

# Weekend Round-Up: Facebook & Cambridge Analytica Edition

By The Editors

March 20, 2018

This weekend, Carole Cadwalladr and Emma Graham-Harrison broke a story on Cambridge Analytica featuring an interview with former CA employee Christopher Wylie.

Revealed: 50 million Facebook profiles harvested for Cambridge Analytica in major data breach | News | The Guardian

The data analytics firm that worked with Donald Trump's election team and the winning Brexit campaign harvested millions of [Facebook](#) profiles of US voters, in one of the tech giant's biggest ever data breaches, and used them to build a powerful software program to predict and influence choices at the ballot box.

A whistleblower has revealed to the *Observer* how [Cambridge Analytica](#) - a company owned by the hedge fund billionaire Robert Mercer, and headed at the time by Trump's key adviser Steve Bannon - used personal information taken without authorisation in early 2014 to build a system that could profile individual US voters, in order to target them with personalised political advertisements.

Christopher Wylie, who worked with a Cambridge University academic to obtain the data, told the *Observer*: "We exploited Facebook to harvest millions of people's profiles. And built models to exploit what we knew about them and target their inner demons. That was the basis the entire company was built on."

Source: [Revealed: 50 million Facebook profiles harvested for Cambridge Analytica in major data breach | News | The Guardian](#)

The New York Times also featured an article by Matthew Rosenberg, Nicholas Confessore, and Carole Cadwalladr

An examination by The New York Times and The Observer of London reveals how Cambridge Analytica's drive to bring to market a potentially powerful new weapon put the firm — and wealthy conservative investors seeking to reshape politics — under scrutiny from investigators and lawmakers on both sides of the Atlantic.

Details of Cambridge's [acquisition](#) and use of Facebook [data](#) have surfaced in several accounts since the business began working on the 2016 campaign, setting off [a furious debate](#) about the merits of the firm's so-called psychographic modeling techniques.

But the full scale of the data leak involving Americans has not been previously disclosed — and Facebook, until now, has not acknowledged it. Interviews with a half-dozen former employees and contractors, and a review of the firm's emails and documents, have revealed that Cambridge not only relied on the private Facebook data but still possesses most or all of the trove.

Cambridge paid to acquire the personal information through an outside researcher who, Facebook says, claimed to be collecting it for academic purposes.

In a statement to the New York Times, Facebook asserted that the data was taken fraudulently:

But on Friday, the company [posted a statement](#) expressing alarm and promising to take action.

"This was a scam — and a fraud," Paul Grewal, a vice president and deputy general counsel at the social network, said in a statement to The Times earlier on Friday. He added that the company was suspending Cambridge Analytica, Mr. Wylie and the researcher, Aleksandr Kogan, a Russian-American academic, from Facebook.

Source: [How Trump Consultants Exploited the Facebook Data of Millions - The New York Times](#)

Cambridge Analytica was also accused of trying to prevent an undercover report that captured employees discussing its practices.

[Cambridge Analytica](#) tried to prevent London's Channel 4 News from airing an [undercover report](#) in which the firm's chief executive speaks frankly about its practices, according to the [Financial Times](#). Channel 4 said their reporters posed

as potential clients and spoke with senior members of Cambridge Analytica's team, including CEO Alexander Nix. The exposé aired Monday evening on Channel 4.

Source: [Report: Cambridge Analytica tried to block exposé by U.K.'s Channel 4](#)

That report from Channel 4 News was posted on Monday.

An undercover investigation by Channel 4 News reveals how Cambridge Analytica secretly campaigns in elections across the world. Bosses were filmed talking about using bribes, ex-spies, fake IDs and sex workers.

Senior executives at Cambridge Analytica - the data company that credits itself with Donald Trump's presidential victory - have been secretly filmed saying they could entrap politicians in compromising situations with bribes and Ukrainian sex workers.

In an undercover investigation by Channel 4 News, the company's chief executive Alexander Nix said the British firm secretly campaigns in elections across the world. This includes operating through a web of shadowy front companies, or by using sub-contractors.

Source: [Revealed: Trump's election consultants filmed saying they use bribes and sex workers to entrap politicians](#)

Some additional reading listed below:

Facebook Press Release: [Suspending Cambridge Analytica and SCL Group from Facebook](#)  
(By Paul Grewal, VP & Deputy General Counsel)

WRAL's Capitol Bureau chief Laura Leslie reports: "[Tillis may have benefited from Facebook data breach](#)"

The data firm accused of [stealing the private information of more than 50 million Facebook users](#) may have used that information to help U.S. Sen. Thom Tillis win his seat in 2014.

Meanwhile: [New York professor sues Cambridge Analytica to find out what it knows about him](#)

And Slate reports: [Another Whistleblower Says Facebook Knew for Years That Its Data-Sharing Policies Were a Huge Problem](#)

While we are reminded that Michael Zimmer is just one of many academics who have warned of the potential abuses of data harvesting using Facebook apps. Here's Zimmer's Science Friday discussion in 2010: [Protecting Your Privacy On Social Networking Sites](#)