



USA TODAY

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TWENTIETH CENTURY FOX FILM



Emma Stone serves notice in 'Battle'

Movie about tennis legend Billie Jean King out Friday

IN LIFE

Who's meddling in Germany's elections? (Not Russia)

Kim Hjelmgaard
@khjelmgaard
USA TODAY

An alliance of mostly anonymous online trolls and extremist agitators are meddling in Germany's election, but researchers said Russians aren't to blame.

Instead, they said, right-wing groups in the USA are behind materials popping up on YouTube, messaging board sites such as 4chan and reddit and texting service Gab.ai. The evidence comes less than a week before Sunday's vote, which is likely to hand German Chancellor Angela Merkel a fourth term.

"So far, we have not been able to track down any specific Russian activity," said Simon Hegelich, a professor of political science data at the Technical University of Munich who has advised the German government about the threat of hacking and false information. Hegelich said proving connections among sympathizers is difficult and may never be conclusive.

An analysis of 300 million tweets over the past six months by Hegelich and researchers at the Technical University of Munich shows Germany is a hot spot for posts that use the hashtag "#AltRight."

"A lot of the stuff we are

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The B-29 Superfortress, the largest bomber used in WWII, made its debut flight in Seattle.

SOURCE history.com
MICHAEL B. SMITH AND ALEX GONZALEZ, USA TODAY

HURRICANE MARIA Under siege from meaner, louder, more punishing storm



Hurricane Maria brought 150-mph winds to Puerto Rico, toppling trees near a coliseum in San Juan. HECTOR RETAMAL, AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Come inside the fury that beat Puerto Rico powerless

Rick Jervis
@mrRjervis
USA TODAY

SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO The wall pulsed, bowed and finally gave, crashing to the floor and sending Hurricane Maria howling into the lobby of the Courtyard Marriott Isla Verde.

It was 8:30 a.m. Wednesday, and the storm was at peak fury,

mauling central Puerto Rico and lashing mercilessly at San Juan. I huddled with other guests in a cement-lined office in a far corner of the hotel, trying to decide whether we should stay put or evacuate to the concrete car garage next door.

I had covered six hurricanes and thought I knew tropical cyclones. But Maria was different: meaner, louder, more punishing.

By the time the storm finally spun offshore and into the At-

HIGHEST WIND GUST
137 MPH
AT ISLA CULEBRITA

MOST RAINFALL
33.58 INCHES
AT LA PLAZA, CAGUAS

HIGHEST STORM SURGE
2.4 FEET
AT SAN JUAN BAY

FIRST CATEGORY 4 HURRICANE IN PUERTO RICO SINCE
1932

SOURCES ACCUWEATHER, WEATHER.COM

lantic Ocean later in the day, the battered island had suffered through a multi-hour barrage that knocked out all power, toppled cellphone towers and ripped the roofs off homes and businesses.

"God is with us," Gov. Ricardo Rosselló tweeted as Maria's 150-mph winds and horizontal rain paralyzed the island and turned streets into rivers. "We are

► STORY CONTINUES ON 2A

MEXICO REELS FROM POWERFUL QUAKE

Rescue workers, firefighters, police, soldiers and volunteers search for survivors Wednesday in a flattened building in Mexico City as Mexico deals with the aftermath of a powerful earthquake that leveled scores of buildings and killed at least 225 people. In one incident Wednesday, rescuers, some using their bare hands, found a young girl alive under the rubble of a school that collapsed. The discovery raised hope — already dimming — of more survivors trapped beneath pancaked structures. **Story, 3A.**



YURI CORTEZ, AFP/GETTY IMAGES

USA TODAY SPECIAL REPORT

For 20 years, he's been sneaking people into USA. He doesn't expect to stop for Trump.

Human smuggler says wall would make him rich

Daniel González & Gustavo Solis | USA TODAY Network

MEXICALI, MEXICO The ground rules: No revealing the smuggler's identity. No photos or video showing his face. Alter the sound to disguise his voice.

For nearly two hours, the pollero (the slang term translates literally as "chicken herder") describes how he has smuggled thousands of migrants into the USA for the past 20 years.

His voice is calm, except when he talks about the risks of his line of work: the Border Patrol agents who increasingly lock up smugglers; the drug

ABOUT THE PROJECT

"The Wall: Unknown Stories, Unintended Consequences" is the result of a combined effort from USA TODAY Network newsrooms. To experience the full report, including virtual reality, documentaries and an interactive flyover, go to thewall.usatoday.com.

ALSO: Tune in to the PBS NewsHour on Thursday night for highlights from the project.

► STORY CONTINUES ON 4A



Hurricane intrudes into hotel

► CONTINUED FROM 1A

stronger than any hurricane. Together we will rise.”

Across the island, Maria's carnage blew roofs off some homes and smashed fallen trees into others. Windows blew out in high-rise buildings, and in some places, even the plywood nailed over windows flew away.

The fragile power grid failed completely. Cellphone towers toppled in the wind, and communication remained difficult, if not impossible. Rampant flooding persisted, leaving rescuers locked in place most of the day, waiting for the worst to pass.

At my hotel, Maria sheared off the front facade, pushed a wall down, crushed several balconies, punched holes in the first-floor ceiling and flooded the floors. If not for the hustle of the hotel staff, led by general manager José Padin, things could've been a lot worse.

Two days earlier, Padin gathered guests at the lobby bar and explained what to do if the major hurricane aimed at us: All guests were expected to leave their luggage in their rooms and ride out the storm in the lobby, where it was safer.

That call came over the hotel intercom at 3:30 a.m.: Maria was getting closer.

Guests streamed into the lobby carrying pillows, blankets, iPads, babies, spreading blankets on lobby couches or the hotel casino floor for a few hours sleep.

Maria intensified quickly as it plowed into this U.S. territory, home to 3.5 million people. First, the casino's ceiling gave way, sending streams of water into the lobby. Then the winds popped off the large plywood covering the front sliding glass doors. Padin and his staff scrambled to the door with more plywood and drills, covering the hole from the inside.

More water poured in from the ceiling. Outside, the wind howled and whined like a large cat. Ears clogged as the storm's barometric pressure dropped. Debris banged against the roof outside, shaking more ceiling tiles loose.

Everyone nervously eyed the glass wall in the front lobby as it buckled and bowed. Suddenly, with a deafening crack, the wall crashed to the ground, its shatterproof panes still intact. Branches, leaves, palm fronds and punishing winds rushed in.

Maria — the most powerful storm to hit Puerto Rico in eight decades — was now inside with us.

Interestingly, Padin wasn't panicked. The gaping hole alleviated a lot of the built-up pressure, he told me between barking commands to staffers, and could help our situation.



Hurricane Maria tore through Puerto Rico, home to 3.5 million people, taking down the entire power grid and causing untold damage. HECTOR RETAMAL, AP/GETTY IMAGES

As winds whipped around the lobby, guests moved into cement-lined offices, where they napped on floor mats, played Jenga or stared blankly ahead, waiting for the fury to pass. Staffers pushed garbage cans under water cascading from the ceiling or handed out small cups of camomile tea.

After several hours, the winds began to ease. Someone checked Maria's track on a weather app. It had moved past San Juan and was headed back into the Atlantic. A group of staffers let out a cheer. “We survived!” one said.

Tyler Howell of Charlotte shared the staff's enthusiasm but rightfully reminded us that thousands of Puerto Ricans across the island didn't have hotels to shelter in.

“I feel fortunate we had this hotel,” he said. “But I feel bad for the rest of the island.”

As I write this, a gusty wind pulses in and out of the hole in our lobby wall as hotel workers vacuum up storm water and pile ceiling tiles into a large bin.

I don't know the extent of the storm's damage to Puerto Rico and its people, but I intend to find out as soon as the weather permits.

One thing's for certain: Hurricane Maria will forever live in the psyche of Puerto Ricans. And in mine.

HELPFUL JOSE WILL GUIDE MARIA OUT TO SEA

Jose carved out a weakness in a large area of high pressure over the western Atlantic, creating a path that should eventually push Hurricane Maria out to sea.



SOURCE NOAA, Tropicaltidbits.com
DOYLE RICE AND KARL GELLES, USA TODAY

Suddenly, with a deafening crack, the wall crashed to the ground, its shatterproof panes still intact. ... Maria was now inside with us.

Tweets bear tag of U.S. 'alt-right,' study says

“A lot of the stuff we are seeing in Germany can be linked to, or is at least inspired by, the ‘alt-right’ movement in the U.S.”

Simon Hegelich,
Technical
University of
Munich

► CONTINUED FROM 1A

seeing in Germany can be linked to, or is at least inspired by, the ‘alt-right’ movement in the U.S.,” Hegelich said, referring to a loosely defined group whose far-right ideology includes racism and white nationalism.

Many posts denigrate both leading candidates — Merkel and her conservative Christian Democratic Union party and her chief rival, Martin Schulz of the left-of-center Social Democratic Party — with the hashtags #Merkel and #Schulz.

Many of those posts originate in the USA, adding to the impression that right-wing social media users in both countries may be trying to sway German public opinion.

It's possible that some of this

alt-right messaging coming out of the USA may be connected to Russian interference; that, too, is difficult to determine, Hegelich said.

“There will never be an election again in which trolling, hacking and extreme far-right politics do not play a role,” Andrew Auernheimer, a hacker and blogger for the U.S. neo-Nazi Daily Stormer website wrote after Donald Trump's election victory last year.

The Daily Stormer has been available intermittently since August after major technology firms including Google forced the site offline for comments about the death of Heather Heyer by an alt-right protester in Charlottesville, Va. Nevertheless, the website continues to publish commentaries about the German election.



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