

## **Online Appendix for “Correcting Fake News: A Survey Experiment”**

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## Outcome Survey Measures

- For pizzagate: “High-ranking Democrat John Podesta was involved in a pedophile ring at a pizza parlor.” [Disagree/agree on 5-point scale]
- For Podesta brothers conspiracy: “Top Democrats John and Tony Podesta may have been involved in an abduction.” [Disagree/agree on 5-point scale]
- For Vermont power grid: “The Russian government infiltrated Vermont’s power grid.” [Disagree/agree on 5-point scale]
- For Scaramucci-Russia story: “The Senate is currently investigating a meeting between Trump advisor Anthony Scaramucci and the Russia Direct Investment Fund.” [Disagree/agree on 5-point scale]
- For Trump’s pedophilia correction: “President Trump is leading an unprecedented effort to increase the number of arrests for sex trafficking.” [Disagree/agree on 5-point scale ]
- For Obama birth certificate: “Barack Obama was born in Hawaii.” [Disagree/agree on 5-point scale]

Russia Hacks Power Grid				
Greenwald correction	-1.09***	-1.05***		
	(.10)	(.19)		
Washington Post correction	-1.04***	-.81***		
	(.10)	(.19)		
Moderate		.47**		.47**
		(.21)		(.21)
Liberal		.72***		.72***
		(.17)		(.17)
Greenwald x Moderate		.25		
		(.29)		
Washington Post x Moderate		-.38		
		(.29)		
Greenwald x Liberal		-.12		
		(.24)		
Washington Post x Liberal		-.24		
		(.24)		
Overall correction x Moderate				-.05
				(.25)
Overall correction x Liberal				-.18
				(.20)
Overall correction			-1.06***	-.93***
			(.09)	(.17)
<i>Auxiliary Quantities: Correction Effects by ideology</i>				
Greenwald (Conservative)		-1.05***		
Greenwald (Moderate)		-.81***		
Greenwald (Liberal)		-1.17***		
WaPo (Conservative)		-.81***		
WaPo (Moderate)		-1.19***		
WaPo (Liberal)		-1.06***		
Conservative				-.93***
Moderate				-.98***
Liberal				-1.11***
<i>Differences in Correction effects by ideology</i>				
Washington Post - Greenwald (Cons)			-.24	
Washington Post - Greenwald (Mod)			.38	
Washington Post - Greenwald (Lib)			-.12	
Observations	723	723	723	723
R <sup>2</sup>	.17	.22	.17	.21

Note:

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

Table 1: For the Vermont power grid story, we randomly varied the correction, showing either an article by *The Washington Post* or Glenn Greenwald. Above are regression models for Vermont power grid hacking, by correction type. Both the *Post* and the Greenwald corrections are indistinguishably corrective, as indicated by insignificant differences in the *differences* in the correction effects (the second group of auxiliary quantities).

		Number of Corrections			Association
		None	One	Two	
Education	HSD	10	9	10	$\chi^2 = 2.25, p = .68$
	Some Coll	36	38	35	
	BA +	55	52	55	
Gender	Female	50	49	48	$\chi^2 = .52, p = .72$
	Male	50	51	52	
Ideology	Lib	53	51	54	$\chi^2 = 1.65, p = .79$
	Mod	20	21	19	
	Cons	28	28	27	
Party	Democrat	53	49	51	$\chi^2 = 3.61, p = .46$
	Independent	20	21	23	
	Republican	27	30	26	
2016 Vote	Clinton	52	48	52	$\chi^2 = 4.52, p = .37$
	Trump	29	33	28	
	Other	19	19	19	
Race	White	76	76	78	$\chi^2 = 3.69, p = .72$
	Black	7	7	7	
	Hispanic	10	9	9	
	Other	7	8	5	
Age		36.4	36.2	36.5	F(1, 2102) = .0007, p = .98
Income		\$58,133	\$59,095	\$56,847	F(1, 2102) = .07, p = .79

Table 2: Conditional balance. For categorical covariates, the three numerical columns report the proportional distribution of each variable within the variable class. For continuous variables, cells report correction exposure group means. Categorical relationships are tested with a chi-square test, continuous variables are tested with an F-test.

## **Pizzagate Fake News Article**

Found at <https://voat.co/v/pizzagate/1497611> *Top Democrat John Podesta Involved in Pedophile Ring At Pizza Parlor*

This investigation was sparked by strange emails leaked from John Podesta's email account, some of which make bizarre references to food. One such email discussed a handkerchief Podesta left behind at a friend's house. The handkerchief was described as having a "map that seems pizza-related." Given the common pedophile code phrase "cheese pizza", some readers suspected "pizza-related" may have been a reference to child sex abuse. The suspected use of "pizza" as a codeword led us to investigate a pizza restaurant mentioned in one of Podesta's emails, namely Comet Pizza and Ping Pong, owned by an associate of the Podestas. We have found considerable evidence that Comet is a front for child sex trafficking.

### **Exhibit A: Evidence Pertaining to Comet Pizza and Ping Pong**

As demonstrated in Exhibit D, we have connected owner James Alefantis to accused child trafficker Laura Silsby, who was got off the hook by a fake attorney who was later convicted of sex-trafficking, and who was wanted for sex trafficking in four countries. Alefantis had a statue of Antinous as his Instagram profile picture. Antinous was the boy lover of a Roman Emperor, and is considered a symbol of pederasty. On his "jimmycomet" Instagram account, Alefantis posted a baby picture and made a clear pedophile reference. The brother of Jeffrey B. Smith ("werkinonmahnichtcheese"), who commented on several of the suspect Instagram photos, referred to a friend as "my favorite pedo".

Listed first on Comet's website under "friends of comet" is the band Heavy Breathing, which performs at Comet. Heavy Breathing leader "Majestic Ape" wears a ski mask and sunglasses, and uses a voice modulator, hiding his or her identity. Majestic Ape joked about pedophile Jared Fogle and said "we all have our preferences, hee hee hee". YouTube, bringing laughter from the audience. In another video, Majestic Ape talks about killing a baby YouTube. Majestic Ape also referenced pedophilia in a caption on a music video. Heavy Breathing's website features art involving both children and sex.

An employee of Comet posted many images portraying pizza in a sexual way., further fu-

eling our suspicion they are using "pizza" as it is commonly used by pedophiles: a symbol and codeword for sex with minors. Another example. An admitted pedophile on a dark-web pedophile forum acknowledged a trend of pedophiles using pizza parlors as fronts for child sex trafficking. Convicted sex offender Robert L. Robinson, who raped a 13-year-old girl, had a Flickr account with five pages of "favorite" pictures, half of which featured young girls, and the other half of which featured... Comet Pizza and Ping Pong.

Please examine these symbols designated by the FBI as pedophile symbols. Besta Pizza, which is three doors down from Comet, had a logo that is a near-exact match of the boylover symbol. Another nearby business, Terasol, had a girl-lover symbol on their website. No direct connection to Besta or Terasol has yet been uncovered, but the logos seem quite a coincidence. With that in mind, take a look at Comet's logo. It also resembles a pedophile symbol.

General creepiness seems to surround Comet. Alefantis posted a photo of a child taped to a ping pong table. He also posted a photo of a walk-in cooler, to which he commented "murder" and to which Jeffrey B. Smith commented "killroom." Alefantis also posted a picture of Tony Podesta's sculpture modeled after a Dahmer victim and one of "spirit-cooking" queen Marina Abramovic. Comet had a painting of a man playing ping pong, to which graffiti had been added to show him ejaculating on the table and wearing a Satanic upside-down cross. Comet had murals of people with heads cut off, and the artist who painted the murals also painted adults decapitating children.

Pizzagate researcher Ryan O'Neal posted a YouTube video in which he claims James Alefantis threatened his life and the lives of his family YouTube to bully O'Neal into removing a video about Alefantis' "Pegasus Museum" from YouTube. O'Neal showed text messages, which appear to be from Alefantis, bullying him into calling Alefantis. O'Neal claims that when he called, Alefantis immediately began screaming at him and threatening him and his family. O'Neal filed a police report over the alleged threats.

Exhibit B: Evidence Pertaining to John and Tony Podesta

John Podesta is the former Chief of Staff to President Bill Clinton, and was the Chair of Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign. Tony Podesta runs The Podesta Group, a major

lobbying firm. The Podestas are associates of James Alefantis, as detailed in Exhibit C. They are also good friends with known and admitted pedophile, former Republican congressman Dennis Hastert. John Podesta received an email suggesting that Hastert should vanish to an undisclosed Japanese island after the news of Hastert's pedophilia broke.

Now, let's discuss the specific emails that led to our investigation of Comet. John Podesta received an email from Tam Luzzatto saying that children of ages 11, 9, and 7 will be "in the pool for further entertainment" and stating that the children "will definitely be in that pool".

In another email, Podesta was told that he left behind a black-and-white handkerchief "with a map that seems pizza-related". A handkerchief with a "pizza-related" map? What the...? Note that in the gay community, handkerchiefs are sometimes used as code for sexual preferences. It is possible that others have adopted this code as well. Black symbolizes bdsm/domination in this code; some have suggested that white could symbolize pedophilia, due to the association of white with innocence and purity. Furthermore, as discussed previously, "cheese pizza" is a common code phrase meaning "child pornography," so "pizza" could be an adaptation of that.

In another suspiciously cryptic email, a friend complained that Podesta had changed "strategies that have long been in place" and remarked that Podesta sent him "cheese" instead of "pasta," asking if Podesta thought he would do better "playing dominoes on cheese than on pasta". Why would Podesta regularly send this person pasta, why would there need to be a strategy long in place for doing so, and who plays dominoes on cheese or pasta?

Tony Podesta sent John Podesta an email titled "Last night was fun." The email read simply "still in the torture chamber". One could argue this could have been a metaphor, but consider it in light of the fact that Tony Podesta collects art by Biljana Djurdjevic, which references or depicts extreme physical and sexual abuse of children. He also collects photos of naked teenagers, and he has a taste for art portraying cannibalism and murder, such as his headless Arch of Hysteria statue which seems to reproduce one of Jeffrey Dahmer's decapitated victims. John Podesta also likes artwork portraying cannibalism, such as this piece is in his office.

## **Pizzagate Correction**

Found at <http://www.snopes.com/pizzagate-conspiracy/>

CLAIM: The 'Podesta e-mails' revealed the existence of a secret society of pedophiles operating through a pizza place loosely connected to Clinton associate David Brock. See Example(s)

RATING: FALSE

ORIGIN

On 4 November 2016, Reddit user u/DumbScribblyUnctious published a thread titled "Comet Ping Pong - Pizzagate Summary" to subreddit r/The\_Donald (a community of Donald Trump supporters), which appears to have touched off a complex and detailed conspiracy theory involving WikiLeaks' release of e-mails from former Hillary Clinton presidential campaign chair John Podesta, child exploitation, and a Washington, D.C., pizzeria called Comet Ping Pong.

None of this elaborate conspiracy theory was true, as the New York Times noted:

None of it was true. While [Comet Ping Pong pizzeria owner James] Alefantis has some prominent Democratic friends in Washington and was a supporter of Mrs. Clinton, he has never met her, does not sell or abuse children, and is not being investigated by law enforcement for any of these claims. He and his 40 employees had unwittingly become real people caught in the middle of a storm of fake news.

"From this insane, fabricated conspiracy theory, we've come under constant assault," said Mr. Alefantis, 42, who was once in a relationship with David Brock, a provocative former right-wing journalist who became an outspoken advocate for Mrs. Clinton.

Although the original "Pizzagate" post was deleted at some point between 4 and 21 November 2016, archived versions of it contained what appeared to be the original post in its entirety. (A subreddit dedicated to the controversy, r/pizzagate, was created in the interim.) A brief and incomplete summary of the theory espoused in the original post goes as follows:



Comet Pizza is a pizza place owned by James Alefantis, who is the former gay boyfriend of David Brock, the CEO of Correct The Record. It has been the venue for dozens of events for the Hillary campaign staff. John Podesta has had campaign fundraisers there for both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton. John's brother and business partner Tony Podesta has his birthday party there every year.

It's also a dive that according to reviews and photos has hidden bathroom doors and creepy murals. The bathrooms in particular have murals exclusively of nude women, as well as a great deal of graffiti relating to sex. Reviews of the restaurant are bizarrely polarized. Websites describing it positively note that there are regularly "unsupervised children running around". Their menu include a pedophilic symbol, as do the signs and decorations of other neighboring businesses.

The music acts and the posters promoting same acts are bizarre in their presentation, content, and lyrical focus, but are still promoted as being "for all ages". The overtly sexual content would suggest otherwise.

The same has taken place in reference to videos recorded inside Comet Ping Pong by people that frequent their establishment as well as video referencing Comet Ping Pong positively from the exterior.

While initially not the central focus of the investigation at the onset, Comet Ping Pong is a much more overt and much more disturbing hub of coincidences. Everyone associated with the business is making semi-overt, semi-tongue-in-cheek, and semi-sarcastic inferences towards sex with minors. The artists that work for and with the business also generate nothing but cultish imagery of disembodiment, blood, beheadings, sex, and of course pizza.

Several pages were linked to support the details of the claim (an e-mail in which David Brock was described as "batshit crazy" by Clinton associate Neera Tanden was among them) and the post primarily focused on Alefantis and his loose ties to the Clinton campaign via a former romantic relationship with David Brock of Media Matters for America.

Users tracked down Alefantis' purported Instagram account (since deleted or restricted), which they said hosted images of children, gay clubs, drugs, and generally "bizarre" or unsettling imagery. However, the photographs that the Instagram account purportedly hosted were instead, apparently, taken from the pages of various people who "liked" the restaurant's page on Facebook. Some of the photographs were apparently taken from random web sites:

"The most sickening part of this vicious attack has been the stealing of Instagram images, Facebook images of children, minors, aged 5, 7, and 8 years old that are then slapped across their chat boards as nothing but pawns," Alefantis says. "Yes, it's scary to be attacked, it's dangerous for business, but it's disgusting and filthy of these people to be posting photos on these websites...Someone should be prosecuting these people."

Alefantis says the photos have been lifted from his personal social media accounts, and those of his friends and employees not from the restaurant. "Kids in the restaurant are completely safe, none of these people are going there, they're cowards," he says, emphasizing that this scandal only exists on the internet. Inside the restaurant it's business as usual...While Alefantis says he can weather the storm, he's concerned about others who may not have as much community backing as he does. "I personally worry for the individuals who are being attacked and smeared and slandered and maligned and for other independent businesses or restaurants who are less established than Comet."

Scattered evidence from previously leaked Podesta communications was included, such as an e-mail about children orphaned after 2010's catastrophic earthquake in Haiti (along with information about adoption agencies and trafficking), or another thread claiming Clinton campaign manager John Podesta and his brother Tony Podesta were purportedly in Portugal at the time Madeleine McCann disappeared.

Additional evidence was presented in collage format, visually "linking" unrelated Instagram screengrabs, a number of individuals supposedly involved, purported coded signaling for pedophiles (such as a butterfly or a "play, eat, drink" insignia which could be abbreviated "PED"), and assertions that underground tunnels linked adjacent business (which themselves also use pedophilia code in their materials).

Trump supporters on sites like Reddit and 4chan have long been looking for a stronger connection between Clinton and Jeffrey Epstein, a financial tycoon and sex offender whose plane Bill Clinton sometimes used. The Wikileaks release of Clinton campaign chair John Podesta's hacked emails inspired a feverish, and mostly hapless, search for salacious scandal evidence, while PolitiFact calls the evidence for a Clinton sex network "ridiculously thin."

Why, they wondered, did Podesta have a handkerchief with a "pizza-related" map on it? And why did Podesta get so many emails about eating pizza?

The answer to any reasonable person would be that Podesta eats pizza sometimes. Indeed, Alefantis says, "pizza's always a big thing in politics." ... To the alt right, though, "pizza" became a suspected code word for illegal sex trafficking. ...In one 2008 email released by Wikileaks, Alefantis thanked Podesta for attending a fundraiser at the restaurant but regretted not making him a pizza. That drew amateur theorists' attention to the restaurant's murals, which they declared "creepy," and the sliding doors in front of the restaurant's bathrooms, dubbed "hidden rooms."

In the period between 6 November 2016 and 21 November 2016, social media users continued to examine purported links to the pizzeria. Not long after Comet Ping Pong became the center of myriad ambiguous child abuse theories, the business' Yelp page was locked down by the site's operators, along with the following note:

This business recently made waves in the news, which often means that people come to this page to post their views on the news..While we don't take a stand one way or the other when it comes to these news events, we do work to remove both positive and negative posts that appear to be motivated more by the news coverage itself than the reviewer's personal consumer experience with the business.

By 15 November 2016, Alefantis told Washington City Paper the rumors showed no sign of abating, and had begun to affect adjacent venues (who were, according to the conspiracy theory, connected to the pizza restaurant by underground tunnels, apparently including a non-governmental organization across the street that works with Haitian orphans).

The Pizzagate/Comet Ping Pong social media investigation bore striking similarity to a similar Reddit-based panic concerning a “creepy day care” in January 2015. The Fun Time Kidz Day Care conspiracy quickly spiraled into offline harassment and in-person surveillance, but nothing came of the deeply scrutinized claims.

“A bunch of people ran in from Comet and said a man walked in with a gun,” Jain said.

Although the Pizzagate controversy remains a high-interest conspiracy, we are unable to locate any substantive aspect of the claims that could be fact-checked or otherwise held up to the light to determine their veracity. And while rumors about pedophilia and child trafficking remain standard in urban folklore, roughly 90 percent[PDF] of assaults on children in the U.S. are committed by a friend or family member, a number reiterated by the United States Department of Justice. Most [PDF] abuse of the nature alleged is committed by family members, family friends, or other trusted adults - without the use of coded toys or pizzeria sex rings.

# Obama Birth Certificate Fake News Video

Subjects watched this video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7EAXesVQ8wo>

# Obama Birth Certificate Correction

**THE SUNDAY ADVERTISER**  
B-6 August 13, 1961

**Health Bureau Statistics**

## Births, Marriages, Deaths

**BIRTHS**

Mr. and Mrs. Samuel K. Haas Sr., 849-A 11th Ave., son, Aug. 4.  
Mr. and Mrs. Charles J. Staley, 1319 Anapa St., daughter, Aug. 6.  
Mr. and Mrs. Richard R. Kilson, Apt. 11, 1635 Clark St., son, Aug. 6.  
Mr. and Mrs. George P. Avau Sr., 87-143 Lili'ana St., Malli, son, July 31.  
Mr. and Mrs. Thaddeus J. Raymond, 1371 Halea Drive, son, July 30.  
Mr. and Mrs. Robert I. Arakawa, 935-B Houston St., son, Aug. 1.  
Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Y. Takaha, 55 Nanea Ave., Wahiawa, daughter, Aug. 2.

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Mr. and Mrs. Allington K. Brown, Maunawili Road, Kailua, son, Aug. 2.  
Mr. and Mrs. Cirilo V. Caberto, 918 Puuhale Road, son, Aug. 3.  
Mr. and Mrs. Samuel L. M. Mo'kua'i Sr., 732 Laukaa St., son, Aug. 2.  
Mr. and Mrs. John R. Clifford Sr., 2674 Maunawili Place, son, Aug. 4.

**LU'AU**  
**58281 — KANEDA'S**  
\$2.50 per person, all you can eat.

Mr. and Mrs. Peter C. Kamei'olo Jr., 441 McNeill St., son, Aug. 3.  
Mr. and Mrs. Edward W. Walker, 1660 S. King St., daughter, Aug. 7.  
Mr. and Mrs. Wallace M. Durkin, 3813 Radford Drive, son, Aug. 7.  
Mr. and Mrs. Mike A. Nagaiishi, 2187 Gardenia St., son, Aug. 8.

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Mr. and Mrs. Glenn E. Earnest, 1218 Wilhelmina Rise, son, Aug. 8.  
Mr. and Mrs. Edward S. H. Chun, 45-40 Akimela St., Kaneohe, son, Aug. 5.  
Mr. and Mrs. John R. Waldich, 937 18th Ave., son, Aug. 5.  
Mr. and Mrs. Emmett P. Simpson, 2752 Kahili St., daughter, Aug. 5.  
Mr. and Mrs. Melvin K. F. Liu, 45-58 Kealahala Road, Kaneohe, son, Aug. 5.  
Mr. and Mrs. Richard D. Wright, 91-939 Kaka'oa St., Ewa Beach, Ewa, daughter, Aug. 5.  
Mr. and Mrs. Barack H. Obama, 6085 Kalaanani'ole Hwy., son, Aug. 4.  
Mr. and Mrs. Norman Asing, 2135 Alii Anika St., son, Aug. 4.  
Mr. and Mrs. Andrew A. Hatcher, 2420 Kaula'aua St., daughter, Aug. 4.  
Mr. and Mrs. Harry Y. Wong, 451 Lawelawe St., son, Aug. 4.

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## Podesta Brothers Fake News

*Top Democrats John and Tony Podesta Look a Lot Like Two Wanted Men*

Former Clinton campaign manager John Podesta and his brother, well-connected Democrat Tony Podesta, are suspected of being involved in the 2007 abduction of Madeleine McCann. The suspicions stem from the fact that the brothers resemble the police sketch artist's portrait of the suspected kidnappers. Pictured above are the Podesta brothers and the sketch artist's portrait of the suspects.



## Podesta Brothers Correction

Fact or Fiction?

Prominent Democrats John and Tony Podesta May Have Been Involved in An Abduction: Fiction!

WHAT'S TRUE: Taken out of context, two images of a single suspect in the disappearance

of Madeleine McCann appeared to resemble Tony and John Podesta.

WHAT'S FALSE: The "efits" circulated by police depicted one man, not two; the images were of a person of interest or witness, not a possible kidnapper.

Images of 2013 police sketches known as "efits" (short for "Electronic Facial Identification Technique," or computer-generated composite images) were circulated alongside images of the Podestas with little ancillary information, such as the photograph above, which was published without any additional context.

It appears to show incontrovertibly that the Podesta brothers eerily resemble the men wanted in connection with the kidnapping of Madeleine McCann in Portugal on 3 May 2007.

Without the necessary context, the images do seem to resemble the brothers. However, that context is key in this case. The sketch depicts not two but one man, and that man was sought as a witness to the kidnapping (not necessarily a perpetrator of or accessory to it). The digitally generated images were released in October 2013, alongside renewed pleas from police to the public for any information in the cold McCann case:

*Police have issued two efits that they believe are descriptions of the same man, who is now being sought as a priority by the British detectives leading the new McCann inquiry. He was seen in the vicinity of the Praia da Luz resort in Portugal six years ago at the time that the three-year-old went missing. Despite numerous appeals for information over the years, the man has not come forward to talk to investigators in Portugal or Britain. Descriptions of the suspect were given to the Portuguese inquiry by two witnesses after Madeleine disappeared.]*

*It is only now, after Metropolitan police detectives cross-referenced all the information gathered by Portuguese detectives, private investigators and the mobile phone data from the resort, that the significance of the witness statements has been fully understood. In an appeal to be broadcast on Monday night on BBC1's Crimewatch, Detective Chief Inspector Andy Redwood of the Metropolitan police will call for anyone who recognises the man to contact him immediately.*

It is true that some reports referenced the man (singular) as a "suspect," but it went on to list a number of factors that, again, did not ensure the rumor would stick:

*The inquiry is focusing on 41 suspects and requests for assistance have been issued to 30 countries in a bid to identify and eliminate these people, 15 of whom are British. Crime-watch will feature other efits of individuals that the police would also like to trace ... [The depicted individual] was described by the witnesses as white, aged between 20 and 40, with short brown hair, of medium build, medium height and clean shaven.*

John Podesta was 67 in December 2016, indicating he was between 58 and 59 at the time of McCann's disappearance; the man depicted was described as being between the ages of 20 and 40. While only 18 years separate 40 and 58, it would be incredibly difficult to mistake a 60-year-old man for a 20-year-old.

Some versions of the rumor claimed that John Podesta was in Portugal around the time of the incident, but referenced an e-mail about a trip which occurred several months after McCann vanished. In another version, Podesta was placed in Portugal at the time of the disappearance by an unnamed law enforcement source, information that without any supporting evidence was as implausible as it was unreliable.



# Townhall

Townhall Columnists Liz Crokin

## Why the MSM Is Ignoring Trump's Sex Trafficking Busts



By Liz Crokin

Since President Donald Trump has been sworn in on Jan. 20, authorities have arrested an unprecedented number of sexual predators involved in child sex trafficking rings in the United States. This should be one of the biggest stories in the national news. Instead, the mainstream media has barely, if at all, covered any of these mass pedophile arrests. This begs the question – why?

As a strong advocate for sex crime victims, I've been closely following the pedophile arrests since Trump took office. There have been a staggering 1,500-plus arrests in one short month; compare that to less than 400 sex trafficking-related arrests in 2014 according to the FBI. It's been clear to me for awhile that Trump would make human trafficking a top priority. On October 8, 2012, Trump tweeted:

"Got to do something about these missing children grabbed by the perverts. Too many incidents – fast trial, death penalty."

My suspicions were confirmed on Feb. 23 when Trump gave a press conference from the White House addressing how human trafficking is a "dire problem" domestically and internationally. He gave further confirmation when he said: "Dedicated men and women across the federal government have focused on this for some time as you know -- it's been much more focused over the last four weeks." Trump's press conference was barely a blip in the mainstream media and the massive arrests have been almost completely ignored by the MSM altogether. Here's a rundown of some of the massive sex trafficking rings that have been broken up since Trump took office.

-On Jan. 27 authorities arrested 42 in a human trafficking operation in Tennessee.

-On Jan. 29 authorities announced that 474 were arrested in a statewide California human trafficking operation and 28 sexually exploited children were rescued.

-108 were arrested from Jan. 18 to Feb. 5 in Illinois as part of a national sex trafficking sting operation.

- 178 people were arrested in Texas for sex trafficking in sting that operated in January till Super Bowl Sunday.

-16 people were arrested in January in Michigan for sex trafficking during the Detroit Auto Show.

-In February, authorities arrested 11 in Virginia in a child sex sting.

-On Feb. 14 the Polk County sheriff announced that 42 were arrested in Florida in child pornography related cases.

As the MSM has ignored these historical arrests, they have zeroed in on casting conservative icon Milo Yiannopoulos as a monster. They claim he supports pedophilia based on comments he made in a video years ago. The reality is Milo was a victim of child sex abuse, and although he did joke about his abuse in an interview, he in no way promotes pedophilia. The opposite is true, and he addressed this controversy head on in a press conference. Not only is it normal for sex abuse victims to make light of their abuse as a coping mechanism, Milo has personally taken down and exposed pedophiles in his columns over the years. However, the mainstream media and the left ignored this information and demonized Milo. The irony of all this is that the left and MSM have been the biggest proponents of pedophilia. Salon has published articles attempting to normalize pedophilia; however, to maintain their faux outrage over Milo, they deleted them. The face of the very fake news network CNN, Jake Tapper, fired off several tweets condemning Milo. For example, he tweeted:

"My friend, a survivor of sex trafficking: "Milo straight up defended abusing 13 yr old boys...Please don't let that be normalized"

If Tapper is so concerned with sex trafficking, why in the world hasn't he covered the massive sex trafficking arrests that have taken place since Trump took office? It seems he, and many in the leftist media, are only concerned with sex trafficking if it can be used to destroy a conservative. After the MSM went after Milo, he was disinvited to speak at CPAC and his book deal was pulled. Let's contrast this with one of the left's heroes, Lena Dunham, who was a staunch and vocal Hillary Clinton supporter during her campaign. She got a \$3.5 million book deal. In her book, she literally bragged about how she molested her little sister and made false claims that a conservative raped her in college. Has Fake Tapper or anyone in the MSM ever expressed outrage over her? Of course not!

Milo told this column that once one realizes the MSM "cares nothing for real victims and only wants its ideological enemies destroyed, this behavior becomes intelligible. Journalists don't care about children. They care about damaging their political enemies." Milo is absolutely right. This is why

we've heard nothing from the MSM about the mass sex trafficking arrests and this will continue unless a conservative can be targeted.

The good news is that we have a president who genuinely does care about children and he's vowed to make solving the human trafficking epidemic a priority. The recent pedophile arrests are just the tip of the iceberg and, whether Tapper and his ilk in the MSM like it or not, this story will eventually get so big that they will be forced to cover this horrific epidemic that has plagued our country for too damn long.

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## Trump's Mythical Crackdown on Sex Trafficking

No, there haven't been an "unprecedented" number of child sex-trafficking rings busted since Donald Trump took office.

**Elizabeth Nolan Brown**

At Townhall.com, sex-crime victims' advocate and author Liz Crokin accuses the mainstream media of "ignoring Trump's sex trafficking busts." In Crokin's reality, "authorities have arrested an unprecedented number of sexual predators involved in child sex trafficking rings in the United States" since Donald Trump took office on January 20. "There have been a staggering 1,500-plus arrests in one short month; compare that to less than 400 sex trafficking-related arrests in 2014 according to the FBI," Crokin writes.

This is, as Trump would put it, "fake news." Every part of it. For starters, the 2014 data she links to is far from a complete account of U.S. sex-trafficking arrests that year. It reflects incomplete state-level arrest numbers from just 26 U.S. states, Guam, and the Virgin Islands. It does not include all state sex-trafficking arrests, by far, nor does it include any sex trafficking arrests by federal agencies such as the FBI and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which make thousands of sex trafficking arrests annually (though far fewer trafficking indictments and convictions).

The idea that there have been "an unprecedented number" of sex traffickers arrested since Trump took office has similarly little basis in reality, and there's zero truth to the claim of law-enforcement busting up child sex-trafficking rings. Meanwhile, many of the arrests Crokin includes in her tally—arrests that include mostly women selling sex and men trying to engage in consensual adult prostitution—are part of annual sting operations, were the result of investigations that works long before Trump took office, and/or had absolutely nothing to do with federal law-enforcement directives or activities. (That is, when we can check Crokin's sources; two of the pages she links to as evidence can't be found.)

Here are the arrests that Crokin credits as Donald Trump-brokered busts of pedophile trafficking rings:

- 478 people arrested in a statewide California sting that included zero sex-trafficking arrests, according to a press release from the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. One-hundred and forty-two men were arrested for attempting to pay consenting adult women for sexual activity. Thirty-six men were arrested for pimping. The rest of those arrested—300 in total—were women taken in on prostitution charges or people in trouble for charges unrelated to commercial sexual activity.
- 178 men arrested in Texas for soliciting prostitution from an undercover cop posing as a consenting adult sex worker. The stings were part of a nationwide "Johns Suppression Initiative" organized annually by Cook County, Illinois, Sheriff Tom Dart.
- Four "pimps" and 12 people arrested on unspecified charges during a month-long Detroit operation concluded two days after Trump took office.
- 11 people arrested as part of a "five-month cyber-sting operation led by the Spotsylvania Sheriff's Office Child Exploitation Unit in partnership with the Northern Virginia Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force." The sting—a To Catch a Predator-style operation involving police posing online as a 13-year-old into older men—began in October 2016 and ended in early February.

As evidence of these arrests that Crokin doesn't think are being covered in the mainstream media, she links to news reports on ABC, NBC, and CBS news affiliates, describing events also covered widely by other media in their respective states or regions. The California sting was also reported by mainstream print and broadcast media across the country, as was the broader National Johns Suppression Initiative that resulted in the Texas arrests.

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## **TRUMP WATCH**

# Congress investigating Russian investment fund with ties to Trump officials

Thomas Frank, CNN Investigates

**(CNN)** Senate investigators are examining the activities of a little-known \$10-billion Russian investment fund whose chief executive met with a member of President Donald Trump's transition team four days before Trump's inauguration, a congressional source told CNN.

The source said the Senate intelligence committee is investigating the Russian fund in connection with its examination of discussions between White House adviser Jared Kushner and the head of a prominent Russian bank. The bank, Vnesheconombank, or VEB, oversees the fund, which has ties to several Trump advisers. Both the bank and the fund have been covered since 2014 by sanctions restricting U.S. business dealings.

Separately, the Treasury Department has been looking into the Jan. 16 meeting between the fund's chief executive and Anthony Scaramucci, a member of the transition team's executive committee and a fundraiser and adviser for Trump's presidential campaign, according to a Jan. 30 letter from Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin.

Two Democratic senators asked Treasury to investigate whether Scaramucci promised to lift sanctions -- a policy shift that would help the fund attract more international investment to Russia.

The inquiries draw attention to the Russian Direct Investment Fund, a government investment arm that has helped top U.S. private-equity firms invest in Russia and that was advised by Stephen Schwarzman, who is now chairman of Trump's Strategic and Policy Forum, an advisory group of business leaders.

Schwarzman, chief executive officer of Blackstone Group, was named in 2011 to the fund's International Advisory Board along with other leaders of major equity companies and sovereign-wealth funds who reviewed the fund's operations, plans and potential investments. Schwarzman declined to comment. A source close to him said Schwarzman has not spoken to anyone on the fund "for some time."

The fund also worked with Goldman Sachs, whose former president Gary Cohn is Trump's chief economic adviser and where Kirill Dmitriev, the fund's chief executive, worked as an investment banker in the 1990s. Goldman was part of a consortium created in 2012 to invest in large Russian businesses preparing to go public, and was hired in 2013 to burnish Russia's investment image. The company declined to comment.

## 'I would reach out to people to help him'

Senate and House investigators are looking into various Russian entities to determine whether anyone connected to the Trump campaign helped Russians as they meddled in the 2016 presidential election, and whether Trump associates discussed sanctions with Russian officials.

The congressional inquiries, along with a criminal investigation by special counsel Robert S. Mueller, have shadowed the Trump administration. Trump has denied any connection to Russia's election-meddling, calling the criminal probe "a witch hunt."

Scaramucci, a billionaire founder of SkyBridge Capital, minimized his January meeting with Dmitriev in the resort town of Davos, Switzerland, at the celebrated annual gathering of the World Economic Forum. Scaramucci had met Dmitriev at previous Davos meetings, although at the gathering in January, Scaramucci was expecting to be named White House liaison to the business community.

Dmitriev "came over to say hello in a restaurant, and I was cordial," Scaramucci said in a recent email to CNN. "There is nothing there."

The day after the meeting, Scaramucci told Bloomberg TV that he had "as a private citizen" been working with Dmitriev on bringing a delegation of executives to Russia.

"What I said to him last night, in my capacity inside the administration, I would certainly reach out to some people to help him," Scaramucci said before describing a thicket of ethical clearances he would face. "The idea was many months ago to have more outreach with Russia but also other countries, not just Russia. China, other countries."

Scaramucci's comments alarmed Democratic Senators Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts and Ben Cardin of Maryland, who asked Mnuchin investigate whether Scaramucci sought to "facilitate prohibited transactions" or promised to waive or lift sanctions against Russia.

In a reply Jan. 30, before he was sworn in, Mnuchin said he would "ensure the appropriate Department components assess whether further investigation of this matter is warranted." The Treasury Department did not respond to CNN requests for an update.

A spokeswoman for the Russian fund said the two men did not discuss sanctions, and that the discussion itself did not violate sanctions that U.S. imposed in 2014 after Russia annexed part of neighboring Ukraine. The spokeswoman declined to describe the conversation, saying, "We do not comment on private meetings."

## An advocate for lifting sanctions

Since Trump's election, Dmitriev has been one of Russia's most vocal officials in calling for an end to U.S. sanctions and arguing that joint U.S.-Russia projects can create jobs in the United States.

The fund hired two U.S. lobbying firms in September 2014, after sanctions were imposed, paying them a combined \$150,000 over two months for public relations work. The fund has not hired any lobbyists since then.

With a history of helping U.S. manufacturers and asset management companies invest in Russia, the fund is a logical starting point for Russia's push to lift U.S. sanctions, former State Department chief economist Rodney Ludema said.

"If you're going to get your nose under the tent, that's a good place to start," said Ludema, a Georgetown University economics professor. "I'm sure their objective is to get rid of all the sanctions against the financial institutions. But RDIF is one [sanctioned organizations] where a number of prominent U.S. investors have been involved."

Scaramucci also questioned U.S. sanctions while he was in Davos and echoed Trump's statements about improving relations with Russia.

Two weeks after the meeting between Scaramucci and Dmitriev, when President Trump spoke by phone to Russian President Vladimir Putin, the fund announced it would open an office in New York in May.

No New York office has been opened but the fund "still expects to open a representative office in the US this year," the spokeswoman said.

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# The Washington Post

National Security

## Russian hackers penetrated U.S. electricity grid through a utility in Vermont, officials say

By Juliet Eilperin and Adam Entous

A code associated with the Russian hacking operation dubbed Grizzly Steppe by law enforcement has been detected within the system of a Vermont utility, according to U.S. officials.

While the Russians did not actively use the code to disrupt operations, according to officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a security matter, the discovery underscores the vulnerabilities of the nation's electrical grid. And it raises fears in the U.S. government that Russian government hackers are actively trying to penetrate the grid to carry out potential attacks.

Officials in government and the utility industry regularly monitor the grid because it is highly computerized and any disruptions can have disastrous implications for the country's medical and emergency services.

Burlington Electric said in a statement that the company detected a malware code used in the Grizzly Steppe operation in a laptop that was not connected to the organization's grid systems. The firm said it took immediate action to isolate the laptop and alert federal authorities.

Vermont Gov. Peter Shumlin (D) called on federal officials "to conduct a full and complete investigation of this incident and undertake remedies to ensure that this never happens again."

“Vermonters and all Americans should be both alarmed and outraged that one of the world’s leading thugs, Vladimir Putin, has been attempting to hack our electric grid, which we rely upon to support our quality-of-life, economy, health, and safety,” Shumlin said in a statement. “This episode should highlight the urgent need for our federal government to vigorously pursue and put an end to this sort of Russian meddling.”

Rep. Peter Welch (D-Vt.) said the attack shows how rampant Russian hacking is. “It’s systemic, relentless, predatory,” Welch said. “They will hack everywhere, even Vermont, in pursuit of opportunities to disrupt our country. We must remain vigilant, which is why I support President Obama’s sanctions against Russia and its attacks on our country and what it stands for.”

Officials said that it is unclear when the code entered the Vermont utility’s computer, and that an investigation will attempt to determine the timing and nature of the intrusion, as well as whether other utilities were similarly targeted.

“The question remains: Are they in other systems and what was the intent?” a U.S. official said.

Officials from the Department of Homeland Security, FBI and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence shared the Grizzly Steppe malware code with executives from 16 sectors nationwide, including the financial, utility and transportation industries, a senior administration official said. Vermont utility officials identified the code within their operations and reported it to federal officials Friday, the official said.

The DHS and FBI also publicly posted information about the malware as part of a joint analysis report, saying that the Russian military and civilian services’ activity “is part of an ongoing campaign of cyber-enabled operations directed at the U.S. government and its citizens.”

Another law enforcement official, who also spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss security matters, said in an email that “by exposing Russian malware” in the

joint analysis report, “[we seek to] alert all network defenders in the United States and abroad to this malicious activity to better secure their networks and defend against Russian malicious cyber activity.”

According to the report by the FBI and DHS, the hackers involved in the Russian operation used fraudulent emails that tricked their recipients into revealing passwords.

Russian hackers, U.S. intelligence agencies say, earlier obtained a raft of internal emails from the Democratic National Committee, which were later released by WikiLeaks during last year’s presidential campaign.

President Donald Trump has repeatedly questioned the veracity of U.S. intelligence pointing to Russia’s responsibility for hacks in the run-up to the Nov. 8 election. He also has spoken highly of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Russia has been accused in the past of launching a cyberattack on Ukraine’s electrical grid, something it has denied. Cybersecurity experts say a hack in December 2015 destabilized Kiev’s power grid, causing a blackout in part of the Ukrainian capital. Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko accused Russia of waging a hacking war on his country that has entailed 6,500 attacks against Ukrainian state institutions over the past two months.

Since at least 2009, U.S. authorities have tracked efforts by China, Russia and other countries to implant malicious software inside computers used by U.S. utilities. It is unclear if the code used in those earlier attacks was similar to what was found in the Vermont case. In November 2014, for example, federal authorities reported that a Russian malware known as BlackEnergy had been detected in the software controlling electric turbines in the United States.

The Russian Embassy did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Representatives for the Energy Department and DHS declined to comment.

*Alice Crites, Carol Morello and Ellen Nakashima contributed to this report.*

# The Intercept



Glenn Greenwald  
December 31 2016,  
8:44 a.m.

## Russia Hysteria Infects WashPost Again: False Story About Hacking U.S. Electric Grid

**THE WASHINGTON POST** reported a genuinely alarming event: Russian hackers have penetrated the U.S. power system through an electrical grid in Vermont. The Post headline conveyed the seriousness of the threat:

### Russian hackers penetrated U.S. electricity grid through a utility in Vermont, officials say

The first sentence of the article directly linked this cyberattack to alleged Russian hacking of the email accounts of the DNC and John Podesta — what is now routinely referred to as “Russian hacking of our election” — by referencing the code name Grizzly Steppe.

The Post article contained grave statements from Vermont officials of the type politicians love to issue after a terrorist attack to show they are tough and in control. The state’s Democratic governor, Peter Shumlin, said:

Vermonters and all Americans should be both alarmed and outraged that one of the world’s leading thugs, Vladimir Putin, has been attempting to hack our electric grid, which we rely upon to support our quality of life,

economy, health, and safety. This episode should highlight the urgent need for our federal government to vigorously pursue and put an end to this sort of Russian meddling.

The article went on and on in that vein, with all the standard tactics used by the U.S. media for such stories: quoting anonymous national security officials, reviewing past acts of Russian treachery, and drawing the scariest possible conclusions (“The question remains: Are they in other systems and what was the intent?” a U.S. official said”).

The media reactions, as Alex Pfeiffer documents, were exactly what one would expect: hysterical, alarmist proclamations of Putin’s menacing evil:

Our Russian "friend" Putin attacked the U.S. power grid.<https://t.co/iAneRgbuhF>

— Brent Staples (@BrentNYT)



The Post’s story also predictably and very rapidly infected other large media outlets. Reuters thus told its readers around the world: “A malware code

associated with Russian hackers has reportedly been detected within the system of a Vermont electric utility.”

**WHAT’S THE PROBLEM** here? It did not happen.

There was no “penetration of the U.S. electricity grid.” The truth was undramatic and banal. Burlington Electric, after receiving a Homeland Security notice sent to all U.S. utility companies about the malware code found in the DNC system, searched all its computers and found the code in a single laptop that *was not connected to the electric grid*.

Apparently, the Post did not even bother to contact the company before running its wildly sensationalistic claims, so Burlington Electric had to issue its own statement to the Burlington Free Press, which debunked the Post’s central claim (emphasis in original): “We detected the malware in a single Burlington Electric Department laptop **NOT** connected to our organization’s grid systems.”

So the key scary claim of the Post story — that Russian hackers had penetrated the U.S. electric grid — was false. All the alarmist tough-guy statements issued by political officials who believed the Post’s claim were based on fiction.

Even worse, there is zero evidence that Russian hackers were even responsible for the implanting of this malware on this single laptop. The fact that malware is “Russian-made” does not mean that only Russians can use it; indeed, like a lot of malware, it can be purchased (as Jeffrey Carr has pointed out in the DNC hacking context, assuming that Russian-made malware must have been used by Russians is as irrational as finding a Russian-made Kalishnikov AKM rifle at a crime scene and assuming the killer must be Russian).

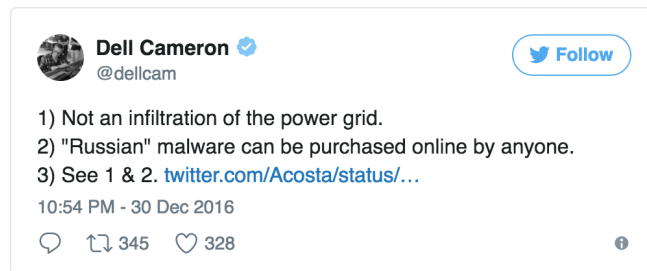
As the actual truth emerged once the utility company issued its statement, the Post rushed to fix its embarrassment, beginning by dramatically changing its headline:

National Security

## Russian operation hacked a Vermont utility, showing risk to U.S. electrical grid security, officials say

The headline is still absurd: They have no idea that this malware was placed by a “Russian operation” (though they would likely justify that by pointing out that they are just stenographically passing along what “officials say”). Moreover, nobody knows when this malware was put on this laptop, how, or by whom. But whatever else is true, the key claim — “Russian hackers penetrated U.S. electricity grid” — has now been replaced by the claim that this all shows “risk to U.S. electrical grid.”

As journalists realized what did — and did not — actually happen here, the reaction was swift:



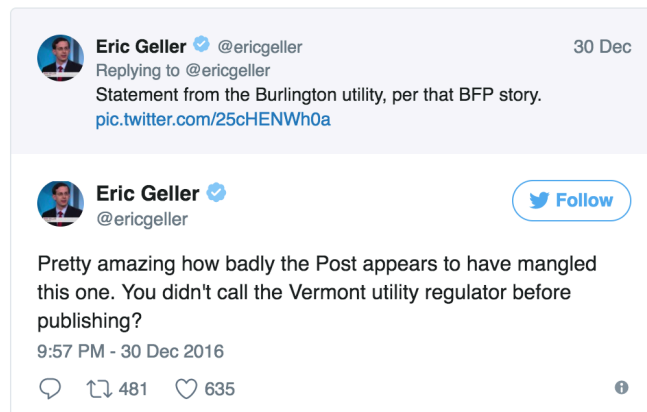
A screenshot of a tweet from Dell Cameron (@dellcam), a verified user. The tweet contains a numbered list of three points: 1) Not an infiltration of the power grid. 2) "Russian" malware can be purchased online by anyone. 3) See 1 & 2. [twitter.com/Acosta/status/...](https://twitter.com/Acosta/status/...) The tweet is dated 10:54 PM - 30 Dec 2016 and has 345 retweets and 328 likes.

**Dell Cameron** ✓  
@dellcam

1) Not an infiltration of the power grid.  
2) "Russian" malware can be purchased online by anyone.  
3) See 1 & 2. [twitter.com/Acosta/status/...](https://twitter.com/Acosta/status/...)

10:54 PM - 30 Dec 2016

345 328



A screenshot of two tweets from Eric Geller (@ericgeller), a verified user. The top tweet is a reply to @ericgeller, dated 30 Dec, and contains a link to a picture: [pic.twitter.com/25cHENWh0a](https://pic.twitter.com/25cHENWh0a). The bottom tweet is dated 9:57 PM - 30 Dec 2016 and has 481 retweets and 635 likes.

**Eric Geller** ✓ @ericgeller 30 Dec  
Replying to @ericgeller  
Statement from the Burlington utility, per that BFP story.  
[pic.twitter.com/25cHENWh0a](https://pic.twitter.com/25cHENWh0a)

**Eric Geller** ✓  
@ericgeller

Pretty amazing how badly the Post appears to have mangled this one. You didn't call the Vermont utility regulator before publishing?

9:57 PM - 30 Dec 2016

481 635

**THIS MATTERS NOT** only because one of the nation’s major newspapers once again published a wildly misleading, fearmongering story about Russia. It matters even more because it reflects the deeply irrational and

ever-spiraling fever that is being cultivated in U.S. political discourse and culture about the threat posed by Moscow.

The Post has many excellent reporters and smart editors. They have produced many great stories this year. But this kind of blatantly irresponsible and sensationalist tabloid behavior — which tracks what they did when promoting that grotesque PropOrNot blacklist of U.S. news outlets accused of being Kremlin tools — is a byproduct of the Anything Goes mentality that now shapes mainstream discussion of Russia, Putin, and the Grave Threat to All Things Decent in America that they pose.

The level of groupthink, fearmongering, coercive peer pressure, and über-nationalism has not been seen since the halcyon days of 2002 and 2003. Indeed, the very same people who back then smeared anyone questioning official claims as Saddam sympathizers or stooges and left-wing un-American loons are back for their sequel, accusing anyone who expresses any skepticism toward claims about Russia of being Putin sympathizers and Kremlin operatives and stooges.

But it's all severely exacerbated by social media in ways that we don't yet fully understand. A large percentage of journalists sit on Twitter all day. It's their primary window into the world. Because of how intense and raw the emotions still are from Trump's defeat of Clinton, the social media benefits from tweeting and publishing unhinged claims about Trump and Putin are immense and immediate: thousands upon thousands of re-tweets, a rapidly building follower count, and huge amounts of traffic.

Indeed, the more unhinged it is, the greater the benefits are (see some of the most extreme examples here). That's how otherwise rational people keep getting tricked into posting and re-tweeting and sharing extremely dubious stories that turn out to be false.

And that's to say nothing of the non-utilitarian social pressures. It's not news that coastal elites — particularly media and political figures — were and are virtually unified in their unbridled contempt for Trump. And we have seen over and over that any time there is a new Prime Foreign Villain consecrated — now Putin — U.S. media figures lead the campaign. As a result, any denunciation or accusation toward Trump or Russia, no matter how divorced from reason or



devoid of facts, generates instant praise, while any questioning of it prompts instant peer-group denunciation, or worse.

Few things are more dangerous to the journalistic function than groupthink, and few instruments have been invented that foster and reinforce groupthink like social media, particularly Twitter, the platform most used by journalists. That's a phenomenon that merits far more study, but examples like this one highlight the dynamic.

In this case, the effect is a constant ratcheting up of tensions between two nuclear-armed powers whose nuclear systems are still on hair-trigger alert and capable of catastrophic responses based on misunderstanding and misperception. Democrats and their media allies are rightly alarmed about the potential dangers of Trump's bellicose posture toward China, but remarkably and recklessly indifferent to the dangers of what they themselves are doing here.

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# The Washington Post

National Security

## Russian government hackers do not appear to have targeted Vermont utility, say people close to investigation

By Ellen Nakashima and Juliet Eilperin

As federal officials investigate suspicious Internet activity found last week on a Vermont utility computer, they are finding evidence that the incident is not linked to any Russian government effort to target or hack the utility, according to experts and officials close to the investigation.

An employee at Burlington Electric Department was checking his Yahoo email account Friday and triggered an alert indicating that his computer had connected to a suspicious IP address associated by authorities with the Russian hacking operation that infiltrated the Democratic Party. Officials told the company that traffic with this particular address is found elsewhere in the country and is not unique to Burlington Electric, suggesting the company wasn't being targeted by the Russians. Indeed, officials say it is possible that the traffic is benign, since this particular IP address is not always connected to malicious activity.

The investigation by officials began when the Vermont utility reported its alert to federal authorities, some of whom told *The Washington Post* that code associated with the Russian hackers had been discovered within the system of an unnamed Vermont utility. *The Post* published its report, and Burlington Electric released a statement identifying itself as the utility in question and saying the firm had "detected the malware" in a single laptop. The company said in its statement that the laptop was not connected to its grid systems.

*The Post* initially reported incorrectly that the country's electric grid had been penetrated through a Vermont utility. After Burlington Electric released its statement saying that the potentially compromised laptop had not been connected to the grid, *The Post* immediately corrected its article and later added an editor's note explaining the change.

U.S. officials are continuing to investigate the laptop. In the course of their investigation, though, they have found on the device a package of software tools commonly used by online criminals to deliver malware. The package, known as Neutrino, does not appear to be connected with Grizzly Steppe, which U.S. officials have identified as the Russian hacking operation. The FBI, which declined to comment, is continuing to investigate how the malware got onto the laptop.

Initially, company officials publicly said they had detected code that had been linked by the Department of Homeland Security to Grizzly Steppe.

Over the weekend, the company issued a statement, saying only that it had "detected suspicious Internet traffic" on the computer in question.

The murkiness of the information underlines the difficulties faced by officials as they try to root out Grizzly Steppe and share with the public their findings on how the operation works. Experts say the situation was made worse by a recent government report, which they described as a genuine effort to share information with the industry but criticized as rushed and prone to causing confusion. Authorities also were leaking information about the utility without having all the facts and before law enforcement officials were able to investigate further.

The incident comes as President-elect Donald Trump has cast doubt on the findings of intelligence officials that the Russians conducted a hacking operation designed to help him win the White House.

Experts also said that because Yahoo's mail servers are visited by millions of people each day, the fact that a Burlington Electric employee checking email touched off an alert is not an indication that the Russian government was targeting the utility.

"It's not descriptive of anything in particular," said Robert M. Lee, chief executive of Dragos, a cybersecurity firm.

The company said it was told much the same thing by authorities. "Federal officials have indicated that the specific type of Internet traffic, related to recent malicious cyber activity that was reported by us [on Friday], also has been observed elsewhere in the country and is not unique to Burlington Electric," company spokesman Mike Kanarick said in a statement.

The FBI and DHS released a report last week intended to prompt companies to search their systems for any evidence of a Russian hacking operation that they concluded had infiltrated Democratic Party servers. The document was intended to help companies mitigate Russian hacking and report any suspicious activity to the government. That report itself contained a caution regarding the suspicious IP addresses it listed: "Upon reviewing the traffic from these IPs, some traffic may correspond to malicious activity, and some may correspond to legitimate activity."

The discovery of the laptop issue has prompted criticism that the government provided overly broad information to companies that was not effective in isolating Russian government hacking.

"That report offered no technical value for defenders," Lee said. "It was very much high level and nothing in there was specifically descriptive of Russian activity."

Some in the administration are concerned that this episode with the Vermont utility will cause industry officials to avoid sharing information with the government, for fear that it will be leaked. The company in this case, the U.S. official said, "did what it was supposed to do."

Experts also expressed concerns regarding the report released by DHS and the FBI on the Russian hacking operation. The report said it was providing “technical details regarding the tools and infrastructure used by the Russian civilian and military intelligence services” to “compromise and exploit” political, government and private computer networks. The government released the document on the same day it announced a series of measures taken to punish the Russian government for its interference in the 2016 presidential election, including the DNC hacks.

But a range of cybersecurity experts say that although the intention of the report was good, it lacked specific details that would enable firms to detect Russian government hackers.

At least 30 percent of the IP addresses listed were commonly used sites such as public proxy servers used to mask a user’s location, and servers run by Amazon.com and Yahoo. (Amazon’s founder and chief executive, Jeffrey P. Bezos, owns The Washington Post.) The IP address information alone is not useful, experts noted. Moreover, a server that is used by Russian spies one year might be used by “granny’s bake shop” the next, Lee said.

“No one should be making any attribution conclusions purely from the indicators in the [government] report,” tweeted Dmitri Alperovitch, chief technology officer of CrowdStrike, which investigated the DNC hack and attributed it to the Russian government. “It was all a jumbled mess.”

A senior DHS official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive security matter, defended the report.

“We know the Russians are a highly capable adversary who conduct technical operations in a manner intended to blend into legitimate traffic,” the official said. The indicators of compromise contained in the report, he said, “are indicative of that. That’s why it’s so important for net defenders to leverage the recommended mitigations contained in the [report], implement best practices, and analyze their logs for traffic

emanating from those IPs, because the Russians are going to try and hide evidence of their intrusion and presence in the network.”

The official said the information shared was “precisely the type of information DHS should be sharing, particularly since we know that cybersecurity capabilities differ among companies and organizations.”

The nation’s electrical grid is not a physical entity, but rather a series of networks that generate, transmit and distribute electricity. There are three primary networks--the Eastern Interconnect, Western Interconnect and the Electric Reliability Council of Texas--and smaller grids within those three groups. Each amounts to an industrial control system that dispatches electricity from where it is generated to the consumers who use it.

While these systems include redundancies to prevent any disruptions in service, and human operators oversee them, the functioning of the country’s grid is also highly automated. Experts say that this results in the system being more vulnerable to hacking attacks.

Utilities connected to the grid are routinely subjected to penetration efforts, but the U.S. electrical grid has never lost its transmission capacity because of such attempts.

“This is an example of the system working, and us getting bad things off our system as soon as they’re known,” said Nathan Mitchell Sr., who directs electric reliability standards and security at the American Public Power Association.

He added that while federal authorities inform utilities on a daily basis about potential threats to the grid, when it came to Thursday’s joint report, “A presidential directive and a high-profile release on this brought it to the forefront.”

*Adam Entous contributed to this report.*