

Prominent PR firm spreading disinformation ahead of Honduran elections | Rest of World

By Leo Schwartz

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After the publication of this month's Pandora Papers, a massive leak of documents revealing global corruption, the Honduran investigative outlet Contracorriente found that two leading politicians from the country's ruling National Party were owners of offshore companies in tax havens.

Then, the next day, a website purporting to be a news site called Universal Noticias published a story suggesting that a major opposition figure, Manuel Zelaya, also appeared in the Pandora Papers. But unlike the claim from Contracorriente, this second claim was untrue — Agence France-Presse described it as disinformation.

A new investigation suggests that the disinformation effort is tied to a renowned Latin American political communications agency, which is running a network of websites and Facebook pages made to look like news outlets, in order to disseminate misinformation campaigns. These efforts are intensifying ahead of Honduras' presidential elections, which will be held on November 28.

"We usually don't have anything to make a direct attribution to someone that is crafting disinformation," said Aldo Salgado, the Honduran researcher behind the investigation. "This time we have it."

Disinformation networks across the globe have long exploited vulnerabilities within social and digital media. One of the most well-known was the Kremlin-linked groups spreading fake news in the 2016 U.S. elections. Outside of the United States, there have been cases, such as a government-run Twitter army in Ecuador and fake accounts and trolling on Facebook in Azerbaijan, tied to the ruling party.

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