

Max Rizzuto's Portfolio

In this document you will find a number of projects I have lead and collaborated on.

Reporting
Lead Author

DC anti-mandate rally leveraged to broaden audience for anti-vax narratives

January 23 anti-vax rally softened messaging and utilized support from anti-mandate doctors to reach broader audiences

Extremists on Telegram exploit Parler's de-platforming to ramp up recruiting

Rebranded Proud Boys Telegram group saw massive subscriber growth after it was converted into a refuge for Parler users

New York City's open-source "cop watch"

How a group of civilian volunteers monitor police activity using open-source methods

Russian disinfo targets UK Prime Minister's hospitalization

Russian campaign transforms Boris Johnson's supplemental oxygen support into far more ominous ventilator treatment

Conservative group manipulates Pelosi footage to support Trump coronavirus policies

State of the Union speech edited to make Nancy Pelosi appear dismissive of COVID-19 threat

U.S. politicians exploit coronavirus fears with anti-Chinese dog whistles

Political tensions rise as leading conservative politicians repeatedly term COVID-19 as a Chinese or "foreign" disease

Tracking narratives around James Le Mesurier and the White Helmets

How conspiracies resurfaced and shifted after Le Mesurier's death

Reporting
Co-Author

Kremlin outlets exploit suspicious user comments on German Navy chief's resignation

Outlets cited suspicious comments giving the impression they represented broader German public opinion

QAnon's hallmark catchphrases evaporating from the mainstream internet

The conspiracy's followers on alternative platforms have failed to out-post their counterparts on mainstream ones

Facebook shuts down Egyptian disinformation network, bans two marketing companies

Facebook removed more than 1,700 assets linked to Egyptian digital marketing firms targeting audiences in Middle East and North Africa

Disinfo targeting South African Defence Force surges amid COVID-19 lockdown

South African Twitter accounts recycled old images and decontextualized videos as the country began a 21-day military enforced lockdown.

The yellow poster behind the “no more lockdowns” protests

How the poster spread and mutated alongside the protests

How Manny from Diary of a Wimpy Kid galvanized political activism on TikTok

How Manny from Diary of a Wimpy Kid galvanized political activism on TikTok

UK-based far-right Telegram channels amplify disinfo targeting U.S. election integrity

The flourishing domestic demand for disinformation in the U.S. attracts far-right groups from across the Atlantic

UAE Facebook pages targeted Qatar and Muslim Brotherhood

The multi-regional operation spread anti-Qatar content online and attacked the Muslim Brotherhood

Contributions to Larger Projects

Collaborator on Projects / Long-Form Reports

Dichotomies of Disinformation [[Github](#)]

Lead and designed data reconciliation and cleaning process. Consulted on visualization design (within the confines of what partners allowed). Collaborated with peers in the iterative development of a taxonomy and codebook. Calculated and assessed coder agreement with Cohen's Kappa.

#OperationFFS: Fake Face Swarm

Led research on a portion of the accounts which were connected to New Tang Dynasty pages. Provided insight on techniques for spotting GAN Generated images.

Foreign Interference Attribution Tracker [[Github](#)]

Led data collection and cleaning efforts and designed and monitored data pipeline. Worked with peers to establish and iterate codebook and taxonomy. Wrote the RFP for the visualization and interviewed web developer candidates. Elected to hire Mattias Stahl, who now leads Data Visualization at Der Speigel.

The Long Fuse: Misinformation and the 2020 Election

Performed monitoring and managed interns and student volunteers. Lead and designed data reconciliation and cleaning process. Authored sections on data fidelity and showcased findings in several EIP's daily briefs to press, academia, and public.

#StopTheSteal: Timeline of Social Media and Extremist Activities Leading to 1/6 Insurrection

Contributed research and a breadth of materials I had archived during my monitoring efforts in the days leading up to January 6, 2021.

Private Research Products

Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection

In partnership with Georgetown Law's Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection (ICAP) I have produced nearly of 70 weekly, daily, and special-edition monitoring reports centered on the movement of domestic violent extremist (DVE) groups operating in the United States.

The typical report details the most recent activity of DVEs with attention to how they act to effect democratic processes. The frequency and focus of monitoring reports varies as events unfold, switching from weekly to daily products around elections with special-edition reports produced in step with pertinent news events or direct action by DVEs. Reports are distributed to project partners including lawyers, community organizers, and civil society, and members of the law enforcement and intelligence community.

Credible threats highlighted in the monitoring report have been actioned on in the past.

In September 2022, I traveled to Portland Oregon to present my work to regional stakeholders and project partners.



As per the partnership, the work produced is a private research product which cannot be circulated to parties outside the project partners. I've tried to outline what the work looks like in my portfolio with respect to my agreement with ICAP, but it does leave a bit of a hole in my published outputs.

Private Research Products

Unofficial ISIS Website Uses Blockchain Tech to Evasive Deplatforming

In August 2021 I discovered a network of sites promoting the recruiting materials and media publications, and instructional tutorials from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The most interesting of the sites was one by the name “oqq.lv” which hosted a breath of materials and was frequently updated. The site’s address did not appear widely on social media, instead traffic was routed through a number of proxy sites hosted on the InterPlanetary File System (IPFS). Hosting the proxies which fed the site on the decentralized file system would place them out of reach of governing bodies. In order to make sure that the sites remained accessible to those seeking to access them, the Ethereum Name Service was employed to tie the IPFS hash to a human readable “.eth” domain. One such proxy was “elokab.link.eth” which has since been withdrawn, however records remain.

The screenshot shows the Ethereum Name Service (ENS) registration for the domain `elokab.eth`. The registration details are as follows:

- Controller:** `0xb0a0fdc52e2ba7a08b0efe41ff9f5863d1eddb9a`
- Registrant:** `0xb0a0fdc52e2ba7a08b0efe41ff9f5863d1eddb9a`
- Expiration Date:** `2022-07-14 at 02:07`

Below the registration details, there is a section for "Related Transactions" with columns for "Transactions", "Age", "From", and "Actions".

Screenshot of Ethereum blockchain where ENS is used to connect the IPFS hash

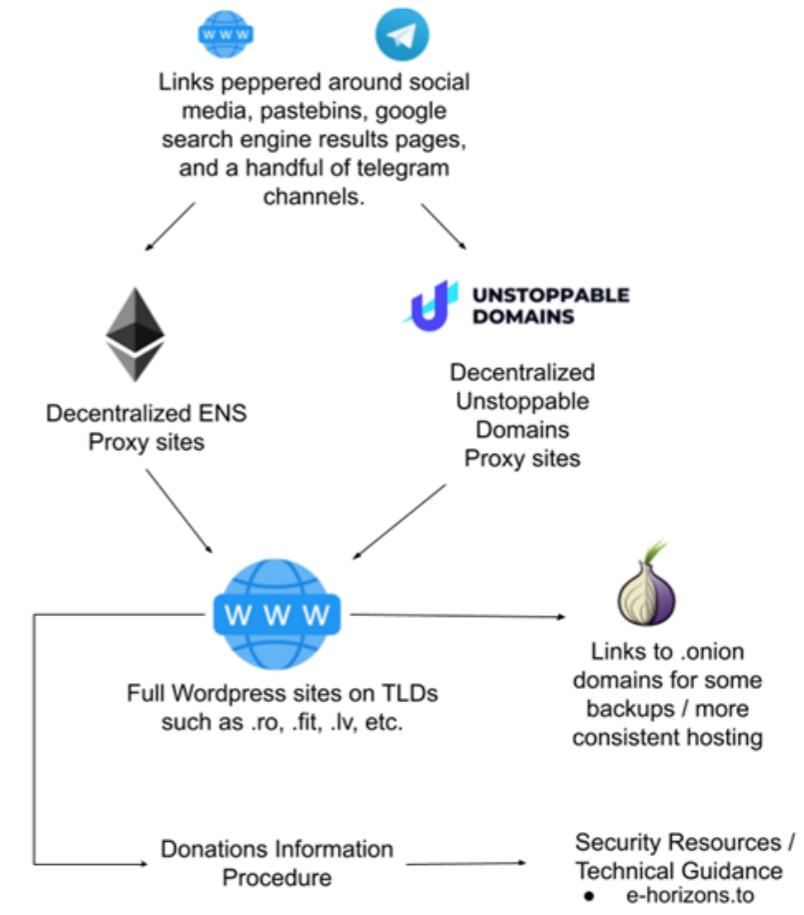


Illustration of how the site and its proxies work to connect users to recruiting materials

Once past the proxies and on the actual site, instructions directed users to telegram channels, onion domains, and resources for more technical guidance. At the time of the initial research in August, the site and its proxies operated in a structure illustrated in the diagram above.

Education Materials

“Artificial Intelligence” Enabled Disinformation

The collage consists of four slides:

- Mechanized Harm**: A slide with a dark background featuring a small image of a CRT monitor showing a person running, labeled "First ever CRT image". To its right is a larger image of a woman's face with a blue and red bounding box around her head, labeled "Lena.png". Text on the slide reads: "This kind of exploitation was not unforeseeable considering the computer science cannon."
- A.I. to Deceive - Video**: A slide titled "DeepFake" with the subtitle "Altering the movement or speech of a person in video". It shows two video frames: a "target video" of a man with a mustache and a "source video" of the same man. Below the frames, text lists: "Manipulated video", "Mouth Movement is altered to accommodate translated audio", "Unnatural mouth movements", and "Unnatural speech patterns".
- A.I. to Deceive**: A slide titled "The Liars Dividend" with the subtitle "The mere existence of deepfakes and other forms of hyper-real manipulation afford liars with greater capacity to deceive by simply citing the efficacy of these techniques." It includes a quote: "Deepfakes will make it easier for liars to deny the truth in distinct ways." (Chesney 2018) and a statement: "These approaches undermine the verifiability of information online and can be used to erode the credibility of forms of evidence previously held in high esteem, such as images and video."
- DeepFaker: A Looming Challenge for Privacy, Democracy, and National Security**: A slide showing a document page with the title and authors (Sethi, Chesney, and Deibert). The page contains dense text about the challenges posed by DeepFake technology.

Some slides from one of the training sessions

“DeepFakes” and “Artificial Intelligence” are widely misunderstood technologies. Having focused my undergraduate thesis on DeepFakes and continued that work into my research career, I have taken the lead on all trainings and internal capacity building related to AI enabled deception techniques, how they were developed, how they are used, and how to research their application in various information spaces.

In the presentation of my research, I attempt to deescalate the perceived threat these technologies pose and explain the underlying statistical principals behind the discipline such that trainees can more easily understand the true capabilities, spot their identifying artifacts, and approach their research with a more nuanced perspective.

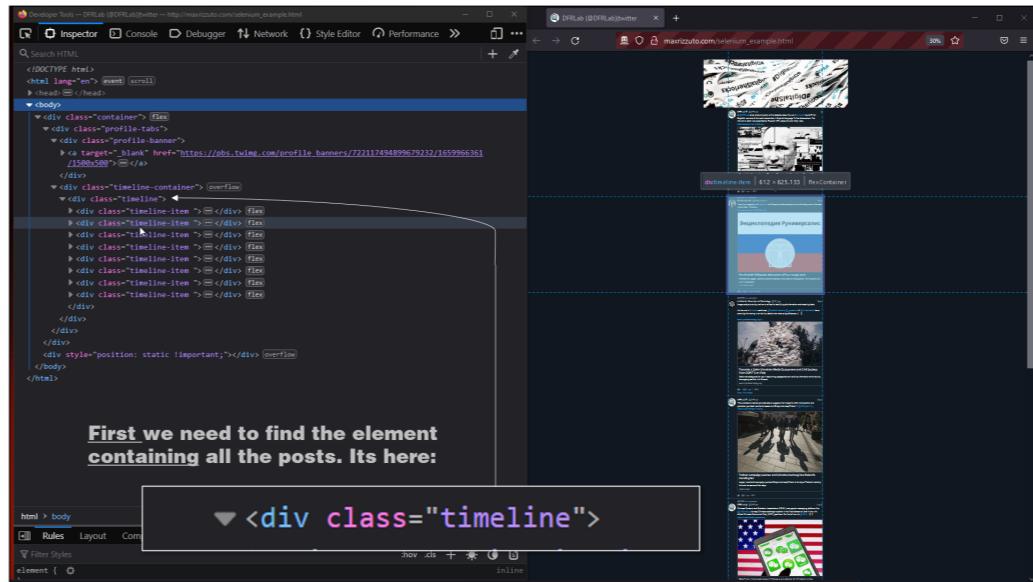
Internal Capacity Building

Suite of Scrapers

Data access continues to be a challenge for internet researchers. In the past few years we've seen platforms roll back researcher visibility while communities have fragmented across a host of alternative sites. In an effort to regain some ground and elevate the work of my team, I developed a suite of website scrapers using Python, accompanied by a detailed training on how to write and deploy purpose built scrapers on any site (except Facebook).

The suite of scrapers cover general data collection for accounts and keywords for Gab, GabTv, Parler, Gettr, Rumble, Odysee, RuTube.ru, Patriots.win, TGStat, and a prominent 4chan archive. The tutorial and training session I put together also included a [static sample site](#) based on a simplified clone of Twitter and a scraper for educational purposes.

To accompany the slides there is also a [Google Colab](#) where participants can follow along with the introductory steps of the process.



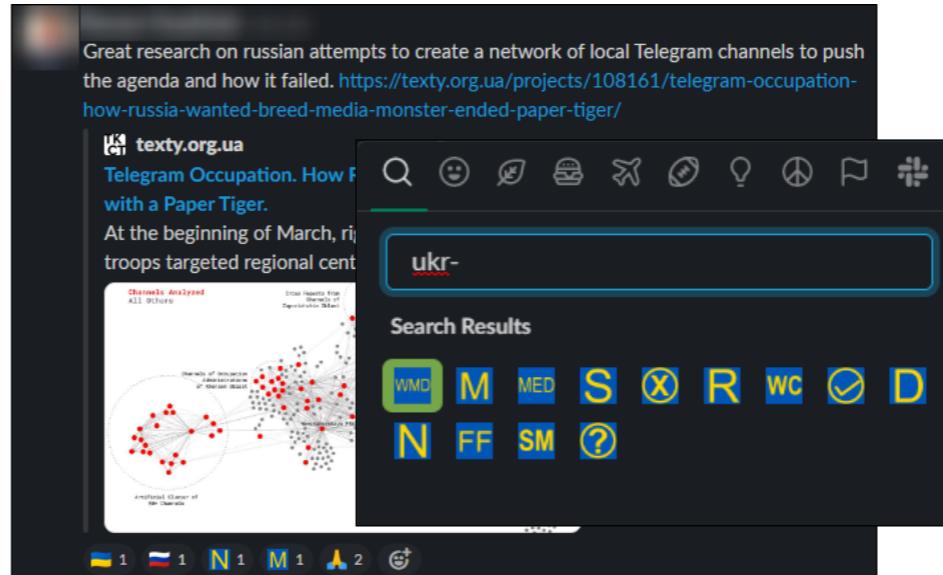
Internal Capacity Building

Collaborative Research Repository using Slack

In the immediate aftermath of Russia's full scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, I began ideating on a process for our research team to collectively archive and codify events as they developed. Soon after, I deployed a solution that meshed with our research team's existing slack channel, that would not task our researchers with any undue work, and would add considerable value to their collective monitoring efforts. The data collected by my tool was the subject of a mainstage presentation at the [360/OS](#) conference in Brussels, the foundation of a partnership with Stanford University's Starling Lab, and will be featured in a forthcoming DFRLab report.

A	B	F	G	H	I	K	L	N	O
index	message	datetime	text	urls	attached_text	attached_ts	attached_author	country_codes	all_codes
2399	Reply	2022-03-06 16:26		[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	
2400	1330 Post	2022-03-06 16:05	[https://twitt [#Russia's sta [1646581595, 1 [Julia Davi [[]	[]	[]	[]	['narratives', 'false flag']	
2401	1331 Post	2022-03-06 16:17	[https://twitt [Message fror [1646576858] [Peter por [[]	[]	[]	[]	['security', 'war crime']	
2402	1332 Post	2022-03-06 16:25	[https://tass.r [[]	[]	[]	[]	['narratives']	
2403	Reply	2022-03-06 16:40	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	
2404	1333 Post	2022-03-06 17:55	[https://twitt [The ludicrou [1646588943, 1 [Ben Collir [[]	[]	[]	[]	['narratives', 'false flag']	
2405	1334 Post	2022-03-06 18:14	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	['narratives', 'false flag']	
2406	1335 Post	2022-03-06 18:16	[https://twitt [Let's discuss [1646580934] [Kamil Gal [[]	[]	[]	[]	['narratives']	
2407	1336 Post	2022-03-06 18:32	[https://twitt [Russia aircr [1646591056] [Franak Vi: [belarus flag]	[]	[]	[]	[]	['security']	
2408	1337 Post	2022-03-06 18:42	[https://twitt [:exclamation [1646591544] [MFA Russ [[]	[]	[]	[]	['narratives', 'false flag']	
2409	1338 Post	2022-03-06 19:33	[https://twitt [:Horrifying fo [1646594964] [Golnaz Es [[]	[]	[]	[]	['war crime', 'graphic', 'security']	
2410	Reply	2022-03-06 19:35	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	
2411	Reply	2022-03-06 19:40	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	
2412	1339 Post	2022-03-06 21:11	[https://twitt [:Dear friends! [1646590751] [Kamil Gal ['china flag']	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	
2413	1340 Post	2022-03-06 21:32	[https://twitt [:Outside the F [1646579269] [Mike Gals [[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	
2414	1341 Post	2022-03-06 22:55	[https://twitt [:Russia Recrui [1646606398] [Nancy Yo: ['syria flag']	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	
2415	Reply	2022-03-07 00:25	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	['syria flag']	
2416	1342 Post	2022-03-06 23:18	[https://twitt [:exclamation [1646608349] [MFA Russ [[]	[]	[]	[]	['false flag', 'narratives']	
2417	1343 Post	2022-03-07 02:55	[https://twitt [:Have any Rus [1646621495, 1 [Emerson [[]	[]	[]	[]	['social media', 'narratives']	
2418	Reply	2022-03-07 02:55	[https://t.me/[:Внимание се [[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	
2419	Reply	2022-03-07 03:05	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	
2420	Reply	2022-03-07 08:15	[https://www/Google, Metz [1646253711]	[]	[]	[]	[]	[]	
2421	1344 Post	2022-03-07 03:40	[https://www/Chemical wh [[]	[]	[]	[]	['security']	
2422	1345 Post	2022-03-07 04:15	[https://www/ [[]	['plugotare']	[]	[]	['narratives']	
2423	1346 Post	2022-03-07 05:35	[https://twitt/:Вооруженъ [1646630485] [/Лента.нов/]	[]	[]	[]	[]	['refugees']	

A sample of the Excel formatted output of the data. Several columns are hidden for brevity.
Additional pages are generated automatically to show filtered outputs of the data.



Screenshot of a codified post on the #ukraine-research slack channel and the project's custom emojis

Python code run remotely on AWS servers collects all new posts from the Ukraine research team's slack channel and saves any images or files posted, and archives all URLs on a cloud server. The slack channel contains several custom emojis that enable researchers to codify their contributions in real time with categories such as: "WMDs," "false-flag," "war crimes," and others. The data collected has been instrumental in the DFRLab's collaboration with Stanford University's Starling Lab which used portions of our data as a platform for their Web3 based digital evidence certification program. At this time the dataset numbers roughly 10 thousand archived assets and is still used every day. The program is entirely autonomous.

Internal Capacity Building

Inter-coder Reliability Toolkit

Annotated screenshot of the reconciliation user interface where project managers would review inter's data entry tasks.

When embarking on the task of building a dataset using inter-coder reliability it is imperative that project managers have a trusted, transparent, and reliable tool for processing data. With limited budget and some resourcefulness I created a tool that enables project management to view and reconcile the entries by coders. This enabled our team to assess the efficacy of our

dataset as cases were coded, and to iteratively improve our language as the project advanced. Part of this process is based on an utter abuse of free Google services wherein a data aggregator based in Google Colab would create and populate a new workbook in a Google sheet for each case. The resulting data was accessed from a master document which treated the external document as a sort of relational database.

Internal Capacity Building

Rapid Response Monitoring Template

<p>[002] - [Stewart Rhodes Interview with Alex Jones]</p> <p>Answers go in the white boxes, not the colored boxes. Answers are required unless otherwise specified. Please keep your answers brief.</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">Ticket created by: [add contributor names if applicable]</td> <td style="padding: 5px;">If there are any related tickets, specify the ticket number. If there are multiple specify the numbers separated with commas</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="padding: 5px;">Adam Gates</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="padding: 5px; font-size: small;">Take high-quality screenshots of all content (assume that we might have to use these in a future publication); put these screenshots in a Google drive folder named after the ticket in the Archived Content folder or in the Appendix below.</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="padding: 5px; font-size: small;">Come back to summary after filling out the rest of the ticket.</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="background-color: #c8e6c9; padding: 5px;"> Summary </td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2" style="padding: 5px;"> 1) Please write a sentence briefly summarizing this ticket for the next analyst: Oathkeeper Stewart Rhodes was interviewed by Infowars on 01/20/21. 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What platforms has the misinformation trended on? [Please include all that apply, separated by commas]</p> <p>Infowars.com, the Alex Jones Showlivestream</p>
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<p>I. What is being said</p> <p>1) What is the content? What type of media is it (livestream, video, etc)? Provide a brief description (mentioning violence, platform, tactics, media used, why this warrants a ticket etc.) so that other analysts can understand the content at a glance. If there is any dis- or misinformation being spread, what is it? Oathkeeper founder Stewart Rhodes was interviewed by Infowars on 01/20/21. He advocates for the organization of militias to resist a regime he deems illegitimate. He was interviewed as part of livestream Alex Jones' inauguration coverage. Stewart Rhodes calls for the creation of militias and that they be ready to defend themselves. Trump was our last sitting legitimate president. We'll see if we can ever have one again, but that's going to require paper ballots. And in local elections you must insist on paper ballots, you hold your own parallel elections using paper ballots to prove that your patriot candidate did win and from bottom to top that's how you take it back"</p> <p>2) What is the content's potential for violence 2</p> <p>[1] Violent humor, vague threats of violence, apocalyptic predictions, ominous rhetoric. Example: "God is not a pacifist, Christ will return to wage war", "1776 again" [2] Allusion to violence. Example: "stay home" / "watch out" they can't stop me from peacefully protesting" [3] Affirmations of violence. Example: "there <u>will</u> be violence." [4] Calls to action or specific threats of violence. Example: "I am going to bomb the capitol" [5] Current violent activity. Example: a livestream of a user storming the capitol, "I am covered in blood" Leave blank if not applicable</p>	<p>III. Who is saying it</p> <p>1) What kind of account is primarily responsible for spreading the content? If the account is organic, and includes a name, please add it next to the type of account. (Example: Organic account, Eric Munchel)</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px; width: 50%;">• Politician/candidate for office</td> <td style="padding: 5px; width: 50%;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">• Influencer/verified account</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: center;">Stewart Rhodes</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">• Organic account (seems like a regular person)</td> <td style="padding: 5px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">• Seemingly inauthentic account</td> <td style="padding: 5px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">• Anonymous account</td> <td style="padding: 5px;"></td> </tr> </table>	• Politician/candidate for office		• Influencer/verified account	Stewart Rhodes	• Organic account (seems like a regular person)		• Seemingly inauthentic account		• Anonymous account																						
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As events unfolded during January 6 I found myself frustrated with how ill-equipped the DFRLab was for rapidly documenting events as they unfolded. As a result I created a ticketing system for documenting events. With the help of some peers we decided which information would be valuable to collect.

A researcher would be able to hail a new ticket by typing a command into the team's slack channel. A bot would reply with a link to a blank ticket (a copy of a template Google Doc) that had

been automatically numbered chronologically. Researchers would then be able to fill out the tickets and, because the data entry took place inside addressable table cells, I was able to create a master Google Sheet that functioned as a dashboard. The dashboard Google Sheet used Google App Script to search a shared Google Drive for all created tickets, and would populate all ticket data into the Google Sheet, which could then be searched for key terms, urgency scores, and potential for violence scores.

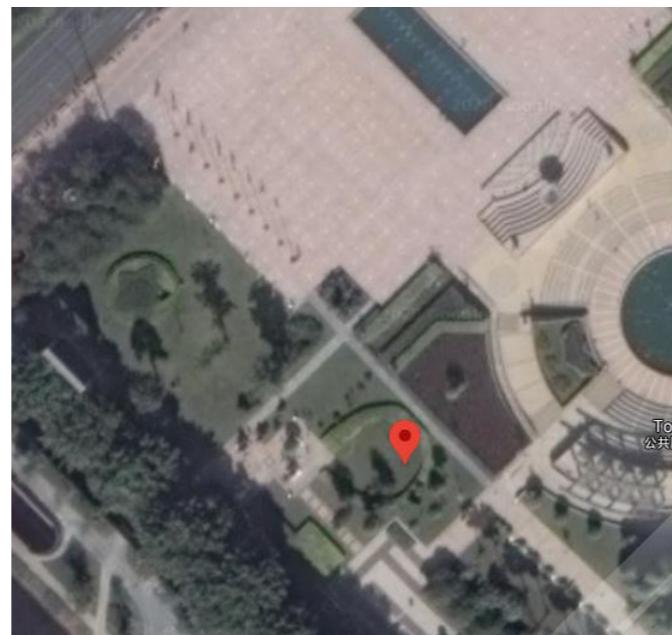
Unpublished Research

An Extension of ABC14News

The website Outwittrade.com was tied to ABC14News, a site that was known to be auto-generating news articles, passing them off as fact, and circulating COVID-19 misinformation. The dailybeast had attributed the site to a known North Macedonian disinformant, but I discovered that there may have been more to the story. The site Outwittrade is was tied to the ABC14News through an SEO trick wherein revenue and SEO score could be gained by connecting a network of websites and faking cross-site traffic with bots. When the score of one site goes up, so do the scores of all the others. Outwittrade neglected to hide its file directories (which can be found at “www.examplewordpress.com/wp/up-content/uploads”), which revealed a number of images that were not part of the site’s regular content. This image of a dog stands out, it was much larger than other images on the site and was one of only a few that in the directory that was not GAN generated or a graphic.

I was able to geolocate the image based on the the building in the background, using Google Lens (which has an extremely powerful reverse image search feature) and Bluestack to run it on my laptop. Once the fountain and the building was confirmed I was able to identify where in the field the dog appeared to be sitting. Ultimately this research did not get published because it was well past the news cycle.

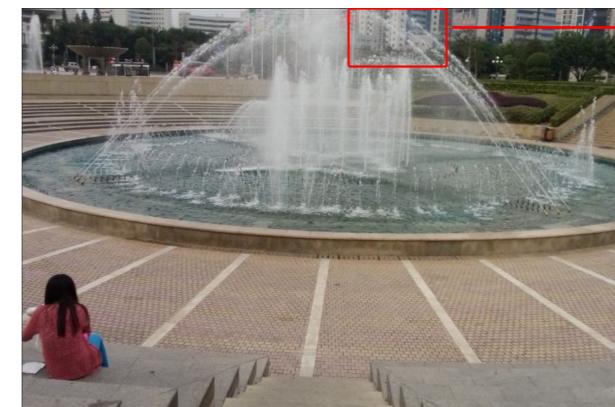
But hey, we found a dog.



Fountain found at these coordinates:
<https://bit.ly/3leTOhO>



A Chinese dog



A fountain in a suburb of Shenzhen

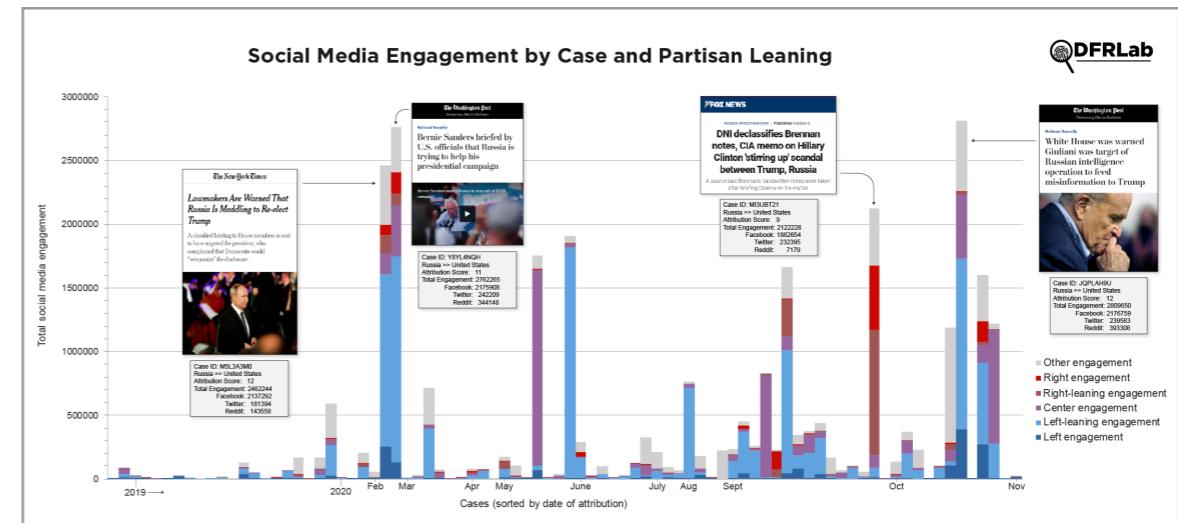
Bonus lens-corrected reflection from dog eye shows owner.
<https://bit.ly/31o0sBm>

Design Work

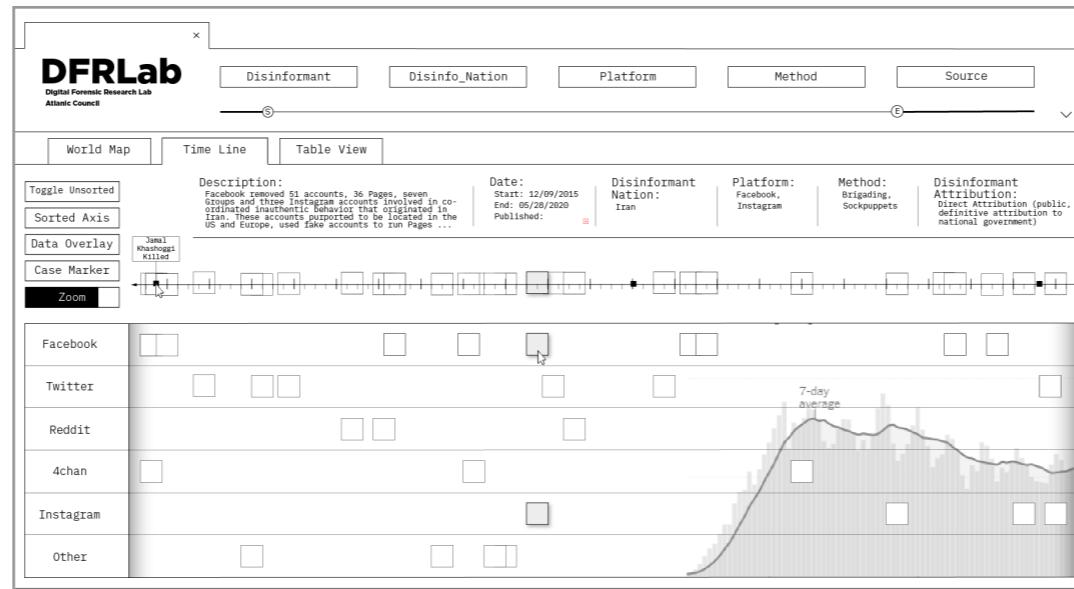
Graphics made for the Foreign Interference Attribution Tracker



Banner graphic for the Atlantic Council publication on the Interference 2020 project



Plot of the dataset stacked by attribution source partisan leaning



Pre-Alpha mockup of a possible user interface for navigating the dataset. Obviously we did not go with this one.

Design Work

DFRLab Website Redesign Mocks

As the DFRLab works to establish a more original online identity and move away from Medium for hosting reporting, I took the opportunity to play with some visual ideas that could compliment our reporting, while aligning with Atlantic Council design expectations. This example serves to demonstrate my familiarity with Adobe Illustrator.

Concept for Re-Styling AC Publications on the DFRLab website and for DFRLab Reports:

The Image on the left features an article published to AC's website, reformatted to appear in a DFRLab style, tags are transferred over from the AC website (and truncated). The Image on the right is a DFRLab report similarly stylized. My thinking was that reports and posts from AC may be formatted more extravagantly than our normal research and publications.

Concept for website taxonomy stickers
Inspired by Github shields (github.com/badges/shields), the badges are colored by category.

Wordpress element ideation

Page Intentionally Left Blank

Recreational Meddling

Mods are Asleep, Post Copywritten Content

Platforms don't really care about hate speech, especially platforms owned and operated by Elon Musk. You know what they do care about -- copywritten content. That is what will get advertisers up in arms and lawyered-up.

In the spirit of our unwavering support for American-Hearthrob Elon Musk, a friend and I repurposed some old API keys to write a Python program that would exploit Twitter as a CDN for video, just for fun.

Using our project, users can instantly split a movie into 2 minute long segments, and upload the entire feature lenght film as a thread to Twitter.

Once on Twitter, users could then use our project to download the thread of movie segments and stitch it back together locally.

Obviously, I do not condone or support the unlawful dissemination of copywritten content under any circumstances and discourage this heinous act in the strongest possible terms.



The program is still in development, we've tested it with the 1992 movie "[Hard Boiled](#)" knowing it would not immediately raise any alarms.