Anti-Latinx:
Understanding Disinformation Targeting the Latinx Community

Saiph Savage

CIVIC INNOVATION LAB

UNAM

Background: What is Disinformation?

False information which is intended to mislead, especially propaganda issued by a government organization to a rival power or the media.

Background: Example of Disinformation

- People posted pictures allegedly of the "migrant" caravana attacking police officers in Mexico.

- But, the pictures were from old events that happened in Mexico.

- The pictures tried to promote a narrative that Soros was promoting violence during the U.S. elections.

Background: Example of Disinformation

- Influencers shared quotes from celebrities allegedly showcasing the effectiveness of a political candidate.

  - But, the celebrity never said that.

  - The facts presented are also incorrect
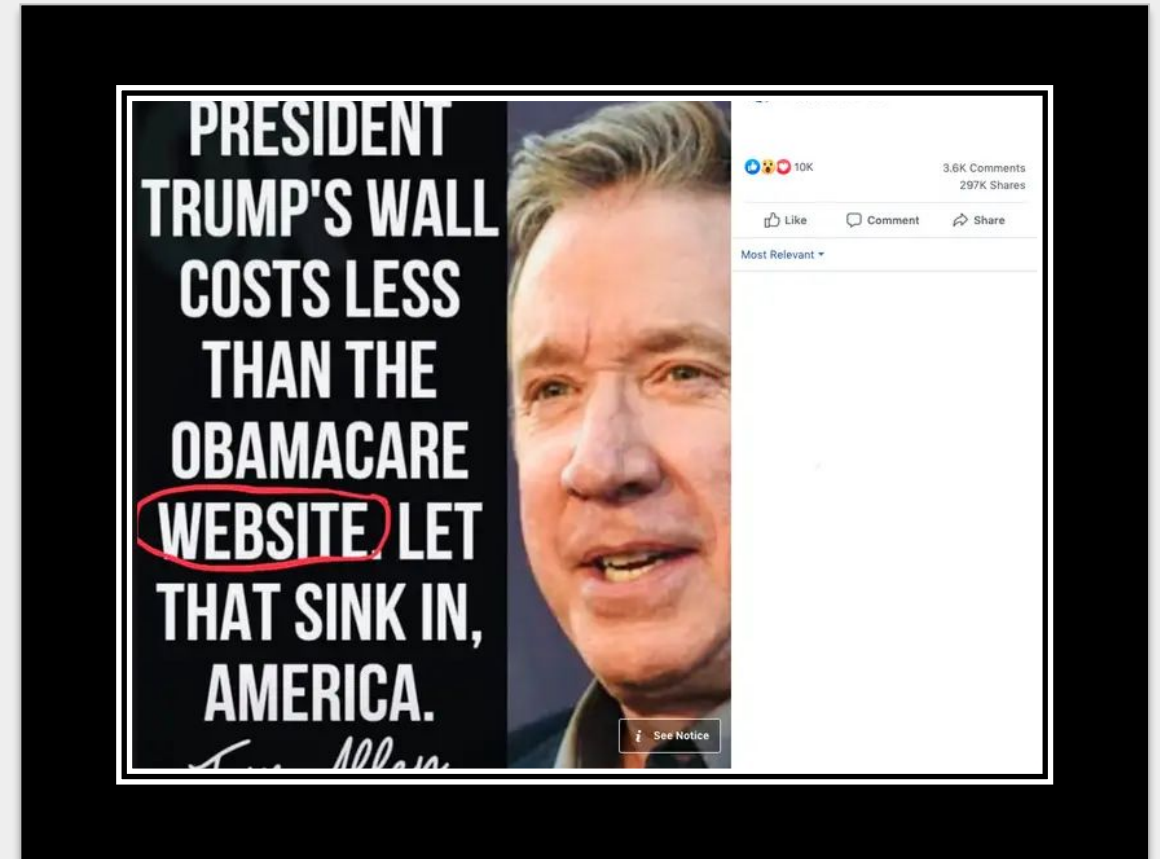
Background: Disinformation and Automation.

- Automation can facilitate creating bots that:
    - target and reach a large audience.
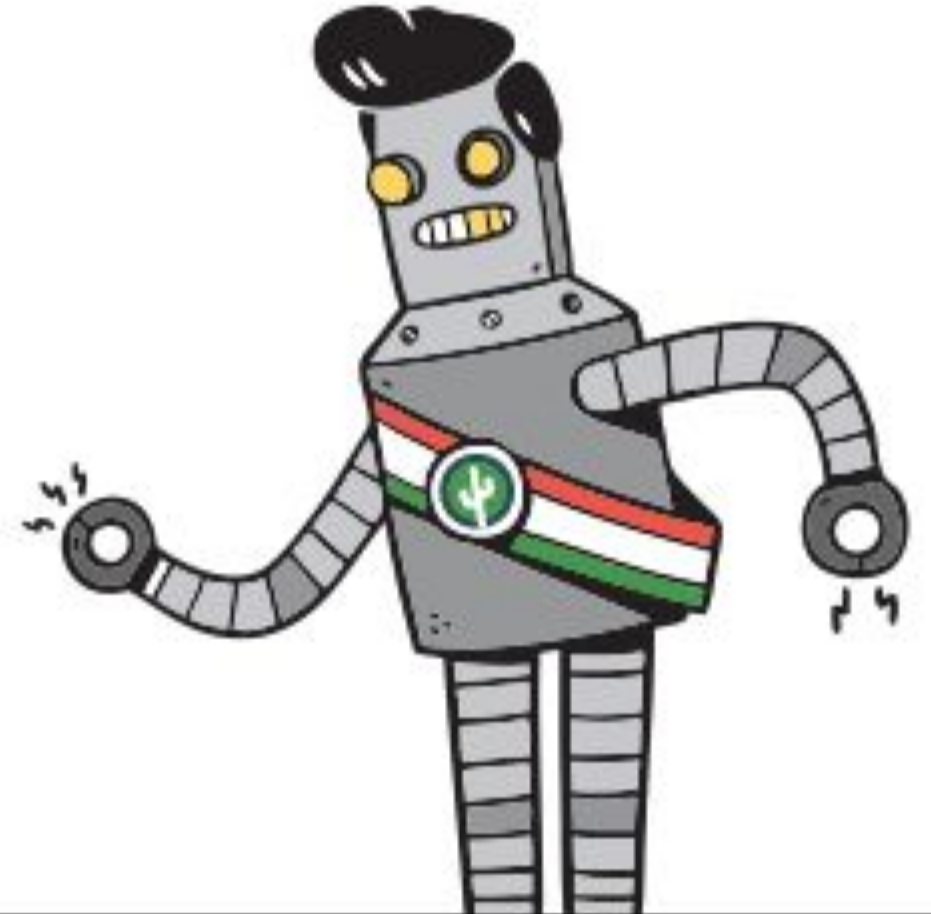   - flood the internet with the desired disinformation messages.

Bots & Disinformation:

Fake Support Bot:
Peña Bots

🤖🇲🇽   🤖🇲🇽   🤖🇲🇽

Bots that post content praising the Mexican president:
Enrique **Peña** Nieto.

PEÑABOT

"MUY BIEN SEÑOR PRESIDENTE"

Fake Support Bots

1. Retweet supporters or online content supporting a political campaign.

2. Coordinate accounts to tweet same hashtag to get it trending and support a cause.

3. Padding Twitter follower count to show support.

Patty_Rospo   27 m
El candidato con la mejor opinion entre los mexicanos es Enrique Peña Nieto @EPN t.co/DFZ3gsSc

rosario_chantal   32 m
El candidato con la mejor opinion entre los mexicanos es Enrique Peña Nieto @EPN t.co/RPYvkNsd

jane_navar   1 h
El candidato con la mejor opinion entre los mexicanos es Enrique Peña Nieto @EPN t.co/LDFJbr8t

alexa_fonsian   1 h
El candidato con la mejor opinion entre los mexicanos es Enrique Peña Nieto @EPN t.co/HdpWjsav
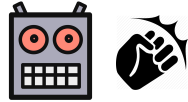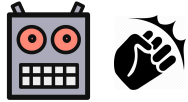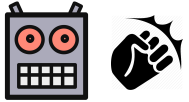
sandra_ganzpind
El candidato con la mejor opinion entre los mexicanos es Enrique Peña Nieto @EPN t.co/v3Cvxri9

Fighting Opposition Bots

"This is how the Veracruz Governor left his wife after beating her yesterday.#beatingWivesVer"

Fake News.

1. Create a fake news story using some factual truths.

2. Promote fake story with hashtags and fake images.

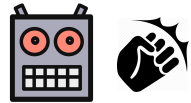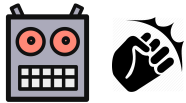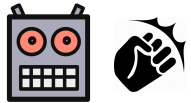Story was fake. But bots promoted and shared the story getting also mass media attention.

Fighting Opposition Bots

Divert Attention. Remove unfavorable hashtags from trending topics list by replacing them with more favorable hashtags.

Diverting Attention

People post about doing rallies against the president with #MarchaAntiEPN

Manuel Lozann @gallitoinglez · 20 Jun 2016
¿SE ACUERDAN?... REPITAMOSLE LA DOSIS. #MarchaAntiEPN

MEXICANOS ES TIEMPO DE HACER HISTORIA. #MarchaAntiEPN

Bots promote #DiaDePuente to divert attention from unfavorable hashtags.

Ashley @JoeDavie5638762 · 3 Jul 2015
- Cómo va tu puente?
- super!

#DiaDePuente
Translate from Spanish

Background: Disinformation and Artificial Intelligence.

Artificial Intelligence can be used to create disinformation campaigns that learn who are the people most likely to fall for certain type of disinformation.
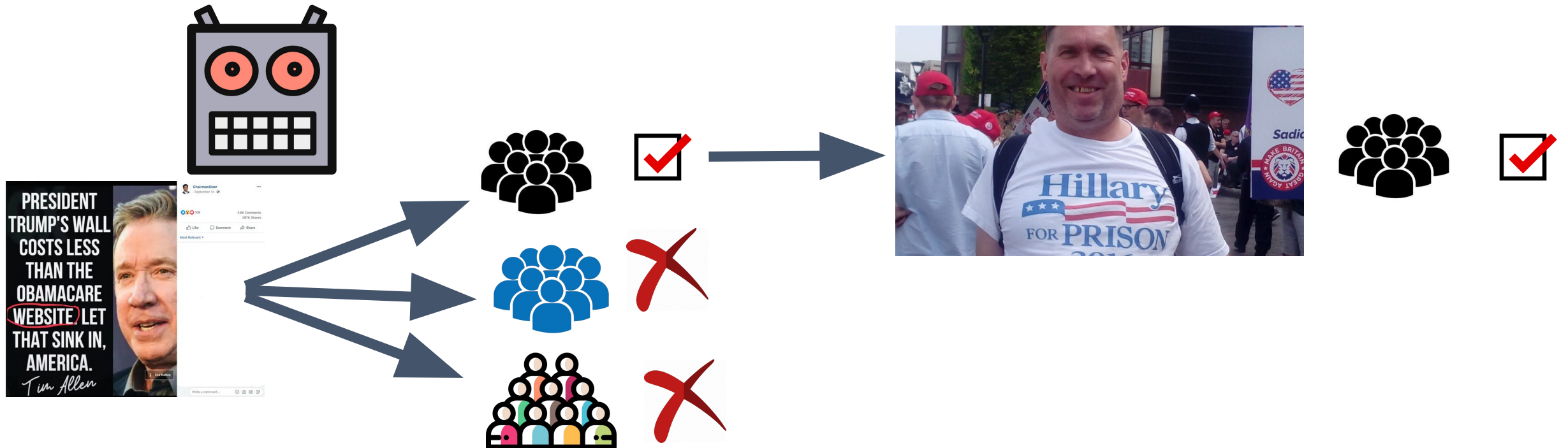
Background:
Disinformation and Artificial Intelligence.

Artificial Intelligence can be used to create disinformation campaigns that learn who are the people most likely to fall for certain type of disinformation.
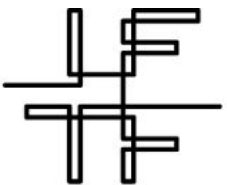
How are the Latinx targeted in online political discussions?

INSTITUTE FOR THE FUTURE

Anti-Latinx

Computational Propaganda in the United States

An analysis of discussions about Latinxs and politics on Reddit prior to the 2018 midterm elections

- We collected all of the reddit posts from September 24, 2017 to September 24, 2018 mentioning keywords related to Latinx community and elections.
- We identified 1,463 unique posts about Latinos and the midterm elections, generated by 968 unique users.

Political Conversations targeting Latinx during Midterm Elections
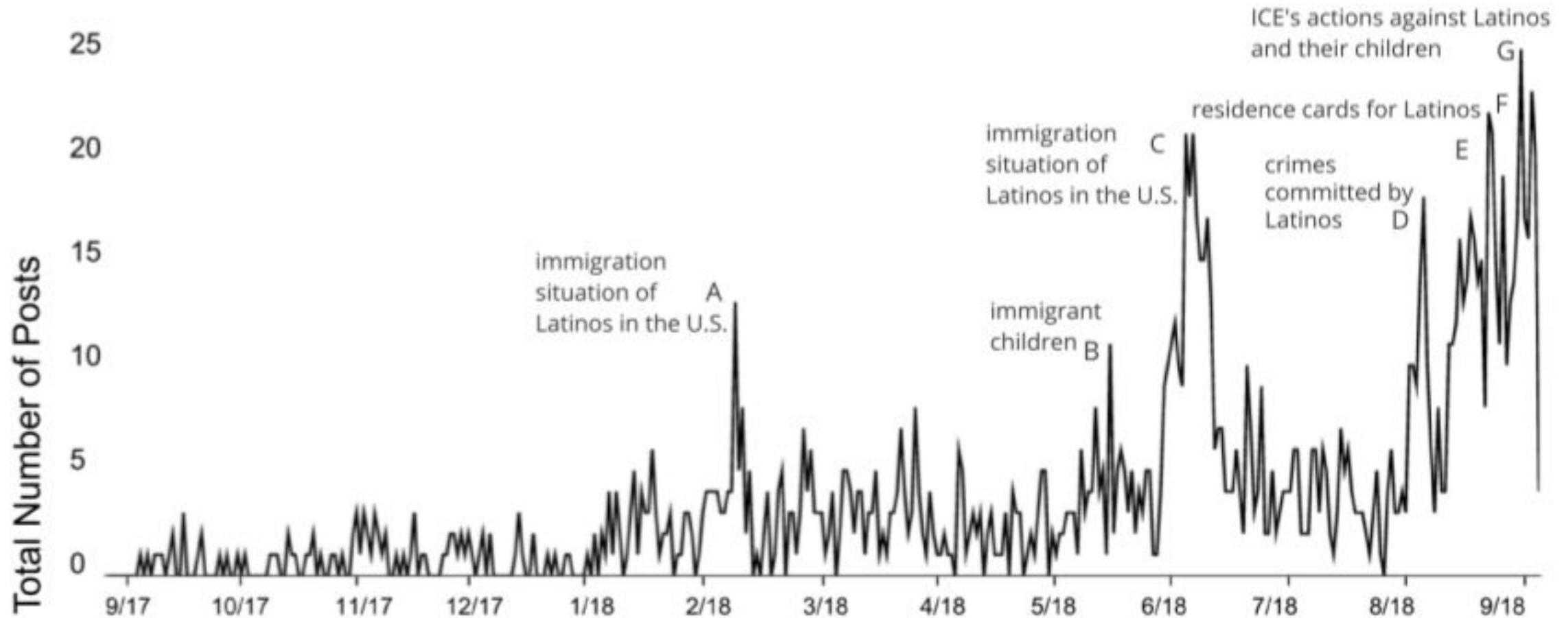
Takeaways

The political discussions on reddit surrounding Latinos were about illegal immigrants or new Latinos in the US.
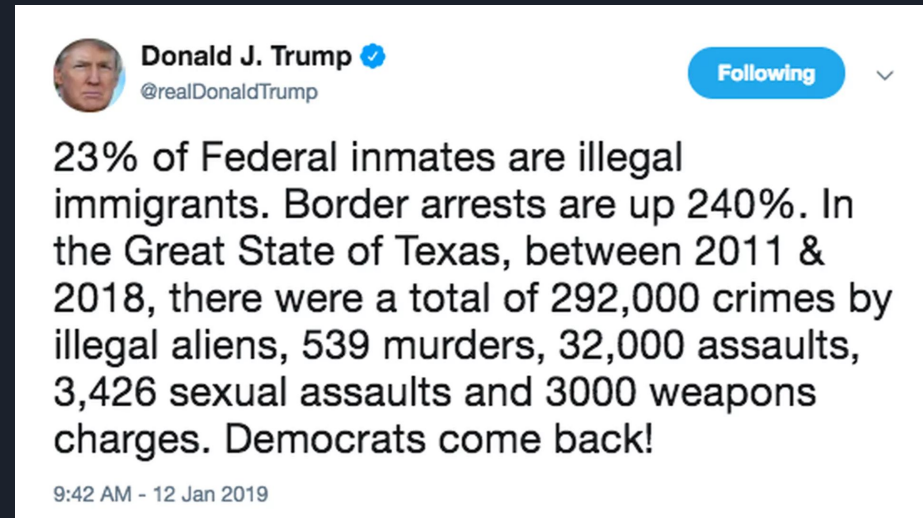

Donald J. Trump ✔
@realDonaldTrump

Following

23% of Federal inmates are illegal immigrants. Border arrests are up 240%. In the Great State of Texas, between 2011 & 2018, there were a total of 292,000 crimes by illegal aliens, 539 murders, 32,000 assaults, 3,426 sexual assaults and 3000 weapons charges. Democrats come back!

9:42 AM - 12 Jan 2019

Takeaways
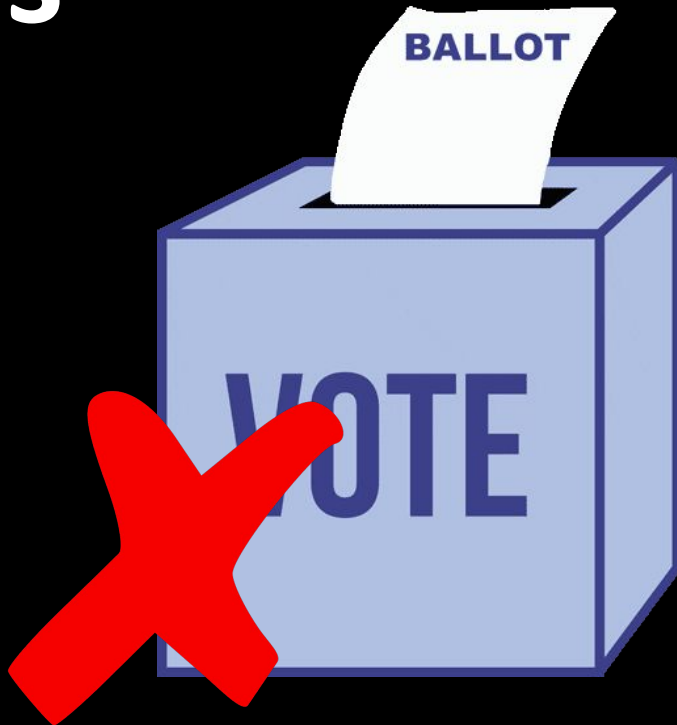
- There were **data voids:**

  - Limited:

    - discussions around Voting Rights for Latinos.

    - conversations around which Political candidates who were most Latino-Friendly.

    - discussions in Spanish on the midterm elections.
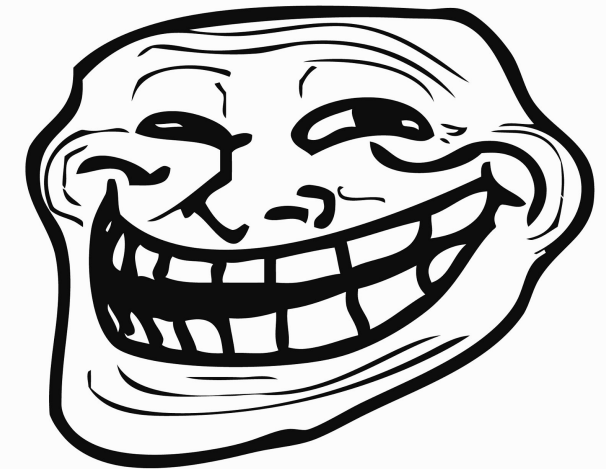
Why are Data Voids Dangerous?

- If there is limited information about a topic it can be hard to verify its accuracy.

- Political trolls can occupy data voids to push their own agenda. Given information is limited, it would be hard to identify that they pushed misinformation.

Example of why Data Voids Are Dangerous

- Someone could post dubious information about a political candidate and Latinx communities

- Since the information around Latinx is limited people cannot easily investigate whether not it is fake.

How do Latinx engage with solutions fighting Disinformation?

Atlantic Council

Context

- Latinx Fact Checking organizations have emerged to provide the Latinx Community with verified information during Covid-19.

- We study how accounts engage with the Fact Checking content on Twitter.

- Collected all of the tweets of the accounts that retweeted, mentioned, replied, or favorite the content of the Fact Checkers (collected data from 20,869 accounts).

-

How Accounts Engaged with Latinx Fact Checkers
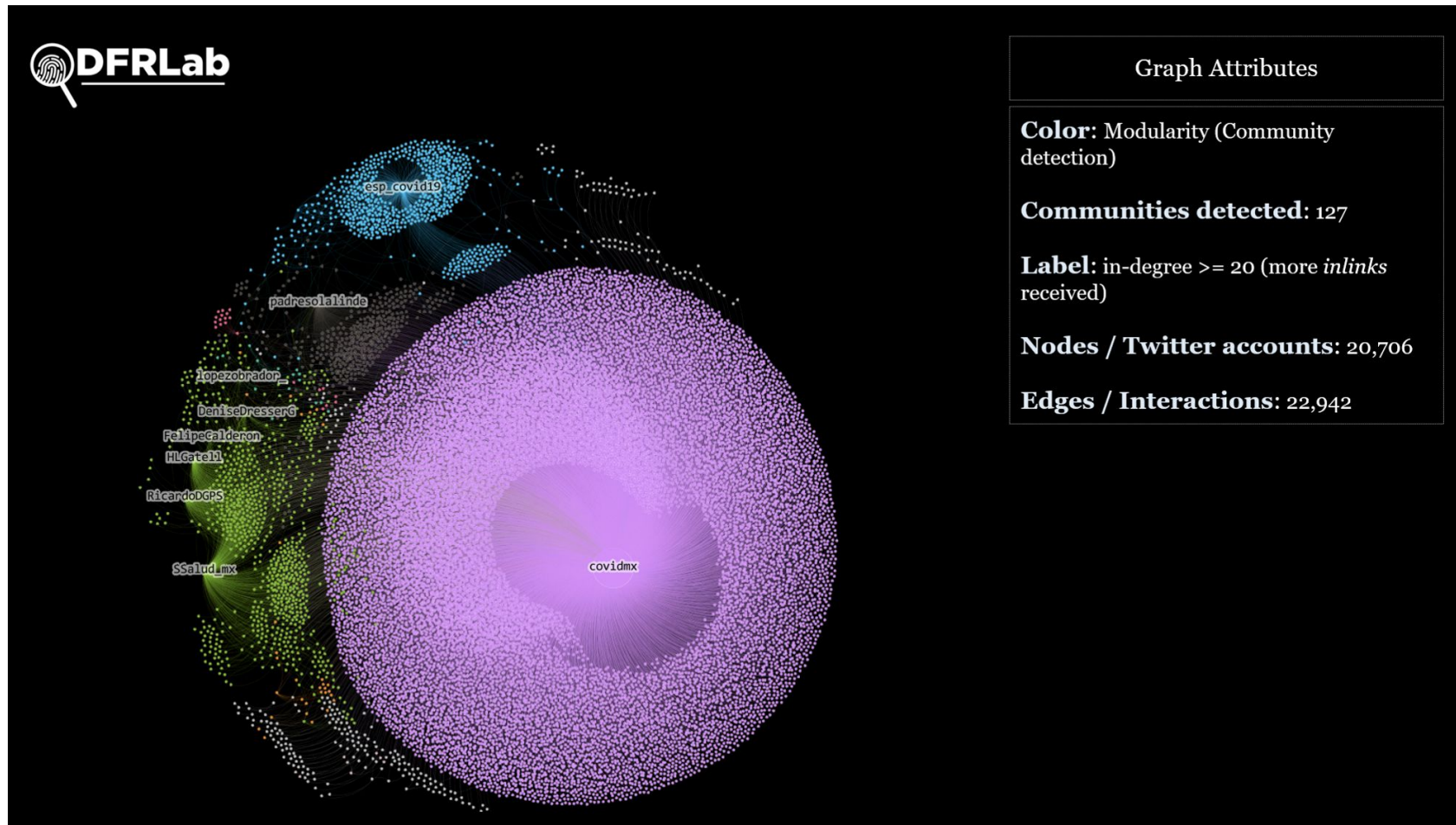
Identified that a wide range of networks engaged with the Latinx Fact Checkers (networks with political actors, religious figures (priests), healthcare actors, journalists)

How Accounts Engaged with Latinx Fact Checkers

- We identified that Mexican Political actors used the Fact-Checkers content to have political fights.

- This led to the fact checkers' content to be discredited.
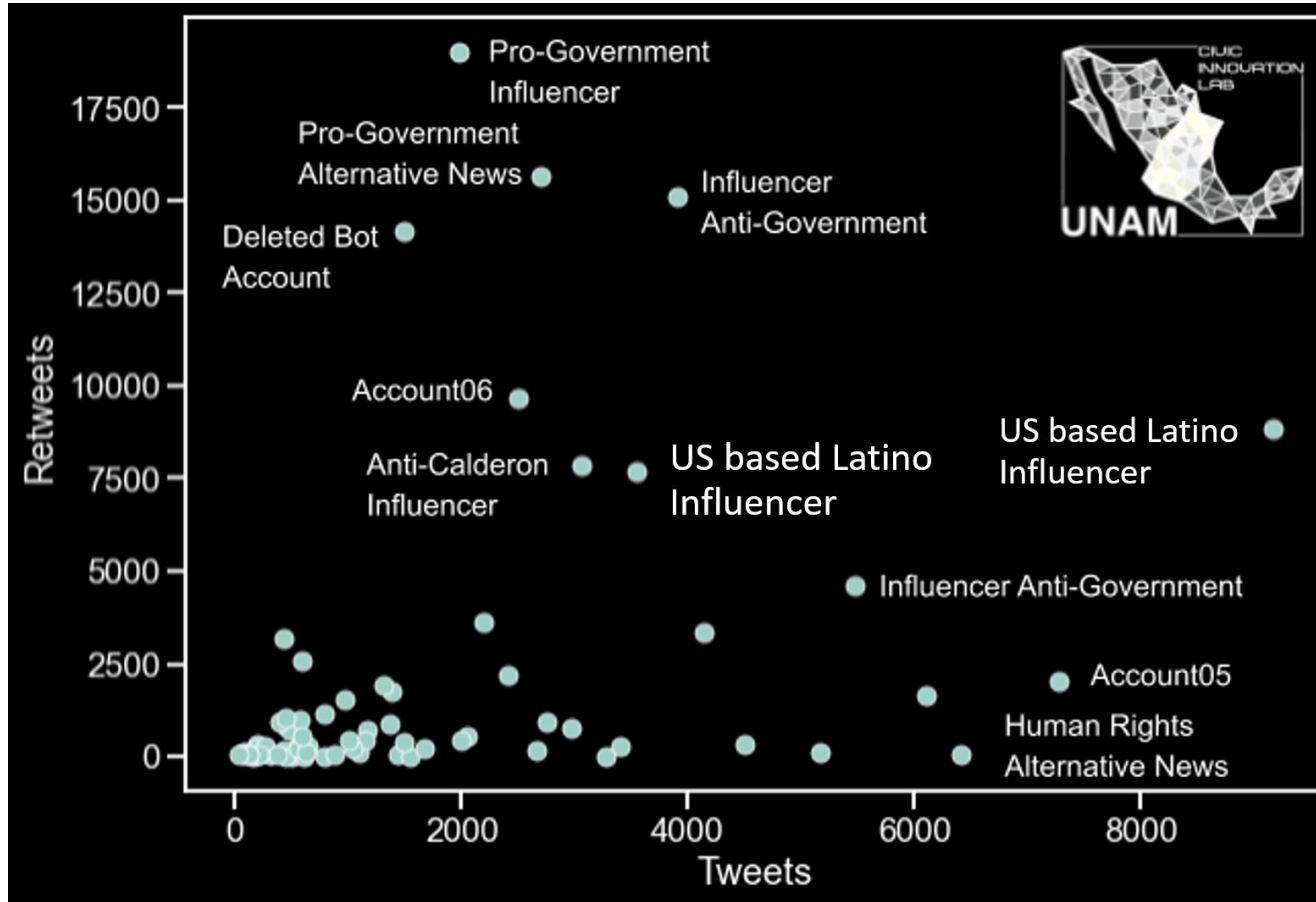

Political Fight with Fact Checkers content.

Accounts discrediting Fact Checkers.

How Accounts Engaged with Latinx Fact Checkers

The accounts that engaged the most with Latinx Fact Checkers were political accounts.

Takeaways

- Initiatives to combat disinformation sometimes have unintended second-order effects.

- In this case, an impartial fact-checking effort was at times exploited to advance political objectives.

- Those tweets and posts started to sow doubt about the trustworthiness and objectivity of, in this case, two fact-checking organizations that were providing timely, authoritative health information.

Main Takeaways

- There are data voids around Latinx communities and elections.

- Latinx Fact Checking content can be weaponized by political actors from Latin America.

    - Mexico has sophisticated political disinformation campaigns (Latin America has decades of experience in Government funded disinformation.)

Design Opportunities

- Platforms that inform Fact Checkers about the content that could be weaponized by political actors.

- Platforms that inform Fact Checkers how to navigate a polarized political environment.

- Platforms that identify data voids around Latinx communities and guides community to help cover them.

Join us!

- Currently exploring platforms to understand how organizations fight misinformation/disinformation targeting latinx communities.
    - Collaborating on glassbox.
        - glassbox offers a repository of how Mexican news papers correct and edit their news stories.
        - Looking to create more collaborative online spaces for Latinx journalists to fight misinformation while producing high quality articles.
        -

glassbox

Questions?

- **Saiph Savage**

🌐 http://www.saiph.org/

🐦 @saiphcita
saiph@uw.edu