

# Election Hacking:

Russian Interference in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election

PRESENTER: JIM MILLER

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# The Mueller Indictment

CONSPIRACY TO DEFRAUD THE U.S.

## “The Grand Jury for the District of Columbia charges:”

- The defendants, the Internet Research Agency (IRA), violated the Federal Election Campaign Act and Foreign Agent Registration Act by spending money to influence a U.S. election and performing political activities without registering with the U.S.
- “...Defendants, together with others known and unknown to the Grand Jury, knowingly and intentionally conspired to defraud the United States by impairing, obstructing, and defeating the lawful functions of the Federal Election Commission, the U.S. Department of Justice, and the U.S. Department of State in administering federal requirements for disclosure of foreign involvement in certain domestic activities.”

## “Manner and Means of the Conspiracy”: Social Media

- Beginning in 2014, the IRA studied U.S. social media websites, focusing on political and social issues
- They created hundreds of social media accounts and used them become “leaders of public opinion”
- They created thematic group pages on these social media sites to address a variety of issues, amassing hundreds of thousands of followers by 2016
- They designed Twitter accounts to appear as if controlled by U.S. citizens or groups, for example @TEN\_GOP (over 100,000 followers)
- These “specialists” were guided and given feedback on their posts and overall performance on “ratios of text, graphics, and videos to use in posts...”

## “Manner and Means of the Conspiracy”: Social Media Cont.

- In 2016, the IRA’s intent was to spread derogatory information about candidates, like Hillary Clinton, Ted Cruz, and Marco Rubio, and promote Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders
- The IRA posted content, created groups, created events, bought ads, and communicated with campaigns and activists to achieve this goal
- In June 2016, the IRA began to organize political rallies (under false names) and promoted these events through their social media influence and financial means
- They also offered money to individuals attending their events in exchange for performing certain tasks, like holding a particular sign

## “Manner and Means of the Conspiracy”: Other Actions

- They violated the Federal Election Campaign Act and Foreign Agent Registration Act by spending money to influence a U.S. election and performing political activities without registering with the U.S.
- They provided inaccurate information while obtaining visas, specifically employment location and reason for travel
- They setup an infrastructure of VPNs to allow for social media and other activities to be performed from Russia
- They created hundreds of email accounts under false names to appear as U.S. citizens or groups
- They unlawfully used the D.O.B. and S.S.N of real U.S. citizens to obtain PayPal accounts, false identification, etc.

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# Discussion

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# Social Media

WHAT IS ITS ROLE IN OUR SOCIETY?



# The Mission Statement of Social Media

## FACEBOOK

- “Founded in 2004, Facebook's mission is to give people the power to build community and bring the world closer together. People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them.”

## TWITTER

- “Give everyone the power to create and share ideas and information instantly, without barriers.”

# Terms of Service

## FACEBOOK

- “You will not use Facebook to do anything unlawful, misleading, malicious, or discriminatory”
- Ads: “must not contain deceptive, false, or misleading content...must not contain content that exploits controversial political or social issues for commercial purposes”
- Pages: “must not contain false, misleading, fraudulent, or deceptive claims or content”

## TWITTER

- “We do not endorse, support, represent or guarantee the completeness, truthfulness, accuracy, or reliability of any Content or communications posted via the Services or endorse any opinions expressed via the Services. You understand that by using the Services, you may be exposed to Content that might be offensive, harmful, inaccurate or otherwise inappropriate, or in some cases, postings that have been mislabeled or are otherwise deceptive. All Content is the sole responsibility of the person who originated such Content.”
- “You may not impersonate individuals, groups, or organizations in a manner that is intended to or does mislead, confuse, or deceive others. ”

# Current Technological Efforts- Facebook

- Remove economic incentives
  - Use fact-checking organizations and machine learning to better identify fraud
  - Users see fewer ads/posts from “low-quality” web pages
  - Users who repeatedly share stories marked as false cannot advertise
- New Software
  - “show more informative links”
  - Easier ways to report stories as fake news
- Helping Users
  - Facebook Journalism Project
  - If an article is fact checked, the fact checking story is added to the post

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# Discussion

# “Hacking” the 2016 Election

# Analyzing the Legality of the Operation

- What crimes were committed?
- How do these crimes relate to the previous section?
- Was what the Russians did technically “hacking”? Didn’t they use the features of these platforms as they were designed to be used?
- Are the current efforts enough to prevent reoccurrence?
- How can you technically prevent somebody from using features as they were designed to be used?
- How can these social media platforms be manipulated without violating the law?
- Should these platforms be liable?

## Sources

- <https://www.justice.gov/file/1035477/download>
- <https://www.lawfareblog.com/russian-influence-campaign-whats-latest-mueller-indictment>
- <https://newsroom.fb.com/news/2017/04/working-to-stop-misinformation-and-false-news/>
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