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# **Special Conference 2 on Shifting Power Dynamics in a Globalised World**

Addressing foreign manipulation of domestic  
political institutions



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## Introduction

Manipulation is defined by the Oxford dictionary as “behavior that controls or influences somebody/something, often in a dishonest way so that they do not realize it” (Manipulation) . In a domestic political context, it is when external agents try to influence and/or control political institutions from another country such as governments or parliaments. It is done to benefit the internal affairs of the foreign agent or the affairs of a third party. This could be done in ways such as but not limited to propaganda, spies, hacking or social media manipulation.

With this new digital age and highly classified information being digitized hacking is at an all time high which makes it easier for manipulation to occur. Countries such as Canada and the United States which depend highly on today’s technologies are the most vulnerable to hacking. Furthermore, digital tools are forever expanding, and more scopes of life are being digitized this is working in favor of bad actors.

Social media is another tool that is now more than ever being used to destabilize elections and lower the trust in democratic institutions. Foreign operations target and interfere with Western and emerging democracies during recent elections. The implication of such manipulation is that it poses a threat to democracies. It lowers basic confidence in the legality of electoral decisions A quote written in the global disinformation order report made by the Oxford Internet Institute (OII) incapsulates how social media has changed over the years “Social media which was once heralded as a force of freedom and democracy, has come under increasing scrutiny for its role in amplifying disinformation, inciting violence, and lowering levels of trust in media and democratic institutions.” (Samantha Bradshaw, Philip N. Howard page 21)



An example of where foreign manipulation is seen is in the 2016 presidential elections in the United States of America. To this day there is still some uncertainty regarding if the election of president Trump was manipulated by Russia. In this instance the presidency was the political institution at hand. The manipulation by Russia occurred in ways such as making fake news that damaged the image of the other candidate, Hilary Clinton, and funding the campaign which is illegal and puts at risk the integrity of the democratic institutions of the United States. Trump denies that this manipulation ever occurred stating that it was a “hoax” created by the democrats to explain Hilary’s loss. Russia also denied claims of them ever meddling or interfering in the elections.

## Definition of Key Terms

### Democracy

A democracy is a system of government in which power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or through freely elected representatives. Democracies are made up of democratic institutions such as the parliament which has legislative power, the government which has executive power and the judiciary power. Other institutions of democracies which are not political are religious organizations, The press and trade unions. These institutions hold no political power but they have influence and responsibilities.

### Domestic political institution

Domestic political institutions are organizations that apply, create and enforce laws, they hold power and have responsibilities which are internal in a country. Domestic means that it is existing or occurring inside a particular country. An example of a domestic political institution would be the Dutch parliament.

### International political institution

International political institutions are institutions formed by at least 3 states. The members of such institutions are held together by formal agreement.

### Foreign Manipulation



It is important to understand what exactly manipulation means to be able to address the issue properly. Manipulation is defined as the action of manipulating something in a skillful manner. In the context of the institutions, it is when one agent takes control of another agent's actions, either through impairing the other's capacity to act or through taking advantage of such impairment. The institutions make decisions that they would not make without the previous influence of the foreign agent. Those decisions favour the foreign agents.

## Legislature

Legislature is defined by the Oxford dictionary as “a group of people who have the power to make and change laws”. A legislature is an organ of government that makes laws for a political entity such as a country or city. Additional powers include establishing the government's budget, the power to lay taxed and impeaching and removing members of the executive and judiciary from the office.

## Constitution

The constitution is a collection of principles and laws of a nation, state or social group that determine the powers and duties of the government. Its main three function is to project the form of government in the country, ensure that citizens have fundamental rights and direct how states make legislations.

## Propaganda

Propaganda is defined by the Oxford dictionary as “ideas or statements that may be false or exaggerated and that are used in order to gain support for a political leader, party, etc.” (“propaganda”) The function of propaganda is to influence an audience and further a narrative or agenda. It is also used to produce an emotional response rather than a rational response to the information.

## General overview

The more information is shared, the more we tend to trust it and the less we tend to use critical thinking to assess it. Countries such as Russia use information warfare to better their image and manipulate public opinion (Galeotti, Mark) which therefore manipulates



political institutions. Social media and cyber-hacking are also another tool to facilitate this manipulation. Countries political institutions have been affected in ways such as influence in votes in elections. Furthermore, there have been instances when countries political leaders have responded and have taken action to minimize this manipulation. These changes made can be used to make new solutions.

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### Early instance of political manipulation

Political manipulation has been happening for decades. Countries want things to happen that favor their own agenda. In 1953 Mohammad Mossadegh was democratically elected prime minister of Iran. He introduced a range of social and economic policies which gave him a good name. Mossadegh also helped significantly in the nationalization of the Iranian oil industry. The prime minister had cut all ties and negotiations in the British involvement in Iran's oil industry. This caused Britain to appeal to United States for help which led to the overthrowing of Mossadegh. The CIA publicly admitted having been involved in the 1953 coup against Iran's elected prime minister at the time. The documents provided by the CIA showed details of the plan orchestrated to overthrow the prime minister. The plan was led by Kermit Roosevelt Jr the grandson of the at the time US President Theodore Roosevelt. There were 2 attempts to destabilize the Iranian Government and overthrow Mossadegh. Both attempts happened over the period of 4 days. Stephan Kinzer alleged that Roosevelt bribed the Iranian press into circulating anti-Mossadegh propaganda. The CIA wanted to put the shah in power. Methods the CIA used in order to overthrow Mossadegh included using propaganda to undermine Mossadegh politically, inducing the Shah to cooperate, bribing members of parliament, organizing the security forces, and ginning up public demonstrations.

## Major Parties Involved

### Russia

Russia lost a lot of its power and influence after the division of the USSR. An instance where this is prevalent is that Russia lost its power and control on Europe's eastern and central countries such as Poland, Hungary, Romania and the Baltic states, which before were part of the Warsaw pact. Since then, Russia has tried to influence the politics of European countries through means such as fake news through the RT Channel which gives one-sided news, funding extremist political movements and increased spending on propaganda in European languages. The Kremlin's power is enforced by making it clear that it can dictate the terms of the 'truth' which enhances its aura of power. Additionally, Russia has formed close ties with Eurosceptic and populist parties belonging to both ends of the political spectrum in an attempt to destabilize the system. Russia has not only manipulated





European countries but also the United States of America. During the 2016 presidential election, Russia influenced the vote by doing numerous things. Russia favoured one candidate over another which aligned better with their own interests. This led to Russian governors creating false accounts that posed as Americans. (Scott Shane) The accounts were aimed to get Americans to do specific things such as demonstrations and events that were in favour of Trump and against Hillary. A narrative was set by reiterating certain messages such as that Hilary was a liar. Over a period of time this had a complex impact on a person's cognitive environment because the human brain remembers things that are repeated to it several times. This had effectives on people's opinion which in turn has an effect on what people voted for. Russia's questionable actions have ended up causing reactions by political leaders. Until 2014 many attempts to bring attention to this phenomenon were met with indifference from Europe's great powers such as the United kingdom. This has changed however as Political leaders no longer question calling out Russia's actions. In November 2017, Theresa May, who at the time was prime minister of the United Kingdom took direct aim at Russia as she accused Russia of election interference among other things. Another instance when Russia was called out was when defense Swedish minister Peter Hultqvist adopted when he denounced "the Russian aggression in eastern Ukraine," and that Russia uses "disinformation and propaganda operations."

## China

The People's Republic of China (PRC) has a long history affiliated with ideological struggle and extended use of propaganda. China uses propaganda in its own interest to accomplish things such as maintaining and bettering its image. The 2 key prerogatives of the Chinese Communist party (CCP) are the fabrication of propaganda and ideological indoctrination. The CCP has at hand a bureaucratic structure made for the controlling of all information. The 2 main objectives are to control the internal and external political space and to maintain the party's legitimacy in ways such as censorship and disinformation. China controls more than 3000 public television channels, 150 pay TV channels, around 2,500 radio stations, about 2,000 newspapers and 10,000 magazines and more than three million internet sites worldwide. This gives China complete control on what is broadcasted to their inhabitants and the world. In addition, China created a state-owned global broadcasting group called the China Global Television Network in 2016. Many stories recycle stories published by RT, the Russian tv network and published. China uses the media and propaganda to influence its image and public opinion on certain topics that concern them.

## United States of America



CIA intelligence reports that the United States had been subject to electoral interference in the 2016 November election in order to get Donald Trump elected. Social media was used by the kremlin to attack Hilary Clinton and boost Donald Trump. Although the United States had been subject of electoral interference this does not take away from how the US has meddled in other elections. American intelligence agencies have found ways to put leaders that are more favorable to U.S national interests. Loch K. Johnson, the dean of American intelligence scholars stated that Russia's 2016 operation was the cyber-age version of standard United States practices, ones that have been going for decades. In the 1950s the CIA helped overthrow elected leaders in Iran and Guatemala. Furthermore, the CIA supported violent coups and supported anti-communist governments in Latin America among other places. (Scott Shane)

## United Kingdom

The intelligence and Security Committee's released a report regarding Russian activity in the UK. The report stated that the UK was a target to misinformation and disinformation campaigns. In addition, the report suggested that Russian influence campaigns tried to influence the Scottish independence referendum in 2014. In addition, a report written by the European parliament stated that disinformation campaigns targeted the UK's population in efforts to secure the victory for the leave side of the Brexit referendum. (Judith Bayer).

## UN involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- Declaration on the Inadmissibility of Intervention and Interference in the Internal Affairs of States, 9 December 1981 (A/RES/36/103)
  - Clause 2 sub-clause j states 'The duty of a State to abstain from any defamatory campaign, vilification or hostile propaganda for the purpose of intervening or interfering in the internal affairs of other States' This correlates perfectly with the issue as foreign agents use defamatory campaigns in order to manipulate another agents.
- Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security, 5th of December 2018 (A/73/505)
  - The 9<sup>th</sup> perambulatory states "Reaffirming the right and duty of States to combat, within their constitutional prerogatives, the dissemination of false or distorted news, which can be interpreted as interference in the internal affairs of other States or as being harmful to the promotion of peace, cooperation and friendly relations among States and nations, ". This is also directly related



to the issue as foreign agents use propaganda and fake news to manipulate a domestic political institution.

- Clause 1 subclause 10 states “states should seek to prevent the proliferation of malicious ICT tools and techniques and the use of harmful hidden functions.”

Advancing responsible state behaviour in cyberspace in the context of international security, 22 of december 2019 (A/73/505)

- This resolution looks to further advance state behavior in cyberspace to increase international security. "Stressing that it is in the interest of all States to promote the use of information and communications technologies for peaceful purposes and to prevent conflict arising from the use of information and communications technologies"

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

In 2007 a series of cyberattacks began targeting Estonian organizations. The Estonian government was accused of the Kremlin, as they were thought to be behind these attacks. Later however, it was revealed that these allegations were invalid as there was little evidence linking the cyberattacks to the kremlin. After this happened, Estonia advocated for an increase in cybersecurity protection and response protocol. The government increased cybersecurity in ways such as having a plan that explicitly addressed authentication, recognizing the security limitations of digitizing classified information and ensuring that authentication supports mobiles.

Prior to the election on March 15, the Dutch government decided to change the way it counts votes because of software problems and fears of Russian hacking. Instead of using computers to count votes The Dutch government opted for an all-paper manual election. This would prevent any sort of hacking from occurring.

In June 2018 units of the governments set up a task force to identify potential cyberattacks and influence from foreign agents that would be targeting the upcoming Australian elections. The Electoral Integrity Task Force which was led by the Home Affairs Department was created to identify and address risks to Australia’s electoral process.

In April 2019 the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) launched a campaign called “Stop and consider”. They advertised this campaign on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. One post published by AEC stated “Don’t be misled by disinformation this





federal election. Get tips for how to check the source. Authorized by the Electoral Commissioner, Canberra.” Below a link was put that allowed people to check sources. The campaign was made in efforts to warn citizens about disinformation.

## Possible Solutions

It is impossible to completely eradicate foreign manipulation but there are ways to prevent it and lessen its effects. Elections are one of the most manipulated areas in countries as voter opinions are manipulated and votes are meddled with. Paperless touch-screen voting machines could fail to accurately record votes and the system could be hacked and have the votes interfered with. To make it less likely to be affected and influenced by a foreign agent voting machines should have paper records. Election systems should also require separate funding from the government to increase cyber defenses in voting databases and protect the system from electoral interference.

At the age of 18 everyone is legally permitted to vote. Voting is something all adults do. For that reason, everyone should be taught about how elections are manipulated. This could be done by advertising by the government or electoral commissions making campaigns warning voters about fake news. It would also be effective for this to be taught more extensively in school curriculums. This could be in the form of a nationwide program aimed at teaching high school students about fake news, propaganda and how it affects other agents. This knowledge would allow people to be more aware of how misinformation spreads and increase alertness surrounding propaganda and fake news.

Many disinformation campaigns are located on social media. For this reason social media companies could have systems to trace and track down platforms where campaigns spread disinformation which could be a threat to a nation's political institutions. There could also be law reform making it harder for disinformation to occur. Additionally, with this new digital age and constant change and expansion there is need in investment in technological devices that aid in assessing if there has been electoral interference.

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