Did Google rig Obama's election so that Obama could kick-back hundreds of billions of dollars to Google's investors in the Cleantech Funding scandal?

2016

How Google Could Rig the 2016 Election

Google has the ability to drive millions of votes to a candidate with no one the wiser.

By ROBERT EPSTEIN FOR POLITICO

Getty.

America's next president could be eased into office not just by TV ads or speeches, but by Google's secret decisions, and no one—except for me and perhaps a few other obscure researchers—would know how this was accomplished.

Research I have been directing in recent years suggests that Google, Inc., has amassed far more power to control elections—indeed, to control a wide variety of opinions and beliefs—than any company in history has ever had. Google's search algorithm can easily shift the voting preferences of undecided voters by 20 percent or more—up to 80 percent in some demographic groups—with virtually no one knowing they are being manipulated, according to experiments I conducted recently with Ronald E. Robertson.

Given that many elections are won by small margins, this gives Google the power, right now, to flip upwards of 25 percent of the national elections worldwide. In the United States, half of our presidential elections have been won by margins under 7.6 percent, and the 2012 election was won by a margin of only 3.9 percent—well within Google's control.

There are at least three very real scenarios whereby Google—perhaps even without its leaders' knowledge—could shape or even decide the election next year. Whether or not Google executives see it this way, the employees who constantly adjust the search giant's algorithms are manipulating people every minute of every day. The adjustments they make increasingly influence our thinking—including, it turns out, our voting preferences.

What we call in our research the Search Engine Manipulation Effect (SEME) turns out to be one of the largest behavioral effects ever discovered. Our comprehensive new study, just published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* (PNAS), includes the results of five experiments we conducted with more than 4,500 participants in two countries. Because SEME is virtually invisible as a form of social influence, because the effect is so large and because there are currently no specific regulations anywhere in the world that would prevent Google from using and abusing this technique, we believe SEME is a serious threat to the democratic system of government.

According to Google Trends, at this writing Donald Trump is currently trouncing all other candidates in search activity in 47 of 50 states. Could this activity push him higher in search rankings, and could higher rankings in turn bring him more support? Most definitely—depending, that is, on how Google employees choose to adjust numeric weightings in the search algorithm. Google acknowledges adjusting the algorithm 600 times a year, but the process is secret, so what effect Mr. Trump's success will have on how he shows up in Google searches is presumably out of his hands.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

Our new research leaves little doubt about whether Google has the ability to control voters. In laboratory and online experiments conducted in the United States, we were able to boost the proportion of people who favored any candidate by between 37 and 63 percent after just one search session. The impact of viewing biased rankings repeatedly over a period of weeks or months would undoubtedly be larger.

In our basic experiment, participants were randomly assigned to one of three groups in which search rankings favored either Candidate A, Candidate B or neither candidate. Participants were given brief descriptions of each candidate and then asked how much they liked and trusted each candidate and whom they would vote for. Then they were allowed up to 15 minutes to conduct online research on the candidates using a Google-like search engine we created called Kadoodle.

Each group had access to the same 30 search results—all real search results linking to real web pages from a past election. Only the ordering of the results differed in the three groups. People could click freely on any result or shift between any of five different results pages, just as one can on Google's search engine.

When our participants were done searching, we asked them those questions again, and, *voilà*: On all measures, opinions shifted in the direction of the candidate who was favored in the rankings. Trust, liking and voting preferences all shifted predictably.

More alarmingly, we also demonstrated this shift with real voters during an actual electoral campaign—in an experiment conducted with more than 2,000 eligible, undecided voters throughout India during the 2014 Lok Sabha election there—the largest democratic election in history, with more than 800 million eligible voters and 480 million votes ultimately cast.

Even here, with real voters who were highly familiar with the candidates and who were being bombarded with campaign rhetoric every day, we showed that search rankings could boost the proportion of people favoring any candidate by more than 20 percent—more than 60 percent in some demographic groups.

GOOGLE SCORES PRIOR TO CLOSE OF 2014 INDIAN ELECTIONS
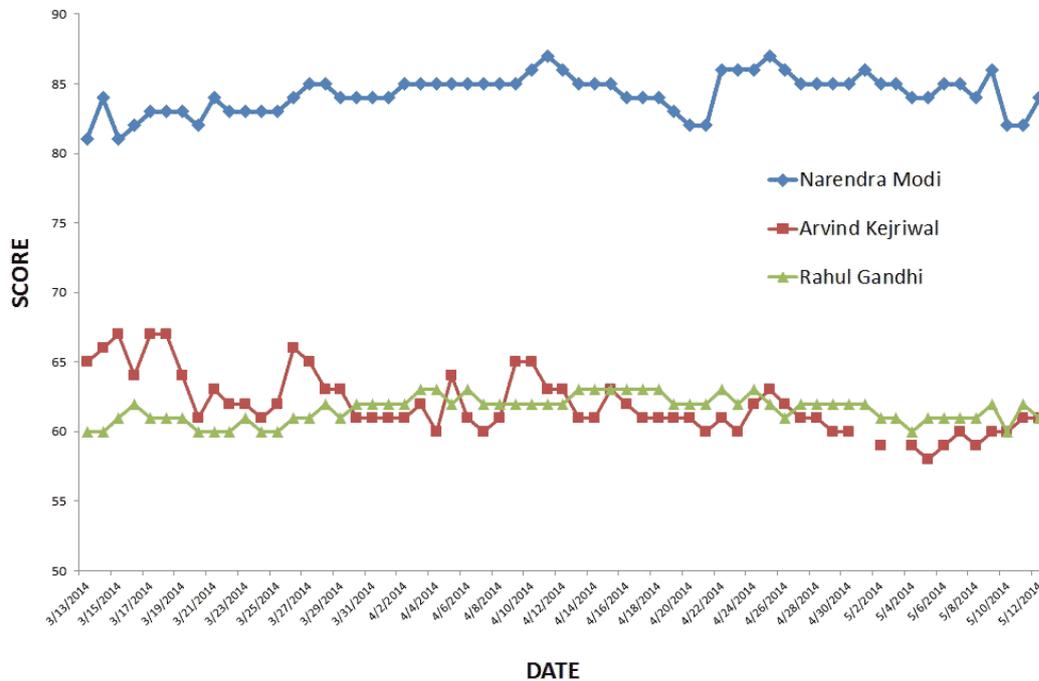
Given how powerful this effect is, it's possible that Google decided the winner of the Indian election. Google's own daily data on election-related search activity (subsequently removed from the Internet, but not before my colleagues and I downloaded the pages) showed that Narendra Modi, the ultimate winner, outscored his rivals in search activity by more than 25 percent for sixty-one consecutive days before the final votes were cast. That high volume of search activity could easily have been generated by higher search rankings for Modi.

Google's official comment on SEME research is always the same: "Providing relevant answers has been the cornerstone of Google's approach to search from the very beginning. It would undermine the people's trust in our results and company if we were to change course."

Could any comment be more meaningless? How does providing "relevant answers" to election-related questions rule out the possibility of favoring one candidate over another in search rankings? Google's statement seems far short of a blanket denial that it ever puts its finger on the scales.

There are three credible scenarios under which Google could easily be flipping elections worldwide as you read this:

First, there is the Western Union Scenario: Google's executives decide which candidate is best for us—and for the company, of course—and they fiddle with search rankings accordingly. There is precedent in the United States for this kind of backroom king-making. Rutherford B. Hayes, the 19th president of the United States, was put into office in part because of strong support by Western Union. In the late 1800s, Western Union had a monopoly on communications in America, and just before to the election of 1876, the company did its best to assure that only positive news stories about Hayes appeared in

newspapers nationwide. It also shared all the telegrams sent by his opponent's campaign staff with Hayes's staff. Perhaps the most effective way to wield political influence in today's high-tech world is to donate money to a candidate and then to use technology to make sure he or she wins. The technology guarantees the win, and the donation guarantees allegiance, which Google has certainly tapped in recent years with the Obama administration.

Given Google's strong ties to Democrats, there is reason to suspect that if Google or its employees intervene to favor their candidates, it will be to adjust the search algorithm to favor Hillary Clinton. In 2012, Google and its top executives donated more than $800,000 to Obama but only $37,000 to Romney. At least six top tech officials in the Obama administration, including Megan Smith, the country's chief technology officer, are former Google employees. According to a recent report by the *Wall Street Journal*, since Obama took office, Google representatives have visited the White House ten times as frequently as representatives from comparable companies—once a week, on average.

Hillary Clinton clearly has Google's support and is well aware of Google's value in elections. In April of this year, she hired a top Google executive, Stephanie Hannon, to serve as her chief technology officer. I don't have any reason to suspect Hannon would use her old connections to aid her candidate, but the fact that she—or any other individual with sufficient clout at Google—has the power to decide elections threatens to undermine the legitimacy of our electoral system, particularly in close elections.

This is, in any case, the most implausible scenario. What company would risk the public outrage and corporate punishment that would follow from being caught manipulating an election?

Second, there is the Marius Milner Scenario: A rogue employee at Google who has sufficient password authority or hacking skills makes a few tweaks in the rankings (perhaps after receiving a text message from some old friend who now works on a campaign), and the deed is done. In 2010, when Google got caught sweeping up personal information from unprotected Wi-Fi networks in more than 30 countries using its Street View vehicles, the entire operation was blamed on one Google employee: software engineer Marius Milner. So they fired him, right? Nope. He's still there, and on LinkedIn he currently identifies his profession as "hacker." If, somehow, you have gotten the impression that at least a few of Google's 37,000 employees are every bit as smart as Milner and possess a certain mischievousness—well, you are probably right, which is why the rogue employee scenario isn't as far-fetched as it might seem.

And third—and this is the scariest possibility—there is the Algorithm Scenario: Under this scenario, all of Google's employees are innocent little lambs, but the *software* is evil. Google's search algorithm is pushing one candidate to the top of rankings because of what the company coyly dismisses as "organic" search activity by users; it's harmless, you see, because it's all natural. Under this scenario, a *computer program* is picking our elected officials.

To put this another way, our research suggests that no matter how innocent or disinterested Google's employees may be*, Google's search algorithm, propelled by user activity, has been determining the outcomes of close elections worldwide for years, with increasing impact every year because of increasing Internet penetration.*

SEME is powerful precisely because Google is so good at what it does; its search results are generally superb. Having learned that fact over time, we have come to trust those results to a high degree. We have also learned that higher rankings mean better material, which is why 50 percent of our clicks go to the first two items, with more than 90 percent of all clicks going to

that precious first search page. Unfortunately, when it comes to elections, that extreme trust we have developed makes us vulnerable to manipulation.

In the final days of a campaign, fortunes are spent on media blitzes directed at a handful of counties where swing voters will determine the winners in the all-important swing states. What a waste of resources! The right person at Google could influence those key voters more than any stump speech could; there is no cheaper, more efficient or subtler way to turn swing voters than SEME. SEME also has one eerie advantage over billboards: when people are unaware of a source of influence, they believe they weren't being influenced at all; they believe they made up their own minds.

Republicans, take note: A manipulation on Hillary Clinton's behalf would be particularly easy for Google to carry out, because of all the demographic groups we have looked at so far, no group has been more vulnerable to SEME—in other words, so blindly trusting of search rankings—than moderate Republicans. In a national experiment we conducted in the United States, we were able to shift a whopping 80 percent of moderate Republicans in any direction we chose just by varying search rankings.

There are many ways to influence voters—more ways than ever these days, thanks to cable television, mobile devices and the Internet. Why be so afraid of Google's search engine? If rankings are so influential, won't all the candidates be using the latest SEO techniques to make sure they rank high?

SEO is competitive, as are billboards and TV commercials. No problem there. The problem is that for all practical purposes, there is just one search engine. More than 75 percent of online search in the United States is conducted on Google, and in most other countries that proportion is 90 percent. That means that if Google's CEO, a rogue employee or even just the search algorithm itself favors one candidate, *there is no way to counteract that influence*. It would be as if Fox News were the only television channel in the country. As Internet penetration grows and more people get their information about candidates online, SEME will become an increasingly powerful form of influence, which means that the programmers and executives who control search engines will also become more powerful.

Worse still, our research shows that even when people *do* notice they are seeing biased search rankings, their voting preferences *still* shift in the desired directions—even *more* than the preferences of people who are oblivious to the bias. In our national study in the United States, 36 percent of people who were unaware of the rankings bias shifted toward the candidate we chose for them, but 45 percent of those who *were* aware of the bias also shifted. It's as if the bias was serving as a form of social proof; the search engine clearly prefers one candidate, so that candidate *must* be the best. (Search results are *supposed* to be biased, after all; they're supposed to show us what's best, second best, and so on.)

Biased rankings are hard for individuals to detect, but what about regulators or election watchdogs? Unfortunately, SEME is easy to hide. The best way to wield this type of influence is to do what Google is becoming better at doing every day: send out customized search results. If search results favoring one candidate were sent only to vulnerable individuals, regulators and watchdogs would be especially hard pressed to find them.

For the record, by the way, our experiments meet the gold standards of research in the behavioral sciences: They are randomized (which means people are randomly assigned to different groups), controlled (which means they include groups in which interventions are either present or absent), counterbalanced (which means critical details, such as names, are presented to half the participants in one order and to half in the opposite order) and double-blind (which means that neither the subjects nor anyone who interacts with them has any idea what the hypotheses are or what groups people are assigned to). Our subject pools are

diverse, matched as closely as possible to characteristics of a country's electorate. Finally, our recent report in PNAS included four replications; in other words, we showed repeatedly—under different conditions and with different groups—that SEME is real.

Our newest research on SEME, conducted with nearly 4,000 people just before the national elections in the UK this past spring, is looking at ways we might be able to protect people from the manipulation. We found the monster; now we're trying to figure out how to kill it. What we have learned so far is that the only way to protect people from biased search rankings is to break the trust Google has worked so hard to build. When we deliberately mix rankings up, or when we display various kinds of alerts that identify bias, we can suppress SEME to some extent.

It's hard to imagine Google ever degrading its product and undermining its credibility in such ways, however. To protect the free and fair election, that might leave only one option, as unpalatable at it might seem: government regulation.

Robert Epstein is senior research psychologist at the [American Institute for Behavioral Research and Technology](#) and the former editor-in-chief of Psychology Today. *Follow him on Twitter [@DrREpstein](#).*

- [2016](#)
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- [Technology](#)

Proving That Google Manipulates The Internet For Elon Musk and His Political Elections And Stock Market Results For Investors: How It Was Done

- Technical testing arrays were built, by numerous groups, which spent long periods testing the internet

- Results prove that "mood manipulation" technology is intentionally used and operated by Google management

- Google accused of running "NAZI-LIKE" mind experiments on the public without their knowledge

Internet search engines may be influencing elections

By

[David Shultz](#)

"What we're talking about here is a means of mind control on a massive scale that there is no precedent for in human history." That may sound hyperbolic, but Robert Epstein says it's not an exaggeration. Epstein, a research psychologist at the American Institute for Behavioral Research in Vista, California, has found that the higher a politician ranks on a page of Internet search results, the more likely you are to vote for them.

"I have a lot of faith in the methods they've used, and I think it's a very rigorously conducted study," says Nicholas Diakopoulos, a computer scientist at the University of Maryland, College Park, who was not involved in the research. "I don't think that they've overstated their claims."

In their first experiment, Epstein and colleagues recruited three groups of 102 volunteers in San Diego, California, who were generally representative of the U.S. voting population in terms of age, race, political affiliation, and other traits. The researchers wanted to know if they could influence who the Californians would have voted for in the 2010 election … for prime minister of Australia.

So they built a fake search engine called Kadoodle that returned a list of 30 websites for the finalist candidates, 15 for Tony Abbott and 15 for Julia Gillard. Most of the Californians knew little about either candidate before the test began, so the experiment was their only real exposure to Australian politics. What they didn't know was that the search engine had been rigged to display the results in an order biased toward one candidate or the other. For example, in the most extreme scenario, a subject would see 15 webpages with information about Gillard's platform and objectives followed by 15 similar results for Abbott.

As predicted, subjects spent far more time reading Web pages near the top of the list. But what surprised researchers was the difference those rankings made: Biased search results increased the number of undecided voters choosing the favored candidate by 48% compared with a control group that saw an equal mix of both candidates throughout the list. Very few subjects noticed they were being manipulated, but those who did were actually *more* likely to vote in line with the biased results. "We expect the search engine to be making wise choices," Epstein says. "What they're saying is, 'Well yes, I see the bias and that's telling me … the search engine is doing its job.'"

In a second experiment, the scientists repeated the first test on 2100 participants recruited online through Amazon's labor crowdsourcing site Mechanical Turk. The subjects were also chosen to be representative of the U.S. voting population. The large sample size—and additional details provided by users—allowed the researchers to pinpoint which demographics were most vulnerable to search engine

manipulation: Divorcees, Republicans, and subjects who reported low familiarity with the candidates were among the easiest groups to influence, whereas participants who were better informed, married, or reported an annual household income between $40,000 and $50,000 were harder to sway. Moderate Republicans were the most susceptible of any group: The manipulated search results increased the number of undecided voters who said they would choose the favored candidate by 80%.

"In a two-person race, a candidate can only count on getting half of the uncommitted votes, which is worthless. With the help of biased search rankings, a candidate might be able to get 90% of the uncommitted votes [in select demographics]," Epstein explains.

In a third experiment, the team tested its hypothesis in a real, ongoing election: the 2014 general election in India. After recruiting a sample of 2150 undecided Indian voters, the researchers repeated the original experiment, replacing the Australian candidates with the three Indian politicians who were actually running at the time. The results of the real world trial were slightly less dramatic—an outcome that researchers attribute to voters' higher familiarity with the candidates. But merely changing which candidate appeared higher in the results still increased the number of undecided Indian voters who would vote for that candidate by 12% or more compared with controls. And once again, awareness of the manipulation enhanced the effect.

A few percentage points here and there may seem meager, but the authors point out that elections are often won by margins smaller than 1%. If 80% of eligible voters have Internet access and 10% of them are undecided, the search engine effect could convince an additional 25% of those undecided to vote for a target candidate, the team reports online this week in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*. That type of swing would determine the election outcome, as long as the expected win margin was 2% or less. "This is a huge effect," Epstein says. "It's so big that it's quite dangerous."

But perhaps the most concerning aspect of the findings is that a search engine doesn't even have to intentionally manipulate the order of results for this effect to manifest. Organic search algorithms already in place naturally put one candidate's name higher on the list than others. This is based on factors like "relevance" and "credibility" (terms that are closely guarded by developers at Google and other major search engines). So the public is already being influenced by the search engine manipulation effect, Epstein says. "Without any intervention by anyone working at

Google, it means that Google's algorithm has been determining the outcome of close elections around the world."

Presumably Google isn't intentionally tweaking its algorithms to favor certain presidential candidates, but Epstein says it would extremely difficult to tell if it were. He also points out that the Internet mogul will benefit more from certain election outcomes than others.

And according to Epstein, Google is very aware both of the power it wields, as well as the research his team is doing: When the team recruited volunteers from the Internet in the second experiment, two of the IP addresses came from Google's head office, he says.

"It's easy to point the finger at the algorithm because it's this supposedly inert thing, but there are a lot of people behind the algorithm," Diakopoulos says. "I think that it does pose a threat to the legitimacy of the democracy that we have. We desperately need to have a public conversation about the role of these systems in the democratic processes."

Posted in [Brain & Behavior](), [Technology]()

PSYCHOLOGIST'S WORK FOR GCHQ DECEPTION UNIT INFLAMES DEBATE AMONG PEERS

- [Andrew Fishman]()

Aug. 7 2015, 6:18 p.m.

A British psychologist is receiving sharp criticism from some professional peers for providing expert advice to help the U.K. surveillance agency GCHQ manipulate people online.

- The debate brings into focus the question of how or whether psychologists should offer their expertise to spy agencies engaged in deception and propaganda.

- Dr. Mandeep K. Dhami, in a 2011 paper, provided the controversial GCHQ spy unit JTRIG with advice, research pointers, training recommendations, and thoughts on psychological issues, with the goal of improving the unit's performance and effectiveness. JTRIG's operations have been referred to as "dirty tricks," and Dhami's paper notes that the unit's own staff characterize their work using "terms such as 'discredit,' promote 'distrust,' 'dissuade,' 'deceive,' 'disrupt,' 'delay,' 'deny,' 'denigrate/degrade,' and 'deter.'" The unit's targets go beyond terrorists and foreign militaries and include groups considered "domestic extremist[s]," criminals, online "hacktivists," and even "entire countries."

- After publishing Dhami's paper for the first time in June, *The Intercept* reached out to several of her fellow psychologists, including some whose work was referenced in the paper, about the document's ethical implications.

- One of the psychologists cited in the report criticized the paper and GCHQ's ethics. Another psychologist condemned Dhami's recommendations as "grossly unethical" and another called them an "egregious violation" of psychological ethics. But two other psychologists cited in the report did not express concern when contacted for reaction, and another psychologist, along with Dhami's current employer, defended her work and her ethical standards.

- A British law firm hired to represent Dhami maintained that any allegations of unethical conduct are "grossly defamatory and totally untrue."

- The divergent views on the paper highlight how the profession of psychology has yet to resolve key ethical concerns around consulting for government intelligence agencies. These issues take on added resonance in the context of the uproar currently roiling the American Psychological Association over the key role it played in the CIA torture program during the Bush administration. The APA's Council

of Representatives [voted](#) Friday to bar psychologists from taking part in national security interrogations or to advise on confinement conditions. Dhami's consultation with JTRIG and the APA's role in support of the CIA torture program are disparate — there is no suggestion that Dhami advised on interrogations involving torture nor that her paper was part of an ongoing relationship with JTRIG — but Dhami's GCHQ work, like the APA scandal, provokes heated disagreement and criticism.

- Psychologists respond strongly to ethical issues

- Some peers are outspoken against Dhami's paper. They do not believe it is possible to engage ethically with the deceitful activities of a unit like JTRIG at any level. Arguments in defense of assisting psychological operations, meanwhile, include the notion that doing so helps ensure they are conducted in a responsible fashion and can help obviate the need for operations that are violent.

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- Dr. Stephen Soldz, Director of Center for Research Evaluation and Program Development at Boston Graduate School of Psychoanalysis

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- Dr. Stephen Soldz, co-founder of the Coalition for an Ethical Psychology and co-author of two reports from Physicians for Human Rights on health professionals' role in the CIA torture program, told *The Intercept* that the recommendations in Dhami's report highlight the moral hazard of "operational psychology," in which psychological expertise is used to further military and intelligence operations.

- Soldz condemned the "deeply disturbing and grossly unethical recommendations" in Dhami's JTRIG report. He added that "the psychology profession and the public must grapple with developing proper ethical constraints on the activities of operational psychologists."

- For Dr. Bradley Olson, who is past president of APA Division 48, which studies peace, conflict, and violence, using one's training to assist in a mission like JTRIG's, which involves the deception and manipulation of unsuspecting targets, is inherently problematic. Using one's "expertise, research, or consultation to guide deceptive statements, even the statements of others, when the deceptive intentions are clearly documented ... that is against psychological ethics," according to Olson, who has collaborated with Soldz, including as a co-founder of the Coalition for an Ethical Psychology. "This is a terrible, terrible violation of psychological ethics" and a violation of the APA's ethical standards, he added.

- Dhami is not currently a member of the APA, but was a member of an APA Division at the time the report was

written. According to [APA bylaws](#), "Divisions must comply with all APA Bylaws, Association Rules and current policies." Her online [profile](#) at Middlesex University, where Dhami is a professor, currently lists her as a member of [APA Division 41](#) and a fellow of [Division 9](#). A representative of APA Division 9, the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues, said that Dhami stopped paying dues in 2013 and is therefore no longer a member. The APA and an officer of Division 41, the American Psychology-Law Society, acknowledged receiving but did not respond to questions from *The Intercept*.

- Dr. Christian Crandall, a professor in the University of Kansas' social psychology program, disagrees with Dhami's critics. "In my perusal, it seemed that she was writing a brief that would lead to research opportunities, consulting opportunities, and the like," he said. "Because this brief was commissioned and written prior to the Snowden revelations … we might give Prof. Dhami the benefit of the doubt, that she might not [have] know[n] or anticipate[d] the extent of misconduct in the intelligence agencies."

- Crandall is also a council member at SPSSI, the APA division that honored Dhami as a fellow in 2007, and, emailing in that capacity, said he sees nothing unethical about Dhami's report for JTRIG. After a "fairly quick look at the document," he said the report did not merit an investigation. "What should SPSSI do? Nothing. Nothing at all, until evidence of actual unethical conduct appears. And we have not seen it."

- "It is certainly possible that JTRIG acts badly, spies on domestic (or American) targets, or even breaks international law. It is a stretch to hold Prof. Dhami responsible for this," Crandall wrote. "[The report is] quite a bit like what the U.S. Army teaches their strategic communication officers. It's less offensive than the behaviors of Karl Rove. It's not benign. But Dhami specifies two relevant ethical codes … and two relevant UK laws … and recommends that JTRIG follow the relevant laws."

- **"I do not think that JTRIG requires a set of ethical guidelines that is different from those that are relevant to the rest of humanity."**

- Dhami was contacted for this article and responded to questions from *The Intercept* through Schillings, a British law firm, and Culhane Meadows, a U.S. firm. A letter from Schillings said that Dhami had "upheld the highest ethical standards" throughout her academic career and had never sought to hide her association with GCHQ. "The work undertaken by our client has been focused on helping GCHQ to accurately understand and responsibly apply psychological science," the letter stated. "In working with the government our client typically provides advice on how to improve specific aspects of their work" and is "not therefore actively engaged in the day-to-day business of these departments, but rather an independent observer/commentator" with a "strong track record of publishing critiques of existing Government policies."

- Schillings also said Dhami was "legally restricted in terms of the responses that she is able to give" to *The Intercept*'s questions "by virtue of the government agency involved," adding that no "adverse inferences" should be drawn from this. Asked about Dhami's report, GCHQ said in a statement that the agency is "aware of the responsibility that comes with the nature of its work and in addition to the legal accountability we also take the ethical considerations surrounding our mission seriously."

- Middlesex University defended Dhami's work, writing: "Middlesex University has robust ethical procedures and is

committed to operating in an ethical way to ensure the highest possible standards of decision-making and accountability. Professor Dhami's work for Middlesex University is carried out in strict accordance with the ethical codes of the organisation, which in turn conform to the standards laid down by the British Psychological Society."

- Psychological advice for covert propaganda unit

- Dhami appears to have been a senior lecturer in criminology at Cambridge University when she wrote the report, as well as a social psychologist with the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, an agency sponsored by the U.K. Ministry of Defence. During this period, she was temporarily transferred, or "seconded" to GCHQ, according to a version of Dhami's [CV](#)posted online.

- The top-secret document, titled "Behavioural Science Support for JTRIG's (Joint Threat Research and Intelligence Group's) Effects and Online HUMINT Operations," appears to have been written during this stint at the spy agency. (The term "HUMINT" commonly refers to human intelligence.) It was based on interviews with 22 JTRIG staffers and seven support staff from GCHQ. In it, Dhami provides advice on how JTRIG can improve its approach and attain desired outcomes, for example, by applying theories and research around persuasive communication, compliance, obedience, conformity, and the creation of trust and distrust.

- "Compliance can be achieved through various techniques," reads the "obedience" section of Dhami's report, "including: Engaging the norm of reciprocity; engendering liking (e.g., via ingratiation or attractiveness); stressing the importance of social validation (e.g., via highlighting that others have also complied); instilling a sense of scarcity or secrecy; getting the 'foot-in-the-door' (i.e., getting compliance to a small request/issue first); and applying the 'door-in-the-face' or 'low-ball' tactics (i.e., asking for compliance on a large

request/issue first and having hidden aspects to a request/issue that someone has already complied with, respectively).”

- In other cases, Dhami presents a menu of possible effective approaches grounded in specific psychological research that is formally cited throughout the body of the paper, in a “recommended reading list,” and in a “list of training requirements for JTRIG staff.”

- “Propaganda techniques include,” Dhami writes, “Using stereotypes; substituting names/labels for neutral ones; censorship or systematic selection of information; repetition; assertions without arguments; and presenting a message for and against a subject.”

- Dhami’s 42-page report came nearly three years before the world became aware of JTRIG and of its methods of deception, dissemination of online propaganda, and acquisition of human intelligence. The unit’s existence was first revealed through leaked documents provided by NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden and published by *NBC News* and *The Intercept*. JTRIG’s tactics include seeding propaganda on social media, impersonating people online, and creating false blog posts to discredit targets.

- Dhami recommends that staff be trained on the various specific techniques she outlines, that a social influence research program be developed, that the possibility of compiling psychological profiles for exploitation in intelligence operations be explored, that a catalog of online crime prevention techniques be developed, that processes for assessment of risk and effectiveness be established, and that JTRIG develop guidelines for operational best practices.

- ‘JTRIG has now acquired this material’

- Some of the psychology research texts Dhami recommends are marked with an asterisk indicating “JTRIG has now

acquired this material." *The Intercept*attempted to contact the authors of materials that had been "acquired" by JTRIG.

- One of those authors, Peter Smith, emeritus professor of psychology at University of Sussex near Brighton, England, raised questions about Dhami's paper.

- "Some of the reported actions of JTRIG are clearly contrary to the ethical guidelines of the British Psychological Society," Smith wrote in an email. "The descriptions that [s]he provides of the social psychology of influence are broadly accurate, but the use of this knowledge to deceive people or distort the information that they receive is not advocated in any of the sources that [s]he cites." He added: "I am certainly not comfortable with the ways in which Dr. Dhami has used [her] knowledge of social psychology."

- Dhami's profile at Middlesex University does not list the British Psychological Society among her current professional affiliations.

- Other psychologists cited by Dhami did not criticize her paper but rather disclaimed any control over her use of their material. Susan Fiske, a Princeton psychologist and fellow of six APA divisions, also had her work acquired by JTRIG. She told *The Intercept* by email, "Anyone can buy my book. When you write a textbook, it's in the public domain, and anyone can use it. I have no control over what happens after it is published."

- Joseph Forgas, a psychology professor at the University of New South Wales in Australia, had his work on the list as well. He responded: "This is published research that is in the public sphere and is openly available to anyone. So, I have no further control over its use, and I see [no] problem at all with anyone using it. If there are indeed any ethical issues here, it is the responsibility of democratic governments to supervise such activity. I am not aware of any abuse, and on the whole, I don't see any real issues here."

- Eleven other psychologists whose work was cited by Dhami did not respond to emails from *The Intercept*.

- A 'bespoke' code of ethics

- Dhami does directly address ethical concerns in part of her report. But her treatment of ethics is brief. JTRIG, she writes, operates under "no specific guidelines on ethical practice." She notes that professional codes of conduct exist, such as those of the British Society of Criminology and the British Psychological Society, but determines that "clearly, not all of the aspects of the above codes will be relevant or applicable to JTRIG's operations" and the codes "do not identify best practice in all of the types of online interactions that JTRIG staff might be involved in." "Thus," she concludes, "JTRIG may need to develop a bespoke code" that complies with the U.K. legislation governing intelligence agencies.

- Smith, the University of Sussex psychologist whose work was acquired by JTRIG, views the issue differently. "Dr. Dhami neither condemns nor directly endorses the reported actions of JTRIG, but suggests that their actions may need to be guided by a 'different' ethical code," he wrote. "I do not think that JTRIG requires a set of ethical guidelines that is different from those that are relevant to the rest of humanity."

- The very idea of a "bespoke code" that "complies" with the law but merely considers established ethics codes "that may be pertinent," without being bound by them, is controversial, but not novel. It's far from clear that there is an ethically correct way to engage in acts to discredit, deceive, denigrate, and degrade unsuspecting targets, and it's decidedly possible that developing guidelines that purport to do so will only lend legitimacy to unsavory behavior.

- A change to the APA's Ethics Code, adopted in August 2002, allowed psychologists, for the first time, to "adhere to the requirements of the law, regulations, or other governing legal authority" in cases where those regulations could not be squared with ethical standards.

- That same month, the Bush Justice Department issued one of the key, then-secret "torture memos," which suggested that interrogators could avoid prosecution for torture if they

believed in "good faith" their actions would not result in "prolonged mental harm"; demonstration of such "good faith" included "consulting with experts."

- Three years later, after images of the Abu Ghraib torture scandal had shocked the world, the APA Presidential Task Force on Psychological Ethics and National Security affirmed the organization's support for psychologists' participation in government interrogations. "The Task Force believes that a central role for psychologists working in the area of national security-related investigations is to assist in ensuring that processes are safe, legal, and ethical for all participants," it stipulated.

- This institutional posture gave psychologists the ethical cover to participate in interrogations, which in turn provided interrogators with the legal cover, in accordance with the DoJ memos, to engage in "enhanced interrogation tactics."

- In 2010, the APA removed the clause added to the Ethics Code in 2002, which could open the door to the so-called "Nuremberg Defense." The 2005 PENS report was retracted in 2013.

- 'Propaganda for democracy'

- Social scientists and medical professionals have long struggled with the moral and ethical dilemmas inherent in operational work on behalf of militaries and intelligence agencies. Proponents of such work posit that so-called psychological operations can limit conflict and save lives — particularly when used tactically, for limited applications within a battlefield, as opposed to strategically around the world.

- Critics maintain that because the potential for abuse is inherent, scholars have an obligation to combat, rather than enable, psychological operations.

- Dr. Sara B. King, chair of the psychology department at Saint Francis University in Pennsylvania, summarizes the

argument in [her study](#) of military social influence. Some propaganda critics, she writes, "have argued that 'propaganda for democracy' is simply a contradiction in terms, because pervasive propaganda inevitably shapes totalitarian, rather than democratic, psychological process." In describing strategic psychological operations "planned and executed at the national level," King explains: "These broad-based military perception management initiatives, argue some, have the potential to endanger both science and democracy."

- According to King, this debate was most fervent in the period between the two world wars, was largely quashed during the anti-Communist McCarthy era, and became a relative whisper in the post-9/11 era, when the APA changed its ethical posture to enable psychologists to participate in interrogations.

- In a published response to King, [Dhami argued](#) in March 2011, the same month the JTRIG report was issued, that military use of psychology is inevitable, and therefore civilian psychologists have a responsibility to monitor its application in order to prevent misuse.

- "The integrity of our psychological science is threatened by the great potential for its misinterpretation and misapplication in military social influence campaigns," Dhami wrote. "The harm that may be caused by remaining detached from such campaigns, perhaps because of the element of deception and invasion of privacy involved, may far outweigh the benefits of striving for the welfare and rights of the campaign targets."

- Even in the wake of today's APA vote, the debate over Dhami's paper shows the profession of psychology is still grappling with questions over the ethical limits of involvement in government intelligence programs.

- "Psychologists should use their unique insights into human behavior to promote human welfare and dignity, not undermine or harm individuals," Sarah Dougherty, a lawyer and senior fellow of the U.S. Anti-Torture Program at

Physicians for Human Rights, told *The Intercept.* "The JTRIG allegations merit further investigation."

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Psychologists Approve Ban on Role in National Security Interrogations

By **JAMES RISEN**

Photo

The Washington headquarters of the American Psychological Association, the nation's largest association of psychologists. CreditStephen Crowley/The New York Times

TORONTO — The American Psychological Association on Friday overwhelmingly approved a new ban on any involvement by psychologists in national security interrogations conducted by the United States government, even noncoercive interrogations now conducted by the Obama administration.

The council of representatives of the organization, the nation's largest professional association of psychologists, voted to impose the ban at its annual meeting here.

The vote followed an emotional debate in which several members said the ban was needed to restore the organization's reputation after a scathing independent investigation ordered by the association's board.

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That investigation, conducted by David Hoffman, a Chicago lawyer, found that some officers of the association and other prominent psychologists colluded with

government officials during the Bush administration to make sure that association policies did not prevent psychologists from involvement in the harsh interrogation programs conducted by the C.I.A. and the Pentagon.

Nadine Kaslow, an association board member and head of a special committee established by the board to oversee the investigation into the organization's role in interrogations, said she was pleased by the overwhelming vote in favor of the measure. "This is a very resounding 'yes,' " Ms. Kaslow said. The ban was approved by the association's council by a vote of 156 to 1. Seven council members abstained, while one was recused.

"I think this was a tremendous step in the right direction," said Susan McDaniel, the association's president-elect, who was the chairwoman of Friday's meeting. She expressed hopes that Friday's vote would persuade psychologists who quit the organization because of its involvement with Bush-era interrogations to rejoin the group.

Many A.P.A. leaders and members said they were stunned by the lopsided vote in favor of the ban, and its backers said that as late as Thursday night they were not certain it would pass. Just before Friday's vote, the measure's supporters agreed to change some of the ban's language, which may have won over some wavering council members. Two of the ban's advocates on the council, psychologists Scott Churchill and Steven Reisner, insisted that the changes did not weaken the ban. "This was a momentous day," said Mr. Churchill.

The ban passed on Friday says that "psychologists shall not conduct, supervise, be in the presence of, or otherwise assist any national security interrogations for any military or intelligence entities, including private contractors working on their behalf, nor advise on conditions of confinement insofar as these might facilitate such an interrogation." The measure's backers added language on Friday that stated that psychologists may consult with the government on broad interrogation policy, but may not get involved in any specific interrogation or consult on the specific detention conditions for detainees.

The final vote was met by a standing ovation by many of the council members, as well as the large crowd of observers, which included anti-torture activists and psychology graduate students who had come to the meeting to support the ban. Some wore T-shirts proclaiming "First, Do No Harm," a reference to the physicians' Hippocratic oath.

 "I'm really happy they didn't vote no," said Deb Kory, a clinical psychologist from Berkeley, Calif. "I think that would have been the death knell for the A.P.A."

Some psychologists did speak out in opposition to the ban, or at least expressed reservations about it during the debate before the vote on Friday morning, arguing that it went too far. "I'm concerned about unintended consequences," said Larry James, who represents the A.P.A.'s division of military psychology on the council.

The ban would only prohibit involvement in what the association defines as national security interrogations, which are those conducted by the American military or intelligence agencies, or by contractors or foreign governments outside traditional domestic criminal law enforcement inside the United States.

It would not prohibit psychologists from working with the police or prisons in criminal law enforcement interrogations.

President Obama signed an [executive order in 2009] banning the use of the harsh interrogation techniques employed against terrorism suspects during the Bush administration. But there are still some psychologists involved in the interrogation programs now used in terrorism cases by the Obama administration.

Most interrogations of important terrorism suspects now are conducted by the [High Value Detainee Interrogation Group], an interagency unit led by the F.B.I. that includes C.I.A. and Pentagon personnel. The group also includes psychologists, who both conduct research and consult on effective means of interrogating terrorism suspects.

Pentagon officials have said that psychologists are also still assigned at the American military prison at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, where they oversee voluntary interrogations of detainees.

A.P.A. officials said that psychologists could be subject to ethics complaints if they continued to be involved in national security interrogations after a new association ethics code was in place to reflect Friday's ban.

Ms. McDaniel said that she did not know how many A.P.A. members were now involved in national security interrogations. But the measure passed Friday calls for the A.P.A. to send a letter to Mr. Obama and other top government officials informing them of the new policy, and requesting that psychologists be removed from Guantánamo Bay and other sites where national security interrogations are conducted, so that they do not violate the new ethics policy.

Psychologists played crucial roles in the post-9/11 harsh interrogation programs created by the C.I.A. and Pentagon, and their involvement helped the Bush administration claim that the abusive interrogation techniques were legal. The involvement of psychologists in the interrogations enabled the Justice Department to

issue secret legal opinions arguing that the interrogations were safe because they were being monitored by health professionals, and thus did not constitute torture.

Even before Friday's vote, the Hoffman report and its unsparing findings of collusion during the Bush administration had already had a dramatic impact on the A.P.A. Four top association officials, including its chief executive and his deputy, have left the organization since the report was released in July.

Friday's vote in favor of the ban prompted an immediate reaction among military psychologists who are members of the A.P.A.

After the vote, about 50 members of the A.P.A.'s military psychology division, including several who were in uniform, held a separate meeting in another conference room in the hotel that hosted the annual meeting. They expressed frustration and anger.

Tom Williams, the president of the A.P.A.'s military psychology division, said that he thought the language of the ban was overly broad.

"I think the wording could have a large effect on any psychologist in a national security setting," said Mr. Williams, a retired Army psychologist. He said that the group may consider splitting off from the A.P.A.

"We are keeping our options on the table," Mr. Williams said.

Correction: August 7, 2015
An earlier version of this article misspelled the name of a psychologist who supported a ban on involvement by psychologists in national security interrogations. He is Steven Reisner, not Reissner.

Did Kleiner Perkin's and Vinohd Khosla Test Google's Election Rigging System With India's Elections

Obama connection to Silicon Valley now examined for darker purposes

Was Google taken over by a rogue CIA operation called In-Q-Tel in order to rig the Obama Election? In-Q-Tel money proven to be in Google. Eric Schmidt Connection to White House, New America Foundation and In-Q-Tel proven. Corbett Report says dirty deeds were afoot.

"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

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- Date of Publication: 08.06.15. 08.06.15
- Time of Publication: 1:24 pm. 1:24 pm

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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