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DID YOU KNOW?

The Trump Campaign Used Computer Analytics to Craft His Message

When Richard Nixon first ran for Congress in 1946, he and his supporters used a wide range of dirty tricks aimed at smearing his opponent as pro-Communist, including a boiler-room operation generating phone calls to registered Democrats, which simply said, "This is a friend of yours, but I can't tell you who I am. Did you know that Jerry Voorhis is a Communist?" Then the caller would hang up.

In 2016, the same basic strategy was employed but with decades of refinement, technological advances, and massively more money behind it. A key player in this was right-wing computer scientist and hedge-fund billionaire Robert Mercer, who contributed \$13.5 million to Trump's campaign and also funded Cambridge Analytica, a data analytics company that specializes in "election management strategies" and using "psychographic" microtargeting—based on thousands of pieces of data for some 220 million American voters—as Carole Cadwalladr reported for *The Guardian* in February 2017.

After Trump's victory, Cambridge Analytica CEO Alexander Nix said, "We are thrilled that our revolutionary approach to data-driven communication has played such an integral part in President-elect Trump's extraordinary win."

Cambridge Analytica's parent company, Strategic Communication Laboratories, was more old-school until recently in elections across Europe, Africa and the Caribbean. In Trinidad, it paid for the painting of graffiti slogans purporting to be from grassroots youth. In Nigeria, it advised its client party to suppress the vote of the opposition "by organizing anti-poll rallies on the day of the election."

But now the company can micro-target its deceptive, disruptive messaging. "Pretty much every message that Trump put out was data-driven" after Cambridge Analytica joined the campaign, Nix said in September 2016. On the day of the third presidential debate, Trump's team "tested 175,000 different ad variations for his arguments" via Facebook.

This messaging had everything to do with how those targeted would respond, not with Trump's or Mercer's views. With the real patterns of influence, ideology, money, power and belief hidden from view, the very concept of democratic self-governance is now fundamentally at risk.