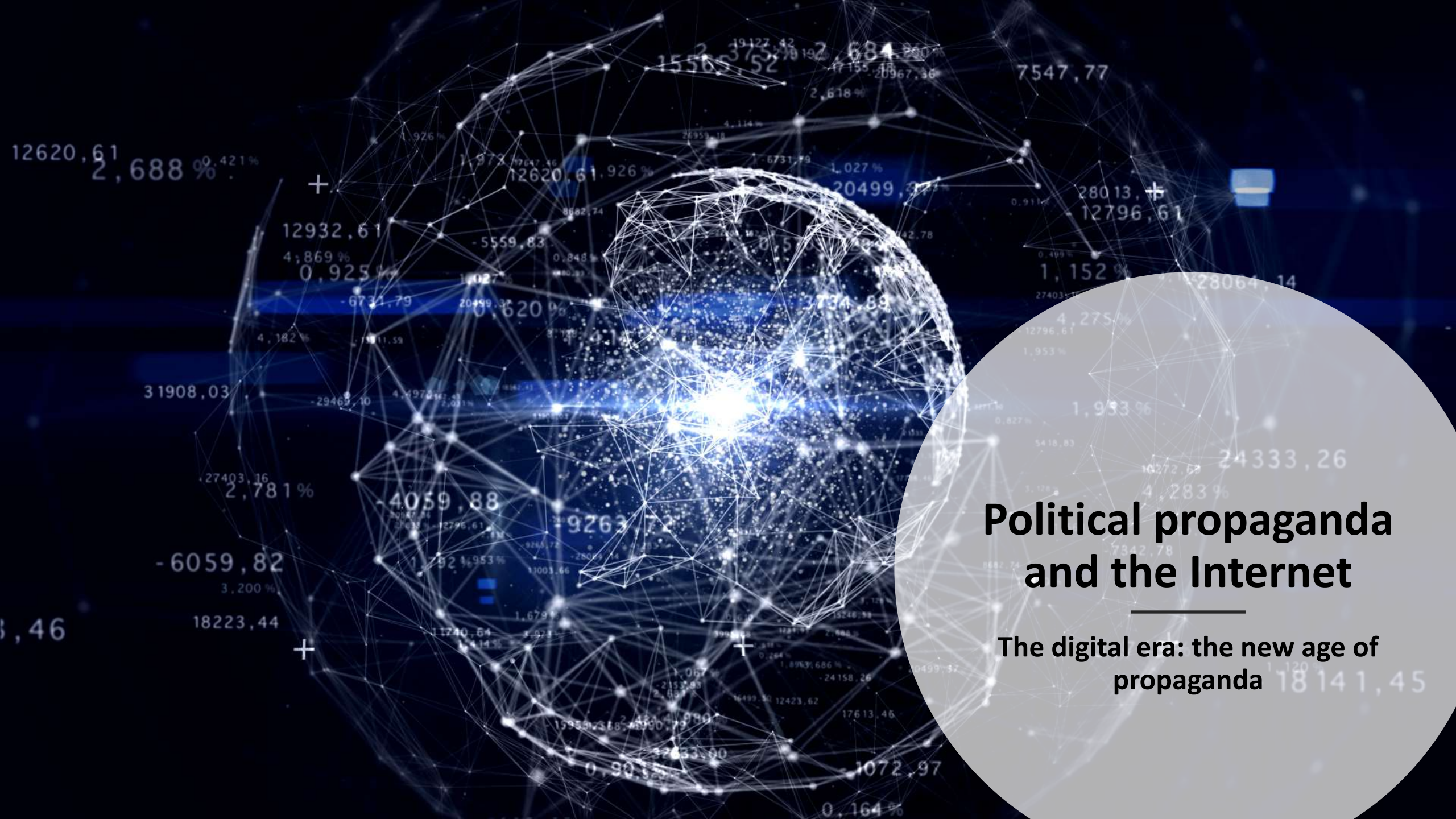




Political propaganda in the digital era

Russia's specialty



Political propaganda and the Internet

The digital era: the new age of
propaganda

It is all about **intent**

Misinformation

Misinformation: spreading false information without the intent to mislead

Disinformation

Disinformation: false information disseminated in a hostile act of tactical political subversion



The digital technology

The transformation of the
methods & techniques of
propaganda and mass
manipulation

A hand holding a smartphone displaying the Facebook logo, with the word 'facebook' blurred in the background.

facebook

2015: Facebook ahead of Google as a **main source of information**

THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

THE FILTER BUBBLE

What the Internet is
Hiding from You



'Astonishing'
Andrew Marr

'Explosive'
Chris Anderson

ELI PARISER



The “**Filter Bubble**” & the selective exposure to information

The state of **intellectual isolation** resulting from **personalized searches** (a website **algorithm** selectively guesses what a user would like to see based on information about the user)

The **algorithms**: a reflection of our choices (likes, shares, comments...

The principles of **similarity, conformity & selective exposure**



Paul Lazarsfeld

Selective exposure

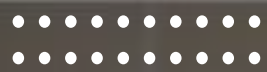
Our tendency to favor information which reinforces our pre-existing beliefs while avoiding other points of view

Trolling

Verbal violence towards someone who does not share our views until that someone decides to avoid online interactions

Violence encouraged on the Internet: someone who expresses his opinion deemed credible





“One of the attributes of the future war will be the confrontation over the information, because the information is becoming a weapon like missiles, bombs...”

Vladimir Slipchenko (1998)



White, grey & black propaganda

White propaganda: propaganda that does not hide its origin or nature

Russian media and their foreign networks
Sputnik (multimedia platform) & TV network *Russia Today*

Generously financed by the Russian state
To spread Russia's point of view



White, gray & black propaganda

Gray propaganda: propaganda that does not identify its source – The objective: to advance Russia's viewpoints while concealing the source to convince a broader audience

Black propaganda: false information that is supposed to be from a source on one side of a conflict when it is actually from the opposite side



“Dark Posts”

Targeted negative Facebook posts: to spread ads highlighting Hillary Clinton’s 1996 comments about Black criminals

The objective: to stop African Americans from voting for Clinton in 2016



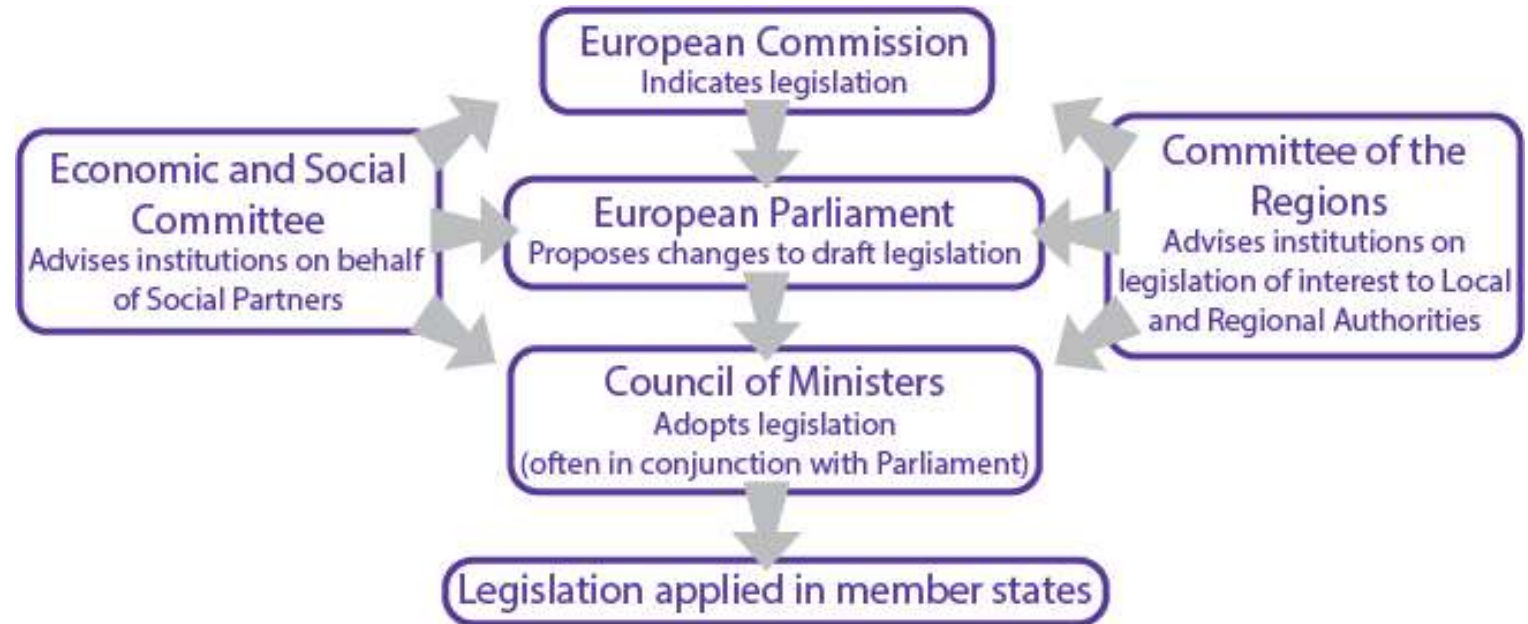
Targeting Europe

Putin's **growing animosity** against
the EU

The EU's **power of attraction**:
political stability, democracy &
standards of living



Collegiality



Qualified majority voting: mechanism used to take decisions without the need for unanimity (55% of member states & at least 65% of EU population represented within the EU Council)



Promoting **economic integration**
between Russia & Central Asia

Russia's central role

**2015: the creation of the Eurasian
Economic Union**



Europe's power of attraction

Russia's "near abroad"

The case of Ukraine





The **Orange Revolution**

(November 2004-January 2005)

Anti-corruption non-violent protests

Putin: an attempt by the West to destabilize Russia

Rapprochement Ukraine-European Union initiated



2013: EU-Ukraine Association Agreement

To facilitate economic & political cooperation between the EU & Ukraine

Under **Russian pressure**, Ukrainian president changed his mind days before the signing of the agreement

"Maidan" Revolution of 2014

Pro-Russian president forcefully removed from office

Putin denounces a "*fascist coup*" (March 2014)

"Russia reserves the right to use every available options, including military force"
(Putin)





SPERRT
DEN MÖRDERN
DIE KONTEN






A possible membership
to the EU?

A threat to Putin's authoritarian
regime

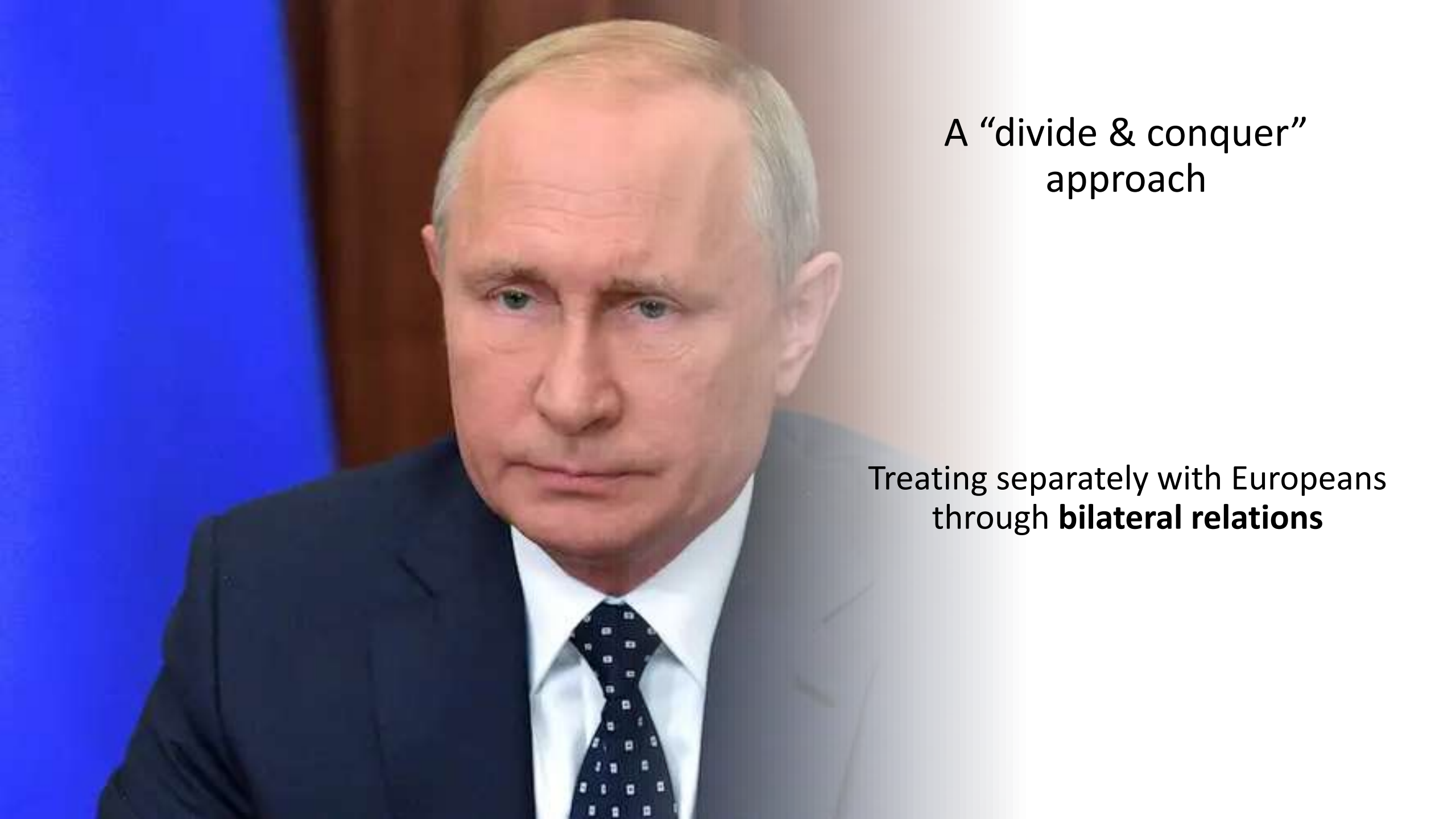


A portrait of Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia, looking slightly to the left. He is wearing a dark blue suit, a white shirt, and a dark tie with a small white pattern. The background is a blurred mix of blue and brown.

Europe's power of attraction
over Russia's "near abroad"

Disintegration of the Soviet Union
made irreversible

*"The collapse of the Soviet Union was
the **greatest geo-political catastrophe
of the century....**"*

A portrait of Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia, looking directly at the camera. He is wearing a dark blue suit, a white shirt, and a dark tie with a small white pattern. The background is a solid blue color.

A “divide & conquer”
approach

Treating separately with Europeans
through **bilateral relations**



Southern Europe



Moscow's favorite region of Europe
Eager to collaborate with the Kremlin

The Euro debt crisis of 2010: lower natural gas rates offered to Greece



“Middle Europe”

France & Germany: a **pragmatic**
approach

Conciliatory stance & determination
to preserve a good relationship with
Moscow

Little results





Northern Europe

The group of “realists”

Standing firm against Moscow

Scandinavia, Baltic States & Poland: a question of political & territorial survival

Moscow's repeated attempts to isolate the Baltic States & Poland

UK Votes Leave



Turnout  72.2%

Rejected ballots  26,033

BBC



Russia's meddling

Active participation – "Leave"
encouraged



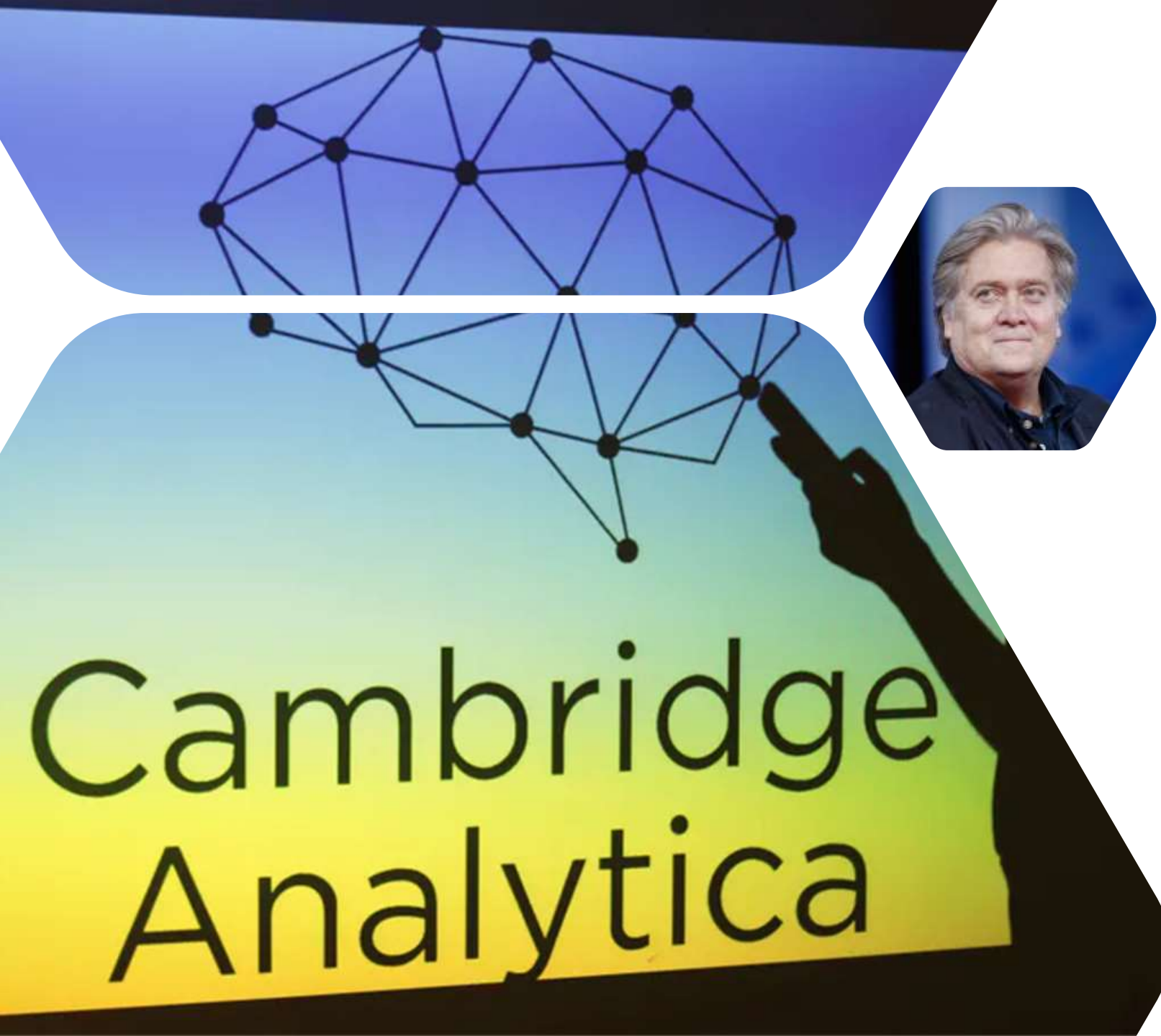


Alexander Yakovenko
(Russian ambassador to
Britain)

Alexander Udod (Russian
diplomat)



Arron Banks (prominent
Brexiteer): largest political
donation in British history
Close to the Kremlin (trade
opportunities)



Steve Bannon

Vice-President of
Cambridge Analytica
A specialist of *big data*

The background of the slide is a complex, abstract digital pattern. It features a dense network of glowing blue and purple lines, some straight and some curved, creating a sense of depth and movement. The lines appear to be data streams or network connections. In the center, there's a bright, almost white light source that radiates outwards, illuminating the surrounding lines. The overall effect is a futuristic, high-tech aesthetic.

Cyberspace

Set of digital data **stored** and **exchanged** within an information network



Big Data

A *data broker* (data suppliers): companies that collect data or buy it from other companies and roam through the Internet for useful information about users

A most lucrative industry (\$200 billion in revenue annually)



Obama presidential campaign (2012)

A *data broker* provided the Obama campaign 600 types of information on 140 million voters





The “Cave” (Chicago)

66 000 machines + a team of
50 data analysts

Data modelling & predictive
analytics

Focus on swing states
(probabilities)



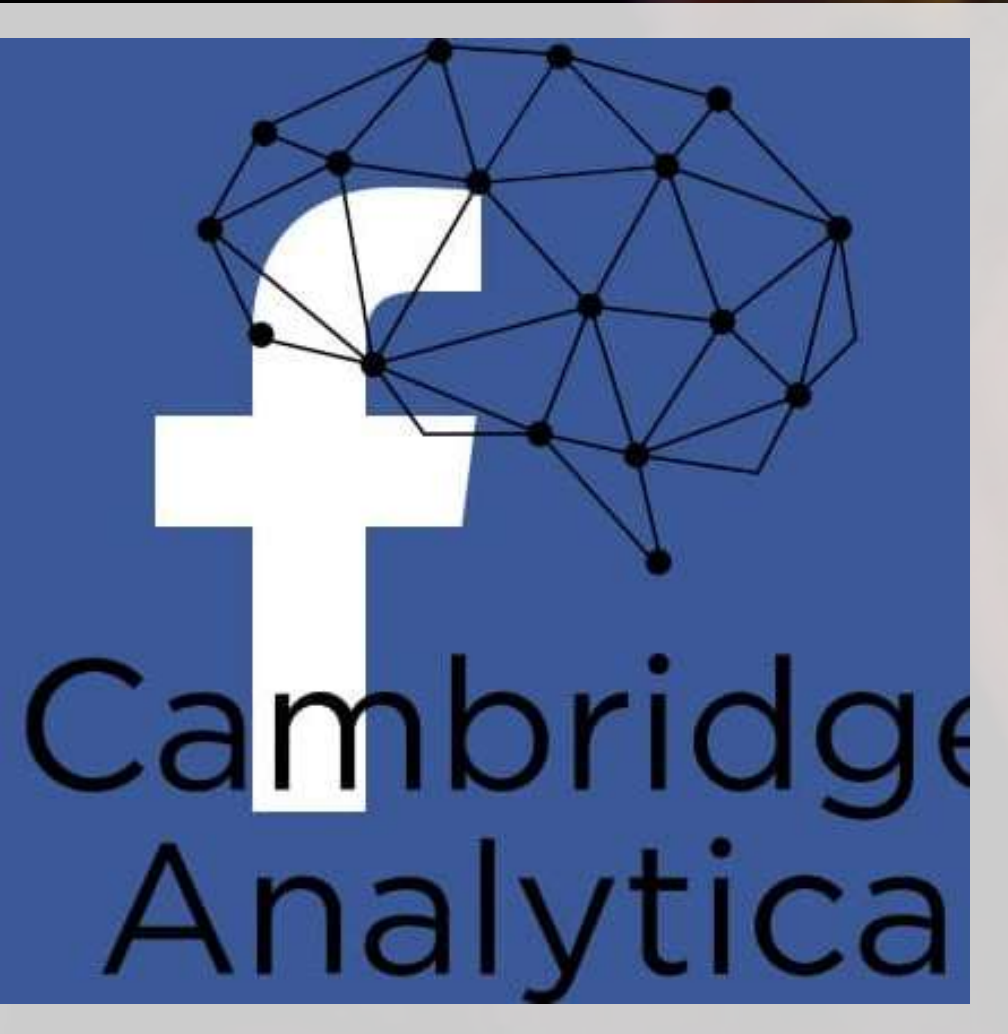


A new way of
campaigning

The Republicans and the
2014 Midterms

Techniques of *social sourcing*:
figuring out **trending topics**

BARACK OBAMA.COM



The Trump campaign (2016)

Twitter & Big Data

Cambridge Analytica founded by Robert Mercer (a friend of Donald Trump)

The collect of thousands of information on millions of Americans (without their consent)

A **personality test** on Facebook
What motivated voters...

Short Personality Test

I don't talk a lot

Very
Inaccurate

Moderately
Inaccurate

Neither
Inaccurate nor
Accurate

Moderately
Accurate

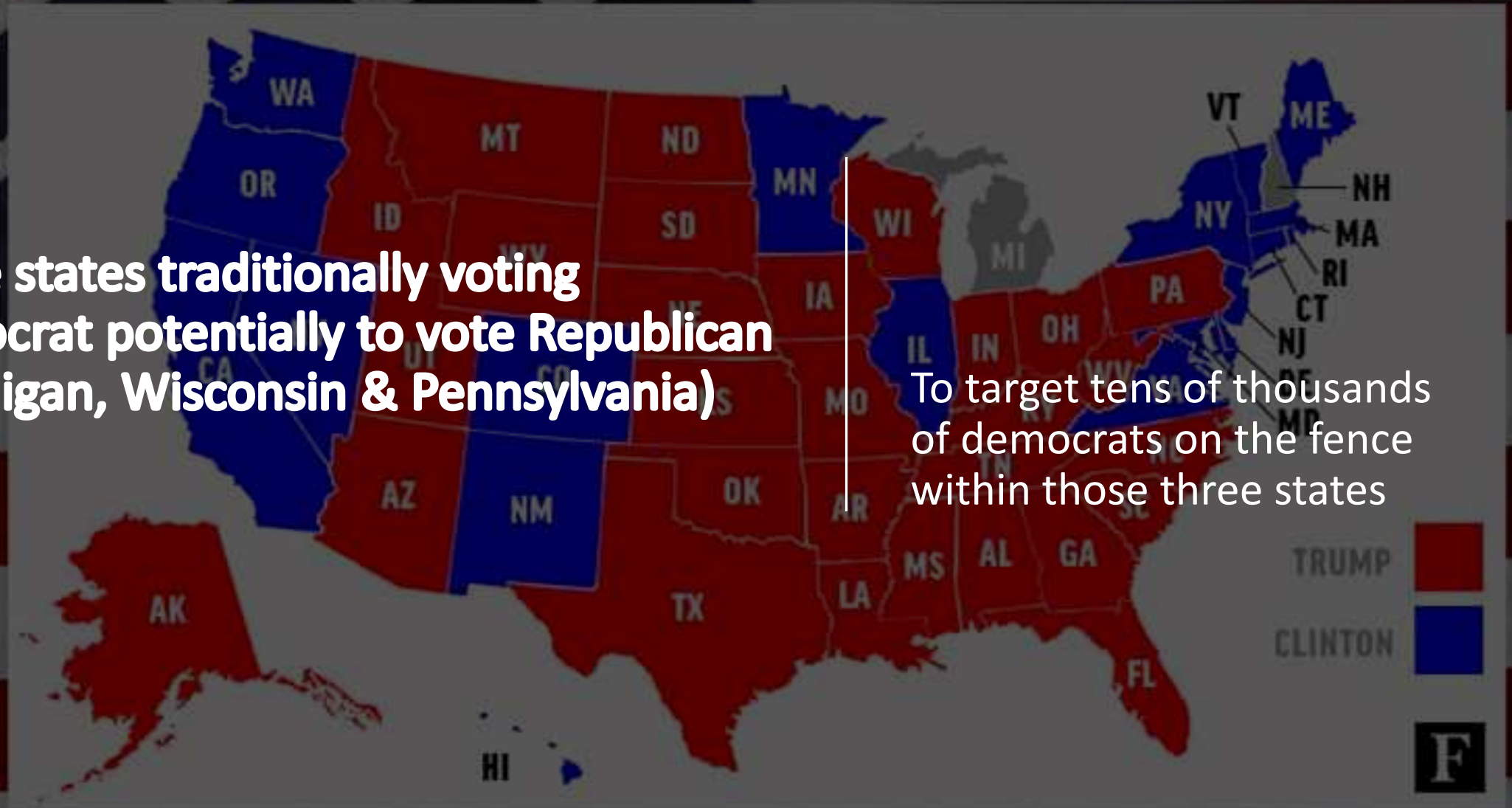
Very Accurate

[Suggest a Question](#) | [Report](#)

ELECTORAL COLLEGE 2016

**Three states traditionally voting
Democrat potentially to vote Republican
(Michigan, Wisconsin & Pennsylvania)**

To target tens of thousands
of democrats on the fence
within those three states





Article 5

“The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all”

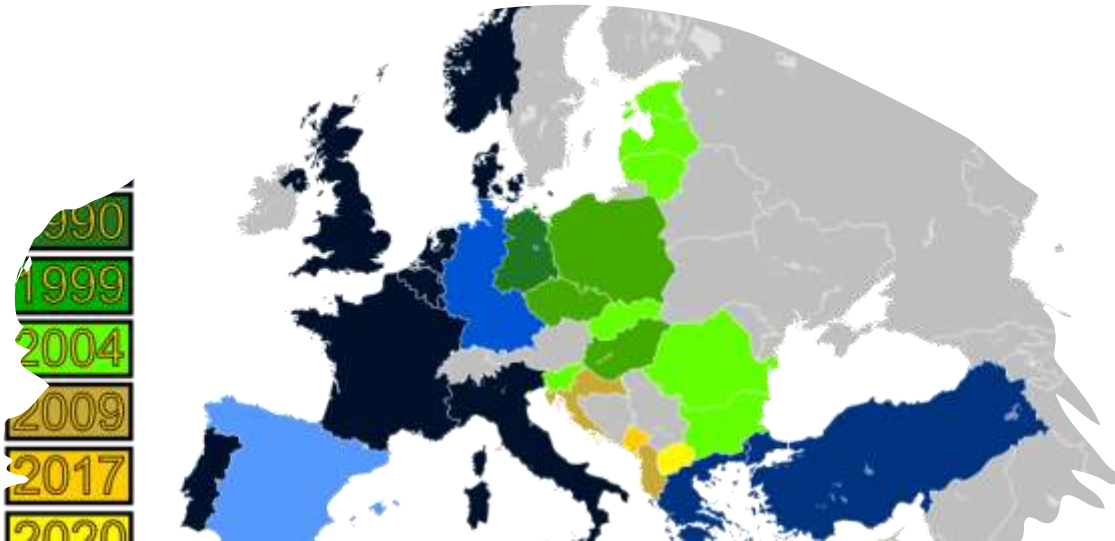


Political divisions within NATO

Doubts (2017-2020): would the Trump administration intervene militarily against Russia (article 5)?

Article 5 invoked only once (12 September 2001) and activated a month later

What reaction to a Russian attack against a NATO member or Finland or Sweden?





The background image shows a person wearing a dark hoodie, sitting at a desk with their arms resting on a laptop. The scene is overlaid with various digital and data-related icons. In the upper left, there's a cluster of hexagonal icons containing symbols like a bar chart, a lightbulb, a magnifying glass, a globe, and a person. The laptop screen itself features a central shield icon with a checkmark, surrounded by several circular icons: a lightbulb, an envelope, a smartphone, a padlock, a computer monitor, a person silhouette, and a battery. The bottom of the image has a bar chart graphic. The overall color palette is cool, with blues and greys, and a soft, ethereal lighting.

Amplifying existing divisions

To encourage divisions within western societies (social unrest in France, anti-migrant sentiments in Germany or pro-Brexit in the UK)

A photograph of Emmanuel Macron, the President of France, celebrating his victory in the 2017 French presidential election. He is standing in the center, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and dark tie, with his arms raised in a 'V' gesture. He is surrounded by a large, dense crowd of supporters. Many people are holding French flags (blue, white, and red) and banners. One prominent banner in the background features a large 'EM!' (for Emmanuel Macron). In the bottom left corner, there is a white banner with the text '#MacronPrésident' and '17 AVRIL 2017' below it, next to the French flag's vertical stripes. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting an outdoor event at night or in a large indoor arena.

2017 French presidential election

Hacking operations targeting Emmanuel Macron's campaign

“MacronLeaks” (20 000 emails leaked two days before final vote)

6 agents of **unit 75455** (Russian **cybermilitary** unit of the **GRU** (military intelligence) implicated

FRANCE DECIDES
MARCH 2014
THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION



FRANCE DECIDES
MARCH 2014
THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

THE FUTURE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION



Kremlin support to Marine Le Pen



The “Yellow Vests” (*Gilets jaunes*)

Civil disobedience encouraged (RT
& Sputnik)

France described as a dictatorship

Facebook videos sponsored by
Sputnik multiplied by 4 within the
first month

The objective: to destabilize the
French State



Extreme violence
Hate statements
Death threats on social media
A ministry attacked
Antisemitism & homophobia

NOTHING democratic about
the “Yellow Vests” movement





Symbolic violence: a guillotine in a country that abolished the death penalty





Migrant crisis in Germany

Russian support to anti-migrants political movement **Pegida** (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamicisation of the Occident) & far right **Alternative for Germany**



Migrant crisis in Europe

The image of a EU on the verge of collapse, incoherent and invaded by Muslims vs. a stable Russia



A strategy adapted to each European country

Spain: Catalonia's pro-independence movement depicted as the failure of the European project



The Balkans

The objective: to prevent the instable Balkans from integrating the EU & NATO

Serbia: military cooperation

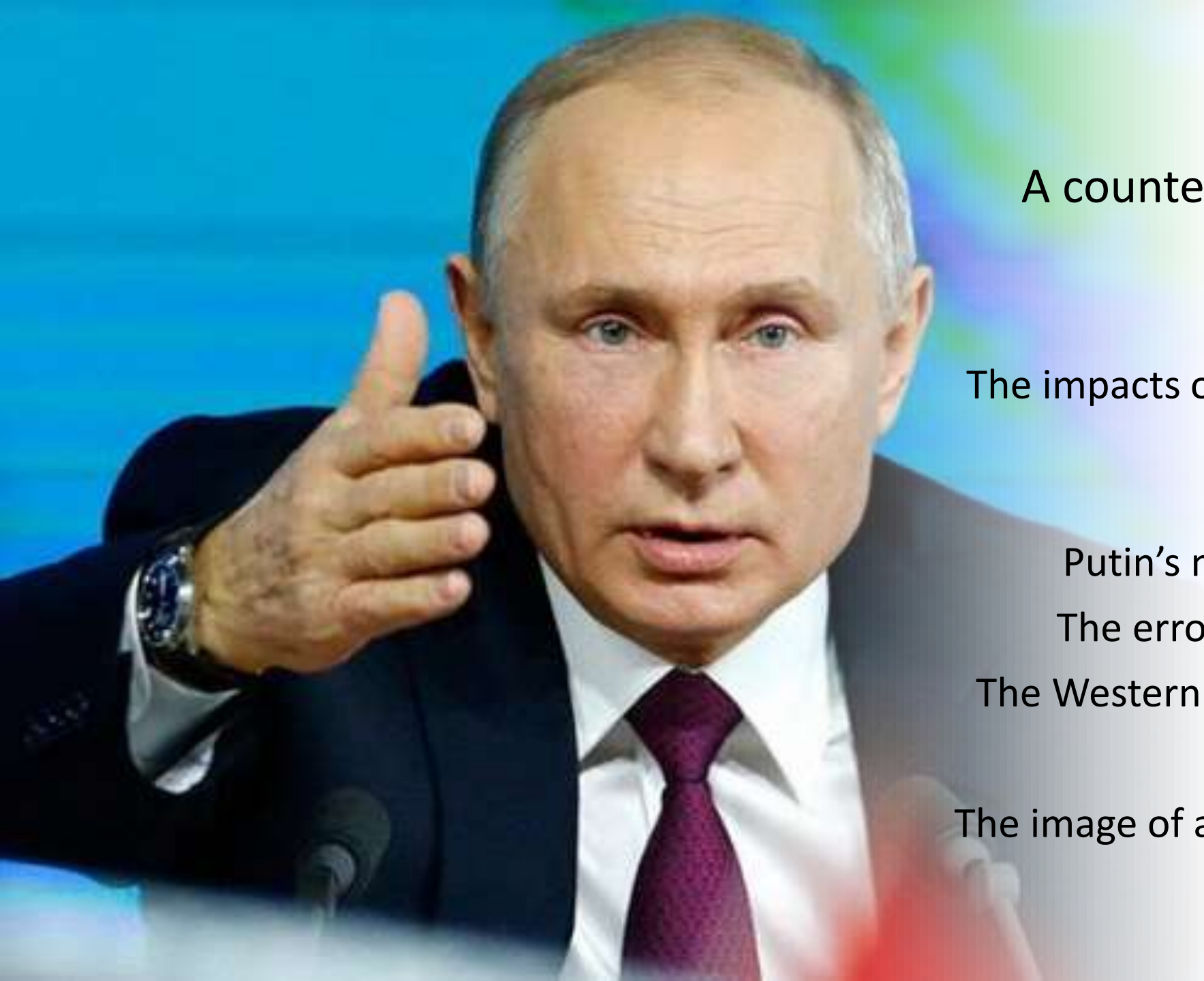
Bosnia: the creation of a “humanitarian centre” (unofficial military & intelligence base)



The Balkans

Montenegro: attempted coup to overthrow the pro-Europe government

Agents of the GRU (Russian intelligence) condemned in 2016



A counter-productive strategy?

The impacts of harsh Western economic sanctions

Putin's misreading of Ukraine

The errors of his invasion plan

The Western reactions underestimated

The image of a **shrewd tactician** seriously eroded





Gamble in America

November 2020: the election of Joe Biden

Trump's "big lie": alleged widespread voter fraud

NO evidence of widespread fraud or irregularities (Attorney General William Barr)



The Kremlin's **triple tactic**

1. Vladimir Putin did not congratulate Joe Biden quickly (the need to confirm the results)
2. Ella Pamfilova (chair of the Central Election Commission of Russia) backed the accusations of fraud
3. The Kremlin denounced a “real censorship against Trump”

Russian interference

August 2020: a warning from **William Evanina** (Director of the National Counterintelligence and Security Center)

“Election Threat Update for the American Public”

“Russia is using a range of measures to primarily denigrate former Vice President Biden”

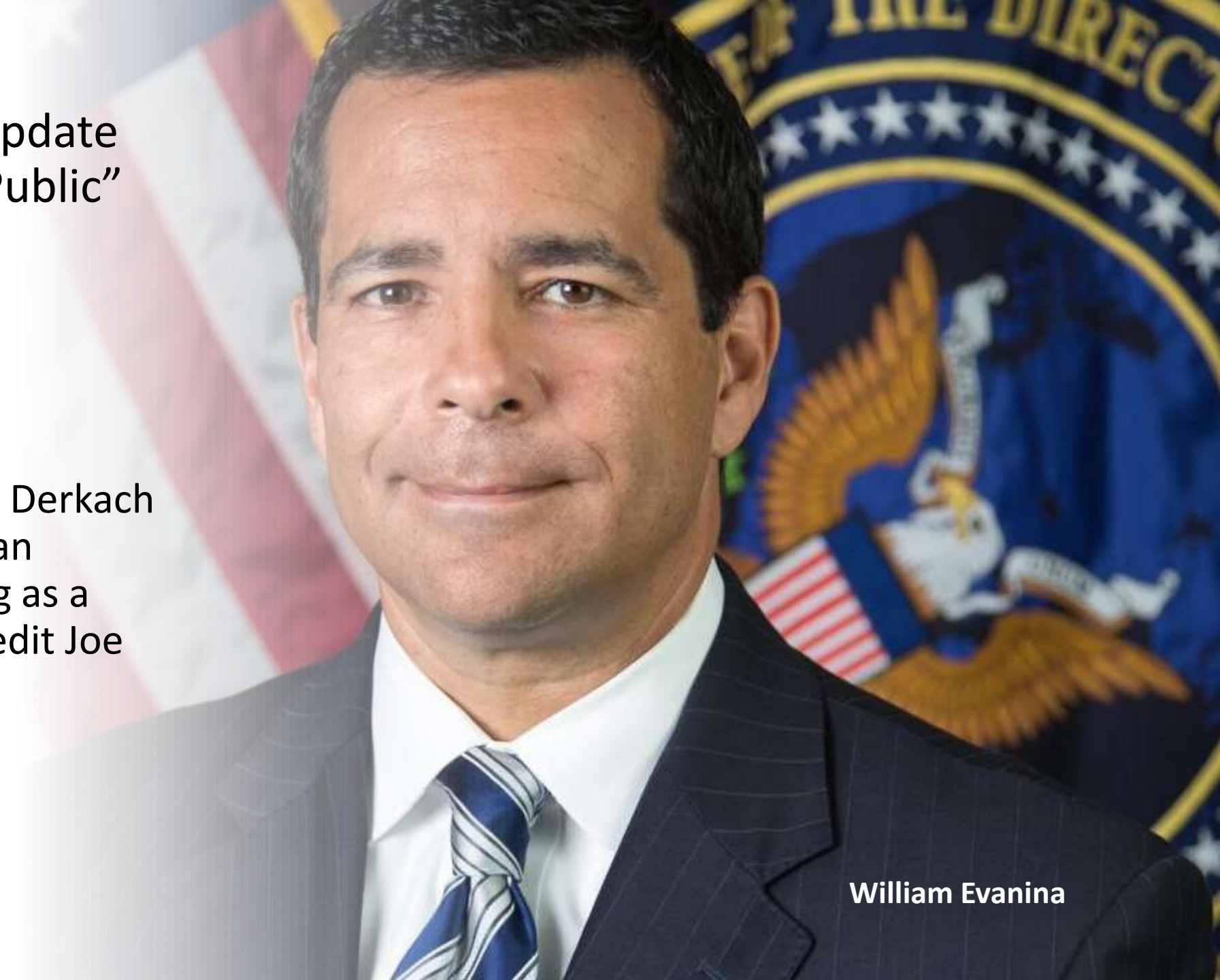
<https://www.dni.gov/index.php/newsroom/press-releases/item/2139-statement-by-ncsc-director-william-evanina-election-threat-update-for-the-american-public>



“Election Threat Update for the American Public”

The involvement of Andriy Derkach
(pro-Russia Ukrainian
parliamentarian) acting as a
“Russian agent” to discredit Joe
Biden

William Evanina



Trump accused of “seeking dirt” on the Bidens

The objective: to damage Biden’s White House bid

U.S. ambassador in Ukraine (Marie Yovanovitch) fired by Trump for not playing along





August 2020: **bipartisan
report**

Trump campaign contacts with
Russia in 2016

966 pages

Trump's financial relations with
Russia: a "threat" to the U.S.
security



Alert from Facebook & Twitter over a vast **campaign of disinformation** sponsored by Moscow to discredit Joe Biden

Fake accounts suppressed

Microsoft: hacking operations (Russian military intelligence)



Russia's Internet Research Agency

Role: to influence online conversations on topics impacting Russia's foreign and domestic interests

Based in St. Petersburg

Owned by oligarch Evgeni Prigojine (close to Putin)

400 employees – 800 independent bloggers whose role is to spread and amplify Moscow's point of view

Fake media of information: the **Newsroom for American and European Based Citizens** (NAEBC) – Attacks against Black Lives Matter movement & Joe Biden





What is behind “troll”?

Internet bots (web robots): software application running automated tasks

Bots programmed to generate fake social media accounts and post false information

IRA agents can create countless bots to further amplify Moscow’s point of view (“Majority Illusion”)

False information more credible



Troll farms made in the USA

Operators recruited to disseminate comments (under false identities) on social media

The emergence of troll farms in the U.S. (unlike in 2016)

The 2016 precedent

The Kremlin convinced Hillary Clinton to win the election

Clinton perceived as an obstacle
Against Putin's re-election in 2012

2014 annexation of Crimea: Putin's
action compared to what *"Hitler
did in the 1930s"*



The 2016 precedent

To prevent Clinton from being elected
*“We had the choice between a craze,
Clinton, and a hooligan, Trump... Of
course we preferred Trump”* (Russian
oligarch)

Collusion Trump-Russia unproven
(Muller report) but contacts between
the Russians and Trump campaign did
exist





Contacts with the Kremlin

Jared Kushner's meetings with **Dmitri Simes** (president of the Center for the National Interest – Washington D.C. based public policy think tank)

Simes in contact with Maria Butina (Russian spy expelled from the U.S.)

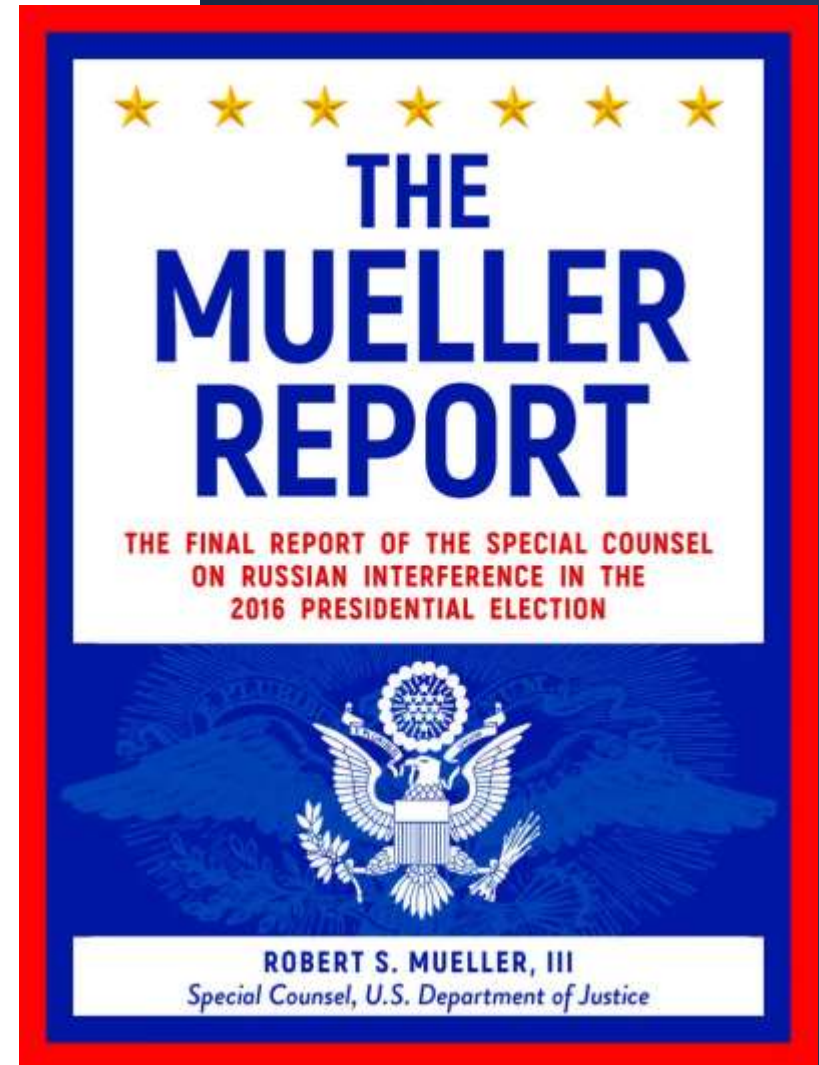
Kushner's relations with Russian ambassador – Private link with Moscow



Muller Report: multiple operations

From hacking operations to the publishing
of stolen documents (Democratic HQ) &
manipulation of information
(disinformation)

Multiple **fake accounts** on social media **to
manipulate** U.S. voters and amplify political
& social divisions





The role of the IRA

470 fake Facebook accounts
controlled by the IRA: 80 000 posts
between January 2015 & August 2017

126 million Americans exposed to
Russian propaganda

2018: Twitter identified 3 814 “IRA”
accounts – 1.4 million people exposed
to those accounts



The role of the IRA
confirmed

Chosen targets generated millions
of interactions on Twitter,
Facebook, YouTube & Instagram

Fake websites (Pro-African
Americans) denigrating Clinton &
inviting African Americans not to
vote for her

The role of the IRA confirmed

Calls to vote for Green Party activist **Jill Stein** (to split the vote)

Jill Stein invited to the 2015 **RT gala** with **Michael Flynn** (director of the Defense Intelligence Agency & future short-lived U.S. National Security Advisor)



The role of the IRA confirmed

Flynn after 22 days due to contacts with Russian ambassador & omitted to declare he was paid \$40 000 to deliver a pro-Moscow speech!

Flynn pardoned by Trump (November 2020)






Amplifying divisions

Trump's 2016 election: a "victory"
for the Kremlin

Trump's approach: to destabilize
& divide

A photograph of Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin seated in ornate wooden chairs during a formal meeting. Trump, on the left, is wearing a dark suit and a red tie, with his hands clasped in his lap. Putin, on the right, is wearing a dark suit and a patterned tie, with his hands resting on his lap. Between them is a small round wooden table with a vase of white flowers and some papers. In the background, the American and Russian flags are displayed on poles. The room has a patterned rug and classical architectural details.

2008 Russia-U.S. summit

Trump: what was said at 2-hour
meeting with Putin “None of your
Business”

Trump sided with Putin against the FBI
(Russian interference)

An “act of treason” (John Brennan,
former CIA director)



A photograph of Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin sitting in ornate wooden chairs, facing each other in a formal setting. Behind them are the flags of the United States and Russia. A small round table with a vase of white flowers and a notepad sits between them. The room has a patterned rug and classical architectural details.

Defending Moscow's interests

Calls to reintegrate Russia into the G7

Sanctions against Russia only under pressure from U.S. Congress

Real admiration for Putin and the way he runs Russia



Amplifying divisions

Political divisions

Democrats vs. Republicans

Trump supporters vs. opponents

Frequent attacks against the media
(*"Fake News Media"* or *"enemies of the people"*)

Unprecedented assault on the
media in a democracy



Amplifying divisions

Social divisions

Conspiracy theories (QAnon propagating the notion of a conspiracy against Trump)

Support to the “*good people*” threatening State capitols to protest against Covid-19 mandates

Support to White supremacist militias (Proud Boys)

The image of the strongman who restores order



Amplifying divisions

International divisions

International relations: a power struggle – Chaos and confrontation

Criticism towards international organizations (UN, NATO)

Europe called an “enemy”

Authoritarian leaders admired (Kim Jong-un of North Korea described as a “great leader”)

Biden's election

A blow to Russia's ambitions

BUT

Moscow to capitalize on its
growing influence in the
developing world (Africa)

