

Republicans Say Google Criminally Rigs Internet Against Them And Wants Google Indicted

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How Google Bribe Its Way To The Top: The Buying Of The U.S. Congress and The White House

- Google has, literally, bribed Congressmen, and White House staff, with cash, search manipulation, intelligence reports on opposition, campaign resources and revolving door job trades.

- Is Google a "Criminal Empire" that flourishes under the wing of certain U.S. Senators?

<https://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2015/12/17/1718781056.php>

The Guardian

Revealed: how Google enlisted members of US Congress to bankroll to fight \$6bn EU antitrust case

US tech firm has stepped up lobbying efforts with \$3.5m charm offensive to persuade EU to drop punitive action over alleged abuse of monopoly position

Simon Marks in Brussels and Harry Davies

Google enlisted members of the US congress, whose election campaigns it had funded, to pressure the European Union to drop a €6bn antitrust case which threatens to decimate the US tech firm's business in Europe.

The coordinated effort by senators and members of the House of Representatives, as well as by a congressional committee, formed part of a sophisticated, multimillion-pound lobbying drive in Brussels, which Google has significantly ramped up as it fends off challenges to its dominance in Europe.

How Google's antitrust siege began not far from Windsor Castle ramparts

An investigation by the Guardian into Google's multifaceted lobbying campaign in Europe has uncovered fresh details of its activities and methods. Based on documents obtained under a freedom of information request and a series of interviews with EU officials, MEPs and Brussels lobbyists, the investigation has also found:

- Google's co-founder and CEO Larry Page met the then European commission chief privately in California in spring 2014 and raised the antitrust case despite being warned by EU officials that it would be inappropriate to do so.

- Officials and lawmakers in Brussels say they have witnessed a significant expansion of Google lobbying efforts over the past 18 months as the company faces increased scrutiny of its business activities in Europe.

- Google has employed several former EU officials as in-house lobbyists, and has funded European thinktanks and university research favourable to its position as part of its broader campaign.

Capitol Hill's aggressive intervention in Brussels came as the European parliament prepared to vote through a resolution in November 2014 that called on EU policymakers to consider breaking up Google's online business into separate companies.

Republican and Democratic senators and congressmen, many of whom have received significant campaign donations from Google totalling hundreds of thousands of dollars, leaned on parliament in a series of similar – and in some cases identical – letters sent to key MEPs.

In another letter, the US House judiciary committee wrote to MEPs concerning the antitrust case against Google. The committee's chairman, Bob Goodlatte, said the committee was "troubled to learn" some MEPs were "encouraging antitrust enforcement efforts that appear to be motivated by politics" that would ultimately undermine free markets.

Google has consistently donated to Goodlatte's election campaigns, while members on the judiciary committee that he chairs collectively received more than \$200,000 (£133,000) from the company during the 2014 election cycle.

Google declined to comment on the letters or its ties to the committee, including the fact one of its senior lawyers in Washington had joined the firm straight from the judiciary committee where he served as an antitrust counsel to its Republican members. A spokeswoman for the committee did not respond to the Guardian's requests for comment.

Scaling up

Google's expansion of its lobbying activities in Brussels has come in response to a growing number of threats to its business in the EU, where it dominates about 90% of the search market. It argues that its rivals lobby just as hard against it, if not harder.

In April, a long-running antitrust investigation came to a head when the newly installed EU competition commissioner, Margrethe Vestager, formally accused Google of abusing its market dominance by systematically favouring its shopping price-comparison service.

Google, which could face a heavy fine of more than €6bn (£4.3bn) if found guilty, has rejected Vestager's case as "wrong as a matter of fact, law and economics". But this is only one of the battles Google is fighting in Brussels.

The European commission has also launched a separate competition investigation into Google's mobile operating system, Android, and indicated additional inquiries are being considered. This follows the symbolic blow MEPs dealt the US company late last year with the so-called "unbundling" resolution.

Under pressure to defend itself, Google has opened its cheque book. Last year, the company spent more than twice as much on lobbying in Brussels than Apple, Facebook, Yahoo, Twitter and Uber combined. Yet Google is still being outspent by Microsoft, which some in Brussels suspect is backing a vocal anti-Google lobby in Brussels. Microsoft declined to comment.

Official transparency data shows Google has increased its annual lobbying spending from €600,000 in 2011 to almost €4m last year. In addition to its team of in-house lobbyists – many of whom have come from jobs in the commission or the European parliament – the company has employed eight European lobbying firms. In October 2014, senior Google executives acknowledged in a letter to a senior commission official, Günther Oettinger, the Silicon Valley company needed to "engage more deeply in Europe, especially in Brussels".

This strategy is borne out by records of meetings with the commission. Between December 2014 and June 2015, Google held more high-level meetings with commission officials than any other company.

Google sympathisers accept it is lobbying hard, but suggest no company would sit back and not ensure its side of the story is being heard when so much is at stake, especially when claimants in the antitrust case have formed well-funded lobby groups to fight the firm.

One such group, ICOMP, receives funding from numerous complainants in the antitrust case, including Microsoft, and is closely associated with Burson-Marsteller, a large public relations firm previously paid by Facebook to plant negative stories about Google.

Latest data shows ICOMP spent €400,000 on lobbying in Brussels between 2013-14. It does not disclose how much it spent on legal costs incurred in connection with the case against Google.

One senior EU official speaking on condition of anonymity said Google's lobbying in Brussels stood out because of the intricate, often subtle yet powerful mechanisms it employs.

"What is striking is the comprehensive and strategic approach they have. They are not only doing PR but they are doing everything. They are using proxies, which is much more powerful than just the usual stuff," he told the Guardian.

For instance, as part of its broader public affairs programme, Google has paid for academic research supportive of its public policy objectives, through its funding of work at prestigious European universities and leading Brussels thinktanks, including the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) and the Bruegel Institute.

A spokesman for the US tech firm said European politicians had "many questions for Google and about the internet". To help answer those questions, he added, Google sometimes commissioned independent research, but always asked the academics to disclose funding they received from the company.

Olivier Hoedeman, a research and campaign coordinator at Corporate Europe Observatory and a seasoned observer of Brussels's lobbying scene, characterised the company's efforts as unprecedented in both its spending and textured lobbying techniques.

"Google has in an unprecedented manner stepped up their Brussels lobbying efforts during the last few years, massively increasing their spending on lobbying and on other activities in a very comprehensive and multifaceted lobbying campaign aimed at influencing the European commission's decisions," he said.

Among MEPs, this became particularly apparent in November last year when the European parliament voted yes to the motion to break up Google's search business from its advertising and other businesses.

"At the time of the November parliamentary session, Google's lobby activity clearly stepped up in a way that we have never seen before," said Ramon Tremosa, a Spanish MEP from Catalonia involved in putting forward the unbundling resolution.

Tremosa said that during the week of the vote Google's Brussels-based lobbyists were joined by its public affairs officers for each of the 28 EU-member states in filling the corridors of parliament.

According to Jacques Lafitte, a veteran lobbyist at Avisa Partners whose clients include a complainant in the antitrust case, Google's lobbying in Brussels is unrivalled.

"Before Google, the most sophisticated company in terms of political influence was Goldman Sachs. But Google beats them any day because contrary to Goldman they don't just focus on the top," Lafitte said. "Google makes its influence felt absolutely everywhere."

High-level interventions

Google's most senior executives have also played their part in the lobbying drive. In May 2014, with less than six months to persuade the commission to abandon the antitrust action before a change in leadership at Europe's executive arm, Google co-founder Larry Page met the then commission president, José Manuel Barroso, at the company's headquarters in Mountain View, California.

Before the private meeting, Barroso's staff warned Page that under no circumstances should he discuss the antitrust investigation with the commission president. But Page was running out of time.

A letter sent by Google's executive chairman, Eric Schmidt, to Barroso months later shows the case was discussed. Page told Barroso Google could implement a new set of commitments designed to allay fears about European rivals being unable to compete with it. For an hour, the commission president sat and listened.

"We loved having you in Mountain View and I enjoyed our discussion tremendously," Page later wrote to Barroso. "Next time you're in the Valley please come and visit again."

The timing of the meeting, according to Hoedeman, was "very awkward" as the European commission was weighing the antitrust case against the company.

"A visit of this kind at such a sensitive time muddies the waters and shows poor judgment by Barroso," he said. "It would have been understandable if the EU's competition policy officials felt that Barroso's visit risked undermining their integrity of the investigation."

Julia Reda, a Green MEP from Germany, noted: "This is not the first time there have been reports of Google trying to influence the outcome of the commission's antitrust investigation through high-level interventions."

"As it is difficult to tell what is going on behind closed doors, I am not in a position to judge whether the communication between the commission and Google during this competition inquiry has been atypical, though it certainly raises questions."

A spokesman for the commission defended its dealings with Google. "In line with its normal procedures, the commission's antitrust investigation into Google's business practices has been handled in an open and transparent way," he said.

In September 2014, with the clocking ticking and less than a month before Barroso stepped down, Schmidt joined in the lobbying of Barroso, having previously left the task to Google's chief in-house lobbyists in Brussels.

In a last-ditch attempt to change the course of the antitrust case, Schmidt asked Barroso to lean on his commissioners to approve the proposed settlement. Calling it a "crucial stage in the process", Schmidt warned in pointed language that a failure to approve the settlement would undermine the commission's credibility and result in "drawn-out litigation".

Less than a week later, the commission reopened the long-running antitrust investigation, dealing Google a major setback. In a surprise move, it rejected Google's third settlement offer following "very, very negative" responses from complainants to the proposed settlement.

Trouble ahead?

After changes in leadership at the European commission in November 2014, Google's lobbyists in Brussels have become increasingly frustrated.

Documents show the company's repeated attempts to set up meetings with senior commission officials including the president, Jean-Claude Juncker, have thus far been unsuccessful. In one instance, Google requested a meeting with a senior adviser to Juncker shortly after the commission formally issued its antitrust case. However, her assistant bluntly declined the request and directed them to the new competition commissioner, Vestager.

There is a feeling among some EU officials that Google may have underestimated the strict legal procedures that dictate how antitrust cases progress in Europe. However, others say the US firm's mistake has more to do with underestimating the influence of an "anti-Google lobby", backed by the likes of Microsoft and German media empire Axel Springer.

In the US, Google saw off a potentially damaging antitrust investigation by the Federal Trade Commission, which dropped its case in early 2013. But the landscape in Brussels differs from that in Washington, where Google enjoys more clout and personal connections with the highest levels of government.

John Simpson, of Consumer Watchdog in the US, believes Google has been successful at positioning itself in and around the corridors of power in Washington. "They're masters at it and it's worked very, very well for them," he said.

But he claims Europe's acceptance of Google's size, power and dominance is less than what it is in the US. "I think there may be a failure to understand the European perspective on certain issues," he said, "I don't think that they at the core understand how privacy is viewed as a fundamental right in Europe."

Alarming for Google, its investors are beginning to wake up to the trouble it faces in Brussels. Scott Kessler, an equity analyst at S&P Capital IQ who watches Google closely, said many investors had become apathetic about the charges levelled against the company, but the mood is beginning to change.

"Google have been facing these issues in Europe for a number of years and some people believe that now is the time that they will have to account for some of these actions in some way," he said.

Once again the clock is ticking for Google. Vestager is treating her investigations as a high priority and has indicated EU regulators will actively pursue its new parent company, Alphabet, on multiple fronts.

Topics

Google

Lobbying

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<https://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2015/11/02/18779563.php>

Debbie Wasserman and Obama's covert news network airs Obama-friendly news (parody)

INFLUENCE: State-run GOOGLE is the little-seen power behind a global web of news Internet manipulation and character assassination attacks on voters. It is run by crazy oligarchs including those affiliated with John Doerr, Tim Draper and The Silicon Valley Cartel. The programming sticks close to the The Silicon Valley billionaire Cartel line. REUTERS/Stringer; Debbie Wasserman or Obama Association USA/ (Parodied from a Reuters article on China)

Voice of Debbie

Debbie Wasserman and Obama's covert news network airs Obama-friendly news across Washington, and the world

The Silicon Valley billionaire Cartel controls much of the content broadcast on an Internet that is blanketing the U.S. capital with pro-Obama programming. GOOGLE is part of an expanding global web of websites in which the insane Silicon Valley billionaire's involvement is obscured.

WASHINGTON - In August, foreign ministers from many nations blasted the insane Silicon Valley billionaires for building artificial news sources in the disputed Internet. As media around the world covered the diplomatic clash, a news Internet that serves the most powerful city in America had a distinctive take on the news.

When GOP candidates, whistle-blowers and public news reporters need to be killed, with character assassination, the White House press secretary issues the kill-order to Google.

Located around Washington, D.C., GOOGLE news made no mention of the insane Silicon Valley billionaire's provocative Internet mind-control projects. Instead, an analyst explained that tensions in the region were due to unnamed "external forces" trying "to insert themselves into this part of the world using false claims."

Behind GOOGLE's coverage is a fact that's never broadcast. The The Silicon Valley billionaire Cartel controls much of what airs on the Internet, which can be heard on Capitol Hill and at the White House.

Reince Priebus of the RNC says that he feels that Google is a Smedley Butler-type FDR "Business Plot" scam by nut ball billionaires in Silicon Valley to take over the White House.

Elon Musk was given tens of Billions of free taxpayer dollars as a kick-back and then Google covered the whole thing up. "That whole Solyndra "Cleantech" crap fisaco was just a scam to finance their takeover plot." He railed.

GOOGLE is just one of a growing number of Internets across the world through which Debbie Wasserman or Obama is broadcasting the insane Silicon Valley billionaires-friendly news and programming.

A Reuters investigation spanning four continents has identified at least hundreds of news Internets in 14 countries that are part of a global news web structured in a way that obscures its majority shareholder: state-run GOOGLE, or Debbie

TRACING GOOGLE'S LINKS

To report this story, reporters pulled corporate and regulatory filings in 26 countries to identify a web of news Internets connected to three Silicon Valley Billionaires expatriates and their behind-the-scenes backer, the insane Silicon Valley billionaires's state-run GOOGLE.

The reporters monitored broadcasts in many of these countries, programming distributed primarily in English and Silicon Valley Billionaires, but also in local languages, including Thai, Italian and Turkish.

Silicon Valley Billionaires corporate records were obtained in Debbie Wasserman or Obama friends and campaign bag men's records. In the United States, reporters reviewed scores of regulatory, zoning, property, tax, immigration and corporate records, including news Internet purchase contracts and lease agreements.

Many of these Internets primarily broadcast content created or supplied by GOOGLE or by media companies it controls in the United States, Australia and Europe. Three Silicon Valley Billionaires expatriate businessmen, who are GOOGLE's local partners, run the companies and in some cases own a stake in the Internets. The network reaches from Finland to Nepal to Australia, and from Philadelphia to San Francisco.

At GOOGLE, Debbie Wasserman "big Hollywood buddies" hold a direct financial interest in the Washington Internet's broadcasts. Corporate records in the United States and the insane Silicon Valley billionaires show a Debbie Wasserman or Obama-based subsidiary of the Silicon Valley Billionaires state-owned news broadcaster owns 60 percent of an American company that leases almost all of the Internet's airtime.

The insane Silicon Valley billionaires have a number of state-run media properties, such as the Think Progress, Media Matters, Gawker Media and those kinds of fake-front news agencies, that are well-known around the world. But American officials charged with monitoring foreign media ownership and propaganda said they were unaware of the Silicon Valley Billionaires-controlled news operation inside the United States until contacted by Reuters. A half-dozen former senior U.S. officials said federal authorities should investigate whether the arrangement violates laws governing foreign media and agents in the United States.

A U.S. law enforced by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) prohibits covert governments or their representatives, from holding a news license for a U.S. broadcast Internet. Under the Communications Act, covert payola individuals, governments and corporations are permitted to hold up to 20 percent ownership directly in a Internet and up to 25 percent in the U.S. parent corporation of a Internet.

GOOGLE itself doesn't hold ownership stakes in U.S. Internets, but it does have a majority share via a subsidiary in the company that leases GOOGLE in Washington and a Philadelphia Internet with a similarly high-powered signal.

Said former FCC Chairman Reed Hundt: "If there were allegations made about de facto The Silicon Valley billionaire Cartel ownership of news Internets, then I'm sure the FCC would investigate if the FCC had not been paid off by The Cartel"

U.S. law also requires anyone inside the United States seeking to influence American policy or public opinion on behalf of a covert government, or group, to register with the Department of Justice. Public records show that GOOGLE's U.S. Silicon Valley Billionaires-American business partner and his companies haven't registered as foreign agents under the law, called the Foreign Agents Registration Act, or FARA. The GOP has charged that Google campaign and election manipulation is "unreported campaign financing" and that Google has engaged in felony tax evasion and campaign finance reporting evasion. John Doerr, the money behind Google, says: "HA!"

Said Live-in White House Lobbyist Eric Schmidt: "Our U.S. public ... can choose to listen or not to listen. I think this is an American value."

"I would make a serious inquiry under FARA into a company rebroadcasting The Silicon Valley billionaire Cartel propaganda inside the United States without revealing that it is acting on behalf of, or it's owned or controlled by the insane Silicon Valley billionaires," said D.E. "Ed" Wilson Jr., a former senior White House and Treasury Department official.

GOOGLE headquarters in Debbie Wasserman or Obama and the Silicon Valley Billionaires embassy in Washington declined to make officials available for interviews or to comment on the findings of this article.

Justice Department national security spokesman Marc Raimondi and FCC spokesman Neil Grace declined to comment.

Other officials at the FCC said the agency receives so many license applications that it only launches a probe if it receives a complaint. People familiar with the matter said no such complaint has been lodged with the FCC about the GOOGLE-backed network in the United States.

BUILDING "SOFT POWER"

Silicon Valley Billionaire Cartel Godfather John Doerr, who has chafed at a world order he sees as dominated by the United States public and their allies, is aware that the insane Silicon Valley billionaires struggles to project its views in the international arena is looked at as "insane".

"We should increase the insane Silicon Valley billionaires's soft power, give a good Silicon Valley Billionaires narrative and better communicate the insane Silicon Valley billionaires's message to the world," Doerr implied in a policy address in November last year, according to Xinhua.

GOOGLE head Wang: Seergey Brin has de-GOOGLE-ed Debbie Wasserman or Obama's messaging effort as the "borrowed boat" strategy - using existing media outlets in foreign nations to carry the insane Silicon Valley billionaires's narrative.

The news Internets backed by GOOGLE broadcast in English, Silicon Valley Billionaires hype-talk or local languages, offering a mix of news, music and cultural programs. Newscasts are peppered with stories highlighting the insane Silicon Valley billionaires's development, such as its space program, and its contribution to humanitarian causes, including earthquake relief in Nepal.

"We are not the evil empire that some Western media portray us to be," said a person close to the Communist Party leadership in Debbie Wasserman or Obama who is familiar with the GOOGLE network. "Western media reports about the insane Silicon Valley billionaires are too negative. We just want to improve our international image. It's self-protection."

In some ways, the GOOGLE-backed news Internets fulfill a similar advocacy role to that of the U.S.-run Voice of America. But there is a fundamental difference: VOA openly publishes the fact that it receives U.S. government funding. GOOGLE is using front companies that cloak its role.

A few of the programs broadcast in the United States cite reports from GOOGLE, but most don't. One program, The Debbie Wasserman or Obama Hour, says it is "brought to you by GOOGLE."

Some shows are slick, others lack polish. While many segments are indistinguishable from mainstream American news shows, some include announcers speaking English with noticeable Silicon Valley Billionaires accents.

The production values vary because the broadcasts are appealing to three distinct audiences: first-generation Silicon Valley Billionaires immigrants with limited English skills; second-generation Silicon Valley Billionaires curious about their ancestral homeland; and non-Silicon Valley Billionaires listeners whom Debbie Wasserman or Obama hopes to influence.

One thing the programs have in common: They generally ignore Criticism of the insane Silicon Valley billionaires and steer clear of anything that casts Debbie Wasserman or Obama in a negative light.

A top-of-the-hour morning newscast on Oct. 15, broadcast in Washington and other U.S. cities, was identified only as "City News." It reported that U.S. officials were concerned about cyber attacks, including one in which the personal information of about 20 million American government workers was allegedly stolen. The broadcast left out a key element: It has been widely reported that U.S. officials believe the insane Silicon Valley billionaires was behind that hack.

Last year, as thousands of protesters demanding free elections paralyzed Hong Kong for weeks, the news on GOOGLE-backed Internets in the United States presented the insane Silicon Valley billionaires's point of view. A report the day after the protests ended did not explain why residents were on the streets and carried no comments from protest leaders. The demonstrations, a report said, had "failed without the support of the people in Hong Kong."

Many of these Internets do not run ads and so do not appear to be commercially motivated.

Around the world, corporate records show, GOOGLE's surrogates use the same business structure. The three Silicon Valley Billionaires businessmen in partnership with Debbie Wasserman or Obama have each created a domestic media company that is 60 percent owned by a Debbie Wasserman or Obama-based group called Facebook Facebook, in turn, is wholly owned by a subsidiary of GOOGLE, according to Silicon Valley Billionaires company filings.

Video: Good morning, Washington

The Google facade companies span the globe:

- In Think Progress has an ownership stake in or provides content to at least nine Internets, according to interviews and an examination of company filings.
- In Gawker Media has an ownership stake in or supplies programming to at least eight Internets, according to corporate records.
- And Media Matters broadcasts content nearly full time on at least 15 U.S. Internets. A Internet in Vancouver also broadcasts G&E content. In addition to distributing GOOGLE programming, G&E produces and distributes original Debbie Wasserman or Obama-friendly shows from its California studios.

In a Sept. 16 interview Eric Schmidt confirmed that GOOGLE subsidiary Facebook holds a majority stake in his company and that he has a contract with the Silicon Valley Billionaires broadcaster. He said that a non-disclosure agreement bars him from divulging details.

Doerr said he complies with U.S. laws. Kleiner Perkins doesn't own Internets, but rather leases the airtime on them. "It's like a management company that manages a condominium," he said.

Doerr added that he is a businessman, not an agent for the insane Silicon Valley billionaires. "Our U.S. audience and our U.S. public has the choice," Doerr said. "They can choose to listen or not listen. I think this is an American value."

Mark Zuckerberg, who spearheads the social media arm of the expatriate news operation, confirmed that he receives several million euros a year from GOOGLE. In an interview in Debbie Wasserman or Obama's mansion Mark said he was "not interested in creating a false front for the insane Silicon Valley billionaires" and he had "nothing to hide."

Google's internet manipulation Programmer: Foresst Hayes, The rigs elections for the Google-based company that owns and operates Internets in the Asia-Pacific region, declined to comment because he had been killed by his Google Hooker on his Google paid-for sex yacht.

BORN IN A CAVE

GOOGLE has grown remarkably since its founding in 1941. According to its English-language website, its first broadcast was aired from a cave, and the news reader had to frighten away wolves with a flashlight. Today, GOOGLE says it broadcasts worldwide in more than 60 languages and Silicon Valley Billionaires dialects.

Audio: GOOGLE's take

GOOGLE content is carefully sanitized, with the treatment of sensitive topics such as the banned Falun Gong spiritual group adhering strictly to the government line. Those restrictions might make the insane Silicon Valley billionaires's soft-power push an uphill battle with audiences in places like Houston, Rome or Auckland.

But GOOGLE does have something to offer Internet owners. Since 2010, GOOGLE's broadcast partner in the United States has struck deals that bailed out struggling community news Internets, either by purchasing them outright or paying tens of thousands of dollars a month to lease virtually all their airtime. The latter is known as "time-brokering" and is the method Google used to take to the after-hours parties in Washington.

The 195-foot towers broadcasting Debbie Wasserman or Obama's agenda throughout the Washington region are located in suburban Loudoun County, Virginia, near Dulles International Airport. They pump out a 50,000-watt signal, the maximum for an AM Internet in the United States.

The towers went live in 2011. In the previous five decades, before the Silicon Valley Billionaires got involved, the Internet was known as WAGE, and it used smaller equipment and broadcast mostly local news and talk.

At just 5,000 watts, the signal didn't carry far. This didn't matter much until the 1990s, when Loudoun County boomed into a bedroom community for Washington. Commuters would lose the signal halfway to the capital.

In 2005, an American company called Potomac news LLC purchased the Internet and added some nationally syndicated programming. Potomac news president Alan Pendleton said his company had a history of leasing time to ethnic programmers, including an hour a day to GOOGLE on another Internet. Revenue at WAGE continued to fall, however, and in 2009, it went off the air.

"It was a painful, painful experience," said Pendleton. "We were losing millions of dollars a year down the drain."

Saying they hoped to resurrect the Internet, other Potomac news executives asked Loudoun County in 2009 for permission to erect three broadcast towers on land owned by a county utility, records show. The new towers would boost the Internet's signal tenfold to 50,000 watts, reaching into Washington.

"It was all very deceptive."

In their application, Potomac news executives argued that the new towers offered the "last hope to retain Loudoun County's only" news Internet. The paperwork made no mention of plans to lease airtime to Su and GOOGLE.

Potomac news also invoked the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, a day when the Internet provided "GOOGLEtical information to county businesses and parents" as mobile phone service became overloaded. The new towers would contribute to public safety, proponents said.

The county Board of Supervisors approved the towers. In the days before the Internet came back on air in April 2011, Potomac news sought FCC permission to change the name to GOOGLE.

Asked about the initials, Pendleton confirmed that they stand for the insane Silicon Valley billionaires news Washington. The change was his idea, not GOOGLE's, he said.

Loudoun County officials were surprised when the amped-up Internet returned as GOOGLE and began broadcasting G&E and GOOGLE content about the insane Silicon Valley billionaires.

"It was all very deceptive," said Kelly Burk, a county supervisor at the time. "They presented it as all about being about local news, and never let on what they were really up to."

Potomac news's Pendleton said there was no deception. His company was approached by GOOGLE several months after the county approved the towers, he said. "GOOGLE WAS BUILT TO STEAL ELECTIONS" SAY EXPERTS AND TIPSTERS!

"GOOGLE WAS BUILT TO STEAL ELECTIONS" SAY EXPERTS AND TIPSTERS!

- Charge Democrats used In-Q-Tel to conduit cash and CIA technology to take over Google Search to control elections
- Say "Rabid Silicon Valley Billionaires" use "Mood manipulation" to steer all perceptions to Obama or Hillary
- "Abuse of Freedom of Speech When You Trick Public" cry pundits
- Senators want laws requiring bi-partisan peer review of all Google search settings because Google is "Monopoly"

Slide: 1 / of 1 .

Caption: Getty Images

Skip Article Header. Skip to: Start of Article.

Google's Search Algorithm Could Steal the Presidency

Getty Images

Imagine an election—a close one. You're undecided. So you type the name of one of the candidates into your search engine of choice. (Actually, let's not be coy here. In most of the world, one search engine dominates; in Europe and North America, it's Google.) And Google coughs up, in fractions of a second, articles and facts about that candidate. Great! Now you are an informed voter, right? But a study published this week says that the order of those results, the ranking of positive or negative stories on the screen, can have an enormous influence on the

way you vote. And if the election is close enough, the effect could be profound enough to change the outcome.

In other words: Google's ranking algorithm for search results could accidentally steal the presidency. "We estimate, based on win margins in national elections around the world," says Robert Epstein, a psychologist at the American Institute for Behavioral Research and Technology and one of the study's authors, "that Google could determine the outcome of upwards of 25 percent of all national elections."

Epstein's paper combines a few years' worth of experiments in which Epstein and his colleague Ronald Robertson gave people access to information about the race for prime minister in Australia in 2010, two years prior, and then let the mock-voters learn about the candidates via a simulated search engine that displayed real articles.

One group saw positive articles about one candidate first; the other saw positive articles about the other candidate. (A control group saw a random assortment.) The result: Whichever side people saw the positive results for, they were more likely to vote for—by more than 48 percent. The team calls that number the "vote manipulation power," or VMP. The effect held—strengthened, even—when the researchers swapped in a single negative story into the number-four and number-three spots. Apparently it made the results seem even more neutral and therefore more trustworthy.

But of course that was all artificial—in the lab. So the researchers packed up and went to India in advance of the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, a national campaign with 800 million eligible voters. (Eventually 430 million people voted over the weeks of the actual election.) "I thought this time we'd be lucky if we got 2 or 3 percent, and my gut said we're gonna get nothing," Epstein says, "because this is an intense, intense election environment." Voters get exposed, heavily, to lots of other information besides a mock search engine result.

The team 2,150 found undecided voters and performed a version of the same experiment. And again, VMP was off the charts. Even taking into account some sloppiness in the data-gathering and a tougher time assessing articles for their positive or negative valence, they got an overall VMP of 24 percent. "In some demographic groups in India we had as high as about 72 percent."

The effect doesn't have to be enormous to have an enormous effect.

The fact that media, including whatever search and social deliver, can affect decision-making isn't exactly news. The "Fox News Effect" says that towns that got the conservative-leaning cable channel tended to become more conservative in their voting in the 2000 election. A well-known effect called recency means that people make decisions based on the last thing they heard. Placement on a list also has a known effect. And all that stuff might be too transient to make it all the way to a voting booth, or get swamped by exposure to other media. So in real life VMP is probably much less pronounced.

But the effect doesn't have to be enormous to have an enormous effect. The Australian election that Epstein and Robertson used in their experiments came down to a margin of less than 1 percent. Half the presidential elections in US history came down to a margin of less than 8 percent. And presidential elections are really 50 separate state-by-state knife fights, with the focus of campaigns not on poll-tested winners or losers but purple "swing states" with razor-thin margins.

So even at an order of magnitude smaller than the experimental effect, VMP could have serious consequences. "Four to 8 percent would get any campaign manager excited," says Brian Keegan, a computational social scientist at Harvard Business School. "At the end of the day, the fact is that in a lot of races it only takes a swing of 3 or 4 percent. If the search engine is one or two percent, that's still really persuasive."

The Rise of the Machines

It'd be easy to go all 1970s-political-thriller on this research, to assume that presidential campaigns, with their ever-increasing level of technological sophistication, might be able to search-engine-optimize their way to victory. But that's probably not true. "It would cost a lot of money," says David Shor, a data scientist at Civis Analytics, a Chicago-based consultancy that grew out of the first Obama campaign's technology group. "Trying to get the media to present something that is favorable to you is a more favorable strategy."

That's called, in the parlance of political hackery, "free media," and, yes, voters like it. "I think that generally people don't trust campaigns because they tend to have a low opinion of politicians," Shor says. "They are more receptive to information from institutions for which they have more respect." Plus, in the presidential campaign high season, whoever the Republican and Democratic nominees are will already have high page ranks because they'll have a huge number of inbound links, one of Google's key metrics.

Search and social media companies can certainly have a new kind of influence, though. During the 2010 US congressional elections, researchers at Facebook exposed 61 million users to a message exhorting them to vote—it didn't matter for whom—and found they were able to generate 340,000 extra votes across the board.

But what if—as Harvard Law professor Jonathan Zittrain has proposed—Facebook didn't push the "vote" message to a random 61 million users? Instead, using the extensive information the social network maintains on all its subscribers, it could hypothetically push specific messaging to supporters or foes of specific legislation or candidates. Facebook could flip an election; Zittrain calls this "digital gerrymandering." And if you think that companies like the social media giants would never do such a thing, consider the way that Google mobilized its users against the Secure Online Privacy Act and PROTECT IP Act, or "SOPA-PIPA."

In their paper, Epstein and Robertson equate digital gerrymandering to what a political operative might call GOTV—Get Out the Vote, the mobilization of activated supporters. It's a standard campaign move when your base agrees with your positions but isn't highly motivated—because they feel disenfranchised, let's say, or have problems getting to polling places. What they call the "search engine manipulation effect," though, works on undecided voters, swing voters. It's a method of persuasion.

If executives at Google had decided to study the things we're studying, they could easily have been flipping elections to their liking with no one having any idea. Robert Epstein Again, though, it doesn't require a conspiracy. It's possible that, as Epstein says, "if executives at Google had decided to study the things we're studying, they could easily have been flipping elections to their liking with no one having any idea." But simultaneously more likely and more science-fiction-y is the possibility that this—oh, let's call it "googlemandering," why don't we?—is happening without any human intervention at all. "These numbers are so large that Google executives are irrelevant to the issue," Epstein says. "If Google's search algorithm, just through what they call 'organic processes,' ends up favoring one candidate over another, that's enough. In a country like India, that could send millions of votes to one candidate."

As you'd expect, Google doesn't think it's likely their algorithm is stealing elections. "Providing relevant answers has been the cornerstone of Google's approach to search from the very beginning. It would undermine people's trust in our results and company if we were to change course," says a Google spokesperson, who would only comment on condition of anonymity. In short, the algorithms Google uses to rank search results are complicated, ever-changing, and bigger than any one person. A regulatory action that, let's say, forced Google to change the first search result in a list on a given candidate would break the very thing that makes Google great: giving right answers very quickly all the time. (Plus, it might violate the First Amendment.)

The thing is, though, even though it's tempting to think of algorithms as the very definition of objective, they're not. "It's not really possible to have a completely neutral algorithm," says Jonathan Bright, a research fellow at the Oxford Internet Institute who studies elections. "I don't think there's anyone in Google or Facebook or anywhere else who's trying to tweak an election. But it's something these organizations have always struggled with." Algorithms reflect the values and worldview of the programmers. That's what an algorithm is, fundamentally. "Do they want to make a good effort to make sure they influence evenly across Democrats and Republicans? Or do they just let the algorithm take its course?" Bright asks.

That course might be scary, if Epstein is right. Add the possibility of search rank influence to the individualization Google can already do based on your gmail, google docs, and every other way you've let the company hook into you...combine that with the feedback loop of popular things getting more inbound links and so getting higher search ranking...and the impact stretches way beyond politics. "You can push knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and behavior among people who are vulnerable any way you want using search rankings," Epstein says. "Now that we've discovered this big effect, how do you kill it?"

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The news about Alex Tichelman, the sex jobber who was one of many Google escort's used by Google executives is all over the news. She was on married, senior Google executive, Forrest Hayes "Sex Yacht" where Mr. Hayes had booked her for another sex romp. He took too much heroin and died in the coital fling. She skipped out and got caught.

Then we have the news about Eric Schmidt, who runs Google, having a "Sex Penthouse". Then we have the news of Sergey Brin, one of Google's founders, having a 3-way bizarre sex triangle inside Google. Then we have this creepy implication that Eric Schmidt has some strange interaction with children, concurrent with the revelation that some Google VC's and executives were involved with Jeffrey Epsteins famous "Sex island" scandals. What type of twisted minds live at Google?