

Facebook Nabs Russia-linked Campaign to Fuel U.S. Chaos

By [AFP](#)

September 01, 2020



Jaap Arriens / Zuma / TASS

Facebook on Tuesday said that it caught a budding Russia-linked campaign to fuel political chaos in the U.S., working off a tip from the FBI in its latest take-down of coordinated inauthentic behavior at the leading social network.

The network of 13 Facebook accounts and two pages posing as journalists and targeting left-wing progressives was removed for violating a policy against "foreign interference" at the platform.

The investigation that uncovered the covert operation, which was linked to the Internet Research Agency in Russia (IRA), started with a tip from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, according to Facebook head of security policy Nathaniel Gleicher.

The network was in the early stages of building an audience, with little engagement from

users, Facebook said.

"They put substantial effort into creating elaborate fictitious personas, trying to make fake accounts look as real as possible," Gleicher said while briefing reporters.

The list of topics in posts included "social and racial justice in the U.S. and Britain, NATO and EU politics, alleged Western war crimes and corruption, environmental issues, the founder of Wikileaks, tensions between Israel and Palestine, the coronavirus pandemic, criticism of fracking, French influence in Africa, the Biden-Harris campaign, QAnon, President Trump and his policies, and the U.S. military policies in Africa."

Unwitting freelance writers were recruited to write material to be posted online, according to Facebook.

The Facebook pages were said to be crafted to drive viewers to websites of the social network, and their operators were working diligently to get approval to run targeted ads.

"It follows a steady pattern where particularly Russian actors have gotten better at hiding who they are, but their impact is smaller and smaller and they are getting caught earlier," Gleicher said.

"These actors are caught between a rock and hard place: run a large network that gets caught quickly or run a small network that has limited reach."

The campaign targeted its audience with English-language content focused heavily on a small number of political groups, including Democratic Socialists, environmentalists, and disgruntled Democrats in the US, according to an analysis by Graphika.

A consistent target of the network was left-leaning voters in Britain and the U.S. with the potential to be dissuaded from supporting centrist leadership of the Democratic and Labour parties, Graphika determined.

The network worked to amplify a PeaceData website that posed as an independent news outlet, the analysis found.

Only about five percent of the English-language articles on the website dealt primarily with the U.S. election or candidates, but they appeared oriented to build a left-wing audience and steer it away from Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden's campaign, in the same way that the IRA tried to depress progressive and minority support for Hillary Clinton in 2016, according to Graphika.

The operation had a presence on Twitter and LinkedIn as well as on Facebook, according to the social network analysis specialist.

Twitter said it suspended five accounts linked to Russia for "platform manipulation."

The accounts appeared to be associated with the PeaceData website and appeared to gain little traction on Twitter before being removed, according to the one-to-many messaging platform.

"Regardless of the low-level impact in this case, governments around the world must stop these practices," Twitter said in a tweet.

"They're antidemocratic."

Twitter is blocking links to content from the PeaceData website, which could still be accessed online Tuesday.

The website began publishing in December, and the Facebook accounts were set up in May, according to Graphika.

"The network was in its infancy when it was taken down," Graphika concluded.

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