Israel Firm Meddled in Africa, Asia and Latin America Elections

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An Israel-based campaign to meddle in the elections of several African, Asian and Latin American countries has been uncovered by social media giant Facebook.

Facebook announced today that it had deactivated dozens of accounts found to be spreading disinformation by posing as local journalists and influencers. The social media giant traced these accounts to Archimedes Group, a private company based near Tel Aviv which had engineered the campaign.

Facebook's head of cybersecurity policy, Nathaniel Gleicher, told reporters that the platform had deleted 65 accounts, 161 pages and dozens of groups linked to the misinformation campaign, noting that this activity had garnered 2.8 million followers and hundreds of thousands of views. Gleicher also told reporters that Archimedes has now been banned from Facebook, *Haaretz* reported.

For its part, the *Times of Israel* quoted Gleicher as saying that

> "these are actors that were essentially facilitating deception, and they appear to be commercially engaged to do this".

He added:

> "That type of business does not have a place on our platforms so we are removing them from the platform and our teams will continue to investigate to look for other instances of this type of behaviour, [whether] for commercial or other strategic purposes."

Archimedes' operations are thought to have focused on Nigeria, Senegal, Togo, Angola, Niger and Tunisia, as well as a handful of Asian and Latin American countries. It is thought that the campaign has spent over $800,000 on Facebook adverts since 2012.

Relatively little is known about Archimedes Group. The *Washington Post* noted that the group presents itself as "a consulting firm involved in campaigns for presidential elections," using the slogan "winning campaigns worldwide". The website also features a vague description of the group's "mass social media management" software, which it claims can enable the operation of an "unlimited" number of online accounts.

The *Washington Post* added that Archimedes is headed by Elinadav Heymann, citing Swiss

negotiations consultancy Negotiations.CH. Heymann is also [reported](#) to have been Executive Director of the European Friends of Israel since 2012 and an "advisor to various parties [in] the Israeli Knesset for 3 terms".

Facebook's Gleicher said he could not speculate as to whether Archimedes' motives were political, and as yet it is not known who solicited and paid for the group's services. However, given the campaign's focus on predominantly central and west African countries – a region in which the Israeli state has recently tried to increase its influence – questions to this effect are likely to be raised going forward.

In January, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [visited](#) Chad to restore diplomatic relations between the two countries, which were severed in 1972. Speaking at a press conference before his departure, Netanyahu said that the visit was "part of the revolution we are doing in the Arab and Muslim world," claiming that such an initiative "greatly worries, even greatly angers" Palestinians and the wider Arab world.

Though Israel's normalisation drive in Africa has material benefits – often including lucrative arms deals, memorandums for economic cooperation and the use of [airspace](#) which will significantly shorten flight paths for commercial Israeli airlines – the initiative is also pursued for its propaganda value. Netanyahu has long been keen to [emphasise](#) these diplomatic successes, particularly in the run up to Israel's [general election](#) which took place last month.

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