DISASTER DISINFORMATION IS THIS YEAR'S JOHN PODESTA EMAILS

I've already focused on these three paragraphs, but want to return to them. They're from NYT's article anticipating how the apparently tied race will roll out in the next 30 (now 28) days.

> With polling averages showing all seven battleground states nearly tied, many Democrats believe their biggest advantage may be an extensive ground game operation that their party has spent more than a year building across the country. Mr. Trump's campaign thinks that recent events — the escalating conflict in the Middle East and deadly hurricanes that have killed more than 200 people across the Southeast — will give them an edge in the final weeks.
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> [snip]
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> Their field operation stretches from turning out staunch Democrats to persuading moderate Republicans who supported Mr. Trump in previous races but disapprove of his indictments, impeachments and general conduct since leaving office.
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> In contrast, Trump aides see recent events as reinforcing their central campaign message that Ms. Harris is unprepared, weak and incapable of restoring the sense of calm that the Biden administration promised when elected four years ago.

The entire article contrasts the extensive Democratic ground game with sketchier GOP infrastructure. Importantly, Republicans *do not*

contest that Democrats are better prepared to turn out their seemingly equal share of voters.

In response, Republicans first claim they're better positioned on the issues, pointing to immigration and the economy but not abortion.

> They believe they are competing in a country that has become more conservative over the past four years — pointing to surveys showing that more voters now identify as Republican — and more likely to side with them on the issues.

As I've been tracking, Trump's one-time lead on the economy has been shrinking. This Cook Political Report podcast provides more nuance, one that explains a great deal of the polling we're seeing in polls based on different turnout models. Among college-educated people, Harris now does *better* than Trump by 4% points. Among non-college voters, Trump retains a 10% lead. The trick, though, is that the former are far more likely to turn out than the latter. The differences you're seeing on this issue may stem from likely voter models.

But that means that GOP certainty that they're fine because Trump leads on the issue that is most important for the largest number of people — the economy — depends on their ability to turn out low-propensity voters.

Yet they admit they don't have the GOTV infrastructure in place that Harris has.

Instead, Trumpsters told the NYT (again, Maggie Haberman is on the byline) that their plan to make up for that deficit is Bibi's war (which works — and it may well work — primarily in MI) and disasters.

On one level, it was an utterly ridiculous claim, though the NYT didn't blink. It's a non-sequitur.

On another level, they were telling the truth. They admit they don't have the ground game

necessary to turn out voters who are disproportionately low-turnout voters. But their answer to that is to exploit two devastating hurricanes as a basis to argue, "that Ms. Harris is unprepared, weak and incapable of restoring the sense of calm."

If NYT were engaged in journalism, they would have noted that even by the time Trump's people made this claim, the affected GOP governors had already publicly commented on how satisfied they were by the Federal support they were getting.

That is, it is insane for Republicans to assume, as a matter of faith, that disasters will serve a narrative that VP Harris in unprepared. It's just as likely that some swing voters in North Carolina and Georgia will see in the Biden-Harris Administration a level of responsiveness they wouldn't otherwise, if they were simply following reporting of an event twelve states away.

But we've seen *why* they said it. Trump and hackish Republicans are treating this in the same way that they treated John Podesta emails and wanted to treat Hunter Biden's laptop, as an opportunity to distract attention with make believe stories in the weeks before the election. He knew the things he was Tweeting about John Podesta's emails weren't true, Microchip testified at Douglass Mackey's trial, but he didn't care. He wanted, "To cause as much chaos as possible so that that would bleed over to Hillary Clinton and diminish her chance of winning." This is precisely what they're doing by making shit up about the Helene (and soon, the Milton) response.

To be fair, because the stakes are life and death, Republicans are getting a lot more pushback on their lies this time around. There have been a slew of Republican local officials calling on other Republicans to stop. A fact check Glenn Kessler did — noting that while Joe Biden hasn't diverted FEMA money to immigrant detention, Trump did — has gotten a lot of

attention (though Trump's abysmal record on disaster response generally and hurricane response more specifically, such as when Trump threw paper towels at Puerto Rican hurricane survivors, deserves far more systematic attention).

Indeed, Trump's choice to make disaster response this year's distraction effort in the month of October presents an opportunity to hold not just Trump, but especially members of Congress, accountable for their refusal to govern.

But make no mistake what he's doing. A fair assessment of the disaster response, so far, would in no way help Trump; indeed, it creates a topic on which Trump fails any meaningful comparison of outcomes. But that's not what Trump's team meant when they said impending disaster creates an opportunity to attack Harris.

They have learned to succeed in recent years by taking packaged up events — John Podesta's risotto recipe, Hunter Biden's dick pics, and now deadly hurricanes — as a hook on which to hang disinformation. Holy hell, Senator John Kennedy was wailing about tampons on Hannity!

They are not making a rational argument. They are using disinformation to create distrust and a sense of unease. That's what the NYT would have said if they were reporting reality rather than spin.

The Republican party is treating deadly hurricanes like they treated John Podesta's risotto recipe and Hunter Biden's dick pics in past elections.

Reporters (including the NYT here) too often treat Trump as if his utterances involve truth claims, rather than efforts to use noise to create chaos. But even now, even as a second deadly hurricane bears down on Trump's own state, Trump is making it clear he intends to use the disasters as another opportunity to create noise.