“Why wouldn’t someone think of democracy as a target?”

Security practices & challenges of people involved with U.S. political campaigns

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How John Podesta’s email got hacked, and how to not let it happen to you

How the Russians hacked the DNC and passed its emails to WikiLeaks

Macron Leaks: The anatomy of a hack

Vox


The Washington Post

July 2018

BBC News

May 2017
“Security and politics should be separate... If you’re a candidate, you should win or lose on your best day, based on who you are. Not because your email got popped and posted online by a [nation-state cybersecurity team].”

- A study participant [emphasis added]
Research
Qualitative research

28 people involved with political campaigns in the U.S.

Roles
- candidates
- campaign managers
- digital directors
- research, strategy
- security / IT staff

Organizations
- political campaigns
- party committees (nat’l, state)
- super PACs
- campaign-specific service / support providers
- academia
2 main security factors

- Work culture
- Tech practices and vulnerabilities
Campaigns are] **totally transient**, and almost everybody gets hired in the 3 months prior to the election...

There’s really very **few incentives for any kind of [security] rigor**.

Because you’re up against the clock, and **faced with the ticking clock, everything pales.**”

— A study participant [emphasis added]
Different culture

- They are short-lived
- They are chaotically busy
- They are resource-constrained
- They have amorphous boundaries
Account use

MANY accounts are used for campaign work

- workplace system(s)
- communication tools(s)
- social media
- video / phone conferencing
- personal communications accounts
- and so on...

Some accounts are hyper-shared or hyper-owned
Not just campaign accounts

Accounts **not used for campaign-related work** are also targeted

**Anything** that can derail, embarrass, or otherwise disrupt could be a target
Some important aspects

It’s unusual for campaigns to have IT staff

Only the individual can access all accounts

This means they need to...

- understand that there’s a real risk
- do something about it
- know what to do about it
- prioritize doing something about it
“Emails, communications, anything that could compromise the campaign, make it look bad... Anything that makes the campaign or the staff look bad...”

— A study participant [emphasis added]
2FA practices

Heard of and probably have used 2FA

2FA is under-utilized on targeted accounts

Weaker 2nd factors are often used
Common 2FA concerns

Too much *time & effort*

Fear of *account lockout*

Hyper-shared & hyper-owned accounts
Different factors

Different factors = different levels of security

They know 2FA is important, BUT ...

don’t know or can’t explain why

aren’t aware that they should use it to protect most of their accounts
Risk & outcomes

Campaigns face an **outsized risk** of being attacked

The outcomes can be **outsized too**
Expert roundtable

44 experts from 28 organizations
Expert roundtable’s focus

Improve security practices on political campaigns

Single, consistent piece of top advice for 2020

Feedback on our research findings
Tailored advice & education

Security advice & education that is tailored to their needs and context

Prioritize! Not everything can be critical

Exactly what to do & why

Consistent message
More research

From deep, foundational research to tactical usability studies.

Around the world

Across various types of campaigns & campaign workers.
Improved protections

Very robust, very usable security protections

Standardization of offerings & experience

(Perceived) time & effort

Default settings
“What is 100% true... is that foreign adversaries want information... The faster we all realize that, the better off we’re going to be...

to see politics and campaigns at all levels as a fundamental piece of democracy that needs to be protected . . .

For sure foreign adversaries are trying to attack our systems... Why wouldn’t someone think of democracy as a target?”

— A study participant [emphasis added]
A big thank you

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- Our roundtable attendees
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