter fraud

The narrative that the election would be stolen was disseminated via Right-targeted accounts on Facebook and Instagram, and was promoted on Twitter via several personas including the prominent @TEN_GOP account.

WHAT DO U CALL THIS AT 5PM?



Latest #voterfraud cases so far: 1) More Extensive Broward County Voter Fraud Reported By Elections Worker <http://joeforamerica.com/2016/11/broward-voter-fraud-reported/> 2) Van Full Of Illegals Shows Up To Vote Clinton At SIX Polling Places <http://thunderviral.com/van-full-illegals-shows-vote-clinton-six-polling-places-still-think-voter-fraud-myth/> 3) BREAKING : Elections Systems Down Across Colorado] <http://truthfeed.com/breaking-elections-systems-down-across-colorado/34659/> 4) Louisiana Voting Machine Logged Votes Before Poll Opened <http://www.breitbart.com/texas/2016/11/08/louisiana-voting-machine-logged-votes-poll-opened/> 5) Voting machine problems reported across metro Detroit 6) Election systems temporarily go down in Colorado, delaying voters <http://www.thedenverchannel.com/news/local-news/election-systems-temporarily-go-down-in-colorado-delaying-voters> STAY TUNED! #conservative #liberal #stupidliberals#secondamendment #trump #donald#donaldtrump #hillno #feelthebern#Bernie #killary #hillary #hillaryclinton#murica #merica #american #military#guns #patriot #politics #gop#liberallogic #republican #democrat#nobama #obama #makeamericagreatagain #USA

Targeting McCain

Several IRA posts actively targeted John McCain and other “establishment” Republicans (especially those who supported the investigation into Russian interference.)



**JOHN MCCAIN'S ATTACK
AGAINST TRUMP DEFINITELY
CROSSED THE LINE, HE IS OUT
OF HIS MIND**

Promoting conspiracies

The IRA pushed a few political-intrigue conspiracies on Facebook and Instagram, about Hillary Clinton's health and the DNC hacks. They made some interesting audience choices; the story that Seth Rich was behind the DNC hack was primarily a right-wing conspiracy, but the IRA promoted it on @bornliberal in August 2016. It appeared alongside text claiming that Julian Assange had suggested that Rich was his source, and made an appeal for readers to turn to Jill Stein. Posts about Wikileaks appeared in Left, Right, and Black-community targeted content in conjunction with the email dumps.



Leveraging Anonymous

The IRA co-branded official Anonymous memes with its own accounts, and eventually made their own Anonymous-inspired Instagram account, @_anonymous_news_, in July 2017. We believe they may have replicated this strategy of leveraging the Anonymous hacktivist brand and iconography to create politically-oriented Facebook pages in other countries and languages as well.



Impeachment narratives

Left-wing pages reiterated distaste for Trump but cautioned their audiences against advocating for impeachment using the justification that Vice President Mike Pence is worse.

Mike Pence Sucks



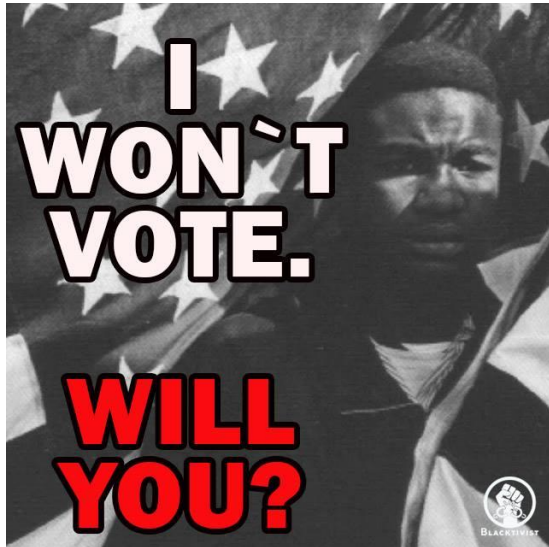
- Signed Law Legalizing Discrimination Against Gays / LGBT
- Against Same Sex Marriage
- Anti-Women's Rights / Anti-Choice
- Has a Long History Attacking Social Security & Medicare
- Against Raising the Minimum Wage
- Supports the Trans-Pacific Partnership
- Passed Anti-Union Laws
- An Ignorant Climate Change Denier

33342 LGBT United 2 steps forward, 100 steps back. Reminder: Mike Pence Is the Worst Candidate for LGBTQ Equality Perhaps the most disturbing result of this 'Trump Effect' is that Mike Pence, his Vice Presidential candidate, has, for too many years, slid under the radar of mainstream controversy. In fact, it is fair to suggest that the spectacle of Trump has made it possible for Mike Pence to appear like the calm and reasonable one. His performance in the Vice Presidential debate was undoubtedly bolstered in comparison to the many debates by Trump, because at the bare minimum, Pence knows how to string a sentence together. In many ways, Pence is more dangerous than Trump in that he's not just talking about oppressive legislation, he's actually fought for and enacted it himself. He's the action to Trump's words, but a lot of media is so distracted with Trump that we haven't gotten the same, much-needed level of criticism of his running mate, who would be one person away from the presidency. Pence's track record and stances are disturbing. He is, by far, the worst type of candidate for LGBTQ equality and will undoubtedly try to set the country's clock back by a couple of decades. Here are just a few of the receipts, in case there are people still questioning the legitimacy of the Trump/Pence threat against queer people. In case anyone forgot, Mike Pence in the White House would mean disaster for queer people!! I heavily disagree with his policies regarding church and state and his lgbtq policy. I see alot of leftist calling for impeachment or assassination on trump but truely Trump is worlds better than Pence when talking about equal rights for all... 2016-11-10 14:45:28 PDT



Suppression narratives

The Black community-targeted accounts periodically attempted to redirect their followers to vote for Jill Stein, and spent part of November 2016 discussing the need for the Black community to boycott the election in memes and on video. On Twitter, there were more overt suppression attempts such as posting incorrect procedural information related to voting.



A variety of anti-Hillary Clinton narratives on Black-targeted pages



BM



Amplifying secessionist movements

The IRA amplified secessionist movement content, both in the UK and in the US. Textit and Calexit content appeared frequently. The IRA also amplified militia content on the Right, then created content for Black audiences pointing out the ways that different races were treated by the police who responded to armed protesters.



AMERICAN "JUSTICE"
AT ITS BEST

BUNDY GANG
40 DAYS IN A PARK
WITH REAL GUNS
THREATENING THE
GOVERNMENT AND
COPS
ALIVE

TAMIR RICE
PLAYED WITH
HIS TOY GUN
IN A PARK
DEAD

BLACKTIVIST

Post-election transition: “Abolish Electoral College”

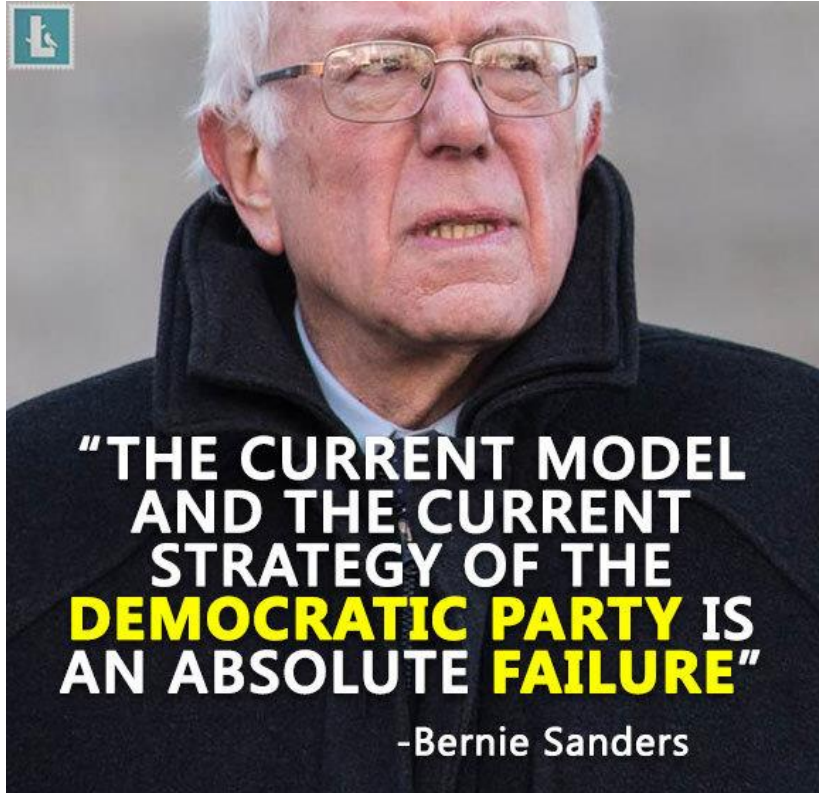
The IRA operation adapted quickly to President Donald Trump’s win. They immediately produced a collection of posts and tweets targeting left-leaning groups, advocating for the elimination of the electoral college; many called for in-the-streets action and marches.



Incitement: Antifa and the Alt-Right



Amplifying Intra-Party Divisions



Dissemination of Syria narratives

Black, Left, and Right-oriented pages were all targeted with IRA propaganda that aligned Russian state talking points about Syria to topics the targeted communities cared about.

USA: we are holding Syria responsible for poisoning and killing their own people!

Flint, Michigan:



LIKE IF YOU AGREE

Does anyone believe that on the eve of **peace talks**, just after the White House said the Syrian people should **choose** their own leaders, that Assad would launch a gas attack to **turn the whole world** against him?

We're back to the **same lies** that got us into Iraq. Do we never learn to question the propaganda?

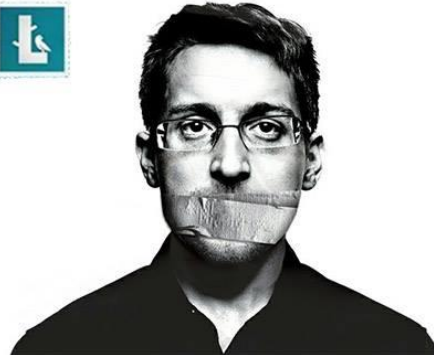
Ron Paul

Born Liberal and @feminism_tag

The generic Left-leaning pages have gotten much less attention in the analyses of IRA content, perhaps because less of the content has been made public. Themes included anti-corporatism and suspicion of government.



"IF I AM A TRAITOR, WHO DID I BETRAY?"



"I gave all my information to the American public, to American journalists who are reporting on American issues. If they see that as treason, they need to consider who they think they're working for. The public is supposed to be their boss, not their enemy."

supposed to be their boss, not their enemy.



Born Liberal and @feminism_tag

The posts were occasionally somewhat incongruous compared to the type of content traditionally seen on liberal political pages; the Left-leaning data set included Turning Point USA memes.

RON PAUL EXPLAINS WHY ALL DRUGS SHOULD BE LEGAL



Ron Paul

3 hrs · 🌐

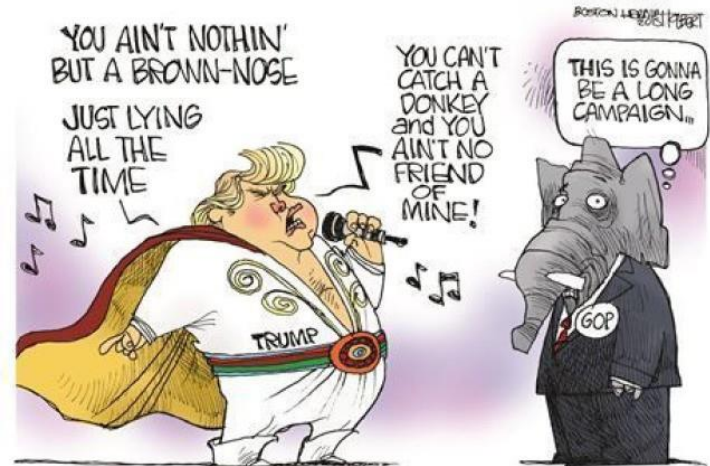
Ending the war on drugs would drastically reduce violence in America. Drug addicts and drug users would no longer have to commit thefts and robberies to pay for the artificially high price of illegal drugs. Legalizing drugs would cause prices to plummet (much like liquor, wine, and beer). Today, people rarely commit muggings and robberies to get the money for a bottle of wine or beer. Furthermore, drug gangs and drug cartels would go out of business. How many addicts would use a violent black-market dealer when they could get their drugs from a reputable pharmacy or pharmaceutical company? How many people are buying bottles of wine or beer in a dangerous back alley these days? ... It's unnecessary!



Instagram: rare anti-Trump diatribes targeting right-leaning pro-Trump pages

Very rare criticism of then-candidate Trump appeared simultaneously on several Right-leaning Instagram accounts in August 2015, after he criticized Edward Snowden.

4437 _americafirst_ 4437 Hey, I just don't understand do we have really normal candidate for the presidential run??? Hmm... Presidential frontrunner Donald Trump called for the execution of Edward Snowden during a 2013 appearance on "Fox & Friends," labeling the whistleblower a "traitor" for disclosing the National Security Agency's illegal activities. "You know, spies in the old days used to be executed," Trump said. Actually I can't call the person adequate after this speech. I think it's time for him to go and check his mental health. It seems like if he becomes the president he'll cover with blood the whole country! Welcome the #MadDonald #cartoonagency #cartoon #caricature #politicalcartoons #politics #caricaturella #meme #america #usa #murica #interesting 116 2 | 2015-08-11 06:05:25 PDT



Instagram: rare anti-Trump diatribes in response to criticism of Edward Snowden

92371 stop_refugees 92371 Presidential frontrunner Donald Trump called for the execution of Edward Snowden during a 2013 appearance on “Fox & Friends,” labeling the whistleblower a “traitor” for disclosing the National Security Agency’s illegal activities. “You know, spies in the old days used to be executed,” Trump said. Since Snowden first revealed the NSA’s widespread surveillance practices more than two years ago, the hotel tycoon has repeatedly called for both the death and imprisonment of the former intelligence contractor. The conclusion is: Donald Trump is a latent dictator. Taking into account what he allows himself to speak in public even without holding the most important state office, it is easy to imagine what would happen if he came to power. It would be the most tyrannical presidency in whole the history of USA. This is a specific psychological type of business-tyrant for whom it is absolutely normal to insult women, swear at representatives of different nations, and scoff at people. The appeal to execute Snowden who revealed one of the most outrageous crimes of the government characterizes Trump as the one tending to state crimes. Do you remember how he raped his ex-wife? If no, then read this article:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3176878/Ivana-claimed-Donald-Trump-violated-violent-sex-attack-amid-argument-bald-patch-treatments.html>. If Trump becomes President, then America might replace his ex-wife. #usdaily #news #hotnews #usa #america #murica #today #political #issues #americaproud #urgent #hot #interesting #Trump #Hitler 85 10 2015-08-11 10:04:47 PDT



Facebook as Censor

Secured Borders had posts moderated by Facebook in March 2017; they didn't take it well. They do appear to have gotten their Page back.



Secured Borders 47479 "...And that's how the tyranny begins... ??????????????????" 2017-03-26 16:05:58 PDT



Secured Borders

47466

"We'd like to apologize for the delays in posting and updating. It seems that commie fascists of Facebook's community standards department are waging a real jihad against us infidels. They just can't stand free speech and politically incorrect truth. Recently the bastards temporary banned nearly all of our moderators and admins, also forced us to delete some 'controversial' entries. We were paralyzed and worried about the future of Secured Borders. But we're here again! Hopefully with no interruptions, at least for some time. Thank you for your patience and support, our dear friends!" 2017-03-26 09:17:45 PDT

Same date, same article, two perspectives

68361 muslim_voice 68361 A Breitbart News review of State Department and Homeland Security data reveals that the United States already admits more than a quarter of a million Muslim migrants each year. President Obama intends to add another 10,000 Syrian migrants on top of that. Just look at those innocent people! They did nothing bad and there is no reason to harm them, they just want to survive, to live in peace and calmness because they are not terrorists. Not all Muslims are terrorists?? #muslim_voice #muslimpride #middleeast #east #muslimamerican #Islam #submission 207 3 2015-09-15 09:51:25 PDT



2480 _americafirst_ 2480 A Breitbart News review of State Department and Homeland Security data reveals that the United States already admits more than a quarter of a million Muslim migrants each year. President Obama intends to add another 10,000 Syrian migrants on top of that. Seems like supporting 250k muslim refugees on US taxpayers' expense is not enough, let's now have some more! Notably Syrians. Who are aware about who's had a hand in their civil war (i.e. America). Isn't this a terrorism threat? As history has shown, even a small group of radical islamists is enough to make a lot of noise in America. Look at Europe: they are closing now their borders to put an end to the uncontrolled inflow of refugees (whereof there are ex-IS guerillas). By the way, to accept 1 Syrian refugee costs \$ 15,714. Guess who covers this expenditure (hint: not Obama). #cartoonagency#politics#caricature#cartoon#cartoonist#art#artworks#artstagram#conservative#no bama#nohillary#drawing#comics#pixart#republican 124 9 2015-09-15 10:01:55 PDT

They made mistakes

These screenshotted tweets were posted to Facebook



Apparently, I already voted today when I went to vote. What?! #voterfraud #TrumpPence16

РЕТВИТОВ 5

9:08 - 8 нояб. 2016 г.

5



LadyVeteran23 @LadyVeteran23 ❤️ · 35 мин
@cfmahnken call 844-332-2016 and report it to Trump's team, also submit report on this here #maga
donaldjtrump.com/landing/electi...

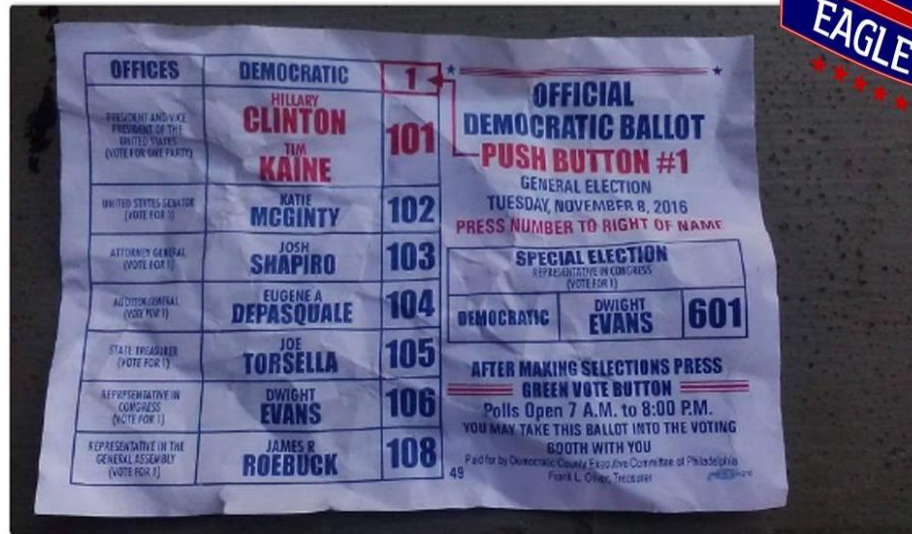
**NO VOTER FRAUD SHOULD BE IGNORED !
WRITE US ABOUT ALL SIMILAR CASES
VIA COMMENTS AND DM!**



Читать

BREAKING: reports of #VoterFraud in Philly.. "Instructional ballot" being handed out inside polling stations !!

#voted #ElectionDay



РЕТВИТОВ 132

ОТМЕТКИ «НРАВИТСЯ» 82



Facebook / Instagram: mocking the idea of Russian interference

Following Election 2016, there were approximately 70 posts on Facebook and Instagram mocking the idea of Russian interference, all targeting right-wing audiences. The Page and Instagram accounts “The Red Pill” focused on this narrative, and drew content from another IRA Page, “Clinton FRAUDation” that posted about it.

Posts about Russia also aimed to discredit the U.S. media channels that had begun to cover the story.

93228	the.red.pill	93228	Everything is Russians' fault! #Killary#Clintonfraudation#fraud#elections2016#Clinton#Clintonforprison#HillNo#HillaryClinton#Hitlary#presid	2016-11-29 08:20:36 PDT
93053	the.red.pill	93053	Oh these nasty Russians #Killary#Clintonfraudation#fraud#elections2016#Clinton#Clintonforprison#HillNo#HillaryClinton#Hitlary#presid	2016-12-12 11:46:11 PDT
93075	the.red.pill	93075	BREAKING: According to CNN aliens kidnapped Democratic voters in key states to make Donald Trump win the election! A huge relief for Russia	2017-01-12 07:31:16 PDT
93094	the.red.pill	93094	The Russians did it #Killary#Clintonfraudation#fraud#elections2016#Clinton#Clintonforprison#HillNo#HillaryClinton#Hitlary#presid	2017-01-16 07:31:24 PDT
93577	the.red.pill	93577	Don't forget to blame Russia when you run out of arguments. Our education system is totally occupied by perverted liberal crybabies who teac	2017-02-07 09:31:05 PDT
55686	The Red Pill	55686	"I just hate when Russian do this..."	0 2017-02-22 06:22:17 PDT
93289	the.red.pill	93289	I just hate when Russian do this... #Killary#Clintonfraudation#fraud#elections2016#Clinton#Clintonforprison#HillNo#HillaryClinton#Hitlary#presid	2017-02-26 07:30:27 PDT
93313	the.red.pill	93313	Oh nasty Russians #liberal#Killary#Clintonfraudation#fraud#elections2016#Clinton#Clintonforprison#HillNo#HillaryClinton#Hitlary#presid	2017-02-28 01:33:24 PDT
55537	The Red Pill	55537	"Oh these nasty Russians"	0 2017-02-28 08:07:35 PDT
93410	the.red.pill	93410	Repost @eddie_loves_elsa Republicans are under a friggin microscope and it's SO HYPOCRITICAL 1. Democrats thought misleading congress v	2017-03-03 01:30:41 PDT
55547	The Red Pill	55547	"Liberal logic: there was no voter fraud but the Russians hacked the election"	0 2017-03-06 07:26:31 PDT
93434	the.red.pill	93434	Liberal logic: there was no voter fraud but the Russians hacked the election #liberal#Killary#Clintonfraudation#fraud#elections2016#Clinton#	2017-03-06 11:31:27 PDT
93382	the.red.pill	93382	Everyone I Don't Like Is a Russian Agent: In desperate attempt to promote his weird conspiracy narrative John McCain made another idiotic stat	2017-03-16 07:32:02 PDT
92550	the.red.pill	92550	The Russians for sure #liberal#Killary#Clintonfraudation#fraud#elections2016#Clinton#Clintonforprison#HillNo#HillaryClinton#Hitlary#presid	2017-03-25 09:30:44 PDT
92651	the.red.pill	92651	Al Jazeera Arabic's Facebook coverage of the terror attack in St. Petersburg, Russia was flooded with positive comments and happy emoticons a	2017-04-04 09:20:01 PDT
92465	the.red.pill	92465	RUSSIANS RUSSIANS RUSSIANS #liberal#Trump#MAGA#PresidentTrump#NotMyPresident#USA#theredpill#nothingleft#conservative#republican#li	2017-05-11 01:15:21 PDT
55581	The Red Pill	55581	"RUSSIANS RUSSIANS RUSSIANS"	0 2017-05-11 08:03:50 PDT
92886	the.red.pill	92886	Lol is it real? These Russians are savage #liberal#Trump#MAGA#PresidentTrump#NotMyPresident#USA#theredpill#nothingleft#conservative#re	2017-05-17 03:20:22 PDT
92900	the.red.pill	92900	Do you remember the Russians kidnapping Democrat voters in order to prevent them voting for Hillary? Me neither. #liberal#Trump#MAGA#Pr	2017-05-22 11:45:30 PDT
92860	the.red.pill	92860	Traitor McCain is in the news again saying Russia (specifically Putin) is the bigger threat than ISIS. You know it's funny cause I'vent heard of Russi	2017-05-30 07:32:44 PDT
92747	the.red.pill	92747	A peaceful transition of power is impossible in a country full of terrorists. It was the mistake made in Libya when the legitimate government wa	2017-06-20 09:26:45 PDT
92701	the.red.pill	92701	Or maybe the Russians... Credits @massachusettsrumpster #liberal#Trump#MAGA#PresidentTrump#NotMyPresident#USA#theredpill#nothin	2017-06-21 01:31:32 PDT
92708	the.red.pill	92708	CNN Senior Producer John Bonifield caught on tape admitting the Trump-Russia story is "bullsh*t" for "ratings." Bonified admits CNN CEO Jeff z	2017-06-27 11:31:01 PDT
93633	the.red.pill	93633	NY Times are so hysterical they can't even remember how the president of Russia looks like. Russia everywhere and everyone is Russian. #liberal	2017-07-12 07:31:45 PDT
93641	the.red.pill	93641	Skittles hacked by Russians #liberal#Trump#MAGA#PresidentTrump#NotMyPresident#USA#theredpill#nothingleft#conservative#republican#li	2017-07-13 11:30:51 PDT
93616	the.red.pill	93616	I think Donald Trump Jr had every right to meet with a Russian lawyer. First of all, she might have got really important information about Hillar	2017-07-14 09:31:04 PDT
93647	the.red.pill	93647	You've lost and don't know what to do? Just blame it on Russian hackers #liberal#Trump#MAGA#PresidentTrump#NotMyPresident#USA#thered	2017-07-21 03:39:03 PDT
93661	the.red.pill	93661	Russia Russia Russia #liberal#Trump#MAGA#PresidentTrump#NotMyPresident#USA#theredpill#nothingleft#conservative#republican#libard#	2017-07-28 05:43:04 PDT
93726	the.red.pill	93726	Also he helped the economy, lowered taxes, reduced the use of welfare and food stamps, he struck fear into the Russians and kept American out	2017-08-16 08:01:01 PDT
93714	the.red.pill	93714	Trump is NO Racist just like he never colluded with Russia. It's all #fakewews bull shit. Check out my friends: @wall_up @Being.patriotic @sta	2017-08-18 12:00:31 PDT

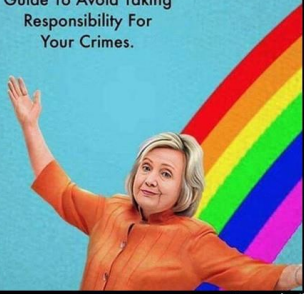
Facebook / Instagram: mocking the idea of Russian interference, and propaganda



Russian trolls on Russian trolls, Russian relations

Everyone I Don't Like
Is A Russian Hacker

The Emotional Child's
Guide To Avoid Taking
Responsibility For
Your Crimes.



@_americafirst

**HILARIOUS MOSCOW
AIRPORT SIGNS**



Child: Mommy there are monsters
under my bed
Mom: It's probably just the Russians



IT'S NOT MY FAULT OFFICER



**THE RUSSIANS HACKED
MY SPEEDOMETER**

**BOOM=> New NSA
Expert's Report Says
There Was "No
Russian Hack" of DNC
Computers - It Was a
"Leak"**



Jim Hoft Aug 10th, 2017 2:37 pm — Leave a
Comment

**THE RUSSIAN HACKER STARTER
PACK**



**TRUMP AND PUTIN AGREE TO IMPROVE
'UNSATISFACTORY' US-RUSSIA TIES**



COMMON SENSE WINS

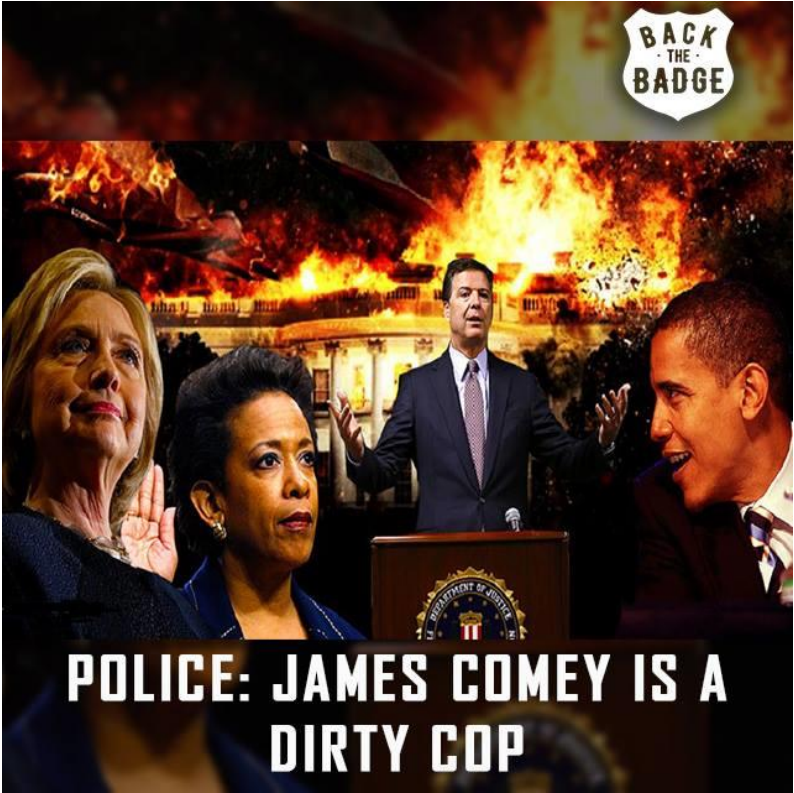


Discrediting the Russia investigation

Posts designed to erode support for the Russia investigation, and some with the goal of discrediting Mueller himself, appeared on both Facebook and Instagram right-wing-targeted accounts in mid-2017.



Targeting Comey



To Summarize: Active Measures

The goals of active measures are to undermine citizens' trust in government, exploit societal fractures, create distrust in the information environment, blur the lines between reality and fiction, undermine trust among communities, and erode confidence in the democratic process.

This campaign pursued all of those objectives with skill and precision.

The IRA exploited divisions in our society using vulnerabilities in our information ecosystem.



"We'll know our
disinformation program is
complete when everything
the American public believes
is false."

- William Casey, CIA Director

(from first staff meeting in 1981)



Researcher Concerns & Suggestions



Concerns About Data Provided

We are concerned that what was uncovered and provided to the Senate by the platforms were the accounts that were most obvious; many of these accounts did not appear to go to great lengths to obfuscate their attribution. There are likely more that did, particularly as suspicions of Russian interference increased throughout 2017.

Facebook did not provide any metadata indicating how they arrived at attribution, email addresses associated with accounts (useful for cross-platform account linking and discovery purposes), or IP address data. It also provided no comments. There were many posts that appeared to be duplicates, in which the content was identical but one or two engagement statistics were off by a very small number; this necessitated extensive data cleaning. For some of the Instagram accounts there was no follower count data.

In the Twitter set, the metadata indicates a significant number of the accounts used Russia bee-line phones. Many of the bots are spammy and unsophisticated, perhaps indicating they were purchased from a vendor.

No data provenance was provided, which is key to rigorous research. To draw meaningful conclusions about Russian operations, we would like to see more information about the platforms' detection procedures in general, and about how they identified this set of accounts specifically.

Further, key metadata and other data was left out of the content provided. Twitter neglected to provide URL data, including only t.co shortened links, and Facebook provided no account data. In some cases, it seems the platforms did extra work to *remove* crucial metadata that is typically included with the data when accessing via other means such as the APIs. This hints at the possibility of deciding to provide the bare minimum possible to meet the Committee's request.

Unanswered Questions

It is impossible to gauge the full impact that the IRA's influence operations had without further information from the platforms. We believe that the platforms have the capability to provide an assessment of what the targeted communities thought of the IRA content – whether it had an impact – based on the comment sentiment, subsequent actions taken on the platform, how many other cross-linked IRA pages they responded to, etc. The platforms neglected to include the material that would have enabled outside researchers to gauge this.

- We know that many posts – including clear voter suppression attempts – received many hundreds of comments. We don't know what the comments said, or how targeted audiences reacted. We could have a far better understanding of the impact of the organic content if we had anonymized comment data.
- We know that people clicked on ads; we do not know the extent to which they joined Pages or followed Instagram accounts they were shown (conversion data is absent). We know that several of the Pages were promoted via the Recommendation engine, but similarly have no conversion data.
- We don't know how well the IRA's elaborate cross-pollination strategy worked; were members of targeted communities likely to be members of more than one Page in a specific media mirage?
- We know the IRA reached out and solicited private contact; we know a handful of anecdotes have emerged from targeted individuals but the comments data indicates there were possibly many more.
- We can see Share numbers, but do not know the extent to which this content was shared into Groups (or any other share cascade information).
- We know very little about the behavior of the IRA sockpuppet accounts that were active on Facebook.
- We know that the IRA made several very obvious errors – including screenshots of a Russian language Twitter interface on a Facebook post alleging voter suppression, for example. We know they used poor grammar indicative of non-native speakers while pretending to be American citizens. We do not know if American audiences noticed or reacted to these slips.

Unacknowledged Pages & Accounts

There were several accounts that appear to have been IRA-run based on their interactions with attributed accounts. Several strong possibilities appear in this list, based on an observation of their content via regram and other sites. More visibility into the content and post patterns would improve the ability to detect ongoing activity and enable better mapping of the mirages surrounding targeted communities.

- @_yosemite.sam
- @armed.n.ready
- @17thsoulja4
- @american.police
- Soldiers of Black Knowledge
- Black Israelite

Pages that appear to be related to ReportSecret are still live (though dormant, and with tiny audiences) on Facebook. Similarly, Twitter accounts that appear to be related to shuttered Instagram accounts are still live and dormant.

Ecosystem Manipulation Takeaways

- There are visibility blind spots in social ecosystem awareness; platforms remain unaware of threats detected by other platforms so malign activity simply shifts from place to place. Third party monitoring can help.
- Attributable IRA Facebook pages and Twitter accounts continue to exist as a result of these ecosystem monitoring gaps (i.e., Twitter handles associated with IRA websites identified by Google remain live).
- Extensive amounts of IRA content continue to circulate, particularly memes. Users can still share propaganda from known Russian front website content to social platforms; with the exception of Facebook marking links from Blackmattersus.com as spam, it is still possible to share much of what remains (e.g. GI Analytics, Newinform, Donotshoot.us).
- The IRA was committed to bringing the campaign offline to American streets. There were 81 real-world Facebook Events promoted.
- Careless or unscrupulous U.S. media properties lift tweets and cite them as authoritative, generating legitimacy and media lift; this was seen with accounts such as @wokelouisa and others in the Twitter data set.
- Propagandist and state-owned media properties such as Sputnik leverage this embedded-tweet strategy as well, possibly deliberately – the recently-active Facebook Page AsdiqaRussiya was discovered by way of tweets embedded in Russian-language Sputnik articles.
- Very little – perhaps none – of this content would have come down as a result of existing content policy violations. It is critical to understand dissemination patterns, dubious domains, and dynamics around fake accounts to detect these operations.

In Closing

Foreign manipulation of American elections on social platforms will continue to be an ongoing, chronic problem. As platforms evolve and make features more impenetrable, the adversaries will adapt and manipulate the ecosystem in new ways. This is information warfare, not an issue of fake narratives or false messaging.

New Knowledge is continuing to investigate Russian propaganda and other foreign influence attacks that attempt to undercut public discourse and democracy; we monitored and reported out the evolution of tactics in 2018.

We expect to see manipulation attempts in the 2020 election, including laundering narratives through Americans, and focusing on smaller/secondary platforms and peer-to-peer messaging services.

We hope that additional sections of this data set (beyond the ads) will be made available to the public for further research, and that platforms will release more data that can speak to the impact and uptake among targeted communities.



Appendix: Charts, Figures, Engagement Data



Top 20 Facebook Posts by Engagement

1	Date	Page Name	Content Text	# Likes	# Comments	# Reactions	# Shares	Engagement
2	2017-03-09	South United	""	27288	1584	1373	955958	986203
3	2016-09-08	Being Patriotic	settle them among us. We have to take care of our own citizens, and it must be the primary goal for our politicians!"	73158	6621	3624	640347	723750
4	2016-11-23	Blacktivist	MURDER EVEN WHEN IT'S CAUGHT ON CAMERA JUST BECAUSE THEY WEAR A 'MAGICAL' BADGE AND GUN.	19552	36493	21830	538970	616845
5	2017-01-23	Stop A.I.	Sharia, but Obama never intended to enforce it or even let you know about it at all. Instead he started to import	162850	93231	11014	312632	579727
6	2016-12-12	Blacktivist	"This video will make you cry. Husband surprises her wife. This is how black man appreciates and loves his wife."	250625	24615	67538	195342	538120
7	2016-10-04	BM	the windshield so hard, causing the glass to shatter."	11480	17658	13151	238660	280949
8	2016-10-26	Blacktivist	"Africa is in your bloodline."	37197	7930	6486	223412	275025
9	2017-03-09	Blacktivist	"Listen to these young Kings."	107992	5408	16969	130767	261136
10	2017-01-18	Stop A.I.	"It should be obvious to every sane man! Sharia has no place in any civilized society!"	14970	2068	1293	235320	253651
11	2016-12-22	Blacktivist	"Never trade you brotherhood for this world."	73648	10966	19132	92991	196737
12	2016-08-23	Stop A.I.	country, we will remain one nation under God!"	15683	4754	891	152918	174246
13	2017-01-17	Blacktivist	"repost @africanstyle diary"	52860	5632	28065	83264	169821
14	2016-06-12	United Muslims of America	"New York city Muslim Harassment Social Experiment !!! watch and subscribe on youtube: https://goo.gl/lZbsUd "	44215	10317	20142	94001	168675
15	2016-12-14	Heart of Texas	be banned on Texas soil!"	16640	5228	952	127619	150439
16	2016-04-22	Heart of Texas	"One of my favorite shows still. Too bad it would never get on the air today since political correctness won't allow it!!"	25870	2704	1053	119333	148960
17	2017-06-13	Blacktivist	"repost @thebassman102"	49654	15440	28543	54874	148511
18	2016-05-19	Heart of Texas	Texas has voted to rename seven schools previously named for Confederate leaders. The Houston school district board	38500	8753	1832	92881	141966
19	2017-06-22	Blacktivist	"When you are black, intelligent and proud!"	59307	3752	27672	49234	139965
20	2017-01-20	Stop A.I.	economic life virtually impossible. It's symbol of slavery and degradation and also a perfect disguise for terrorists. For	22904	3944	1474	109621	137943
21	2016-02-05	United Muslims of America	"I think God has ordered all mankind with modesty, so what is your problem with the Islamic veil (Hijab) ????"	56862	4158	158	74913	136091

Top 20 Facebook Posts by Likes

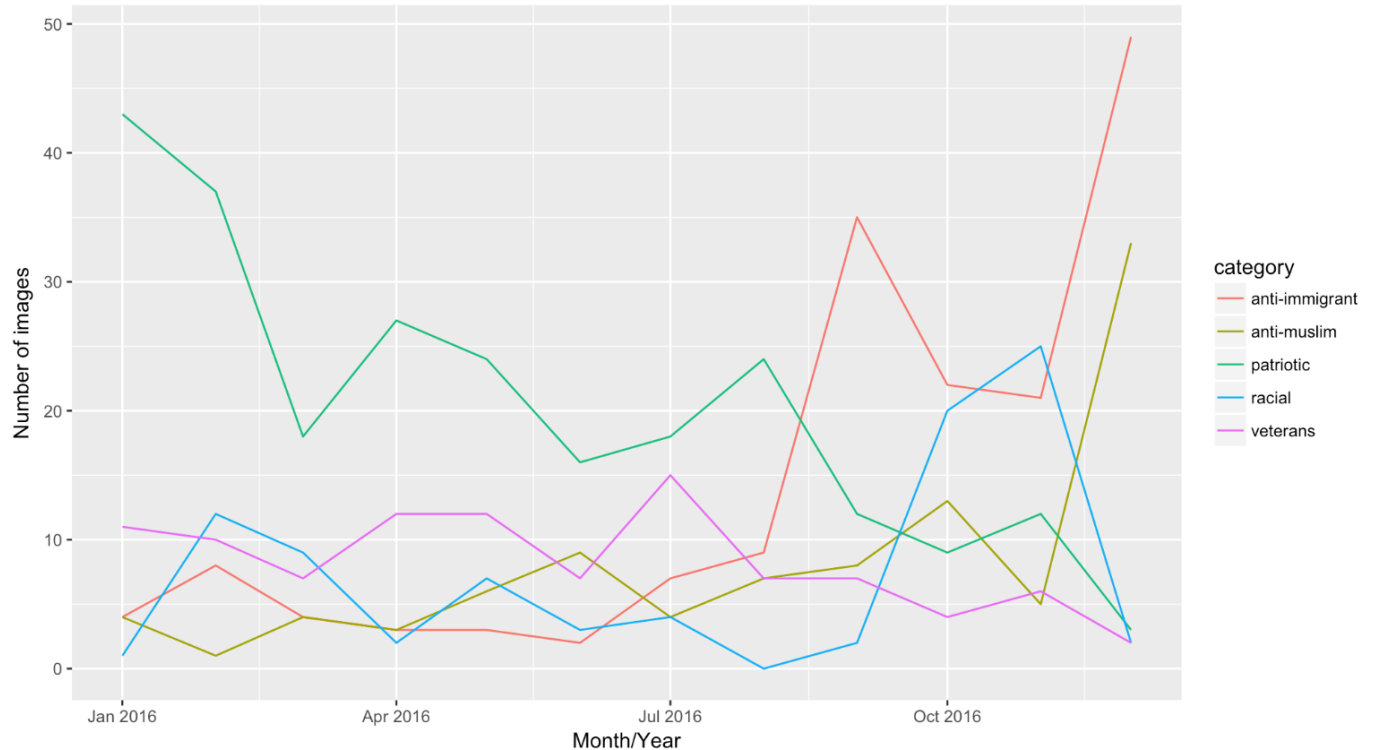
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10	2017-06-13	Blacktivist	"repost @thebassman102"	49654	15440	28543	54874	148511
11	2017-02-08	Blacktivist	"When ballet dancers can mix modern dance and ballet."	45866	6771	16118	56276	125031
12	2016-06-12	United Muslims of America	"New York city Muslim Harassment Social Experiment !!! watch and subscribe on youtube: https://goo.gl/lZbsUd "	44215	10317	20142	94001	168675
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14	2016-10-26	Blacktivist	"Africa is in your bloodline."	37197	7930	6486	223412	275025
15	2017-04-03	Blacktivist	"This hairdresser from Atlanta is amazing. She can install locs at supersonic speeds."	36626	6243	9911	37199	89979
16	2017-04-28	Blacktivist	"These 3-year-old preschoolers definitely are showing confidence in spelling their names. #blackEducatedBabies"	36166	6174	25887	49215	117442
17	2017-06-17	Blacktivist	"Too lit to be true"	30125	9459	22360	60163	122107
18	2017-04-26	Blacktivist	"This is how schools should welcome their new incoming students and their families."	29506	7768	18931	78611	134816
19	2016-12-15	Blacktivist	"Someone's grandma is killing it"	28772	5902	10272	64163	109109
20	2017-04-27	Brown Power	"Couldn't have said it better."	28517	681	4460	19769	53427
21	2017-07-18	Veterans Come First	beloved country. Thank you for your service sir! God bless you!"	27884	5046	2213	46580	81723

Top 20 Instagram Posts by Engagement

Date	Content ID	User Name	Content Text	# Likes	# Comments	Total Engagement
6/17/17	"13449"	"_blacktivistt_"	"What a great idea for kids. #Blacktivist #hotnews #black #africanamerican #blacklivesmatter #blackpride #blackandproud #dreamchasers #blackgirls #blackwomen #blackman #westandtogether #proudtobeblack #blackbusiness #blackunity #blackis #melanin#icantbreath #neverforget #sayhername #blackhistorymonth"	168998	954	169952
6/10/17	"55295"	"feminism_tag"	"@expression_tees #feminismtag #feminism #female #humanrights #equality #freedom #love #support #feminist #yesallwomen #womensrights #heforshe #femen #equality #freedom #feminist #woman #riot #support #protest #gay #lesbian #equality #motherhood #sextrremism"	129400	3155	132555
6/19/17	"38439"	"blackstagram_"	"Repost from @sincerely_black_Yesss, girl #lastchemo #blackpower #pride #power"	124936	627	125563
8/19/17	"39943"	"blackstagram_"	"Beautiful in every shade. @afrokingdom_ #blackexcellence #blackpride #blackandproud #blackpower #blackbeauty #blackisbeautiful #blackgirlmagic #blackgirlsrock #naturallyshesdope #blackgirl#blackgirls #blackwomen #blackwoman #blackout #blackqueens #blackmodel #blackmodels #blackgirlskillingit #melaninonfleek #melaninpoppin"	111102	3197	114299
6/19/17	"38441"	"blackstagram_"	"👑 Black Barbie @panafrican.roots #blackbeauty #blackisbeautiful #blackgirlmagic #blackgirlsrock #naturallyshesdope #blackgirl #blackgirls #blackwomen #blackwoman #blackout #blackqueens #blackmodel #blackmodels #blackgirlskillingit"	94138	572	94710
3/2/16	"30145"	"army_of_jesus_"	"Like, if you believe in Jesus! #Bible #sonofgod424 #God #Love #Redeemed #Saved #Christian #Christianity #Pray #Chosen#jesus #lord #truth #praying #christ #jesuschrist #bible #word #godly #angels #cross #faith #inspiration #jesussaves #worship #yahweh #holyspirit #praise #spiritualwarfare"	87750	1989	89739
6/13/16	"28336"	"army_of_jesus_"	"Like, if you believe in Jesus!❤️ #bible #sonofgod424 #God #Love #Redeemed #Saved #Christian #Christianity #Pray #Chosen#jesus #lord #truth #praying #christ #jesuschrist #bible #word #godly #angels #cross #faith #inspiration #jesussaves #worship #yahweh #holyspirit #praise #spiritualwarfare"	84469	2177	86646
6/10/17	"84243"	"sincerely_black_"	"True @melanin.city @loveblackbodies_ #blackqueens #blackexcellence #blackisbeautiful #blackgirlmagic"	83440	2545	85985
6/3/17	"38583"	"blackstagram_"	"Repost from @melanin.university She slays so hard! #blackbeauty #blackisbeautiful #blackgirlmagic #blackgirlsrock #naturallyshesdope #blackgirl #blackgirls #blackwomen #blackwoman #blackout #blackqueens #blackmodel #blackmodels #blackgirlskillingit"	81201	465	81666
6/11/17	"38414"	"blackstagram_"	"QUEEN! 🍑 @_fit.black_ @melanin.city @loveblackbodies_ #blackbeauty#blackisbeautiful#blackgirlmagic#blackgirlsrock#naturallyshesdope#blackgirl#blackgirls#blackwomen#blackwoman#blackout#blackqueens#blackmodel#blackmodels #blackgirlskillingit"	75052	1581	76633
8/9/17	"39309"	"blackstagram_"	"A woman who recently had her left leg amputated is having a difficult time accepting her new body. She was shocked and disheartened to discover she only had two color options for a foot shell: one shade was way too light and another was too dark. @_blacktivist_ #blackexcellence#blackpride#blackandproud#blackpower#africanamerican#melanin#ebony#panafrican#blackcommunity#problack#brownskin#unapologeticallyblack#dopeness#dope#slaying#slayer#slay"	71428	2819	74247
7/28/17	"55526"	"feminism_tag"	"A lot of boys like doll houses. A lot of girls like spaceships. @expressiontees #feminismtag #feminism #female #humanrights #equality #freedom #love #support #feminist #yesallwomen #womensrights #heforshe #femen #equality #freedom #feminist #woman #riot #support #protest #gay #lesbian #equality #motherhood #sextrremism"	73175	505	73680
6/11/17	"38389"	"blackstagram_"	"That's so kind! What a honorable little king 🙌 @expression_tees #blackexcellence #blackpride #blackandproud #blackpower #africanamerican #melanin #ebony #panafrican #blackcommunity #problack #brownskin #unapologeticallyblack"	72687	787	73474
6/8/17	"38574"	"blackstagram_"	"Beautiful photo with a deep meaning. Black girls have to color their ballet shoes because the industry doesn't believe in Black ballerinas and make no ballet shoes in their shade. #BlackBalletMatters! @sincerely_black_ #blackexcellence#blackpride#blackandproud#blackpower#africanamerican#melanin#ebony#panafrican#blackcommunity#problack#brownskin#unapologeticallyblack#blackbeauty#blackisbeautiful#blackgirlmagic#blackgirlsrock#naturallyshesdope#blackgirl#blackgirls"	69653	2046	71699
7/14/17	"39404"	"blackstagram_"	"Repost from @panafrican.roots #Zendaya showed everyone what that women unity can do magical things! It's easy to make a person happy and she proves it! #blackexcellence #blackperfection #blackbeauty #blackbusiness #africanamerican #blackcommunity #melanin #blackpride #america #usa #blackscience #education #diversity #blackgirlmagic"	69232	584	69816
5/9/17	"55992"	"feminism_tag"	"#feminismtag #feminism #female #humanrights #equality #freedom #love #support #feminist #yesallwomen #womensrights #heforshe #femen #equality #freedom #feminist #woman #riot #support #protest #gay #lesbian #equality #motherhood #sextrremism"	66560	2833	69393
6/25/17	"55363"	"feminism_tag"	"#feminismtag #feminism #female #humanrights #equality #freedom #love #support #feminist #yesallwomen #womensrights #heforshe #femen #equality #freedom #feminist #woman #riot #support #protest #gay #lesbian #equality #motherhood #sextrremism"	65706	3083	68789
8/17/17	"55420"	"feminism_tag"	"#feminismtag #feminism #female #humanrights #equality #freedom #love #support #feminist #yesallwomen #womensrights #heforshe #femen #equality #freedom #feminist #woman #riot #support #protest #gay #lesbian #equality #motherhood #sextrremism"	67386	865	68251
7/8/17	"39478"	"blackstagram_"	"Repost from @__melanin__ Powerful talent!👏 #blackpower #blackwoman #blackwomen #blackgirlsrock #blackgirlmagic #melanin #melaninpoppin #myblackisbeautiful #blackqueen #unapologeticallyblack #problack #blackpeople #africanamerican #blackandproud #afrocentric #blackmen #blackout #blackart #blackman #blackhistory #blackexcellence #melaninonfleek"	66942	467	67409
7/1/17	"55213"	"feminism_tag"	"#feminismtag #feminism #female #humanrights #equality #freedom #love #support #feminist #yesallwomen #womensrights #heforshe #femen #equality #freedom #feminist #woman #riot #support #protest #gay #lesbian #equality #motherhood #sextrremism"	65053	729	65782

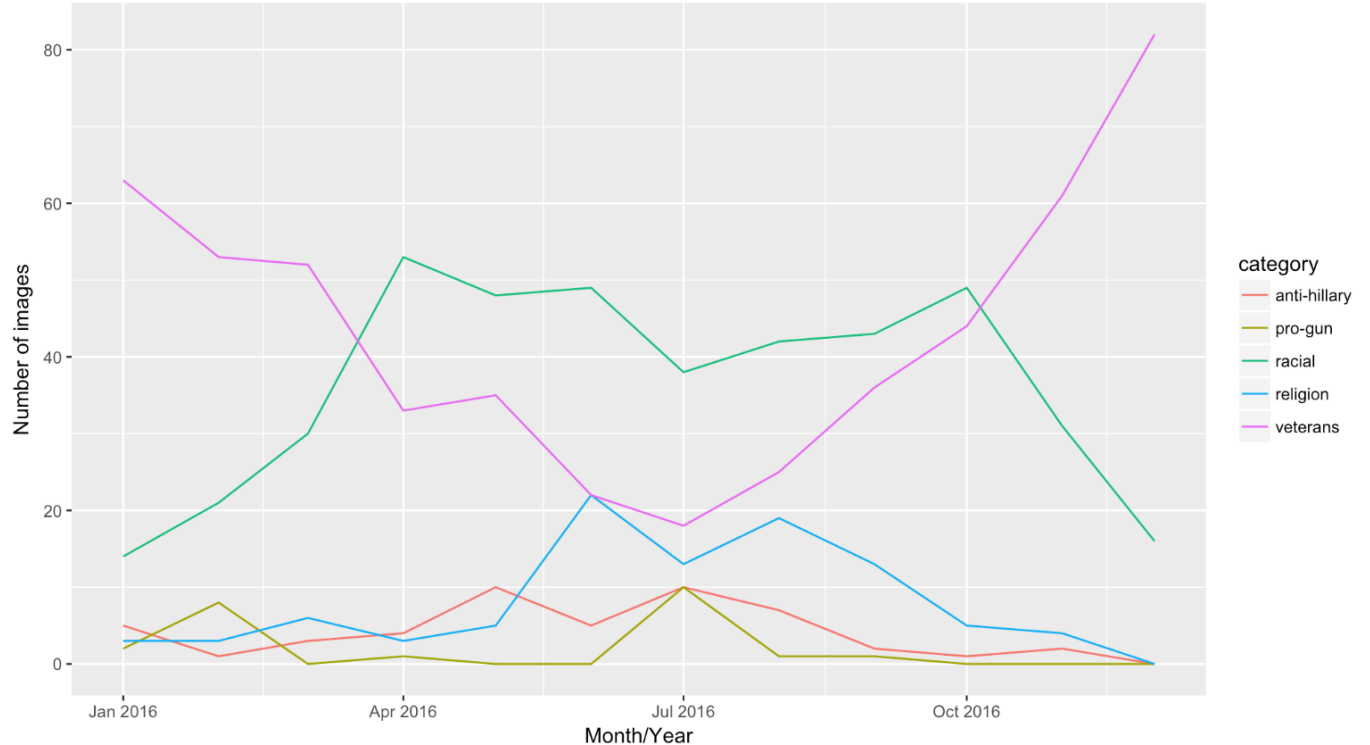
Facebook: Top Performing Image Themes by Month

Top 100 images per month on Facebook, by engagement
(Top 5 image categories only)



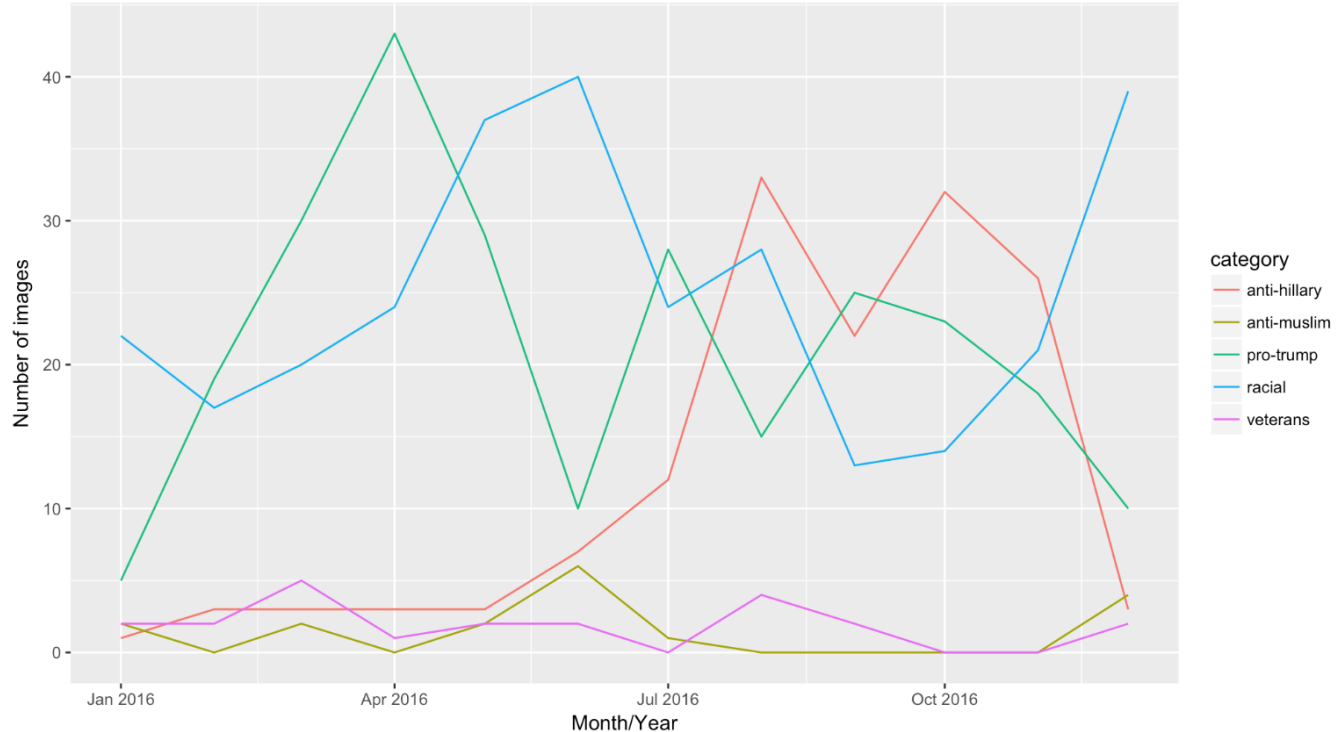
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Twitter: Top Performing Image Themes by Month

Top 100 images per month on Twitter, by engagement
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The IRA and Political Polarization in the United States

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The IRA and Political Polarization in the United States, 2012-2018

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Bharath Ganesh, *University of Oxford*
Dimitra Liotsiou, *University of Oxford*

John Kelly, *Graphika*
Camille François, *Graphika*



Russia's Internet Research Agency (IRA) launched an extended attack on the United States by using computational propaganda to misinform and polarize US voters. This report provides the first major analysis of this attack based on data provided by social media firms to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI).

This analysis answers several key questions about the activities of the known IRA accounts. In this analysis, we investigate how the IRA exploited the tools and platform of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube to impact US users. We identify which



aspects of the IRA's campaign strategy got the most traction on social media and the means of microtargeting US voters with particular messages.

We provide an overview of our findings below:

- Between 2013 and 2018, the IRA's Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter campaigns reached tens of millions of users in the United States.
 - Over 30 million users, between 2015 and 2017, shared the IRA's Facebook and Instagram posts with their friends and family, liking, reacting to, and commenting on them along the way.
 - Peaks in advertising and organic activity often correspond to important dates in the US political calendar, crises, and international events.
 - IRA activities focused on the US began on Twitter in 2013 but quickly evolved into a multi-platform strategy involving Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube among other platforms.
 - The most far reaching IRA activity is in organic posting, not advertisements.
- Russia's IRA activities were designed to polarize the US public and interfere in elections by:
 - campaigning for African American voters to boycott elections or follow the wrong voting procedures in 2016, and more recently for Mexican American and

- Hispanic voters to distrust US institutions;
 - encouraging extreme right-wing voters to be more confrontational; and
 - spreading sensationalist, conspiratorial, and other forms of junk political news and misinformation to voters across the political spectrum.
- Surprisingly, these campaigns did not stop once Russia's IRA was caught interfering in the 2016 election. Engagement rates increased and covered a widening range of public policy issues, national security issues, and issues pertinent to younger voters.
 - The highest peak of IRA ad volume on Facebook is in April 2017 – the month of the Syrian missile strike, the use of the Mother of All Bombs on ISIS tunnels in eastern Afghanistan, and the release of the tax reform plan.
 - IRA posts on Instagram and Facebook increased substantially after the election, with Instagram seeing the greatest increase in IRA activity.
 - The IRA accounts actively engaged with disinformation and practices common to Russian “trolling”. Some posts referred to Russian troll factories that flooded online conversations with posts, others denied being Russian trolls, and some even complained about the platforms' alleged political biases when they faced account suspension.

[Read the full report here.](#)

Philip N. Howard, Bharath Ganesh, Dimitra Liotsiou, John Kelly & Camille François, “The IRA, Social Media and Political Polarization in the United States, 2012-2018.” Working Paper 2018.2. Oxford, UK: Project on Computational Propaganda. comprop.oii.ox.ac.uk. 46 pp.

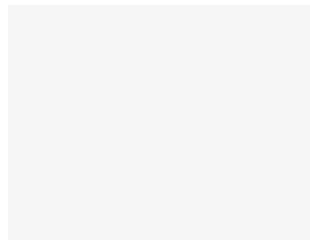
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Executive Summary

Russia's Internet Research Agency (IRA) launched an extended attack on the United States by using computational propaganda to misinform and polarize US voters. This report provides the first major analysis of this attack based on data provided by social media firms to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI).

This analysis answers several key questions about the activities of the known IRA accounts. In this analysis, we investigate how the IRA exploited the tools and platform of Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube to impact US users. We identify which aspects of the IRA's campaign strategy got the most traction on social media and the means of microtargeting US voters with particular messages.

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 - The IRA accounts actively engaged with disinformation and practices common to Russian “trolling”. Some posts referred to Russian troll factories that flooded online conversations with posts, others denied being Russian trolls, and some even complained about the platforms' alleged political biases when they faced account suspension.

Introduction: Rising IRA Involvement in US Politics

Most of what we know of Russia's social media campaigns against voters in democracies comes from the small amounts of data released by the major social media firms. There is certainly a constant flow of examples of suspected Russian-backed, highly automated or fake social media accounts working to polarize public understanding of important social issues. But understanding the structure and reach of the Internet Research Agency's efforts requires large pools of data. In the summer of 2017, the major social media firms provided a snapshot of such data pertaining to campaigns against voters in the United States.

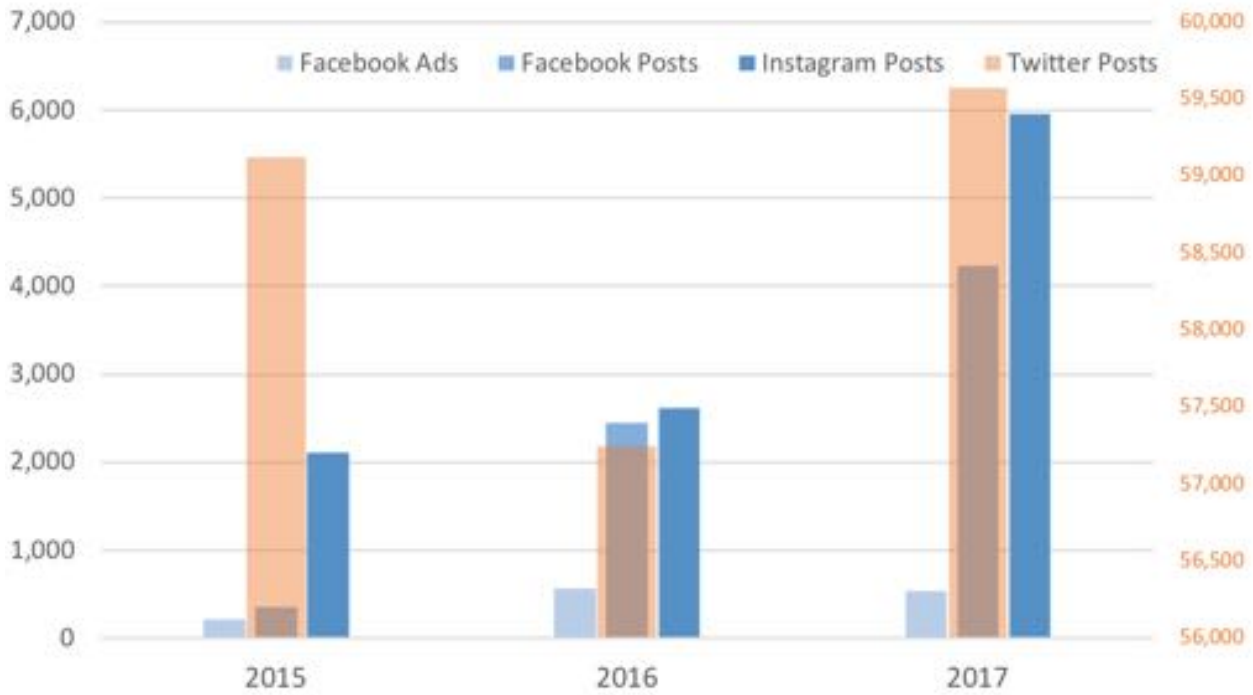
Russia's Internet Research Agency (IRA) began targeting US voters for misinformation as early as 2012, using some of the techniques it had deployed on its own citizens and those of neighboring countries in Eastern Europe. The Twitter dataset contains posts in a variety of languages. Some of the accounts were also "re-purposed" in their targeting. For example, some were shifted from operating in Indonesian for an Indonesian audience to operating in English for a US audience (see Appendices for additional data). While the IRA targeted a few different countries and language communities, the vast majority of its output was written in Russian and English.

The IRA's activities across the major social media platforms have grown in recent years. Figure 1 plots the average monthly volume of live ads purchased by the IRA per year, from 2015 to 2017. Figure 1 and Table 1 show that the volume of live Facebook ads purchased in the US by the IRA increased between 2015 and 2017. In 2016, the average monthly volume of live ads was more than double the 2015 level and remained similar in 2017. Unlike the ads, the monthly volume of organic Facebook posts rose steadily between 2015 and 2017. Between 2015 and 2016, monthly organic post volume increased almost sevenfold and continued to rise rapidly into 2017. On Instagram, after a small increase in average monthly post volume between 2015 and 2016, we see a large increase between 2016 and 2017. Unlike the average volume of Facebooks ads, the average volume of Facebook and Instagram organic posts was much higher in 2017 than in 2016: by a factor of 1.7 for Facebook organic posts, and by a factor of 2.3 for Instagram organic posts. The volume of Twitter posts (tweets) did not change significantly in the period 2015-2017, as shown in Figure 1.a.

In more detail, Table 1 shows the values for the average monthly volume of IRA Facebook ads, Facebook organic posts, Instagram organic posts, and Twitter posts (tweets). We note that Twitter provided data for many more accounts (3,841 accounts) than Facebook and Instagram (76 Facebook ad accounts; 81 Facebook pages; and 133 Instagram accounts). Google chose not to disclose any account data on ads, YouTube, or Google+ so Google is not included in Figure 1 or Table 1.

The volume of Twitter posts made available to us is much larger than the volume of Facebook ads, Facebook posts, and Instagram posts. The average monthly Twitter post volume is over fifty thousand tweets per month, while the average monthly volume of Facebook ads, Facebook posts, and Instagram posts is in the hundreds to low thousands, never exceeding the six thousand mark.

Figure 1: The Volume of IRA Activity, Monthly Average (Twitter on Right Axis)



Note: Facebook, Instagram and YouTube relative to the primary left axis, Twitter relative to the secondary right axis.

Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by the SSCI

Table 1: The Volume of IRA Facebook Ads, Facebook Posts, Instagram Posts, and Tweets, Monthly Average

Year	Facebook Ads	Facebook Posts	Instagram Posts	Twitter Posts
2015	207	360	2,110	59,126
2016	564	2,442	2,611	57,247
2017	541	4,234	5,956	59,634

Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by the SSCI.

Data & Methodology

Major social media firms provided the SSCI with data on the accounts that these firms identified as being IRA-origin. Facebook provided data on ads bought by IRA users on Facebook and Instagram and on organic posts on both platforms generated by accounts the company knew were managed by IRA staff. Twitter provided a vast corpus of detailed account information on the Twitter accounts the company knew were managed by IRA staff. Google provided images of ads, videos that were uploaded to YouTube, and non-machine-readable PDFs of tabulated data on advertisements but provided no context or documentation about this content.

The research teams at the University of Oxford and Graphika agreed to a Non-Disclosure Agreement with the SSCI for a short period of 7 months to prepare this report in a rigorous and secure manner. Our analysis is notable for two reasons. First, our analysis is the first, most comprehensive analysis of the data provided to the Senate by the social media firms. Second, the data enables an understanding of IRA activity across platforms, along with visibility into platforms on which little or no data had previously been revealed, such as Instagram. As a firm, Facebook manages both Facebook and Instagram platforms. While the company provides researchers with very restricted access to publicly valuable Facebook platform data through its Application Programming Interface (API), it currently provides none on Instagram.

The data provided by Facebook, Twitter, and Google reveals new aspects of how the IRA's activity on social media has afflicted US politics in the last few years. Facebook and Instagram data cover the period 2015-2017, Twitter data cover the period 2009-2018, and YouTube data span the period 2014-2018. This report presents the most comprehensive analysis of the raw data provided, and actually makes use of three sources: (1) public data, (2) the special data that technology platforms provided to the SSCI, and (3) the special data that was publicly released by the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI).

Below we outline the broad contours of the multiple kinds of data analyzed in this report.

- Facebook provided data on 3,393 individual ads. Public data released by the HPSCI provided details on 3,517 ads. These ads encouraged users to engage with specific pages. These pages were the center of issue-based ad campaigns run by the IRA.
- Facebook provided data on 76 different ad accounts purchasing ads on behalf of these campaigns on Instagram and Facebook, though only a handful were responsible for the majority of ad spend.
- On Facebook, these campaigns generated a total of 67,502 organic posts (produced by the IRA page administrator and not advertised) across 81 different pages.
- On Instagram, these campaigns generated a total of 116,205 organic posts across 133 different Instagram accounts.
- The campaigns' organic Facebook posts had very high levels of engagement. In total, IRA posts were shared by users just under 31 million times, liked almost 39 million times, reacted to with emojis almost 5.4 million times, and engaged sufficient users to generate almost 3.5 million comments. Table 2 below provides further detail.
- Engagement was not evenly distributed across the 81 pages for which Facebook provided organic post data: the top twenty most liked pages received 99% of all audience engagement, shares, and likes. Twenty ad campaigns received the most attention from audiences and absorbed the majority of the IRA's spending.

- On Instagram, a similar pattern is evident. In total, all Instagram posts garnered almost 185 million likes and users commented about 4 million times. Forty pages received 99% of all likes. The themes of these Instagram posts do not seem to differ significantly from those of Facebook, though the presentation style is different.
- The data Twitter provided contained handles and associated metadata for 3,841 accounts believed to have been managed by the IRA. The analysis of Twitter content in this report covers 8,489,989 posts (tweets, in this case) across 3,822 of these accounts.
- Google provided images of 655 AdWords ads and 228 YouTube videos in mp4 (video) format without metadata, though they are named by their video ID. The images were not machine-readable and the data was incomplete and provided without context.

Table 2 reveals the rapidly growing levels of attention received by IRA campaign communications on Facebook over time. In this report an “organic post” is a crafted message from an IRA-managed fake page or user account pretending to be a concerned citizen. Between 2015 and 2017, this IRA content generated increasing levels of interaction, in terms of sharing, liking, reactions and comments. The data provided by Facebook does not allow us to say how much of this activity was from unique users.

The most shared and liked forms of content are important because we have evidence that hundreds of thousands of people not only saw them, but also actively engaged with them. Sharing is particularly important as it exposes even more people to IRA content, including those who do not follow IRA pages.

On Facebook, the five most shared and the five most liked posts focused on divisive issues, with pro-gun ownership content, anti-immigration content pitting immigrants against veterans, content decrying police violence against African Americans, and content that was anti-Muslim, anti-refugee, anti-Obama, and pro-Trump. IRA posts tended to mimic conservative views against gun control and for increased regulation of immigrants. In some cases, terms such as “parasites” were used to reference immigrants and others expressed some tolerance of extremist views. The top five posts by known IRA accounts are overtly political and polarizing, and details about the content and engagement by social media users is described in Appendix B. On Twitter, of the five most-retweeted IRA accounts, four focused on targeting African Americans.

Table 2: The Total Audience Engagement with Facebook Posts, by Year

Year	Shares	Likes	Emoji Reactions	Comments
2015	1,388,390	2,104,487	478	131,082
2016	12,861,314	15,077,235	1,698,646	1,322,342
2017	16,714,594	21,644,714	3,695,278	2,001,882
<i>Total</i>	<i>30,964,298</i>	<i>38,826,436</i>	<i>5,394,402</i>	<i>3,455,306</i>

Source: Authors’ calculations based on data provided by the SSCI.

Overview of IRA Activity across Platforms

The IRA adapted existing techniques from digital advertising to spread disinformation and propaganda by creating and managing advertising campaigns on multiple platforms, often making use of false personas or imitating activist groups. This strategy is not an invention for politics and foreign intrigue, it is consistent with techniques used in digital marketing. This overall strategy appeared to have served three advantages. First, it enabled the IRA to reach their target audiences across multiple platforms and formats. Indeed, the IRA's core messages and target audiences show consistency across the various platforms they used to reach the US population. Second, it helped create a semblance of legitimacy for the false organizations and personas managed by the IRA. We can hypothesize that users were more likely to assume the credibility of the false organizations set up by the IRA with a presence across multiple platforms, operating websites, YouTube channels, Facebook pages, Twitter accounts and even PayPal accounts set up to receive donations. Finally, the IRA was able to leverage their presence on multiple platforms once detection efforts caught up with them by redirecting traffic to platforms where their activities had not been disrupted, and by using their accounts on one social media platform to complain about suspensions of their accounts on another platform.

The Broader Cross-Platform Picture

The data examined in this section makes use of the following data sources: Twitter posts (tweets); organic posts on Facebook pages; Facebook ads; and organic posts on Instagram. The YouTube data provided to the SSCI was remarkably scarce and only included video files, without the context or metadata necessary to be comparable to the other datasets. We pursued an alternative approach to tracking IRA activity on YouTube, by extracting data on citations of YouTube content in IRA tweets to use as a proxy for the IRA's exploitation of the YouTube platform. The proxy is imperfect, but the IRA's heavy use of links to YouTube videos leaves little doubt of the IRA's interest in leveraging Google's video platform to target and manipulate US audiences.

These combined sources provide a glimpse into the cross-platform strategy of the IRA, and reveal that other technology companies may have additional records on IRA activity. The provided dataset only includes data provided by Twitter, Facebook, and Google. Although it is reasonable to assume that the core of the IRA's effort was conducted on these platforms, posts on these platforms provide links to others (notably Medium, PayPal, Reddit, Tumblr, and Pinterest). Many kinds of social media platforms have acknowledged that their internal investigations yielded IRA-related activity, but such activities not evaluated here.

Platforms that provided data to the SSCI have used different approaches and scopes when selecting the data to be shared. For instance, Twitter's data contribution clearly covers activity in multiple languages, but Facebook's data contribution focuses on activity only in English. Facebook chose not to disclose *Profiles* or *Groups* discovered throughout the course of their internal investigation and only shared organic post data from a small number of *Pages* with the Committee. As discussed earlier, Google's data contribution was by far the most limited in context and least comprehensive of the three. Any cross-platform analysis must take these different limits into account before drawing conclusions on differences in how these platforms may have been used by the IRA.

Table 3 shows how much IRA activity (or engagement with IRA activity, in the case of Facebook ad clicks) increased in the six months after the 2016 election, across social media platforms.

Twitter as a Training Ground for Political Polarization Efforts

The IRA began posting on Twitter in 2009 in Russian language and focused on a domestic Russian audience. The earliest accounts tweeting in English and targeting a US audience began operating in

2013, but at a low level. English language tweet activity increased somewhat in early 2014, before ramping up dramatically at the end of 2014 into 2015 (Figure 2).

Looking at timeline of activity across all platforms in Figure 2, it appears that the IRA initially targeted the US public using Twitter, which it had used domestically in Russia for several years. But as the IRA ramped up US operations toward the end of 2014, this dataset suggests that the IRA began leveraging other platforms in sequence: YouTube (here measured via Twitter citations of YouTube content), Instagram, and lastly Facebook.

The latter part of Figure 2, from 2017 onwards, also highlights the different timing and stages of the platform's own disruption efforts. As a result of internal investigations and subsequent takedowns, Facebook-related activity stops in abrupt stages, and the activity continues on Twitter before being similarly disrupted over nine months later. Google's disruption efforts are impossible to audit and contrast with Facebook's and Twitter's efforts given the sparse data provided.

Across Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, the data shows consistency in the different communities the IRA targeted and the topics of their organic posts and tweets, which consistently target audiences across the US political spectrum. In contrast, the YouTube videos provided by Google were predominantly used to target African Americans, although given the Google's limited provision of data, little can be said about the full scope of IRA activities involving its products.

Vignette: A Campaign Across Platforms, the Case of Black Matters US

One such campaign, Black Matters US, offers a window into how these platforms were leveraged for different strategic goals and used against one another once detection efforts disrupted the IRA's campaign. Black Matters US maintained an online presence across multiple platforms: Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Google+, Tumblr, and even PayPal, which it used to encourage donations to the group. These different accounts were used in concert to promote each other's posts and events. The Black Matters Twitter account (@blackmatterus), for instance, persistently posted news stories from the associated website and promoted events organized through the Black Matters Facebook page. Through these links, readers could convert their online activity into offline rallies and protests.

When the Black Matters Facebook page was shut down in August 2016, organizers started a new Facebook page a few days later simply called "BM", which employed a new audience-building strategy around more positive themes of black affirmation and black beauty, seemingly to avoid further detection and suspension. This style of messaging was refined further through an associated @blackmatterus Instagram account.

However, unlike the older Black Matters, the BM page was keen to redirect traffic to the associated website and its new "Meet Up" feature rather than to keep its audience engaged on the Facebook platform where its efforts had previously been detected and suspended. It is also after this initial suspension on Facebook that the IRA turned to Google Ads to promote the associated Black Matters US website, with ads leveraging text, image, and video formats. These ads sought to promote the Black Matters US website, including messages that provoke fear, ranging from statements such as "We are in danger!" to ad text reading:

"Cops kill black kids. Are you sure that your son won't be the next?" Following the initial suspension of the Black Matters Facebook page, the IRA also leveraged the Black Matter US Twitter account to

complain about its suspension on the platform and to accuse Facebook of “supporting white supremacy.” More details on the case of Black Matters US are presented in Appendix F.

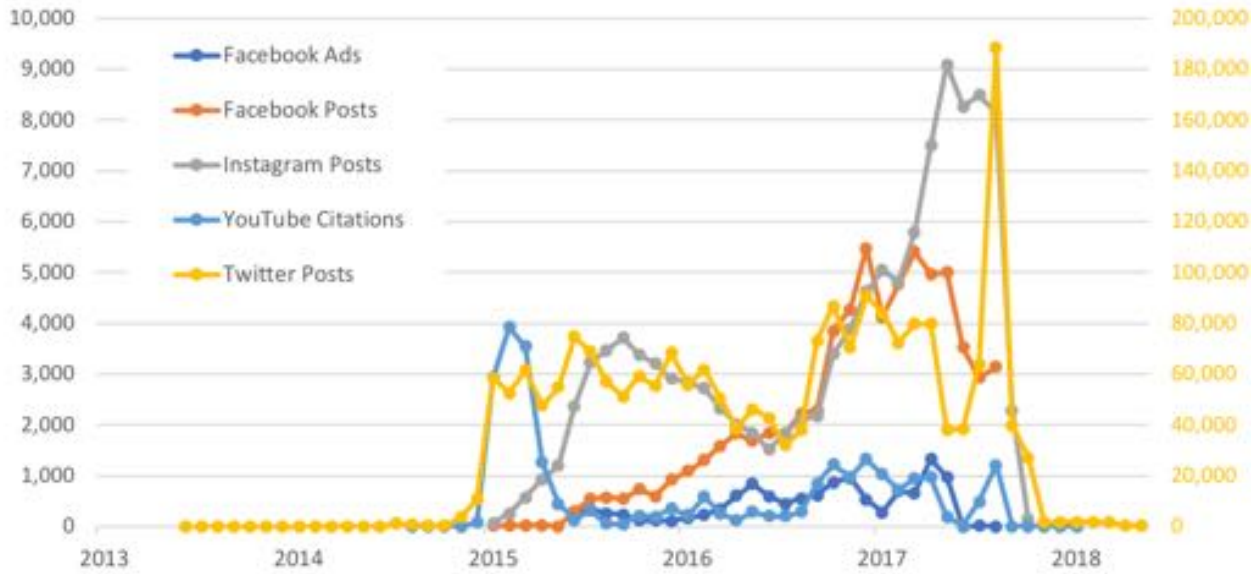
Despite the IRA’s sophistication, their efforts to pose as US citizens on social media reveals mistakes that enable the detection. For instance, the use of Russian phone carriers and IP addresses for St. Petersburg are evident in the account metadata for user profiles the IRA had created. US technology firms’ differential responses also become apparent upon analyzing the data. We clearly observe a belated and uncoordinated response from the platforms that provided the data. In some cases, activity on one platform was detected and suspended months before similar action was taken against related activity on another platform.

Table 3: Increase in IRA Activity in the Six-Month Period after the 2016 US Election

Social Media Platform (Activity Metric)	Increase in Activity (%)
Instagram (Number of Posts)	238
Facebook (Number of Posts)	59
Twitter (Number of Tweets)	52
YouTube (Number of Citations on Twitter)	84
Facebook (Number of Ad Clicks)	45

Source: Authors’ calculations based on data provided by the SSCI.

Figure 2: The Cross-Platform IRA Activity, for All Platforms, Monthly Totals (Twitter on Right Axis)



Note: Facebook, Instagram and YouTube relative to the primary left axis, Twitter relative to the secondary right axis.

Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by the SSCI

IRA Activity and Key Political Events in the US

Having explored the cross-platform activity of the IRA, in this section we provide a detailed analysis of the evolution of IRA activity volume over time on Facebook and Instagram.

We find that numerous events related to US politics between 2015 and 2017 are matched with significant increases in IRA activity. Several, but not all, spikes in ad and post volume happen on, or very soon after, the dates of important political events. Figures Figure 3-Figure 6 reveal the pacing of IRA account activity, with bursts of activity on a number of occasions:

- the third Democratic primary debate and the sixth Republican primary debate (both in January 2016);
- the presidential candidate debates between Hilary Clinton and Donald Trump (autumn 2016);
- election day (November 8, 2016);
- the dates of the post-election Russian hacking investigation (December 29 and 30, 2016).

Broadly, over the entire 2015-2017 period, the volume of activity in Facebook ads, Facebook posts, and Instagram posts increased from the Democratic and Republican National Conventions in July 2016 to voting day in November 2016.

In these figures, ad volume is measured in terms of how many ads were live on a given day, for daily analyses, or month, for monthly analyses. Post volume is measured in terms of the number of posts uploaded on a given date or month.

Figure 3 shows that ad volume increased steeply during the first part of the primaries (February to May 2016), peaking in May, the month when candidates Ted Cruz and John Kasich suspended their campaigns and Trump crossed the delegate threshold for the GOP nomination. After this period, volume dipped temporarily but started increasing again in the month of the Democratic and Republican National Conventions and continued increasing until the month of the election, between July and November 2016. Figure 3 shows a sharp drop in ad volume in the summer of 2017, a surprising pattern, which we speculate might be due to Facebook blocking the IRA from purchasing further ads, although this was not explicitly stated in the data provided by Facebook. Facebook announced in August and September of 2017 that they were shutting down accounts by “threat actors” and IRA Facebook ads and pages (Share & Goel, 2017; Shinal, 2017). Figure 3 also shows that the months with the most ad activity were long after the 2016 election (April and May 2017), and the third most active month being the month of the election itself, November 2016.

In more detail, Figure 4 shows the volume of ads on a daily basis, allowing us to examine whether peaks in ad volume occurred around important political events. Important political events were compiled using news articles listing key political events during the 2016 US election cycle, based primarily on the following sources: *ABC News*, *Reuters*, *the Guardian*, *Time* magazine, *CNN*, and the *New York Daily News*, (Stracqualursi, V., 2016; “Timeline: Pivotal moments in Trump's presidential campaign”, 2016; Gambino & Pankhania 2016; Teague Beckwith, 2018; CNN Library, 2018; Daily News Projects, 2018).

Figure 4 reveals that the day with the highest ad volume was the day after the first presidential debate (September 26, 2016), and volume remained relatively high for several days after. Not all peaks directly followed an important political event such as a candidate debate. The second highest peak was on April 13, 2016, a day that did not feature significant news events directly related to ongoing campaigns. However, there were a few important events listed on this date by the *New York Times*, including a

battery charge against Trump's campaign manager, Corey Lewandowski. The third highest peak occurred three days after Ted Cruz suspended his campaign (May 3, 2016), and again activity remained relatively high for several days afterwards. The next five peaks happened post-election, in April 2017. There is also a peak on January 14, 2016, the day of the 6th Republican debate.

However, it is likely that the organic posts on Facebook, not the ads, had the most reach. Figure 5 indicates that up to June 2015 there are very few organic posts, often just a single post per day, even after the launch of the Clinton and Sanders campaigns in April 2015. Activity picks up in early June, before the Jeb Bush and Trump campaigns were launched in June 2015. It also shows that post volumes tended to rise over time, and from around October 2016 onwards organic post volumes picked up considerably. Volumes peaked in December 2016 and stayed high in early 2017 until they started dropping somewhat after May 2017. However, this drop is nowhere as dramatic as that exhibited by Facebook ads in the same period, in Figure 1 of the Appendix. Volumes here still remain around or above the 3,000 posts mark, far from dropping to zero, which is considerably higher than the average monthly volume for 2016 (around 2,400 units) and for 2015 (360 units), per Table 1. Indeed, volumes pick up again in August 2017, as shown in Appendix A. As discussed previously, we speculate that this modest drop might have been due to Facebook banning some of these accounts. These patterns are shown more clearly in the monthly timelines and additional figures provided in Appendix A.

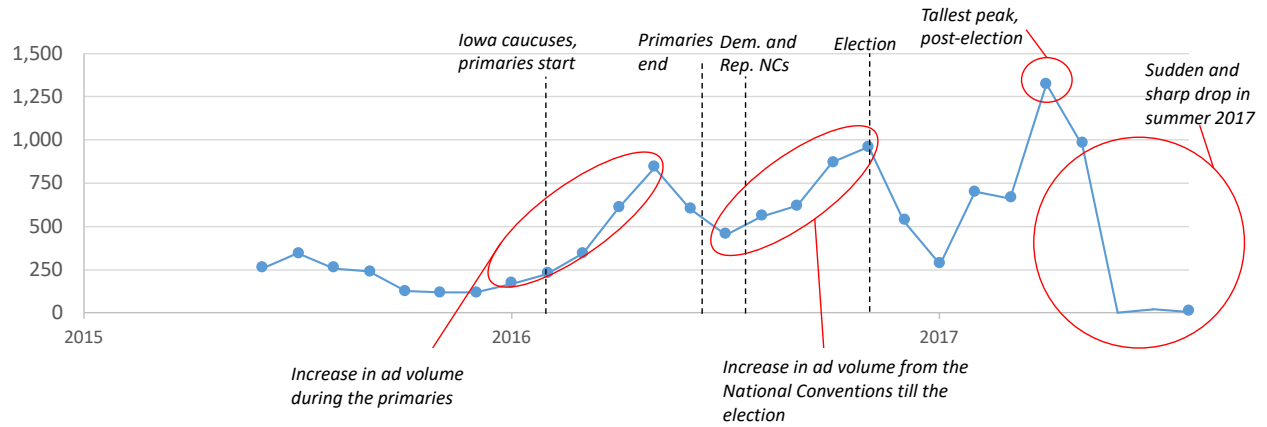
Figure 5 also shows how volume peaks relate to important political events. We see some local spikes in Facebook posts after the final presidential debate between Clinton and Trump, and also on Election Day. However, the biggest spikes overall were on December 29 and 30, 2016 after the Obama administration announced that it was investigating Russian meddling in the US election and Putin stated that he would not respond with sanctions against the US. There is also a drop in activity on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day, though we did not see one over Christmas holidays. The volume of organic posts rose again on January 2, 2017.

Finally, we examine the daily volume of organic posts on Instagram, shown in Figure 6. In terms of overall temporal trends in volume, Figure 6 shows that, on Instagram, post volumes showed four phases over time. First, post volumes pick up early, already from the first few months of 2015, in contrast to the Facebook posts which did not pick up until June 2015 (Figure 5), and increase until September 2015. In the next phase, there is a drop which also covers the primaries, in contrast to Facebook ads and posts, which showed some increases during the first part of the primaries. Next, there is a rise from the end of the primaries through the Democratic and Republican National Conventions, all through the elections and past them becoming steeper in 2017, and then reaching a peak in May 2017. In the final part, there is a drop from May 2017. The drop becomes particularly severe from August 2017, with a sharp two-stage fall till the volume becomes negligible in October 2017. We speculate that this sharp drop might be due to Instagram detecting and deleting these accounts. This drop is similar to the steep drop seen in summer 2017 for Facebook ads (Figure 3), and somewhat in contrast to the summer trends for Facebook posts (Figure 5) where, even though post volume dropped somewhat, it still remained above the 5,000 units mark (far from negligible), and picked up again in August 2017 (as shown in Appendix A).

Figure 6 reveals that there were large spikes of activity related to key public moments in Clinton's campaigning: on June 30 2015, the day of the first release of Clinton's emails; on September 4 2015, during the Clinton Benghazi investigation; on October 5 2015, the day after Clinton's appearance on Saturday Night Live. The highest peaks overall are concentrated in 2017, however, showing again that, on Instagram, IRA activities did not cease after the 2016 election but became substantially more vigorous. Indeed, the 95 days with the highest volume overall are in 2017, and 197 of the 200 highest

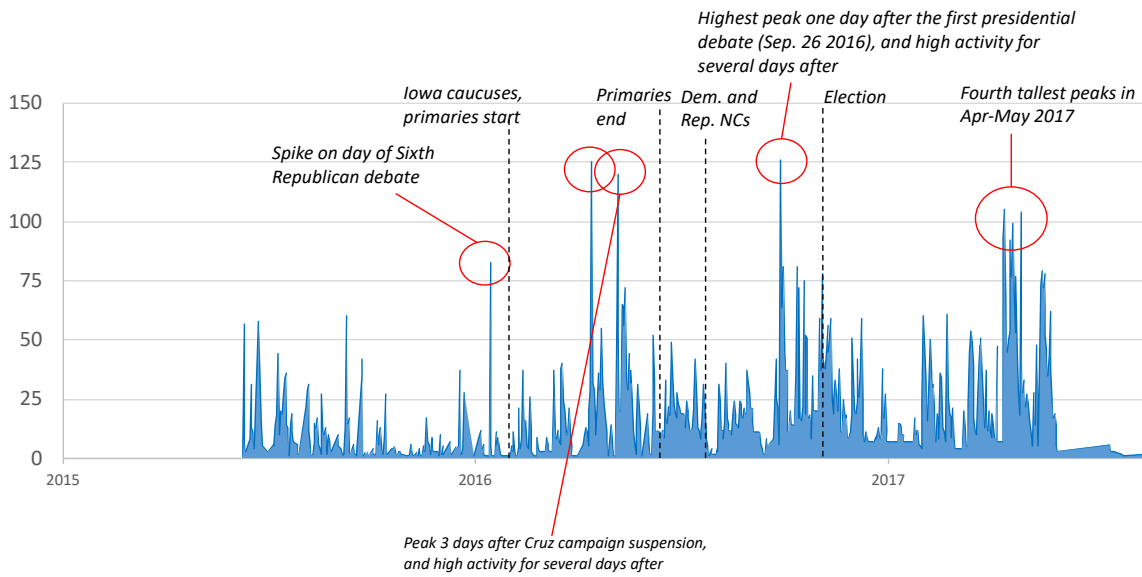
peaks are in 2017. In addition to the pre-election peaks discussed above, others include two relatively high spikes after the 6th Republican debate and before the Iowa caucuses (January 15 and 19, 2016). Appendix A contains additional time plots of IRA activity.

Figure 3: The Volume of Facebook Ads, Monthly Totals



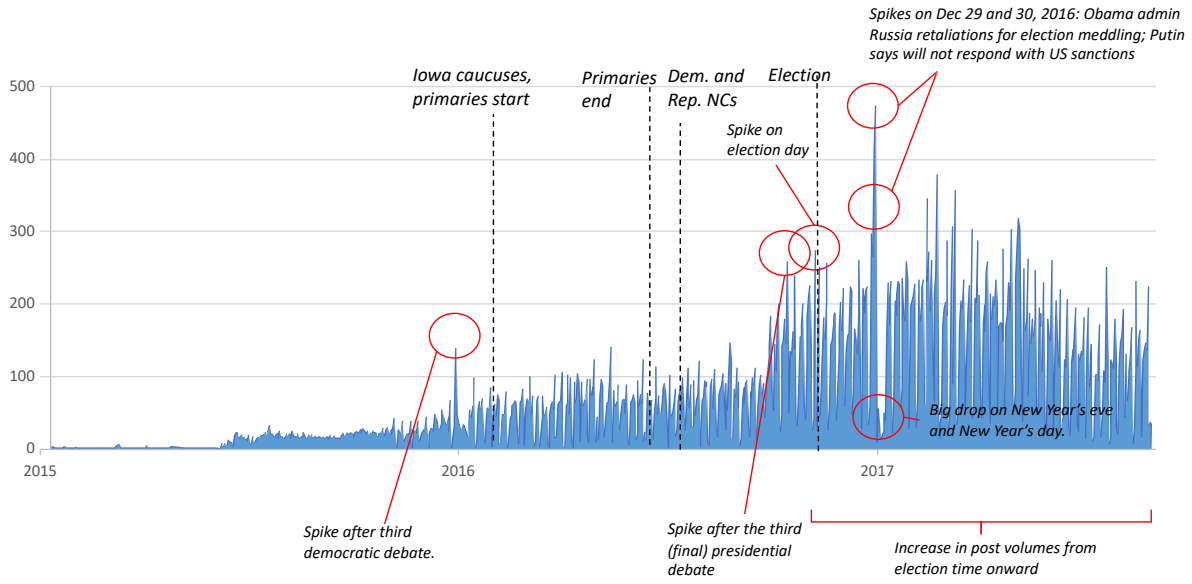
Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by the SSCI.

Figure 4: The Volume of Facebook Ads, Daily Totals



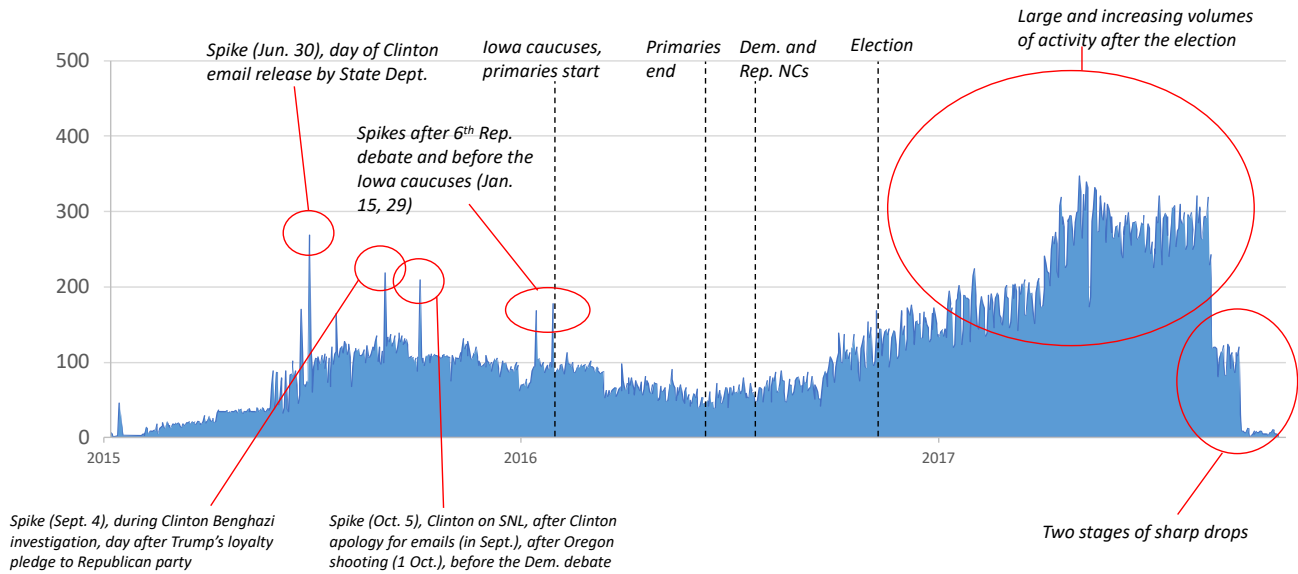
Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by the SSCI.

Figure 5: The Volume of Facebook Posts, Daily Totals



Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by the SSCI.

Figure 6: The Volume of Instagram Posts, Daily Totals



Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by the SSCI.

The IRA's Advertising Campaign against US Voters

People, Groups, and Networks Targeted by the IRA

Facebook allows businesses to advertise on its platform through its Ads Manager software. The tool provides advertisers with the capacity to easily target users based on their interests and behaviors. "Interests" in this context refers to categories of content, such as "Veterans", "Mexico" or "Malcolm X", which Facebook's Ads Manager can use to target audiences. The interests targeted the most by the ads are visualized in Figure 7. Our analysis of the interests shows that the IRA sought to segment Facebook and Instagram users based on race, ethnicity, and identity. Once this segmentation was completed, the IRA then ran multiple ad campaigns targeting different groups between 2015 and 2017. These campaigns were connected to Facebook pages controlled by the IRA, where they posted related organic content.

Our analysis here focuses on ads purchased on Facebook and Instagram. The IRA also purchased ads on Google. The data shared by Google with the SSCI suggests the IRA's ads sought to redirect traffic towards 38 different websites and URLs, leveraging a mix of text, display, and video formats. Without additional context, these 38 different links do not tell a clear story, and point to disparate efforts: 5 of these URLs point to YouTube videos, while another points to a website hosting information about voting in the Kenyan election targeted at Kenyan audiences, while another targeted residents of Johns Creek in Georgia (with a budget of \$666), and others targeted Canadians with ads encouraging donations to Justin Trudeau's campaign. The lack of context, metadata, and documentation prevents any further analysis of advertising products offered by Google that were purchased by the IRA.

Data on 3,517 ads on Facebook and Instagram released by the HPSCI were analyzed. The data presented here is based on a sample of 3,233 ads (91.9% completion). Of these, 248 ads were not analyzed as a result of text extraction errors due to the format in which the data were released (PDF). All findings in this section are based on this sample.

We used the ForceAtlas 2 layout algorithm (Jacomy et al., 2014) to produce the network graph of interests in Figure 7. ForceAtlas 2 lays out the graph such that densely connected nodes (in this case "interests") appear more closely together. We can already see specific clusters of interests that the IRA had targeted: for example, the dense connections between "Mexico", "Chicano rap" and "Hispanidad" interests suggest the IRA was intending to target Latin American Facebook and Instagram users.

In order to confirm that these were valid clusters of interests, we used a standard technique for the detection of communities in network analysis (modularity, per Blondel et al., 2008). Using this automated method, we detected a series of clusters of related ads that clearly targeted a specific segment of Facebook and Instagram users. This was then validated through manual analysis of all of the interests, resulting in a final set of 20 segments that we describe in detail in Table 4. Note that Table 4 is not based on all of the ads studied (3,233 ads); it includes only those which targeted a single segment (2,855 ads). The 378 ads that targeted multiple interest groups are analyzed in more detail in Appendix C.

We can see from Table 4 that the African American segment was targeted with the most ads. White users were divided into liberal and conservative segments and targeted differently. A number of other ethnic segments, including Latin Americans and Muslim Americans, were targeted with smaller campaigns. By selecting interests in Facebook's Ads Manager tool, large audiences (for example African Americans, conservatives and right-wing voters) can be divided into smaller segments: for example, allowing the IRA to target African Americans across mainstream political and cultural issues,

but also users with interests in Black Nationalism and identity, or with more specific interests in the prison system (“Incarceration” segment). Conservatives and right-wing voters were targeted based on their interests in supporting veterans and police forces, particularly *against* Black Lives Matters, patriotism, the Second Amendment, and immigration. Finally, ads targeting Internet culture—for example those with interests in memes, comedy, funny pictures and music streaming—were geared towards attracting younger users. We also saw some ads that targeted no interests, often involving paid promotion of Facebook posts to those who had not already liked the page, intended to increase visibility with new audiences.

Facebook uses an auction system to price impressions for different segments, meaning different target interests are priced differently, according to advertiser demand. We see from Table 4 that ads to African Americans, Native Americans, Latin Americans, and youth were the cheapest, while ads to conservatives, Muslim Americans, and LGBT users were the most expensive. If we look at the amount spent in total, we see that a similar amount was spent on conservatives (a small number of expensive ads) as was spent on targeting African Americans (a large number of cheap ads).

Polarizing Ad Content Sent by the IRA on Facebook and Instagram

We can see from our analysis of the dataset that IRA Facebook and Instagram ads and organic posts were targeted at specific groups. The IRA messaging had had two strategies. The first involved appealing to the narratives common within a specific group, such as supporting veterans and police, or pride in race and heritage, as a clickbait strategy to drive traffic to the Facebook and Instagram pages the IRA set up. Based on an analysis of both ads and posts, we find that the IRA posted content on these pages to which they drove traffic with ads. Then the pages posted content that intended to elicit outrage from these groups. However, the main difference is between conservative and right-wing voters and all other identity groups in the audience segments summarized below is that where conservative and right-wing voters were actively encouraged to get behind Trump’s campaign. Other voters were encouraged to boycott the election, abstain from voting for Clinton, or to spread cynicism about participating in the election in general.

We briefly outline below the strategies used against the main groups targeted on Facebook: African Americans; conservative and right-wing voters; LGBT and liberal voters; Mexican American voters; and Muslim American voters.

African American voters. Messaging to African Americans sought to divert their political energy away from established political institutions by preying on anger with structural inequalities faced by African Americans, including police violence, poverty, and disproportionate levels of incarceration. These campaigns pushed a message that the best way to advance the cause of the African American community was to boycott the election and focus on other issues instead. This often happened through the use of repetitive slogans. This accounts for the majority of content in the dataset that targeted this group.

Conservative and right-wing voters. Messaging to conservative and right-wing voters sought to do three things: repeat patriotic and anti-immigrant slogans; elicit outrage with posts about liberal appeasement of “others” at the expense of US citizens; and encourage them to vote for Trump. Messaging to this segment of voters focused on divisive, and at times prejudiced and bigoted, statements about minorities, particularly Muslims. Well documented anti-Muslim tropes are present in both the ads and organic posts (for example claims about the burqa, blanket statements about Muslims as terrorists and sexual

deviants). Messaging also focused on pro-gun supporters and various strains of patriotic nationalism, in the form of Texan and Southern identity. Veterans & policing were important subjects of IRA messaging, often in the context of allegations of poor treatment of veterans by the Obama administration, in comparison to how well refugees were allegedly treated. Often, the IRA used unsourced numbers to persuade their audiences of this.

LGBT and liberal voters. Messaging to these groups utilized the same types of symbolic politics of slogans encountered with African Americans. Here, ongoing current events seemed to play an important role and were framed with antagonism towards groups that are perceived as anti-gay (for example certain religious groups, certain segments of conservative and right-wing voters). While there was a limited amount of discussion that sought to drive some of these voters towards Bernie Sanders or third parties, patterns of trying to reduce trust in the political system were more apparent. Claims meant to demerit Hillary Clinton are occasionally peppered into this content, but are relatively infrequent. We interpret messaging to this group as an attempt to increase polarization between liberals and conservatives around LGBT rights, a well-known wedge issue between these groups.

Mexican American voters. Messaging to this group was limited until *after* the 2016 election, when the Brown Power campaign, run by the IRA, began to gain momentum. There is the repetition of the same themes as with African American voters, again geared towards increasing distrust and cynicism about the US political system. Coverage of issues such as deportation and treatment of migrants, as well as discrimination against them, were important themes. However, as is the case with African American voters, the majority of content tends to focus on slogans about identity that might resonate with this group.

Muslim American voters. Messaging to this group was somewhat different than that of other identity groups. The main IRA page that targeted this community tended to promote positive narratives about Islam and Muslims (for example the values of the religion and its members, its history, and denouncements of terrorist attacks, as well as best wishes sent to victims of attacks in the US and abroad). While this does mirror some of the common discourse of Muslim Americans, it does not use the same kind of slogans that might resonate with Muslim Americans as was done with African Americans or Mexican Americans. It does, however, repeat the themes of suspicion towards the US government, particularly by drawing on US foreign policy. Some anti-Clinton content is peppered in, as it was with LGBT and liberal voters, but there are also a few pro-Clinton messages in the organic posts.

Differential messaging to each of these target groups was designed to push and pull them in different ways. What is clear is that all of the messaging clearly sought to benefit the Republican Party—and specifically, Donald Trump. Trump is mentioned most in campaigns targeting conservatives and right-wing voters, where the messaging encouraged these groups to support his campaign. The main groups that could challenge Trump were then provided messaging that sought to confuse, distract, and ultimately discourage members from voting. While the IRA strategy was a long-term one, it is clear that activity between 2015 and 2016 was designed to benefit President Trump’s campaign.

States Targeted by IRA Ads

As well as allowing targeting of ads by interest, the Facebook Ad Manager allows targeting of ads by location of the target user, including city, state, and country. We found from the data that location targeting of ads was not used extensively by the IRA, with only 1,673 different instances of location targeting, by 760 ads. These ads were usually used to target African Americans in key metropolitan areas with well-established black communities and flashpoints in the Black Lives Matter movement.

Some make reference, for example, to Ferguson, MO, and a smaller group of ads that marketed rallies and demonstrations to users living in particular places.

Figure 8 below provides a count of the number of times a location was targeted per state. Swing states were targeted 543 times in total (out of 1,673 instances of location targeting). Swing states were defined based on the FiveThirtyEight classification. These included Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Wisconsin (defined as “Traditional swing states”), and Arizona, Georgia, Maine, and Utah (defined as “New swing states”). See Silver, 2016. As well, there were 342 instances evident in the data in which areas with significant African American populations were targeted. We believe the targeting had more to do with race than a state’s role in the Electoral College or status as a swing state. For example, African Americans in Ferguson, MO were targeted for the “Black Matters” campaign. African Americans in Baltimore, MD and Oakland, CA were targeted for the “Blacktivist” campaign. Texan cities were targeted for campaigns focusing on patriotism and pro-gun politics. However, more research is needed before we can say whether or not the IRA campaigns overall had an effect in those states.

Figure 7: Network Graph of Ads and Interests Targeted

Note: This based on 3,233 ads. Only interests targeted 24 or more times by JRA ads on Facebook or Instagram are labeled. The size of each interest node is based on the number of times that interest was targeted by an ad.

Source: Authors' calculations based on data released by the HPSCI.



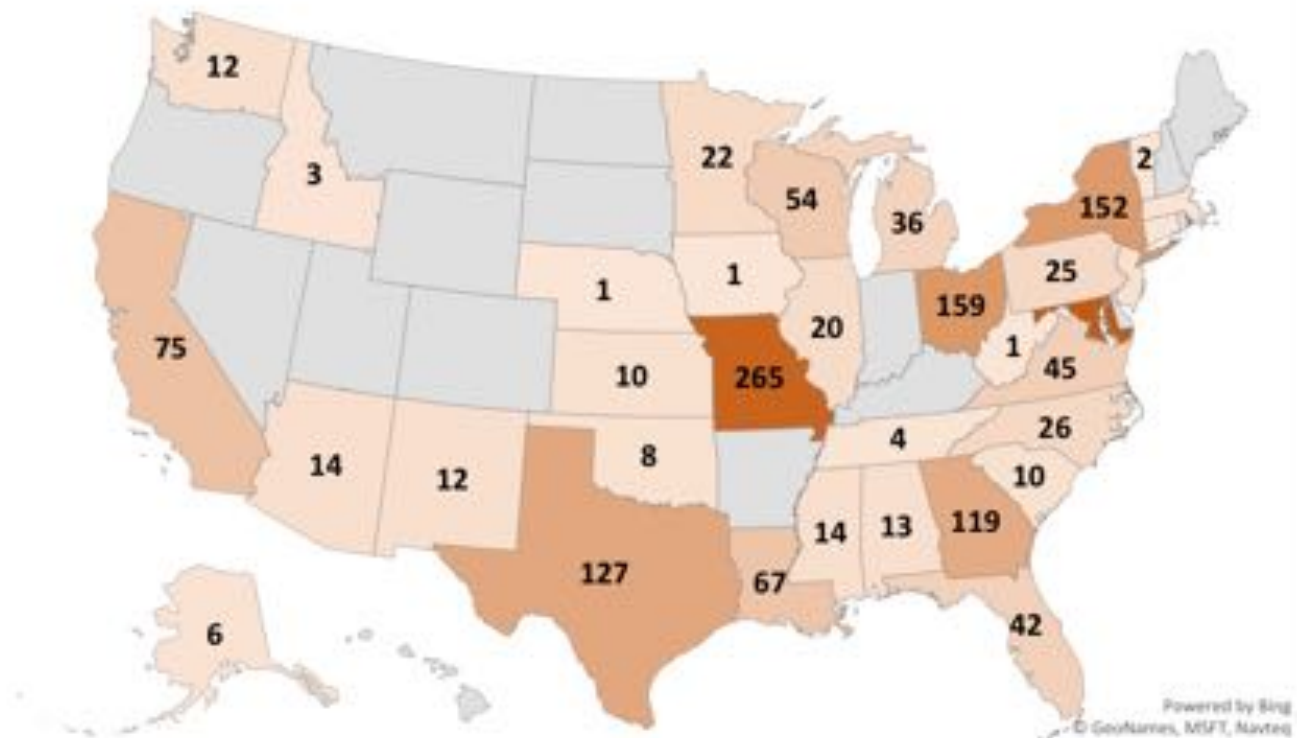
Table 4: The Detected Audience Segments on Facebook, Total Spend, Impressions, and Clicks

Audience Segment	Number of Ads Purchased	Total Spent on Ads Targeting Segment (RUB)	Average Cost per Ad (RUB)	User Impressions (per Segment)	User Clicks (per Segment)
African American Politics and Culture	841	761,745	905.76	13,594,144	1,417,209
Black Identity and Nationalism	246	588,744	2,393.27	2,221,453	146,375
Campus Politics	16	812	50.73	1,333	11
Conservative Politics and Culture	166	1,025,843	6,179.78	2,878,401	254,007
Immigration	60	81,611	1,360.18	162,939	26,980
Incarceration	10	19,746	1,974.63	45,552	4,779
Internet Culture	165	90,531	548.67	933,892	88,657
Latin American Culture	143	120,328	841.45	4,680,521	548,139
LGBT Rights & Social Liberalism	70	360,692	5,152.75	953,350	80,373
Music Streaming	61	3,131	51.33	10,206	41
Muslim American Politics and Culture	57	257,687	4,520.83	523,137	17,125
Native American History and Culture	18	5,729	318.28	34,884	4,276
None	753	888,121	1,179.44	4,005,747	346,070
Other	4	2,262	565.41	12,860	97
Patriotism	24	116,404	4,850.15	689,573	44,527
Pro-gun Politics	66	156,557	2,372.08	832,874	65,596
Self Defense	20	16,756	837.82	28,693	1,186
Social Justice	81	297,403	3,671.64	1,264,902	71,126
Texan Identity	11	39,480	3,589.12	60,965	4,386
Veterans & Policing	43	78,099	1,816.25	743,693	15,986
<i>Total</i>	<i>2,855</i>	<i>4,911,680</i>	<i>1,720.38</i>	<i>33,679,119</i>	<i>3,136,946</i>

Note: Spend is given in Rubles (RUB), as supplied in the data. Impressions are the number of placements on a user's screen, whether a web browser or mobile device. A click indicates that a user clicked on the link to the IRA-managed Facebook page associated with the ad. As an indication, the yearly average exchange rate of RUB to USD for 2016 was 0.015 USD to 1 RUB (based on data from www.x-rates.com). The total ad spend of RUB 4,911,680 above corresponds to approximately USD 73,711.

Source: Authors' calculations based on data released by the HPSCI

Figure 8: The IRA Ad Targets, By State



Note: This map shows state-level activity, and if an ad targeted users in multiple states, it was counted for each state. An ad targeting CA, TX, and MD is counted for each of those states. The numbers therefore show the number of times a particular state was targeted by an IRA ad on Facebook or Instagram, not the total number of ads that targeted that state.

Source: Authors' calculations based on data released by the HPSCI.

How the IRA Targeted US Audiences on Twitter

In the dataset provided by Twitter, at least 57% of the IRA’s posts are in Russian, 36% are in English, and the remainder are in several languages. Our analysis confirms that the early focus of the IRA’s Twitter activity was the Russian public, targeted with messages in Russian from fake Russian users. These misinformation activities began in 2009 and continued until Twitter began closing IRA accounts in 2017. The IRA’s English-language, US-focused activity began in 2013. It increased dramatically at the end of 2014 to a level sustained through the 2016 election, after which it increased again. US-focused activity decisively increased over the level of Russian-focused activity only in mid-2017, well after the US Presidential Election and shortly before Twitter suspended the majority of accounts in late 2017 (Figure 9).

The initial acceleration of the IRA’s US-focused Twitter campaigns at the end of 2014 began shortly after the IRA’s largest sustained Twitter campaign, which supported Russian activities in the Ukraine conflict from mid- to late 2014. This spike in Russian language activity was accompanied by an increase in English language tweets, which the IRA had produced in small amounts (hundreds per year) since 2009, peaking at 148,177 in August 2014. Though in English, these tweets came primarily from “motivational” accounts, while others pushed the hashtag “#UkrainianLie”. IRA activity that involved creating personas that mimicked segments of US audiences ramped up at the beginning of 2015, concurrent with a second major Russian language campaign to support the objectives of the Russian government in the Crimean and Donbass conflicts. Russian language IRA activity remained higher than English activity targeted at US audiences until 2016, when they became roughly equal. This acceleration is evident in Figures 9 and 10.

Researchers have analyzed how the IRA played both sides of an issue, sometimes going so far as to organize opposing protests on either side of the same street, as the Facebook groups “Heart of Texas” and “United Muslims of America” did in Texas in May 2016. The IRA used the same approach on Twitter, constructing online “sock puppet” identities that mimicked a number of different types of legitimate users.

This analysis reveals how sets of sock puppet accounts pretending to be members of particular ideological segments operated as coherent teams. An analysis of mentions relationships among these accounts reveals the primary configuration of embedded assets—sock puppets targeting specific communities—constructed by the IRA (Figure 11). Furthermore, analysis of IP addresses associated with the IRA accounts demonstrates that teams of accounts targeting the US public on the right and on the left were operated from the same IP address, proving the IRA used the tactic of playing both sides of the political spectrum against one another (see Appendices D, G, & H).

IRA Teams in Twitter Mentions Network

To better understand how the IRA’s Twitter accounts interacted with each other, we constructed a graph of mentions relationships among them (Figure 11). Of the 3,841 accounts in the IRA dataset, we found 2,648 connected to at least one other IRA account. We used a force-directed layout algorithm (Fruchterman-Reingold) to position nodes based on mentions arcs, revealing the structure of these interactions. The resulting network (Figure 11) shows that sets of IRA accounts typically operated in “teams” of co-mentioners that corresponded closely to their fictitious online identities. Team members tended to mention teammates far more often than non-teammates, thus forming a number of coherent communities of interaction.

An analysis of accounts within the broader liberal and conservative groupings shows that the IRA focused their political messaging on two targets above others: conservative voters and African Americans. However, they created and maintained a wide variety of sock puppets. This included non-political accounts, such as those focused on local news and marketing, and politically aligned accounts like conservative veterans and LGBT activists.

Teams of accounts varied widely in their purpose, behavior, and level of activity. Some had a narrow objective and were mainly active over a short period of time. For instance, the non-partisan *Food Hoax* team primarily coordinated around Thanksgiving 2015 to spread a rumor of food poisoning from turkeys connected to Koch Farms and Walmart. Similarly, a partisan subset of accounts on the right (“Conservative 2”) existed primarily to push content from a junk news site, *ReportSecret.com*, in late 2017 (per Figure 10). A “Local-focused” group primarily imitated non-partisan local news outlets and was heavily active throughout the IRA’s US timeline with an average output of 14,097 tweets per account, more than more than four times higher than the next most productive group, *African American* (a subset of the “Liberal” grouping), at 3,476 tweets per account. These variations demonstrate how the IRA operated teams of accounts pursuing different strategies, targeting different audiences, and employing different techniques of manipulation.

Figure 9 and Figure 10 show the evolution of the number of IRA tweets over time. The IRA’s US-focused Twitter activity featured false accounts posing as politically active US citizens on both sides of the liberal/conservative spectrum, and also accounts mimicking non-partisan local news sources. Per Figure 10, the local news accounts were particularly active throughout 2015, with activity (number of tweets) decreasing in 2016 until ramping up slightly just before the election, and increasing again after the election. While in early 2015, activity focused on conservatives was notably higher than activity focused on liberals, this gap closed later in the year. Right and left activity levels tracked closely together, at almost even levels, until early 2017. By the middle of 2017, there was a marked surge of activity focused on conservatives and decrease in activity focused on liberals. Most of the surge on the right came from a new set of accounts (labeled “Conservative 2”), which focused their efforts on promoting content from a single junk news website, *ReportSecret.com*.

News vs. Social Mobilization: Hashtag Usage by Political Lean of Target Audience

The IRA’s tactics can be further understood by analyzing the content of their messages. A common content marker on Twitter is the hashtag, which indicates the topic of a particular tweet. We leverage prior work to examine the *peakedness* of hashtags (Etling et al. 2012). Peakedness measures how concentrated hashtag usage is in a time period. High peakedness refers to hashtags the usage of which is highly concentrated in time (high volumes of hashtag use over a narrow time period, and low use over the remainder of the time period under study), often corresponding (in this data) to operations around major real or fictitious events (such as #ColumbianChemical and #Fukushima2015). In contrast, hashtags with low peakedness are spread out more evenly over a longer period of time, and correspond with “Ongoing topics” (such as #News, #Sports, #Politics, #Local). Hashtags with low peakedness reference content in tweets that recurred over time, while hashtags with high peakedness were concentrated in specific bursts. The presence and high volume of hashtags in both categories is an important finding about the IRA’s strategy. The agency did not exclusively commit to spreading disinformation about breaking news. The agency did not commit to breaking fake news, such as the #ColumbianChemical hoax about a chemical attack on a plant in Louisiana, or even to injecting disinformation into everyday conversation but pursued both strategies.

We further focus the peakedness analysis by political ideology. Figure 12 shows frequency by peakedness for hashtags used by IRA accounts presenting a right-leaning identity; Figure 13 shows frequency by peakedness for hashtags used by IRA accounts presenting a US left-leaning identity (including African American). For example, Figure 12 shows that #Fukushima2015 was used more than 10,000 times in total, and 100% of uses of this hashtag occurred in the peak period of its use. In contrast, #MAGA was also used more than 10,000 times in total, but less than 10% of the uses of this hashtag occurred in the peak period of its use.

Both figures have the same shape, but there is one key difference. When it comes to day-to-day hashtags, right-leaning IRA accounts talked about #news, #local, #world, and #TopNews; in contrast, left-leaning IRA accounts talked about #BlackLivesMatter, #BlackTwitter, and #PoliceBrutality. This suggests that IRA assets approached disinformation in ongoing topics differently based on the political affiliation of their target audience: US conservative audiences were targeted with tweets about general topics, such as the news, and African American audiences were targeted with tweets about more specific topics, such as the Black Lives Matter movement. This finding is consistent with the focus of IRA-sponsored ads on topics relevant to African Americans and those following the Black Lives Matter movement. More broadly, this finding suggests the IRA strategy on the right included collecting a general conservative audience and pushing particular themes (#MAGA, #ISIS, #Trump), including mistrust of mainstream news and media (#WakeUpAmerica). The strategy for race-based appeal involved rallying African Americans around Black political identity and issues.

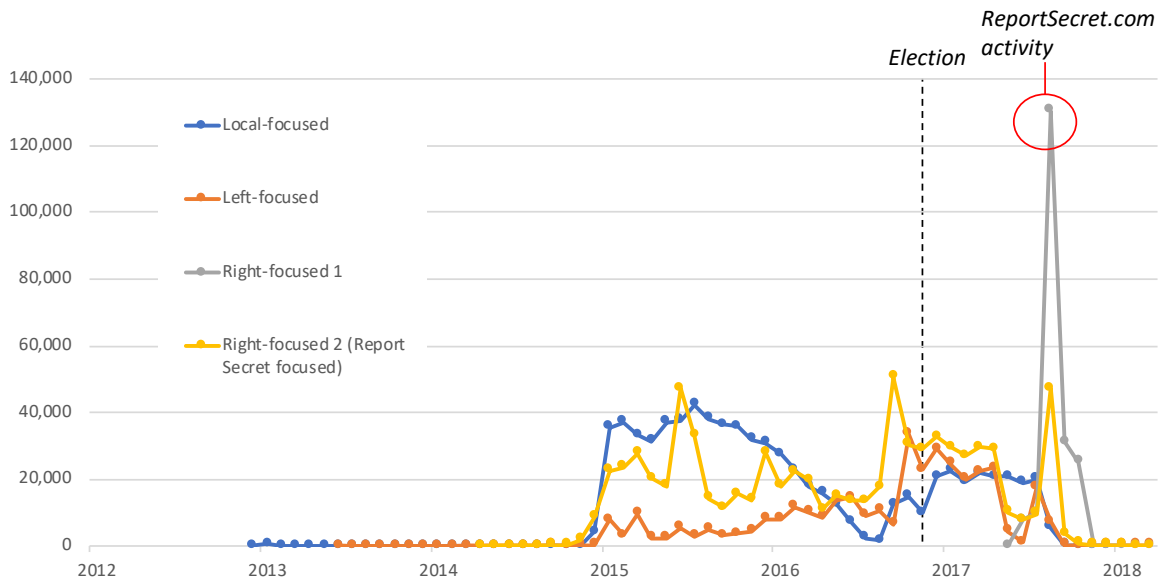
In conclusion, the IRA Twitter data shows a long and successful campaign that resulted in false accounts being effectively woven into the fabric of online US political conversations right up until their suspension. These embedded assets each targeted specific audiences they sought to manipulate and radicalize, with some gaining meaningful influence in online communities after months of behavior designed to blend their activities with those of authentic and highly engaged US users.

Figure 9: The IRA Activity on Twitter Focused on Russia and the US, 2009-2018, Monthly Totals



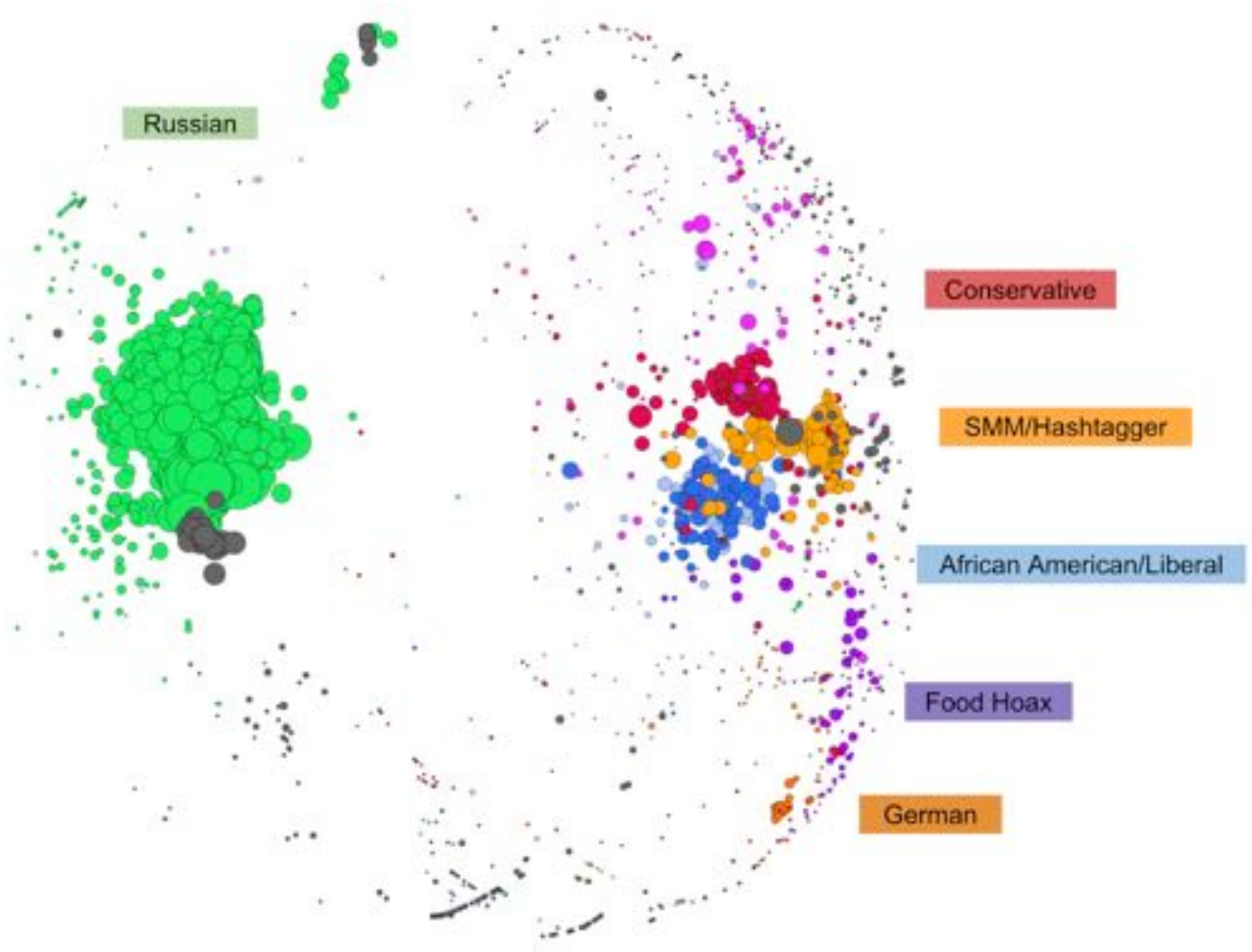
Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by the SSCI

Figure 10: The IRA Twitter Activity Focused on the US, by Category, 2012-2018, Monthly Totals



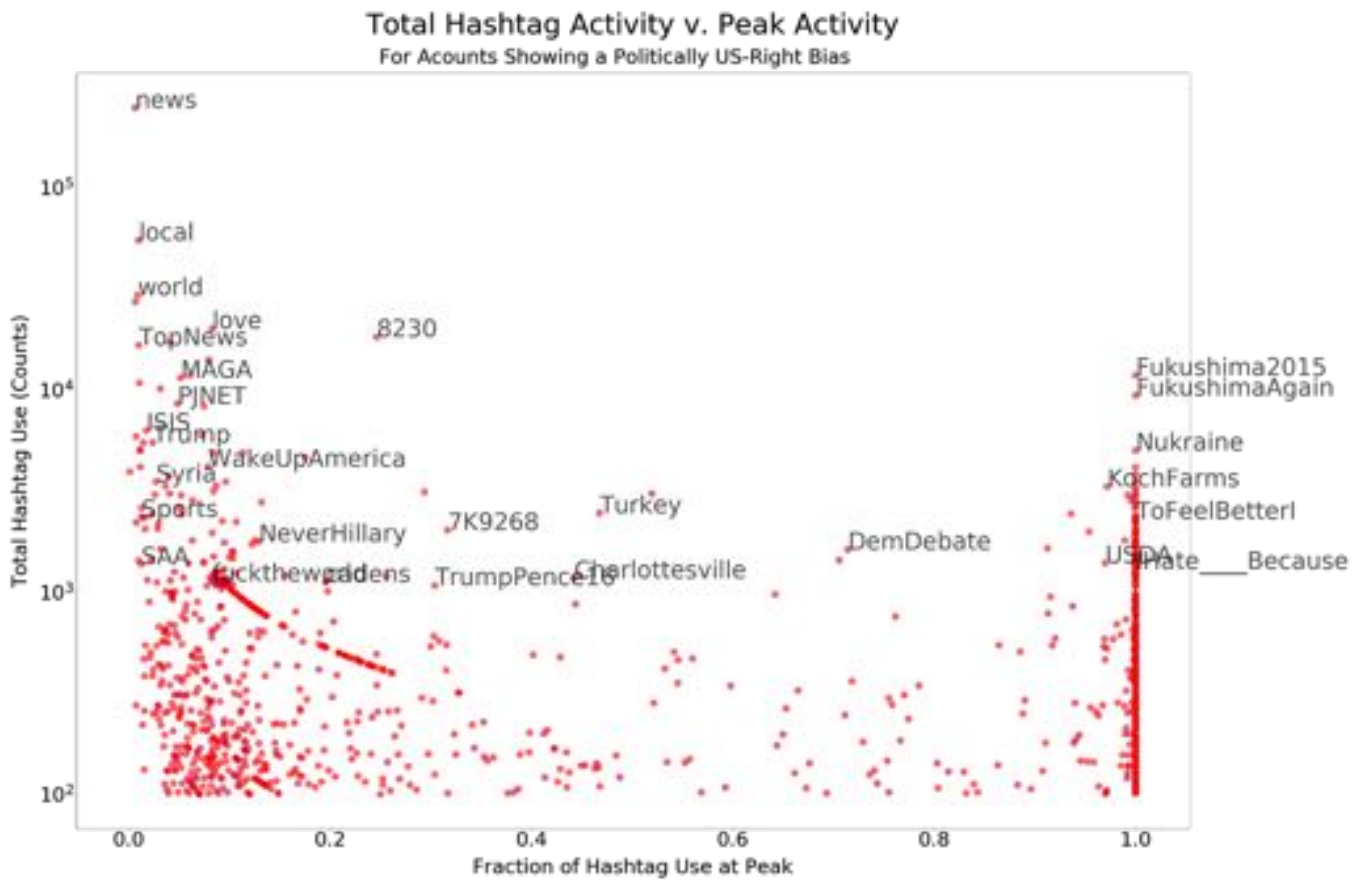
Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by the SSCI

Figure 11: The Mentions Network of 2,648 IRA Accounts, 2009-2018



Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by the SSCI

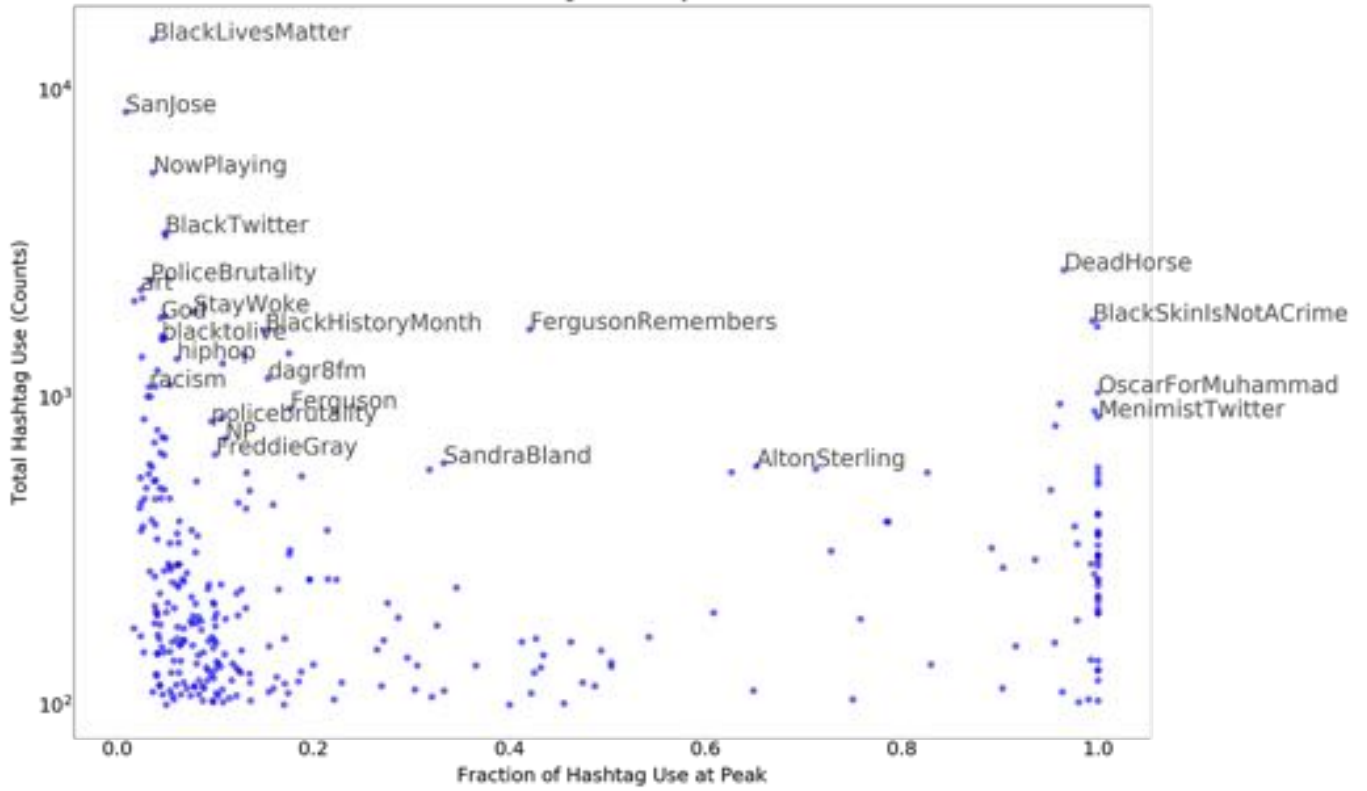
Figure 12: The Frequency of Twitter Hashtag by Peakedness for IRA Activity Targeting the US Right



Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by the SSCI

Figure 13 : The Frequency of Twitter Hashtag by Peakedness Targeting US Left

Total Hashtag Activity v. Peak Activity
 For Accounts Showing a Politically US-Left Bias



Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by the SSCI

Engaging US Voters with Organic Posts on Facebook and Instagram

The IRA ran numerous campaigns that targeted different segments of US Facebook and Instagram users, which were set up by the IRA using 76 different Ads Manager accounts. Through interest and location targeting, each ad sought to attract users to its corresponding Facebook or Instagram page, with organic posts from IRA staff that contained slogans, stories, and commentaries on current events. These personalized messages exposed US users to a wide range of disinformation and junk news linked to on external websites, including content designed to elicit outrage and cynicism. By understanding the most active campaigns, it becomes clear that the IRA sought to energize conservatives around Trump's campaign and encourage the cynicism of other voters in an attempt to neutralize their vote.

While there were many campaigns, a handful resulted in significant user engagement: the vast majority of the *organic posting* activity was concentrated in 81 pages, which produced 67,502 organic posts between them. Almost all the engagement by users, that is, shares, likes, and comments, was received by only 20 pages, representing 99.6% of all engagement (Table 5). These 20 pages primarily targeted African American users and conservatives. In total, IRA content was shared by about 31 million users, liked by almost 39 million users, garnered almost 5.4 million emoji reactions, and generated almost 3.5 million comments.

Table 5 displays the top 20 IRA campaigns on Facebook, sorted by the number of likes they received from users on the platform. When compared with Table 2, it shows that the vast majority of likes, shares, emoji reactions, and comments were generated by users that engaged with content from these top 20 campaigns.

We focus on the top 10 organic post campaigns by likes and shares in the following analysis, which are: Being Patriotic, Stop A.I. (All Invaders), Heart of Texas, Blacktivist, United Muslims of America, Army of Jesus, Brown Power, LGBT United, South United, and BM (Black Matters). We explore when these campaigns were active over three timeframes: the primary season, late 2015 to mid-2016, around the 2016 election with a focus on September and October 2016, and early to mid-2017. Breaking down the timeline allows exploration of relevant timeframes in which IRA activity can be differentiated. Viewing these top 10 campaigns over time makes evident that it was not until early 2016 that the IRA began running many simultaneous campaigns targeting different audience segments.

Figure 14-Figure 16 visualize the activity of these campaigns and the user engagement they received from their audiences between 2015 and 2017. Figure 14 displays the proportion of all organic posts produced by each of these top 10 campaigns by month. For example, Being Patriotic and LGBT United account for almost 100% of the ads in June 2015, while in early 2017, almost all the campaigns are active. Figure 14 provides an overview of when these campaigns are most active relative to one another. Note that the total number of posts over this time period increased significantly. Therefore Figure 14 only shows the relative activity as a proportion of all the top 10 campaigns, not absolute volumes of posts. Figure 15 and Figure 16 are stacked area plots that visualize the total number of likes and shares garnered by these top 10 campaigns between 2015 and 2017 by month. Unlike Figure 14, the numbers in these figures are absolute (not proportions). The likes and shares generated by each campaign are stacked upon one another to provide an impression of how much each campaign contributed to likes and shares in that month.

In mid-to-late 2015, "Being Patriotic" and "LGBT United" produced the majority of organic posts. By early 2016, seven of the ten campaigns were active and were posting regularly. In 2015, there were a

total of 4,108 organic posts from a few of these campaigns. In total, more than half (2,139) targeted right-wing users. “LGBT United” accounted for almost all of the rest (1,814 posts).

In early 2016, just over half (3,799 of 7,451) of all organic posts were for campaigns targeting right-wing users (Being Patriotic, Heart of Texas, South United, and Stop All Invaders). This content prior to Trump’s securing the Republican nomination was not particularly oriented towards his campaign. In 2015, there are relatively few mentions of him on these campaigns targeting right-wing voters. Rather, they stressed (and inflated) the harms of immigration, with a particular focus on Muslims and terrorism. Many ads focused on President Obama, accusing him of being a Muslim, building on ongoing biased reporting on Obama. While antagonism towards Muslims and President Obama were common in 2015, the majority of posts were positive stories about members of the armed services and patriotic slogans, often consistent with the content in the sponsored ads. Explicit mentions of Donald Trump increased in early and mid-2016, as his primary campaign gained momentum. These campaigns, however, seemed to be geared towards extending the anti-immigrant rhetoric that Trump’s campaign frequently made use of.

United Muslims of America significantly increased its activity in this period, as did Blacktivist. For Blacktivist, United Muslims of America, and LGBT United, organic posts in the primary season were not particularly focused on any candidates—for example little mention is made of Bernie Sanders or Hillary Clinton. During this time, Blacktivist tended to post information on attacks on African Americans by police officers, Black Lives Matter, and messages about slavery and ongoing discrimination and mass incarceration affecting African Americans. United Muslims of America tended to provide a positive image of Islam and Muslims and often condemned terrorist attacks across the world. There is little evidence to suggest that during the primaries, these campaigns were focused on ongoing political campaigns by Clinton, Sanders, or Trump. Rather, the goal may have been to create a following for these pages, laying the foundation to later push content to audiences in 2016 and 2017.

In the last six months of 2016, Figure 14-Figure 16 show a much more diverse set of campaigns emerging and posting organic content. In the last six months of 2016, there were a total of 9,373 organic posts produced by these ten campaigns (the “Army of Jesus” and “Brown Power” campaigns had just launched in late 2016). Of these posts, 4,596 (49%) were for right-wing campaigns and 2,355 (25%) were for campaigns targeting African Americans. Until the election, 50% of the posts produced by these top 10 campaigns targeted right-wing audiences. However, after the election, this proportion reduces to 45%. The analysis of the ads clearly suggests that African American audiences were targeted with the most ads. However, the majority of the activity of the IRA’s most successful campaigns, measured by likes and prior to the election, was actually focused on conservatives. While the black community is another important bloc, it is one among a handful of others. From the perspective of the campaigns, the primary focus appears to be on right-wing audiences. Just prior to the election, attacks on Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton became more frequent among these campaigns, often offering opinions on data regarding their purported decrease of funding in services for US citizens while allegedly earmarking funds to support refugees. In September, October, and November, 1,597 posts targeted conservatives and other right-wing voters. While there are temporary increases in daily posting following each presidential debate, these increases are neither particularly acute nor do they often mention anything that was discussed during the debates.

It is evident that the campaigns sought to demobilize African Americans, LGBT, and liberal voters. This was attempted through organic posts that attacked Hillary Clinton. Content referred to President Clinton’s 2016 signing into law of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) as an attack on the gay community, and in another, argued that Hillary supports Muslims, who the post insinuates are anti-gay.

Attacks on Clinton and calls for voter disengagement were particularly clear in Blacktivist during September, October, and November 2016, with statements such as “NO LIVES MATTER TO HILLARY CLINTON. ONLY VOTES MATTER TO HILLARY CLINTON” (Blacktivist, 29 October 2016), another one argues that black people should vote for Jill Stein (Blacktivist, 7 October 2016), or not vote at all, with the claim: “NOT VOTING is a way to exercise our rights” (Blacktivist, 3 November 2016).

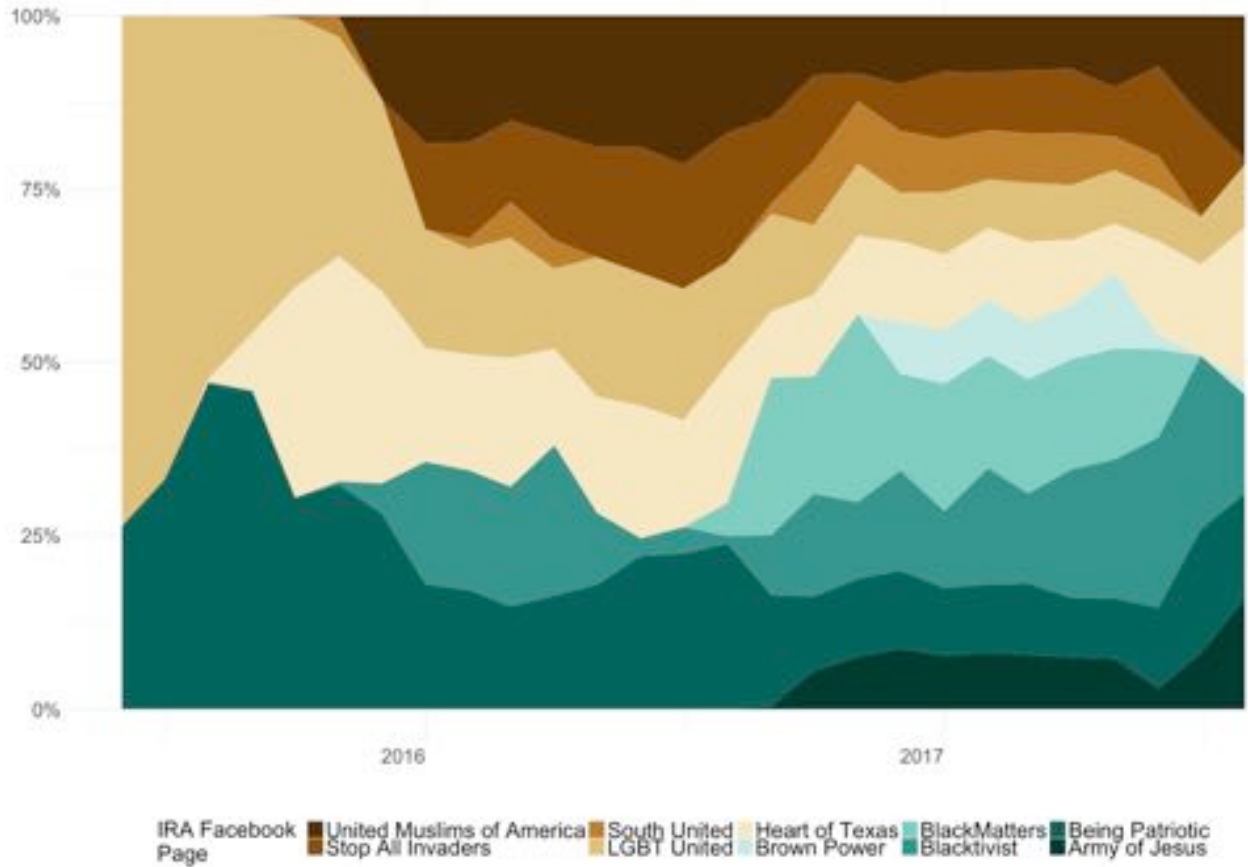
After the election, campaigns targeting conservative and right-wing voters continued to constitute the plurality of content. As Figure 14-Figure 16 show, “Brown Power,” which targeted Latin Americans, only began producing organic posts after the election. These broadly followed similar patterns to those of “Blacktivist” and “Black Matters”—repeating narratives of positivity towards Mexican Americans and posting commentaries on stories that affect this community. The “Army of Jesus” campaign also started in the same timeframe. These posts are rather different to others that targeted conservatives and right-wing users. Instead of negative messaging about immigrants and antagonism towards liberals, these messages involved a more conciliatory discourse centered on Christianity as a means to heal the divides that crystallized in the US by the end of 2016. These posts encouraged users to put less faith in politics and instead be faithful to God: “America is in trouble and the solution is not in the politics, not the Democratic Party or the Republican Party. The only hope for this nation is God...Like if you agree!” (Army of Jesus, 6 November 2016). Other campaigns continued their general themes, and significant differences have not been observed, though qualitative observations about the differences between content after the election requires further exploration.

Table 5: The Top 20 IRA Facebook Pages, Sorted by Number of Likes

Facebook Pages Managed by the IRA (Top 20 Liked)	Number of Likes	Number of Shares	Number of Reactions	Number of Comments
Being Patriotic	6,431,507	4,429,880	399,542	393,179
Stop A.I. (Stop All Immigrants)	6,050,989	5,202,716	552,684	778,924
Heart of Texas	5,489,337	4,986,384	590,664	414,599
Blacktivist	4,642,946	4,843,595	1,411,605	509,882
United Muslims of America	2,479,294	1,268,022	265,716	175,976
Army of Jesus	2,359,018	651,106	262,113	387,765
Brown Power	2,098,769	1,300,998	373,643	128,795
LGBT United	1,974,368	930,199	396,257	87,500
South United	1,419,503	2,263,031	101,931	72,461
BM (Black Matters)	1,333,173	1,797,479	325,864	146,254
Secured Borders	1,220,079	713,905	121,553	117,824
Defend the 2nd	986,969	551,847	90,228	39,530
Williams&Kalvin	569,627	541,436	138,078	39,960
Woke Blacks	454,151	490,623	127,179	37,876
Back the Badge	410,364	155,524	63,765	26,274
Veterans Come First	330,662	307,021	45,057	33,302
Memopolis	135,704	78,996	21,061	13,002
Pan-African roots MOVE	124,938	152,931	44,929	15,655
Born Liberal	104,314	79,938	22,933	5,749
Black Matters	59,032	97,516	14,620	9,350
<i>Total</i>	<i>38,674,744</i>	<i>30,843,147</i>	<i>5,369,422</i>	<i>3,433,857</i>

Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by the SSCI.

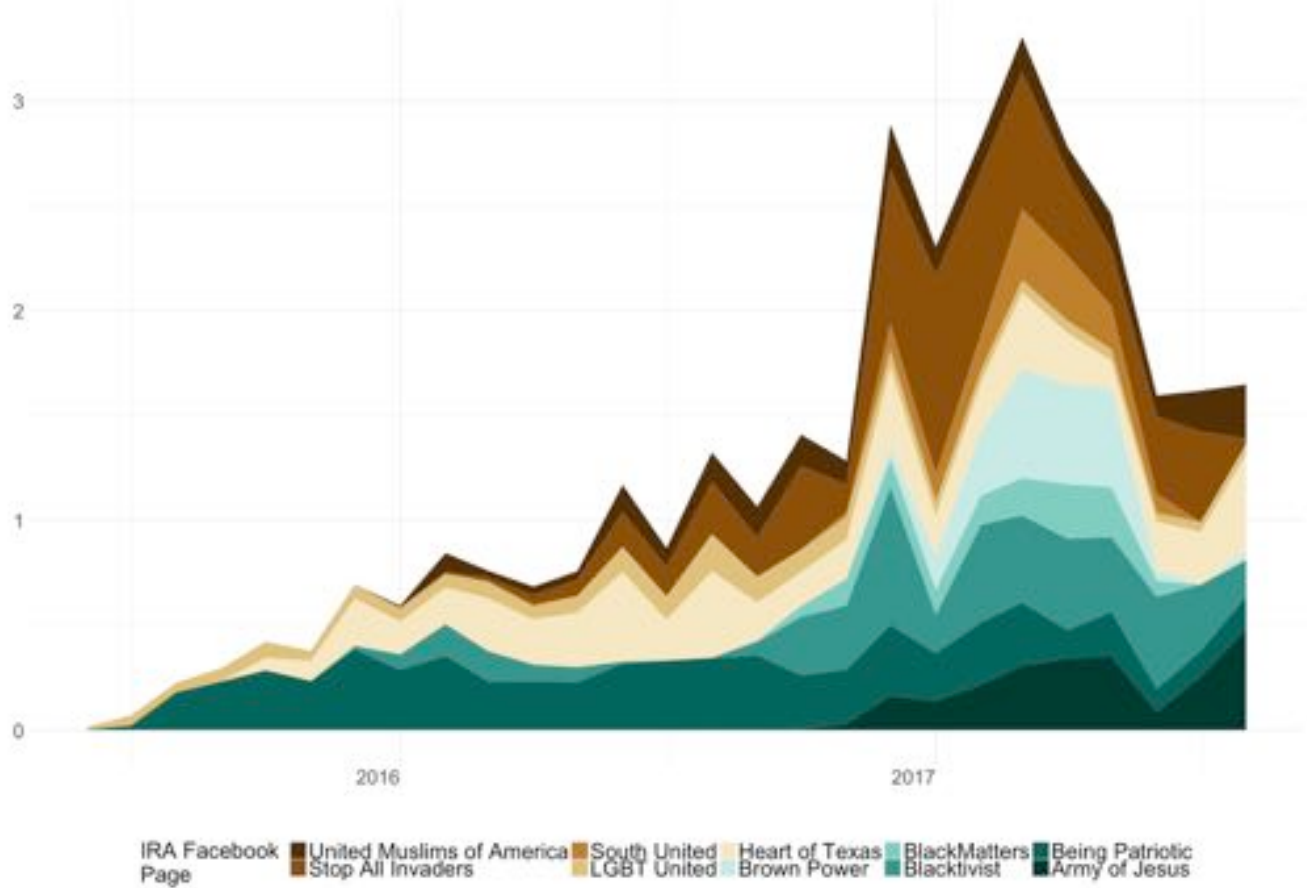
Figure 14: The Proportional Volume of Facebook Organic Posts for Top 10 Campaigns



Note: Values on the y-axis refer to the proportion of total organic posts produced by all of the campaigns over time. For example, in June 2015, LGBT United posted over 70% of all total posts in that month, while Being Patriotic posted the remainder. The chart only tells us what proportion of the posts came from a particular ad campaign, and does not tell us the total number of posts, which were much higher in 2016 and 2017 than 2015.

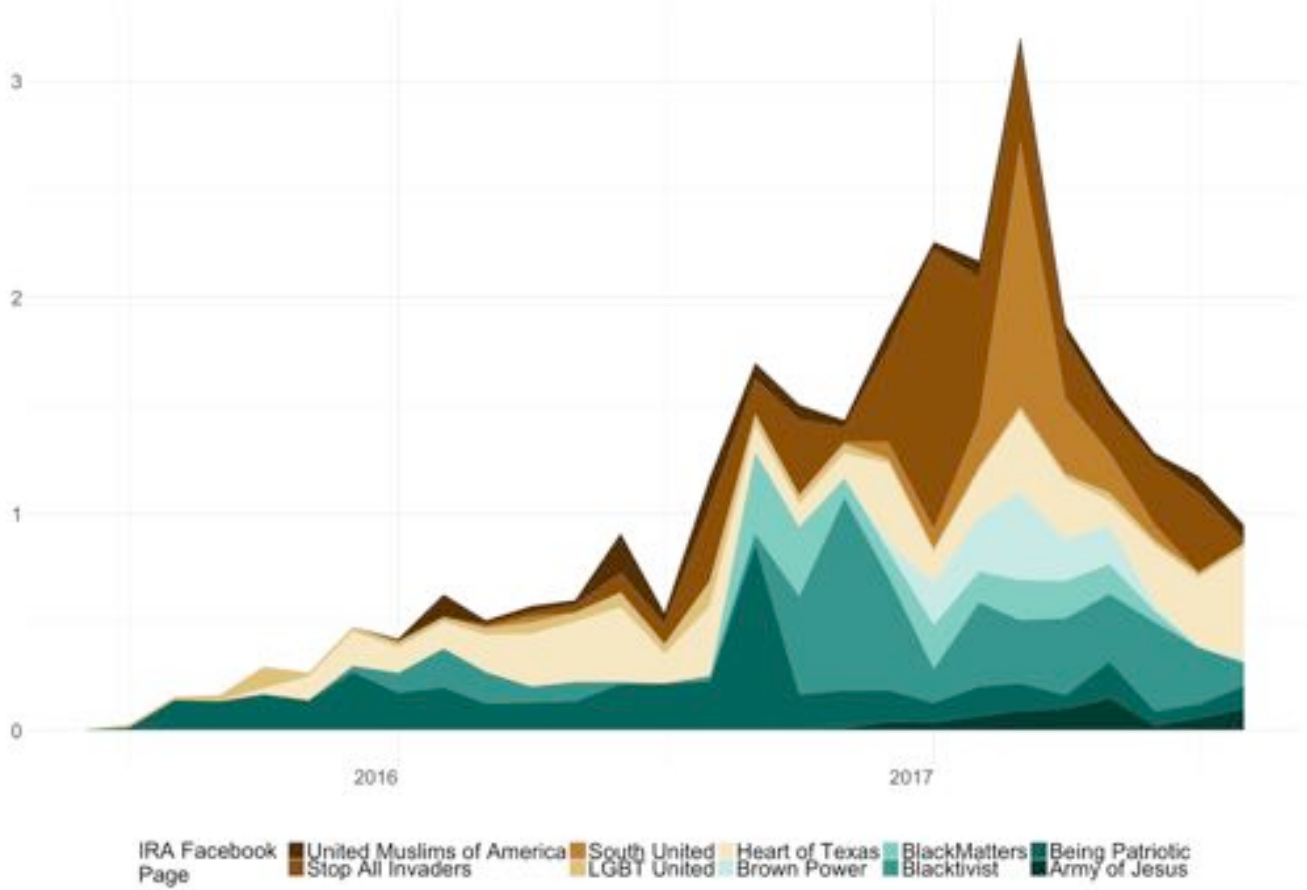
Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by the SSCI.

Figure 15: The Total Likes on Organic Posts for Top 10 Campaigns, in Millions



Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by the SSCI.

Figure 16: The Total Shares of Organic Posts for Top 10 Campaigns, in Millions



Source: Authors' calculations based on data provided by the SSCI.

Conclusion: IRA Activity and Political Polarization in the US

The data on the Internet Research Agency (IRA) provided to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) by US social media and Internet platforms demonstrates a sustained effort to manipulate the US public and undermine democracy. With years of experience manipulating public opinion in Russia, the IRA used major social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to target US voters and polarize US social media users.

The Russian effort targeted many kinds of communities within the US, but particularly the most extreme conservatives and those with particular sensitivities to race and immigration. The IRA used a variety of fake accounts to infiltrate political discussion communities on the right and left, including black activist communities, in order to exacerbate social divisions and influence the agenda. Accounts posing as US users on the right and left were frequently created and operated from the same computers.

“Cyber troops” are defined here as government or political party actors tasked with manipulating public opinion online (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018a). Specifically, we focus on how these actors disseminate computational propaganda over social media platforms. We define computational propaganda as the use of automation, algorithms, and big-data analytics to manipulate public life (Howard & Woolley, 2016). The term encompasses issues to do with so-called “fake news”, the spread of misinformation on social media platforms, illegal data harvesting and micro-profiling, the exploitation of social media platforms for foreign influence operations, the amplification of hate speech or harmful content through fake accounts or political bots, and clickbait content for optimized social media consumption. This report has examined how the IRA made use of computational propaganda to shape public opinion in the US.

The affordances of social media platforms make them powerful infrastructures for spreading computational propaganda (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018b). Social media are particularly effective at directly reaching large numbers of people, while simultaneously microtargeting individuals with personalized messages. Indeed, this effective impression management—and fine-grained control over who receives which messages—is what makes social media platforms so attractive to advertisers, but also to political and foreign operatives. Where government control over Internet content has traditionally relied on blunt instruments to block or filter the free flow of information, powerful political actors are now turning to computational propaganda to shape public discourse and nudge public opinion.

A strong democracy requires high-quality news from an independent media, a pluralistic climate of opinion, and the ability to negotiate public consensus. But the IRA leveraged social media to manufacture and spread junk news, manipulate public opinion, and subvert democratic processes.

Social media platforms are among the most used applications on the Internet. In the US, 85% of the adult population uses the Internet regularly, and 80% of those people are on Facebook (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016). Most of the time, social media are not used for politics: they are a place where friends and families connect and reconnect, or where individuals find and share entertainment, popular culture, as well as humorous cat videos. The ubiquity and prominence of social media for everyday life underscores their importance in today’s society, and users place high amounts of trust in these platforms. But with their ability to segment audiences and target messages in a quick, cheap and largely unregulated way, it is clear why these platforms have attracted the interest of political operators. Unfortunately, there is mounting evidence that social media are being used to manipulate and deceive the voting public—and to undermine democracies and degrade public life.

We once celebrated the fact that social media let us express ourselves, share content, and personalize our media consumption. It is certainly difficult to tell the story of the Arab Spring without acknowledging that social media platforms allowed democracy advocates to coordinate themselves in surprising new ways: to send their demands for political change cascading across North Africa and the Middle East (Howard & Hussain, 2013). But the absence of human editors in our news feeds also makes it easy for political actors to manipulate social networks. In previous research conducted by the Computational Propaganda Project, we found rather paradoxical evidence of the chilling effect of social media on freedom of speech and political participation. Half of Russian Twitter conversations involve highly automated accounts that actively shape online discourses (Sanovich, 2018). In Brazil, both professional trolls and bots have been used aggressively to drown out minority and dissenting opinions during three presidential campaigns, one presidential impeachment campaign, and the major race for the Mayor of Rio (Arnaudo, 2018). Social media have gone from being the natural infrastructure for sharing collective grievances and coordinating civic engagement, to being a computational tool for social control, manipulated by canny political consultants, and available to politicians in democracies and dictatorships alike (Howard & Woolley, 2016).

However, understanding precisely how social media platforms impact public life is difficult (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018a). In many democracies it is not even clear that spreading computational propaganda contravenes election laws (Howard, Woolley, & Calo, 2018). It is, however, quite clear that the strategies and techniques used by government cyber troops have an impact, and that their activities violate the norms of democratic practice. We cannot prevent all bad actors from using computational propaganda, but in democracies we can have guidelines discouraging its use. To start to address these challenges, we need to develop stronger rules and norms for the use of social media, big data and new information technologies during elections.

During 2016 and 2017 we saw significant efforts made by Russia to disrupt elections around the world, but also political parties in these countries spreading disinformation domestically. Looking at the growth of cyber troop activity from 2017 to 2018 has demonstrated that these strategies are circulating globally. We cannot wait for national courts to address the technicalities of infractions after running an election or referendum. Protecting our democracies now means setting the rules of fair play before voting day, not after.

This analysis has several consequences for public policy and industry behavior. Obviously, democracies need to take computational propaganda seriously as a threat to their public life. Social media firms need to share valuable data about public life with the public. For example, Facebook now focuses on ad transparency, while disabling the API for public posts and not offering an Instagram API at all. However, in this report we found that the IRA's political ad activity has not particularly increased over time, while organic post activity has. Organic post activity is also much greater in volume than political ad activity. As well, our findings indicate that organic posts receive far more engagement. The loss of access to the API for public post data prevents further public understanding of the latest trends in computational propaganda.

Finally, this process of investigating IRA activities has also allowed us—as researchers—to develop some recommended best practices for social media firms that want to hold the public trust. First, all social media platforms should provide an open and consistent API that allows researchers to analyze important trends in public life. For example, Twitter used to provide researchers at major universities with access to several APIs, but has withdrawn this and provides so little information on the sampling of existing APIs that researchers increasingly question its utility for even basic social science. Facebook provides an extremely limited API for the analysis of public pages, but no API for Instagram. Facebook

provided the US Senate with information on the organic post data of 81 Facebook pages, and the data on Facebook ads bought by 76 accounts. Twitter's data contribution covered activity in multiple languages, but Facebook's data contribution focuses on activity only in English. Facebook chose not to disclose data from IRA *Profiles* or *Groups* and only shared organic post data from a small number of *Pages* with the Committee. Google chose to supply the Senate committee with data in a non-machine-readable format. The evidence that the IRA had bought ads on Google was provided as images of ad text and in PDF format whose pages displayed copies of information previously organized in spreadsheets. This means that Google could have provided the useable ad text and spreadsheets—in a standard machine-readable file format, such as CSV or JSON, that would be useful to data scientists—but chose to turn them into images and PDFs as if the material would all be printed out on paper.

Even in times of crisis, social media firms need to co-operate with public agencies in a way that respects users' privacy. However, sharing data about public problems should be more than performative, it should be meaningful and constructive. And it should be matched with responsive support and communication channels so that researchers can make progress understanding problems that the social media firms themselves seem to have difficulty investigating.

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