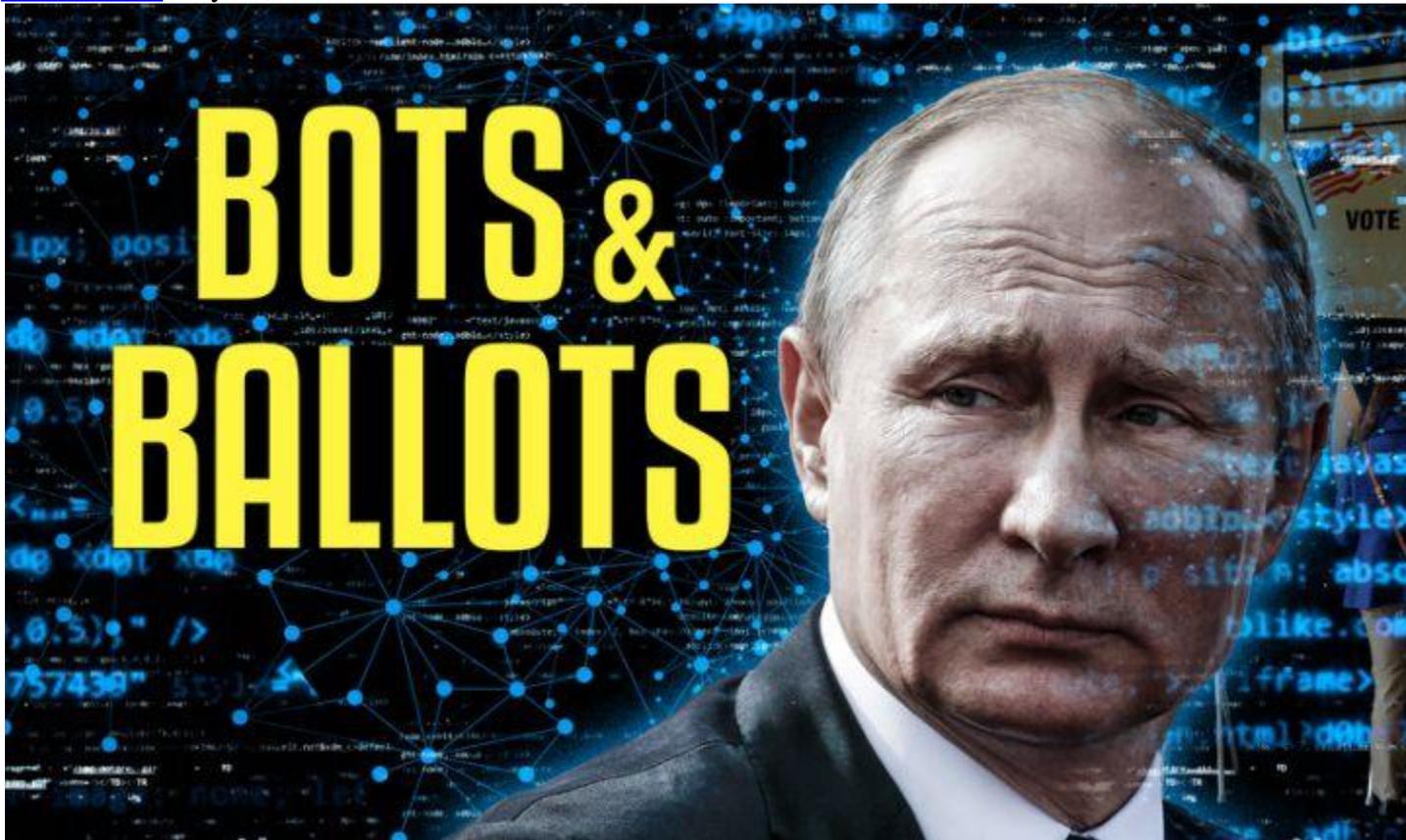


# Expert: Putin can hack our midterm elections



[David Knowles](#)

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SAN FRANCISCO — Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) is poised once again to meddle in an American election, and there's little the U.S. can do to stop him, an expert says.

“The midterm is vulnerable to attack. There’s nothing we can do about it. It’s too late — if Putin wants to attack our midterm, he will.” Barbara Simons, a former IBM researcher and the co-author of [“Broken Ballots: Will Your Vote Count?”](#) told Grant Burningham, host of the [Yahoo News podcast “Bots & Ballots.”](#)

Having spent the last decade trying to warn politicians of the vulnerabilities of computerized voting systems, Simons, who received a PhD in computer science from the University of

California, Berkeley, says that states like Georgia, New Jersey, Delaware, Louisiana and South Carolina that have switched to paperless elections are especially ripe targets.

“We know that the Russians probed voter registration databases and related technology in these states and that they actually breached at least two of these databases,” Simons said. While U.S. officials say they have not turned up any evidence that Russia was able to disenfranchise voters in the 2016 presidential election or pad the rolls with fictitious identities that helped sway the vote in any given state to [Donald Trump](#), proof itself may be difficult establish even if it had.

“When you say digital only, you are saying there’s no paper ballot, no paper record. That means that there’s no way to recount. You have to basically trust that the information that’s stored in the computer is correct and hasn’t been tampered with,” Simons said. “The fight against paperless voting systems was led by computer scientists in the early 2000s because we understand that you just can’t trust computers for a whole variety of reasons — they could have software bugs, there could be mistaken programming, or they could be attacked or manipulated surreptitiously. If there’s no paper trail, no paper ballot, there’s no way to verify if any of these things have happened.”

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With the midterm elections just a little more than three months away, Simons is dismayed that many Americans, including those in positions of power, seem to be ignoring the alarm bells.

“We are not prepared, it’s very discouraging,” Simons said. “Members of the intelligence community are talking about the fact that we are under cyberattack from Russia. This isn’t me saying this, this is members of the intel community saying this. But the country is not acting as if we are under attack. And in particular we are not defending our elections the way they need to be defended. As I say, the security of your vote will vary from state to state, but as a country we are not taking the necessary steps to protect the results of our elections.”

Now a board member of [Verified Voting](#), a nonpartisan advocacy group that promotes accuracy and transparency in U.S. elections, Simons hopes the country will realize just how vulnerable American democracy has become to outside interference.

“Anything that uses a computer is insecure. That includes paper-ballot-based systems because almost all of them are tabulated by scanners, and the scanners basically are computers,” Simon said. “That means we can’t trust any of these outcomes. We have to check them. We have to verify them.”

Putting those checks and balances in place takes time, however, and that means the upcoming midterms are vulnerable for mischief.

“Oh, I’m damn scared,” Simons says about the threat from governments like Putin’s. “I’m not saying everyone else should be, but I am. A little knowledge can be disconcerting.”

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