

Max Rizzuto's Portfolio

In this document you will find a collection of projects I have led and
colloraborated on, as well as some breif explanations of some note worthy
technical accomplishments and design work. Embedded links appear to
only work in acrobat, I've included URLs

Reporting
Lead Author

Tracking narratives around James Le Mesurier and the White Helmets

How conspiracies resurfaced and shifted after Le Mesurier's death

<https://medium.com/dfrlab/tracking-narratives-around-james-le-mesurier-and-the-white-helmets-40b767cc6cf5>

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

<https://medium.com/dfrlab/u-s-politicians-exploit-coronavirus-fears-with-anti-chinese-dog-whistles-ff61c9d7e458>

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

<https://medium.com/dfrlab/conservative-group-manipulates-pelosi-footage-to-support-trump-coronavirus-policies-4fff00750d6c>

Russian disinfo targets UK Prime Minister's hospitalization

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

<https://medium.com/dfrlab/russian-disinfo-targets-uk-prime-ministers-hospitalization-d257d6f4d621>

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

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

<https://medium.com/dfrlab/new-york-citys-open-source-cop-watch-50b2cd5a270d>

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

<https://medium.com/dfrlab/extremists-on-telegram-exploit-parlers-de-platforming-to-ramp-up-recruiting-eb1256227a5d>

Reporting Co-Author

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

<https://medium.com/dfrlab/qanons-hallmark-catchphrases-evaporating-from-the-mainstream-internet-ce90b6dc2c55>

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

<https://medium.com/dfrlab/facebook-shuts-down-egyptian-disinformation-network-bans-two-marketing-companies-60260d52ae0d>

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.

<https://medium.com/dfrlab/disinfo-targeting-south-african-defence-force-surges-amid-covid-19-lockdown-6b450bd652e0>

The yellow poster behind the “no more lockdowns” protests

How the poster spread and mutated alongside the protests

<https://medium.com/dfrlab/the-yellow-poster-behind-the-no-more-lockdowns-protests-17abd9c0a06>

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

<https://medium.com/dfrlab/how-manny-from-diary-of-a-wimpy-kid-galvanized-political-activism-on-tiktok-1c0405f1b54e>

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

<https://medium.com/dfrlab/uk-based-far-right-telegram-channels-amplified-disinfo-targeting-u-s-election-integrity-b0d007b1375b>

UAE Facebook pages targeted Qatar and Muslim Brotherhood

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

<https://medium.com/dfrlab/uae-facebook-pages-targeted-qatar-and-muslim-brotherhood-8aec916fa1f7>

Contributions to Larger Projects

Collaborator on Projects / Long-Form Reports

Dichotomies of Disinformation, DFRLab 2019

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.

Code book: <https://github.com/DFRLab/Dichotomies-of-Disinformation>
Data Viz: <https://jigsaw.google.com/the-current/disinformation/dataviz/>

#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.

Report: <https://graphika.com/reports/operationffs-fake-face-swarm/>

Foreign Interference Attribution Tracker

Led data collection and cleaning efforts (see "behind the scenes work" below) and designed and monitored data creation and pipeline. Worked with peers to establish and iterate codebook and taxonomy. Wrote the RFP for the visualization and interviewed web developer candidates. Hired Mattias Stahl, who now leads Data Visualization at Der Speigel, I am so proud.

Visualization: <https://www.interference2020.org/>
* Methodology and codebook found at the bottom of the page
Github: <https://github.com/DFRLab/Interference2020-Data>

Election Integrity Partnership

Performed monitoring and reviewed work from interns and student volunteers. Lead and designed data reconciliation and cleaning process. Wrote section on data fidelity and showcased findings in some of the EIP's daily briefs to press, academia and public servants.

<https://www.eipartnership.net/>

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

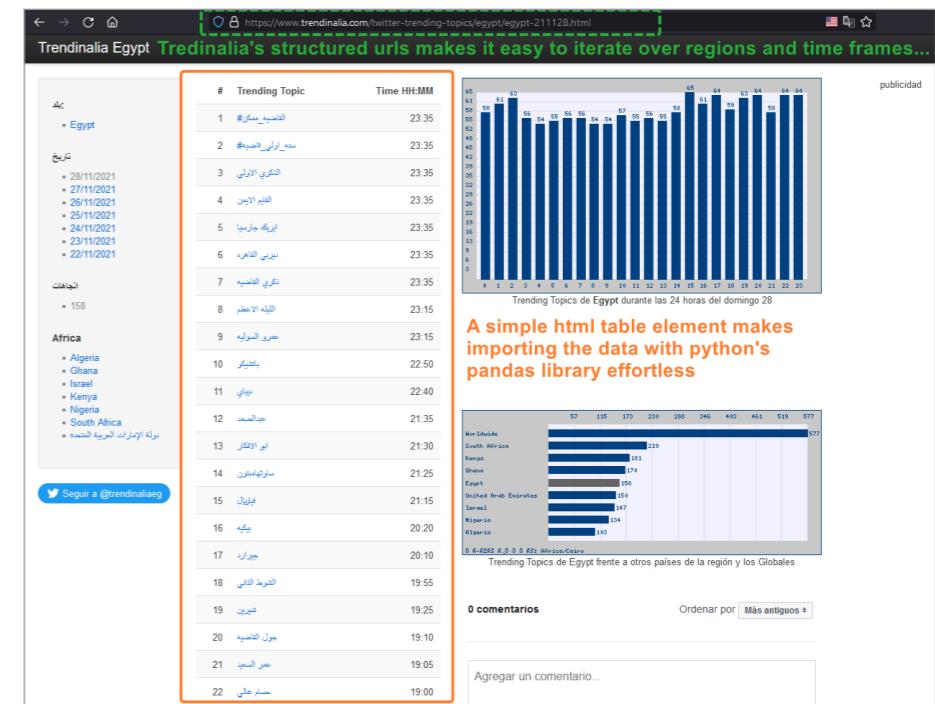
Contributed research and a breadth of materials I had archived during my monitoring efforts in the days leading up to Jan 6

<https://www.justsecurity.org/74622/stopthe steal-timeline-of-social-media-and-extremist-activities-leading-to-1-6-insurrection/>

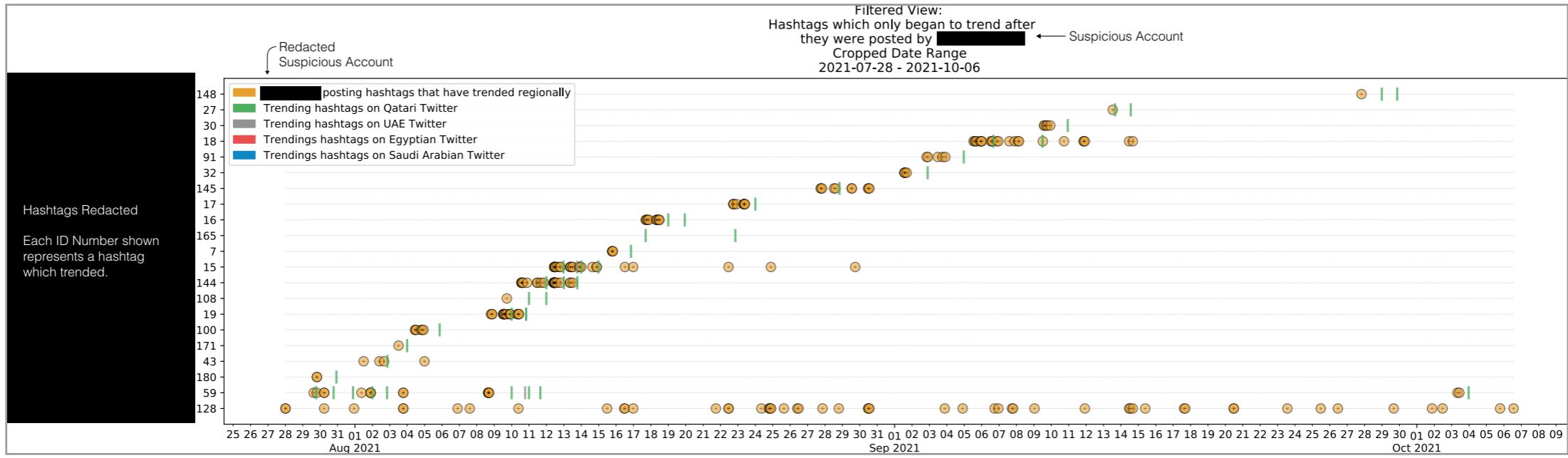
Unpublished Research

Qatari Twitter Influencer

A tip alerted us to the activity of a Twitter profile which was able to make original hashtags trend, sometimes within minutes of posting it for the first time. In order to test this hypothesis I scraped the website trendinalia.com to get a record of terms as they trended on Twitter in Qatar, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia from 2019 to Present. I then scraped all of the Tweets from the suspicious Twitter user and extacted the dates and times of every hashtag used. This chart (which is actually a modified scatter plot) illustrates how the user pumps hashtags in their Tweets (orange circles) and in just a short time they trend (as indicated by the colored bars)



Annotated screenshot of Trendinalia's trending records



Python, Pandas, Matplotlib, Illustrator to redact

Unpublished Research

Unofficial ISIS Website Uses Blockchain tech to evade 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

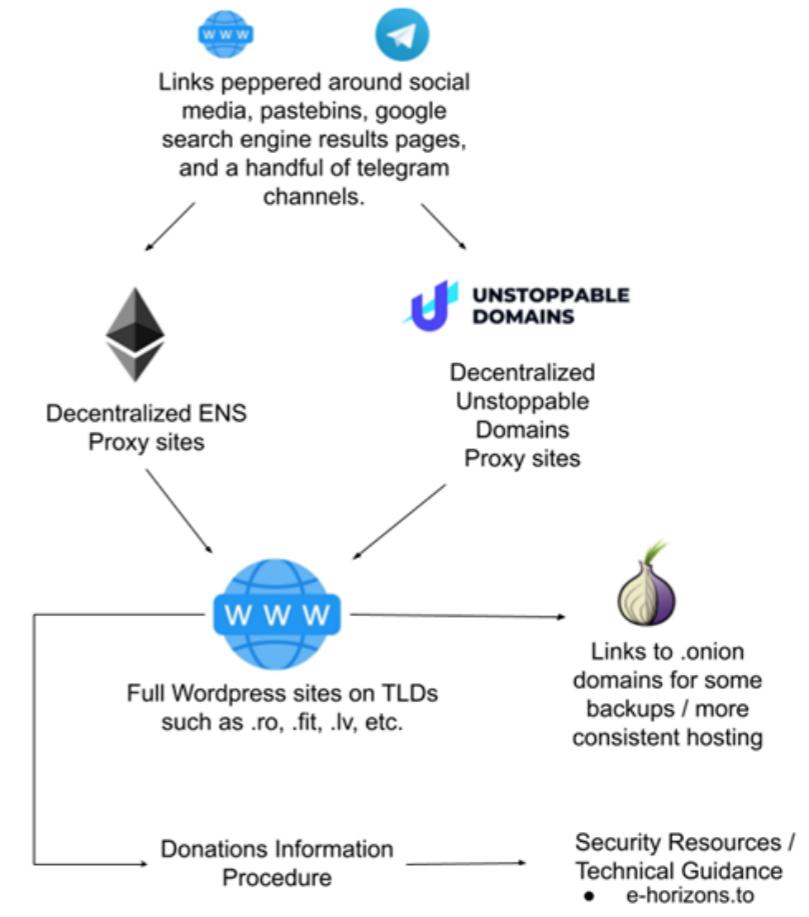


Illustration of how the site and its proxies work to connect users to recruiting materials

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.

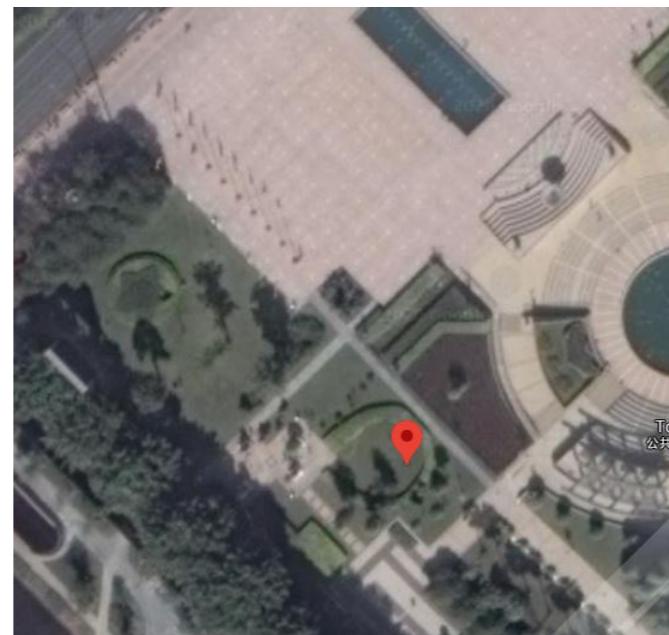
Unpublished Research

An Extension of ABC14News

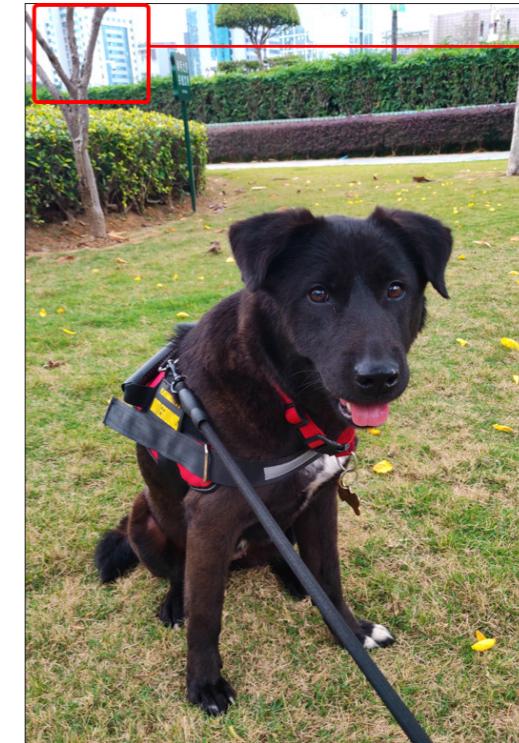
The website Outwittrade.com was tied to ABC14News, a site that was known to be auto-generating news articles, passing them off as fact, and circulating COVID-19 misinformation. The dailybeast had attributed the site to a known North Macedonian disinformant, but I discovered that there may have been more to the story. The site Outwittrade 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/wp-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 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>

Behind the Scenes Work

Inter-coder Reliability Toolkit

The screenshot shows a Google Sheets document titled "FIAT_Doc_2.0". The document is organized into several sections:

- Case selection field:** A red box highlights the "Case Hash" column (A2) and the "Case Info" image (A3). The image shows a lock icon on a circuit board.
- Research questions posed to coders:** A blue box highlights a table of research questions grouped by categories: Credibility, Objectivity, Evidence, and Transparency. Each question includes a Yes/No response scale from 0 to 1.
- Coders responses and indication of agreement or discord for each question:** A green box highlights a grid where coders (POYLZELT, HDBZIBP, 46PA2IGK, P9G8Q1JN, 1GDZM7XT, M3UB) provide their responses (match, async, etc.) across the research questions.
- Reconciliation field for review and correction of incongruent values:** A green box highlights a section at the bottom right for reviewing discrepancies between coder responses.
- All data entry ranges react to coder selection field:** A yellow box highlights the footer message indicating that data entry ranges react to the coder selection field.

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. lol.

Behind the Scenes Work

Rapid Response Monitoring Template

[002] - [Stewart Rhodes Interview with Alex Jones]

Answers go in the white boxes, not the colored boxes. Answers are required unless otherwise specified. Please keep your answers brief.

Ticket created by: [add contributor names if applicable]	If there are any related tickets, specify the ticket number. If there are multiple specify the numbers separated with commas												
Adam Gates													
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.													
Come back to summary after filling out the rest of the ticket.													
Summary <p>1) Please write a sentence briefly summarizing this ticket for the next analyst:</p> <p>Oathkeeper Stewart Rhodes was interviewed by Infowars on 01/20/21. He advocates for the creation of armed militias to resist a regime he deems illegitimate.</p> <p>2) Is this urgent immediately?</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>[1] Send to Jared and have him look ASAP [2] Send to Jared and have him look when he gets a chance [3] Don't send to Jared yet, but keep this in monitoring pool</td> <td>Fill in number choice 3</td> </tr> </table> <p>3) Overview:</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Potential for / rumor of violence</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>[What is being said]</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Who is the entity or individual behind it?</td> <td>Stewart Rhodes Oath Keepers founders</td> </tr> <tr> <td>[Who is involved?]</td> <td>Alex Jones Infowars host</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Platform [What is the name of the platform?]</td> <td>Infowars.com Banned.video</td> </tr> </table>		[1] Send to Jared and have him look ASAP [2] Send to Jared and have him look when he gets a chance [3] Don't send to Jared yet, but keep this in monitoring pool	Fill in number choice 3	Potential for / rumor of violence	2	[What is being said]		Who is the entity or individual behind it?	Stewart Rhodes Oath Keepers founders	[Who is involved?]	Alex Jones Infowars host	Platform [What is the name of the platform?]	Infowars.com Banned.video
[1] Send to Jared and have him look ASAP [2] Send to Jared and have him look when he gets a chance [3] Don't send to Jared yet, but keep this in monitoring pool	Fill in number choice 3												
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[Who is involved?]	Alex Jones Infowars host												
Platform [What is the name of the platform?]	Infowars.com Banned.video												

Screenshots of the various sections of a ticket that was filled out by an intern and submitted to the database.

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

Archived URL repository										
Archive all the links with relevant material using archive.org or archive.is . Place links to archived content here: For livestreams and videos, use the video / stream downloader here , and input the ticket number when prompted. If you encounter an error, raise it in the slack. https://archive.is/wxQPY Video is archived at 002-AJ										
I. What is being said										
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"										
2) What is the content's potential for violence										
Fill in number choice 2										
[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										
II. Where are they saying it, platform(s)-wise?										
1) What platform(s) does the content appear on? Include links or links to screenshots, if appropriate. What platforms has the misinformation trended on? [Please include all that apply, separated by commas] Infowars.com, the Alex Jones Show livestream										
III. Who is saying it										
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) <table border="1"> <tr> <td>• Politician/candidate for office</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Influencer/verified account</td> <td>Stewart Rhodes</td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Organic account (seems like a regular person)</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Seemingly inauthentic account</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>• Anonymous account</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>	• Politician/candidate for office		• Influencer/verified account	Stewart Rhodes	• Organic account (seems like a regular person)		• Seemingly inauthentic account		• Anonymous account	
• Politician/candidate for office										
• Influencer/verified account	Stewart Rhodes									
• Organic account (seems like a regular person)										
• Seemingly inauthentic account										
• Anonymous account										
Additional Thoughts / Misc.										
Appendix										
Document and screenshot your findings as you go. Paste images or a collection of images in the right column, include basic information for each in the left column.										
Description, URL, and Date/Time Captured	Images / Screenshots									
Stewart Jones being interviewed by Alex Jones, https://archive.is/wxQPY	Timecode 1:51									
Video is archived at 002-AJ										

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.

Design Work

Article Banners

From the article:

EXTREMISTS ON TELEGRAM EXPLOIT PARLER'S DE-PLATFORMING TO RAMP UP RECRUITING

The banner image was rendered in Blender, all of the models (the Telegram logo and the flood of Parler logos) were made from svg files of the icons. Rendered with Eevee.



From the article:

TRACKING NARRATIVES AROUND JAMES LE MESURIER AND THE WHITE HELMETS

Modeled and rendered in Cinema4D. Used rigid body physics to drop all of the logo into a pile. Helmet was found online, logos extruded from svg files, touched up in illustrator.

From the article:

NEW YORK CITIES OPEN SOURCE “COP WATCH”

Model was found online and rendered with C4D's Sketch and Toon. Antenna, grain, and background added in photoshop.

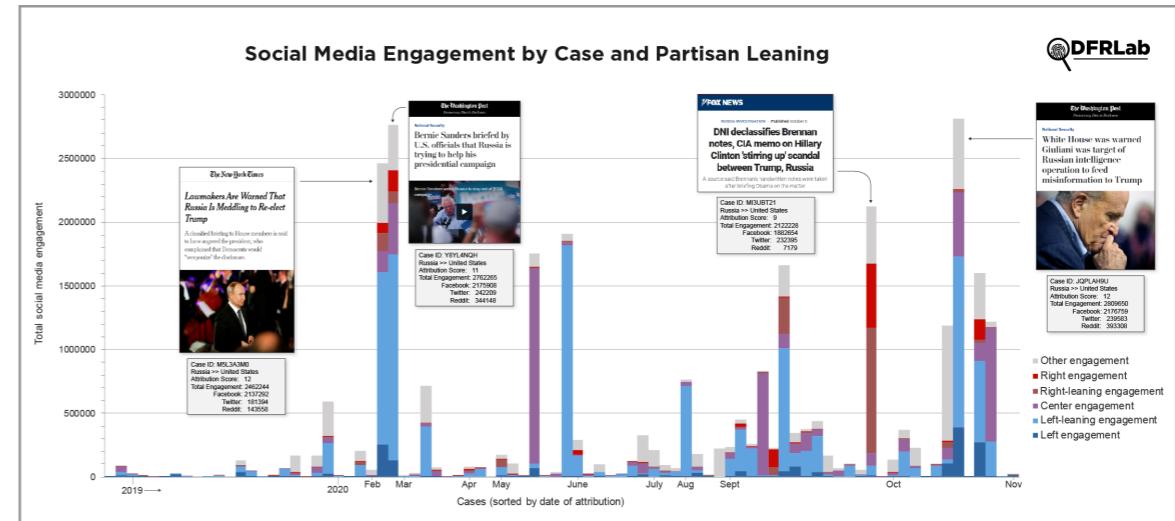


Design Work

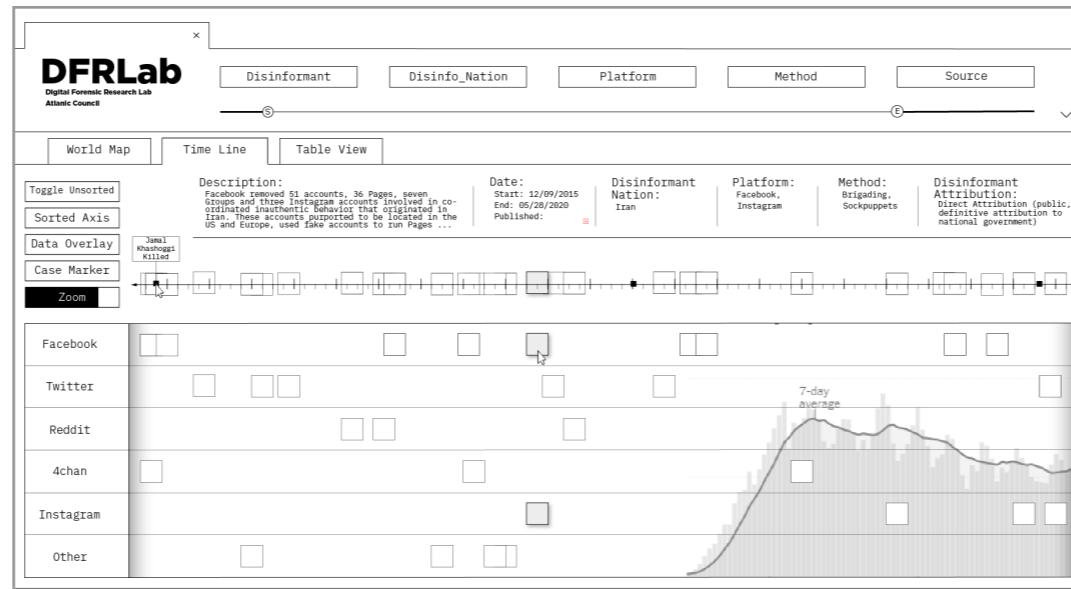
Graphics made for the Foreign Interference Attribution Tracker



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. The quality of this document should not represent my competence with InDesign, however - I'm still learning.

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.

To the right of the report mockup, there is a note: "Took with a simplified DFRLab logo that resizes a little better."

Wordpress element ideation