

Russian troll farm aimed to discourage black US voters: study

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The Russian troll farm that disrupted the 2016 US presidential election sought particularly to demoralize Africa-Americans and discourage them from voting, according to a comprehensive new report for the Senate.

The primary goal of the St Petersburg-based Internet Research Agency (IRA) was to deepen divisions in US society and convince Democrat-favoring liberals—including Latinos, youths and the LGBTQ community—not to vote, the report said.

But the most extensive analysis yet of thousands of IRA ads and posts across [social media platforms](#) in 2015-2017 showed a special emphasis on provoking the anger of black Americans so that they would stay home on election day.

The IRA-created account "Blacktivist" sent out messages on the Democratic candidate such as: "No lives matter to Hillary Clinton. Only votes matter to Hillary Clinton."

Another IRA account, "Black Matters", posted on Facebook: "Cops kill black kids. Are you sure that your son won't be the next?"

"It is evident that the campaigns sought to demobilize African Americans, LGBT, and liberal voters," said the report by the Computational Propaganda Project at Oxford University and social media specialists Graphika.

"These campaigns pushed a message that the best way to advance the cause of the African American community was to boycott the election and focus on other issues instead."

Separately, a portion of the 3,841 IRA accounts on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube studied by the researchers sought to provoke Republican-leaning white Americans to get out and vote.

While the study did not draw any lines between the IRA propaganda and the election results—Republican Donald Trump stunned Clinton to take the White House—post-election data suggests some impact.

According to the Pew Research Center, white voter turnout surged in 2016 while black turnout sank by five percentage points, to 59.6 percent, from four years earlier.

The IRA was set up by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a businessmen close to Russian President Vladimir Putin, as a domestic social media propaganda operation.

The study showed the IRA US campaign began in 2015, aiming to mobilize conservative voters, with no specific backing for Trump at the time.

But as the then-candidate gained support, and especially when he drove his anti-immigrant message, the IRA posts turned in his favor.

The IRA had "coherent teams," formed around specific ideologies such as gun rights and LGBTQ issues, that directed posts using user profile data provided by advertising arms of the social media companies.

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