



## **Election Protection Project**

*An Alethea Group led coalition to warn the public against disinformation*

With the US presidential election weeks away, in the midst of a global pandemic, detecting disinformation threats and educating voters about foreign and domestic attempts to influence and manipulate them is critical. Alethea Group will conduct a series of public investigations into the disinformation campaigns surrounding the November election and disseminate the findings. Every voter should be aware of the false narratives and fake news.

While the US Government may be briefing elected and government decision-makers on disinformation, the majority of that information is classified and will not see the light of day. Yet in democratic elections, every voter is a decision maker, which is why Alethea Group will use public and open source information to inform voters of the networks seeking to undermine them. The public deserves truth; we are here to protect it.

Disinformation is designed to influence. The events of 2020 have provided nefarious actors new avenues to manipulate voters. Through this project, we aim to protect our democratic institutions, validate the legitimacy of the election, and expose those conducting influence campaigns or seeking to build influence, so that the public can better understand the genesis of their information.

Our first report details a coordinated network of 178 websites, at least half of which are part of a datamining operation using self-described right-wing political websites. The data, including email addresses, are then sold to third parties and used to push out targeted, false content with the intent to influence the public.

*About Alethea Group:* Founded in 2019 to help organizations navigate the digital reality, Alethea Group is a firm that detects and mitigates instances of disinformation to protect each organization's ability to communicate the truth to its stakeholders. Alethea Group's proactive approach provides organizations with actionable information that protects brands, bottom lines, corporate strategy, and democratic institutions from disinformation that could target their ability to make smart decisions. Alethea Group conducts its public interest work with the goal of informing citizens about threats targeting them.



## **Alethea Group Uncovers Coordinated Network of Political Websites that Collects and Sells Visitor Data**

*Published by The Alethea Group*

This report is the first in an ongoing series to identify disinformation campaigns attempting to influence the public ahead of the US 2020 presidential election. For more information, please read the *Washington Post's* coverage [here](#): "Disinformation for profit: How a Florida 'dealmaker' turns conservative outrage into cash," published on 11 August 2020.

Alethea Group is identifying networks of domestic and foreign actors trying to take advantage of perceived political division in the United States. In this study, we uncovered large datamining operation that also spread false information. We recently identified a coordinated network of 178 websites, nearly ninety of which claim to be right-wing news websites. We attributed these sites to a Florida-based real estate investor and digital marketing entrepreneur who uses them to push out false, misleading, and sensational information to gather data. Our assessment of the sites, which include names like "Sons of 1776" and "The Bearded Patriot," is based on common technical infrastructure used by the websites, such as digital ad technology, public company records, and public social media posts by employees and pages linked to the primary operator and his companies.

The websites in this network attract subscribers by pulling content mostly from right-wing news sites, such as The Daily Caller and The Blaze, but they also post content they appear to have generated independently. Each of the websites encourage visitors to sign up to receive daily news updates with their email addresses.

These websites are primarily used to collect vast amounts of data on its visitors, including email addresses and credit card information, to sell to third parties, including political campaigns. The operator of these sites runs at least two companies that sell the data to third parties: RightSide Data and Direct Mailers Group LLC (also known as Direct Mailers LLC). We discovered posts by RightSide Data and known employees of the companies attempting to sell the data as "conservative" lists of email leads gained from their websites. Public social media posts by employees also suggested the companies had skip tracing software, which can enumerate data, and was looking to bring on bulk messaging capabilities.



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