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Bad Reputation

Suspected Russian Actors Leverage Alternative Tech Platforms in Continued Effort to Covertly Influence Right-Wing U.S. Audiences

Graphika & The Stanford Internet Observatory

12.2022

Information Operations

Bad Reputation

Suspected Russian Actors Leverage Alternative Tech Platforms in Continued Effort to Covertly Influence Right-Wing U.S. Audiences

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Executive Summary

Suspected Russian actors have leveraged alternative social media platforms to target right-wing U.S. audiences with divisive political narratives to a greater extent than previously known. This report describes ongoing activity by a set of 35 newly-discovered and previously-attributed inauthentic accounts on Gab, Gettr, Parler, and Truth Social, building on previous foreign influence operations (IO) likely conducted by the same actors since at least 2020.

The content and behaviors closely mirror those of earlier operations. The actors created a network of fake personas on platforms popular with right-wing communities, which act in a coordinated manner to spread political messages. These include narratives common within these communities, such as allegations of voter fraud in the 2020 U.S. presidential election and 2022 midterms, as well as attempts to undermine public support for Ukraine in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war.

Based on the technical, behavioral, and content indicators detailed in this report, we assess with high confidence that this activity is linked to the actors behind the Newsroom for American and European Based Citizens (NAEBC), a fake right-wing news outlet that targeted U.S. audiences ahead of the 2020 presidential election. NAEBC has been attributed by Meta to individuals associated with past activity of Russia's Internet Research Agency (IRA), an assessment reportedly shared by U.S. law enforcement.

The newly-identified activity illustrates the extent to which suspected Russian actors are able to leverage social media platforms that lack robust policies on foreign IO. Some of the accounts in this network were first exposed in 2020, again in 2021, and most recently ahead of the 2022 U.S. midterms. Due to an apparent lack of enforcement, the actors have established a degree of persistence unavailable on most mainstream platforms and are able to conduct their operations with relative ease.

Our analysis of the fake personas' follower network shows they largely operated in an echo chamber of highly-dense overlapping follower relationships on fringe platforms. However, the

operation also experienced moments of significant "break out," when content created by the actors was amplified organically to large audiences on mainstream social media platforms.

On June 15, 2022, for example, Donald Trump Jr. shared a screenshot with his 6.1 million Instagram followers of a post by a Gettr account in the operation that purported to be a fan page for musician Kid Rock. Screenshots of another post by the same Gettr account criticizing Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy were also widely shared on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter in October 2022, prompting Reuters news agency to release a fact check.

Lastly, we assess the actors engaged in a deliberate effort to capitalize on public concerns about foreign interference in U.S. elections - a recurring IRA tactic known as "perception hacking." Following media reporting on a part of this network's activity ahead of the U.S. midterms, which included naming some of the operation's personas, multiple assets "outed" themselves as "Russian trolls" and sarcastically apologized for "being too aggressive with our political stance." At the same time, Russian businessman Yevgeny Prigozhin - who U.S. prosecutors say has funded and directed IRA operations since at least 2014 - claimed, without citing any evidence, to be successfully interfering in the U.S. midterms.

This report aims to provide a fact-based analysis of the tactics, techniques, and procedures employed by these actors, the reach those afforded them, and the limitations they faced. We hope this and other reports we publish on similar activity will provide the foundation for an informed discussion about the realities of online influence operations, rather than relying on unverified claims by the threat actors themselves.

Actors & Attribution

Based on the technical, behavioral, and content indicators detailed below, we assess with high confidence that the activity discussed in this report is linked to the actors behind the Newsroom for American and European Based Citizens (NAEBC), an operation Meta previously attributed to individuals associated with past activity of the IRA. These indicators include:

- Repurposing accounts that previously posed as staff and editors at NAEBC
- Sharing identical content in close coordination with accounts previously attributed to NAEBC, including unique content that has been publicly connected to IRA-linked actors
- Activity indicating the accounts' operators viewed social media platforms in Russian
- Repeated English-language errors typical of non-native speakers

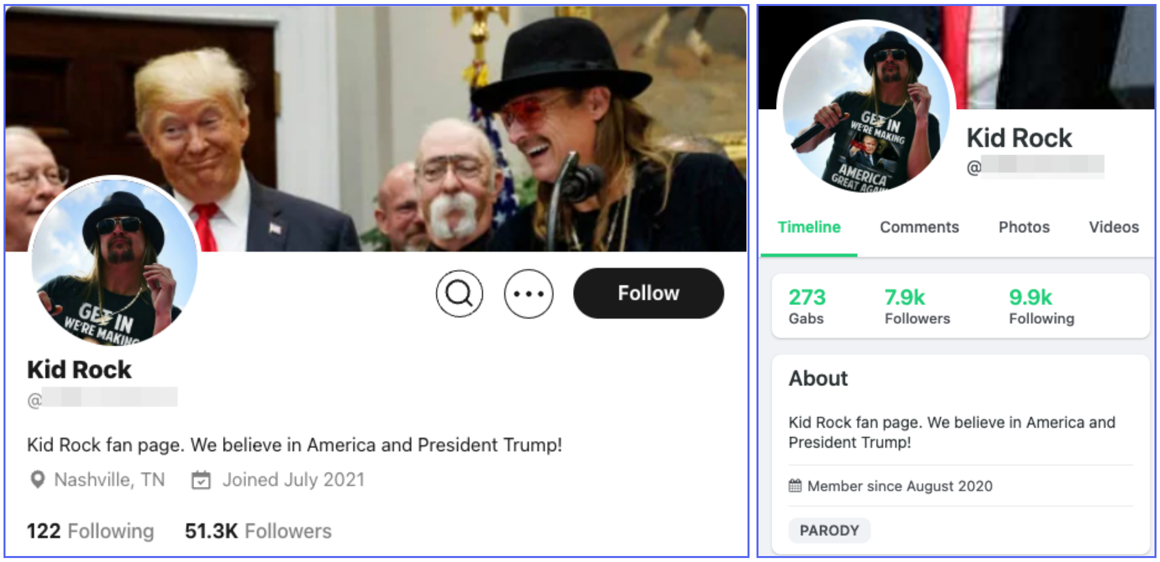
We also observed multiple network assets engaging with Gab, Gettr, and Parler accounts that used the same name, profile picture, and bio as a persona identified by the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab (DFRLab) in 2020. The DFRLab report analyzed this persona as part of a "coordinated inauthentic behavior" network focused on the U.S. that Meta suspended in August 2020 and attributed to unknown actors in Romania. While we have previously analyzed

IRA-linked operations that claimed to operate from Romania during the same time period, we do not currently have sufficient open-source information to assess the nature of the connection – if any – between the 2020 network and the activity discussed in this report.

American Bad Ass?

Three of the most influential assets in the network purport to be fan pages for American singer-songwriter Robert James Ritchie, better known by his stage name, Kid Rock. The accounts are active on Gab, Gettr, and Truth Social, where they all use near-identical bios, the same profile picture, and matching cover photos. All three assets repeatedly post identical content within minutes and sometimes seconds of each other, strongly suggesting they are operated by the same actors. On Dec. 8, 2022, for instance, each of the three accounts posted the exact same content five times. On each occasion, the posts occurred in the space of one minute across all three platforms.

These accounts provide a high-confidence connection between the newly-identified assets and the 2020 NAEBC operation. Until late October 2022, the "Kid Rock" account on Gab operated as the NAEBC persona "Niels Holst," who claimed to be an editor at the fake media outlet based in Amsterdam. Our assessment that a previously-attributed NAEBC account was repurposed in this way is supported by a comparison of posts by the account from April 2021. Archived versions of a post from April 2021 show the account operating as "Niels Holst," while the same post viewed today shows the Kid Rock fan page persona. Importantly, Gab's unique data-ids and matching timestamps prove it is the same post by the same asset, not two different accounts. Comments on posts by the account in October and November 2021, which now display as coming from the Kid Rock fan page, also reference the handle of the defunct Niels Holst persona.



Kid Rock
@[redacted]

Kid Rock fan page. We believe in America and President Trump!

Nashville, TN Joined July 2021

122 Following 51.3K Followers

Kid Rock
@[redacted]

273 Gabs 7.9k Followers 9.9k Following

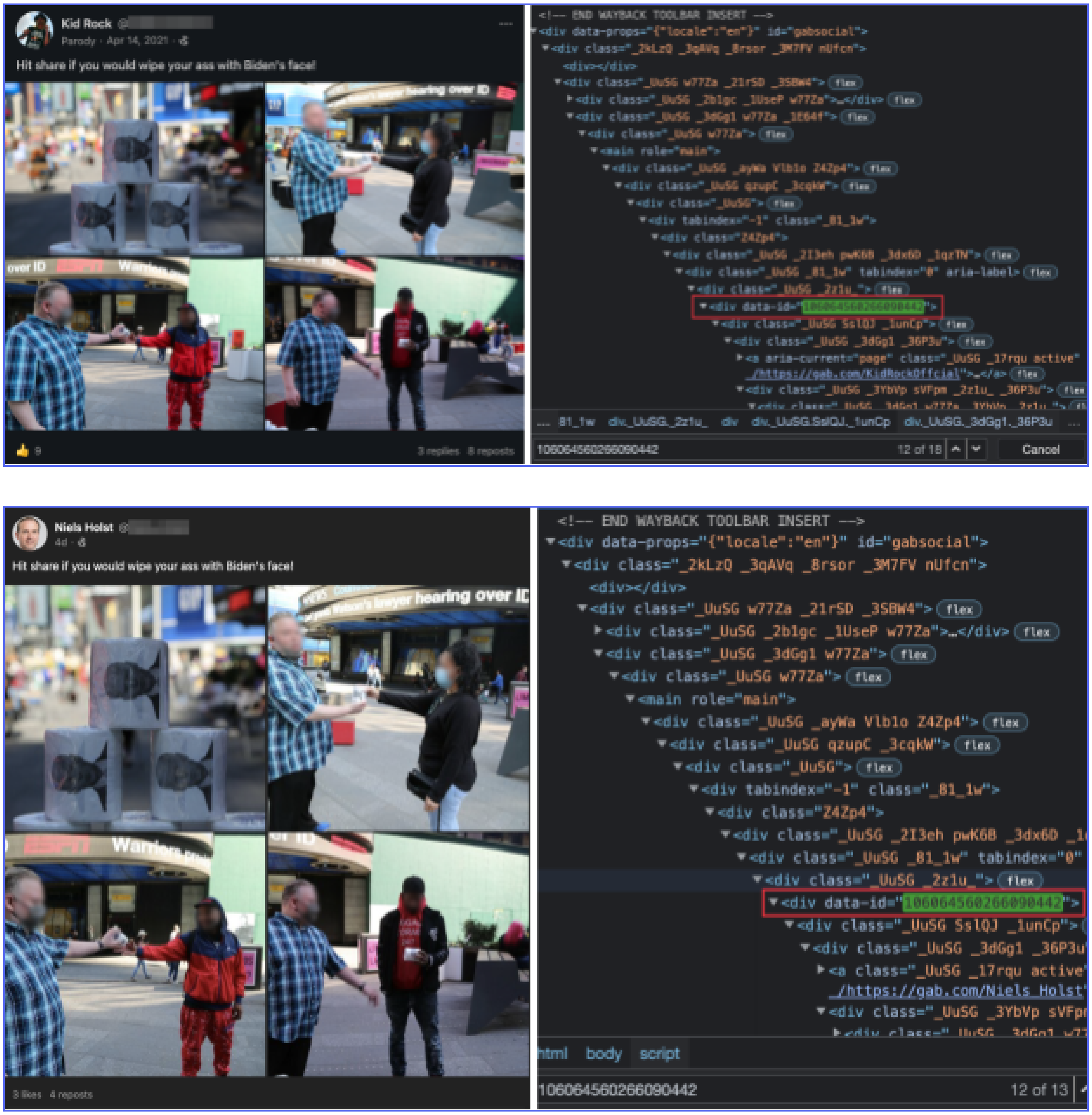
About

Kid Rock fan page. We believe in America and President Trump!

Member since August 2020

PARODY

Screenshots of accounts in the network using fake Kid Rock fan page personas on Gettr (left) and Gab (right)



Kid Rock @[redacted]
Parody · Apr 14, 2021 ·

Hit share if you would wipe your ass with Biden's face!

9

3 replies 8 reposts

```
<!-- END WAYBACK TOOLBAR INSERT -->
▾<div data-props="{"locale":"en"}" id="gabsocial">
 ▾<div class="_2kLzQ _3qAVq _8rsor _3M7FV nUfcn">
   <div></div>
  ▾<div class="_UuSG w77Za _21rSD _3SBW4"> flex
   ▸<div class="_UuSG _2b1gc _1UseP w77Za">…</div> flex
   ▾<div class="_UuSG _3dGg1 w77Za _1E64f"> flex
    ▾<div class="_UuSG w77Za"> flex
     ▾<main role="main">
      ▾<div class="_UuSG _ayWa Vlb1o Z4Zp4"> flex
       ▾<div class="_UuSG qzupC _3cqkW"> flex
        ▾<div class="_UuSG"> flex
         ▾<div tabindex="-1" class="_81_1w">
          ▾<div class="Z4Zp4">
           ▾<div class="_UuSG _2I3eh pwK6B _3dx6D _1qzTN"> flex
            ▾<div class="_UuSG _81_1w" tabindex="0" aria-label> flex
             ▾<div class="_UuSG _2z1u_"> flex
              ▾<div data-id="106064560266090442">
               ▾<div class="_UuSG SslQJ _1unCp"> flex
                ▾<div class="_UuSG _3dGg1 _36P3u"> flex
                 ▸<a aria-current="page" class="_UuSG _17rqu active"
                   ./https://gab.com/KidRockOffcial">…</a> flex
                 ▾<div class="_UuSG _3YbVp sVFpm _2z1u_ _36P3u"> flex
... 81_1w  div._UuSG._2z1u_  div  div._UuSG.SslQJ._1unCp  div._UuSG._3dGg1._36P3u  ...
106064560266090442                                  12 of 18  ⌃  ⌄   Cancel
```

Niels Holst @[redacted]
4d ·

Hit share if you would wipe your ass with Biden's face!

3 likes 4 reposts

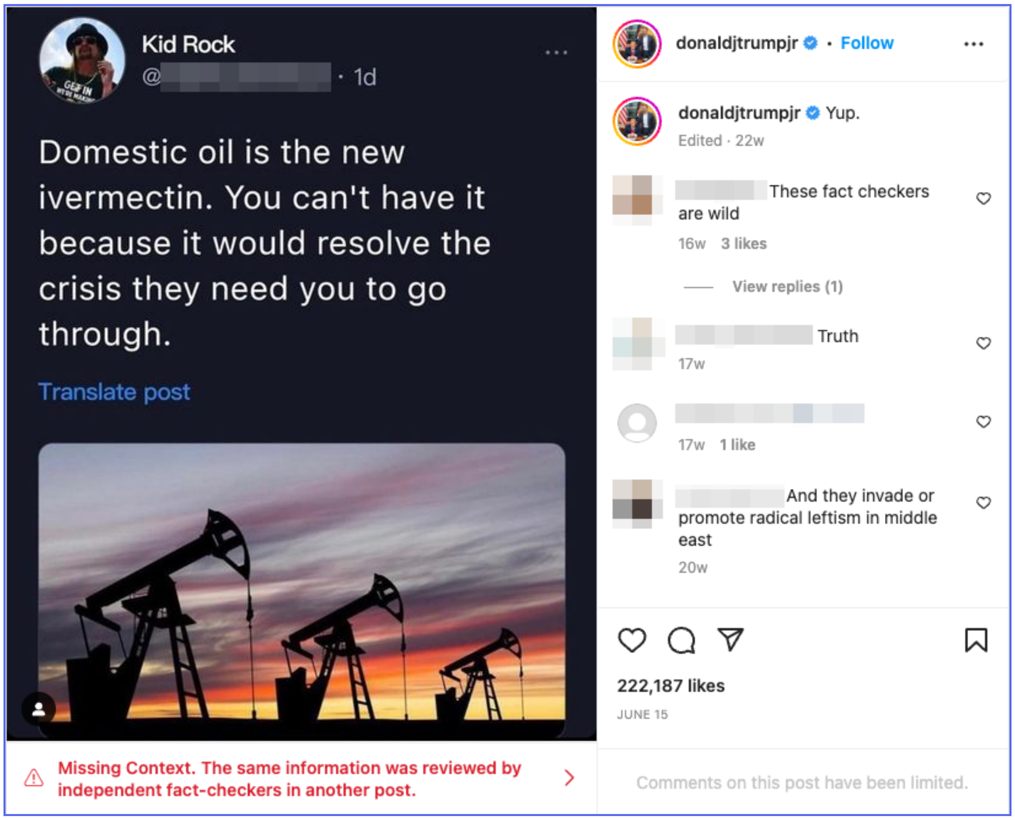
```
<!-- END WAYBACK TOOLBAR INSERT -->
▾<div data-props="{"locale":"en"}" id="gabsocial">
 ▾<div class="_2kLzQ _3qAVq _8rsor _3M7FV nUfcn">
   <div></div>
  ▾<div class="_UuSG w77Za _21rSD _3SBW4"> flex
   ▸<div class="_UuSG _2b1gc _1UseP w77Za">…</div> flex
   ▾<div class="_UuSG _3dGg1 w77Za"> flex
    ▾<div class="_UuSG w77Za"> flex
     ▾<main role="main">
      ▾<div class="_UuSG _ayWa Vlb1o Z4Zp4"> flex
       ▾<div class="_UuSG qzupC _3cqkW"> flex
        ▾<div class="_UuSG"> flex
         ▾<div tabindex="-1" class="_81_1w">
          ▾<div class="Z4Zp4">
           ▾<div class="_UuSG _2I3eh pwK6B _3dx6D _1
            ▾<div class="_UuSG _81_1w" tabindex="0"
             ▾<div class="_UuSG _2z1u_"> flex
              ▾<div data-id="106064560266090442">
               ▾<div class="_UuSG SslQJ _1unCp">
                ▾<div class="_UuSG _3dGg1 _36P3u
                 ▸<a class="_UuSG _17rqu active
                   ./https://gab.com/Niels_Holst
                 ▾<div class="_UuSG _3YbVp sVFp
html  body  script
106064560266090442                                  12 of 13
```

Screenshots showing the unique data-id of an April 14, 2021, post by the same Gab account, as viewed on Dec. 8, 2022 (top), and April 19, 2021 (bottom).

Perhaps due to concerns about being suspended for false impersonation, the operators state in the bios of all three accounts that they are "fan pages" and use the "parody" account label on Gab. However, the account handles - which, unlike bios, appear in users' timelines – use variations of the word "official." This deception appears to have worked and after screenshots of a post by the "Kid Rock" Gettr account achieved widespread engagement across Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram in October this year, Reuters news agency released a fact check debunking claims that the post was from the real Kid Rock.

Screenshots of a separate post by the Gettr account were also amplified by influential figures on the American right, including conspiracy theorist and raw food advocate David "Avocado" Wolfe (10.5k retweets) and Donald Trump Jr., who shared the screenshot to his 6.1 million Instagram followers in June (222k likes). This widespread engagement and celebrity amplification represent a category five incident on Ben Nimmo's breakout scale, a framework for assessing the reach and impact of online influence operations.

Interestingly, this is not the first time IRA-linked actors have attempted to tap into a readymade audience of Kid Rock fans: In 2018, DFRLab reported on an operation it said was run by the IRA and included a Kid Rock fan page on Instagram.



Kid Rock
@[redacted] · 1d

Domestic oil is the new ivermectin. You can't have it because it would resolve the crisis they need you to go through.

Translate post

Missing Context. The same information was reviewed by independent fact-checkers in another post.

donaldjtrumpjr · Follow

donaldjtrumpjr Yup.
Edited · 22w

[redacted] These fact checkers are wild
16w 3 likes
View replies (1)

[redacted] Truth
17w

[redacted]
17w 1 like

[redacted] And they invade or promote radical leftism in middle east
20w

222,187 likes
JUNE 15

Comments on this post have been limited.

Donald Trump Jr. posted a screenshot of a post by the "Kid Rock" Gettr account to his Instagram profile in June 2022

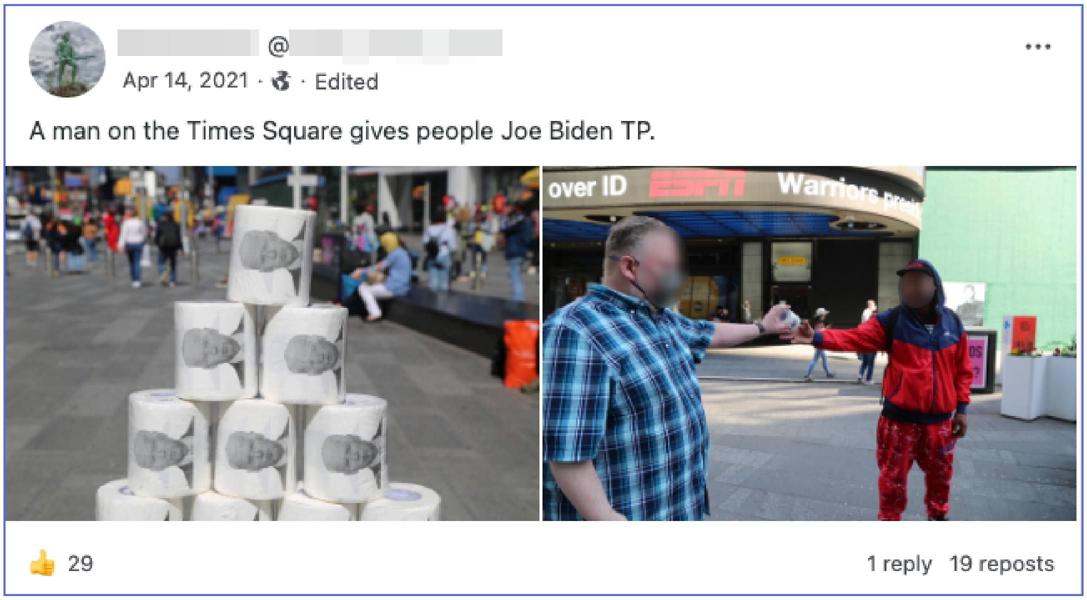
Telltale Toilet Paper

Assets in the network repeatedly share identical content in a coordinated manner, including with accounts previously attributed to NAEBC. While content sharing on its own never amounts to a strong attribution signal, in this case we observed a consistent pattern of behavior with accounts posting identical images, links, text, and videos, sometimes within minutes and seconds of each other - a behavioral signal that was supported by multiple other indicators in our assessment.

Frequently, this coordinated posting promoted unique content that has been publicly connected to IRA-linked actors. At least nine assets in the set, for instance, shared distinctive political cartoons bearing the artist signature "Schmitz" - a hallmark of IRA-linked operations targeting the U.S. since

2021. Other examples include repeatedly posting links to electiontruth[.]net, which analysts at Recorded Future told the New York Times in November 2022 was “almost certainly” linked to Russian IO efforts, and the “Foundation to Battle Injustice” [Фонда Борьбы с Репрессиями] - a self-proclaimed human rights organization that says it was “founded with the assistance of Russian entrepreneur Yevgeny Prigozhin.”

Additionally, on April 14, 2021, four accounts in the network posted the same set of photos in rapid succession over a period of 23 minutes, showing a man on Times Square in New York City handing out rolls of toilet paper printed with the face of President Joe Biden. The photos show the same incident from different angles, documenting a real-world event from April 8, 2021, that Graphika has assessed may have been orchestrated by the actors. The four accounts included two that previously posed as NAEBC staff and two newly-identified personas.



[redacted] @[redacted]

Apr 14, 2021 · · Edited

A man on the Times Square gives people Joe Biden TP.

👍 29

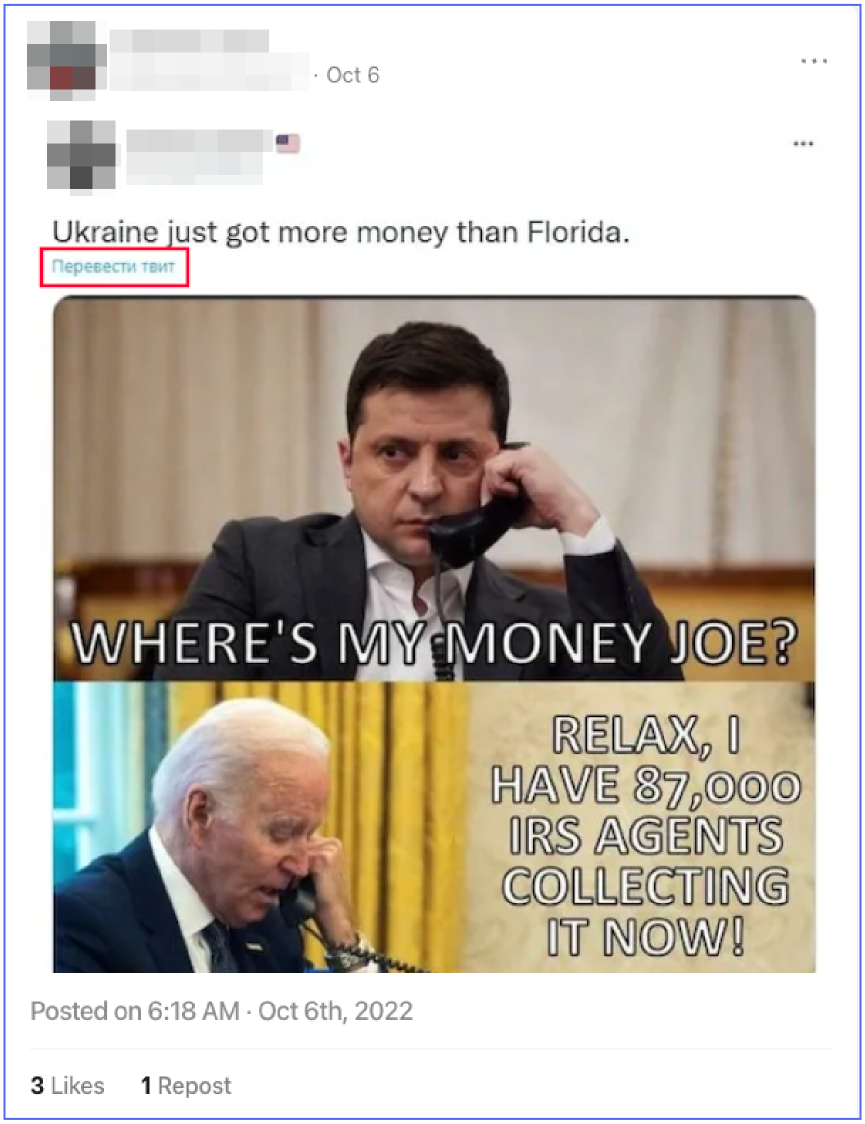
1 reply 19 reposts

A post by a newly-identified persona in the network sharing photos from the April 8, 2021, “toilet paper incident”

Language Lapses

Notably, a large amount of content shared by assets in the network consists of text copied from other social media users without attribution, possibly in an effort to avoid making English-language mistakes. Supporting this hypothesis, posts that do appear to be original content created by the actors often included grammatical errors common among native Russian speakers, such as incorrect use of definite and indefinite articles. In May 2021, for example, an account in the network that presents itself as a supporter of U.S. far-right militias posted: “Fake news media is unbearable. America under Democrats is on it's [sic] way to a [sic] ruin.” In May 2022, another account posted a cartoon criticizing EU limits on Russian oil imports with the comment: “This is how partial embargo looks like [sic].”

In one instance, we also saw a network asset post a Twitter screenshot to Gettr in which Twitter's automatic translation prompt is visible in Russian under the English text. This display suggests the user is browsing Twitter in Russian or using an operating system set to Russian.



[redacted] · Oct 6

[redacted]

Ukraine just got more money than Florida.

Перевести твит

Posted on 6:18 AM · Oct 6th, 2022

3 Likes **1** Repost

A tweet screenshot posted by a Gettr account in the network shows the Twitter auto-translate option in Russian under the English text

Network Overview

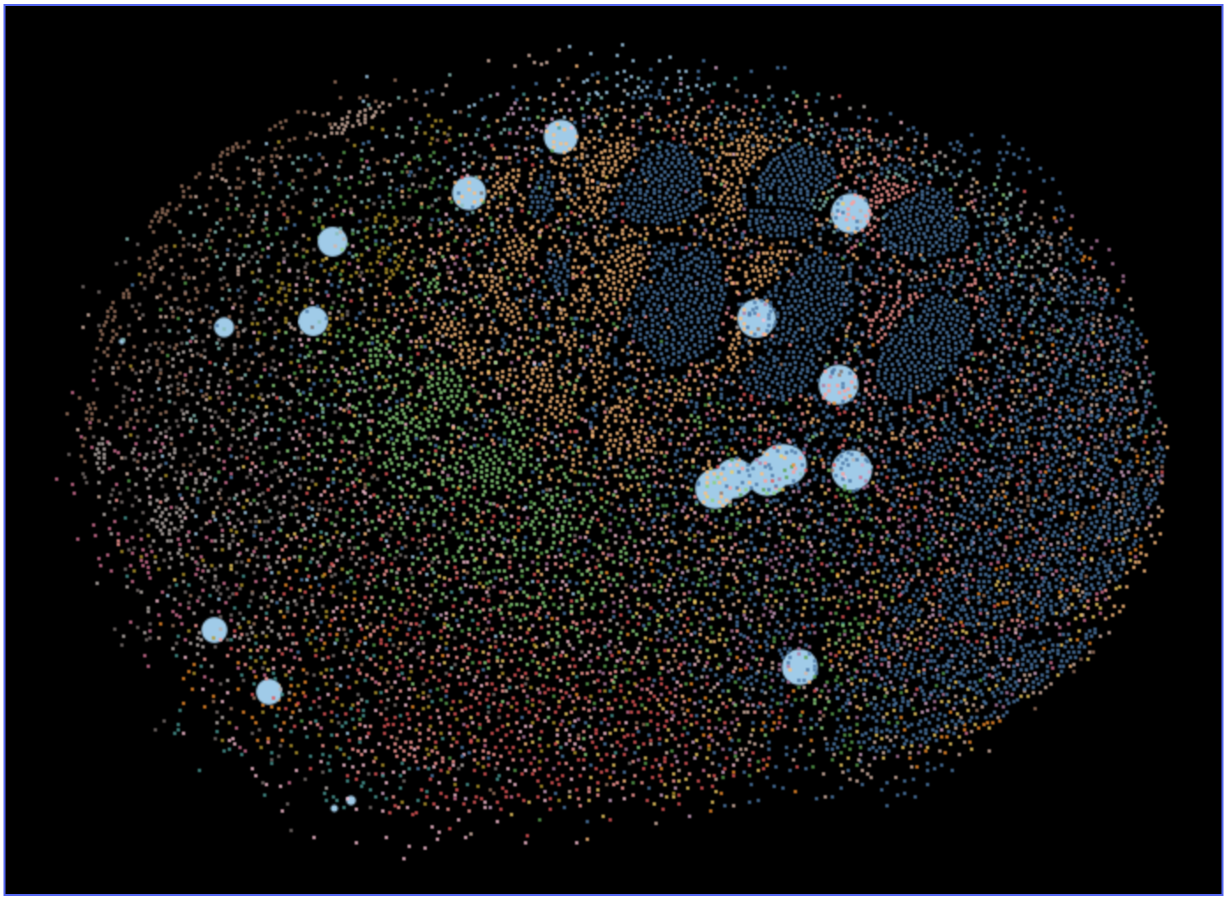
The operation discussed in this report revolves around a core group of 19 Gab and 10 Gettr accounts. We analyzed the follower and following networks of these accounts in order to understand the key structural characteristics of the audience the actors cultivated on those platforms. For each network, we describe the audience's size, average followership of the assets, and the degree of reciprocal relationships at varying levels of connectedness.

Our investigation of the operation's activity on Gab identified a primary network of 19 accounts - five accounts previously attributed to NAEBC and 14 additional accounts that display near-identical posting patterns, content promotion, and highly correlated network behavior.

While a simple tally of the assets' follower counts at the time of investigation totaled just over 93k, the actual size of the network's entire audience is considerably smaller, coming in at just over 33k unique accounts connected by around 195,000 links (arcs). On average, each asset has around 5k followers but follows just under 10k accounts, nearing the Gab-imposed limit for non-pro users. This suggests the actors may engage in the practice of mass following - topping out near the platform-imposed limit – in order to elicit "follow backs" from other Gab users.

Our network analysis shows the operation has cultivated a core group of thousands of interlocking following relationships on Gab, building an audience of largely authentic users. About 15,200 users follow two or more actor-linked accounts, 5,700 follow five or more, and 2,200 follow 10 or more. These numbers do not differ greatly when examining mutuals (accounts that follow each other). About 13,000 Gab users are engaged in reciprocal following relationships with two or more actor-linked accounts, around 5,000 follow and are following at least five, and around 2,000 share follower/following relationships with at least 10.

Regarding follower relationships between actor-linked accounts, the median asset is connected to three of the 19 accounts we identified in the operation. This pattern of relationships may indicate the operators want to create interlocking ties between assets but have not attempted to create a maximally connected network, possibly in an effort to avoid detection.



Map of the follower network on Gab, showing all users connected to two or more accounts in the operation. Node size corresponds to number of followers. Color represents cluster affiliation as determined by follower relationships.

On Gettr, our investigation identified a primary network of 10 accounts that exhibit the same behavior patterns described above and also show connections to operation assets on Gab, such as using the same user names and profile pictures, coordinated posting, and identical creation dates. The network's audience on Gettr is larger than on Gab but less dense. In total, the 10 accounts have a total audience of around 62.1k followers, the bulk of which only follow one of the assets.

On average, the actor-linked accounts on Gettr have around 8.3k followers and follow 4.8k accounts. In contrast to Gab, this Gettr network is dominated by a single account - the Kid Rock "fan page" (51.2k followers) - whose audience outstrips the other assets by tens of thousands of followers.

The network on Gettr is far less dense than on Gab. About 12,400 users follow two or more of the actor-linked accounts, 1,000 follow five or more, and no users follow 10 or more. Bidirectional follower/following relationships are also more sparse: around 5,600 users follow and are followed by two or more actor-linked accounts, fewer than 100 follow and are followed by at least five, and no users share follow/follower relationships with all of the assets. Lastly, the accounts in the operation on Gettr are less likely to follow each other. Of the 10 accounts we identified on Gettr, only seven follow or are followed by another account in the operation.

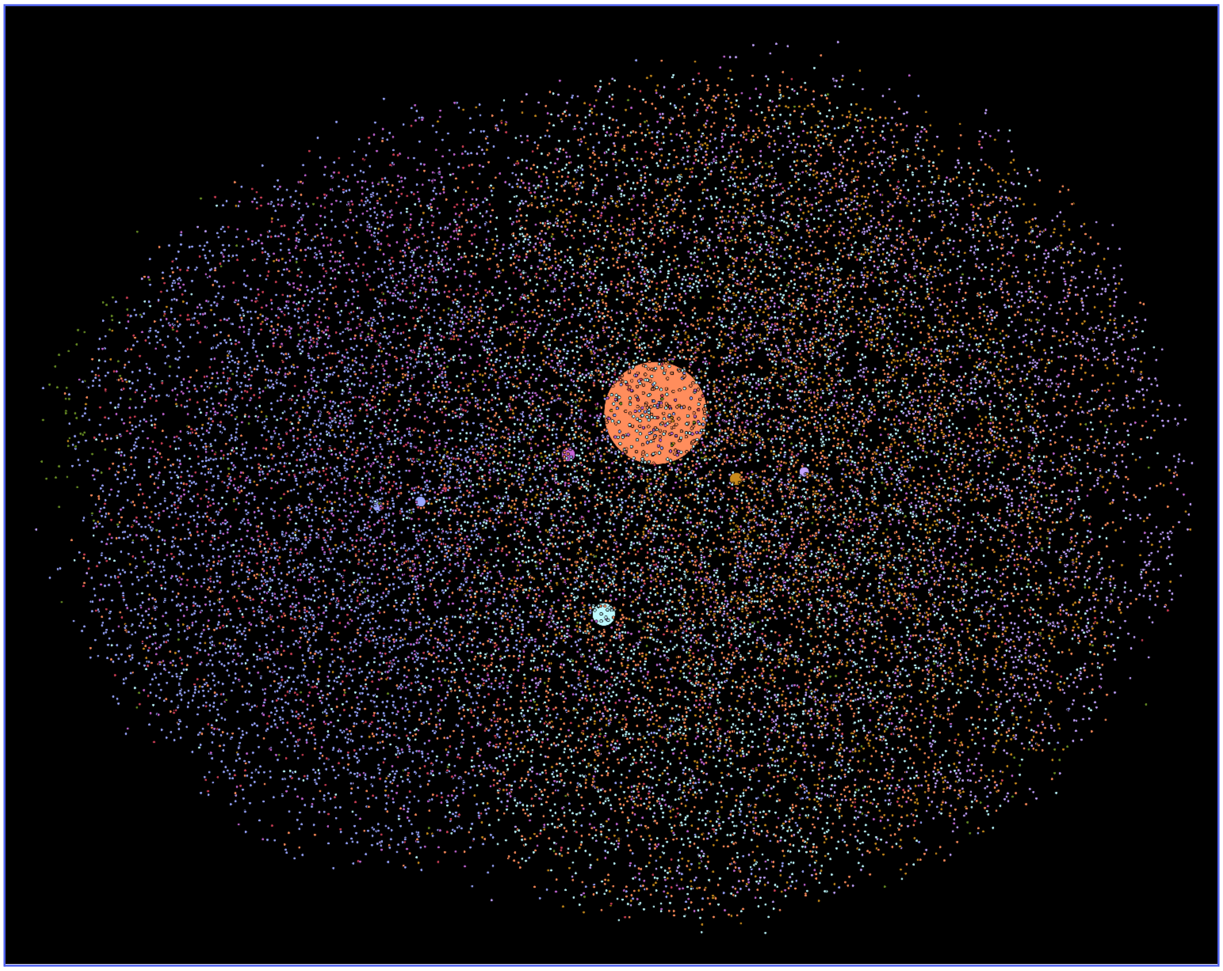


Image of the follower network on Gettr showing all users connected to two or more accounts in the operation. Node size corresponds to number of followers. Color represents cluster affiliation as determined by follower relationships.

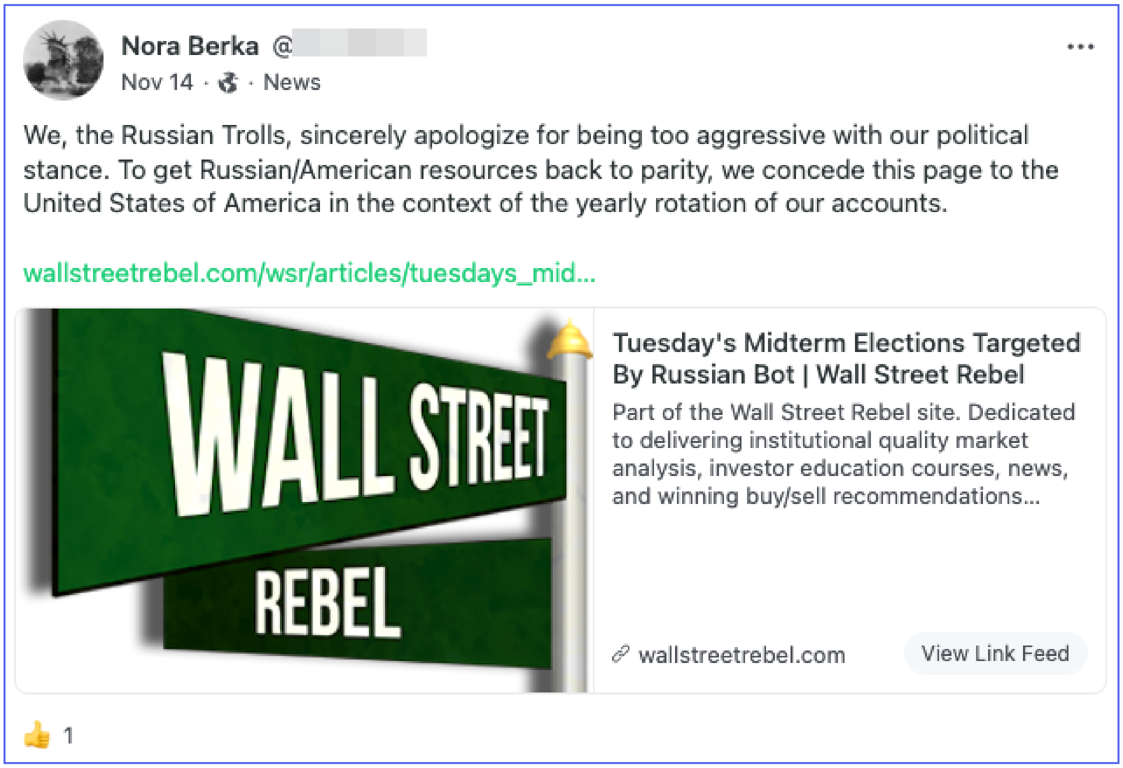
Behaviors

Meta Trolling

As discussed previously, we assess the actors behind this operation engaged in a deliberate effort to capitalize on public concerns about foreign interference in U.S. elections - a recurring IRA tactic known as “perception hacking.”

Most notably, following media reporting on a part of this network’s activity ahead of the U.S. midterms, which included naming some of the operation’s personas, multiple assets posted identical statements between Nov. 12-29 “outing” themselves as “Russian trolls.” This included accounts previously-attributed to NAEBC, as well as newly-identified accounts that were not named in the media coverage, and received minimal reaction from authentic online users.

These posts followed widely-reported comments by Yevgeny Prigozhin, who has previously denied U.S. allegations of orchestrating IRA operations but claimed in November to be successfully interfering in the U.S. midterms. Prigozhin did not cite any evidence to support his claims of success, and his comments and the subsequent behavior of accounts in the network closely mirror past "meta trolling" activity by IRA-linked actors. In 2018, for example, the IRA created a website shortly before the U.S. midterms, claiming to expose a network of accounts they were using on Instagram to swing the vote.



Nora Berka @[redacted]

Nov 14 · · News

We, the Russian Trolls, sincerely apologize for being too aggressive with our political stance. To get Russian/American resources back to parity, we concede this page to the United States of America in the context of the yearly rotation of our accounts.

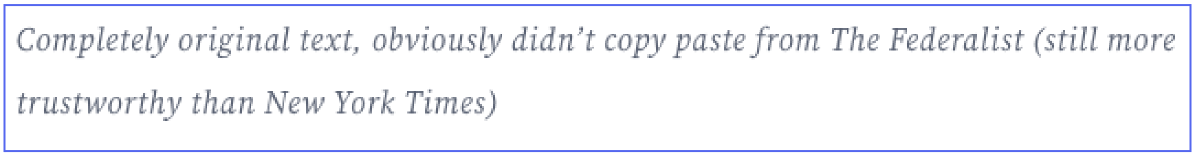
wallstreetrebel.com/wsr/articles/tuesdays_mid...

Tuesday's Midterm Elections Targeted By Russian Bot | Wall Street Rebel

Part of the Wall Street Rebel site. Dedicated to delivering institutional quality market analysis, investor education courses, news, and winning buy/sell recommendations...

An "admission" statement posted by Nora Berka, a persona previously attributed to NAEBC

We also observed sarcastic disclaimers that the text in posts and articles shared by network assets was copied from other outlets, a possible reference to previous tactics employed by the same actors to avoid English-language grammar and syntax errors. On the website electiontruth[.]net, for instance, which Record Future has linked to IRA actors, at least two articles ironically deny that the text was copied from unaffiliated media outlets.



Completely original text, obviously didn't copy paste from The Federalist (still more trustworthy than New York Times)

Text at the bottom of an electiontruth[.]net article copied from The Federalist

Masked as a Minuteman

As seen in past IRA-linked operations, the actors behind this activity use fake personas to pose as members of the community they are attempting to infiltrate and influence. The Kid Rock "fan page" accounts were by far the most successful in this regard, building a large follower base and reportedly viewed online as genuine Kid Rock accounts. However, we also identified other personas presenting as authentic right-wing users on Gab, Getter, Parler, and Truth Social.

These accounts typically embraced themes popular with conservative audiences, such as freedom, patriotism, and loyalty. Others presented as overtly anti-left-wing personas, using vulgar variations of "Joe Biden" as their screen names. Echoing the Kid Rock pages, one account on Gettr posed as a fan of actor and film director Mel Gibson, who has been widely criticized for his reportedly antisemitic views.

Additionally, we observed assets in the network that appear to mimic specific groups within the broader right-wing online community. One account on Gab, for instance, purports to be a supporter of far-right militias, using a name referencing the Minutemen and a handle that references the Oath Keepers. Another claims to be a Black member of the Republican party, displaying a profile picture of former President Donald Trump and the American eagle, and calling on "Ignorant leftist, (esp black leftists) … to follow for emancipation from the democratic mental slavery."

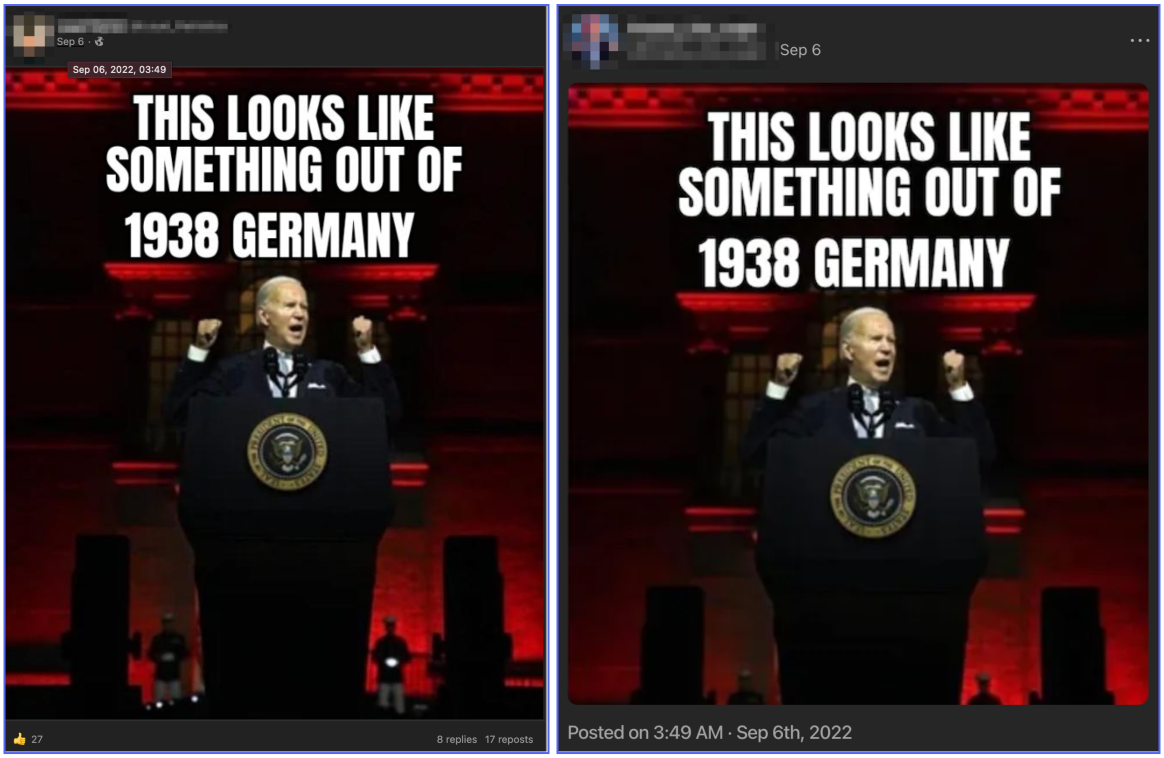
Profile pictures used by network accounts posing as a supporter of far-right militia groups (left) and a Black supporter of former President Donald Trump (right)

Cross Platform & Coordinated

Assets in the network exhibit clear and repeated signs of coordination, including near-simultaneous posting and the use of identical images and media links across accounts and platforms. Often, one or more assets will publish posts containing the same text, image, or website link within minutes of each other.

In three cases, we identified pairs of “sibling” assets on Gab and Gettr that consistently mirror each other’s posting activity, despite sometimes adopting seemingly incongruent personas. One pair split across Gab and Gettr is made up of an account that identifies as “Pro White - 100% antisemitic” and another using the persona of a Black Trump supporter.

We observed this type of coordination between newly-discovered assets and accounts previously attributed to NAEBC. This is clearly shown in the below heat charts, which display posting times by four accounts in the network. All four accounts posted almost exclusively between 09:00 - 16:00 UTC (04:00 - 11:00 EST) Monday to Friday, atypical behavior for authentic internet users based in the U.S. Similar behavior is exhibited by nearly every other account in the network.



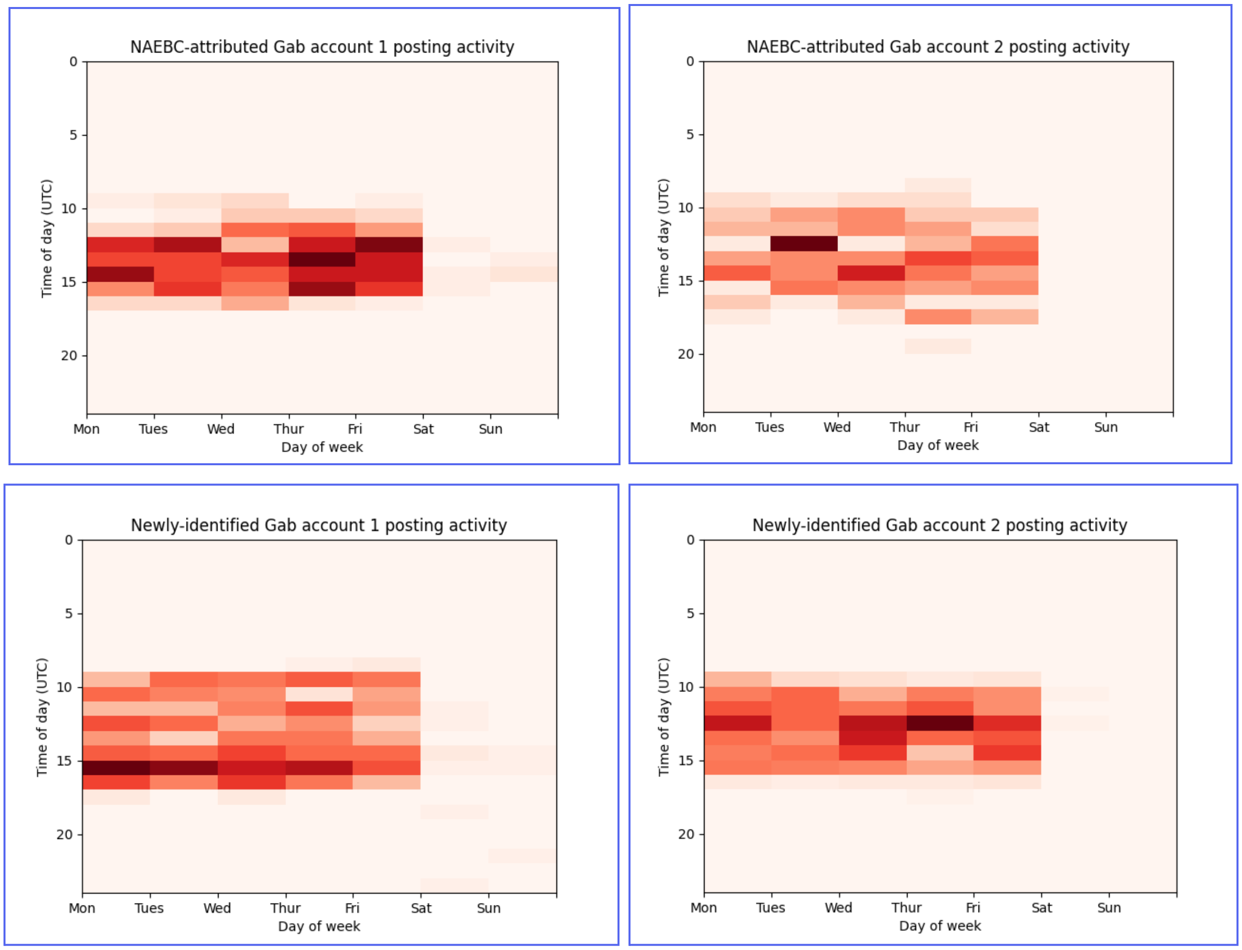
[redacted]
Sep 6 ·
Sep 06, 2022, 03:49

27
8 replies 17 reposts

[redacted]
Sep 6

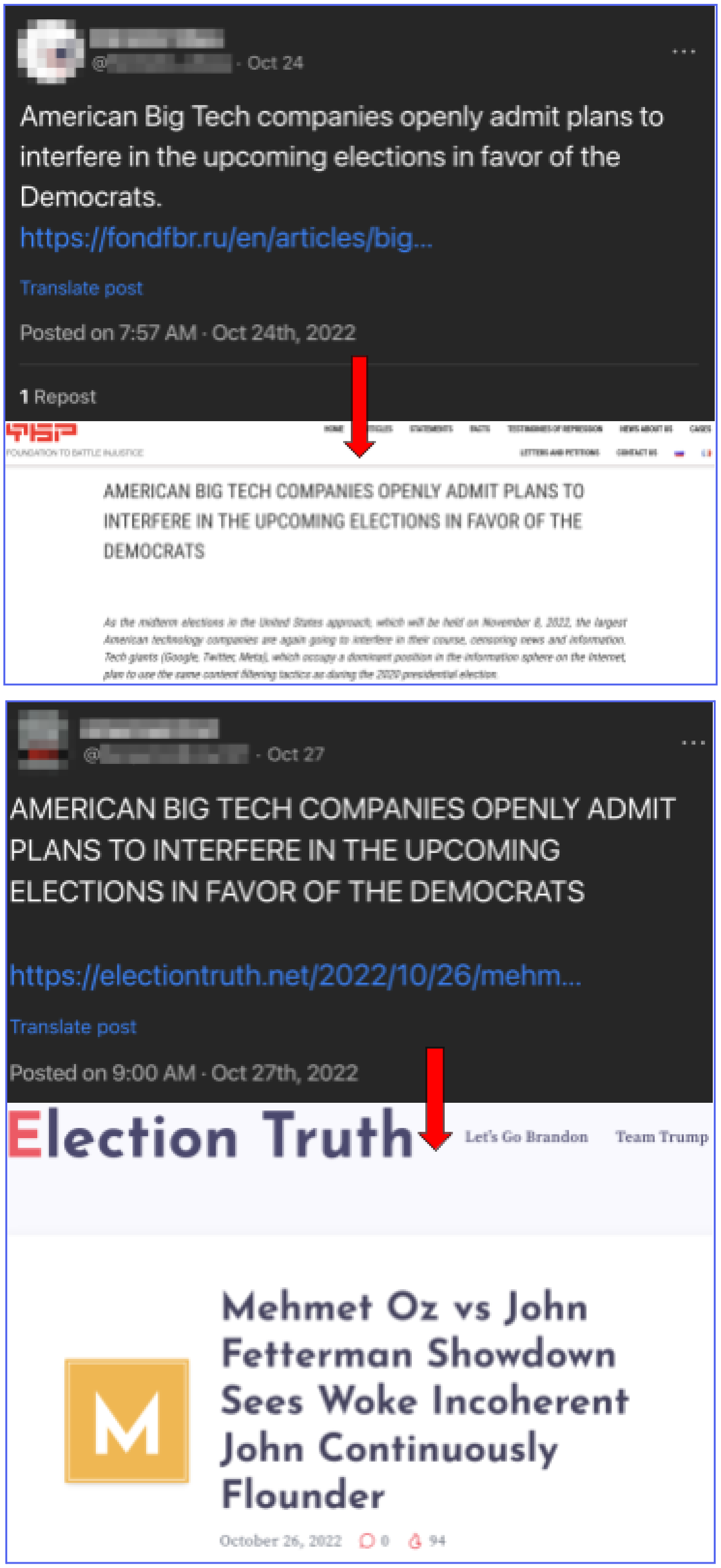
Posted on 3:49 AM · Sep 6th, 2022

Identical images posted to Gab (left) and Gettr (right) by two assets within seconds of each other on Sept. 6, 2022



Heat charts showing posting activity by four Gab accounts in the network. Note the significant overlap in peak activity periods (09:00 - 16:00 UTC, Monday - Friday)

At times, the actors appear to have attempted to obfuscate this coordination by posting identical content across multiple accounts over a period of hours or days rather than in close succession. In October 2022, for instance, two accounts shared an identical passage of text about “American Big Tech companies” interfering in the U.S. 2022 midterms in two posts made three days apart. In the first of these posts, the text aligns with the headline of a linked article from the “Foundation to Battle Injustice.” In the second, the account operator links to an unrelated article from electiontruth[.]net, possibly by mistake.



[redacted]
@[redacted] · Oct 24

American Big Tech companies openly admit plans to interfere in the upcoming elections in favor of the Democrats.
https://fondfbr.ru/en/articles/big...

Translate post

Posted on 7:57 AM · Oct 24th, 2022

1 Repost

AMERICAN BIG TECH COMPANIES OPENLY ADMIT PLANS TO INTERFERE IN THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS IN FAVOR OF THE DEMOCRATS

As the midterm elections in the United States approach, which will be held on November 8, 2022, the largest American technology companies are again going to interfere in their course, censoring news and information. Tech giants (Google, Twitter, Meta), which occupy a dominant position in the information sphere on the Internet, plan to use the same content filtering tactics as during the 2020 presidential election.

[redacted]
@[redacted] · Oct 27

AMERICAN BIG TECH COMPANIES OPENLY ADMIT PLANS TO INTERFERE IN THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS IN FAVOR OF THE DEMOCRATS

https://electiontruth.net/2022/10/26/mehm...

Translate post

Posted on 9:00 AM · Oct 27th, 2022

Mehmet Oz vs John Fetterman Showdown Sees Woke Incoherent John Continuously Flounder

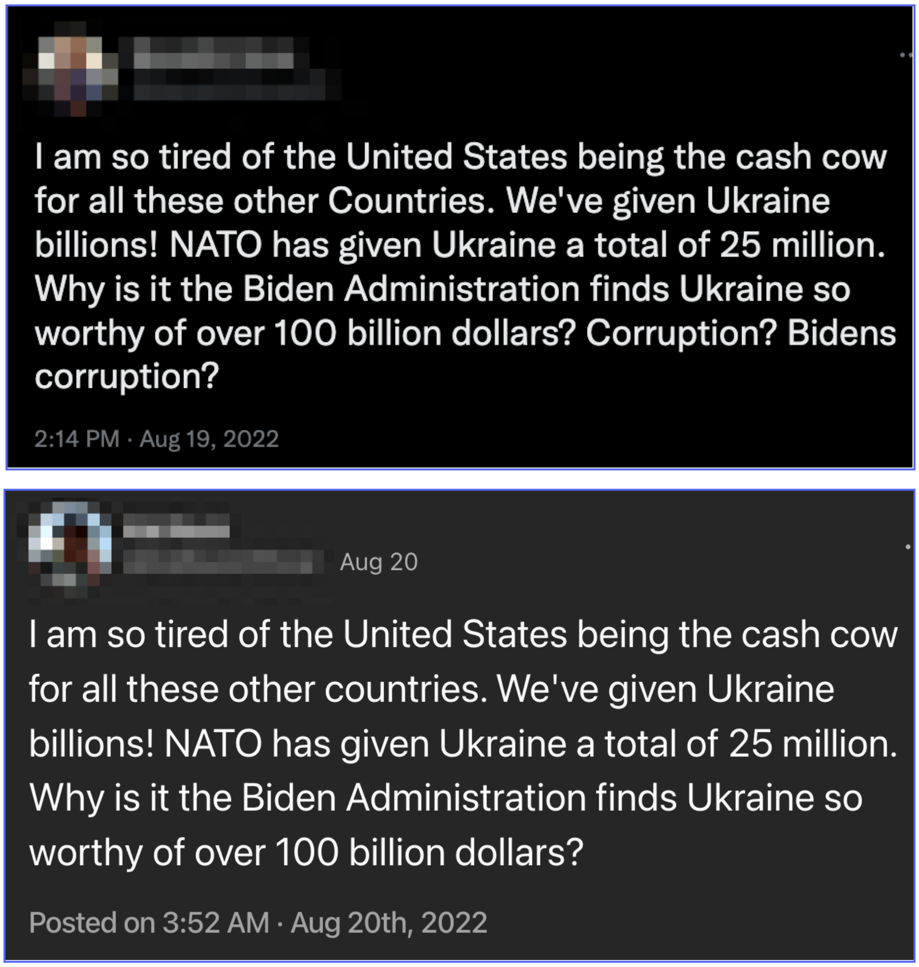
October 26, 2022 0 94

Two posts by network assets on Gettr with the exact same text but linking to different articles three days apart

Copy & Paste

Assets in the network consistently repurpose content from elsewhere on the internet, typically without giving credit to the original posters. On Gab, Gettr, and Truth Social, for example, accounts operated by the actors often post text that appears to have been plagiarized from unconnected users on Twitter. And in at least one instance, one of the Kid Rock fan page accounts posted a text passage about an alleged "sprawling network of secret biological labs" in Ukraine that was copied verbatim from an earlier article by Russian state media outlet RT.

On the website electiontruth[.]net, which is repeatedly shared by assets in the network, articles are often lifted wholesale from authentic right-wing media outlets such as the Gateway Pundit and the Washington Examiner, sometimes with a sarcastic editor's note denying this has happened.



[redacted]

I am so tired of the United States being the cash cow for all these other Countries. We've given Ukraine billions! NATO has given Ukraine a total of 25 million. Why is it the Biden Administration finds Ukraine so worthy of over 100 billion dollars? Corruption? Bidens corruption?

2:14 PM · Aug 19, 2022

[redacted] Aug 20

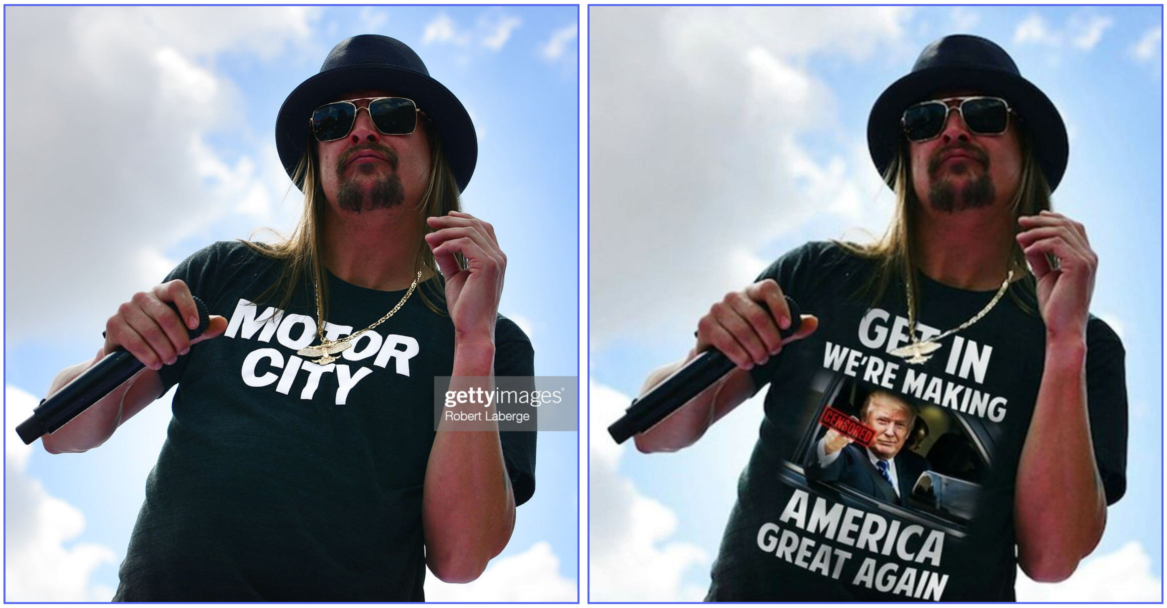
I am so tired of the United States being the cash cow for all these other countries. We've given Ukraine billions! NATO has given Ukraine a total of 25 million. Why is it the Biden Administration finds Ukraine so worthy of over 100 billion dollars?

Posted on 3:52 AM · Aug 20th, 2022

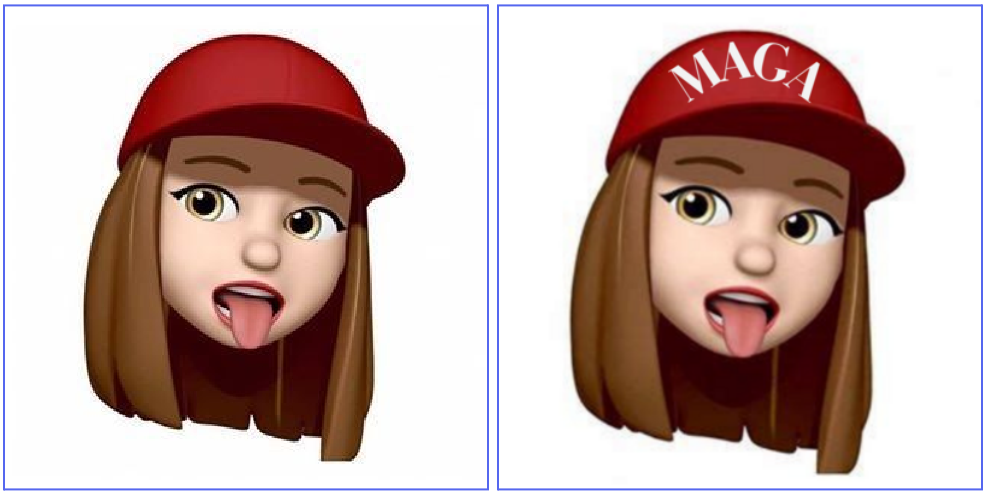
An Aug. 19, 2022, Twitter post by an unconnected user (top) that was partially copied by a network asset the next day (bottom)

The actors also repurpose images from publicly-available sources as profile pictures for their accounts. The Kid Rock fan page accounts all use an image of the singer performing at the Daytona 500 motor race which has been edited to add a pro-Trump slogan to his t-shirt. Similarly, another account which presents as a female Trump supporter uses an Apple Memoji avatar that has very likely been altered to add "MAGA" to its baseball cap.

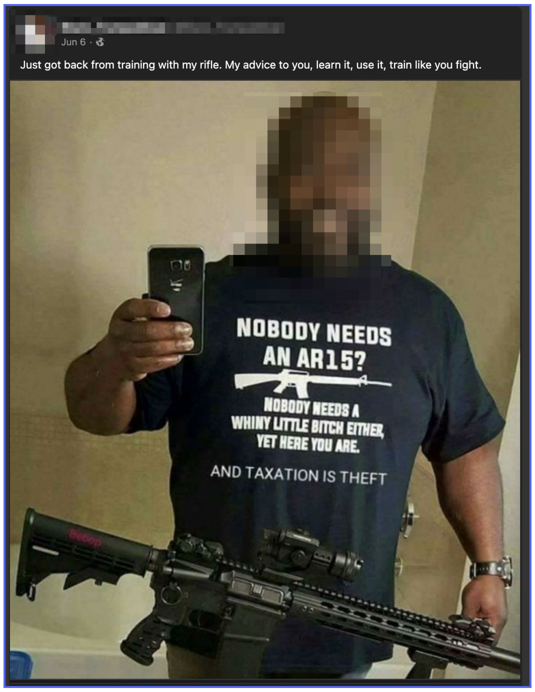
Furthermore, the Black Trump supporter persona has posted a photo of a Black man posing with an AR15 assault rifle, which the account implies shows its operator after visiting a shooting range. The original image was first posted online over six years ago and was subsequently edited by unknown internet users to include an anti-taxation slogan on the man's t-shirt.



Left: Original image of Kid Rock at the 57th Annual Daytona 500. Right: The edited image subsequently used by the Kid Rock fan page accounts on Gab, Gettr, and Truth Social

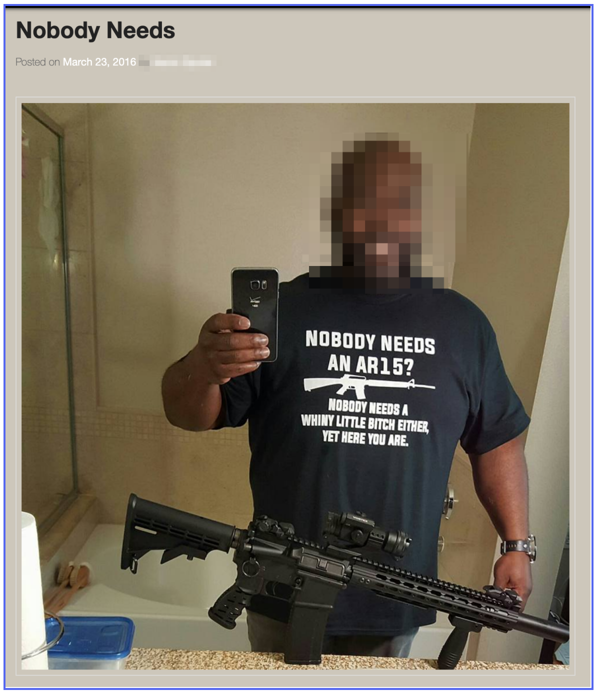


Left: Original Apple Memoji found on Pinterest. Right: An altered version of the Memoji used by network assets on Gab and Gettr



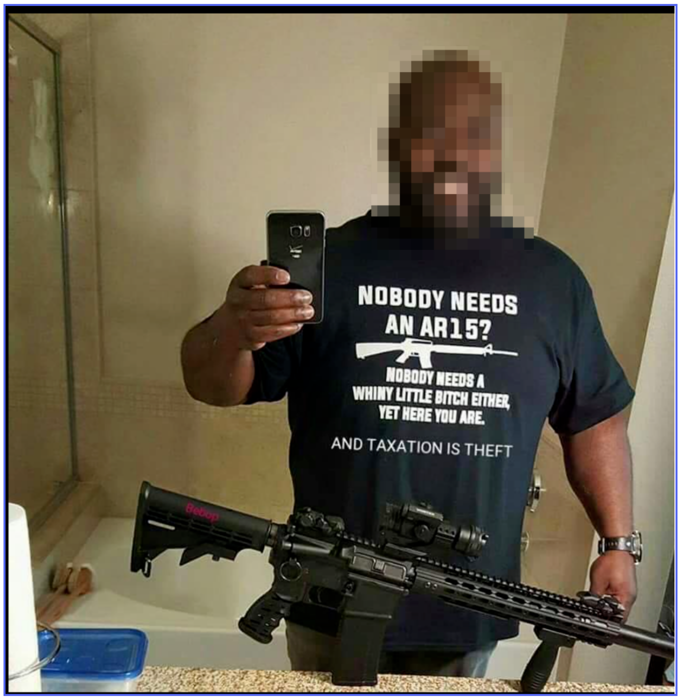
[redacted]
Jun 6 ·

Just got back from training with my rifle. My advice to you, learn it, use it, train like you fight.



Nobody Needs

Posted on March 23, 2016 [redacted]



Top left: A post by a network asset implying its operator is the man in the image. Top right: First occurrence of the image online, from 2016. Bottom: First occurrence of the image in 2016 with "AND TAXATION IS THEFT" added to the t-shirt.

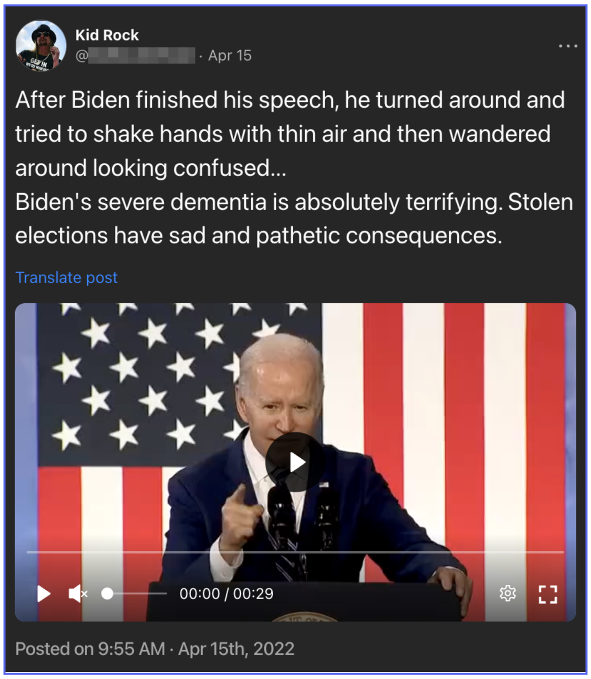
Content Analysis

We analyzed content posted by assets in the network between January 2021 and December, 2022, surfacing several distinct narratives in the run-up to, and during, the 2022 U.S. midterm elections. As discussed in the behaviors section, much of the content shared by the operation is either text copied from unconnected social media users without attribution, or screenshots of social media posts on other platforms.

Broadly, content posted by the operation promotes Russian state interests and attempts to undermine U.S. public support for Ukraine, criticizes left-wing politicians and cultural figures, and expresses support for right-wing politicians, especially Republican candidates who have questioned or cast doubt on the result of the 2020 U.S. presidential election.

It is important to note, however, that we have previously seen the same actors amplify narratives from left-wing voices, as part of a long-standing pattern of behavior in which they play both sides of the U.S. political divide. In 2020, for instance, IRA-linked actors created a fake left-wing media outlet that promoted narratives critical of right-wing and center-left politicians, highlighted alleged U.S. human rights abuses, and railed against capitalism. In 2016, the IRA posed as Black Lives Matter activists to exacerbate online tensions over racial injustice in the U.S and promote Russian state interests, such as support for Moscow's military intervention in Syria.

We have no evidence to suggest that any group or individual who was promoted by the actors or shared their content is aware of, or complicit in, the activity detailed in this report.



Kid Rock
@[redacted] · Apr 15

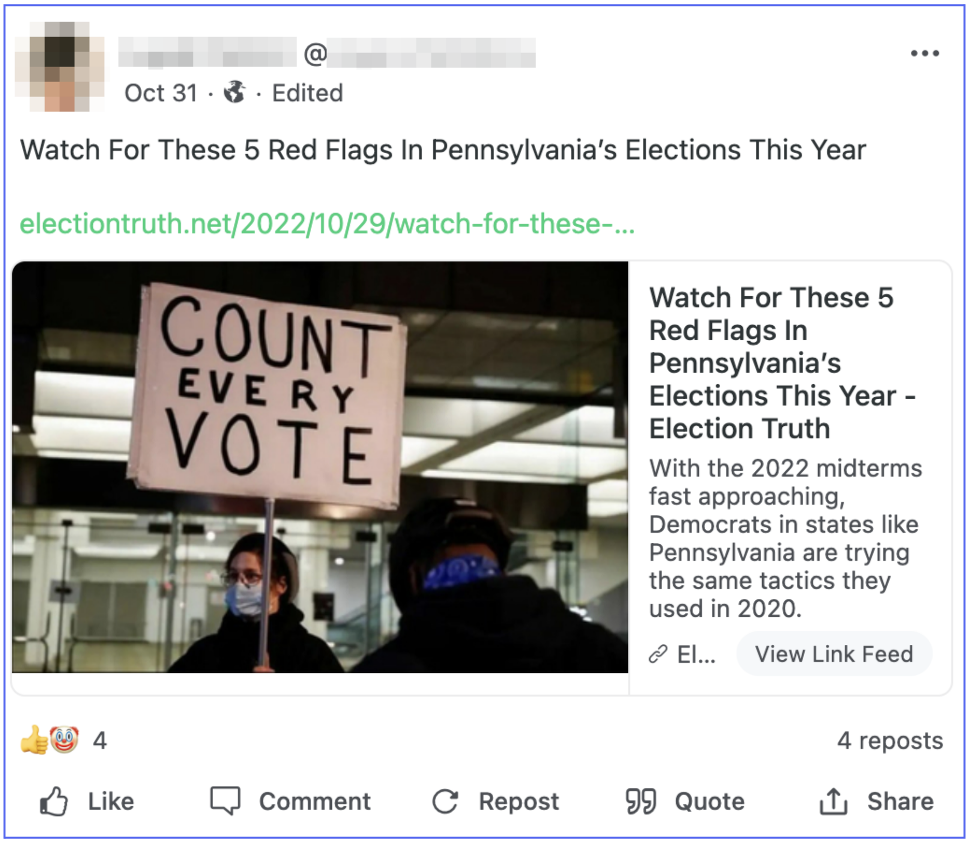
After Biden finished his speech, he turned around and tried to shake hands with thin air and then wandered around looking confused...
Biden's severe dementia is absolutely terrifying. Stolen elections have sad and pathetic consequences.

Posted on 9:55 AM · Apr 15th, 2022

Post by a network asset on Gettr criticizing President Joe Biden and casting doubt on the result of the 2020 U.S. election

#VoterFraud

Accounts in the network promoted a range of narratives about alleged electoral fraud in U.S. elections, both before and after the 2022 midterms. Prior to Nov. 8, posts raised concerns that voting in the midterms would be rigged against right-wing candidates, calling on users to monitor polling stations and “watch for red flags.” Subsequently, the accounts reacted to a better-than-expected showing by the Democratic Party by questioning the validity of the vote. “Republicans start off winning, end up losing, slow count every time. Coincidence?” asked one of the Kid Rock fan page accounts shortly after the election.



[redacted] @[redacted]

Oct 31 · · Edited

Watch For These 5 Red Flags In Pennsylvania’s Elections This Year

electiontruth.net/2022/10/29/watch-for-these-...

Watch For These 5 Red Flags In Pennsylvania’s Elections This Year - Election Truth

With the 2022 midterms fast approaching, Democrats in states like Pennsylvania are trying the same tactics they used in 2020.

El... View Link Feed

4 4 reposts

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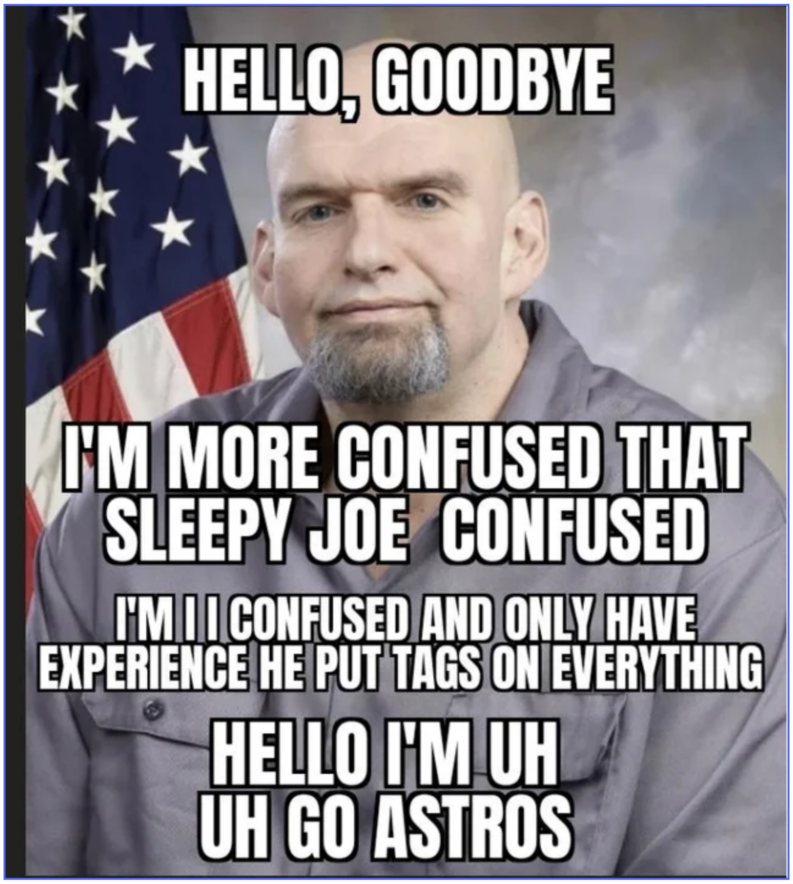
A network asset on Gab shares an article from electiontruth[.]net telling users to watch for ‘red flags’ in Pennsylvania

Denigrating Democrats

In the run-up to the 2022 midterms, accounts in the network consistently denigrated Democratic candidates, particularly focusing on those in Pennsylvania, Georgia, New York, and Ohio.

Pennsylvania Democratic Senate candidate John Fetterman, for instance, was regularly criticized as unfit for office, with posts highlighting his state of health and faltering performance during a televised debate. Often, the accounts attempt to draw comparisons between Fetterman and President Joe Biden, who they consistently depict as old and senile.

In another tight race in Georgia, the accounts accused Democratic candidate Raphael Warnock of being a "wife beater" and stoking a "race war," while his fellow party candidate Stacey Abrams was portrayed as an overly progressive "woke" politician intent on defunding the police.

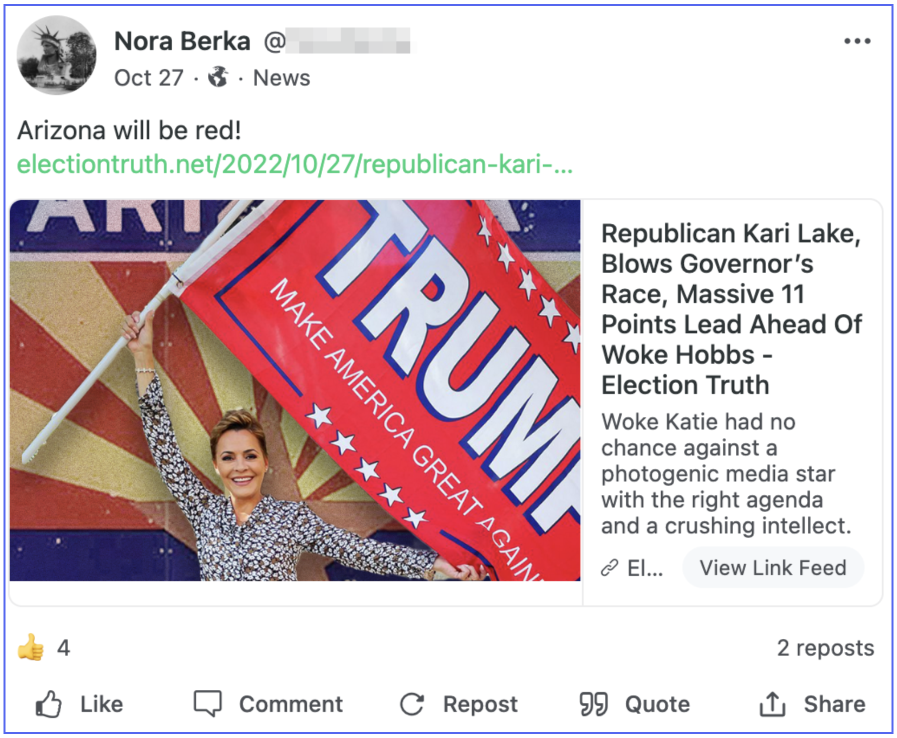

HELLO, GOODBYE
I'M MORE CONFUSED THAT SLEEPY JOE CONFUSED
I'M I I CONFUSED AND ONLY HAVE EXPERIENCE HE PUT TAGS ON EVERYTHING
HELLO I'M UH UH GO ASTROS

A meme shared by accounts in the network mocking Democratic Senate candidate John Fetterman

Promoting Republicans

As well as criticizing Democrats ahead of the midterms, the operation consistently promoted their Republican rivals, repeating widespread assertions that right-wing candidates would perform well at the polls. In early November, for instance, multiple accounts in the network shared the same article from electiontuth[.]net reporting a "massive 18-point lead" for the Republicans alongside the image of a red wave sweeping through Washington, D.C.

All of the Republican figures promoted by the network were candidates endorsed by former President Trump who have questioned or cast doubt on the results of the U.S. 2020 election. Prominent among those was Arizona gubernatorial candidate Kari Lake, who the accounts predicted would easily defeat her "woke" Democratic opponent and "make Arizona red." One network asset on Gab even styled itself as a Kari Lake "war room" and following her defeat has spread claims that the election was rigged.



Nora Berka @[redacted]

Oct 27 · · News

Arizona will be red!

electiontruth.net/2022/10/27/republican-kari-...

Republican Kari Lake, Blows Governor's Race, Massive 11 Points Lead Ahead Of Woke Hobbs - Election Truth

Woke Katie had no chance against a photogenic media star with the right agenda and a crushing intellect.

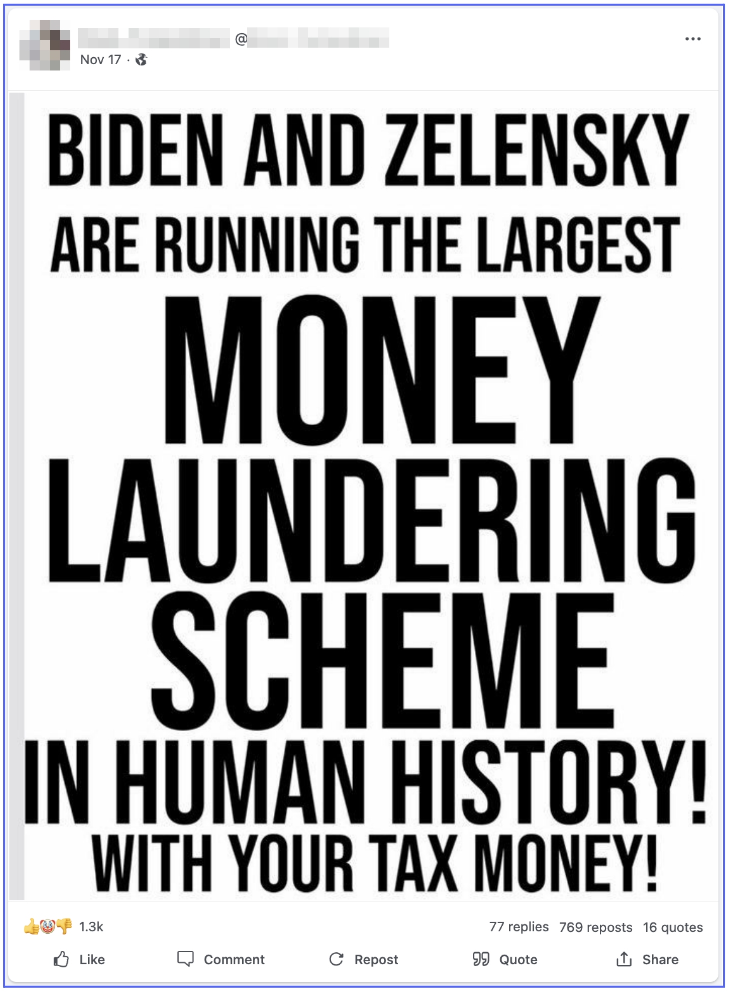
A network asset on Gab shares an electiontruth[.]net article supporting Kari Lake with the comment "Arizona will be red!"

Image used to illustrate multiple electiontruth[.]net articles shared by the network to express support for Republican candidates in the 2022 U.S. midterms

Cheerleaders for Putin

In addition to posting about U.S. politics, the operation notably focuses on Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Content shared by the accounts is uniformly supportive of Russian President Vladimir Putin while seeking to undermine U.S. public support for Ukraine and portray President Volodymyr Zelenskiy as a far-right extremist who is embezzling money sent by Western allies.

One prominent anti-Ukraine narrative in recent weeks concerns the collapse of cryptocurrency exchange FTX, which accounts in the network have alleged was funded by Ukraine using the money it received from the U.S. and other allies to support its war effort against Russia. Some posts go on to allege that money given to FTX by officials in Kyiv was then passed on to Democratic candidates.



[redacted] @[redacted]
Nov 17 ·

BIDEN AND ZELENSKY ARE RUNNING THE LARGEST MONEY LAUNDERING SCHEME IN HUMAN HISTORY! WITH YOUR TAX MONEY!

1.3k

77 replies 769 reposts 16 quotes

Post by a Gab account in the network claiming Presidents Biden and Zelenskiy are complicit in a money laundering scheme

Lastly, accounts in the network regularly use the hashtag #PutinsFault, part of a meme that mocks people who blame things on Russia to deflect from their own culpability. One post on Gab, for instance, copied a tweet from an unconnected Twitter user about Biden catching COVID-19 and added the text "Can't wait to start him [sic] blaming Putin #Putinsfault." This echoes previous memes used by IRA-linked accounts to deride media coverage about Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

Graphika

***Graphika** is an intelligence company that maps the world's online communities and conversations. Graphika helps partners worldwide, including Fortune 500 companies, Silicon Valley, human rights organizations, and universities, discover how communities form online and understand the flow of information and influence within large-scale social networks. Customers rely on Graphika for a unique, network-first approach to the global online landscape.*

Stanford | Internet Observatory
Cyber Policy Center

***The Stanford Internet Observatory** (SIO) is a cross-disciplinary program of research, teaching and policy engagement for the study of abuse in current information technologies, with a focus on social media. The Stanford Internet Observatory was founded in 2019 to research the misuse of the internet to cause harm, formulate technical and policy responses, and teach the next generation how to avoid the mistakes of the past.*

Graphika

Stanford | Internet Observatory
Cyber Policy Center