



Although much of K Street spends its time plying the halls of Congress on behalf of well-heeled clients, there is a growing dark side to Washington's lobbying and public-relations industry: figuring out new ways to undermine and sabotage opponents.

This little-discussed aspect of the influence business came into view in recent weeks with the release of thousands of hacked corporate e-mails, which detail a pair of high-tech dirty-tricks campaigns aimed at supporters of WikiLeaks and foes of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

The plans were pitched by three federal contractors to lawyers at Hunton & Williams, a top-flight D.C. law and lobbying firm that works for the chamber. Proposed tactics included creating fake personas online to fool chamber critics; planting false electronic documents to undermine the credibility of activists; and using powerful computer tools to "scrape" Facebook and other social media sites for personal information about chamber foes, according to the e-mails.

Opposition research and assorted dirty tricks have long been a staple of politics in this country, from a smear campaign - backed by Thomas Jefferson - against John Adams in the 1800 presidential race to Richard Nixon's notorious efforts to steal Democratic Party secrets in the 1970s.

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