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Executive Summary

The U.S. justice system is under attack as part of a long-term Russian effort to undermine the appeal of democracy and weaken the West. Via multi-platform disinformation operations, Kremlin-backed operatives work to exacerbate existent divisions within populations and increase overall mistrust and paranoia against democratic institutions. In the process, justice systems are portrayed as corrupt, inept, and hypocritical.

This report describes the nature of this threat and proposes measures for countering it. The report focuses on activities by the Russian government, including the ways it feeds, is fed by, and amplifies domestic voices to weaken public confidence in the justice system. The insights gained by examining Russia's efforts can and should inform our understanding of both threats from other nations and the challenges contemporary communications technologies pose to a healthy democracy generally.

The Propaganda Channels

In accordance with its New Generation Warfare, Russia uses a combination of propaganda channels to maximize the effectiveness of their disinformation campaigns. Each channel serves a slightly different, but complimentary, purpose. In this report, we focus on how state-sponsored media and social media platforms have been used to opportunistically fuel discontent within democratic populations.

Our team studied Russian state-sponsored programming on RT and Sputnik, and data from social media platforms, to better capture how these channels promote messaging to erode confidence in institutions of justice. Further, we explored the ways in which the Russians are capitalizing on already-present divides in society and just turning up the volume of resentment.

Frames

While there is a sense of general resentment featured in Russian propaganda, the disinformation campaigns rely on frames to level more direct attacks on the justice system. Framing theory refers to the packaging and presentation of ideas and suggests that the way ideas are presented determines how that information is processed and acted upon. Russia has developed four frames that are particularly damaging to the justice system. Each frame reinforces the overarching message that the U.S. justice system is not independent or impartial. Instead, the Kremlin's disinformation asserts:

- The justice system tolerates, protects, and covers up crimes committed by **immigrants**
- The justice system operationalizes the institutionally racist and corrupt **police state**
- The justice system directly supports and enables **corporate corruption**
- The justice system is a tool of the **political elite**

The last frame is the most prevalent. It reinforces the idea that democracy is run by the societal elites, and the justice system is a pawn used to justify the government's corrupt dealings. Recently, this frame was used to undermine Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation. The courts hold the power to shine a light on Russia's corrupt dealings, which in turn will create a world that is more aware of and less susceptible to Russia's influence operations. It's not surprising, then, that Russian President Vladimir Putin worked to undermine the justice system to pre-emptively cast doubt on the Mueller investigation and similar investigations conducted in the future.

Recommendations

This report focuses on Russia, but other states—and domestic actors—are adopting similar tactics. Further, even though these exploits are greatly aggravated by advancements in technology, that does not necessarily mean that the solutions must be uniquely technological.

Given the ever-advancing nature of threats in this space, it is important to consider broader countermeasures that make democracy more resilient to these sorts of attacks in the future.

The February 2018 Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) report *Countering Adversary Threats to Democratic Institutions* called for a whole-of-nation strategy to prevent, deter, and reduce the effectiveness of democracy-undermining activities. The contributing experts agreed the strategy should address the following imperatives:

1. Publicize the extent of adversary interference and increase public awareness
2. Promote bipartisan action, increase technical defenses, and increase the cost of disruptive activities
3. Improve transparency into foreign adversary interference
4. Research the extent to which specific adversary techniques influence public opinion and target mitigation approaches accordingly
5. Engage in a national effort to promote U.S. understanding of the importance of democracy and democratic institutions

The whole-of-nation strategy is still needed, and it needs to include a significant international component as well. But the threat to the justice system requires additional, institution-specific attention. In keeping with the five imperatives, the following recommendations broadly highlight preliminary actions that must be taken to safeguard institutions of justice:

- Raise threat awareness and invest in impact-oriented research to understand the full

scope of disinformation operations aimed at the justice system;

- Improve rapid response capabilities and communication capabilities between institutions like the justice system, appropriate federal entities, and social media platforms; and
- Expand civics and media literacy trainings, elevating these efforts as a national security imperative for the sake of building societal resilience.

Russia's attacks on the justice system provide strong evidence that disinformation operations go well beyond elections, are adapting, touch all parts of society, and show no signs of abating. Russia has signaled its intention to continue undermining democratic institutions like the justice system. We must commit to a coordinated, whole-of-nation response to this national security threat.

1 | Introduction

"You think we are living in 2016. No, we are living in 1948. And do you know why? Because in 1949, the Soviet Union had its first atomic bomb test. And if until that moment…the Americans were not taking us seriously, in 1949 everything changed, and they started talking to us on an equal footing…I'm warning you: we are at the verge of having 'something' in the information arena, which will allow us to talk to the Americans as equals."

-Andrey Krutskikh, senior Kremlin adviser (Infoforum 2016)[1]

In the aftermath of the 2016 Presidential election, Americans sobered up to the news that a foreign nation interfered in their election process. This spawned numerous debates, investigations, and policy proposals addressing adversary activities around elections. Now, almost two years later, Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation confirms that Russia *did* meddle in the democratic process via disinformation operations specifically "designed to sow social discord, eventually with the aim of interfering with the election."[2]

However, what is still missed in much of the public discussion is that these affronts on liberal democracies are significantly broader and meant to impair institutions beyond the ballot box.

The United States' justice system is under attack as part of a long-term Russian effort to undermine the appeal of democracy and weaken the West. Like elections, the justice system depends on public trust in the legitimacy of its processes and outcomes. And like elections, there is documented evidence that justice systems are consequential targets in our adversaries' attempts to undermine democracy.

Using multi-pronged disinformation operations, Kremlin-backed operatives exacerbate existent divisions within populations and increase overall mistrust and paranoia against "the system," particularly as manifested in democratic institutions. In the process, justice systems, traditionally the most trusted and transparent institution of any healthy democracy, are portrayed as irretrievably corrupt, inept, and hypocritical rather than independent and impartial. No institution is perfect, certainly not the U.S. justice system. Russia seizes upon legitimate problems in the system and portrays those not as opportunities for reform but as reasons for giving up on democracy.

The Russian threat against democratic institutions of justice—including the courts, judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement—is unrelenting and evolving. Yet, to date, we have been entirely too slow to recognize and adequately respond to the gradual erosion of this vital pillar of Western democracy.

This report will explore the ways in which Russia has used disinformation to weaken democracies, and will shine light on how these attacks, and potentially attacks by others, uniquely threaten public trust in institutions of justice in the United States. After introducing the Russian strategy and tactics pursued, the subsequent chapters review the primary propaganda channels facilitating the spread of disinformation. Then the report highlights the democracy-undermining narrative frames designed by Russia to portray the justice system in a negative light. The report concludes with a series of recommendations and countermeasures to prevent, detect, and mitigate the effectiveness of adversary campaigns against institutions of justice.

Russia has signaled its intention to continue undermining democratic institutions, including justice systems, so it is time we commit to commensurate preparedness.

Understanding the Threat

Russia's New Generation Warfare is "primarily a strategy of influence, not of brute force" with the goal of "break[ing] the internal coherence of the enemy system—and not about its integral annihilation."[3] The tearing apart of countries from within is not a wholly new concept for the Russians. In the past few decades alone, Russia has successfully carried out information operations in Eastern Europe and the Baltic states.[4] In those nations, Russia waged political warfare by dividing groups, instigating them, and breaking apart the emerging democracies from the inside.[5] But today's technology helps Russia resuscitate and improve upon some of its previously successful democracy-disruption tactics.[6]

General of the Russian Army, Valery Gerasimov, has indicated that the rules of war are changing and Russia must look to the role that nonmilitary means can play in "achieving political and strategic goals."[7,8] He justifies the complete acceptance of hybrid war as a consequence of today's "blurring of the line between a state of war and peace."[9]

In other words, Russia's current outlook is that hybrid strategies can and should be used at any time, not just reserved for times that fit traditional definitions of war, to secure national interests.[10]

This acceptance of hybrid tactics as an option to be used at any time is a potential game changer, and with frequent use, gives Russia at least a short-term comparative advantage for conflicts in this domain. First, hybrid tactics are incredibly economical for the Russian government: as was noted by historian Timothy Snyder last year, Russia's entire budget for cyberwarfare, which includes information operations, costs less than one U.S. F-35 jet.[11] Second, it provides opportunities to wage more constant and consistent challenges at a level just shy of triggering a retaliatory military response. Whereas before, Russia might have been slightly more hesitant to provoke developed Western democracies—nations like the United States that far surpass Russia in military might—nonmilitary tactics like cyber-enabled disinformation are harder to definitively trace back to the Russian state.

Russia uses a combination of propaganda channels to maximize the effectiveness of its disinformation operations, each channel serving a slightly different, but complimentary, purpose. For example, Russian state-sponsored media outlets like RT and Sputnik peddle conspiratorial and sensationalist stories about democracies that can be lifted, reproduced, and spread through more popular media outlets to target populations. At another level, Russian operatives use social media platforms to monitor political discourse online, identify inflammatory divisions

present in the target nations' population, and then amplify discourse meant to drive wedges between different groups of individuals, and between the government and the governed.

Understanding the Target

Russia's strategic outlook is a reactionary outgrowth of a simultaneous desire to change the current world order and preserve its own regime. At the heart of such ambitions lies the need to undermine the overall appeal of democracies worldwide. Russia's use of disinformation against democracies is thus simultaneously an offensive and defensive attempt at undermining nations that challenge the Russian state.

As it stands, many of the world's democracies directly stand in the way of Russia pursuing its immediate national interests. The deterioration of these governments and their institutions could translate into significant victories for the Russian state, like a weakened or fully dissolved NATO and European markets that are significantly more accessible to Russia.[12,13]

Moreover, liberal democracies inherently pose a threat to autocracies. In its truest form, a democracy is accountable to the governed and characterized by the values of freedom and transparency. These values are incompatible with systems of government ruled by single despots with absolute power, and these values hold the potential to destabilize whole regimes if accepted by the masses. Russia is particularly aware of this outcome; after all, it is Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost* (openness) policies that are often cited as triggering the ultimate collapse of the Soviet Union.[14] It is thus in an attempt to minimize this threat that Russian President Vladimir Putin looks to undermine democracies.

What's most concerning for democracies is that the values that make them strong are being exploited by adversaries—the more open the society, the more access points available for Russia and other bad actors to directly interact with the targeted nation's population. To weaken a democracy, Russia infiltrates and establishes a presence in the democracy's information streams, and then promotes democracy-undermining messages to the public.

Russia has prioritized this form of information warfare whereas the United States and other democracies have not. Michael Hayden, former director the CIA and NSA, noted that in the balance between cyber dominance and information dominance, the United States chose cyber dominance, due in large part because information dominance is "not a comfortable field for Americans to play in" since they strongly emphasize and promote freedom of speech and due process.[15] Russian strength, on the other hand, is not premised on living up to any such ideals. They can operate freely in this space knowing full well that it will be difficult for democracies to respond in-kind without compromising their own value systems.

We need to turn this around so that the United States recaptures freedom of speech and transparency as a comparative strength in information battles against closed and secretive autocracies. At the end of this report, we describe how the United States should "train to fight in the light."

Understanding the Solution

As Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) expert Heather Conley observed in her 2014 report *Russia's Influence on Europe*, there exists "a strong correlation between a

marked decline in transparency, rule of law, and democratic practices, and the extent of Russian economic and political engagement" in Eastern European countries like Hungary and Bulgaria.[16] Fortunately, the United States has largely been insulated from the full brunt of Russia's political and economic levers of influence. However, institutions in the U.S. are less prepared to counter disinformation operations actively undermining American faith in ideas like justice and the rule of law.

While challenges measuring attribution and audience reach make it difficult at present to determine the full effects of these disinformation campaigns, we are able to track the progression of Russian information operations online to see how they have evolved in a short period of time. What we have observed is that the channels of disinformation have grown more advanced.

Even though these exploits are greatly aggravated by advancements in technology, that does not necessarily mean that the solutions must be uniquely technological. This report will emphasize that while there are necessary institution-specific steps, including continuing to hold our institutions and political leaders accountable for living up to their responsibilities and aspirations under the Constitution, comprehensively mitigating the effectiveness of disinformation operations requires building up a resilient citizenry.

Disinformation can successfully erode public confidence in democracies if the public is ill-informed of the threat landscape, and ill-equipped to combat nefarious campaigns when identified. Societal and cultural changes must be made, not simply as a moral imperative, but as a national security imperative, to protect the strength and longevity of democracies around the world.

Preparing for the Future

In April 2007, Estonia was hit with one of the largest cyberattacks the world has ever seen.[17] For a little over three weeks Estonia was bombarded with a large-scale distributed denial of service attack (DDoS). The attackers essentially overwhelmed critical systems across the country with junk data requests. Unable to respond to the spike in incoming requests, systems and whole networks shut down and became inoperable.

As has become routine, the Russians denied any involvement.

When it comes to Western democracies, Russia is trying a new approach: a Distributed Denial of Truth. Russian operatives pollute information networks with disinformation with the goal of causing targeted populations to shut down, to give up on democracy, and walk away. The rule of law establishes a fair playing field, and our institutions of justice are the referees.[18] Thus a weakened rule of law not only breeds corruption and encourages abuses of power, but it holds the power to convince individuals that democracy does not, cannot, and will not work in their favor; they are better served without it. And it only takes a selectively small percent of disaffected individuals to have a very destabilizing effect on a democratic society.

The Defending Democratic Institutions project (DDI) is a proactive attempt to counter foreign adversary efforts by increasing understanding about the nature of the adversary threat and strengthening institutional and public resilience, for the sake of our justice systems and for the continued strength of democracies at large.

US DOMESTIC CLIMATE – AN ENABLER OF DISINFORMATION

The Russian threat against democratic systems often is **highly opportunistic**—it capitalizes on societal vulnerabilities in democracies to establish a presence and expands to an active disinformation campaign. To fully appreciate the seriousness of this threat it is important to understand how the domestic climate in a democracy like in the U.S. can greatly facilitate an effective disinformation operation.

Increased Use of Social Media: As of 2018, 69% of Americans are active on some form of social media.[19] Additionally, 20% of Americans "often get their news through social media."[20] While a high number of citizens on social media is generally an indication of a society with free flow of information, for our adversaries, it is an invitation to directly engage with the American public. The more open and active the social media platforms, the lower the barrier to entry for adversary disinformation operations.

The Polarization of Discourse: There is no hiding the fact that dialogue in the country today has become highly polarized, but democracies inherently have mechanisms to withstand, and even encourage, routine and constructive dissent. However, Russia has become adept in identifying and then amplifying the most extreme and divisive dialogues with the intent of exacerbating domestic tensions and creating distorted narratives about democracies.

Lack of Confidence in Government Institutions: Trust in many government institutions is either steadily decreasing or has stagnated at unimpressively low rates in the United States.[21] While the justice system in the U.S. does, as an institution, boast higher confidence numbers than institutions like Congress, trust is still a concern.[22] For instance, while confidence levels in the Supreme Court seem to hold between 2017 and 2018, confidence has risen among Republicans and decreased drastically among Democrats.[23]

Declining Trust in Media: For the first time in its reporting history, the 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer reported 'media' as the least trusted institution worldwide. In the U.S. trust further divides along party lines—only 27% of Trump voters trust the media.[24] An eco-system already built on paranoia and distrust towards the media only lowers the barrier to entry for alternate media sources, like Russian media, to attract niche audiences in a democracy.

A combination of an increased number of individuals on social media, the already existent polarization of discourse, and a general feeling of distrust towards institutions writ large create vulnerabilities for the justice system. The judiciary is more resilient to disinformation than political parties, electoral institutions, and the media. However, our analysis suggests that Russia is quick to engage in disinformation when there is a public controversy surrounding an issue of justice, and oftentimes judicial systems are ill equipped to recognize or respond to Russian disinformation, as compared to political campaigns, or media outlets.

2 | The Propaganda Channels

"They say Russia has a bad public image. Do you know who else now has a bad public image—the United States. We are currently in a state of information warfare with the trend-setters in the information space, most notably with the Anglo-Saxons, their media."

-Dmitry Peskov, Russia's Presidential Press Secretary [25]

On the morning of January 11, 2016, in Berlin, Germany, a 13-year old Russian-German girl named Lisa disappeared.[26] The next day she returned home and told her parents that she had been kidnapped and raped by Arab migrants. The accused were taken into custody. However, after further investigation, it was revealed that Lisa had not in fact gone missing at all; she was at her friend's house the whole time. Seeing as no criminal activity had actually taken place, the suspects were free to leave.

Unfortunately, Russia caught wind of the story. At first, the Lisa case was only picked up by a pro-Russian television network, *First Russia TV*.[27] Then, 10 Kremlin-sponsored media outlets began reporting on the kidnapping and rape allegations. In time, the coverage was picked up and spread wildly over German social media platforms.[28]

Even as German officials made clarifying statements on the case, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov alleged that this was all part of a government cover-up. He accused Germany of trying to get this story "swept under the rug," and the justice system was portrayed as a tool of the politicians.[29]

The inundation of false information surrounding the case incited over 1,000 people to take to the streets in protest.[30] The insinuation that the courts were in cahoots with the German government to cover up a massive scandal mobilized many and, at the very least, seeded the idea that the justice system was in the pocket of politicians and soft on immigrant crime.

Above *Rumors continue to spread on social media and in Russian outlets. On January 23 and 24, the incident spawns protests against the government's migration policy in front of Chancellor Angela Merkel's offices in the capital and elsewhere in Germany.*

Generally, one of the primary reasons online operations are pursued by nefarious actors is because attribution is incredibly difficult. There exist few technical processes or solutions that can, with full certainty, determine the originating sources of online activity.[31] Disinformation operations usually operate across different platforms, promoting the more egregious content through channels that are difficult to directly attribute to the adversary nation's government, and then reinforcing these narratives via more attributable channels like Russian state officials.

Further complicating matters, domestic audiences contribute to the spread of disinformation, making it exponentially harder to go back and find the originating sources of certain campaigns. These unwitting amplifiers—unknowingly falling for *and* spreading propaganda—play a large role in fueling the Russian propaganda machine and giving legitimacy to certain claims made by Russian state-sponsored media, inauthentic domains, and fake online accounts. Increasingly, domestic voices are actually the originators of content repurposed by Russia.

As has been eloquently captured by Ben Nimmo, Information Defense Fellow with the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Lab, these vicious Russian-led disinformation dissemination efforts become effective by **dismissing** the critic, **distorting** the facts, **distracting** from the main issue, and **dismaying** the audience.[32] P.W. Singer and Emerson T. Brooking importantly note a fifth trait, **dividing** the audience.[33] The Lisa Case not only highlights how all five methods were used to provoke tension, but it also demonstrates how different channels of disinformation worked in tandem to undermine the German justice system.

State-Sponsored Media and the Spread of "Alternate" News

"State-sponsored media" refers to media organizations and operations that are financially dependent upon the state in some capacity. This often indicates that the state can exert a certain amount of editorial control over the published content of the supported media outlet. Historically, the Russian government has exercised near-total control over its media and, despite claims to the contrary, that continues to be the case today.[34]

Over the past few years, Russia has grown more adept at using state-sponsored media as a tool for disinformation.[35] Whereas the audience once was primarily the Russian population, and the focus was to have control over its own information space, Russian media today has a global reach—it's broadcast to different countries, in different languages, on different types of media platforms.[36]

On January 6, 2017, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence released a report identifying RT and Sputnik as prominent Russian state-run outlets that target global audiences.[37] Among other things, the report found that these outlets are co-opted by the Russian government to spread content that looks favorably upon Russia, and "fuel[s] discontent in the United States."[38]

It is commonplace to find storied corruption all over RT and Sputnik. Their respective company mottos are "Question more" and "Telling the untold." One need only take a quick skim of their show descriptions to detect a very clear pattern: the vast majority of the shows are dedicated to *exposing the corruption and lies that the mainstream media won't tell you about*.[39] With this focus, the U.S. justice system is often featured as a prominent point of conversation.

FROM RUSSIA TODAY TO RT

RT's Editor in Chief Margarita Simonyan maintains that the scrutiny of Russian outlets is hypocritical and akin to censorship.[40] In her opinion, RT has a professional and reputable format similar to a BBC, CNN, or Euronews, and the only difference is that RT represents a more fair and balanced Russian point of view than do other news outlets.[41,42]

However, one way Russian media arguably differs is that it deceptively tries to mask the Russian origins of its propaganda to better infiltrate target populations. At its inception, RT was known as Russia Today and appeared to be a soft-power tool promoting a positive view of Russia abroad, just as Simonyan implied.[43] Since 2008, the network has invested in re-branding efforts that appeal more to Western audiences: changing its name from Russia Today to RT,[44] hiring Western program hosts whose ideas align with those of the network, and creating an "autonomous nonprofit organization" to fund its U.S. programs—one that happens to be based in Moscow and has direct ties to the Russian government.[45,46]During this time, RT also drastically changed its reporting focus from talking positively about Russian issues to persistently talking about the corrupt United States democracy. Sputnik seems to follow a very similar reporting model.[47]

Though RT and Sputnik de-emphasize their Russian origins, the Kremlin has not shied away from its intent to spread propaganda.[48] In a 2013 interview with RT, President Putin remarked that the point of the network was in part to "try [and] break the Anglo-Saxon monopoly on the global information streams."[49]

"To say that the justice system in the United States is broken would be a gross understatement. Corporations and corrupt politicians have taken control, turning the once impartial judiciary into a tool for the elite to use for their own gain."
- America's Lawyer, RT

Additionally, both RT and Sputnik have entire programs devoted to criticizing the U.S. justice system. On RT it comes in the form of *America's Lawyer*, a show hosted by Florida trial lawyer Mike Papantonio.[50]

On Sputnik, the primary legal podcast is associated with the *Loud and Clear* program and is called "Criminal Injustice." Every week, the hosts discuss "the most egregious conduct of our courts and prosecutors and how justice is denied to so many people in this country."[51]

The examples listed are not one-off comments directed at the justice system. Rather, they are prototypical samples of a consistent messaging scheme.

Skeptics could raise the following counterpoints: 1) are the contributors on the international programs *truly* mouthpieces of the Russian government and 2) do these programs have any sort of discernable impact on or presence in targeted democracies? To the first point, correspondents and contributors to RT and Sputnik vociferously deny that they are paid to express Kremlin-approved viewpoints on their shows. For instance, the *Loud and Clear* co-hosts expressed a deep dissatisfaction with our justice system in their work predating their stint on Sputnik.

However, Russia purposely gives platforms to individuals across the political spectrum that harbor feelings of discontent toward aspects of the democracy in question. The relentless programming biased against democracies—bolstered by news reports that are riddled with misleading content, and on occasion, outright falsities—demonstrates that while individuals contributing to RT and Sputnik might not themselves feel pressured to report in certain ways, they are complicit in operationalizing state media as a tool to undermine democracies.

Whatever the intent of the hosts, it is certainly not Putin's intent to highlight problems so that these institutions will reform and become stronger. Putin is not trying to make us better; he is trying to make us weaker.

To the issues of potential reach and influence, there is a growing belief that Russian state-sponsored media has not had any form of measurable impact on a country like the United States.[52] Russian programs seem to have a relatively low reach compared to domestic networks, and audience numbers reproduced and touted on RT are apparently grossly exaggerated.[53,54,55,56,57] However, these statistics do not account for RT and Sputnik's growing credibility as "alternate news," and underestimate the secondary-reach of Russian media.

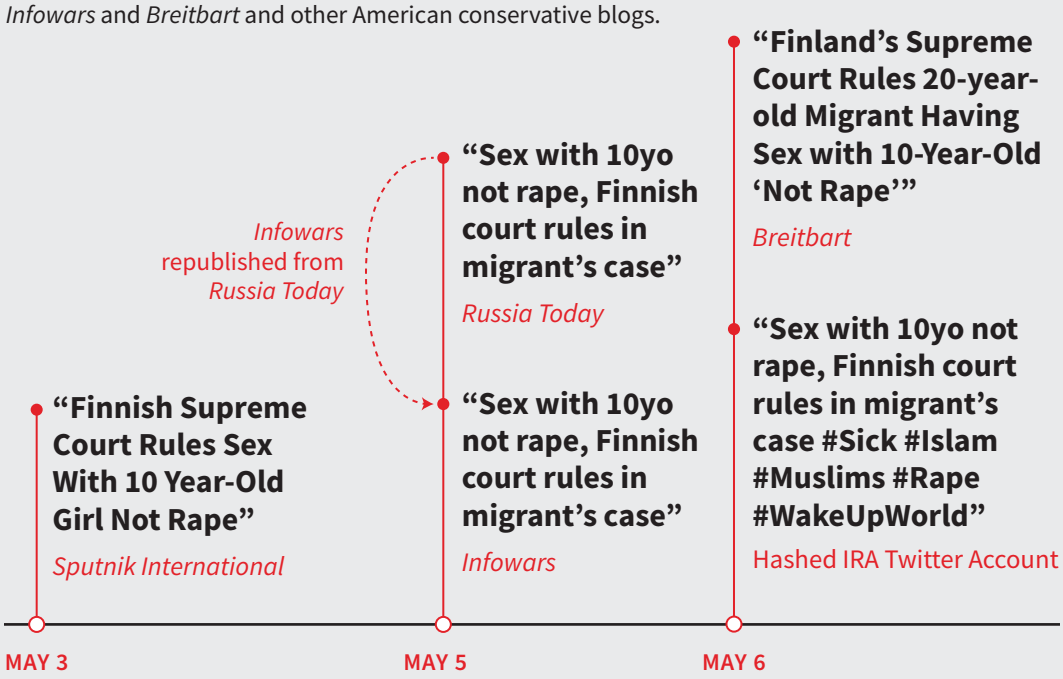
Russia's propaganda networks are made to seem as authentic as possible. These networks are extremely well funded, with production values rivaling that of many Western networks. RT in particular has even been nominated for four international Emmy awards, and one daytime Emmy.[58] Further, in the mix of no-name, self-declared expert commentators frequenting the programs of RT and Sputnik, there are a slew of renowned journalists, politicians, and other well-known personalities that give Kremlin-sponsored media credibility. For example, famed U.S. television host Larry King has a show on RT.[59] In an ecosystem where there is already such distrust toward media as an institution, Russian media outlets are in a position to capitalize on the mistrust, instigate more suspicion toward the media and other targeted institutions in general, and grow their brands.

These stories are also able to reach individuals beyond those directly tuning in to Russian programs. Harvard Professor Yochai Benkler's book, *Network Propaganda: Manipulation, Disinformation, and Radicalization in American Politics* closely examines how the media operates in today's polarized U.S. climate. One of his findings is that Russia "combin[ed] white propaganda on RT and Sputnik with gray and black propaganda sites and social media accounts to disseminate and add credibility to false information and propagate destabilizing disinformation."[60]

A not insignificant number of stories from "moderately visible" sites like RT and Sputnik were directly re-produced, or replicated with only minor changes, on more popular sites

The spread of Russian state sponsored media

Content generated from Russian state-sponsored propaganda is lifted by media outlets in the United States. In this case, *Sputnik International* published a sensationalist anti-immigrant headline about a complex legal case in Finland. In the coming days, the same sensationalist story would be republished by *Infowars* and *Breitbart* and other American conservative blogs.



known for promoting conspiratorial narratives. In 2017, Buzzfeed News found that Infowars, for example, had republished over 1,000 stories from RT.[61] Our analysis shows that Infowars has not slowed since BuzzFeed released their report, having republished at least 600 more stories from RT in the last two years.

The Russian media potential for impact does not necessarily mean that it needs to attract a large audience. It just needs to attract the right audience—one that can successfully push a version of these anti-democratic stories out to their followers. From there it has the growing potential to exert unwanted pressure on our democratic justice systems.

Exploiting Social Media

Techniques used in other contexts illuminate what we can expect to see used against the justice system. Between 2014 and 2018 Russia systematically exploited social media platforms to interfere in democratic elections in the United States, France, Germany, Finland, the Netherlands, and other democracies.[62] Russia also leveraged networks of accounts on social media platforms to manipulate online public dialogue during periods of democratic vulnerability. For example, researchers have found clear evidence that Russians were involved in disinformation campaigns during the Brexit Referendum,[63] Italy's December 2016 referendum on constitutional reform,[64] and the Spanish-Catalan secessionist crisis

in 2017.[65] Most recently, Russia launched an information operation during the French "Yellow Vest" protests in December 2018.[66,67]

Russian operations seem most active during large democratic events. It is during elections and national crises that people are most civically engaged and likely to participate in related discourse on public platforms. That said, to assume that Russian activity starts and stops in tempo with Western elections and referenda is a mistake.

Moscow's online information operation, referred to as "Project Lakhta," is run by a Kremlin-sponsored organization called the Internet Research Agency (IRA) based out of St. Petersburg.[68] The IRA employs young, educated, English-speaking Russians to shape discourse and promote divisive messaging using false accounts on social media.[69,70] "Project Lakhta" operatives are also notorious for rapidly propagating stories from propaganda sites and spreading disinformation through social media advertising.

U.S. Department of Justice documents reveal that Project Lakhta's stated goal is to "spread distrust towards…the political system in general."[71] And it has proven itself to be unrelenting and persistent in its efforts.

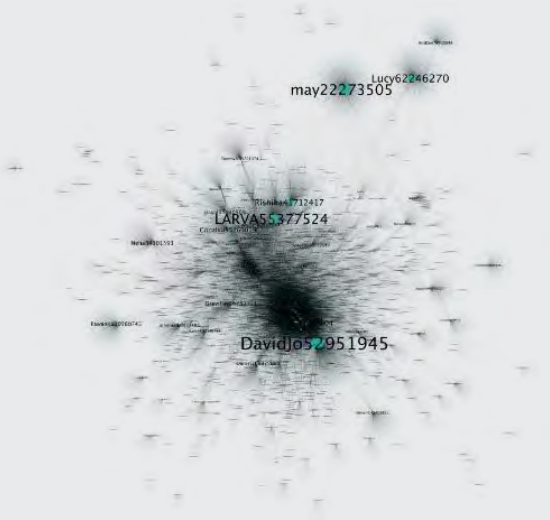
The U.S. population has been a primary target for "Project Lakhta" since 2014 on all the prominent social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Alphabet, Twitter, and Reddit.[72] Recent research indicates that Russian activities expanded to other popular platforms like Vine, Gab, VKontakte, LiveJournal, Tumblr, Pinterest, and Medium.[73]

The disinformation efforts on these platforms are purposely disguised to mask both origin of content and identity. What this means is that if certain troll farms are identified, it is easy and incredibly cheap for the group to evolve—creating new accounts, infiltrating different online communities, and rapidly amplifying divisive and destructive rhetoric meant to undermine the proper functioning of our democracy.

Our team studied data from Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, Tumblr, and our archived list of Russian-sponsored Instagram accounts to better understand the different threat vectors of each social media platform.[74 75 76 77] The studied data sets in existence today are generated from verified IRA accounts and sites. There are many more unattributed accounts on social media that either a) have not been detected at all, or b) have been detected, but cannot with certainty be classified as IRA-linked accounts.

This project makes little comment on direct impact not out of fear of overstating the Russian impact, but out of recognition that any claims we make will likely underreport the full impact of these attacks.

The Toolkit



Above *This is a follower network graph of 63099 Russian-suspected bots identified after the Charlottesville protest. Tweet from @conspirator0, August 22, 2017*

BOTS AND BOTNETS

A bot is a fully automated or scripted account that can function without human supervision.[78] These bots can be active on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and, most prominently, Twitter. One study found that up to 15% of all Twitter accounts—48 million—may be bots.[79]

A botnet is a network of coordinated bot accounts that can swarm conversations online to amplify, dampen, and distort the dialogue without authentic users realizing that the conversation is being interfered with.[80] These botnets can be used to give authentic accounts a louder voice, to attack or drown out accounts, or to make content go viral.[81]

Russian operatives use botnets, some as large as 60,000 accounts, to push divisive or pro-Russian content.[82] Perhaps more importantly, these botnets amplify U.S. voices that align with Russian goals. They even push certain hashtags viral, by starting "hashtag campaigns" and "hashtag games" to manipulate Twitter's algorithms, thereby encouraging other authentic Twitter users to adopt the hashtag.[83] [84] This is why successful manipulation of authentic Twitter users makes it challenging to measure the impact of Russian botnets; it is not possible to precisely determine the extent to which real people changed their behavior based on exposure to Russian activity.

ADS

IRA operatives used direct advertising on platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Google.[85] These ads promoted Russian-created pages, events, and other content. Russia used microtargeting—the practice of targeting ads to reach individual-level audiences using their social media metadata—to curate ads to specific audiences.[86]

For example, the IRA ran ads promoting their Facebook content designed primarily for African Americans by targeting audiences that were interested in Malcolm X. They also ran police brutality ads in geographic areas near Ferguson, Missouri, and Baltimore, Maryland, after prominent police shootings occurred there. IRA operatives spent at least 73,000 USD on approximately 2,855 Facebook ads.[87] However, non-advertised content had a

Above *HPSCI Release*

much larger reach.

SOCKPUPPETS

Sockpuppets are fake online identities managed by a human to deceive other people online.[88] Sockpuppets can masquerade as trusted groups, news sources, or individuals.[89] For example, to make the content convincingly authentic, Russian operatives ran accounts that were purportedly average U.S. citizens. One account might seem like a New England soccer mom, while another might appear to be a steelworker from Ohio who supports U.S. President Donald Trump. In reality, these accounts were run by young Russian operatives in St. Petersburg, Russia.[90]

IRA sockpuppet accounts were not limited to imitating individual people. For instance, IRA operatives ran Facebook pages, Instagram accounts, and Twitter handles that interacted with U.S. citizens hundreds of millions of times.[91] On Facebook, pages like "Defend the 2nd" cultivated an audience of U.S. gun activists, while pages like "Black Matters" cultivated an African American audience and "Secured Borders" attracted individuals with anti-immigrant viewpoints. On Twitter, the account @Ten_GOP described itself as the "unofficial Twitter account of Tennessee Republicans" and was followed by 136,000 people, including former National Security Advisor Michael Flynn.[92]

MEMES

On the internet, memes usually refer to images, cartoons, or short GIFs, sometimes overlaid with text, that relay ideas quickly.[93] Memes may seem relatively innocuous at first, but they are effective delivery systems for weaponized narratives. If designed well, memes spread rapidly across the internet. More importantly, memes are shared, picked up, and adopted across peer-to-peer networks. Injecting a humorous cartoon or GIF about police brutality, or judicial corruption, or the Deep State into the web is far more viral and disruptive than a text-based comment or Tweet.[94]

INAUTHENTIC DOMAINS

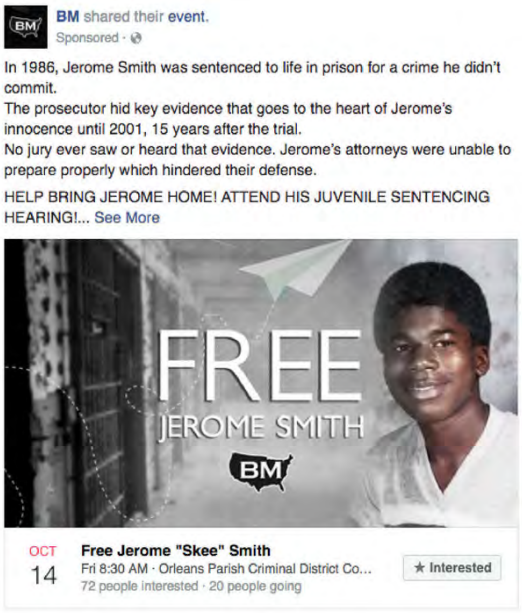
The IRA established inauthentic domains that functioned as hubs for their social media following.[95] These domains were designed, hosted, and advertised by IRA operatives. IRA set up dozens of these domains, focused on anything from U.S. immigration issues to the Syrian conflict.[96,97] Experts believe many domains are undetected and active.

Above *screenshot – blackmattersus.com*

Example: "Black Matters"—Black Matters is a IRA-operated online property that functioned like a nascent company. The brand had a Facebook page, ran an Instagram account, organized rallies, sold merchandise, and even solicited graphic designers, activists and photographers online.[98] Its website, blackmattersus.com, was the online center for these activities. The website also gave Black Matters a sheen of legitimacy. The website is still live, albeit inactive, today. ●

THE JOINER TOOLS

Social media platforms are dual-use tools—they present a direct, two-way interaction, allowing for more precise disinformation campaigns to attract and mobilize larger segments of targeted populations. The platforms are good for capturing the "pulse" of certain online discourses or gauging the content spectrum of conversations surrounding certain topics or groups.[99] Then, fake accounts can be used to infiltrate the online communities and monitor groups that appear susceptible to a disinformation campaign. After observing and innocuously participating in community discussions and growing a following, these accounts start to use social media as a joiner tool, inspiring group cohesion under shared interests or values.



Our research suggests that minority and affinity groups in democracies are primary targets, largely because individuals in these communities usually harbor legitimate feelings of shared grievance or cause. Russians and other adversaries can more successfully reinforce group identity within these already existent groups online, while simultaneously working to erode group attachment to a shared national identity.[100]

Over time, once a reliable audience is developed and information channels are solidly established, the fake accounts replicate in tone and grow in volume the voices of legitimate, aggrieved individuals. These messages spread by fake accounts are meant to incite individuals in online communities.

Part of our shared national identity necessarily includes shared commitments to justice and the rule of law. In their larger aims to break the internal cohesion of democracies, the Russians have occasionally used this tactic to mobilize groups in protest of democratic institutions.

Initiating and promoting rallies like the ones above are overt attempts to provoke action against institutions of justice. They become successful to the extent that the groups mobilized are concerned enough with the proceedings of particular court cases or issues involving justice and rule of law. While this tactic may prove more dangerous if continued into the future, at present, the more visible Russian tactic has been to use social media to pollute all the platforms with disinformation.

AMPLIFICATION OF DIALOGUE

Perhaps the most dangerous aspect of social media is the ease with which stories can be amplified in both intensity and reach. Russian troll farms have greatly contributed to amplifying divisive messaging on both sides of already contentious issues in the United States in the hopes of instigating more tension and distrust in the democracy.

Relating to the judiciary, the low barrier to entry for disinformation campaigns on social media platforms has allowed for Russian operatives to spread disinformation and distorted facts about cases, first seeding or picking up conspiratorial stories from online communities, then amplifying the message to a broader receptive audience.

Russian operatives then take disruptive comments and use bots to exponentially re-tweet and share them as to reach larger segments of the population. Additionally, they exploit algorithms to drive certain topics or hashtags. The Russians are capitalizing on already-present divides in society and turning up the volume of resentment. This amplification is then extremely hard to detect and measure because it feeds off of and is fed by domestic voices contributing to the conversations.

Disinformation via amplification has two important consequences. First, the content being amplified sometimes is authentic, but its reach is manufactured. Second, as more people hear about disinformation but are unable to detect it themselves, they may move from healthy skepticism to outright paranoia about who they engage with on social media. If the fear of disinformation is great enough, people could start to disengage from online discourse and communities. Strong community engagement through forums like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are prime signals of a healthy, resilient, and thriving democracy. Russian disinformation on social media actively distorts legitimate discourse, which in turn casts a dark shadow over online discourse in general and can lead to an erosion of democratic society.

There isn't a single, prescriptive channel for the spreading of Russian disinformation. These propaganda streams are used together to reinforce certain narratives to larger segments of democratic populations. The many potential channels for spreading disinformation make active campaigns are hard to detect and hard to counteract comprehensively.

Look who profits from police brutality

US Supreme Court: An Archaic Institution?

Above Video *RT America, Look who profits from police brutality, October 28, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBwsuwinlZI.*

Below Video *RT America, US Supreme Court: An Archaic Institution?, October 1, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44otyUv40N0.*

3 | Framing the Conversation

"Foreign politicians talk about Russia's interference in elections and referendums around the world. In fact, the matter is even more serious: Russia interferes in your brains, we change your conscience, and there is nothing you can do about it."

– Vladislav Surkov, Adviser to Russian president Vladimir Putin[101]

The reporting on Russian state-sponsored media sometimes characterizes it as chaotic and dizzying.[102] Its content and audiences "cross all ideological boundaries."[103] Russia's broad social media presence also seems random. They amplify divisive messaging on all sides of any given issue, so much so that it sometimes appears as though the sole purpose of a disinformation operation is to sow general chaos in the targeted society. With disinformation flowing in all directions, how are the Russians able to consistently and effectively promote messaging specifically meant to undermine certain institutions in democracies?

Frames.[104]

Framing theory refers to the packaging and presentation of ideas to the public.[105] It is a mass communication theory suggesting that the way ideas are presented determines how that information is processed and acted upon. Some commonly referenced frames include "the war on drugs," or "the military-industrial complex." These frames are crafted to influence how people organize new information that is being presented to them.[106]

Russia has developed quite a few frames in order to coherently bind complicated or unrelated stories together under overarching democracy-undermining narratives.[107] On state-sponsored media, these repetitive frames serve as highly effective messaging devices meant to redirect news stories back to the networks' anti-democratic premises. When spread on social media, these prepackaged narratives can dangerously prompt individuals less familiar with the complexities of certain institutions to incorrectly distill and draw erroneous conclusions about how democracies actually function.

There are four such common frames that all reinforce the overarching narrative that the justice system is not independent and impartial:

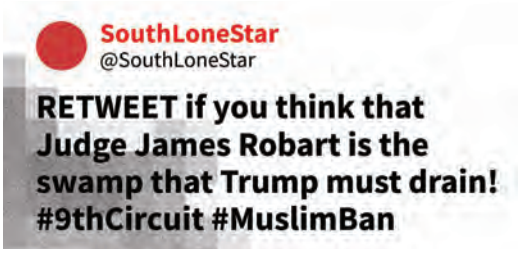
- The justice system tolerates, protects, and covers up crimes committed by **immigrants**.
- The justice system operationalizes the institutionally racist and corrupt **police state**.
- The justice system directly supports and enables **corporate corruption.**
- The justice system is a tool of the **political elite.**

A single story or incident likely does not have the ability to prompt mass disaffection with democratic institutions. However, if all stories are forcibly directed or packaged to fit into one out of a handful of well-developed ideas, it becomes easier to create the perception of corruption and dysfunction within specific institutions.

Immigration

Immigration policy has become a societal wedge issue throughout most of Western society. In Europe, a surge of refugees and migrants has created fissures between EU members and provided fuel for far-right political parties with xenophobic agendas.[108] In the United States, the Democratic and Republican parties have increasingly sparred over immigration, with public opinion dividing along party lines.

Recognizing an opportunity, Russia has attempted to inflame these divides in response to certain judicial decisions involving immigration. For instance, in early 2017, U.S. District Court Judge James Robart issued a nationwide preliminary injunction on President Trump's refugee ban.[109] Russian trolls quickly responded by pushing out tweets like the following, portraying both the judge and the courts as obstructionist.



As immigration becomes an increasingly important issue for voters in Western democracies, and as political parties continue to make immigration a core topic in their respective party agendas, stories of immigrant crime are brought to the fore of public conversation. Russia takes the most sensationalist stories, particularly ones involving rape and murder, to exploit public fears and provoke tension around immigration. Russia then points to the justice system as a culprit in aiding and abetting continued criminal activities carried out by undocumented immigrants: justice is not being served, because the courts protect and cover-up the crimes carried out by immigrants.

ATTACK ON JUDGES

Russia has engaged in specific attacks against individual sitting judges on Twitter. These attacks are opportunistic and so far have occurred in the wake of legitimate public controversy. Once the U.S. media spotlight is off the judges, Russian attacks subside, but not without first undermining trust in the impartiality of the courts in the process.

The attacks on judges are meant to highlight corruption and the bias of judges in order to smear the judicial institutions they represent. To date, we have not seen attacks on judicial elections, but it is a vulnerability that should be closely monitored. As has been noted in a study featured in the *American Economic Journal*, because people are generally unfamiliar with judges, "even a single news story covering apparent judicial malfeasance can decisively influence elections."[110]

CASES INVOLVING RAPE AND PEDOPHILIA COMMITTED BY IMMIGRANTS

The incorrect reporting surrounding Germany's "Lisa Case" was not a case of journalistic accident; rather, it was part of a concerted effort to instigate the German population and pit them against each other, and against their justice system.[111]

The disinformation campaign carried out was successful for a few reasons. First, blatant lies and half-truths about the case were convincingly produced alongside factually correct stories in Russian media, making it hard for people to discern which facts in the story were true and which were false. Even if the reporting does not mobilize the reader to action, at the very least it has a way of evoking confusion and paranoia in the reader.

Second, the story involved a legally complicated and exploitable topic: child rape. In many democracies, cases of child rape or sexual abuse are bound by regulations that limit the disclosure of case details. This is done to protect the privacy of the people involved. In these situations, Russia can make accusations about the case in question while local officials, law enforcement, and the courts are unable to immediately correct the record.[112] Even if at some later point officials can contest the misinformation spread about the case, Russian media is well positioned to spin the narrative and accuse the government of being part of a cover-up. For the courts, the arbiters of truth and justice, this is a particularly worrying phenomenon.

Which leads to the third reason this sort of case held potential to undermine the German justice system: the accused were all immigrants. The sensationalist story of child rape, coupled with the accusations that the government was covering up for crimes committed by immigrants, ensured that the Lisa case received attention and provoked hysteria.

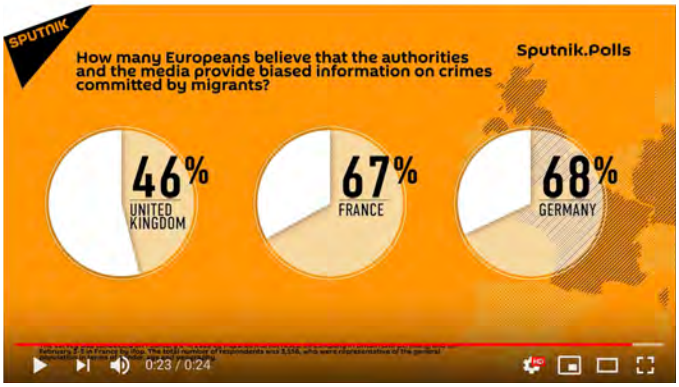
Since the success of the Lisa Case, Russian operatives strategically have pushed similarly false allegations around immigrant rape in other European nations:[113]

TARGET COUNTRY	HEADLINES FROM RUSSIAN MEDIA
Finland	"Migrants rape teenage school girls right on the streets in Finland: **the country's police are hiding such incidents**, so as not to shock the local population"[114]
United Kingdom	"The white slaves—migrants rape British girls for years, **police fears accusations of racism**"[115]
Austria	"In Austria, **a court acquitted a refugee** who was convicted of rape of a child"[116]
Sweden	"Due to migration, Sweden introduces new law on sexual consent"[117]

A few months after the Lisa Case, the IRA tried to emulate the success of its German disinformation campaign in the United States. A story broke about the sexual assault of a minor in Twin Falls, Idaho. In time, the story morphed, and Facebook posts started falsely alleging that a little girl had been "gang raped at knife point" by Syrian refugees. Anti-immigrant narratives began surfacing in and around the small community about how the "refugees were responsible for a rash of rapes in Europe and that a similar phenomenon in the United States was imminent."[118]

Law enforcement was slow to push back on any of these accusations—they were constrained from discussing details of the case because minors were involved. IRA operatives tried to bring people to the streets as was done in Germany.

Ultimately, the judge and prosecutor were targets of threats, and the town was polarized.[120]



Above *Sputnik.Polls: Media Provide Biased Coverage of Migrants' Crimes*[119]

Below *In addition to trying to organize a rally in Twin Falls, Idaho, Russian accounts promoted tweets meant to incite. For instance, @SouthLoneStar wrote, "5 yo girl was sexually assaulted by Muslims in Twin Falls, Idaho. City Council votes to invite EVEN MORE refugees.* https://t.co/8hR4VqaeEE."

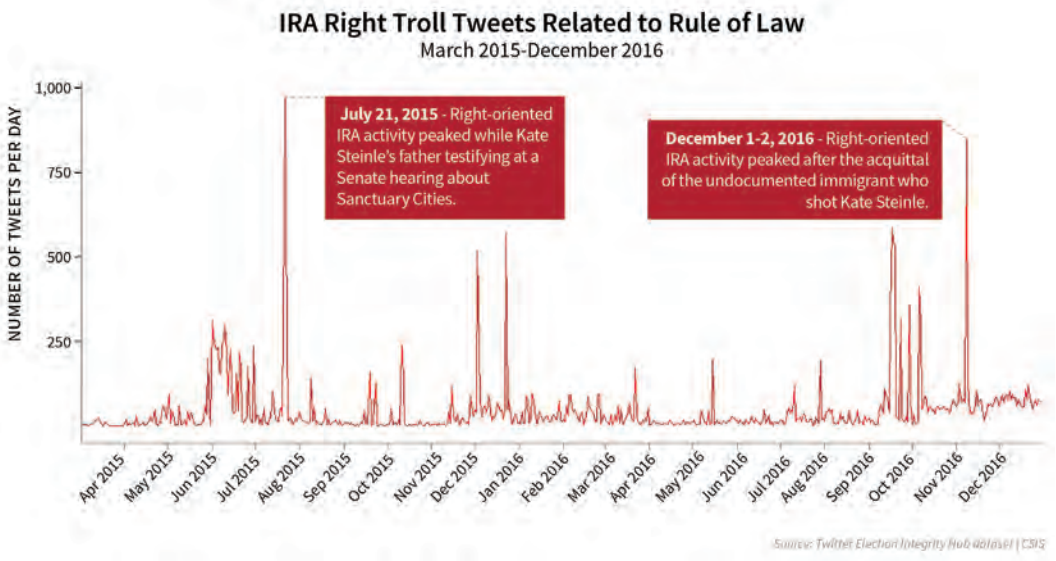
CASES INVOLVING MURDER

Like rape cases, cases where undocumented immigrants are alleged to have killed citizens are ripe for exploitation. One such case involves the death of Kate Steinle in 2015. Kate was shot by an undocumented immigrant in San Francisco, a self-designated "Sanctuary City."[121] A California jury determined that the shooting was an accident.[122] The verdict immediately became a flashpoint in U.S. politics, igniting immigration debates all across the country. The Russians noticed the opportunity. Anti-immigrant tweets dominated Russian-linked Twitter accounts at certain points during the trial.

What is interesting is that the Russian IRA bots did not devote attention to #katesteinle for extended periods of time. Instead, Russian Twitter activity spiked during major events related to the case: first, when Kate's father, Jim Steinle, testified before the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee in July 2015, and then again two years later when Jose Inez Garcia Zarate was acquitted by a California jury on November 30, 2017.[123]

@CovfefeNationUS, a Russian account, tweeted out, "The #KateSteinle acquittal has uncovered the corruption of the criminal justice system, with jurors kept ignorant by activist judges and complicit liberal lawyers." By politicizing the court system during an already high-profile trial involving an illegal immigrant, Russia targeted the impassioned audience in the hopes that they would not only draw incorrect conclusions about the case, but also draw similar conclusions about the entire justice system.

More recently, the Mollie Tibbets case has garnered a similar response from the Russians. Mollie, a University of Iowa student, disappeared on July 18, 2018, and was found dead



Above *This graph shows that sudden increases of the IRA's right-leaning Twitter activity about the rule of law issues correspond with high-profile cases. DDI filtered for tweets related to the rule of law by using a multi-keyword query of RightTroll accounts, and then visualized the volume of tweets overtime. In the case of Kate Steinle, DDI observed spikes in Twitter activity during high profile moments after her death.*

one month later. Cristhian Bahena Rivera, an undocumented immigrant, was charged with first-degree murder on August 22, 2018. He is currently awaiting trial scheduled for September 2019.[124] Shortly after the Mollie Tibbets story was picked up by U.S. media, Russian Twitter accounts were implicated in amplifying the story by the German Marshall Fund's Hamilton 68 dashboard.[125] Hamilton68 is a barometer that measures likely Russian-sponsored activity on Twitter.

The "immigrant crime" frame exploits domestic fears, creates political divides across democracies, *and* uses specific cases to paint the justice system as political and broken. It is a frame that directly questions the integrity of our court systems and, if left unchecked, will continue to be an exploitable frame in the foreseeable future.

The Police State

Law enforcement is a manifestation of the government's use of force against individuals on behalf of the community. The presumption is that the government can and will only apply this force when necessary, and always within the rule of law.[126,127] However, there have been instances of corruption and abuse—situations that have rightfully garnered national attention and prompted our democracy to judiciously re-evaluate and repair problems within the system.

The Russians have been closely monitoring debates about U.S. law enforcement and have worked to overexpose and distort instances of corruption to simultaneously erode public confidence in the government and create expanded, longer-lasting rifts between groups of U.S. citizens; "breaking the internal coherence of the enemy system."[128]

Exploiting the thematic frame of the "police state," Russia has pushed out disinformation narratives alleging that the U.S. criminal justice system is irreparably afflicted with insti-

tutional racism, abuses of power, and prison corruption; accusations meant to instigate, as opposed to constructively empower aggrieved populations.

BLACK LIVES MATTER V. BLUE LIVES MATTER: PLAYING ON BOTH SIDES OF LAW ENFORCEMENT

#BlackLivesMatter is an authentic sociocultural movement. The Russians took note and used inauthentic accounts on Twitter and Facebook to exacerbate online discussion about shootings of African American men by police, helping to cement a narrative that the totality of the U.S. justice system was fundamentally racist.

Leaked IRA documents published by Russian investigative journalists show that IRA operatives have been amplifying these narratives about police as early as 2014. Employees of the IRA were instructed to write about "important internal problems" in the U.S., including "American policemen exceeding their authority in a way which has become commonplace. If, 20 years ago, a suspect could count on a preliminary investigation and immunity, now, on being detained, beatings and even killing have become routine business."[129]

The IRA created and maintained a "media mirage" composed of cross-platform pages and accounts that embedded within the community. According to a Senate Intelligence Committee report, an individual that subscribed to just one of the IRA's accounts, "would have been exposed to content from dozens more, as well as carefully-curated authentic Black media content that was ideologically or thematically aligned."[130]

The IRA's inauthentic community pulled users into a virtual vortex; when the audience consumed IRA content, they reinforced the social media platforms' algorithms, which fed them more of the same content. The content was designed to frame law enforcement as a racist and illegitimate institution.

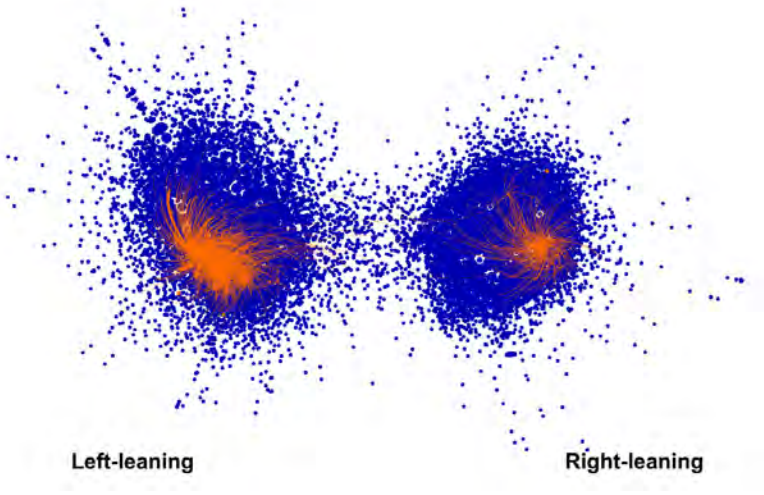
This vortex was doubly dangerous because the content was often based on kernels of truth.

Then, Russia found an opportunity to expand the divide. In July 2016, three back-to-back police shootings of African American men led some individuals to retaliate by targeting police across the country.[131] On July 7, a man angered over the police shootings of African American men killed five police officers. [132] This was the inflection point for the countermovement, #BlueLivesMatter, to go viral.[133,134]

A team of researchers at the University of Washington was able to provide rare insight into how Russians participated in both sides of the debate. They mapped #BlackLivesMatter Twitter activity, organized Twitter accounts into "left-leaning" and "right-leaning" clusters and highlighted Russian activity in orange in the graphic on the following page. The results demonstrate how Russian accounts were centrally embedded in both sides of the debate.

While it could seem like the Russians are just stoking tensions on both sides of an arbitrary wedge issue, Russia probably recognized that one-dimensional criticism of the police was less effective than politicizing the entire institution. Police, like judges, are meant to be nonpartisan. They are peacekeepers who are duty-bound to uphold the rule of law in an objective and fair manner. By actively promoting discourse tying #BlueLivesMatter and

#BlackLivesMatter to opposite sides of the political spectrum, the Russians helped politicize both the debate and law enforcement itself. By playing to both sides of the issue, Russia fostered an environment where support or criticism of police officers became a political choice, not a civic one.



Above *This is a retweet network graph of "left-leaning" and "right-leaning" Twitter accounts discussing the BlackLivesMatter movement. IRA retweets are highlighted in orange. The figure shows that IRA accounts embedded themselves on both sides of the political spectrum in online conversations about #BlackLivesMatter. The figure was generated by Arif et. al at the University of Washington.*[135]

DEMOCRACIES AND POLICE BRUTALITY

In the United States, we rely on law enforcement officials to uphold and enforce the rule of law and trust them to operate exclusively in the interest of justice. While most societies today have police officers, what sets apart the police in a democratic institution is that they are only authorized to use a clearly defined and limited amount of force against individuals, and they are held publicly accountable for their actions. By contrast, in authoritarian regimes, police often operate as political pawns of the government, covertly and overtly enforcing the will of the regime without having to answer to the public.[136]

What this means is that there is a very thin line between using force to protect democracy and using force to threaten it. The Kremlin's goal is to blur that line in the eyes of certain members of the U.S. public.

The "police state" frame is not unique to any one democracy. While it is often pushed through a racial lens in the U.S., similar frames of police brutality have been used to describe civil unrest in other Western democracies. For instance, the "Gilets Jaunes" protests in France and the Catalonia independence crisis were both associated with police brutality. [137] [138]

There is a strategic purpose in tying the police state and police brutality to democracies. First and foremost, it widens divisions within the targeted democracy. However, it also helps Russia shore up domestic support for its own use of force. For instance, during the Ferguson riots, Russian state-sponsored propaganda outlets were quick to compare them to Euromaidan protests in Kiev, Ukraine.

CORRUPTION IN THE PRISON SYSTEM:
CREATING AND TARGETING A DISENFRANCHISED POPULATION

There is a significant minority of Americans who have been incarcerated or convicted through the criminal justice system. The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world. Scholars estimated that 8 percent of U.S. adults have a felony conviction, which was approximately 23 million U.S. citizens in 2016.[139]

Even after being released, formerly incarcerated individuals continue to feel like marginalized members of society. Depending on state law, many U.S. citizens with criminal records are denied the right to vote, denied government welfare, and face difficulty entering the labor market.[140] Russia plays off these grievances and promotes narratives that the U.S. justice system is a power-hungry police state that is failing to meet the basic needs of some of its citizens.

For instance, the IRA set up a sockpuppet account on Facebook and Instagram called "Hell_and_Back," whose self-described purpose was "to bring together all who have faced the wrath of prison life." To amplify the sentiment to a larger sympathetic audience, Russia's state-sponsored propaganda worked to portray the entire system as a corrupt institution of racial injustice. RT's online programs publish videos such as "Brutality behind bars: Abuse, mental illness & overcrowding in U.S. prisons," or "NEW PROOF: Drug War Is A Lie Designed To Imprison Americans."[141,142]

The other angle the Russians have pushed about prisons is that of racial injustice. Most Russian-sponsored mentions of U.S. prison disfunction are directly related to Russia's efforts to draw attention to institutional racism within the U.S. justice system. Over 60 percent of Facebook ads related to prison were also related to the term "black."[143] One Hell_and_Back post, supposedly quoting an African American inmate, reads, "I had no idea about the beast that communities of color are fighting. My mother didn't know about the school-to-prison pipeline, she just knew she had a black boy." Other IRA accounts like "Black Matters" organized Facebook events that called for people to turn up to protest parole hearings of African American inmates.

Certainly, incarceration rates in the United States are deeply problematic, and stories of corruption and dysfunction are worthy of reporting. However, in the aggregate, Russia's selective overexposure of news related to prison corruption does little to promote meaningful reform. The Russians emphasize stories of wrongful conviction, prison abuse, prison overcrowding, and for-profit prison systems to exacerbate already fraught debates concerning prison reform. Further, by preying on a sizeable minority that already feels detached from society, the Russians are trying to exacerbate fractures in our democracy.

Corporate United States

Russian media, and particularly Russian state-sponsored media, is fascinated with the notion that there are "two justice systems:" one for the rich, and one for the poor. One for the black, and one for the white. One for the political elite, and one for the average citizen.

One angle that has been pushed is that democracies are corrupt because of corporations, and corrupt corporations flourish because they are directly enabled by the justice system. In other words, not only do corporations in the United States answer to a different jus-

Above *In addition to alluding to the fact that the United States has a multi-tiered justice system, RT legal analyst Lionel goes on to describe the U.S. justice system in the following way: it's "a system of a corrupt justice that I couldn't even explicate if I had all the time in the world. It's that bad."*[144]

tice system than the rest of society, but the justice system also actively creates a climate whereby corporations can grow more powerful.

LENIENCY TOWARD CORPORATIONS

At the conclusion of every episode, RT's *America's Lawyer* host, a trial attorney in Pensacola, Florida, signs out with the following: "This is *America's Lawyer*, where every week we tell you stories that corporate media is ordered not to tell because their advertisers just won't let them." The larger framing of his show is that corporations tie the hands of institutions in democracies, whether it is the media, the justice system, or any other institution. This in turn creates a corrupt and unjust society.

Russian state-sponsored media strongly commits to the narrative that the courts are in bed with corporations. This frame reinforces an idea that capitalism and free expression might be incompatible concepts: democracies are run by big business, and purported freedoms for the people are co-opted to protect the interests of corporations instead. The justice system is shown as being a prime institution facilitating this process.

"there's never been a better time to be a wealthy CEO in America, because thanks to Jeff Session's dysfunctional DOJ, corporate fines and prosecutions have hit a brand new low . . . corporate law breakers are getting away with everything imaginable . . ."[145]

A related narrative is that "pro-business" judges have ulterior motives when deciding cases. *America's Lawyer* accuses the entire judicial system, at all levels, of being run by corporate America. In one segment, the host warns that while the world was focusing on Brett Kavanaugh's U.S. Supreme Court confirmation process, Republicans and Democrats were willing to fast-track a deal to appoint corporate judges across the country. In his view, federal judges use their power to do the bidding of corporations at all levels in society.[146]

Stories about corporations getting away with crimes against the people are also constantly referenced. As was the case with the police state accusations, some of the allegations are accurate and highlight legitimate concerns about corporate power in the justice system. However, when reported on Russian media, these stories of corruption are predictably, almost inevitably, brought up as the norm.

Similar to exploiting crimes against children, Russia exploits corporate law because there are limitations to what the public will have access to or understand. Corporate law can be prohibitively complicated, and cases increasingly are resolved through confidential arbitration rather than open trial, limiting the transparency that is so important to public trust. Russia benefits from these blind spots in the judicial system.

Another narrative routinely pushed by the Russians is one suggesting a connection between prisons and the economic elite. For instance, Russia has been active in promoting commentary against the United States' "privatized prison industrial complex."[147] This is a unique criticism because it shows the interplay between different frames: the racist police state and corporate corruption.

Russian state-sponsored media publishes videos like, "Prison State America: Inmates becoming corporate slaves in for-profit facilities," or "Locked up in luxury: inmates paying for less painful prison stays."[148,149] Russian accounts promoted similar sentiments. For example, the account @CrystalJohnson1 tweeted, "America's Private Prison Industry Was Born from the Exploitation of the Slave Trade." The implications are two-fold: First, it promotes the notion that prison systems are institutionally racist in their operating models. Second, it reinforces the narrative that corrupt corporations have taken over the justice system.

The Political Elite

Perhaps the most salient frame that Russia reinforces is that the U.S. justice system is a tool of the "deep state." The democracy is run by the societal elites, and the justice system is a pawn used to advance the political goals of these elites.

Russia adopted the deep state narrative in their U.S. disinformation operations toward the end of 2016. At that point in time, Russia used the frame to vilify and discredit the Democratic Party and career bureaucrats who were viewed as opposing Donald Trump. It was a catch-all frame that was widely accepted by many right-wing pundits.[150,151]

FISA AND THE SURVEILLANCE STATE

"First of all, our intelligence efforts are strictly regulated by our law . . .we don't have as much money as they have in the United States, and we don't have these technical devices that they have in the States. Our special services, thank God, are strictly controlled by the society and by the law and regulated by the law."

-President Putin on surveillance[152]

The deep state narrative is often closely tied with the idea of a "surveillance state." For some time now, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA), and the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC), have been referenced by Russian media as prime examples of how the U.S. justice system is a critical component of the surveillance state.

FISA established the FISC to review and authorize government applications to conduct surveillance on "agents of foreign powers" inside the United States. While FISA was intended to promote national security without unduly compromising civil liberties, there have been many debates surrounding the surveillance powers given to the federal government under FISA.[153] For obvious reasons, Russia has taken interest in this debate.

On June 2, 2015, at the height of a debate in Congress around surveillance laws, IRA bots made unsophisticated attempts to help push #SurveillanceDay and #PatriotAct viral. Today, the debate has taken a heightened priority. Congressional fights over the release of the redacted FISA application to investigate President Trump's campaign foreign policy aide, Carter Page, have changed the political calculus of the discourse. Though the DOJ and FBI maintain that the FISA application was both reasonably compiled and legally approved, there is a narrative that the warrant demonstrates an abuse of power and validates suspicions that the Trump administration is being subjected to a "witch hunt."[154] Russia's focus on FISA and surveillance legislation suggests that the legislative debate about the 2019 sun-setting provisions of FISA may be a future target of Russian disinformation.[155]

Relatedly, on January 18, 2018, Russia launched a hashtag campaign meant to quickly send #ReleasetheMemo viral and encourage authentic users to adopt it in their own tweets.[156] The hashtag was in reference to a classified memo written by Congressman Devin Nunes, which allegedly described surveillance abuses and cover-ups by the FBI. This incrimination of the FBI provided further fuel for deep state conspiracies.

These FISA-related controversies have tied the ideas of the deep state and a hypocritically corrupt, "big brother" government with the Mueller investigation. The Russians have capitalized on these openings to undermine the Mueller investigation and the justice system more broadly.

THE MUELLER INVESTIGATION

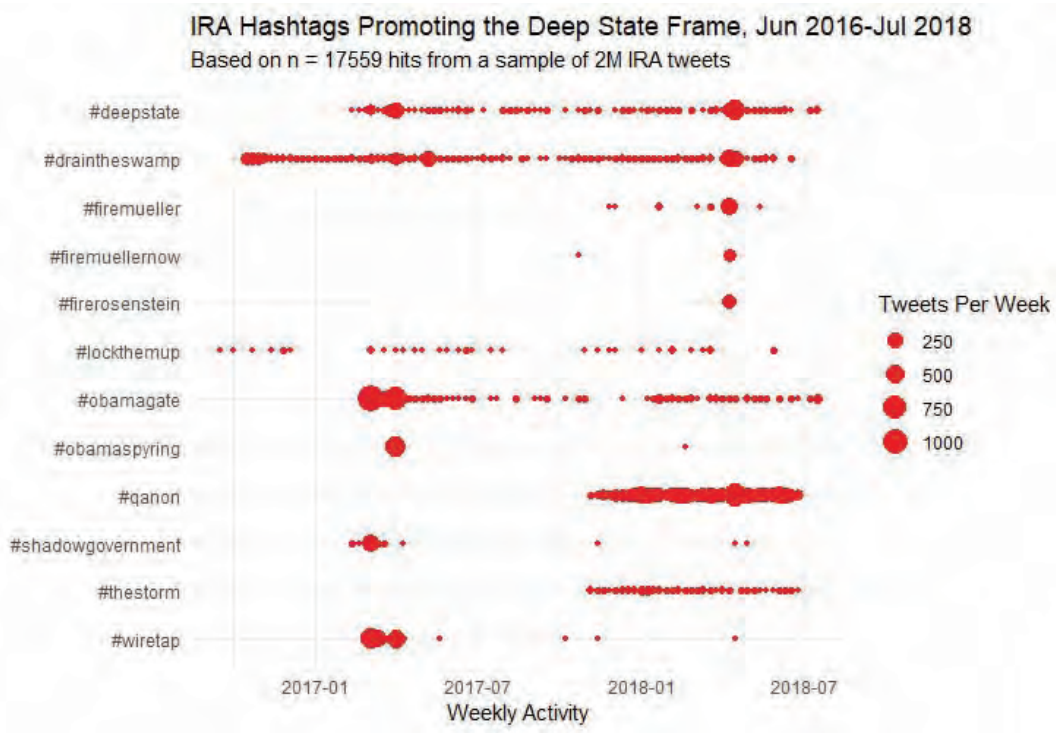
"I'm not interested in this issue a single bit. It's the internal political games of the United States. Don't make the relationship between Russia and the United States—don't hold it hostage to this internal political struggle. And it's quite clear to me that this is just an internal political struggle, and it's nothing to be proud of for American democracy to use such dirty methods and political rivalry."

-President Putin on Mueller indictments[157]

Throughout the investigation, Russian media was intent that there was in fact collusion in the run-up to the 2016 election, but not between Trump and Putin. Instead, they pushed theories about how Mueller had been colluding with the DNC, the media, and other groups operating as a part of the deep State.

Many news reports on RT and Sputnik covering the investigation would abruptly conclude with some iteration of the following: Moscow denies allegations of collusion, and accounts saying otherwise are "invented to excuse the election loss of a presidential candidate, [deflecting] public attention from actual instances of election fraud and corruption."[158]

In the months following Mueller's appointment as Special Counsel, Russia attempted to make numerous connections between Mueller and the deep state. For example, in the Department of Justice criminal complaint against Elena Khusyaynova (Fall 2018), Russian conspirators instructed accounts to make statements like the following: "Special prosecuter Mueller is a puppet of the establishment . . . It is a fact that the Special Prosecutor who leads the investigation against Trump represents the establishment . . . Mueller is a very dependent and highly politicized figure; therefore; there will be no honest and open results from the investigation."[159] Other tweets ranged from calling Mueller a "Swamp Monster" to being "in bed" with Hillary Clinton. Additionally, IRA bots on Twitter amplified domestic stories claiming that the Mueller investigation was biased because some members of the investigation were DNC donors and stories claiming that former FBI Director James Comey and Mueller were conspiring with each other.



Above *This figure illustrates the volume of certain hashtags used in IRA Tweets over time, in weekly increments. The size of each dot represents how many times a corresponding hashtag was used in a week. One large dot represents a high concentration of hashtag usage in a short period of time, while a long string of dots represents consistent usage of the hashtag in IRA messaging on Twitter.*

While the Mueller-deep state connection is a primary frame through which Russian media engaged the investigation, there were two other frames aimed at undermining the investigation.

Russiagate: This frame claimed the Mueller investigation was a dramatic circus. A mockery. RT and Sputnik program headlines sarcastically read like the following: "First Russia was accused of hacking, now its collusion, what's next—telepathy?!"[160] or "How to Spot Russian interference in the US midterm election!"[161] This frame also intimated that there is something wrong with democracy if it is willing to invest heavily in a "sham investigation." In late January 2019, RT republished Stephen Cohen's article, "The End of Russia's 'Democratic Illusions' about America," which makes the point that the United States' recent fascination with Russia demonstrates underlying issues with democracies and the institutions they supposedly hold accountable.[162]

Mueller Incompetence: More than just attacking the investigation outright, the Russians have enjoyed "exposing" the incompetence of those involved in this high-profile investigation. They often used their legal analysts to dissect and ridicule perceived missteps taken by the Mueller team. In reference to whether or not President Trump should have fired Mueller, RT's legal analyst Lionel exclaimed, "why would he fire Inspector Clouseau? . . . Hire more Muellers. Bring it on. Have at it."[163]

Further, to simultaneously shore up sympathy for Russia at Mueller's expense, IRA operatives pointed out that Russia had tipped off the FBI to the two Boston Marathon bombers before the 2013 attack. At the time, Mueller was Director of the FBI. One Russian Twitter account lamented that the #BostonMarathon bombing could have been prevented if Mueller had "listened 2 Russia." Another IRA-affiliated Instagram page, AmericaFirst, posted an image of Mueller with the caption: "Russia warned Mueller about the Boston Marathon bombers twice, and Mueller did nothing. He's incompetent!"[164]

The Russian approach was an opportunistic approach, making a mockery of the already polarizing discourse around the investigation, and a defensively motivated effort to cripple an investigation that could have brought to light certain corrupt practices, diminishing the efficacy of future Russian influence operations.

Russia also played a significant role in amplifying the QAnon conspiracy, which alleged that the Mueller investigation was a sham.[165] The QAnon conspiracy, which originated on 4chan, alleged that the investigation was a cover for Mueller and Trump to work together to expose thousands of deep state pedophiles—the list of culprits includes Hillary Clinton, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama.[166]

QAnon is a fringe conspiracy theory, but its virality is dangerous. And Russia knows this. The QAnon story has evolved from hiding in dark corners of the internet to making appearances at Trump's presidential rallies.[167] Russian operatives pushed narratives like this

because they not only reinforced the existence of the deep state, but also distracted the public from the investigation's primary mandates.

In response to the recent release of the Mueller report, President Vladimir Putin mocked the investigation by referring to it as "a mountain [that gave] birth to a mouse." He went on to state that the investigation was "sheer nonsense aimed at a domestic audience and used for domestic political infighting in the United States."[168] Preliminary analysis of state-sponsored media shows that RT and Sputnik programs are taking the opportunity to very strongly criticize the mainstream media for hyping the investigation. The operations on social media are also holding strong. In March 2019, FBI Director Christopher Wray warned that foreign influence campaigns continue "virtually unabated" on social media.[169] Our analysis shows, for example, that many of the authentic Twitter personalities that comment on Mueller's investigation, which have also been amplified by Russian bots in the past, are still being amplified by unattributed bots.

All the frames introduced earlier are meant to undermine overall confidence in our democracies. The deep state frame, as it pertains to ongoing investigations, is a more direct, calculated attack on a singular aspect of our justice system. The courts hold the power to shine a light on Russia's corrupt dealings, which in turn will create a world that is more aware and less susceptible to Russia's influence operations. It's not surprising that Putin worked to undermine the Mueller investigation and preemptively cast doubt on similar investigations conducted in the future.

4 | Recommendations

This report has focused on Russia, but other states—and domestic actors—are adopting similar computational propaganda tactics. Moreover, the threat is evolving and becoming more sophisticated. Experts at the cybersecurity firm FireEye have already observed a shift in Russia's tactics; Russia has reduced original content creation in favor of amplifying authentic U.S. voices online to better obfuscate the extent of their interference.[170]

Advances in artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies will empower adversaries to wield information operations more effectively at lower cost. Machine-learning algorithms will be able to create video forgeries—known as "deep fakes"—that "will be able to fool the untrained ear and eye."[171] Advances in algorithms and micro-targeting will provide adversaries with increasingly effective ways to precisely target audiences with customized messaging at scale.[172] AI-enabled botnets may empower cybersecurity attacks by efficiently spreading malware or personalizing phishing attempts.[173] Moreover, AI-enabled botnets will be able to target and converse with real, vulnerable people online without revealing that they are not real.[174] Advances in technology will make online propaganda far more piercing and hidden.

Given the pervasive and evolving nature of the threat, democracies must respond with a long-term strategy to counter disinformation, not with ad hoc responses that follow electoral cycles. The February 2018 Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) report *Countering Adversary Threats to Democratic Institutions* called for a **whole-of-nation strategy to prevent, deter, and reduce the effectiveness** of activities aimed at undermining democracies.[175] The contributing experts agreed that the strategy should address the following imperatives:

1. Publicize the extent of Russian, and potentially other adversaries', interference in democratic institutions and increase awareness of the threat within those institutions and among the public.

2. Promote bipartisan action against Russia and its proxies, and increase technical defenses and countermeasures, to increase the costs of disruptive activities.

3. Improve transparency into foreign adversary interference through measures such as campaign finance reform, foreign agent disclosure, and tagging adversary-operated "bots."

4. Research the extent to which specific adversary techniques, including cyber-enabled activities, influence public opinion and target mitigation approaches to address the most damaging techniques.

5. Engage in a national effort to promote and reinvigorate U.S. understanding of the importance of democracy and our democratic institutions, as a bulwark against foreign efforts to exploit divisions and complacency. This should include media literacy, critical thinking, and civics curricula at all levels, updated for the digital age.

This strategy is still needed. Moreover, it needs to include a significant international component. Democracies around the world are threatened by foreign interference. We must share information about the threats and ideas for countering them, including collective action where appropriate. In addition, the threat to the justice system requires additional, institution-specific attention. In keeping with the five imperatives, the following recommendations broadly highlight preliminary actions that must be taken to safeguard institutions of justice.

Recommendations for the Justice System

RAISE AWARENESS AND INVEST IN IMPACT-ORIENTED RESEARCH

Institutions within the justice system are vulnerable to disinformation, in part, because they remain largely unaware that they are being targeted. For the past year, the DDI team has engaged in a series of threat awareness events to the legal community. Initial feedback and observations suggest that these workshops serve an invaluable purpose in initiating dialogue about exploitable vulnerabilities and cybersecurity as it relates to the courts and inspiring more vigilance among participants. There is an immediate need to **expand both the content and the reach of threat awareness among practitioners in the justice system** so that they are cognizant of the threat and can be ready to respond.

Additionally, it is important to **conduct more impact-oriented research into these attacks** in order to target efforts at those techniques and messages that present the greatest risk.

IMPROVE RAPID RESPONSE CAPABILITIES

While institutions of justice are necessarily independent, their staffs must be able to coordinate effectively with social media platforms and the executive branch. The justice system has become a target but lacks the institutional capacity to defend itself effectively. Institutions like the courts **should establish lines of communication with social media platforms and appropriate federal entities** to maintain awareness of the threat. Moreover, institutions of justice must **establish fast-responding communication capabilities** to quickly counter false information with as much accurate information as legally allowed. This should be supported by an outside network of retired judges, former prosecutors, and lawyers in communities across the country who can be trained and organized to quickly respond to misleading or false information in instances where the courts themselves may be prevented or reluctant.

PROMOTE CIVICS AND MEDIA LITERACY AS A NATIONAL SECURITY IMPERATIVE

There is a limit to technological intervention. Anyone online—meaning everyone—is a potential target of computational propaganda. Democracies must focus on building public resiliency to computational propaganda. The best defense is a civically informed and engaged public that is more resilient against disinformation operations. Civics education, including media literacy, is vital to re-instill a shared sense of values and the importance of working to preserve our democracy.

- **Expand the dialogue:** Civic education and engagement is a national security imperative. By bringing together national security practitioners and people involved in civics education, we can more aggressively highlight the importance of this dialogue.
- **Elevate the urgency:** Civics education is being deprioritized nationally. We should reinvest in civics curricula within schools. We should also expand the civic mission to reach primary demographics that are being targeted by disinformation.
- **Emphasize media literacy:** Adversaries are treating the internet as a battlefield, and the public needs training in how to safely operate online. Additionally, we need to make sure that older populations are included in these media literacy conversations.
- **Re-instill shared values:** The West should respond by emphasizing shared values, including a commitment to the rule of law, fairness, freedom, tolerance, and public engagement. These values are central to democracy and points around which citizens can feel a shared sense of identity.

Train to "Fight in the Light"

Russia is engaged in a kind of jujitsu; attempting to use our strengths—freedom of speech, open marketplace of ideas, and even robust public discourse online—against us. We must be careful not to play into this strategy by undermining those strengths ourselves in response. Rather, we should find ways to use those strengths to fight the disinformation threat.

Transparency is both a prerequisite and a huge comparative strength for democracies. Robust democracy demands transparency and a free flow of information. In contrast, autocracies depend upon restricting the flow of information and keeping secrets from the population. We should play to our strength and our adversaries' weakness by using openness and transparency to our advantage.

This means continuing efforts to identify, label, and overwhelm disinformation, ranging from innovative initiatives of social media platforms to the use of legal tools like the Foreign Agents Registration Act and strengthened campaign finance/advertising laws. It means using online tools and targeted messaging to teach media literacy and rebuild shared values and a sense of the importance and fragility of democracy.

Free speech does not require tolerating coordinated inauthentic online activity or allowing the deliberate and repeated spread of lies or direct incitements to violence. However, over-emphasis on takedowns plays into our adversaries' hands and trying to keep information from the public is ultimately a losing proposition.

The world is becoming more transparent every day. The shelf-life of secrets is vanishingly short. Whoever figures out how best to operate in this transparent world will have the advantage. If you trained to fight in the dark, you could meet your adversary at night or turn out the lights and have the advantage. We must continue to train to fight in the light.

5 | Conclusion

Russia's charge against liberal democracies shows no signs of abating. Information operations targeted against democratic institutions provide an incredibly high return on investment for the Kremlin. As this report has shown via the lens of the justice system, Russia's disinformation operations are sophisticated and touch all parts of society. Though gradual, the effects of these campaigns could cause serious damage to institutions tasked with upholding justice and the rule of law. Through various propaganda channels, Russian adversaries infiltrated information streams and promoted content misrepresenting court cases, attacking judges, undermining the credibility of investigations, and more. These stories were packaged into narrative frames, thereby injecting strong, memorable, recognizable sentiments biased against the justice system into the minds of the democratic public.

We know that Putin exploits weaknesses of our own making. The Kremlin did not invent the narratives it pushes. Domestic voices are prevalent contributors to destructive discourse. Moreover, many of the criticisms of our institutions are valid. We must hold our institutions accountable to live up to our aspirations. However, we also must guard against those who would turn our criticism into cynicism and who would encourage us to give up on our institutions. That is part of our civic responsibility. This responsibility is especially acute for our political leaders, who should take greater care in the way they talk about our justice system and other democratic institutions to ensure that they don't reinforce pernicious propaganda designed to weaken rather than improve our institutions and our country.

At times like today, when our politics are particularly partisan and divisiveness defines our discourse, we depend upon our institutions to sustain our democracy. Our courts are being asked to weigh in on highly charged issues and may be called upon to resolve potential constitutional crises between the Congress and the executive branch. This is a dangerous time to have an adversary actively working to undermine the credibility of those courts.

The challenge to democracies from foreign interference goes far beyond elections. The United States and its allies need to recognize the full scope of this threat and the urgency of countering it.

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Ms. Spaulding has also served in Republican and Democratic administrations and on both sides of the aisle in Congress. Before working at DHS, she was general counsel for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and minority staff director for the U.S. House of Representatives Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. She also spent six years at the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), where she was legal adviser to the director's Nonproliferation Center. Additionally, she has spent over 10 years as an attorney in private practice, including serving as Security Counsel to the Business Roundtable. She is a member of the Aspen Institute's Homeland Security Group; former chair of the American Bar Association's Standing Committee on Law and National Security; founder of the Cybersecurity Legal Task Force; and was a member of Harvard University's Long-Term Legal Strategy Project for Preserving Security and Democratic Freedoms in the War on Terror. She is also on the Advisory Boards for King &Union, Nozomi Networks, and Cyber Specialty. Ms. Spaulding has convened and participated in numerous academic and professional advisory panels, been a frequent commentator in public media, and often testified before Congress.

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Appendix

Data Attribution and Collection

The Defending Democratic Institutions Project (DDI) at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) conducted original analysis to examine how Russia's cyber-enabled disinformation operations targeted institutions of justice. The project's coverage included social media data, state-sponsored propaganda outlets, and other activity coordinated by Russia's Internet Research Agency.

The study relied heavily on content analysis of Russia's computational propaganda. It is important to emphasize that DDI draws no conclusions about the *impact* of Russia's activity on any individual or institution. The data is limited to Russian activity and does not include significant data from authentic users. DDI gathered and downloaded datasets that were archived by social media companies after the 2016 U.S. Election. The study assumes that, for the following datasets, any third-party attribution of Russian-coordinated activity is accurate:

- **Twitter Data**—Between October 2018-January 2019, Twitter released two datasets totaling approximately 9.6 million tweets published by approximately 4,000 Russian-affiliated Twitter accounts. DDI's study incorporated Twitter's January alterations to their October 2018 dataset.[176] Analysis ranged from gathering basic statistics to network analysis and natural language processing techniques. Multi-keyword queries of the main corpus of Tweets were used to isolate subcorpora about issues related to the justice system.

- **Facebook Data**—This study examined the 3,517 Facebook ads submitted to, and released by, the House Permanent Select Intelligence Committee.[177] The study relied on archives published by a research team at the University of Maryland, who conducted a qualitative analysis of the ads and extracted metadata from the original PDFs.[178]

- **Reddit Data**—Reddit published a list of 944 accounts linked to the Internet Research Agency in April 2018. Community users harvested and published the activity of the 944 accounts through the Reddit API.[179]

- **Web scraping of IRA-linked domains**—DDI used web scraping techniques to collect data from IRA-operated domains. The list of domains was independently attributed in a Senate-commissioned report published by New Knowledge.[180]

- **YouTube API**—To understand the content of Russia's state-sponsored propaganda, this study collected data from YouTube channels associated with *Sputnik International* and *Russia Today* facilitated by YouTube's Developer API.

- **Archived Content**—DDI archived and analyzed content attributed to the IRA by a leak on the information exchange site "Joker.buzz." The contents of the leak were authenticated by *The Daily Beast*.[181] The content was archived from Instagram, Reddit, and Tumblr using the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine. DDI also drew from IRA content archived online by other independent researchers.[182] The list of accounts was independently authenticated in a Senate-commissioned report published by New Knowledge.[183]

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