

How Trump's campaign used the new data-industrial complex to win the election

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This year's presidential election was not the first 'social media' election, but the campaigns did take their use of online data and activism to a whole new level. [Jonathan Albright](#) writes on how Donald Trump's campaign used 'military grade' data-driven psychometric micro-targeting to influence people to go out and vote for their candidate.



What do Nelson Mandela, Thom Tillis, Trump's possible Secretary of State pick John Bolton, Breitbart Chairman Steve Bannon, Ted Cruz, a reclusive billionaire computer scientist political donor, a quant hedge trading fund, #Brexit, and Donald J. Trump have in common? [Military-grade data firepower](#).

Ted Cruz erased Trump's Iowa lead by spending millions on voter targeting

Filings reveal Texas senator paid \$3m to profiling company as hedge-fund billionaire seeded advantage in 'military escalation' of data-powered campaign

Source: [The Guardian](#)

Too many post-election Trump think pieces are trying to look *through* the "Facebook filter" peephole, instead of the other way around. So, let's turn the filter inside out and see what falls out.

1) Boomers: the new activists

Voters have been on Facebook since 2008. The NYT's late David Carr wrote about how the first Obama campaign famously [used social media to get out the vote](#)—not so much through strategic data profiling as through focused candidate messaging and grassroots mobilization. Yet, the Facebook election world has changed since 2008. It's also much different than in 2012 and in 2014.

Among politically engaged internet users, young adults have the highest level of involvement

Online activities among online political users (the 55% of the voting-age population who used the internet in one way or another for political purposes during the 2008 campaign)

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
% who are online political users	72%	65%	51%	22%
These activities are engaged in by a range of age groups				
Watch online political videos	67	62	54	40
Share/forward political or election news	44	44	41	47
Young online political users dominate these activities				
Engage politically on a social networking site	49	22	7	2
Post original content related to the campaign	40	21	17	9
Customize political or election news	32	21	19	15

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Post-Election Survey, November-December 2008.



Source: [PEW Internet](#)

Today, it's older adults who have taken the place of what PEW described in 2009 as "politically engaged" youth on what are now *mainstream* social media such as Facebook. *Boomers* are the new "young people" of social media activism. To quote [Katie Rogers of The New York Times](#):

Why Do Older People Love Facebook? Let's Ask My Dad

By KATIE ROGERS APRIL 14, 2016



To set the Trump “Facebook” election record straight, Trump’s *real* momentum came in August 2016 when his son-in-law introduced him to the [team hired by Ted Cruz’s primary SuperPAC](#), the London-based [SCL behavioral science group](#)’s US subsidiary [Cambridge Analytica](#) (CA).

NATIONAL REVIEW



Trump Campaign Turns to ‘Psychographic’ Data Firm Used by Cruz

Source: Elaina Johnson, National Review (Aug 5, 2016)

2) Tiny Data, Big Results

The “tiny” voter profiling and behavior targeting firm is having quite a run as of recent, associated with high-profile Republican Party actors during the 2014 elections, including former G.W. Bush staffer John Bolton, Ted Cruz, and a win in [the most expensive midterm senate race in US history](#)—in 2016 battleground North Carolina. The firm is even [described in the Podesta emails on Wikileaks](#).

Cambridge Analytica is responsible for much of the strategic momentum in the pro-Brexit camp’s data-driven “[Leave.eu](#)” [campaign](#). Oh, and helping to ensure the 1994 election of Nelson Mandela, the 2004 Ukrainian “Orange Revolution,” [and managing campaigns for dozens of prime ministers and governments from Indonesia to Albania](#) .

Leave.EU campaign brings in US voter data and messaging firm Cambridge Analytica

November 18, 2015 by Sam Burne James , [Be the first to comment](#)

One of the two campaigns working towards a British exit from the European Union has enlisted the support of a US firm whose former successes include helping Nelson Mandela to the South African presidency in 1994.

Source: [PR Week](#)

3) Viral Marketing

So, the #Brexit success, Nelson Mandela's South African presidency, Ted Cruz's primary campaign, and Donald J. Trump's unexpected election win don't just share the common populist anti-establishment "brick-through-the-window" narrative, they share a behavioral science "psyops" firm that tried to [build a psychological profile of every US voter](#).

To those ignored, suffering people, Donald Trump is a brick chucked through the window of the elites. "Are you assholes listening *now*?"

Source: [David Wong, Cracked.com](#)

Cambridge Analytica, according to an [in-depth Bloomberg piece by Sasha Issenbert](#), is "funded and promoted by secretive billionaire Robert Mercer," a hedge-fund manager who frequents elite political circles. Mercer is a former IBM Robert J. Watson Center researcher who worked on computer language processing before turning financier. An MSNBC piece notes his background:

A born math wiz, Mercer earned his Ph.D. in computer science at the University of Illinois and designed [complicated algorithms](#) for IBM prior to joining Renaissance

Source: [MSNBC](#)

Mercer is involved with [Renaissance Technologies](#), one of the world's most profitable "quant" hedge funds, which was investigated by the US Senate for [software-assisted \(i.e., algorithmic\) tax evasion practices in 2014](#).

analyses. Renaissance is one of the first highly successful [hedge funds](#) using [quantitative trading](#) — known as "quant hedge funds" — that rely on powerful computers and sophisticated mathematics to guide investment strategies. In 1988 the firm established its most profitable portfolio, the Medallion fund, which used an improved and expanded form of [Leonard Baum's](#) mathematical models improved by algebraist [James Ax](#) to explore correlations from which they could profit. Simons and Ax started a hedge fund and christened it Medallion in honor

Source: [Wikipedia entry on Renaissance Technologies](#)

Mercer, along with his GOP mega-donor daughter, was in the top five Republican Party contributors for the 2014 U.S. midterm elections, and was the [leading political donor for 2016](#).

3) OCEANs of Noise

Cambridge Analytica (CA) has been called out for [borderline ethical use of personal Facebook data](#), such as covertly gathering "likes" to predict the attitudes and beliefs that Facebook users might share unknowingly.

Other strategic information could include: connected third party application data; comments and likes on public Facebook pages; internet browsing history through Facebook APIs and scripts; consumer loyalty programs, mobile app logins; publicly shared photos and profile information that users forget about; and (I'm presuming) [more mundane tactics such as harnessing unassuming personality "quizzes" on Facebook that capture invaluable psychometric data](#) people readily share with their friends and families, but not with a psychological voter profiling firm.

CA uses Facebook's "[most used words](#)" quiz to build their OCEAN:

OCEAN Personality Model

We use the established scientific OCEAN scale of personality traits to understand what people care about, why they behave the way they do, and what really drives their decision making.



You can find a simplified version of CA's test [here](#) and "[get to know the real you in five minutes.](#)" Remarked Bloomberg's Sasha Issenbert:

Cambridge Analytica's assessment differed in one crucial way: The firm promised to tell me things I might not even know about myself. It claimed to predict where I would fall on the five-factor personality model ... Of all the microtargeting profiles of myself I had seen, none had flattered my

| self-concept like this one.

Nigel Oakes, the CA parent SCL Group CEO interviewed in Issenbert's story, came from the ad agency Saatchi & Saatchi, and argues that traditional advertising methods are "incapable of effecting the type of mass opinion shifts necessary for social change." Here's Nigel's talk on "**The Most Common Mistakes in Designing Influence Campaigns**" at the US State Department:

Nigel highlighted four very common errors made in designing influence campaigns, especially if one is trying to induce significant behavior change:

- Attempting to change attitudes, not behavior
- Focusing on individuals or audience segments, not groups
- Using broadcast messages, instead of leveraging existing motivations
- Using survey methods for audience analysis instead of group diagnostics.

When Trump's *real* strategy emerged—down to the specific words he used to double down on his controversial propositions ("build a wall") and inflammatory language (e.g., "Crooked Hillary, "[Pocahontas](#)")—many of the tactics likely came from the military-grade psychometric processing of targeted potential voter data.

Why is Trump using this nickname for Warren?

Trump's comments may be racist against Native Americans, but he's using it here to sarcastically suggest that Warren really *isn't* Native American. (Which, oddly enough, proves that Trump can also be racist while trying to insult someone for being white.)

Source: *Emily Crockett*, [Vox](#)

Even if this psychometric data were to be *leaked* to the press, it is complex in the sense that journalists and political pundits would probably not be able to readily comprehend and report on it. And, much of it would be personally identifying and not ethical to report on in the first place. So, how could [the Fourth Estate](#) attempt to use it to inform the general public?

SCL can help you develop the flexibility and dynamism to win.

The gathering of resources and their subsequent allocation must be planned in such a way as to maximise their effectiveness. Careful preparation ensures that time and money are not wasted and that limited reserves are wisely exploited. SCL is adept at helping candidates to organize their campaigns and orientating them to meet the electoral challenges of their constituency. Our staff have worked at all levels of the campaign hierarchy and provided actionable solutions and bespoke advice across multiple elections. SCL is fully equipped to offer advice from the earliest stages of campaign inception, through planning and into the execution of the final voting phase. From party membership cards and the database behind them to roadshows and all the operations to enable them, SCL have the skills and expertise to develop the products and events to engage your supporters and wow the electorate.

Source: [SCL Elections](#)

4) Military Grade Intervention

SCL Group's unique selling proposition is that they help ensure "time and money are not wasted." At \$5 a head, for Trump, let's just say CA's money-saving strategy [worked](#):

At under \$5 each, Trump's votes came cheap



A man leans out of a Hummer shouting words in support of Donald Trump while driving through Times Square in New York. REUTERS/Mark Kauzlarich

Source: [Reuters](#)

While stats hotshot blogs like [FiveThirtyEight](#) and the [NYT Upshot](#) were working with big data from pre-election polls, voter bias surveys, and exit polls, all of which only mirror information that members of the public are willing give away to someone they don't know personally, Cambridge Analytica, described as "half ad agency and half hackathon," was mining the *real* data, finding hot-button topics that got people mad enough to get out the door and rock the vote—not unlike [the Obama campaign did for Democrats in 2012](#).

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President
228 279
 Clinton Trump ✓
 Full Results 9:34 AM ET



Key States

	Fla.	Mich.	N.H.	N.C.	Pa.
Electoral votes	29	16	4	15	20
Clinton	48%	47%	48%	47%	48%
Trump	49% ✓	48%	47%	51% ✓	49% ✓
Reporting	100%	100%	100%	100%	99%

Senate
 Dem. **48** Rep. **51**

House
193 239

TheUpshot Results | How Trump Won | Exit Polls
 Alaska Ariz. Colo. Fla. Ga. Ind. Iowa Miss. Mo. N.C. N.H. Nev. Ohio Pa. Wis.

Who Will Be President?

By JOSH KATZ

The estimates on this page are based on pre-election polls. For an estimate including results, The Times is providing live forecasts on election night.

President Senate House

Hillary Clinton has an **85% chance** to win.
Last updated: Tuesday, November 8 at 10:20 PM ET

CHANCE OF WINNING



85% Hillary Clinton
 15% Donald J. Trump

Source: [The New York Times](#)

As FiveThirtyEight's Harry Enten [noted two days after the election](#): **There Were No Purple States** on 11/9. Nate Silver finally concluded at 3 o'clock in the morning, "it's the most shocking political development of my lifetime."



NATE SILVER 2:52 AM

That's A Wrap

Donald Trump has been elected president of the United States.

In an extremely narrow sense, I'm not that surprised by the outcome, since polling — to a greater extent than the conventional wisdom acknowledged — had [shown a fairly competitive race with critical weaknesses for Clinton in the Electoral College](#). It's possible, [perhaps even likely](#), that Clinton will eventually win the popular vote as more votes come in from California.

But in a broader sense? It's the most shocking political development of my lifetime.

Source: [FiveThirtyEight](#)

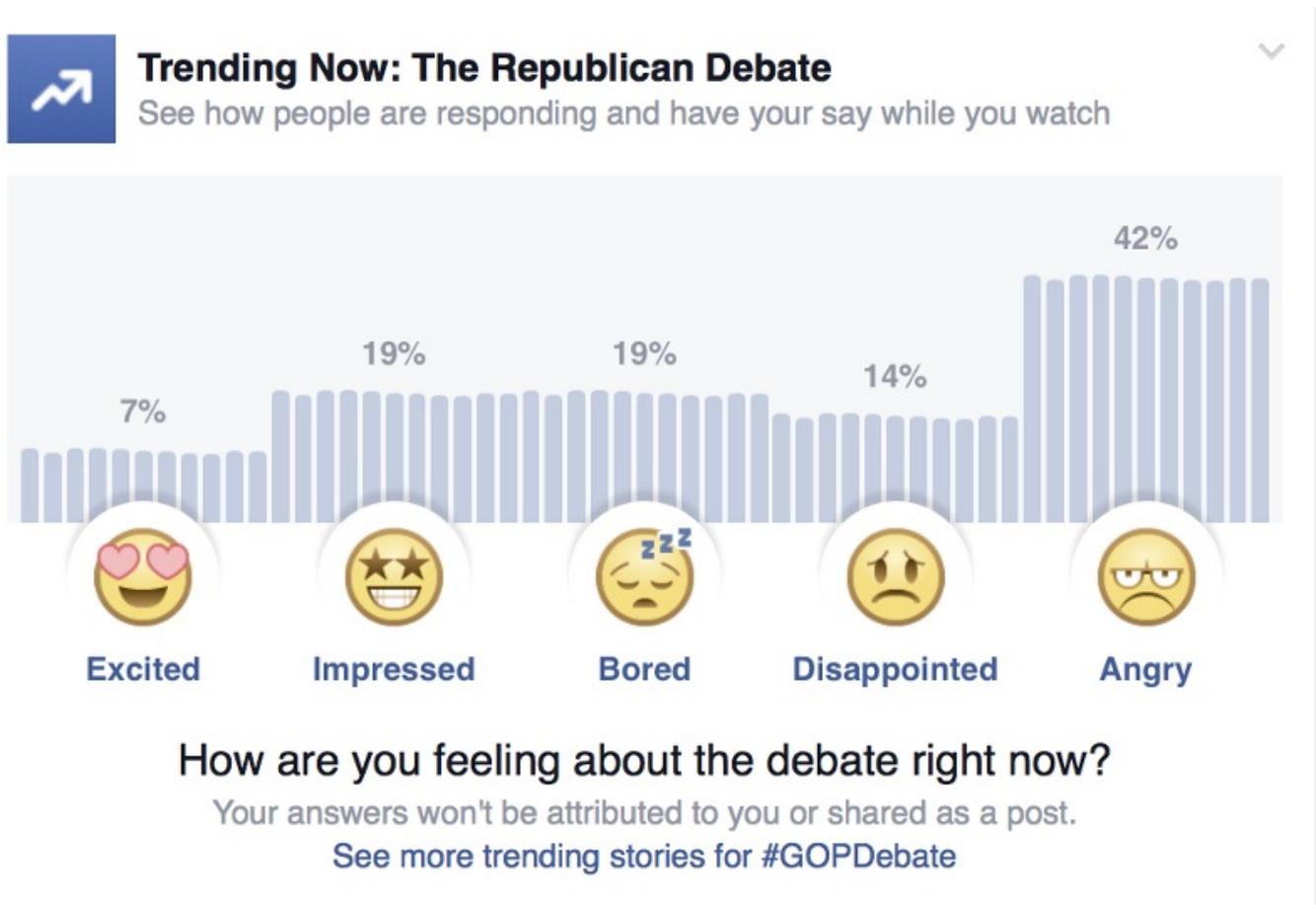
I'm not blaming CA or SCL as the culprit here; the firm offers a service, and politics have always been dirty. The company was hired to do their job, which is to win elections, [overthrow governments](#), [control social uprisings](#), [train](#)

[covert military ops teams](#), etc. They were paid more than \$5 million by the Trump campaign in the month of September alone, not including a sizable payout from Ted Cruz’s primary GOP challenge.

5) The Trump® Card

The **#Election2016** result wasn’t the fault of the Facebook algorithm, the filter bubble, or professional journalism being completely “out of touch” with the majority of the country. Nor was it the fault of pollsters and statistics geeks who were working with enormous—yet unreliable—sources of data.

As the the Trump electoral win clearly demonstrates, the topics people discuss with their closest connections and the viewpoints they share in confidential circles trump even the biggest data sets. Especially when the result involves a clear outcome: an election win from a single behavioral tactic: finding people who can be *influenced enough* to actually go out and vote.



Source: Facebook Promoted Trends, Oct 28, 2015

Stack this strategy on top of an electoral college-based system, and you’ll find the exact voters in the exact states you need to spend time influencing—forget the rest. Well, actually, you’ll want make the ones who you *know* aren’t going to vote for you angry—this way you can extract more data from the people who *might* potentially vote for you. And, of course, all while reminding your recruits that the system is rigged:

Cambridge Analytica, of course, goes far beyond “Facebook data” and uses scholarly research, machine learning, advanced algorithms, thousands of data points, as well as targeted advertising to potentially receptive voters through mediums like [satellite-based DirectTV](#), whose adtech allows for individual household profiling.

New political TV ads can target individual homes



812

BY PHILIP ELLIOTT, ASSOCIATED PRESS February 17, 2014 at 9:20 AM EST

Source: [PBS](#)

Where is **DirectTV** most relevant? In [rural](#) America—areas not well-served by gigabit cable or fiber optic internet services. Its owner [AT&T](#), which currently receives \$427 million in federal money every year to expand rural communication networks might explain it better:

We are seeking to accelerate expansion of Internet access and all of the educational, economic, healthcare and civic opportunities it enables into more unserved, rural areas. We likewise support efforts to increase adoption by underrepresented populations.

The 2016 election was *big data vs. big data*, but the playing field was uneven. This time around, Trump's campaign raised the data-driven psychometric micro-targeting strategy stakes to the next level: **military grade**. Does this mean elections can be "rigged" in a certain candidate's favor?

To be sure, Trump, with major help from one of the world's elite behavioral data strategy firms backed by a hedge fund billionaire computer scientist mega-donor, "beat the system." But the campaign used emotionally-charged data voters were willing to cough up—both knowingly and unknowingly—through intense conflict on platforms like Facebook and Twitter. And CA used the press to fuel this emotional data-mining operation.

Although social media can work to amplify conflict and relay misinformation, the ultimate failure of media to *forecast* a more accurate #Election2016 result wasn't Mark Zuckerberg's, Jack Dorsey's, or Nate Silver's fault. It wasn't the Clinton team's fault. And it wasn't the Fourth Estate's fault. It was [a psychological data-driven model built by CA analysts to seed social change that ended up mostly correct](#).

"Trump-elect" signals that we've entered an entirely different league of data-driven campaigning—[aka the top US political donor of #Election2016](#) billionaire psyops hedge funded-backed SuperPAC military-grade data hunger games—[aka throw Magic Sauce](#) on 240 million people and wait to see what sticks. In a CA *Wall Street Journal* story in October 2016, politics reporter [Michael Kranish](#) said:

The firm says it can predict how most people will vote by using up to 5,000 pieces of data about every American adult, combined with the result of hundreds of thousands of personality and behavioral surveys, to identify millions of voters who are most open to being persuaded to support Trump.

Source: [Washington Post](#)

It's the new **data-industrial complex**. Is this a [problem for democratic society](#)? Definitely. Is it a conspiracy? I mean, [did SCL really plan 9/11](#)?

shows no planes. SCL, London, planned planned the 911 psyop of preplanted WTC towers with military grade explosives planted by 911 perps to be imploded while fake planes were pushed as being the culprits. WTC twin towers were blown up with Cappelletti preplanted explosives to implode when strikes appeared to be generated. 911 was a huge mega ritual, perpetrated by luciferians to cover the preplanned 911 demolitions, preplanned explosives set up in the WTC twin towers for insurance raud.

911 was planned by Strategic Communication Laboratories, London.

Source: <https://forum.davidicke.com/showthread.php?t=183361&page=41>

Has the #Donaldgorgon actually arrived?

I'm guessing not. But as [Cambridge Analytica's election "win" announcement headline](#) suggests, sweeping up the data trails that can easily predict individual voter *behavior* on a national level is a game-winning strategy:

Trump's Data Team Saw a Different America—and They Were Right

Joshua Green and Sasha Issenbert,

Credit: [Cambridge Analytica](#)

A version of this article originally appeared on Medium.

Featured [image credit:](#) [Oli Goldsmith](#) (Flickr, [CC-BY-SA-2.0](#))

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Jonathan Albright is a professor, award-nominated data journalist, and researcher in news and media analytics. His work lies at the interface of communication, culture, and technology—focusing on the thematic analysis of online and socially-mediated news events, creative data-driven journalistic methods, and informational visual storytelling. His work has been featured on Medium, The Huffington Post, The Conversation, and the LSE Impact Blog. He can be found on Twitter [@d1gi](#)



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