

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON DEMOCRACY: The American Experience

States that shifted from Democrat 2012 to Republican 2016

Democratic Stronghold; Pennsylvania (20)

Republican Stronghold: Florida (29)

Swing States: Iowa (6), Michigan (16), Ohio (18) and Wisconsin (10)

National Voting Systems

Western Europe: Centralized

United States: Decentralized (under the control of individual states, even counties within some states)

Visible Election Manipulation (via computer hacking)

Democratic/Hillary Clinton campaign emails released via WikiLeaks

Vulnerability because of widespread use of Moscow-based Kaspersky Labs antivirus.

--60% of company \$633 million business in U.S. and Western Europe

--Kaspersky part of Russian Security Service before establishing his antivirus business

--CIA never used Kaspersky Labs programs because of Russia tie, and it's banned for use by NSA.

--used by 24 US government agencies including Departments of State, Defense, Energy, Justice, Treasury, and the Army, Navy and Airforce.

--Department of Homeland Security waited until September 13, 2017, to order it removed from all federal government computers even though American spy agencies were aware of it since Israel hacked Kaspersky Labs in 2014 and shared information with NSA,

Subtle Election Manipulation

Google (\$53,000; 470 profiles tied to a Russian company Internet Research Agency [shut down]) and Facebook ads (>\$100,000; 3,000 ads + 2,200 with less certain Russia connection because ads were set in Russian language) placed during the 2016 presidential election campaign **on divisive social issues: race, gay rights, gun control and immigration.**

--Google only began allowing ads targeted by political leanings in 2016 and only in the US!

Facebook and Twitter (200 accounts) a year or so before the 2016 election

--sow discord in the US via Russian-linked pages, Being Patriotic, Secured Borders, Blacktivist, United Muslims of America „touching up and recycling“ YouTube videos of police violence, a college student experiment about Muslim prejudice, a practice known as **astroturfing**, cultivating and influencing real political movements.

--consistent themes of hurting Hillary Clinton, helping Donald Trump, and setting Americans against each other.

--offered to embed employees in Clinton and Trump campaigns to teach them how to take advantage of the platform. Accepted by Trump campaign; refused by Clinton campaign.

Computer Hacking?

--Durham County, NC, reliably blue home to the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and Duke Universities, problems with electronic poll books. Breakdown in the electronic check-in software prevented hundreds of „would-be voters from casting their ballots and hundreds more to simply give up in the face of long lines (four hour waits).“ Was VR Systems software manipulated when hacked months before the election? Other „backend“ software vendors?

--At least 21 states were targeted by Russian hackers. Attacks on the back-end election apparatus (voter registration, state and local databases, e-poll books, and other equipment)

--DCLeaks.com created by Russian military, site had little action so moved its hacked Clinton campaign emails to WikiLeaks.

Print and television campaign ads are **regulated by the Federal Election Commission and Federal Communications Commission. Social media platforms remain unregulated!!!**

--Google (c. 80% of computer searches), Facebook, and Twitter **are lobbying to stay that way!**

Legitimized Propaganda Machine

--State sponsored Russian news channel RT – described by US intelligence agencies as Russia’s „principal international propaganda outlet“-- became legitimized through YouTube which helped build and expand RT.

--RT constantly featured negative news stories about Hillary Clinton during the 2016 presidential campaign according to US intelligence. (videos often borrowed from other sources).helped build RT’s audience.

--RT reached 2.2 million subscribers, slightly behind CNN.

--In September the U.S. Department of Justice demanded that RT’s American affiliate register as a foreign agent. If it does happen and restrictions be put on it, President Vladimir Putin said Russia would act „symmetrically and quite swiftly.“

--even recruited American Lori Harfenist as a regular contributor during the presidential campaign, e.g., with segments like :American is a Hypocrite,“and others. Satire?

The aim of Russia was, and is, to weaken democratic governments in addition to NATO and the EU.