An International Collection of Student Essays

2024 GLOBAL YEAR OF ELECTIONS

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2024 GLOBAL YEAR OF ELECTIONS

AN INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COLLABORATION

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FORWARD

These essays are drawn directly from the 2024 iteration of the multi-university "global learning experience" course. This involved sixty-five students from five countries. The faculty included eminent professors–Dmytro Sherengovsky from the Catholic University of Ukraine, Pero Maldini from the University of Dubrovnik, Strini Pillay from the Durban University of Technology, Zaza Tsotniashvilli from Caucuses International University, and Dick Farkas from DePaul University. DePaul assertively promotes these courses as a vehicle to engage students and heighten their understanding of cultural differences and similarities and to deepen their understanding of the complexity of the 21st Century world. Topics are critical dimensions of that world including technology, democracy, and the mechanics of governing in a fast changing world. Each of the professors involved are experts albeit in different dimensions of our topics from international relations, to communications, to public management. This is the fourth volume published in the annual series. It's focus is 2024 – the Year of Elections. Seventy-four countries will be voting during this calendar year.

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INTRODUCTION

Rethinking Elections as a Functional Feature of Modern Democratic Systems: *Dick Farkas, Professor, DePaul University*

To begin, it is wise for us to acknowledge our presumptions.

Our early learning about "democracy" should remain problematic. It has been simplified to a fault, and is rife with assertions that have not been adequately scrutinized. Many notions beg for empirical analysis. Such untested ideas are more often than not wrapped in political language meant to ward off careful examination on many of our "foundational" ideas. Freedom, justice, representation, and participation are all examples. Our presumption that "elections" are essential and pivotal to democracy is one example of a notion begging for more scrutiny.

2024 is a *special moment to examine elections. Consider those voting in 2024:*

- *7 of the world's 10 most populous nations (Bangladesh, India, United States, United Kingdom, Indonesia, Pakistan, Russia, Mexico) voting; Countries that are home to nearly half of the world's people*
- *16 African states including South Africa*
- *11 states in the Americas including U.S., Canada and Brazil*
- *16 Asian states including North Korea and South Ossetia*
- *27 in Europe including the EU and Belarus*
- *4 in Oceania including Australia*
- *74 of 215 countries*
- *4 BILLION potential voters–four billion voices?*

Many in the general public are prone to assume that the vote reflects popular thinking; that all voters have comparable access; that voters are capable of seeking reliable and relevant information; that votes will be collected, counted and reported with integrity; that the outcome will fix (clearly establish) the authority of either the candidate or the policy under consideration; that procedures and regulations will maximize participation/ turnout; and that voters will be presented with multiple, clear choices.

Perhaps more troubling is the expectation or the lack of expectation about what happens between elections. The election expresses an expectation that those in authority will be obligated to interpret and promote the ideas reflected by the thrust of the voting. Many expect the institutions that define the political system will be respected by the winners. Will the voters' collective voice resonate with those in authority throughout the period <u>between</u> elections? Can one be assured that public policy will not be altered simply because of the approach of new elections? And most critically, will those "elected" prioritize the public interest over their own personal interests?

The constructive argument for elections is clear and often repeated in myriad places. Very credible sources tell us that elections allow a society to *broadly gauge the will of the people and provide the public with "voice." The claim is also made that this provides the system with a validation of its democracy.*

Presidential elections in many comparative settings have morphed into processes that raise concerns about the functionality and integrity of elections. For example, U.S. elections are characterized by perpetual campaigning with money playing a key, central, and often determining role.   The

50 state systems generate uber complexity. American political parties have become increasingly candidate centric vs. value-centric. In this way these parties have become much less predictable and appealing.

Russian presidential elections have become patterned marginalizing and castrating opposition leaving competing political parties impotent. In their candidate-driven system, leaders are intimidated or subjected to violence. Media is universally "managed" leading to a cult of personality for Putin. In India, Brazil, Hungary, the Philippines, Venezuela, and elsewhere, nationalism and populism are the central appeals constructed around leadership personalism. The net effect is that these complex systems are able to disassociate elections from issues.

For heuristic purposes, this essay presents twelve ideal requisites for democratic elections. Simply put, the more a political system pursues these qualities, the closer it is to solidly "democratic" elections.

Civility
Active independent & balanced media
Issue-focused
Recognizable range of choices
Fixed rules for short-term & focused campaigns
Rules for financially leveling candidates
A priori commitment to the results
Broad franchise
Ease of casting ballot
Uniform/common mechanics across society
Non-partisan elections
Only self-described and intellectually rationalized ideological labels

Finally, what are the implications if the "conditions" are not perfect?

Some will argue, often without detail, that the elections *are "still valid."*

Others will suggest that imperfect elections are better than any alternative. This argument is often made by those unaware of alternatives.

Skeptics will often be heard to say, *"The outcome doesn't matter."* This is a concession to be manipulated. Or, there is the mantra that *"Power corrupts everyone."*

Perhaps the more intriguing notion is the one held by this too candid political scientist*, "The purpose of elections is to anesthetize the public."*

That intellectual caution reminds us that elections can legitimize tyrants. Elections can be used to rationalize excessive uses of power. Elections can draw our attention to rare and uplifting moments when the public actively engages. It is important to recognize that elections do not allow for the ***scaling*** of support for policies, candidates, or leaders. Most elections give binary choices to their voters. Those are easier to superficially "read" but are more limited in their refined messages.

Many student essays follow with some diverse and creative thinking. The essays that follow are a reflection of active minds seeking to bring some focus to a vast and complex topic. Elections are certainly one of the key elements in the political architecture of "democracies." If what you encounter triggers thought and/or further study, it has achieved its objective.

Funding as a Way to Influence Elections
By Danelia Dachi

Elections are undoubtedly the most significant part of any country's political life. Citizens have the ability to choose their leaders and representatives, and trust them to make just, principled, and objective decisions benefiting the needs of the general public. As the cornerstone of accountability, legitimacy, and civic engagement, the existence of democratic, fair, and transparent elections is of the utmost importance. There are many factors that go into defining free and constitutional elections and guaranteeing their credibility, the most pivotal of which are the equality of representation and the diversity of political viewpoints in a country's main legislative body, the parliament. The most plausible practice to achieve the aforementioned variety of perspectives on certain political, economic, or social issues would be having a multi-party system. In order for those political parties to function and pursue their goals, they need funding, either received from the public or independent individuals, organizations, and companies. Taking all of this into account, the very existence of risks associated

with private funding of political parties is a highly complex and relevant subject to modern elections.

First and foremost, it is worth noting that funding as a way to influence elections is not necessarily a recent trend in politics, but it has been an integral part of the political landscape for centuries. Throughout history, certain individuals or organizations focused on utilizing financial resources to sway public opinion toward specific candidates or parties that would reinforce a wide range of their needs and interests. When we take a closer look at electoral systems and procedures around the world, it is fairly evident that the impact and importance of funding is profound and far-reaching. This is due to several aspects correlated with elections.

For various candidates and parties to cement their place in the political arena of the state, the most crucial and needed thing is the support of the public. That may be obtained by several methods, such as printing flyers, conducting polls, or organizing events, all of which require financial means. Funds are needed to run a successful campaign, hence the more capital a political party or person has, the easier it is for them to convey their agenda, ideology, and plans to the electorate and persuade undecided voters. This can be accomplished by several advertising tactics, for

instance, television ads and social media marketing, which are connected to great financial expenses. Money allows candidates and parties to spread their message on a wider scale and rate, increasing their visibility and chances of winning.

With the intense campaign circulating around specific individuals and groups, we often encounter a phenomenon known as "name recognition." This term in politics refers to a voter's familiarity with a candidate's name and overall image from previous exposure through different campaign strategies. In most elections, voters are likely to support candidates they "know more" and consider themselves to be acquainted with. Financial aid provided by funding gives candidates with higher funding levels the ability to maintain a visible presence throughout the campaign, thereby ensuring their influence on the public opinion and increasing the possibility of their victory in elections.

Considering the existing sociopolitical climate, it is impossible to neglect the prominence of all sorts of media during the electoral campaigns, ranging from tv ads to radio spots and social media promotions. Money received by political parties and candidates from private funds grants them accessibility to media–a very powerful tool in modern politics. Media still remains as

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a primary conduit through which candidates communicate with voters. Even traditional media, such as tv channels, thought to have lost its initial influence, serves as a dominant medium for reaching a wide audience, while the relevance of social media marketing is ever so increasing, with frequent ads on different social platforms giving the politicians an opportunity to solidify support bases.

With all the possibilities created by private funding, it also carries several significant risks that can undermine democratic principles and the integrity of the political process. Money, which is given to political parties by certain organizations and companies, may be used as a tool to shape policies in a manner that best represents the needs of those who are influencing the law-making process, rather than the necessities of the general public. In case of such activity occurring, we face a vividly complex issue of "policy capturing." using this technique, wealthy individuals and interest groups that provide substantial financial support to political parties may exert undue influence over policy decisions. A high risk of explicit or implicit quid pro quo arrangements, during which specific donors expect favorable treatment and to have a say in the policy-making process in return for their financial contributions, proposes a serious threat to democracy.

It can lead to corruption, therefore undermining public trust in their representatives and the general political system.

Disproportionate funding can also be a causing factor of inadequate representation of political parties, creating an almost impossible to overcome difference in power between the government and the opposition parties when it comes to policy-making decisions. This actively damages the principle of equal representation, as candidates and parties that attract significant private funding can dominate the political discourse and election outcomes. At the same time, candidates who lack access to wealthy donors may find it challenging to compete effectively, leading to a political landscape that is less diverse and less representative of the broader population.

Another prominent issue relating to private funding of the political parties or candidates is the lack of transparency. Oftentimes contributions from undisclosed sources can obscure the true meaning behind the campaign funding, making it hard for voters to understand who's really influencing politics in their home country. Due to this complicated process, it is nearly impossible for the electorate to fully believe in any cause or ideal presented by political parties. When policy decisions are skewed in favor of private

interests, public services such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure may be underfunded or neglected, affecting the overall well-being of society. If the voters believe that politicians are beholden to wealthy donors rather than serving the public interest, it can lead to disengagement and apathy, causing an extreme political polarization of the population.

In order to better understand this convoluted subject, using an example of the nature of Georgian politics will be extremely valuable.

In 2021, transparency international Georgia stated that *"financial inequality between political parties and ineffective state oversight of political corruption remain major problems in Georgia." after the detailed analysis of the finances of 17 major parties, which receive either public or private funding, it was revealed that the ruling party's (Georgian dream) expenses were almost twice as high as the other 16 parties combined, once again underlining an excessively uneven distribution of finances between the political parties. Other than that, throughout the years, there have been several allegations of political corruption or other types of violations in Georgian politics. In some cases, following public tenders, which were won by companies affiliated with the donors of the ruling party, have made huge donations to the government on the same day,*

which raises doubts about whether such collective action is organized by someone in advance and lessens the credibility and trustworthiness of the existing political power.

Similar issues were mentioned in a document analyzing Georgia's political finances in 2022 (once again conducted by transparency international Georgia). Instances of massive donors of the ruling political party winning multi-million lari (Georgian currency) procurement contracts continues to pose decisive danger to Georgian democracy and raise concerns about potential corrupt deals made between private companies and political parties, concealed as methods of funding.

While working on the subject, various recommendations have been provided by TI Georgia to improve the sociopolitical situation in Georgia, most significant of which is the creation of anti-corruption bureau, led by a politically neutral individual and equipped with relevant investigative powers to thoroughly inspect links existing between political parties and private donors in order to effectively combat corruption and different sorts of violations. Establishing legislative changes and developing new laws that will overlook the transparency of the donations and oblige political parties to publish crucial

details about their donors might also be considered as a logical measure taken against corruption and imbalance existing in the political field. Considering the intricate nature of private funding of political parties and the influence it has on campaigns, public engagement, and election results, addressing the obvious risks through comprehensive reforms will establish more equitable and transparent political system that better serves the interests of the entire electorate.

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Corporate Election Financing & *Citizen's United*: A Threat to Democracy?

By Adam Nikolai

Elections hold a very prominent place in the mythos of democracy. If you were to ask the average American to describe the democratic system, they're bound to mention the right to vote or emphasize the importance of showing up at the polls come election day. Other important markers of American democracy, such as the separation of powers between the judicial, executive, and legislative branches, the right to a free press, and abstract promises of liberty, may even fade to the back in favor of the seemingly monumental act of voting. Political theorists like Emilee Booth Chapman argue that this emphasis on voting as a pivotal aspect of democracy is not surprising, stating that "elections interrupt the ordinary, delegated business of government with extraordinary spectacles of democracy that command the attention of the general public and manifest the equal political authority of all citizens" (Chapman, 103). In short, elections are a clear and identifiable moment of political action on the part of the common populus. Everyone is equal in the ballot box, be it

a garbage collector, the CEO of a tech company, or even the current president. No one person can influence an election any more than another. Isn't that what democracy is all about?

Alas, as with most aspects of democracy, there is a huge gap between the proposed ideals of our system and the lived reality. Elections and the act of voting may *feel* like a monumental occasion, serving to prove the functionality of the democratic process, but is that really the case? In this essay, I will look specifically at the role private corporate entities play in election cycles, namely campaign financing.

Perhaps the most memorable piece of corporate campaign financing law came in the form of *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* (2010). This is where I will begin my analysis. This Supreme Court case came about in response to the FEC's attempt to curtail large private companies from exerting undue influence over elections in the form of "electioneering communications" such as political advertisements in favor of a candidate. The majority decision of the Court dictated that such a ban was a violation of the First Amendment right to free speech, stating that they could "find no support… that speech that otherwise would be within the protection of the First Amendment loses that protection simply because its source is a corporation" (*Citizens*

United, 346-7). In layman's terms, corporations, regardless of their size, monetary resources, or agenda, have the same First Amendment rights as you or me. They can spend as much money as they want to produce as much content elevating or maligning a certain political figure. So, what exactly is the issue? More free speech is always a good thing in a democracy, right? To explore this question, we can look at the intention vs. the actual influence of this decision.

While the Court opinion does undoubtedly allow for broader monetary maneuvers of large corporations in the political realms, there are still some limitations to this power. The intention of the Supreme Court's language in the *Citizens United* decision does not give full autonomy to corporations to simply shovel money through dark channels and closed door meetings, instead stating that "transparency enables the electorate to make informed decisions and give proper weight to different speakers and messages" (*Citizens United,* 371), and emphasizes the need for the public to decide for themselves whether a politician is "'in the pocket' of… moneyed interests" (*Citizens United,* 370). This system of transparency, the Court asserts, is vital in holding powerful private interests accountable. However, researchers found that the amount of undisclosed funding became even higher after the 2010 decision, with "the percentage of spending coming from

groups that do not disclose their donors has risen from 1 percent to 47 percent since the 2006 midterm elections" (Kennedy, 2). Much of this rise has to do with the lack of legislation surrounding corporate political funding in the wake of the *Citizens United* decision. Simply put, the law hasn't kept up with the changing dynamics of campaign financing.

Despite this, the Supreme Court's core decision that the First Amendment applies to organizations regardless of their corporate identity still stands. With this logic, one might think similarly situated organizations must also be able to use money in a similar way to support a chosen candidate. This is not the case. Unions, for example, are under much more scrutiny and must disclose their spending on any campaign related events or advertisements, fundraising, and voter education campaigns (Kennedy, 5). Corporations on the other hand have no such obligation to make their spending clear to the public, only the IRS, which keeps the records private (Kennedy, 5). This is in spite of the fact that unions tend to have a much smaller budget, while corporations can have millions and millions of dollars at their disposal to use at their political discretion (Kennedy, 2) While some states have put forth stricter safeguards against corporate opaqueness, the issue still remains at a federal level as unknown amounts of money flow through the election

circuit. The contrast between corporations and unions is very prescient to this issue. The average American has more in common with a union representative than they do with anyone on the board of directors at Amazon. Modern day unions have a roughly equal amount of men vs. women, and racially minoritized groups are very well represented, with African American's making up 13% of union workers, compared to 10% of the overall U.S. population in 2023 (Fieveson), whereas C-suite positions are held overwhelmingly by white men to the tune of 56% in 2023 (*Women in the Workplace*). There are also many more unionized workers than there are C-suite positions in the US. When it comes to policy, union stances are more likely to align with the preferences and needs of the working and middle class, while corporation stances sway away from the preferences of the general public (Kennedy,7-8). Essentially, a small, wealthy, and overwhelmingly white minority is funding electoral campaigns with little oversight and no accountability, while more egalitarian organizations are held to a different standard.

It is important to note that such systems are not essential to a democracy. There are many other ways to structure campaign financing on display within many foreign democratic countries. Some of these examples may serve as warnings, such as Kenya's 2022 election

cycle, in which candidates can receive and spend as much money as they can feasibly get their hands on without many limits or comprehensive oversight. The influx of money entering the economy threatened to aggravate the economy and cause harmful inflation (Ndirangu). And, in a country where elections are "personality-driven… ideologies do not hold as much sway as ethnicity and money, which comes in handy for robust campaigning" (Ndirangu). On the other hand, we might look to other countries for a different and perhaps more egalitarian form of monitoring and publicizing campaign finances. Sweden, for example, denies political party access to any public funding if they have received donations from an anonymous source, creating an incentive to make donation sources accessible information ("Sweden Public Accountability Index"). The United Kingdom flat out bans anonymous donations and requires that political parties make annual accounts of donation and spending public. Individual donor identities are automatically revealed if the donation reaches a certain threshold ("United Kingdom Public Accountability Index").

These are only a few examples of different ways that other democracies have grappled with allowing the public and private spheres to engage with campaigns while still implicating a stronger sense of accountability. With the gaping loopholes in the American electoral funding system,

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multi-million dollar companies have an untold amount of influence over the campaigns of their favored politician, one who is likely to support private business interests, even at the cost of the majority working and middle class populus. Many aspects of American life are stacked against the poor and benefit the already wealthy, and this is no different. For all the emphasis on hitting the polls come election day, we must be vigilant of how our potential leaders have gathered the money powering their campaign. The lack of transparency in corporate funding denies us this opportunity. If we truly want to reach the lofty goal of a fair and free election, we must demand more from our laws around corporate funding.

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The Impact of Electoral Systems on the Political Process in the Country of Georgia

By Ketevan Imnaishvili

Before we analyze the political aspects of Georgia, we must know exactly what election processes are, how they work, and what place they hold in society. After reading the first paragraph you will know what electoral systems are, what they contain, and how elections actually work. In the second paragraph you will understand what the fundamental impacts of electoral systems are in general. Then you will read about Georgia's example: how democracy works in Georgia, what are the activities of the Parliament of Georgia, the main principles of Parliament's activities, and the most important issue–how electoral systems impact the political process in Georgia. All of the information will be presented with specific examples.

Electoral systems serve as the backbone of democratic societies, shaping the representation of citizen's voices in legislative bodies. By delineating the rules and procedures for translating votes into political power, these systems play a pivotal role in determining the composition and legitimacy of elected governments. Electoral systems refer to the set of rules and procedures

that govern how elections are conducted and how votes are translated into the distribution of political representation or decision-making power. An electoral system encompasses the mechanism through which citizens express their preferences and elect representatives to govern on their behalf. So key principles underpinning electoral systems include fairness, representation, accountability, and legitimacy. Fairness means that each vote carries equal weight and that the electoral process is free from manipulation or discrimination. It is considered a key principle because it ensures that elections accurately reflect the will of the people and uphold democratic values. Representation involves reflecting the diversity of societal interests and perspectives in elected bodies; it is a fundamental aspect of democracy because it ensures that different groups within society have a voice and are able to participate in decision-making processes. Accountability requires mechanisms for holding elected officials responsible to their constituents. Legitimacy hinges on public confidence in the electoral process and the outcomes it produces.

When we are talking about the impact of electoral system on political processes, we must give an explanation of one of the fundamental impacts of electoral systems and it is "representation." Proportional representation systems, such as part-list systems, tend to produce more diverse

legislatures by ensuring that minority voices are represented. Electoral systems also influence party dynamics and the formation of coalitions. PR systems incentivize cooperation and coalitions-building among parties to secure legislative majorities, fostering a multiparty system. The design of electoral systems can significantly impact voter behavior and political engagement as well. In PR systems, voters have a broader range of choices leading to higher levels of voter turnout and satisfaction with the electoral process. The stability and legitimacy of governments are closely tied to the electoral system in place. PR systems often result in coalition governments, which require compromise and consensus-building among diverse political parties. The degree of democracy in elections and the actual exercise of the right to vote depends on a variety of factors, most notably on the formation of high electoral culture and qualified election administration in society. Fair election is of essential importance in the process of assessing the degree of democracy, which, in turn, includes the existence of a well-defined electoral system of the state.

Now as we have already made clear the general meaning of election processes and their influence, we can move on to the discussion of the example of Georgia and review all the issues related to the elections in this country, the Parliament of Georgia, and their influence of political

processes. It should be noted that one of the important preconditions for the consolidation of democratic institutions is the strengthening of political parties and, in particular, the maintenance of a multi-party system. Citizens' awareness of democracy and governance, modification of the governance system according to the circumstances, and basing the legislation on the core values of democracy freedom and political equality are the main challenges of our state. Elections are the way in which a strong democratic governing body is created in a country if the elections are based on a flexible electoral system and the principles of equality, freedom, and secrecy are upheld. According to this fact, it is important to note that the issue of choosing the optimal model of the electoral system is still being actively discussed in Georgian political and scientific circles. The aim of the presented research is to determine which electoral system is optimal for ensuring representative democracy in Georgia.

To clarify the political process in this country, let's talk about the activities of the Parliament of Georgia and its rules of procedure. The Parliament of Georgia is the supreme representative body of the country that exercises legislative power, defines the main directions of the country's domestic and foreign policies, controls the activities of the Government of Georgia within the scope

established by the constitution of Georgia, and exercises other powers. The main principles of the activities of the Parliament are: the supremacy of the interests of the people, a multi-party system, ensuring representative proportionally, the free and collegial discussion and resolution of issues, strict compliance with the legislation of Georgia, compliance with and respect for universally recognized principles and norms of international law, publicity, transparency, and accessibility. The working language of the Parliament is Georgian and Rules of procedure of the Parliament is a legislative act with the force of law, which determines the powers, structure, and procedures for the functioning of the Parliament.

The impact of electoral systems on the political process in Georgia is significant and multifaceted, influencing everything from party competition and representation to governance and stability. Georgia has experienced several changes in its electoral system since gaining independence in 1991, each with its own set of implications. The choice of electoral system can affect the competitiveness of political parties. In Georgia, the transition from mixed electoral system to a fully proportional representation system in 2020 aimed to enhance the inclusivity of the political process by lowering the electoral threshold for parties to enter parliament. This change has led to increased party competitions, with

greater number of parties vying for seats in the legislature. However, it also raised concerns about the political for fragmentation and instability, as smaller parties now have a greater chance of securing representation. Electoral systems shape the composition of legislative bodies and the representation of voices and perspectives represented. The 2020 elections took place in an unusual context. Although highly contested as usual one aspect made this election season the most special. New electoral rules for the first time made the prospect of coalition government real. Georgia has implemented a varying threshold between 3-5% for parties to enter parliament through the PR list. This has encouraged smaller parties to form coalitions and led to the consolidation of the party system. In 2020 the threshold was lowered to 1%, allowing more diverse representation and for that time nine parties entered parliament, compared to three in 2016. This has helped to address longstanding grievances regarding minority representation, particularly for ethnic minorities and marginalized communities. Challenges remain in ensuring equitable representation for all segments of society, particularly women and other underrepresented groups.

The choice of electoral system can impact the function and stability of government as well. In this country, the transition to a fully proportional representation system

has necessitated the formation of coalition governments as no single party has been able to secure an outright majority in recent elections. While coalition governments can promote inclusivity and consensus-building, they may also face challenges in reaching consensus and implementing coherent polices. This has led to concerns about governance effectiveness and political stability in Georgia, particularly in light of ongoing geopolitical tensions and internal divisions. Coalitions often struggle to maintain unity, leading to frequent government changes or early elections. For example: Since 2012, Georgia has seen multiple coalition governments form and dissolve. The most notable was Georgian Dream coalition, which came to power in 2012 but has since fragmented. Also, Georgia Coalition partners often leave the government due to disagreements, weakening the ruling alliance. This happened with several smaller parties that initially supported Georgian Dream. It is remarkable to say that electoral systems can influence voter engagement and trust in the political process. In Georgia, the move toward the existing system was intended to increase voter confidence by ensuring that every vote counts and reducing the perception of wasted votes. But, concerns persist regarding the transparency and integrity of the electoral process, particularly in the context of allegations of electoral fraud and manipulation. Addressing these

concerns is essential to enhancing voter trust and participation in the political process.

To sum up all of the above stated facts, we can say without any hesitation that the impact of electoral systems on the political process in Georgia is profound and complex, shaping the dynamics of party competition, representation, governance, and voter engagement. While the transition to a proportional representation system has brought about positive changes in terms of inclusivity and diversity, challenges remain in ensuring effective governance and building trust in the electoral process. Ongoing efforts to strengthen democratic institutions, promote transparency and address electoral reforms will be essential to fostering a vibrant political system in Georgia.

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Conceptual Design of Elections: Security

By Anamarija Lučić

Conceptual election design refers to the process of shaping the structure and organization of the electoral system before the concrete details of implementation are finalized. This includes defining the key elements of the election, such as electoral systems, rules and procedures, the way of voting, the way of counting votes, and the organization of the electoral body. All of this must be covered by security and thus give people a certain legitimacy over their votes. This essay explores how security works during elections and what challenges it faces.

Power and Rigged Elections

Power plays a big role in politics, the one who has it and to whom it is gives makes decisions that affect the whole society. When we think or talk about politics and power, we can often come up with the question why do leaders do what they do? The best answer to that question is because they want to come to power, to stay in power, and to the extent that they can, to keep control over money.

No leader can govern alone and in democratic states they cannot achieve this without elections. The problem is that politicians in democracies may have to put up with power, but it is not shocking to hear that whenever they can, they'll try to do rigged elections. We have to remember that they do rigged elections because coming to power and staying in power are the most important things in politics.

At the very thought of the rigged elections, people lose faith in their government and democracy itself. But there is a question to think about it: who is really to blame, those in power or everyone below them? Why does no one react when security is threatened during the elections and when there are some omissions? People need to become more familiar with election security and how much it can actually affect their votes without being manipulated by those who want to rig the election. Once we understand what and who helps leaders to come to and stay in power, we can begin to think and see how to fix politics, recognizing that the world can only be improved if we first understand how it works and why.

Security Challenges During Elections

Organizing and conducting credible elections is a complex and challenging task that requires a delicate balance of principles and rights, all of which can cause significant security challenges. Transparency is one of the main

elements of a credible elections. Every step of the electoral process, from voter registration to the final counting of votes, must be clear, well explained and open to the public. This openness and connection builds trust in the system, ensuring that people believe to the process and see it credible. However, the need for transparency can also create vulnerabilities and during the elections there should be concern that when too much detailed information is made public, it can be exploited by those who wish to disrupt or manipulate the election.

Legal compliance is another critical aspect. Elections must be conducted according to the laws of the country, which often impose strict and immutable timelines. These legal requirements can add pressure to the electoral process, making it challenging to implement necessary security measures effectively. If polling stations need to be set up or votes need to be counted very quickly, there might not be enough time to make sure all security measures are in place. Legal disputes or challenges that arise during the election can create confusion and delays, potentially opening opportunities for those who seek to interfere with the electoral process.

Freedom of speech is a fundamental right in democratic societies, allowing individuals to express their political views and ways of thinking and gather in support of their chosen candidates. However, this freedom can

challenge political atmosphere during elections and it adds another layer of difficulty in ensuring the security of election process. During this process emotions are heightened which can lead to more aggressive environment and cause rallies, protest, and other gatherings.

The institutions responsible for managing and securing elections, such as electoral commissions, law enforcement agencies, and the judiciary, must operate with impartiality to ensure that the election is fair. The need to appear neutral can limit these institutions, making them hesitate to act decisively against security threats because they fear being seen as taking sides.

Inclusiveness is another key principle of credible elections, ensuring that all eligible voters have the opportunity to participate. To achieve this, a highly decentralized operation is often needed, with polling stations in remote areas and many temporary staff managing the voting process. This large scale operation in areas with poor security increases the risk of tampering or theft. Also, managing a large workforce or temporary staff, many with limited training, makes it difficult to consistently enforce strict security measures. Limited training often can lead to a lack of knowledge of what rights staff have which can lead to omissions and manipulations.

Ensuring effective security throughout this process requires careful planning and a thoughtful balance between transparency, legal compliance, freedom of speech, impartiality and inclusiveness. Each of these factors contributes to the overall complexity, making the task of securing elections both essential and exceptionally challenging.

Technology Development and New Security Threats

The development of technology in recent years has significantly transformed the electoral process, introducing both opportunities and challenges. While advancements in digital platforms, electronic voting systems, and online campaign strategies have made elections more accessible and efficient, they have also introduced new security threats that put the fairness of democratic processes at risk.

Social media and digital marketing strategies have revolutionized how candidates and parties engage with voters. Through targeted advertisements, data analytics, and real time communication, political entities can reach broader audiences more efficiently. However, this shift has also made the electoral process more vulnerable to cyber threats and this development is often accompanied by the spread of disinformation.

The digitalization of elections has brought significant cybersecurity challenges, with threat actors

such as state sponsored groups and independent hackers increasingly targeting electoral infrastructure. Governments and electoral bodies must prioritize the implementation of robust cybersecurity measures across all stages of the electoral process. This includes safeguarding voter databases and monitoring online platforms for disinformation.

Collaboration between governments, private sector companies, and international organizations is crucial in developing and enforcing cybersecurity standards. Public awareness campaigns are also essential to educate voters about potential threats and promoting digital literacy. By taking multiple steps, the risks that come with using new technology in elections can be better controlled, helping to protect fairness and honesty of voting processes. Public awareness must be among the most important things because this is how society develops its trust in the system.

Conclusion

The integrity of elections is essential for keeping public trust in the democratic system, but it faces significant challenges. Leaders often prioritize gaining and retaining power which undermines public confidence in both the government and the democratic process itself. The important thing is that society must know that those who can bring these leaders to power, can also bring the leader

down. Furthermore, security during elections is a complex issue, requiring transparency, legal compliance, freedom of speech, impartiality, and inclusiveness. The rapid development of technology has added new layers of complexity to election security. Disinformation and cyberattacks have become significant risks, requiring strong cybersecurity measures and increased public awareness.

To address these challenges, a multifaceted approach is needed. This includes implementing strong cybersecurity practices, educating the public about election security, and ensuring that electoral institutions remain impartial and effective.

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The Role of Media in Elections: Determining Credibility

By Kris Sobolevskaya

Considering the most recent controversies with the United States presidential elections, an issue that has seriously come to light within the country is the credibility of elections. Credibility in a political system stems from how much the citizenry is willing to support the system itself and it relies on the media and other outlets to accurately inform the public of the candidates for the election. The 2020 election was highly contentious in terms of how many people approved of the choice that had been made.

The media information on how many people believe the election was stolen or not is not consistent or easy to discern. One of the biggest issue within the U.S. political system is that the sheer amount of information is so enormous that it is easy to skew people's perceptions because no one truly knows what is correct and what is not.

Fundamentally, media serves as a source of information for the electorate which is why it has such a pivotal role in shaping elections. The election before 2020 was also consequential in the country's shift

toward media appearing severely biased and sensationalized. The big personality that dominated the election was believed to have been the reason that the shift within the media had taken place, but, in truth, that pattern has consistently been revealing itself. Beginning in the 1960s, debates were televised thus, causing a shift from focusing on politics to electing someone charismatic and entertaining. There was a serious focus on Trump during the 2016 election which boosted his exposure leading to his election as President of the United States. This is one of the many ways in which the media can sway the perception of the people and create narratives that may not be all that factual.

Media regulation is a serious point of contention when we are talking about how to determine the credibility of elections. "Fair and balanced" media coverage is the best way to ensure that all candidates can get their message across to the voters. Different countries use different rules to accomplish this. In the U.S., the FCC is supposed to enforce the Fairness Doctrine which requires holders with broadcast licenses to present both sides of controversial issues that hold public importance and to do so fairly. This has not really been achieved. It is hard to see why such a doctrine is even still in place. Other countries focus on ensuring that the media is "fair." The United Kingdom has strict

regulations on media coverage of elections to attempt to ensure that things are impartial and represented objectively.

Independent monitoring organizations are a key factor in ensuring that the media is doing its job and trying to best communicate the facts to the public. Additionally, independent organizations are critical in ensuring that the public can support whoever they elect because they can view the results as being impartial. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe is one of these organizations and their findings on the 2020 election were as follows:

> "The general elections in the United States of America were highly competitive and well managed in spite of the legal uncertainties and logistical challenges amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Aggressive rhetoric and unsubstantiated claims about election fraud reduced public trust in the process." (USA general elections, OSCE.org)

Thus, one can observe that even though the election process in the U.S. was seriously contentious and fraught with many arguments of fraud, an independent organization with no stake in the result was able to observe that it was a credible election. Although many Americans would not turn to this specific outlet for their information about election credibility, it is especially

important to recognize that it was credible.

To compare the Russian election was also reviewed by the OSCE, as they were invited to observe the election. Russian elections are well known for not being equitably administered as there are massive amounts of pressure to conform to the perceived norm and voted for the longstanding President Vladimir Putin. Here were the findings from the OSCE:

> "After intense efforts to promote turnout, citizens voted in significant numbers, yet restrictions on the fundamental freedoms of assembly, association and expression, as well as on candidate registration, have limited the space for political engagement and resulted in a lack of genuine competition." (Russian Federation Presidential Election Report, OSCE)

Thus, the OSCE found that the election was lacking credibility because of the serious pressure placed on the citizenry with the lack of expression and assembly which limited their ability to converse with one Additionally, the report cites the issues with the media not criticizing the incumbent which led to a lack of impartiality on the playing field. The state-controlled media which often dominates similar systems plays an influential role in ensuring that only one or two narratives dominates the news. These are

two serious issues that do not support the capacity for people to truly have a say in who they decide is their leader.

This lack of accountability within the media in the Russian federation is how the world can look at their elections and observe them as lacking credibility. Misinformation is spreading at exponential rates nowadays with the influence of social media being so high within the stratosphere of politics. Fact checking has become an essential part of the news cycle with many different media sources highlighting that as a feature of theirs and using it often on candidates particularly within the United States.

There are serious benefits to developing a diverse media landscape that contributes to the presentation of issues and can help reduce the risk of one narrative dominating the discourse. This can be difficult though when the two-party system dominates and the different news sources that cover each side are heavily skewed in either direction creating an echo chamber on both sides of the aisle. In comparison, Germany has serious regulations that ensure media pluralism along with independence which contributes to the public trust in the electoral process.

After having reviewed the different issues within the credibility of elections based on the role of media,

here are some strategies that can help support the credibility of elections. Independent media should be strengthened by supporting the development and enforcement of regulatory practices to help provide more balanced coverage of topics, and the public needs to be more educated on how to evaluate media critically. Electoral processes should be as transparent as possible. Without infringing on privacy, social media platforms should be regulated to ensure they are also not feeding into the misinformation cycle by the websites and apps taking accountability for their active engagement in the misinformation processes. Currently some social media apps are participating in this process by fact checking statements and adding information on posts that are misinformed for their viewers.

Media's influence on elections is essential in deciding whether the public can trust the process and be adequately prepared to be voters. The media has a crucial role in both democratic and autocratic systems and only a multifaceted approach can help the people prove and trust the credibility of the elections they are involved in.

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The Impact of Information & Misinformation on Elections: Georgia's 2021 Local Self-Government Elections

By Ekaterina Chalaganidze and Ani Gagnidze

In the 21st century, the digital and Internet realms have become integral components of globalization. The Internet provides people worldwide with the ability to access and disseminate various forms of information. Social media platforms, in particular, serve as environments where individuals can freely express their opinions and views publicly. The need for accessing information about current events has become a fundamental human necessity. This process occurs through traditional media channels as well as alternative communication platforms. However, the primary concern today revolves around the quality of the information received and its societal impact, particularly in the context of elections.

This paper aims to define the concepts of "disinformation" and "misinformation" while addressing key questions:

1. **Differentiating Misinformation, Fake News, and False Information:** Misinformation refers to incorrect or misleading information that may be spread unintentionally. "Fake news" typically involves deliberate fabrication or distortion of facts to deceive or manipulate audiences. False information is a broader term encompassing both misinformation and fake news. Distinguishing between these terms lies in the intent behind the dissemination of information.

2. **Categorizing Fake News as Misinformation:** While not all instances of fake news may be intentional misinformation, many are indeed propagated with the purpose of deceiving or manipulating audiences. Therefore, it's reasonable to consider most fake news as a form of intentional misinformation.

3. **Methods for Combating Disinformation and Misinformation:** In combating these phenomena, various methods are employed, including fact-checking, media literacy initiatives, and the promotion of critical thinking skills. Additionally, technological solutions such as algorithms to detect false information and policies to regulate misinformation dissemination on social media platforms are being implemented.

In the context of globalization, media outlets often engage in disseminating disinformation, inadvertently contributing to its harmful effects. The creation of fake news serves various purposes, including influencing public opinion, increasing audience engagement, or advancing specific agendas. In today's interconnected world, global events such as military conflicts, elections, and refugee crises are frequently targeted by disinformation campaigns, reflecting the ongoing information warfare among states, individuals, and groups.

To delve deeper into the theoretical aspects, it's essential to understand that misinformation involves the use of distorted or false information, usually unintentionally. Disinformation, on the other hand, constitutes a deliberate manipulation aimed at shaping public perception. Propaganda, as defined by the Oxford Living Dictionary, encompasses disinformation created by governments or media outlets to promote specific agendas. The ultimate goal of such manipulation is to influence public opinion and behavior in alignment with the manipulator's narrative.

The term "fake news" is now called misinformation. Facts are often fabricated, and fake photos and video editing are used to make them believable. As a result, we get a product of the commercial interests of social media platforms, not the informational interest of the democratic

world. Media literacy and an educated society are the most effective tools for fighting fake news.

Misinformation refers to false information disseminated without the author's awareness of its inaccuracies, often due to insufficient fact-checking or incorrect translation. In contrast, disinformation involves deliberate manipulation of information to deceive or manipulate audiences. The distinction lies in the intent behind the dissemination of information and the reader's perception of its credibility.

For example, in the 2021 the elections of local self-government in Tbilisi, public opinion was divided. Some thought that the ruling party was going to win the elections at the expense of spreading sponsored bots, trolls, and various misinformation, while the ruling party explained that the opposition forces themselves financed the spread of various misinformation. In the end it remained unclear who spread the information. Months before the elections, disinformation managed by various forces began to spread. The mentioned issue has a great influence on the process of election formation. The mayor of Tbilisi constantly had to comment on the events taking place before the elections. The mayor of Tbilisi said that:

"I don't know trolls, bots, we really don't need, because the whole country is fighting against the coronavirus so that this issue can be resolved in time, and

we can get out of this situation as quickly as possible. It's just that there is a question mark about who is organizing, who is that group, specific people who paid certain amounts for advertisements and did everything to start a fight against people who are on the front lines and are involved in defeating the coronavirus."

Very soon after the mentioned announcement, an investigation was started, as a result of which it was determined that 80 pages, 23 personal accounts, 41 groups, and 9 Instagram accounts, which were directly related to individuals associated with the UNM, should be canceled. This is one side of the events, as for the other side, in this case the opposition forces were actively accusing the ruling party. The opposition called "troll factory" everything that happened before the elections.

In addition to targeting political parties, monitoring organizations were often attacked by coordinated efforts from individuals with false accounts. These attacks included homophobic and sexist posts aimed at both the ruling party and the opposition.

The 2021 self-government elections in Tbilisi show how powerful information can be for democracy. Both ruling and opposition parties were accused of spreading false information, creating confusion and distrust among voters. This highlights the urgent need for better media literacy, fact-checking, and collaboration between

governments, social media companies, and civil society to combat misinformation. By working together, they can protect the integrity of elections and ensure that democracy thrives in the digital age.

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Authoritarian Media and Democratic Aspirations: Russian Media vs Ukrainian and Georgian European Dreams

By Yuliia Zyubrovska

The creators of the futuristic series "Babylon 5" may be wrong about many things about our future, but they understand our present very well. As one of the main characters says: "He who controls information controls the world." This is the reality of the information age, in which authoritarian regimes use special methods to maintain and legitimize their power and actions.

One of the main features of authoritarian regimes is the restriction of various rights and freedoms of citizens, and vice versa, the strengthening of control over most (or all) spheres of society's life. In a broad sense, the media is especially important in the information age. Media independence is one of the main indicators determining the level of freedom in the country and its political regime. Particularly, it is used in the research method for "Freedom in the World"–an annual global report by the Freedom House.

Russia is currently one of the largest countries with an authoritarian regime, both in terms of size and influence. According to the Freedom House, Russia is categorised as a Consolidated Authoritarian regime: the country's media, and the country in general, are "not free." They are mostly state-owned or influenced by the official agenda. The journalists, both Russian and foreign citizens, who want to work independently and write about "sensitive" topics are either in jail or abroad due to the high risks of getting into jail.

Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony created the basis for the research on the topic of creating reality by the ruling group or, as in our case, supporting its ideas and legitimising their actions. According to Gramsci, the ruling class maintains power by using media and information in general to disseminate narratives that legitimise the ruling group's power and marginalise oppositional views. This is what Russia has been doing for many years to support its authoritarian power and, at the same time, to marginalise oppositional views by controlling the media and most sources of information inside the country. Now, they are using the media as tools for influence and ideological propaganda, both inside the country and outside, with a specific focus on neighbouring countries and political-societal changes there.

Russian Media and the Democratic Protests of Neighboring Ukraine And Georgia

Russian state-owned media are among the most popular information sources for Russians. According to the Levada Center, 64% of Russians use TV channels as the main information sources–and they are mostly owned or controlled by the government. Moreover, Russians mostly follow such media people as Vladimir Solovyov and Olga Skabeeva, who strongly support the war against Ukraine and other Russian imperialist ideas. Additionally, by the mid-2000s, Russia had garnered control over 70% of the electronic media. Therefore, most Russians are following the messages of their authoritarian government and, most likely, trust them.

Moreover, Russian authoritarianism goes beyond its borders. The Russian Federation, as the inheritor of the imperial Russian tradition, is particularly keen to extend its influence to neighbouring countries, in particular those that were once a part of the Soviet Union. Robert E. Berls Jr., Senior Advisor for Russia and Eurasia at Nuclear Threat Initiative, writes in his article about the concept of the Russian "sphere of influence" and particularly, as they call it in Russia, the "Russian World" (Russkiy Mir)–concept and a political doctrine of the society who share Russian identity, including people outside Russia. According to Russian logic, "security can be ensured only if Russia

maintains a reliable sphere of influence over bordering countries." Russia is trying to ensure this security by both influencing those countries and also opposing the so-called "Collective West," which is officially defined as one of Russia's main enemies.

However, not all countries in this "sphere of influence" want to stay there. They have a long colonial history of relations with Russia, and nowadays, more and more of them are choosing other paths–usually toward the "Collective West," which scares Russia that much, or better to say, toward the principles and values of freedom, democracy, and the rule of law. In such countries, the opinions of the people and the ruling elite do not always coincide. The authorities, which may be pro-Russian, may inhibit the process of democratic changes in order to preserve their own power and meet the expectations of the "elder brother"–Russia.

From about the beginning of the 21st century, Russian authoritarian media have been actively using such protests as an additional tool for their anti-European and anti-Western propaganda. This is perfectly demonstrated by the cases of protests in Ukraine in 2013-2014, in Georgia in 2023, and now, in 2024. The Ukrainian Euromaidan protests in 2013 started when the President of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovych, refused to sign a political association and free trade agreement with the European

Union. For Ukrainians, it was a step back from European integration to the Russian past. After the brutal murders, the beating of protesters, and the adoption of "dictatorship laws," the protests grew into the Revolution of Dignity against the pro-Russian government and president and their actions.

Georgian protests in February 2023 also started as a reaction to the government's decision to adopt the law against "foreign agents" modelled on similar Russian legislation that has been used against independent media and civic society groups. That time, the protests reached the goal: the law was withdrawn, but in August 2024, the Georgian parliament reintroduced it and people took to the streets again with calls not to adopt it. As of May 2024, the protests continue, and the authorities' responses are becoming increasingly harsh: beatings and persecution. In addition, the authorities do not pay attention to the opinions of the protesters and even to the threat of losing the status of a candidate for EU accession.

Internally, these protests could be characterised as pro-European, pro-democratic and anti-Russian. These features made them dangerous not only for the pro-Russian governments of those countries but for Russia itself: why would anyone protest against something pro-Russian if Russia was such a great country? Therefore, the media controlled by the Russian government represent

those protests by using pro-regime and anti-Western narratives and propaganda, and usually also very similar messages.

Most of the protests in post-Soviet countries, including Ukraine and Georgia, nowadays are called by Russian media "colourful" as a reference to the protest movements of the late 20th and early 21st centuries in post-socialist countries, which in most cases led to the change of governments to more democratic ones. However, the main emphasis of the Russian media in making such comparisons is not their pro-democratic nature but that these protests are financed by the West and are aimed at bringing the countries into conflict with Russia.

The journalist of the Russian state-owned RT media, Maryna Kosareva, in March 2023 compared the protests in Georgia with the Ukrainian ones in 2014 and emphasised that in both cases, American government officials supported the protestors–even came to these protests in person. In addition, she pointed out that in both cases, the American government funded the protests and the non-governmental organisations to confront Russia. At the same time, she defended the Georgian pro-Russian government, as it wants to protect the country from "dangerous foreign influence"–as it currently works in Russia.

In fact, she almost quoted the words of the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov: "*Events in Georgia, of course, are orchestrated from the outside. They have the same nature - this is the same desire to create an irritant on the borders of Russia*", and also compared protests to the Euromaidan in Kyiv. This is an example of Russian media promoting the government's ideas about the evil West, which is trying to destabilise countries friendly to Russia and Russia itself. Supporting this message, Russian media are also actively using the words of some people from the "Collective West", which align with their narratives. For example, they are quoting Robert Kennedy Jr., a current US presidential candidate known for supporting and spreading conspiracy theories. They used his groundless words that "the U.S. intelligence agencies spent five billion dollars on the Maidan protests" as facts. Moreover, he said that in an interview with Tucker Carlson, who nowadays is also famous for his pro-authoritarian materials about Russia.

Another Russian media outlet, RIA Novosti, published an article titled "No one expected this. Russia's former adversary has given up on the European Union," alluding to the Georgian prime minister. However, this is an exaggeration–he did not say that he refuses to join the EU but pointed out that there are different positions on this issue in Georgian society. Instead, Russia uses such

words to confirm that cooperation with it is a better alternative than cooperation with the West and to manipulate public opinion in Russia and abroad about the situation.

One more argument supporting the Russian authoritarian power is that democracy spreads "chaos" in society. Russian media call current protests in Georgia "riots" and create the image of protesters-hooligans. One of the main Russian propagandist media, Sputnik, in 2013, quoted Russian President Vladimir Putin, who said that Street protests, similar to those that were active in Ukraine, "would not be tolerated by the authorities in Russia." According to the law since 2012, protests can be held there only in coordination with the authorities–not to create that democratic kind of "chaos."

The Georgian branch of the Russian media outlet Sputnik published information purporting to be from the Security Service of Georgia, in which it was reported that the protests are being financed by outside forces who want them to lead to provocations and riots with human casualties. Such messages from the pro-Russian government also support Russian narratives and could divide societies on their way to European integration.

Recommendations and Possible Solutions

The primary sources of the issues in this situation are Russian media, which serve the authoritarian regime of the

country. However, the influence on them from outside is unrealistic: they are controlled by Russian officials, support the government's ideas, and there is no strong civil society in the country which could change this situation. Therefore, the recommendations are formulated for Georgian and Ukrainian internal actors and will also be useful for other countries, which are also the objects of the increased influence of Russian propaganda.

1. Legislative Regulation of Access to Russian Media

The block of informational sources could be controversial for someone if they see it as a violation of freedom of speech. However, in cases of danger to national security, such measures are justified and effective for the public.

After the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine, laws were passed against Russian informational influences. In 2017, Russian social media platforms, such as VKontakte, were banned. Russian TV channels were blocked, and Russian media mostly left the Ukrainian market. After the start of the full-scale Russian war against Ukraine in 2022, the measures in this area increased in number and became even stricter. Nowadays, most Russian government-owned or and other main Russian media are blocked in Ukraine and in some other countries supporting Ukraine–even to write this essay, I had to use VPN services. Georgia supported the actions of Ukraine after the full-scale invasion, but at the behest of other countries,

it still did not impose restrictions on Russian media. I recommend that Georgia consider such an option, especially as it is facing increased threats from Russia.

2. Adherence to a Single Political Course: From Russia to Europe

The Georgian authorities should return to a European path, listening to the position of citizens, which they express in peaceful protests. The Ukrainian case of the Revolution of Dignity shows that violent crackdowns, beatings, and even murders do not always help the government retain power if the citizens are actively opposed to it. On the contrary, it can only increase the confrontation. Further consequences of such decisions can be particularly dangerous. Ukraine should also adhere to the Euro-Atlantic integration enshrined in the Constitution and prevent the influence of pro-Russian forces, specifically during wartime.

3. Cooperation with Journalists from Other Countries

Ukrainian and Georgian media, especially independent ones, should cooperate actively with their foreign colleagues to cover events without spreading Russian propaganda abroad. Many international media companies have offices in the countries, which is a positive sign. Also, it is necessary to ensure free access to conducting activities on the territory of countries for foreign journalists

under different conditions, even during wartime, as in Ukraine, or during mass protests, as in Georgia.

4. Development of Society's Media Literacy

Ukraine, Georgia, and all post-Soviet countries strategically need to work on internal media literacy to prevent the influence of Russian propaganda narratives in the public sphere. Firstly, it should be the education of citizens. For example, both in Ukraine and in Georgia, there are already a number of state and non-state educational and media projects working in this area. However, the level of media literacy among the citizens is low and should be developed. The NGOs are more active in this, so it would be useful to strengthen their cooperation with the governmental institutions, especially the educational. In general, the development of media literacy education is essential at all levels: at schools, universities, and among professionals.

5. Development of Fact-Checking in Different Areas

Also, it is important to conduct strong fact-checking at various levels of classical media, digital media, and social media platforms, which could also be used to spread false information or propaganda. In both countries, active fact-check projects help fight against fake news, for example, VoxCheck in Ukraine and Myth Detector in Georgia. They should continue to conduct their work and cooperate with other NGOs and governmental structures.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in the example of Russia, we see how the authoritarian authorities turn the media into a tool in their hands. In such cases, the media lose their main roles and characteristics. Russian authoritarian media use pro-European protests as an additional tool for their anti-Western and anti-democratic propaganda to support the authoritarian regime domestically and outside the country. One of the recurring scenarios is the denigration of pro-democracy, pro-European, and anti-Russian protests in countries they consider part of their "zone of influence," such as in cases of Ukrainian and Georgian protests. In different situations, they use similar or often identical messages and narratives to create public opinion that is beneficial to them but could harm the societies on the way to democratic transformation. Therefore, it is important to think critically, especially using any Russian or any other authoritarian source of information, to protect yourself and your country from dangerous, false information.

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Social Media in Political Discourse and the Influence of Hype Machine Theory
By Megi Jomidava

First of all, it should be noted that in the 21st century, with the development of the digital age, the influence of social media platforms on political discourse is increasingly changing traditional communication paradigms. This paper examines the multifaceted impact of social media on the changing political landscape, information dissemination, political campaign strategies, and public engagement with the help of Hype Machine theory.

As businesses expand internationally, social media platforms increasingly inform businesses and provide powerful tools for marketing, advertising, and customer communication. Companies can reach a global audience through targeted advertising campaigns, increase their brand visibility, and maintain their market position.

Nowadays, social media and politics are closely related. It is interesting to consider the potential benefits of social media in political integration and building a level of political culture in the public sector. In this regard, the preferred features are related to issues of speed and

universal access, collaboration, and universal engagement. Political groups can thus communicate directly with their constituents, bypassing traditional media intermediaries. This direct communication promotes a sense of immediacy and transparency. Integration with social media can increase the effectiveness of political activities in many ways, as social media is one of the most useful tools for shaping the public agenda. Social media has emerged as a powerful and transformative tool for political communication, largely governed by the theoretical process of the Hype Machine. It is interesting to consider how political actors use social media to shape the public agenda. They do this through the process of the hype machine. The theory of the hype machine is a chain of interactions between people and social media through technical devices, for information sharing or political programmatic agitation.

The "hype machine" theory is an explanatory framework approach to the functioning of social media, as well as to the characteristics and functions that social media exhibits in the process of interacting with the public/users. The chain of action of social media is a complex issue that needs to be understood and deepened. This concept consists of three components:

- The main actor–a digital social network, which is oriented to be a base of a thousand kinds of information.
- Social network work process–Hype Loop, which determines the ways of informing and means of generating specific information on specific persons, it is carried out through the equipment itself and the person.
- Medium–a smartphone, which is a technical device and through which the main actor, i.e. social network, becomes available to the user, and it is automatically involved in the Hype Loop process.

These components actually accumulate information in people's memory, a chain process of similar interactions determines the effectiveness of social media. Because according to the smart algorithms of social media, it is possible to generate the right information on the right subject, based on past specific actions in your own social network or on the Internet. All this interconnected process is made possible by one of the biggest products of globalization and modernization–the technical device, which actually mediates between us and the Hype Machine process, because technical devices are the main means by which we are constantly in tune in terms of social awareness and perception.

In fact, a process that proceeds algorithmically and is tailored and generated for each individual significantly determines the integrated relationship between, for example, political groups and society. The Hype Machine provides a constant stream of social media on algorithmic occasions with the help and support of political ads, which in turn is one way social media influences the public agenda. Because this process involves the dissemination of various types of information, including hot information about political statements and events, through this process people get information in the shortest possible time and are informed from a social point of view. The more proper planning on the part of political groups on how to use social media and media advantages, including such a deep and important process as the Hype Machine, the more likely it is to deliver the right messages to the public and to achieve a specific goal of a particular political group or party. Political actors and interest groups can use social media platforms to target specific audiences with messages, maximizing the impact of their campaigns through sophisticated data analytics and targeting strategies. That is why the coefficient of integration of political groups with social media appears to be the main determining factor in terms of predicting the success and future perspective of the political activities of these or those political groups.

However, even though social media can be an effective tool for creating public policy and influencing policy outcomes, it can also be seen as a negative influence on democratic processes. Threats such as disinformation, mass dissemination of propaganda, fragmentation of the public sphere, and the potential for manipulation and influence by political actors with more resources and data have increased. To address these issues, it is important to assess social media perspectives. It should be noted that the Hype Machine may not be able to control this, as it is an ongoing process that streams information to targeted targets. Therefore, it is difficult to isolate a person from this process without becoming at least partially a victim of misinformation, propaganda, and all the dangers that may accompany Internet crimes. This issue is quite complex and controversial, as it requires a systematic approach to study and understand social media events, trends and phenomena.

It is important to share theoretical definitions that will allow us to analyze structured media processes: Hype Machine theory, networked public sphere, digital citizenship, and framing theory. The networked public sphere refers to the digital spaces where people engage in political debate and share information. Digital citizenship, on the other hand, emphasizes the role of individuals in changing the online environment through their participation

and interaction. We can better understand the complex relationship between social media and political ideas in the digital age if we examine these theoretical approaches with empirical research.

The mentioned theories separately and together are a constituent part of one big process, which are the main catalyst for driving the Hype Machine theoretical process. Accordingly, all those theories are united in this one big process, which implies the connection of interactions formed between digital media and society. The main locomotive of interaction and this chain process is to inform people. Information is the main tool based on which this process acquires the most important role in the modern developed world, because an informed person is armed with power.

In addition, analyzing this theoretical process from the point of view of the information spreader and receiver is equally important, because with the correct perception of these components, they will be equipped with practical skills necessary to analyze phenomena such as the spread of fake news, propaganda, or the dynamics of violent social movements on the Internet. Digital social networks largely shape the flow of information in society, and it is difficult to control how qualitatively this information is filtered and harmless, or, on the contrary, of poor quality. Unfortunately, social networks are not distinguished by

legal regulation of these issues, although trends are changing and a number of programs are being created that help users filter and discover information. There is a great deal of interest in the consistent regulations needed to create a hands-on digital education that includes critical thinking, media literacy, and civics.

In conclusion, this paper analyzes the complex interaction between social media and political communication. While the speed/access of information dissemination and civil activism has increased, so have the threats to privacy, polarization, and misinformation. As technological development is a dynamic process, dealing with these challenges remain an urgent issue for the healthy functioning of democratic societies.

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How Social Media Political Campaigns Can (Un)Interest Young People in Political Participation
By Romana Knežević

The year 2024 was defined by elections all around the world. Croatian citizens could vote in three elections. And every new election does not only bring new candidates but new voters as well. It is well known that younger generations get their information mostly on social media, but what kind of influence did that leave on this year's campaign in Croatia?

In the weeks preceding the elections, all candidates wanted to present themselves in the best way possible. A lot of candidates thought that simply setting up their social media accounts would be enough, but it is not. The main goal is to create new, innovative, and educational content that will attract young voters, not reject them in another way. Most of the content found on social media was not suited for social media but rather for television. Politicians would talk directly to the camera about their goals, answering different questions for more than a minute. That type of content presentation is rather boring, especially to the social media users.

On social media, the only goal of the creators is to gain attention from their followers. They are trying to be different from other content creators. This desire was present when politicians created social media accounts, but not in their content. If a young person is scrolling through Instagram and a video of a politician speaking directly to the camera pops up, the chances of that young person skipping the video are very high due to the monotonous content. This is exactly why simply creating a social media account is not enough. You need to attract young people in the same way content creators do.

Another big problem with the content of politicians on social media is negativity. They are talking about something that insults other politicians. Do people sometimes make jokes in which other people look bad? Yes. Should politicians base their campaigns on social media? No. That is not a way to engage young voters. Ansolabehere and Iyengar show that negative advertising de-motivates voters; it also contributes to cynicism about politics altogether. Another problem is using movie or TV show references which are outdated and not that well known to younger generations. Looking deeper into their content, posts are far longer than they should be. When trying to attract young people, politicians should look from young voters' point of view. Nobody who isn't already interested will read those long posts. You must find

another way of getting those young voters' attention. Now the question arises do they really want to attract young voters? Or do they only want to look like they are trying to attract them?

The most important part of choosing the right party to vote for should be that parties' principles. Those principles should be easily accessible to voters. Politicians should use new platforms to state their principles, goals, and desires. They should make them engaging and easily available, and their ideology clear so young new voters know who to identify with. But in reality, ideology is not presented adequately, but rather poorly. Principles are hard to find, they seem generic, and people can get easily confused with what each party presents, and those basics should not be something that confuses people.

On the other hand, there is the cultural side. Croatia was part of Yugoslavia, a federal state led by the Communist Party. In the 1990s, Croatia transitioned from an authoritarian rule into democratic country. But this transition was not just about institutional change. An important aspect is the political culture, and that takes time. It takes time for the change to take place and for people to change their way of thinking. Some older people who lived under the communist regime have special experiences and legacies, while younger people only learned about it at school and from their families. Young

people are those who are full of new, innovative ideas for the future because it is up to them to make it better. So why ignore them? They are the ones politicians should listen to.

The whole point of creating a social media account is not: "We created the account and now we relate to the young people." It is about actually connecting with them. Those young people rarely watch television or read online news. Their way of consuming news is through social media. So, what messages do these politicians send them? If all they see is constant insults, they will think that type of behaviour is acceptable. Not only that, but they will look at politics as bickering and verbal assaults, and politics simply is *not* that.

A democratic government is the rule of the majority that governs with respect for minorities. It is about acceptance and dialogue. That is something that should be taught. If we want a participative society, a society that wants to be involved in the process of politics, you cannot push them away. If we wish for a society where discrimination is not acceptable, politicians cannot judge young people who are using social media for the same and then the next day continue to insult their colleagues in opposition. With that behaviour, we are sending a message that the same rules do not apply to everyone. Politicians should be representatives of the citizens who

elected them, and at the same time they should represent their interests, but also respect those who think differently and have opposing interests, without excluding or discriminating against them for any reason. Not everyone has the same education, and not everyone understands politics. Despite the democratic development and the consolidated institutions of the democratic order, the development of civic culture in Croatia is insufficient, which leads to a misunderstanding of political processes and consequently to democratic deficits. So, do we want to pass that on to the next generations as well? We live in an era where everything is within the reach of our fingers, so why do politicians continue to ignore young people? In the elections for EU parliament in Croatia, there was an independent candidate who focused her entire campaign on TikTok and young people. Out of 21.34% of people who went to vote, she got 4.06% of the votes. That shows massive potential. Imagine what would happen if other experienced politicians did more than just simply creating accounts on social media. Imagine that they started creating content for young people. Educational and fun content which would lure those young people. Because if those young people don't see the direct results of their engagement they become skeptical that their individual participation makes a difference, or worse, if they cannot see how an issue will directly affect them, they tend not be

concerned about it. Which is why content should get their attention, which would make them think about how they matter, how their votes matter, and how they could be the change they want to see.

I believe that with this negative and boring type of content politicians are not getting young people's attention and that they are slowly losing them. They show them that there is nothing wrong with insulting others, especially political opponents, and in doing so they make this kind of behavior socially acceptable. That way, they are not creating a participatory democracy but rather a citizen democracy where people understand all the processes but will not try to change anything they dislike and therefore they will stay politically passive. Politicians would just be people who talk too much and are far too boring, and it would be much easier to just scroll down to something new, fun, and exciting.

We live in a time in which everything seems possible. We live in a time of great technological advancements and in this time politics can thrive. It is easier now than ever before to talk about our likes and dislikes so others can hear us. This means that it is easier now for the politicians to rule in a way that will help the people, which will make them secure. Politics can thrive the most just by using the materials we already have in the best way possible. Politicians should stop wanting to approach young people

and start approaching them. We must include those young people in the process of politics because those young people will grow old, and they will make up the majority of our nation. And if politicians want to make this country a better place than it was before, they should start implementing those changes today on those who will make our nation tomorrow.

Information Inequality: Analyzing Media Literacy & Political Manipulation

By Coleman Robbins

Access to broadband is one of the most pressing equity issues in contemporary society, exacerbating the systemic disparities ingrained within our information system. The combination of technology, information, and human instincts reshape how people think and act politically. The average American spends nearly seven hours a day online. Yet, one in five of U.S. households don't have home Wi-Fi and 37 percent or 2.9 billion people worldwide don't have access to home internet. 93% of U.S. individuals reported using the internet, compared to 82% in Croatia, 72% in South Africa and 79% in Georgia and Ukraine. *Information inequality*: disparities related to the structure, accessibility, and output of our contemporary information ecosystem. *Media literacy*: the ability to critically analyze stories/news and determine the accuracy or credibility using cross-referencing. Historically marginalized communities are far less likely to have access to the internet. For many households, they must choose: Wi-Fi or food. Unequal access to political

information, among voters from different social classes, races, and genders leaves certain groups more vulnerable to political manipulation.

Johannes Gutenburg and the printing press changed how people thought about politics; now people could get knowledge at a lower cost from a diverse array of sources. This led to centuries of political turmoil and eroded existing ideas of governance and authority. ICTs (Internet Communication Technologies) are producing an eerily similar result. "ICTs erode the legitimacy of existing authority by changing citizens' expectations and creating competing narratives. The political forces the internet creates mean that representative parliamentary democracy—the nineteenth-century solution to Gutenbergian disruption—is no longer adequate." There is no denying that the internet enables more political participation, communication, and immediate feedback. Bad actors, such as extremist groups and hackers, use this to their advantage to promote extremist views and conspiracy theories to undermine the legitimacy of those in power. The rise of AI has only exacerbated the already rampant fake news and misinformation campaigns spreading throughout social media and the internet. This year over 3.5 billion people will cast a ballot in a major election, every single one will be affected by ICTs. Media literacy has become imperative to the survival of our

political climate–people have to be able to discern fact from fiction. "In the 1960s, former senator Daniel Moynihan said that everyone was entitled to their own opinions, but not to their own facts. The internet changed that."

The extremely high cost of broadband in the United States disproportionately affects lower income households, furthering the digital divide between socioeconomic classes. Americans broadband prices are some of the highest in the world, with the average U.S. household paying $84.37 a month, compared to $46.83 in Europe and $64.29 in Asia. Efforts such as the Affordable Connectivity Program (created in the 2021 IIJA or Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) aimed to help low-income Americans access the internet at a more affordable price. 23 million households were covered by the program, but after the June 1st renewal deadline came and passed, the program is no more. The consequences of not extending the ACP extends beyond mere internet connectivity, deciding political engagement, decision making, and media literacy for millions. "There's an idea in political science that politicians have incentives to cater to the better informed. Politicians will do what's best for old white men because they're paying attention and will be rewarded with votes." Politicians, incentivized to cater to better-informed demographics (old white men), may neglect the needs of less affluent and less informed citizens, which perpetuates

the cycle of disenfranchisement. Although this data is only for the United States, it is universal in politics globally, politicians are incentivized to cater to the better informed, older, and wealthier constituents. Information inequality only expands the gap.

In the U.S., older white men are far more likely to select a true news story than their female or POC counterparts (see Figure 1). If voters are informed about the policies implemented by politicians, the representatives are incentivized to cater to voters' preferences to increase their chances of reelection. Media literacy and an informed voter base is imperative to a politician's winning coalition of voters. Media literacy and critical examination of politics must take place across socioeconomic, gender and racial lines. "Politicians are aware of the link between information and voting, they have incentives to skew their policies towards the better-informed voters." Enhancing the amount of media literate people will promote politicians to legislate for their informed constituents and promote more diverse political representation.

Constructing a more inclusive political system will benefit everyone who seeks to live in a sustainable representative democracy, not just those who are currently marginalized. The lack of broadband has negative health impacts globally. For example, many rural communities lack specialists and resources needed to handle complex

medical issues. Telehealth enables these communities to access the care they need and deserve. The political marginalization of certain groups furthers systemic discrimination, fostering a more inclusive political system will benefit everyone, even old white men. Confronting information inequality demands robust policy interventions to promote media literacy and equitable access to broadband across all demographics. It is imperative to mitigate the effects of digital exclusion and foster an inclusive government working for everyone, not just the well informed. Although I have pointed out the flaws and disparities with internet access, one cannot overlook the immense economic, social, and scientific benefits the internet has provided. Even though more access to knowledge and information is a benefit, it is imperative to recognize that ICTs change the requirements for legitimacy. Our political processes, ideologies, and institutions must evolve rapidly to keep up with the ever increasing pressure the internet puts on governance.

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Invisible War: The Impact of Information Warfare on Ukraine's 2019 Presidential Election and Georgia's 2020 Parliamentary Election

By Yuliia Popudnyk

The "invisible war" is something that is inaccessible to the eyes of the average person, but at the same time causes its own destruction and puts security and well-being at risk. Cyberattacks and disinformation are "invisible weapons," especially when it comes to governance and democratic instruments, including elections. They mostly work in tandem–where hackers' hands cannot reach, the specific disinformation "soft power" acts and does damage through propaganda, fake news, and changing citizens' minds and attitudes. The impact of hostile information campaigns and cyberattacks usually has an inevitable impact on the state of democracy. While elections, in turn, are a manifestation of the democratic process, destabilizing the political situation and undermining trust, critical thinking, and transparency through information warfare is itself a challenge to democracy and national security.

Even state sovereignty is becoming more precarious, as the aforementioned "invisible" information warfare opens the door to the influence of hostile actors even without the declaration of an actual military operation. Russia and its attempts to interfere in the affairs of its independent neighbors, not only through direct military interventions but also through information and cyberattacks, are almost a textbook example of "invisible war" measures aimed at affecting democracy and influencing countries in its favor from within. In this essay, I will look at the cases of two states–Ukraine and Georgia– analyzing their 2019 and 2020 elections respectively in terms of Russian information influence, cyber intrusions, and attempts to undermine the security of states and the further functioning of democratic institutions. I will also assess the measures taken by these states to cope with the issue and try to offer possible solutions.

According to Dr Julie Posetti, a well-known journalist and deputy vice-president for global research at the International Center for Journalists, disinformation narratives have a significant impact on voting intentions, and the situation is worsening due to the algorithmic spread of political conspiracies and malicious content from both external and internal actors. In the cases of Ukraine and Georgia, we will see how these factors were intertwined and how Russia tried to do everything to cause

the most chaotic situation in the election process–it sowed conspiracy theories, discredited the West, slandered the candidates, and tried to hack infrastructure.

Ukraine's 2019 Presidential Election

The 2019 elections in Ukraine have not been entirely smooth, and have become yet another target for Russian cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns following the annexation of Crimea and military aggression in eastern Ukraine. On the eve of the presidential elections in Ukraine, Russia carried out a series of cyberattacks aimed at destabilizing and discrediting the electoral process. According to warnings from the Security Service of Ukraine and other law enforcement agencies, a series of attacks on the servers of the Central Election Commission were planned to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the elections. The hackers used phishing attacks to steal passwords and personal information, as well as other viruses to interfere with the transmission of data to the CEC. These attacks were accompanied by fake letters from high-ranking Ukrainian officials and disinformation disseminated through social media, which were intended to increase political polarization and conflict in society.

Russian mass media actively used disinformation to discredit the Ukrainian election process. Among the main fake narratives were: claims about alleged arrests of opposition supporters on Poroshenko's order; information

about the visit of the Minister of Internal Affairs of Ukraine to the United States to receive instructions on the conduct of elections; unreliable statements about mass calls from residential and operating offices, that recruited to vote for Poroshenko. Zelensky also became a target for Russian disinformation, which was actively spread through Facebook in particular. The most common fakes related to alleged criminal proceedings against him for plans to "overthrow the constitutional order," falsifying the anger of Ukrainians due to his appearance on TV instead of Poroshenko on New Year's Eve, and the false statement that the "EU president" called Zelensky a clown. In general, as we can see, such fakes were aimed at discrediting both presidential candidates and destabilizing and discording society internally.

Georgia's 2020 Parliamentary Election

The 2020 parliamentary elections in Georgia were also heavily influenced by Russian information warfare tactics, including disinformation campaigns. Russia has used platforms such as Facebook to spread divisive and destabilizing narratives that have exacerbated political polarization within the country. Obviously, it resembles the methods and goals of interfering in the presidential elections of Ukraine in 2019. With the help of coordinated campaigns, especially such media as News-Front and Sputnik, Russia spread anti-Western and pro-Russian

propaganda, exploiting the vulnerability of society and inciting conflict among Georgian Facebook users. In particular, News-Front launched its Georgian service in the run-up to the election, using fake accounts to spread content aimed at inciting antagonism and undermining trust in Western alliances and democratic integrity. All this was done to reduce the chances of the most oppositional and pro-Western political force–the United National Movement.

Cyberattacks were also carried out against around 2,000 websites, on which a photo of ex-president of Georgia and the founder of the aforementioned party Mikheil Saakashvili with the caption "I will return" was displayed. Among the affected websites were the website of the President of Georgia, courts of Georgia, non-governmental organizations, local self-government bodies, and private organizations. Russian military intelligence is responsible for what happened. The U.S. State Department said: "These operations are intended to sow division, create insecurity and undermine democratic institutions."

Anti-Western narratives and aspirations to denigrate pro-Western political figures or parties are one of the permanent complex tools of the Russian hybrid war. In the study "Anti-Western Propaganda 2019," the authors present the structure of these narratives and show that due

to fears, disinformation influences lead citizens to despair, such as "democracy is a fiction" or "the West is incapable of protecting" and offer their own "reliable" solution–to preserve neutrality or understand that economic dependence on Russia provides the stability that Georgian citizens crave. In the case of the Ukrainian elections, Russia is also using a similar method of vilifying the West, but sometimes from a slightly different perspective. For example, pro-Russian media outlets (such as Fort Russ, which in July 2019, after the presidential and early parliamentary elections, conducted an interview with a political scientist on Russia 24 TV channel) tried to present Ukraine as a "platform for political experiments," which casts doubt on the fulfillment of their campaign slogans. Such statements also claimed that "Ukraine is not a sovereign state," but a "political experiment of Washington." "Elections are closed and conducted with violations" and, in general, "Ukraine is a corrupt and failed state."

Possible Solutions and Recommendations

To counteract hostile information and cyber influences on stability, it is very important to develop the field of cyber security. Laura Galante, the head of the cyber direction of the working group on the 2019 elections, noted that since 2014, the Ukrainian CEC has proven to the West the need to invest in the Ukrainian cyber security sector: "Ukraine in

2019 is a much more prepared country in cyber security issues, including both the public sector and the public." The qualitative direction of investments in the direction of cyber defense and the conclusion of effective partnerships is one of the really good solutions to combat cyber aggression, especially Russian one.

In fact, the help of other countries (in particular, the U.S. and members of GUAM, which includes Ukraine) helped to strengthen the national security of critical infrastructure in Georgia as well. For example, with the support of USAID, a new cyber security center was opened, which aims to protect the electoral system from cyber threats. In addition to this, in terms of possible defenses in the "invisible war," Georgia has implemented comprehensive measures to protect against cyberattacks based on the Law on Information Security, which defines and authorizes the protection of designated critical information system (CISS) entities. The protection of these CISS is required by law and is implemented through mandatory incident reporting to the relevant authorities (such as CERT.GOV.GE for public sector organizations), development of internal rules in accordance with security standards set by the Data Exchange Agency (DEA), penetration testing and security vulnerability assessment, etc. In addition, in cases where audits or testing reveal non-compliance with security policies, CISS must

investigate and correct the deficiencies. The infrastructure that ensures the conduct of elections is, of course, the responsibility of the CISS, so such guidelines should undoubtedly help to at least prepare for and anticipate the dangers associated with hostile interference in the course of elections.

Speaking about additional recommendations that, in my personal opinion, should be paid attention to, then I would start with the emphasis on the development of media literacy. Of course, it is important to educate children and young people to develop critical thinking and the ability to recognize fakes, bots, and disinformation from an early age, as well as to be able to protect their personal data and accounts. Special attention should be given to relevant programs in schools and universities to ensure that future voters are equipped with knowledge and are able to play their part in democratic processes and civil society. However, at this stage, it is no less vital to train officials who are and will be directly involved in the electoral process. Undoubtedly, if there is no high-quality and reliable infrastructure, people will not be able to prevent the damage caused by information warfare. However, when all efforts have been made to secure the servers, it is worth trying to "secure" the minds, thoughts, and skills of those who are on the "front line" of enemy informational attacks. Regular trainings, confirmation of

qualifications, gaining experience from international experts–of course, this will not cancel the fact that Russia will constantly try to interfere and destabilize the political life of its neighboring countries, but "forewarned is forearmed."

Also, as we have seen before, Russia is making great efforts to spoil the impression of its neighboring countries for the Western world. To minimize the risk of such disinformation campaigns, Ukraine and Georgia need to constantly confirm and improve their image for foreign partners. For this, it is necessary to spread awareness about the course of the political process in these states, talk about the successes of democracy, and draw on their valuable experience. Right now, in 2024, conscious Georgian citizens are working tirelessly so that democracy succeeds and the current pro-Russian government, which has deviated from its previous pro-European orientations, resigned and opened the way for changes.

Last but not least, I would suggest the use of this real experience as the basis of international efforts to create regulatory conventions for hybrid warfare, and information warfare in particular. Of course, it sounds utopian that all states, especially such as Russia, will comply with international obligations, but the presence of rules will make it possible to introduce liability for crimes of cyber aggression, as it works in terms of war crimes. In my

opinion, the experience of Ukraine and Georgia is very valuable for understanding the context of ensuring cyber security, because these countries experienced both the harmful consequences of hostile informational influences and "built up their muscles" for high-quality countermeasures.

Summing up, the examples of Ukraine and Georgia show us how extensive, all-pervading and cunning the "invisible" information war can be. However, democracy needs to be protected by all possible means, as global security depends on its stability, so ensuring transparent, safe and smooth elections is one of the top priorities.

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National Security vs. Freedom of Expression: Deliberating the Telegram Ban Dilemma

By Kateryna Svyrydova

Problem Identification

In today's world, social media has become an important tool for communicating, disseminating, and exchanging information. However, with opportunities come new challenges and threats, including those related to security risks. An exemplary case of this phenomenon is the current situation involving Telegram in Ukraine: the operation of one of the most popular messengers, which is used daily by the vast majority of Ukrainians, is increasingly being questioned due to the high risks, including for Ukraine's national security in times of war.

The research on Telegram's impact on Ukraine's national security is a topical issue that requires serious analysis and consideration. It is worth emphasizing that this problem is primarily a conflict between freedom of speech and the country's security. On the one hand, restricting access to the platform may indicate a restriction on freedom of expression. On the other hand, the

presence of anti-democratic ideas, propaganda, disinformation, and wide opportunities for their dissemination on Telegram may pose a threat to the security of the country and its citizens, especially in wartime. Therefore, understanding and studying this conflict is important for developing effective strategies to ensure Ukraine's national security in the context of the hybrid war with Russia, especially its information component. Additionally, it is imperative to uphold the principles of democracy and freedom of speech.

This paper attempts to investigate and analyze the threats Telegram poses to national security, along with the possible consequences of blocking Telegram for Ukrainian society. The analysis is based on a comparative study of cases of previous social media bans in Ukraine and other countries, such as Iran and Hong Kong, using the desk research method. The ultimate goal is to develop a set of recommendations for optimal strategies to respond to and minimize national security risks associated with Telegram.

Telegram as a Threat

As of the end of April 2024, Telegram had 900 million active users worldwide (Statista, 2024). Telegram's development team operates from Dubai, UAE, with its parent company, Telegram Group Inc. registered in the British Virgin Islands. However, the company remains discreet about the exact locations of its offices and

employees, ostensibly to protect them from potential influence or harassment (*Telegram Users by Country 2024*, 2024). Telegram is one of the most popular messengers in Ukraine. The penetration of Telegram use among the population aged 16-55 is an incredible 90%. During the full-scale invasion, Telegram usage rose to 8 times its pre-war level, averaging 40 minutes per day according to Kantar (*Use of Telegram*, 2022). This data is impressive: Telegram has become an integral part of the lives of many Ukrainians and even the Ukrainian state system. In addition to the main functions of the messenger, Telegram also allows the creation of separate user groups and message channels, which have become widely used by ordinary Ukrainians and official and unofficial media, government, and other structures to communicate information. Thus, according to a KIIS study in the second half of 2023, 44% of the population receives information via Telegram (for young people aged 18-24, this figure is almost twice as high at 76%), followed by television news (43%) (Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, 2023).

Founded by Pavel Durov, Telegram is often portrayed and promoted as an anti-censorship messenger platform. However, this standpoint has also sparked debates, especially regarding the balance between freedom of expression and the potential misuse of the platform for spreading misinformation or facilitating illicit

activities. Recently, the high-ranking Ukrainian officials have been criticizing Telegram and calling for its restriction or even an outright ban. A striking example of such statements were the comments of Andriy Yusov, spokesman for the Main Directorate of the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, that the Telegram platform contains "a number of threats to Ukraine" (Ukrinform, 2024) and Kyrylol Budanov, head of the Defense Intelligence of Ukraine, that "Telegram, from the point of view of national security, is definitely a problem. This must be understood" (hromadske.ua, 2024).

Claims by Ukrainian state officials regarding Telegram are based on several circumstances, including inadequate transparency in ownership, lack of control over the dissemination of illicit content, and the potential for the platform to be used for manipulating public opinion and spreading disinformation. The incident that occurred in late April 2024, involving the temporary restriction of several chatbots used by Ukraine's security agencies to gather intelligence on Russia's military activities, including the locations of Russian forces (Ukrinform, 2024), exacerbated the situation with Telegram.

Telegram has positioned itself as an advocate for freedom of expression. Durov himself has been vocal about his commitment to providing a secure and private communication channel for users, particularly in regions

where censorship and surveillance are prevalent. This statement is partly true, as Telegram has indeed gained recognition as the messenger of protest movements. It has been actively used during protests in Belarus, Iran, and Hong Kong (Urman et al., 2021). However, it is also being utilized by authoritarian regimes for propaganda and surveillance purposes. This dual nature of Telegram is evident in its widespread use by both protest movements and oppressive state structures. For instance, in Russia, pro-Kremlin channels on Telegram have garnered larger followings and reach compared to those critical of the Kremlin (@DFRLab, 2022), indicating the platform's susceptibility to manipulation. Similar trends of pro-Russian propaganda activity have been observed in Georgian Telegram channels (*Russian Propaganda Information Front in Georgian Language on Telegram | ISFED*, 2022). Additionally, in Iran, government-linked Telegram channels have been used to identify and intimidate protestors, highlighting the platform's role in enabling surveillance and suppression of dissent (Gjevori, 2022). Thus, it can be concluded that Telegram serves as a significant tool not only for freedom but also for manipulation and surveillance, depending on how it is utilized.

The security concerns surrounding Telegram are being raised across multiple levels of Ukrainian society and have been subject to extensive discussions. The primary

concerns lie within the findings unveiled in a study conducted by the Ukrainian Institute of Media and Communication in 2022 (Dutsyk et al., 2023). During this study, Ukrainian media experts were interviewed, revealing a number of risks to the country's information security associated with the use of Telegram:

- A significant number of anonymous Telegram channels contribute to the spread of disinformation and illegal content that can influence public opinion.
- The presence of "Russian roots" of Telegram founder Pavel Durov, creates risks of cooperation between this network and Russian special services and possible leakage of Ukrainian users' data to the aggressor country.
- Lack of publication of transparency reports on requests from different states, i.e. lack of information on the data requested by different countries.
- Lack of transparency of Telegram's code, which creates risks for the security of users' data, including their theft and unauthorized interference.
- Cloning of useful chatbots on Telegram by an aggressor country may lead to the acquisition of personal data of users and the dissemination of

false information to manipulate the behavior of the Ukrainian population.

● The lack of legal capacity to control the dissemination of illegal and unlawful content makes it difficult to protect the rights of Telegram users appropriately and legitimately.

This list of risks underscores that Telegram, while serving as a vital communication platform, also presents significant challenges to Ukraine's information security and sovereignty. The platform's vulnerabilities, from the proliferation of anonymous channels spreading disinformation to concerns about its founder's ties to Russia and the lack of transparency in its operations, highlight the need for comprehensive measures to address these issues.

Unfortunately, there is no regulation of social media, including Telegram, in Ukraine due to the lack of Ukrainian jurisdiction over global online platforms. Ukrainian media lawyers point to the limited nature of regulation, which depends on the "goodwill" of the platforms (Dutsyk et al., 2023). The situation may change with the introduction of the European Union's approaches to regulating Internet intermediaries, in particular the Digital Services (*The Digital Services Act Package*, 2024) and Digital Markets Acts (*The Digital Markets Act*, 2022), which provide for a number of obligations for platforms, such as

establishing representatives in the EU and procedures for reporting illegal content. For example, Germany enforced the law on network protection, which resulted in a fine for Telegram for not responding sufficiently to user complaints about illegal content (Dutsyk et al., 2023).

Social Media Bans

The banning of Internet sites and social networks is not a new story in Ukraine. After the events of Maidan and the Russian occupation of Crimea and parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions to combat propaganda and in response to the information threat Ukrainian government blocked access to most of the Russian websites, including VKontakte (VK), one of the most popular social media websites in Ukraine, in 2017 *(Decree of the President of Ukraine, 2017)*.

The banning of VK in Ukraine was a topic of significant debate, with arguments on both sides regarding its advantages and disadvantages. VK had faced criticism for its alleged role in spreading disinformation, facilitating propaganda, and enabling communication among separatist groups in eastern Ukraine. On the other hand, its ban raised concerns about freedom of expression and the impact on users who relied on the platform for social interaction.

One of the main pros of banning VK in Ukraine, similar to the current situation with Telegram, was the

potential to curb the spread of harmful content, including fake news, hate speech, and pro-Russian propaganda. Furthermore, banning VK served as a symbolic gesture of Ukraine's resistance against Russian aggression. As VK was headquartered in Russia, its prohibition sent a message of defiance and solidarity with Ukraine's sovereignty.

However, there were also significant drawbacks to banning VK in Ukraine. Firstly, it rightfully raised concerns about freedom of expression and the right to access information. Critics argued that blocking VK restricted users' ability to communicate and express themselves freely, infringing upon their fundamental rights.

But there was another side to it, the ban on VK has caused two things to happen: the general population became more isolated from Russian propaganda, while the remaining minority (who were still using VK despite the ban with the help of VPN) became further entrenched in it. So, one of the drawbacks of the VK ban in Ukraine was that despite the significant reduction in the number of users and posts, the remaining users became more ideologically active and pro-Russian ("The Effects of Banning the Social Network VK in Ukraine," 2000). With the absence of opposing viewpoints on the platform, they became increasingly radicalized. Additionally, the ban resulted in increased interconnectedness among the remaining users,

forming an informational bubble where the same messages were continuously shared and reposted.

There is a possibility that the ban on Telegram could similarly negatively impact the situation in Ukraine, fueling tensions in Ukrainian society and empowering Russian propaganda and its spread like it was with VK.

If we look at the experience of other countries, partial or outright Telegram bans have been more common in countries where the state has tried to stop opposition protest movements in this way, such as in the aforementioned Iran, Belarus, and Hong Kong. That is, in countries with authoritarian regimes or limited democracy, the authorities often take measures to suppress opposition movements and control the information space. And even despite the ban, citizens of these countries continue to illegally use Telegram. 45 million Iranians out of the country's 85 million population were utilizing the Telegram messaging application despite its blockade by Iranian authorities in 2021 (*45 Million Iranians Use Telegram Despite Ban*, 2021).

As can be seen from the experience of Ukraine and other countries that have imposed a ban on the use of Telegram, the ban itself does not lead to people stopping using this social network or messenger. It only complicates the situation by forcing users to use alternative methods, such as VPN, to circumvent access to blocked platforms.

This shows that banning Telegram does not prevent its use, but can lead to radicalization of society and general distrust of the authorities. Such a scenario could exacerbate existing societal divisions and pose challenges to efforts aimed at fostering unity and stability in Ukraine.

Recommendations

As Telegram continues to play a central role in Ukrainian society, it becomes imperative to develop effective strategies to mitigate risks mentioned earlier and safeguard the country's digital sovereignty and users' rights. The most effective strategy to address this issue would not be the outright ban of Telegram, but rather the regulation of its activities within Ukraine, along with the introduction of transparency requirements:

1. Implementation of transparency requirements for all media platforms, including Telegram, to ensure non-discriminatory access to information and identify potential sources of illicit content

2. Development and implementation of legislative mechanisms ensuring transparency and accountability for information dissemination on media platforms, including requirements for declaring ownership and sources of funding.

3. Collaboration with international partners to adapt European regulatory standards, such as the Digital

Services Act and the Digital Markets Act, into Ukrainian legislation to ensure effective oversight of the media landscape.

4. Strengthening dialogue between government bodies, civil society organizations, and representatives of media platforms to jointly develop and implement strategies for ensuring national security in the face of information warfare and hybrid threats.

By implementing these recommendations, Ukraine can strike a balance between protecting national security interests and upholding principles of free speech and access to information. This approach acknowledges the importance of regulating media platforms like Telegram while promoting transparency, accountability, and collaboration among stakeholders.

Conclusions

The possible ban on Telegram in Ukraine shows how tricky it is to balance free speech with keeping the country safe, especially during a war. While addressing the impact of Telegram on Ukraine's national security and the effectiveness of blocking it as a means of ensuring this security, it is evident that outright banning is not the most effective strategy. Instead, regulating Telegram's activities within Ukraine and introducing transparency requirements would be more beneficial. Regulatory pressure is much

more productive than an outright ban since this approach reinforces a more stable, rule-based operating environment for all types of platforms. Also, it is equally important to safeguard individuals' rights to communicate freely and access diverse viewpoints. Moving forward, policymakers must carefully consider the implications of their actions and strive to strike a balance that upholds both democratic values and national security interests.

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Governance in the Digital Age: Social Media's Challenge to Global Democracy and State Sovereignty
By Yaryna Fialko

Introduction

The average time a person spends daily on social media is 2 hours and 24 minutes (Dean, 2024). For many, it has become a primary entertainment, communication, and news source. People use the Internet to organize and demand better services, for transparency, and for meaningful political participation. At the same time, it influences people's preferences and political views, potentially threatening a state's national security. Social media is both a tool for democratization and a weapon of manipulation. This paper highlights social media platforms' role in helping spread misinformation that leads to political polarization, offers two case studies as examples, and presents possible solutions to mitigate social media's challenge to state sovereignty.

Misinformation and Fake News

Social media's rapid evolution as a primary news source has significantly affected journalism and democracy. According to MIT researchers, fake news can spread up to 10 times faster than accurate reporting on social media

(Micich, 2023). This accelerated dissemination of false information poses a significant threat to data integrity and ultimately challenges global democracy.

Platform design and incentives play a vital role in the spread of misinformation. Social media employ sophisticated algorithms to maximize users' engagement. Sensational and often exaggerated content spreads faster and receives higher engagement, leading to profit gains for a company. Such an engagement-inducing monetization strategy incentivizes big-tech companies to prioritize engaging content, regardless of its accuracy. Social media allows any user to become a pseudo-journalist by reporting on issues or facts that are false or distorted, which results in an endless supply of misinformation. The sheer volume of fake news overwhelms moderators, making it challenging and impossible to flag the content as misleading or remove it from the platform altogether.

Fake news spreads faster thanks to people, not bots (Langrin, 2018). Some individuals do so without malicious intent, finding the content funny, exposing it, or liking the social attention they get through sharing. All these motivations further spread misinformation, unintentionally leading to political consequences like increased skepticism and cynicism toward election campaigns and politicians (Perach, 2024). Frequent intentional distributors of false political content often express ambitions to run for office

and support political violence, groups like QAnon, and individuals like Vladimir Putin (Littrell, 2023). These people are more likely to use social media platforms known for extremist and conspiracy theories, such as 8Kun, Telegram, and Truth Social (Littrell, 2023). The views of such distributors bring degenerate and anti-democratic values to social media platforms, infecting the minds of voters.

As big tech continues to prioritize maximizing user engagement over legitimate news sources, the general public is left susceptible to misinformation backed by foreign governments, leading to extremist views and acts of violence. This further divides an already polarized political aisle as users surround themselves with other users who share beliefs.

Electoral Interference and Political Polarization

Anonymity in social media presents an opportunity for societal opinion manipulation. This allows for the actions of foreign agents who intend to undermine the electoral processes of democratic countries to go undetected, blending into the backdrop of online political discourse. During the U.S. 2016 Presidential elections, the U.S. Senate Intel Committee found that the Kremlin's Internet Research Agency (IRA) played a crucial role in sowing discord in the American online sphere (Senate Intel Committee, 2024). The IRA's social media activity

overwhelmingly supported then-candidate Donald Trump and sought to harm Hillary Clinton's chances of winning the presidency.

Americans took to social media to engage in hot topics of contention, including race relations, immigration, and Second Amendment rights. Looking to capitalize on user engagement, social media algorithms further exacerbated the growing divide among Americans by having their users' feeds continue to play on their fears, creating online echo chambers. Both sides of the political aisle became so detached from reality. They demonized the other side, leading to the hyper-polarization of Americans in the months leading up to the 2016 election.

Case Study Analysis of Possible Solutions

Ukraine faced numerous national security threats from Russia in the last decade. The popularity of Russian social media platforms in Ukraine gave Russia, being a primary stakeholder and having experience in accessing user data, a hold of the narrative and a tool to influence the minds of Ukrainians (The Editorial Team, 2021). In 2017, the Ukrainian government forced internet service providers to block access to major Russian websites, including Vkontakte, the most popular social network in the country (Roth, 2017). Being in a state of war, the Ukrainian government regarded the ban as a national security measure to counter Russian propaganda and surveillance

(Roth, 2017). While VPN services allow to omit the ban, the extra tension in accessing the platform resulted in fewer Ukrainian users and their activity at the platforms.

Like Ukraine, the United States sees a threat in social media with roots in foreign governments. In April of 2024, President Joe Biden signed a bill requiring the ByteDance company, the creator of TikTok, the country's third-largest social media platform, to be sold or otherwise banished (Fung, 2024). Experts suggest the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) can use the app for surveillance and misinformation, given its history of manipulating narratives to undermine opponents and gain strategic advantages (Jamestown, 2024). Previously, the U.S. Army and at least 39 states had banned TikTok on government devices due to cyber threats.

The actions of the two governments differ in their radicality due to different levels of emergency: Ukraine is in a state of war with Russia, while the U.S. recognizes China as a "strategic competitor" and does not consider it to be in an active conflict. Furthermore, the actions vary because of power differences: the U.S. is a world superpower, while Ukraine is a developing country. Therefore, the U.S. can dictate its rules to big-tech companies, as they worry about losing the market.

Representatives of the Russian and Chinese governments express their concerns about violations of freedom of speech. Chinese officials criticize the U.S. actions, calling it an excessive use of national security concepts and bullying, labeling them as violations of free speech. Meanwhile, China has banned numerous American platforms like Google and Facebook for not meeting its data and content-sharing regulations (He, 2024). Both Russia and China have a history of filtering their internet space and banning foreign social media, as well as using them against their opponents. This opens the opportunity for the threatened to take action to defend their sovereignty.

Recommendations

Fighting misinformation and societal polarization on the platforms that incentivize them opposes a comprehensive challenge to democratic states. The pervasive nature of social media demands a collected response from the government and its society and international cooperation to address its dangers. This section examines strategies to combat the spread of misinformation, including restructuring the online environment, developing tools to identify fake news, creating regulatory policies, improving media literacy and increasing self-awareness, public and private sector cooperation, and increasing information sharing between global democracies on active threats.

An effective reduction in misinformation requires restructuring the online environments that encourage its dissemination (Medzerian, 2023). Social media must soften the recommendation algorithm that further polarizes society and gives users various opinions. Big-tech companies need to invest in fake news identification tools to reduce the financial incentives for those who benefit from spreading misinformation. Governments should create policies to regulate the use of social media by their workers, take measures to ensure users' data security and prevent external influence on the political life of the country by banning the platforms. The journalism industry should provide high-quality information on their internet platforms, debunking fake news without legitimizing it. Education institutions can offer media literacy classes and resources to prevent the dissemination and influence of false information. The individual, too, must play a role in maintaining vigilance and checking for sources to ensure news source legitimacy. The state's private and public sectors should cooperate to detect malicious intents of users and outer forces to influence its political life. Lastly, western democracies should set up a framework to facilitate information sharing regarding incoming threats of known misinformation campaigns that threaten their state sovereignty and global security.

Conclusion

Never before have people been able to access information at the tip of their fingers like in this day and age. However, with easy access and flow of information, it is difficult to ascertain what is real and if a post is from another user or backed by a foreign intelligence agency. Playing off of our emotions, social media giants take full advantage of content that plays on the fears and insecurities of its users to maximize engagement on their platforms. In politics, this means feeding the algorithm to boost content rife with misinformation to sow societal discord among citizens. Contrary to popular belief, it is not bots but humans who spread misinformation simply to get a laugh to warn other concerned citizens or discriminate against a political opponent. Consequently, this leads to the formation of extremist and conspiracy theory groups. This undermines a nation's sovereignty by degrading a once-informed voter base. As online users lean further into skepticism and spread misinformation, it becomes difficult for democratic institutions to function as voters no longer make sovereign decisions but now carry the agendas of outside forces. Efforts have been made to curtail these effects. These include banning social media platforms with the explicit backing of a foreign government that threatens national security. Recommendations include promoting restructuring the algorithm to lessen harmful

recommendations from trending and having big-tech companies invest in tools that can better detect misinformation while providing financial incentives to those who do so. Governments must also introduce new regulatory policies, and education institutions can provide resources to strengthen media literacy. The public and private sectors must undertake these efforts, and democracies must increase their collaboration to safeguard each other's sovereignty.

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Control, Management, and Manipulation of Elections Through Social Media–How Do We Stop It?

By Karla Sablijić

In the contemporary digital era, social media has emerged as a pivotal tool in political campaigns, transforming how elections are controlled, managed, and, unfortunately, manipulated. The influence of platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok on the electoral process cannot be overstated. While these platforms offer unprecedented opportunities for voter engagement and democratization of political discourse, they also pose significant risks to the integrity of elections. This essay explores the multifaceted role of social media in elections, highlighting its capabilities in campaign management and its potential for manipulation, and discusses regulatory and ethical considerations.

The Role of Social Media in Political Campaigns

Political campaigns today are increasingly relying on social media to manage their presence and influence voters. The shift from traditional media to digital platforms has revolutionized political communication in several ways.

One of the most significant advantages of social media is the ability to conduct targeted advertising. Political campaigns utilize sophisticated data analytics to segment voters based on demographics, interests, and online behavior. This enables campaigns to deliver highly personalized messages that resonate with specific voter groups, optimizing their outreach efforts. For example, younger voters might receive messages about climate change and education, while older voters might be targeted with ads about healthcare. Social media platforms facilitate direct interaction between politicians and voters. Candidates can use these platforms to communicate their policies, respond to public concerns, and participate in discussions. This direct engagement helps humanize candidates and allows them to build a rapport with the electorate. Platforms like Twitter and Facebook provide spaces for real-time communication, enabling politicians to address issues as they arise and keep their followers informed.

Beyond basic campaign management, political actors use social media to shape public opinion and control the narrative around their campaigns. Social media allows political campaigns to control their narrative by disseminating favorable information and countering negative reports. By highlighting achievements, sharing endorsements, and promoting positive news, campaigns

can craft a compelling image of their candidate or party. This narrative control extends to crisis management, where rapid response to negative news can mitigate damage.

Emphasizing a candidate's strengths and successes is crucial in building a positive public image. Social media platforms enable campaigns to share success stories, policy wins, and endorsements from influential figures. These positive messages can be amplified through likes, shares, and comments, reaching a broader audience and reinforcing the candidate's desired image.

Manipulation of Elections

While social media offers many benefits for campaign management, it also presents significant risks for manipulation, which can undermine the democratic process. When we say that someone is "manipulating elections" we think about disinformation and misinformation.

Disinformation (deliberately false information) and misinformation (false information spread without malicious intent) are pervasive on social media, and their impact on elections can be profound through fake news, deepfakes, trolls, and bots. The spread of fake news can mislead voters and distort their perceptions of candidates and issues. Fabricated articles, doctored images, and manipulated videos are often shared widely, sometimes

with the intention of discrediting opponents. The rapid spread of fake news, driven by algorithms that prioritize engagement, can create false narratives that are difficult to counteract.

Also, advances in technology have made it possible to create highly realistic but fake videos and audio recordings. These deepfakes can be used to spread disinformation about candidates, making them appear to say or do things they never did. The potential for deepfakes to influence voter perceptions and damage reputations is significant, as they exploit the trust that people place in visual and auditory evidence.

Social media bots are automated accounts programmed to perform specific tasks, such as liking, sharing, and commenting on posts. Bots can create the illusion of widespread support or opposition, amplify messages, and drown out dissenting voices. By flooding platforms with coordinated messages, bots can shape public opinion and skew the perceived popularity of certain viewpoints. Trolls are individuals or groups who deliberately provoke and disrupt online discussions. They often spread disinformation, engage in harassment, and sow discord. Trolls can be particularly effective in polarizing debates and diverting attention from substantive issues. Their activities can create a hostile online

environment, discouraging genuine discourse and critical examination of political issues.

Social media algorithms often reinforce existing beliefs and contribute to political polarization. Social media platforms use algorithms to personalize content feeds based on users' past behavior. While this personalization enhances user experience, it also creates echo chambers where users are exposed primarily to content that aligns with their existing views. This algorithmic bias reinforces existing beliefs and reduces exposure to diverse perspectives, making users more susceptible to manipulation. Users are more likely to engage with content that confirms their pre-existing beliefs, a phenomenon known as confirmation bias. Manipulators exploit this tendency by crafting messages that resonate with these entrenched views, further entrenching polarization. This creates a feedback loop where polarized content gains more visibility, deepening divisions within the electorate.

Regulatory and Ethical Considerations

To mitigate the negative impacts of social media on elections, robust regulatory frameworks and ethical guidelines are essential. Regulations should mandate transparency in online political advertising, including the disclosure of funding sources and sponsors. Voters have the right to know who is behind the messages they see,

and transparency can reduce the influence of dark money and foreign interference in elections.

Strong data protection regulations can limit the extent to which political campaigns can exploit personal data. Ensuring that users have control over their data and that it is used ethically is critical for maintaining trust in the electoral process. Regulations like the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in Europe provide a model for protecting user data and privacy.

Social media companies must take proactive steps to manage the content on their platforms responsibly. Platforms should implement robust content moderation policies to detect and remove disinformation and harmful content. Automated tools and human moderators can work together to identify and address violations quickly. Effective content moderation requires transparency in decision-making processes and accountability mechanisms to ensure fair and unbiased enforcement. Collaboration with fact-checking organizations is essential to identify and correct false information. Platforms should prioritize transparency in their fact-checking processes and ensure that users are informed about the veracity of the content they encounter. Fact-checking labels and warnings can help users distinguish between accurate and false information.

Mitigation Strategies

Addressing the challenges posed by social media manipulation requires a multi-faceted approach. Government agencies, NGOs, and educational institutions should run campaigns to teach citizens how to recognize and respond to disinformation. Workshops, online courses, and public service announcements can raise awareness and improve media literacy. Encouraging critical consumption of media can help individuals better evaluate the information they encounter. Teaching critical thinking skills, such as fact-checking and source evaluation, empowers voters to make informed decisions. Advanced technologies can detect and counteract manipulation. AI and machine learning can analyze patterns of behavior and content to identify bots, deepfakes, and disinformation campaigns. These tools can provide real-time monitoring and intervention to prevent the spread of harmful content. Blockchain technology can enhance the transparency and security of electoral processes. It can provide a tamper-proof record of voting and ensure the authenticity of digital communications, reducing the risk of fraud. Blockchain's decentralized nature makes it resistant to manipulation, providing a trustworthy system for managing electoral data.

International Cooperation

The global nature of social media manipulation necessitates international collaboration. Countries should

collaborate to share intelligence, best practices, and technological solutions to combat disinformation. Joint task forces and international agreements can facilitate coordinated responses to threats. Establishing global standards for the use of social media in elections can help create a consistent and effective approach to managing these challenges. International bodies such as the United Nations or the European Union can play a leading role in setting these standards and promoting their adoption.

Conclusion

The control, management, and manipulation of elections through social media presents multifaceted challenges that require comprehensive strategies. While social media offers powerful tools for political engagement and communication, it also poses significant risks related to misinformation, polarization, and interference. By implementing robust regulatory frameworks, enhancing platform policies, educating the public, leveraging technology, and fostering international cooperation, societies can better protect the integrity of their electoral processes. Addressing these challenges is essential for maintaining the health and legitimacy of democratic systems in the digital age.

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How Does Social Media Affect Young People in Croatia During Elections?

By Maja Nikšić, Lana Bartulović, and Sara Bagić

This essay discusses how social media affects young people during elections in Croatia. The topic was chosen because of the huge amount of political content on social media platforms. 2024 is an important election year in many countries including Croatia, which triggered a lot of political parties to participate in the creation of social media content to promote their campaigns and programs just to attract young people to vote. This is justified by their opinion on how young people get most of the information about politics through social media.

Before talking about how social media affects young people, we will explain exactly what social media is. Social media is a form of mass media communications on the Internet through which users share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content. Social networking and social media are overlapping concepts, but social networking is when users build communities among themselves while social media is more about using social

networking sites and related platforms to build an audience (Britannica).

The Croatian parliamentary elections were held on April 17th. The elections are held every 4 years, but this year was a little different. Most of the politicians participated in the global trend of using social media. Less than a month before elections some of them made accounts on TikTok, a social media platform which is very popular among young people and allegedly has the most influence on them.

In order to see if politicians achieved their goal of gaining more votes from young people due, we have conducted a survey in which we asked young people from 18 to 25 years old what they think about elections, social media, the impact of social media on young people, and about political content on social media. This is a pilot study that is not representative since it includes mostly young people who were randomly selected. 105 young people completed the survey and told us their opinions.

For this research, we used a survey as a main instrument of getting the results because with the survey we could see exactly what people from 18 to 25 think about elections. The goal of this survey was to find out some answers as to whether social networks really influence the political opinions of young people and if so, in what way.

In our survey, out of 105, 64% were females and 36% were males. 90.5% answered were current students. A minority had only finished high school and few of respondents finished college.

First we asked if they participated in this year's parliamentary elections. 81.1% voted and 18.9% did not vote in the election.

Because of our essay's theme we asked them if they use social media. 98.1% use social media and 1.9% do not use it. In the next question, we gave 6 options to choose from. Those were Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter (X) and other social media platforms.

- 89.6% of use Instagram on a daily basis
- 83% of the participants use YouTube use
- 55.7% use TikTok
- Only 22.6% use Twitter (X)
- 21.7% use other social media platforms

When asked about how often they saw political content on social media (ranking it from 1 to 5) 32.4%, said 4 (meaning often). 28.6% of participants ranked visibility of content at 3.

We also asked what sources they used to get information about this election. 66% answered that social media were their main source of information during this year's elections. 61.3% got their information from web

pages. 594% of them answered that they got their information about elections from television and from the other people. 13.2% of people that completed our survey answered that they used newspapers to get information about elections and 12.3% said that they used radio for that. 15.1% answered that they got information from some other sources.

The next question was if they think social media platforms regulate political content appropriately. 69.2% people answered that social media platforms do not regulate them well enough. 30.8% think that they do regulate those contents just fine and they wouldn't change anything.

Our next question was whether they changed their political view because of something they saw on some social media platform. 84.8% of people answered that their view stayed firm and unchanged, but 15.2% said that their view was changed because of social media content. Do they think that social media has a big influence on shaping political opinion? 91.5% answered that it does indeed have a big influence and 8.5% of people said that it does not.

Next question was whether they think that the result of elections changed due to social media platforms influence on young people. 54.7% people think that social media platforms have influenced results of elections and 45.3% think that they do not.

77.4% of people think that inappropriate behavior of political parties on social media platforms should be forbidden and 22.6% think that that they should be allowed to post anything on social media platforms.

Our last question was if political content should be allowed on social media platforms. 67% of people think that they should be allowed, but 33% think that they need to be banned from social media platforms.

These days, all the young people use social media platforms for various reasons. Some use it to find inspiration for their style or to find out which books, movies, and tv series are good and worth watching. They also use social media to follow some of their favorite celebrities, influencers, singers, actors, etc. It isn't just about socializing and communicating with peers, but it is a new way of living life. Some of them are even becoming addicted to their mobile phones and social media and they do not know how to stay away from it even for a couple of minutes. Social media platforms alter young people's sense of reality and even their perspective of the world. As they get older and more educated, they start to believe in social media less. We as people need to regulate our usage of social media and learn to not let it affect our way of thinking. Especially, we need to protect young people because their minds are not yet fully developed, and they begin to use social media earlier and earlier.

Through all this research we can see that most of the young people believe that their opinion is not influenced by content on social media, but they think that it affects other people. We did our research on young people from 18 to 25 years and most of them are students or they have already graduated from college, and you can say that they are fairly educated and because of that they have already developed minds and opinions which cannot be so easily changed. So, according to our research, people from 18 to 25 cannot be influenced by social media or by opinions of other people, but people who are younger than 18 and do not have their minds fully developed yet, can have their opinions shaped by other people or by social media.

Politicians use social media for targeted advertising, and they want to reach young voters with their content to get their vote. However, social media is also prone to spreading misinformation and exposing young people to manipulation because their opinions can be easily reshaped. Especially in today's modern time, political campaigns are a crucial part of elections so people of all ages must be responsible while getting their information about them from all kinds of media.

Through this research, we have learned that most young people have their own minds and are not so easily

influenced by social media content, but we cannot know if it will be the case for future generations.

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History of Elections Held in Occupied Abkhazia

By Tatia Kokobinadze

Georgia is one of the smallest countries in the world, but it is a place that holds pages of the greatest history. Obviously, such a powerful state had many enemies. In the background of the change of centuries and the instability of the world political climate, this always tried to be oriented toward progress. Despite many obstacles, it managed to smooth out the corners that were sold in scattered parts and to form a state that had its own state religion. Precisely because values are important for Georgians, they always protected the three most precious things spoken by the father of the nation, Ilia Chavchavadze–that is "land, language, faith."

On March 17, 1991, the referendum on the preservation of the Soviet Union was held in the Abkhazian SSR, which was held despite the prohibitive resolution of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia on February 28, 1991.

At the said union referendum, the electorate was required to answer the following question: "Do you consider it necessary to maintain the Union of Soviet

Socialist Republics as a renewed federation of equal sovereign republics in which human rights of all nationalities will be fully protected?" On March 22, 1991, the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia recognized the results of the union referendum in Abkhazia as invalid.

Vladislav Ardzinba wrote in his autobiography that due to the fact that there was a danger of the then government of Georgia seizing the referendum materials, the materials were sent to the Central Committee of the USSR early by pressing a preliminary reserve.

In the republics where the referendum was held, the majority of the voters decided to create the Central Committee, although its implementation was prevented first by the Moscow putsch in August 1991, and then by the dissolution of the Soviet Union on December 26.

"The fall of Sokhumi" is a phrase that divides the heart of any Georgian into two parts. The battle of Sokhumi is the last, decisive battle of the Abkhaz war (1992-93), which resulted in one of the biggest defeats of Georgians in the recent history of Georgia and the ethnic cleansing of Georgians from Abkhazia.

The decisive battle for Sukhumi was preceded by an agreement on the cessation of fire and the withdrawal of military equipment from the conflict zone, which was signed in Sochi on July 27 between the two sides with

Russian guarantees. The agreement lasted until September 16, when the separatists broke the agreement and launched a large-scale assault on Sukhumi from sea, air, and land approaches. According to the agreement, a large part of Georgia's heavy weapons had already been withdrawn from the conflict zone. Fierce battles continued until September 27, however, the Georgian units with weak weapons could not withstand the massive attack and the city finally fell.

The complete defeat of the Georgian armed forces was followed by the ethnic cleansing of the Georgian population in the region. More than 250,000 ethnic Georgians, Greeks, and other minorities who survived became exiles from Abkhazia.

As a result of observation, we can freely talk about recent developments in our country, although Abkhazia is not only unoccupied, but also a separate part of the body, which simply froze. Yes, unfortunately, time stopped there. It is interesting that elections have been held in our country for almost a hundred years, but this year its format has changed. However, what is happening in Abkhazia, which is forgotten by many, but it is still considered part of our country by Georgians.

Parliamentary elections of the Republic of Abkhazia in 1996—the first elections of the supreme legislative body of the separatist, de facto Republic of Abkhazia, which

were held on November 23, 1996 (second round—December 7). At the same time as the elections, the Georgian side conducted a poll-plebiscite against the said elections, at which a large number of voters, as a sign of their protest, legally canceled the course and results of the said elections.

On April 12, 2002, on the landing operation carried out by Russia in the Kodori valley, which was assessed as an infringement of the country's sovereignty and an obvious aggression, the Parliament responded promptly. In an appeal made on behalf of international organizations (April 12, 2002), it is stated: "This is happening after Georgia, based on the recommendations of international organizations, began to withdraw public formations from the Kodori valley and fulfilled all the conditions of the law."

There are two opinions regarding the war in Abkhazia in political circles and scientific literature. According to the first opinion, they claim that at the end of the 20th century, the war started because of the problems of Abkhazia. The desire to liberate the Georgian nation from Russia and the national liberation struggle waged for this purpose. And from the other point of view, Abkhazia has always been a country equipped with a special status in Georgia. If we add to all this the fact that Western Georgia was called "Abkhazia" at the time, then the outside viewer or interested party is given the opportunity

to manipulate this topic, which our opponents do perfectly, especially in the neighboring country–in Russia and, more or less, in certain circles of Turkey.

During this period, it was also revealed that the USA became more actively involved in the issues of Abkhazia. This topic was given a separate place in the declaration made at the Moscow meetings of President Bush and Putin. Gradually, in Russian-American relations, Georgia (with its problems and probably, first of all, Abkhazia) is becoming a subject that will always take its place. As for the procedure for holding elections in Abkhazia. This can be cited as a case of a specific election.

Presidential elections of the Republic of Abkhazia 2014—the sixth consecutive presidential elections in the de facto Republic of Abkhazia. The first round of elections was held on August 24, 2014 and Raul Khajimba won. Four candidates took part in the elections.

The opposition invaded the presidential palace. Similar events took place in Abkhazia in May 2014, when the opposition stormed the presidential palace and the acting president of Abkhazia, Raul Khajimba, was at the head of this protest. And the then president Alexander Ankvab resigned before the deadline.

Everyone has a feeling that something is happening again and again. Khajimba's chance to stay on

the presidential chair is disappearing in the blink of an eye. This next wave of internal political crisis in Abkhazia was quite predictable.

On the one hand, there is a low rating of trust in the government and the Abkhazian political elite as a whole. This was clearly seen in the presidential elections of September 2019, when the electorate actually made a choice between two "evils," and as a result, one of the "evils" won.

On the other hand, a severe economic, social and, most importantly, criminogenic situation, which has no chance of improvement, was bound to explode sooner or later. Finally, it happened. The last straw for the current protests was the arrest of the current president's personal bodyguard, who is suspected of complicity in the triple murder that took place on the beach of Sukhumi on November 24th.

As a result, his supporters also turned their backs on Raul Khajimba. The maximum they managed to do was to watch from afar how desperate people are storming the presidential palace.

Each election can be called the most high-profile election. Even their complete chronology is not necessary, because the years of the elections and the names of the candidates change, the rest–the entire period before, current or after the elections is the same.

As a Georgian, it was very difficult to talk about the greatness of my country, about how many bloody battles we had to protect the country's history and the constitution. However, in this country too, Abkhazia was separated from Georgia like a child from its mother, and in this regard, the country has been dressed in black for more than 30 years. Today, in the independent country of Georgia, there is still a state called Abkhazia, which, as you have seen, has gone through many difficult paths after its fall.

In conclusion, I can say and wish that Abkhazia is a part of Georgia and it will continue to be a part of a free and democratic country. Where elections will not be based on corruption, nepotism and blood, but on the constitution, protection of people's rights and development of the country.

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The Decision to Not Hold Elections in Ukraine

By Sphesihle Mgaga

The motives and choice to not hold elections in Ukraine during the war may be viewed as some as a power grab by autocrats, but such decisions are often made during emergencies and extraordinary circumstances. This essay will provide the model by which this decision is justified. The principle and factors underpinning the policy not to hold elections will be provided as a case study of Ukraine. It will introduce the additional security factors including foreign election interference and hybrid warfare.

The democratic system is a system that is formed and supported by its people. It is considered an excellent platform to achieve sovereignty because it ensures the rights of citizens to participate in power and fair competition. According to Sartip (2020), by embracing public values, human free will and self-determination, the political system provides the conditions for free, fair, and competitive elections.

Importance of Elections

The election is considered a manifestation of a political system that is based on the will of the people and is an

instrument for delivering the public demands to government institutions. Elections have an integral role in building the state power transmission, ensuring peace and political stability, fundamental human rights, public participation, and a legal state. Elections that do not take place raise systemic issues. It makes sense to examine the consequences of postponing elections in light of democratic theory.

Characteristics of Democratic Elections

In a democratic space, the citizens should be capable of forming associations and assembling based on cooperation, collaboration, and common interest. Free and fair elections should be reflected in citizens' attitudes and behavior, channeled through established methods and access to the selection processes.

If the election procedures take place in a free, fair, and competitive environment with proper management and monitoring mechanisms, the outcome should be accepted by all actors. Compliance with all four principles of democracy (substantive, procedural, organizational, and structural) is essential to the public's vision that democracy is improved and guaranteed. Elections play an important role in the realization of sovereignty, civil rights, liberties, restricting political power, and consolidating the democratic system.

According to James et al (2020), Article Four of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states that in times of public emergency which threatens the life of the nation, elections can be postponed. Cases exist where courts have intervened to postpone an election, such as the 2013 California Gubernatorial Recall elections.

Motives Not to Hold Elections

There are seven reasons for not holding elections (James, 2020). Canceled elections are often understood as those in which the incumbent decides not to schedule voting as part of a deliberate statecraft maneuver. Power is sometimes seized via a military coup. For example, in 1986-93, Lesotho suspended elections for prolonged periods of military dictatorships. There can also be short-term cancellations where leaders expect some advantage by way of the delay. Cancelled elections violate democratic norms, and a deep political crisis can spawn an institutional breakdown. All this can produce a political stalemate and/or a constitutional crisis. The reason for a canceled elected can be political or situational, as the Ukrainian example suggests. For example, parliamentary elections in Egypt were postponed by a decree issued by President Mohamed Morsi. The transitional postponement resulted when the state determined that a broader constitutional framework needed to be established before general elections were held.

The motive of actors in transitional settings is about crystallizing democratic institutions rather than a power grab. The constitutional reform seeks to place a clear framework. In 1996, the postwar election was postponed in the Bosnian state due to technical delays. There was also concerns that leaders from military militias would be elected if held too near the end of the war. Elections are huge, complex logistical events that require a vast volume of resources, laws, and staff (James, 2020). In this case, it was necessary to delay part of the electoral process until staff training was completed and robust information and communication technology systems were established.

Elections might be postponed when there is the death of a candidate. This is common in local elections. The democratic rationale for postponing is a concern that voter choice would be adversely affected if a political party is unrepresented on the ballot paper and parties would be unequally able to contest the election on an even platform. An election can also be annulled. These are the electoral contests that are scheduled, but do not have their result verified. There is also a humanitarian postponement where an election might not take place because of societal conditions. This is usually seen through the lens of deliberate attempts to suppress the opposition vote or wreck the electoral process as part of a campaign to undermine the legitimacy of the process. There is an

obvious humanitarian case for delaying the conduct of elections where it might bring about immediate threat to human life and security.

Why is Ukraine Not Holding Elections?

The International IDEA (2019) defines electoral integrity as the realization of principles in the conduct of elections that are necessary to support the broader realization of democratic ideals.

Garnett et al (2020) claims these principles also include opportunities for deliberation, equality for participation, equality for contestation, electoral management equality, and the institutionalization of rules.

At present Ukraine could be described as an aspiring democracy that is at war. It does not currently meet the criteria for electoral democracy or liberal democracy. Even the most minimal definitions of democracy require regular free and fair elections in which all eligible adults can participate. But Ukraine's democratic credentials would not be confirmed by an unsafe election held under current circumstances. According to Ukraine's constitution, parliamentary elections are normally meant to take place on the last Sunday of October in the fifth year of the Rada's mandate. In terms of its political system, Ukraine has a semi-presidential system of government. Executive power is shared between a president who is directly elected by citizens and a prime minister and a

cabinet of ministers who answer to parliament. Ukraine's parliament is called the Verkhovna Rada. It is a unicameral parliament, it has one chamber with 450 members who are elected for a five-year term. Some parliamentary seats have remained unfilled since 2014 due to the Russian occupation of Crimea and part of Donbas, where Ukraine polling stations could not function.

There has been some pressure on Ukraine to conduct the election to show that it is democratic. According to Breaking Point, and Krystal and Saager's discussion, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky made a statement during his visit to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) headquarters on October 11, 2023: "Now everyone should think about defending our country. We need to pull ourselves together, onward unwinding an splitting up into disputes or other priorities, if there is no victory. There will be no country, our victory is possible."

At present, half of the deputies in the Verkhovna Rada are elected in a majoritarian way from a single-mandate district, while under half of the parliamentary seats are allocated to parties based on proportional representation.

Zelensky declared martial law on February 24, 2022 when Russian President Vladimir Putin launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Ukraine's constitution

mandates that elections cannot go ahead until any declaration of martial law is lifted. The law states that election for the presidential office of Ukraine, Ukraine's parliamentary body of the Verkhovna Rada, the Verkhovna Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, and local self-government bodies are prohibited by law under a martial law regime.

According to Davlikanova (2024), in February 2023, almost 18% of Ukraine's territory was "temporarily" under Russian occupation. The Kyiv International Institute of Sociology surveyed Ukraine on the feasibility of holding elections in Ukraine, according to their report, 81% of respondents voted that "elections should be held after the war."

It is also not possible to provide the necessary conditions for voting on the frontlines. Ukraine soldiers will not be able to run as candidates which is a violation of their rights. According to study done by the civil network OPORA (2023), more than eight million Ukrainians have left the country and could not be accommodated if they desired to vote. For example, in the 2018 elections, fewer than five polling stations were available for Ukrainian voters in Poland.

Another substantial argument is security. Russian attacks are unpredictable and can be targeted to prevent voting. International observers and voters can be targets

for Russian drones and missiles, especially close to the frontline. Most Ukrainians who lost their homes because of the war or were injured as well as children who were orphaned have been moved and need assistance. Elections are costly and now are also unsafe.

Election Interference and Hybrid Warfare

The American war theorist Frank Hoffman was among the first to address hybrid warfare, arguing that it represents a new kind of conflict characterized by the convergence of different modes of warfare. According to Davies (2021), the 2006 conflict between Israel and Hezbollah, in which insurgent fighters used conventional weapons in conjunction with asymmetric terrorist and guerrilla tactics, exemplifies the multimodal nature of hybrid warfare.

According to Davies (2021), the concept of hybrid warfare was originally developed in the early 2000s, Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 propelled it to new prominence and spurred renewed academic discussion of its utility. The tactics used in hybrid warfare can be equally varied, including cyber-attacks and information warfare, plausible deniability, and espionage. It involves the simultaneous use of conventional and unconventional military tactics in conjunction with cyber and information warfare. Election interference is viewed as a tool of hybrid warfare that can be used to undermine the strength and legitimacy of a target state. It is inexpensive in nature and

effective at exploiting internal divisions within the target state. More technologies such as social media, the internet, and artificial intelligence facilitate election interference by making it easier than ever to create and disseminate disinformation.

Moreover, deterrence of election interference is very difficult because it does not conform to the traditional concept of warfare. Not all election interference can be classified as hybrid warfare, but the key impact in a state is intervention of such aggression because that undermines the foundation of a target government, society, and popular legitimacy.

The assertion that information warfare is an important aspect of modern conflict is supported by Russian dissemination of false narrative in its invasions of Georgia and Crimea. The 2017 U.S. National Defense strategy agrees that information warfare and subversion tactics are key tactics that Russia uses to achieve its geopolitical objectives. Indeed, hybrid warfare often erodes the line between war and peace and occurs in the political "gray area."

The election interference literature suggests that the appeal for intervention depends on two key characteristics of the target state: political polarization and strategic importance to the intervener. In many polarized countries, opportunistic politicians attempt to align

themselves with outside actors in exchange for support. Many factors conspire to make effective countermeasures exceedingly difficult. This includes addressing internal divisions which help in limiting the western societies' impulse to foreign meddling. Furthermore, encouraging social media companies to remove hateful posts and passing legislation requiring online political ads to adhere to certain standards to truthfulness could also help combat foreign disinformation campaigns. Defending against election interference with complete success seems difficult for now, but there are certain steps that states can take to reduce their vulnerability (Davies, 2021).

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Campaign Dialogue:
Misrepresentation and the Example of Drone Warfare
By Jael Davis

Elections tend to be overwhelming. A significant part of this is the extent to which politicians will go to misrepresent themselves and the issues that they seek to address. This is particularly true of how candidates discuss international security and warfare technology. The misrepresentation of drone usage by candidates demonstrates larger issues concerning normative understandings of democracy and empirical data concerning drones that leads to a manipulation of voters seeking to cast a ballot in an election. Within election years, politicians refer to drone warfare only in terms of how it upholds normative understandings of democracy. In doing this, candidates exploit the electoral process and deprive the public of a well-rounded understanding of the candidate that they are voting for. In a larger sense, the misrepresentation of drone warfare points to significant issues concerning the role that access to clear, cohesive information concerning candidates and weapon usage plays in election years.

Political environments invite a blind complacency of the public during election seasons. This practice is demonstrated in the prolific use of intellectual sedatives that blur political meaning. The use of these intellectual sedatives creates an atmosphere in which the public is not encouraged to think beyond the face value of what is presented to them and thus cast votes accordingly. In this way, elections depend in part on the general public bowing to the words of politicians without any significant pushback or investment. When issues like drones are brought into this environment, the generalizations that politicians espouse on campaign trails become problematic. An unthinking public combined with a misrepresentation of military technologies allows politicians to present themselves as strong potential leaders. They can present their ideas concerning warfare as ethically in line with democratic ideals. Technologies such as drones easily provide empirical data as to how they are used. However, such data is not made available to the public. As a result, politicians can skew perceptions of the technology as well as their own perspectives, and once in office, behave in ways opposite of how they presented themselves on the campaign trail. Such a misrepresentation is dangerous because it deprives the public of the chance to have a full understanding of the ethical issues that a candidate will lead with.

"Free and fair" are the words often associated with normative understandings of democracies. These ideas extend beyond democracy itself to influence perspectives on military technologies used in warfare. Drones are an example of this. On the surface, drones uphold normative values of democracy. They are hailed as conducting warfare in a way that is fair, precise, and limits use of force. This falls neatly in line with normative understandings of democratic rule which represent democracies as fair and avoiding unnecessary violence. In an empirical sense, these ideas lead to a gross misrepresentation of drones as a form of military technology. Such a misrepresentation is important because it contributes to an already flawed electoral system that allows for candidates to misrepresent their goals surrounding national security and the ethical use of weapons.

Drones are consistently misrepresented by candidates and policy makers. They are put forth as precise weapons that alleviate unnecessary casualties. Yet, there is no substantial evidence to support this idea. Former President Barack Obama emphasized the importance of drones in fighting against Al Qaeda as well as helping countries such as Uganda in defending against piracy. These were significant in propping up the use of

drones as necessary to defend the democratic ideals of the nation.

In his book on digital warfare, Scott Timcke draws attention to a different aspect of drone warfare when he writes that, "due to the multiple areas of operation, state secrecy, and absent reports, it is difficult to estimate the number of casualties drones have created." Within this quote, Timcke is emphasizing how information and data concerning drone warfare is often not collected or skewed. Information about drones is further shrouded by normative narratives concerning the means of democratic warfare. As a result, voters are not aware of how candidates view the ethical boundaries of drone warfare and thus cannot be sure how candidates would use such weapons on a domestic or international level.

It is impossible for a candidate to make their position on every issue clear in an election season. The problem, however, is not with clarity concerning drone usage, but clarity with how politicians view the ethical boundaries of warfare and accountability in a democratic system. The use of drones by candidates is an example of the way normative ideas concerning government are emphasized during elections in order to warp evidence. In the case of drones, this is seen in the way politicians and candidates work to skew the details of unmanned weapons and their effect on civilian populations.

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Within campaigns, drones are discussed by candidates in relation to matters of international relations and security. For the 2024 election in the United States, candidates Donald Trump and Joe Biden have worked with drones and international security in a way that warrants further analysis. Biden has centered his priorities on domestic issues. When he discusses drones, it is related to his role as president and how he uses drones in international relations and warfare. Current discussions surrounding drones in the United States have been focused on Israel and Ukraine. As of May 10th, 2024, the United States has included over ten different kinds of unmanned aerial systems in the aid packages it has given to Ukraine. On the surface, this is of little note. The average voter is not necessarily concerned with the variety of drones that are being sent to help another democratic country. However, it further proves the subject of drones is important to conducting democratic warfare in the 21st century. For a candidate to be able to say that they have provided aid in the form of unmanned weapons systems signals to voters that they are aligned with normative ideas of democracy. They believe in warfare that is free and fair while eliminating unnecessary casualties. This is a gross misinterpretation given that research has found drones to be imprecise and difficult to fully control. In misrepresenting values to voters, the candidate

misrepresents themselves and undermines the electoral process.

While in office, former President Donald Trump did not have the opportunity to use drones in direct warfare the way that President Biden has. However, the actions Trump took toward regulating drones represent his perspective on the use of the technology. In 2016, President Barack Obama required that annual reports be made on the volume of civilian casualties created by US drone strikes. This was meant to address issues concerning the transparency of drone usage. In 2019, Donald Trump repealed this act. The result of this was a serious gap in empirical data concerning how drones affected civilians present in areas targeted by the United States. In removing this requirement, Trump continued to foster the secrecy and uncertainty that surrounds drone warfare. The absence of important data gives candidates the ability to create baseless arguments surrounding drone warfare without fear of empirical data disputing it. Such an environment further allows candidates to discuss warfare and drone usage according to normative understandings of democracies. The lack of information creates space for candidates to discuss the utilization of drones as weapons representative of democratic values in the way that they carry out strikes in a way that is as fair as possible. Since the repeal of Obama's requirement that drone casualties

be reported, voters do not know the role of drones or the damage that may have been caused by them throughout the Trump administration. As a result, it is difficult to ascertain the ethical guidelines with which any administration approaches technology and warfare. Along with this, it is a demonstration of how elections are exploited by candidates through omission of these ideas and a failure to give voters a well-rounded view of the candidate that is optimal for voting.

Misrepresentations of drone warfare and the lack of data collected on it is significant to understand because of its relationship to information warfare at large. The issues of information warfare are explicitly seen in the state of relations between Russia and Georgia. In the past, Russia has led extreme attacks on Georgia by bombing different regions and claiming that it is Georgia bombing its own citizens. The spread of misinformation is an important component of weakening democracy. This contextualizes Russia's actions toward democratic Georgia. However, the role that misinformation plays in American elections and the way it is utilized by American politicians is a display of self-inflicted harm on democracy in the United States that emphasizes the danger that withholding information from a voting public has on the larger electoral system.

The way in which a democratic leader approaches warfare is an issue important to consider during elections.

Drones represent a moral grayness that candidates do not actively engage with on the campaign trail thus demonstrating a weakness in the electoral process. Candidates present ideas of international security during elections that may contrast from the actions they would take and ultimately exploit the electoral process by misrepresenting themselves and their goals to voters. It is the responsibility of the democratic leader to use aggressive warfare when necessary. However, if these issues are not overtly discussed when campaigning there is little room for the public to make well rounded decisions about who to vote for during an election year.

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Ukrainian Elections as an Instrument of Russian Propaganda

By Uliana Holovata

The last parliamentary elections in Ukraine were supposed to be held on October 29th of 2023 and presidential ones on March 31st of 2024. Clearly, this did not happen and will not be happening any time soon for obvious reasons concerning the current war with Russia and the complications that go along with it.

While the issue of not holding this year's elections was accessed quite correctly by the Ukrainian government, it still managed to become a very powerful instrument for Russian propaganda. Russian disinformation campaigns are targeted at undermining the legitimacy of the Ukrainian government, especially President Zelenskiy. The Center for Countering Disinformation has reported the case, which was quickly picked up by Russian media. A resident of Chernihiv Region, Oleg Serik, has filed a lawsuit against the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, in which he pledges for parliament to be found guilty of unlawful action of not scheduling presidential elections on 31st of March 2024. Immediately, the situation was picked up by Russian Telegram channel "STRANA." Later, Ria Novosti, Russian propagandist media outlet, comments on this case,

referring to the words of Oleksandr Dubinsky–a pro-Russian politician charged with treason, Nikolay Azarov–prime minister during the presidency of Viktor Yanukovich. Along with the questionable attempts to undermine the legitimacy of President Zelenskyi, Russian outlets talk about an executive coup by either ex-president Petro Poroshenko or Valerii Zaluznyi, which would have supposedly happened by the end of April or on May 20th of 2024. According to Maryna Semenenko, a deputy of Chernihiv city council, Serik could be someone's puppet and did not come up with such propaganda on his own.

Another example is the "Maidan-3" operation, an expensive, powerful and complex informational operation by Russia, which culminated in March–May of 2024. Again, it targeted the topic of elections in Ukraine, more specifically, delegitimizing President Zelenskiy. Osavul report on the operation accesses it in three vectors, namely: military and political, infrastructure damage, and social unity. The operation was conducted through various media and social media outlets, including Telegram channels, with an average post reach of 20,000 up to 94,500 views. According to the report, for "Maidan-3", Russia did spread fake narratives and misinformation mainly through Telegram.

Such informational campaigns are clear examples of the informational domain of Russia's war against

Ukraine. With these specific operations, not only is Russia trying to question the legitimacy of Ukraine's political elite, but it is also another way of trying to justify the war against Ukrainians.

Now, as we see, the topic of Ukraine not holding elections in 2024 did, in fact, become a source of Russian propaganda. However, in the eyes of law, facts, and the majority of surveyed Ukrainians, the choice to prevail from holding elections during the war was correct.

Both Ukrainian and international law actually prohibits holding elections during warfare. Taras Rad (2024), in his report for EPDE, analyses the Constitutional norms of Ukraine's legislation, national Election Code and Martial Law legislations, along with international declarations and conventions that address human rights and freedoms. To cut a long story short, all these documents help us trace the pattern of reasons why elections during active warfare shall not be held. First of all, elections during warfare are very challenging regarding organization. It will be nearly impossible to ensure the ability of all citizens to vote due to hostilities on certain territories, occupation, and mass migration. Not only would it be hard to manage, but it is also simply unsafe since polling stations will become a target when one is dealing with an enemy like Russia. Secondly, military personnel on

duty could not vote or participate as candidates, making the elective process unfair toward them.

Yes, there are various ways to go about these risks. However, it is up to the country to decide whether they are justified or not. If national legislation is not convincing enough, then international law comes into play. For example, Article 15 of the European Convention on Human Rights allows derogations "in time of war or other public emergency threatening the life of the nation." Thus, Ukraine has lawfully used this right to derogate from several articles, including Article 3–**"**Right to free elections." Despite some public confusion, this action is not taken toward limiting any rights or freedoms of Ukrainian citizens; Ukraine cannot fulfil those rights and freedoms because of Russian aggression and, therefore, has to derogate.

Due to these reasons, the current situation with elections in Ukraine is democratic and legitimate and is the choice that is supported by citizens. Socis (2024) survey has shown that 59.7% of respondents agree that Ukraine should not hold elections until the end of martial law. However, in the same survey, 24.2% disagreed and believed that both parliamentary and presidential elections should be held. 5.9% said only parliamentary elections should be held and 3.2%–only presidential elections should be held. These three categories, especially the first

one, raise concern. Are the actions of the government unclear or wrongly perceived? Is awareness around the issue not spread enough?

With this number of people being reluctant to delay the elections, it is only fitting that we go into potential reasoning for such a lack of support. While parliament is the political institution with, perhaps, the lowest public support (with 3.7% of respondents expressing complete trust for the institution), it is the president's legitimacy which is questioned the most. This leads to the belief that, while the enemy's disinformation campaigns did not cause anything as dramatic as an overthrow, they did maim President Zelenskiy's support. Even him being challenged by Valerii Zaluzhnyi in the simulation elections (Socis 2024) feeds Russian propaganda of coups and revolutions against the existing government.

Society is turbulent for both internal and external reasons. And the way disinformation and propaganda are still effective is a real problem. The challenge we will face until the end of the war is the question of the legitimacy of the political elite in Ukraine, which is more factual than juridical. We cannot influence the existence of propaganda around elections, but we can work on group immunity and resilience against it.

The choice to delay/not hold elections during warfare is a very unique instance for world politics. Even

though countries with respectful legislation can perform such acts, they choose not to.

Even during the Civil War, the USA chose not to set back presidential elections. In 1864, Republicans considered postponing presidential elections, not because of hostilities, organizational, or logistic issues, but simply because they feared that Abraham Lincoln would not be reelected. However, Lincoln still won, which played out as a great advantage for him and his government since the world had not seen elections during such a crisis before.

Algeria's 2019 elections had to be postponed on people's demand, which authorities had to fulfil to avoid an outbreak of civil conflict. In Israel, the 2023 municipal elections were set back by almost four months due to the war with Hamas.

The difference in context with both historical and more modern examples compared to Ukraine is quite significant. They give us an understanding that both holding and prevailing elections during conflict is possible and manageable; however, these will not give us any useful "tips" on dealing with propaganda campaigns from any side of the conflict since it does not play a prominent role in any of the stated cases. It again proves that Ukraine's situation is indeed unique, and we should seek a solution with something less straightforward. In this case, the job is not to cover the problem of not holding elections

during warfare per se but to reach for cases of intervention in elections. Therefore, the next step is to analyze the relatively recent and memorable Russian operation in the 2016 presidential elections in the USA.

During the 2016 presidential elections, the USA experienced Russian interference aimed at boosting Donald Trump and sabotaging Hillary Clinton's campaign, which they ultimately succeeded in but still got caught. The operation targeted social media as a source of destabilization of political discourse surrounding the elections. As the issue was investigated, the US took legal actions against those involved; both intelligence and F.B.I have worked with countering hacking and disinformation campaigns. Election officials had to make improvements to election security and strengthened relationships with state and local election officials. The country has increased cybersecurity expenses and upgraded voting equipment. Even social media platforms changed their ad policies targeting the political and voting advertisements.

The US case is the proper response for interference in the electoral process, but since Ukraine has no such a process in sight, not all lessons learned from the US can be taken into account. One point where Ukraine and the US intertwine in this topic is social media, which is a primary source of information warfare. However, there is little to no point in demanding any actions from popular

platforms such as X or Facebook since a recognized problem in Ukraine is none other than Telegram.

Messenger is based in Dubai and identified by the founder, Pavel Durov, as a neutral and free space. However, this platform is bridging closer together Ukrainian and Russian informational environments with public channels spreading disinformation, propaganda, and uncontrolled flow of information from the enemy, inevitably influencing users who get hold of those channels.

Ukraine recognizes it as a danger to national security; so far, Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine has registered legislation regulating Telegram, but it is doubtful that it will be fully banned for several reasons.

First of all, Ukraine already had experience with banning Russian internet platforms in 2017. Not only was there very easy access to those platforms through VPN but there was even a recorded case of protest against the ban. Moreover, there is a significant difference between how platforms such as VK and Odnoklassniki were used as means of communication, while Telegram is the primary source of information about war for many Ukrainians. A survey conducted by "Democratic Initiatives" foundation shows that 53% of respondents use Telegram as the main source of news, and for the age group of respondents under 30 this number goes up to 73%. Consequently, it is

feasible to expect some degree of dissatisfaction from active users.

Another reason why the Ukrainian government so far prevails from the full ban is the fact that it is indeed a very extreme measure. According to the Head of the Verkhovna Rada Committee on Freedom of Speech, Yaroslav Yurchyshyn, something like NSDC sanctions are needed, which would require a serious threat to national security from Telegram, such as a major information leak.

In the situation when a complete ban is not the most efficient, other measures have been found. Namely, already mentioned legislation on regulating Telegram however, the liability this law put on the platform owners will only result in a ban on using the platform for governmental and financial organizations, thus not doing much for regular users. Also, even prior to the full-scale invasion, The Secret Service of Ukraine has been publicizing propagandist and "dangerous" Telegram channels, and with time, the list has become bigger and bigger. But again, publicizing will not do much since there is still easy access to those, and it is impossible to block them.

So, while there is no sight of banning the platform and even less point in doing it, there is a reasonably simple solution. We cannot convince people of how dangerous telegram is by denying it; however, launching a

country-wide campaign with popular media figures' support (political influencers, volunteers, media military, etc.), raising awareness and educating on information filtering is a less invasive and more "soft" approach. Still, this approach has a severe issue of effectiveness, which will ultimately depend on how well the campaign performs.

Throughout 2017-2018, Sweden faced issues of misinformation and outer influence. Among other solutions, which were more fitting to the particular case, the country has also leaned into a soft approach of raising awareness of citizens on misinformation and media literacy. The measures included targeting youth, their critical thinking and informational resilience. Along with that, The Civil Contingencies Agency has published the *Countering Information Influence Activities: A Handbook for Communicators* document as a response to an issue of misinformation literacy of Swedish citizens.

The issue of Russian propaganda exploiting the topic of elections in Ukraine will be ongoing until the war ends, or at least until the problem of elections is resolved. For now, we have both juridical support for not holding elections and society's. However, even with decent backing, we are still left with a significant number of people who are against this decision, and they are the main target of the enemy's disinformation campaign. Those campaigns are widely spread through Telegram and are aimed at

undermining the legitimacy of the Ukrainian government and justification of war. The choice not to hold presidential elections in 2024 became another source of disinformation for our enemy. So, as disinformation questions legitimacy, we should be countering it.

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The Psychological Impact of Propaganda on Society During the Elections: Ukraine and Georgia

By Uliana Zabolotna

Elections are one of the most important elements of a democratic society, as it is a mechanism of accountability of the power representatives and a peaceful transfer of such power to successors. Unfortunately, this peaceful process is often accompanied by various mechanisms that distort the idea of elections. Such mechanisms may include fraud, falsification, restrictions on the rights and freedoms of citizens, political pressure, and disinformation or propaganda. The latter is important since it is often difficult to detect it, thus the consequences could be more devastating.

Propaganda is the dissemination of information–facts, arguments, rumors, half-truths, or lies–to influence public opinion. Since the main goal is to influence public opinion, it is usually perceived as a negative, manipulative approach and is often used during elections to create a favorable environment for supporting of specific candidates and their ideas and rejecting their opponents by creating certain images of specific candidates or parties to make

the voters like them, thus vote for them, or dislike them, thus choose other candidates, or directly influence the beliefs and preferences of voters by spreading fake information.

Propaganda, in addition to distorting the election process, can also harm the voters, in particular, distort their psychological state, mainly causing stress, anxiety, panic, anger, lowering a person's self-esteem, etc. Such results could be reached by the following mechanisms of propaganda:

- Manipulation of emotions and fears: Propaganda is often aimed at evoking certain emotions, such as fear, uncertainty, anger or hatred, to mobilize a certain audience, support a certain movement, or divert attention from certain issues. Some research suggests that specific emotions make people act in a certain way. For example, when people feel insecure or uncertain, they tend to choose strong and charismatic political candidates (Gillath and Hart, 2010), while people who are easily frightened tend to have more conservative views (Hibbing et al., 2014).

- Creation of stereotypes: Propaganda often creates stereotypes and ideals that can affect a person's self-esteem. If an individual feels that they do not correspond to these ideals, it can lead to feelings of

rejection, low self-esteem, and even depression. In general, poorer mental health, such as having depression or anxiety, is associated with a reduced likelihood of voting (Stickley, et al., 2023).

- Limiting access to information: Propaganda can force people to believe one particular interpretation of events or facts, limiting their ability to learn about alternative points of view. This can lead to feelings of helplessness, frustration, and a sense of loss of control over the situation.

- Polarization of society: Propaganda can incite conflict and division in society, dividing it into "us" and "them." This can lead to hostility and conflicts between different groups.

Elections are in general quite a stressful process because they create uncertainty regarding the future, could cause fear of changes or distress (Pitcho-Prelorentzos et al., 2018), cause helplessness, frustration, and loss of faith in the political process in case election results do not meet people's expectations, make people with mental illnesses feel excluded (Krishna and Uvais, 2023) or worsen their condition (Mukhopadhyay, 2022 and Lagoy, 2024), Therefore, it is important to eliminate as much as possible the negative influence of other mechanisms, such as propaganda.

Case of Ukraine

In May 2024, the term of office of the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy will expire. Since Ukraine is not able to hold another presidential election during martial law, Russia launched a psychological operation to manipulate facts, thus discrediting the Ukrainian government and weakening international support for Ukraine. There is a specific Russian propaganda around the topic of elections in Ukraine, which consists of filling the media with various statements that sometimes contradict each other. This disorients the reader, who quickly gets tired of trying to distinguish between facts and lies.

The first message that is being shared by pro-Russian sources is that President Zelenskyy "allegedly continues the war to cancel the elections and stay in power." The legitimacy of the Ukrainian government is under special attention of Russia probably because the international community in recent years does not recognize the Russian "elections" as democratic. Moreover, international organizations, such as PACE, called not to recognize the legitimacy of Vladimir Putin as the President of Russia after the "elections" in March 2024. The main idea of this message is to sow despair and social tension in Ukraine, to provoke internal destabilization, and to create a split between politicians and the military. Though messages are sometimes contradicting, they mainly

concern the call to the army to "take power into their own hands" and elect a military president.

Another message of Russian propaganda is that "if Ukraine is not holding elections, it should not be perceived as a democratic state as it is violating its Constitution," thus forcing the international community not to cooperate further with the Ukrainian authorities and Ukraine in general regarding military and economic issues. This message is a great example of disinformation because it portrays the half-truth, which makes people to make the wrong conclusion. The fact is that the Ukrainian Constitution sets the terms for elections to be held, but also according to Article 64 of the Constitution of Ukraine, voting rights of citizens may be limited during martial law or the state of emergency. And such a limitation is set by Article 19 of the Law of Ukraine "On the Legal Regime of Martial Law", which states that conducting presidential elections under martial law is prohibited. In the meanwhile, according to the Constitution of Ukraine, the President remains a legitimate head of the state until a new candidate, elected by the people, takes office. There are also other issues, that do not allow Ukraine to hold elections, such as security (which is also guaranteed in the Ukrainian Constitution as one of the highest social values of Ukrainian citizens), because it is impossible to guarantee secure elections during hostilities; money, because

Ukraine doesn't have sufficient financial resources to organize the proper election process; as well as justice in term of accessibility to the election process of Ukrainians, a lot of which have left the country because of security issues or those that are on the Ukrainian territories under the occupation of Russian military forces.

However, thanks to the effective work of intelligence, both international and Ukrainian, and the coordinated actions of the Ukrainian authorities, which launched an information campaign refuting all this Russian propaganda even before the appearance of Russia's psychological operation, it was possible to avoid the spread of the mentioned messages, and most importantly–to inform the population in advance and prevent panic and polarization of Ukrainian society.

Case of Georgia

Georgia as a post-Soviet country experiences a lot of Russian propaganda and the threats it carries. More than 95% of civil servants in Georgia are aware of misinformation and propaganda and consider them a significant threat to national interests. The general goal of this propaganda is to divide the countries, to force them to abandon the Western course and return to the pro-Russian path of development. That is why the main methods of Russian propaganda are to demonize the West, to

undermine faith in European values, and to make people fear the West by manipulating public opinion.

The main messages of the Russian propaganda in Georgia are using the technique of manipulation and polarization to promote the discrepancy between European and Georgian values in the form of "integration with Europe means to accept homosexual marriages and pedophilia" (Javakhishvili, 2023). Polls in Georgia show that the LGBT topic could be a method of the ruling pro-Russian party to gain the support of the conservative part of Georgian society. However, the polls also show that this issue is not high on the agenda for most Georgians compared to existent economic problems and that LGBT issue is used only for political gain, so Georgians understand that it is only for the diversion of their attention.

Another message threatens Georgians with possible war, especially after the Russian invasion to Ukraine, because "the West wants to engage Georgia in war with Russia" and Georgia needs to be neutral "not to irritate Russia" or otherwise "be annihilated" (Javakhishvili, 2023). However, many Georgians consider Russia as their enemy mainly for its current occupation of two Georgian territories, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

One of the comparably recent messages that is spread by the ruling party among society is that "Western humanitarian organizations are foreign agents, civil society

is corrupt, not credible, not trustworthy, and are enemies" to Georgia (Javakhishvili, 2023), which is the main message that caused protests on the streets of Tbilisi in March of 2023, which were resumed at the end of April 2024. The difference with 2023, is that 2024 is the election year in Georgia, thus it is said that the ruling party wants to tighten the civil society because their oversight through election observation could prevent election fraud, and as a result not allow the current government to be reelected.

It is prominent, that apart from the mobilization of the Georgian society to fight for justice, Georgians have also developed a very efficient strategy in combating the propaganda: protestants, most of whom are 16-20 years old, created social accounts and started an effective, targeted information war against the ruling party, by which they attracted tens of thousands of supporters. Through this, and because there is no bright leader (another efficient tool because it is always harder to attack ideas rather than people), they managed to start their propaganda campaign, which appeared even more effective.

Recommendations

Though engaging in politics could be a significant source of stress and anxiety for many, voting in a healthy way and other forms of civic engagement can improve one's mental health (Rome, 2022). Therefore, society's mental state

must not be influenced negatively by propaganda, which is one of the popular methods used during elections.

Propaganda could also have a positive influence, so-called "white propaganda" (Rusu and Herman, 2018), on the voting process and democracy development, if it is objective and doesn't manipulate public opinion. For example, it could mobilize voters and increase voter turnout to make the elections more representative. For example, Marcus and Mackuen (1993) claim that enthusiasm helps voters to be involved in the election process, while anxiety encourages people to find more information about the candidates. This is important because some countries are faced with low or decreasing voter turnout (for example, such countries as France, Switzerland, Romania, etc. had voter turnover lower than 50% in their recent elections). White propaganda could also inform society of the candidates, their programs and views, which allows voters to make more reasonable choices.

To minimize the negative effects of propaganda on the voter mental health during elections, several steps should be taken:

- Provision of access to verified information: It doesn't mean censorship, but rather in-time and independent analyses of various information, which will help voters get an objective picture of

the political situation. For example, a Ukrainian project Voxcheck exposes lies, manipulations, and Russian propaganda both in Ukraine and abroad.

- Regulation of political advertising and propaganda: Governments can set rules and restrictions on political advertising and propaganda, in particular with regard to funding, broadcast time, and control of the reliability of information.

- Education campaigns: Form a more conscious society by developing political literacy among the population starting from schools, helping citizens analyze information critically and objectively, understand their rights and responsibilities and make informed decisions during elections.

- Promotion of social changes and movements: Motivate citizens to act and support certain social ideals, such as equality, justice or the protection of the environment.

- Protection: From external influences, such as cyber-attacks or disinformation from other countries or organizations.

Conclusions

Propaganda can have a significant impact on the mental health of society during the election process. Manipulative data, limitations of information, and twisting of facts can

provoke a rise of stress, anger, panic, and division in society. Excessive exposure to negative information can cause anxiety, depression, and loss of trust in democratic processes. The examples of Ukraine and Georgia showed possible tactics to combat propaganda during the election process. It is important to provide the community with verified information, regulate the election process, and organize education campaigns on critical awareness to change the negative effect of propaganda on the mental health of society.

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Rethinking Elections in Modern Democracy

By Ntandoyenkosi Msomi

Background

Before 1994 in South Africa, there was inequality among people with different backgrounds. This impacted conditions in the country and the lives of the citizens. There was a parliament that was fully populated by the British colonials and permission to be elected as the member of the parliament was only given to the white population, as they were the only ones allowed to vote. The other population was denied their rights. This segregation was reflected in the quality of education, health, land, policy making and implementation, and access to basic needs including water, food, and money. No jobs were granted to Black and Indian persons. However, as years passed, things transformed. The new South Africa was under construction wherein all groups were to be treated "equally," yielding a new democracy. This was not an easy transformation, and many people lost their lives. But in the end, democracy was achieved in South Africa. But as a country, we still need to rethink elections as a key tool to promote democracy.

Introduction

Elections refer to the process where most of the country chooses the individual parties to lead the country and assume various public offices. Elections are the tools to create an arena for democracy. Elections are the way in which we use our rights to vote for our leaders and make decisions together to achieve success pertaining to the country. However, today the elections tend to be a problem in South Africa. Elections have so many challenges. Most South African citizens ask themselves if elections will bring change or not. In this essay, I will dive straight into exposing why we need to rethink the elections in a democratic system. We will look at some of the challenges of the elections in South Africa, and I will look at different solutions to make democracy stronger.

Challenges of Democracy in South Africa

Political parties: The fusion of political parties after we transitioned to our first democratic system is a major problem. We have one ruling party and it has dominated for many years. There is a lot of division among the political parties in South Africa which makes it difficult for the country to establish policies or direction. The biggest problem we have currently is that parties are fighting each other by political posturing–each claiming they support democracy (2024). However, the ruling parties have

deficient performance that cause people to lose faith about the utility of voting for change.

Unemployment: Unemployment in South Africa is a huge problem for young Africans. They have limited jobs and opportunities. Given they are future leaders of the country, this is serious. This is why we should rethink elections as the functional model for democracy. South Africans must vote with their minds. We must think big, think broad, and encourage youth to take part in elections. They are the ones who have the greatest longer term interest and potential power to lead the country.

Education: While the importance of ending apartheid has been emphasized in South Africa, the Black and Indian communities were not given access to education. That could elevate their roles. After 1994, the quality of education in South Africa remains the biggest challenge with many schools lacking basic infrastructure and resources. Hence, we have the ruling party that has dominated for over 20 years without meaningful change. Let us rethink these elections as a country to strengthen the country.

Crime and Violence: The constitution of South Africa under the Bill of Rights says all citizens should be protected and have a right to be safe. However, South Africa still has a proliferation of violence and crime under the rule of the ANC (African National Congress). This

includes gender based violence. This is an issue our government is unable to handle.

Solutions

South Africa needs to build stronger democratic institutions via the guidance of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). This institution must ensure transparency and accountability in elections that will make the political system more open. As we rethink elections, South Africa must ensure the empowerment of marginalized groups in the elections process by giving such groups a voice in the political process and prioritizing South African leaders who can champion the rights and the interests of the marginalized communities. This can help to address inequality and promote social justice, which is the democracy we want and need as a country.

The Aims and the Objectives of Rethinking Elections

Rethinking elections serves as the opportunity for the citizens of the country to eluate the performance of leaders and hold them accountable for their actions. Rethinking elections involves encouraging public debate, enabling voters to assess elected officials' promises, and guiding their understanding of the country's weak points. In South Africa, we hope this year there will be a coalition in parliament. With parties in power, citizens can believe more in the range of political parties committed to change.

As we rethink elections in South Africa, we understand it as the second phase in promoting democracy by way of the new elections. Rethinking elections aims to address the range of voter views that impact marginalized communities. Voter ID laws that restrict many people from taking part in elections and other barriers that affect people participating in elections must be changed. We must become more inclusive and all citizens, regardless of their social status, must have the opportunity to participate in the democratic process. Here in South Africa, social justice is the key element we need to improve. Rethinking elections aims to ensure that all citizens are fairly represented in the political process. Elections contribute to social justice by ensuring that every citizen's voice is heard, and their interests and their demands are represented by a good government. We also believe that elections can ensure the selection of leaders who are committed to applying and advancing the policies that promote social justice. Elections can ensure leaders who will address the inequality stemming from racial discrimination, income inequality, and gender inequality. These are the biggest challenges still facing South Africa. We hope to use elections to think above what we want to solve.

Conclusion

We South Africans are among the countries that are going to elections in 2024. It is important that we energize elections to advance democracy as we did in 1994. Rethinking elections involves analyzing the electoral process and institutions to address the challenges and wrestle with the importance of addressing needs in our society. In South Africa, we take this very seriously as we approach elections. With the 2024 elections, we take our decisions to the ballot box. We hope elections will prove to be a tool to promote the integrity, inclusivity, and effectiveness of our system. Whether elections will go differently or not, there is much work to be done to ensure that these elections will truly reflect the principles of democracy. As a South African student, all I can say is that as we prepare our elections, let us exercise our democratic right to vote and commit ourselves to the ongoing process of elections to ensure elections are remaining a functional tool for promoting democracy and that they speak to the aspirations of South Africans.

Election Inversions

By Max Foshee

Electoral inversions can occur "when the candidate (or party) that wins the most votes from the nationwide electorate fails to win the sought after role and therefore loses the election" (Miller et al, 2015). The resulting outcome by electors can affect the perception of legitimacy regarding the representativeness of elected officials because they were not elected through the popular vote. Because of the disparity between the popular vote and the resulting electoral inversion, it is prudent to determine how electoral inversions affect the perceived legitimacy of elected candidates and how electoral inversions create situations where leaders in presidential and parliamentary electoral systems must rationalize outcomes–coalition building in parliamentary systems is an example.

To reiterate, electoral inversions in political systems occur when a candidate or party that wins the most votes in the popular vote fails to win the most electoral votes overall and "loses" the election. Electoral inversions display the discrepancy between the will of the people, as reflected in the popular vote, and the final decision-making

process that determines the ultimate victor in the election through mechanisms including the Electoral College in the United States or power-sharing arrangements that are common in proportional or parliamentary systems that often find it necessary to build coalitions. The U.K., Croatia, and Georgia are parliamentary systems. In cases of "inversion," the office holders may face legitimacy issues. Electoral inversions themselves stand in contrast to the standard perceptions of democratic voting held by the general public. Electoral inversions prevent the most basic idea of electoral realities that are conceived as being based on popular vote. Subsequently, when electoral inversions do occur in presidential or parliamentary political systems, they underscore the complexities surrounding the mechanisms that are inherent within democratic electoral systems. It is important to understand, however, that electoral inversions are common within presidential and particularly parliamentary systems where it is generally difficult to win an outright majority. Thus, coalition building becomes a necessity. Because of electoral inversions within democratic systems, it is important to understand how they occur in practice within both presidential and parliamentary electoral systems.

Electoral inversions are processed differently in presidential and parliamentary systems. The most prominent examples of presidential elections are in the

United States where inversions "have occurred in four U.S. presidential races" (Geruso et al, 2022), specifically in 1876, 1888, 2000, and 2016. During a presidential election in the United States, each state's electors are chosen by the people in that particular state casting ballots for their desired presidential candidate and those electors in turn have traditionally, but are not bound legally, to vote for a candidate based on the popular vote of their respective state. Despite the possibility of a candidate winning the highest percentage of the popular vote, the implementation of an indirect electoral system for selecting the president makes possible that the Electoral College has the final say in choosing the president. This could supersede the people's choice. It is important to understand that out of 59 presidential elections in the U.S. that the candidate receiving most of the votes from the Electoral College also won the popular vote 91% of the time, making electoral inversions in the United States comparatively rare. Inversions in states operating under parliamentary systems however are more common. This can emerge in either single member plurality elections or in proportional representation election systems.

Electoral inversions are common where coalitions formation is left to the political party leaders. Croatia, Ukraine, and Georgia operate with parliamentary systems. These inversions can result from proportional

representation's features in very diverse societies. The PR system seeks to allocate seats based on the total vote share, as the focus is on proportionality of party representation rather than an individual candidate. Electoral inversions are commonplace in parliamentary systems–an important example of parliamentary electoral inversions occurred in the 2024 Croatian parliamentary election where the "conservative HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union) won 61 seats in the EU member state's 151-seat parliament, five fewer than the last election and 15 short of a majority (Sito-Sucic, 2024) that requires HDZ to enter into a coalition with the Homeland Party to gain a majority in the Sabor. Only after forming a coalition with the Homeland Party was the HDZ able to guarantee its hold on the prime minister's role. Andrej Plenkovic is on his third term as Croatia's prime minister.

In the context of the 2024 Croatian parliamentary election, it becomes evident that electoral inversions present a complex dynamic where the impact of citizens' votes on the final electoral outcome can be significantly altered through negotiation processes. This is because in parliamentary systems political parties and candidates sometimes reach deals and concessions during coalition or alliance negotiations that may not entirely reflect the voting preferences of all voters. Though these discussions are necessary for democratic governance to operate in a

parliamentary system, they occasionally distort the results of elections, obscuring the genuine landscape of the public's political attitudes. Parties may deviate from the clear statement of the intentions of voters as they negotiate the difficulties of forming coalitions, resulting in outcomes that are not entirely consistent with the electorate's overall will. Electoral inversions can become confounding and confusing to the general electoral because inversions seemingly suggest a distortion if not a corruption of the democratic process and a diversion from the principles of majority rule. It is important to address the general perceptions of the electorate and the relationship as it is impacted by electoral inversions.

Electoral inversions, as mentioned earlier, deviate from the simple principle of majority rule. The primary reason behind this anomaly from the perspective of voters is that in an election the candidate who receives the highest overall vote is expected to emerge victorious. However, this expectation is subverted in both presidential and parliamentary systems because of electoral mechanics that fundamentally deflect majority rule. In the U.S., a candidate may occasionally win the presidency because of the allocation system present in the Electoral College. When there is a discrepancy between the results of the public vote and the distribution of seats in the legislature in parliamentary systems or the executive

leadership in presidential systems the discrepancy is alarming to some and alienating to others. For instance, when a party wins a fraction of the national popular vote but because of the concentration of its support in certain areas, it is unable to get a comparable number of seats in the legislature as happened in the recent Croatian election to the Croatian Democratic Union. Since the executive is tied to the legislature rather than the people directly in a parliamentary systems, electoral inversions may not always result in a change of administration. It's critical to understand how often and in what ways electoral inversions seem undemocratic.

Initially, electoral inversions can be interpreted as a flaw that fundamentally undermines the basic principle of majority rule and can undermine voter confidence. Despite these perspectives, electoral inversions are an underlying part and are inherent features in electoral systems generally. The Electoral College operates on a first-past-the-post system where the candidate who wins the plurality of votes in a state receives all of that state's electoral votes. Electoral inversions are still possible due to a candidate being able to lose the popular vote, but still win the electoral vote or for electors themselves to become faithless electors and vote for a different candidate than they were expected to support. In parliamentary systems, such as the system present in Croatia, the executive

function, exercised by the Croatian President (directly elected) and the cabinet, are drawn from and remain accountable to the Sabor. Electoral inversions in the Sabor affect the executive function because of the close relationship between the legislature and executive. When the Croatian Democratic Union had to enter into a majority with the Homeland Party, some votes from the Croatian electorate were inevitable made redundant because of the compromises made for a viable coalition to be created. While electoral inversions may not occur in every election, they are a foreseeable consequence of the design and operation of electoral systems and their related institutions.

The view of majority rule is fundamentally challenged by electoral inversions and is confounding to the general electorate. Proportional representation systems, like those found in Croatia, which distribute seats in Parliament and Sabor fairly based on proportionality, can be created to prevent more egregious electoral inversions from occurring such as those within the presidential system of the United States. However, it is vital to recognize that electoral inversions can still occur under proportional representation systems as well. Electoral inversions are a natural consequence of the design and operation of certain electoral systems because of the complexities and inherent biases of certain electoral system.

An Alternative to Elections: The Dream of a New Way Toward Democracy

By Perihan Yilmaz

The integrity of electoral processes from a global perspective faces significant challenges from the dynamics of election manipulation and its consequences, money-related issues, technological vulnerabilities, candidate packaging misinformation, and the harnessing of social media. The landscape of election control, management, manipulation and even rigging in some countries is multifaceted. The truth is that fraud is not present in the American elections, but it is at the forefront in other countries all over the world, such as developing countries, including the countries of the Middle East in particular, where the candidate wins by 99%. In other countries, there is only one candidate in the entire electoral process, and it is only a sham process, of course, since in some countries, no one dares to run for elections, and if he does, his fate is defamation, imprisonment, or perhaps death in some cases. In our present time, the tactics used to manipulate and falsify elections have become different and sophisticated, aiming to influence the electoral results, the advancement of a party or the victory of a particular

candidate. You may find that some countries and states limit access to voting and implement some measures that make it difficult for citizens to access voting, including insufficient polling stations, the complexity of voter registration procedures, and long waiting times in polling stations that hinder voter participation, in addition to gerrymandering in favor of one political party over another or one candidate over another, which reduces the representation of the competing party or the chance of the competing candidate winning. This casts doubt on the electoral process and distorts it.

Money-related Issues

Campaign finance transparency is an important aspect of democratic governance, as it allows citizens to understand the flow of money in politics and its impact on elections. Some countries, like America, have independent, non-profit institutions that track money in American politics, but we find other countries do not know how electoral campaigns are funded or how the source of that money is flowing to parties and candidates. Whether here or there, the manipulation of this money and concealing its sources and its arrival to electoral campaigns, a candidate, or a particular party is something that is not hidden from insiders and experts in political life, and it may be revealed to the public if someone tracks or investigates it. Perhaps no voice is heard, and the party or candidate even wins

thanks to that money of unknown origin, which may be black money from money laundering and other sources. Even if the source of this money is known and monitored, such as money coming from donation campaigns, it has an impact on the formation of policies and elections. Money fuels political campaigns, increases the chances of some candidates reaching voters, and reduces the chances of other competitors reaching these voters. Hence, the influence on the voter's opinion comes from the amount of money flowing. Campaigns need broadcasted ads and organized rallies to be successful–which are expensive. This can lead to the exclusion of many qualified candidates.

The Packaging of Candidates

Candidate packaging involves shaping public perception and includes messaging and presentation. Voters often respond to charisma, relevance, and authenticity. Effective packaging affects electoral results. Some voters do not evaluate candidates beyond superficial appeal to make informed choices. They do not know how to balance substance, such as political positions and qualifications, with style, such as charisma and appearance. The result is a poor quality of elected leaders, because what happens is that some of these candidates are just useless people. They have no experience in political life except their external appearance and the ability to embellish words and

charm the audience with their style of speaking. The focus is on highlighting this aspect to the public. We find that there are many charismatic elected leaders, but they are corrupt or captured by the deep state, political parties, unions, and businessmen. Or perhaps external entities and countries have certain ambitions, so the outcomes are elected officials who enjoy greater loyalty to their peers or those who control them than to the people who elected them and represent them. These chosen candidates have incentives to lie to voters by telling them promises, building coalitions, and then winning. Sometimes there is a type of good person, but they have presence and charisma among the masses, but they have their own interests, so they are forced to corrupt themselves just to be elected, and all of this creates corruption and many issues and problems that spread in governments and failure to reform them, and the result is the ruling regime versus the people. In addition, some countries have political and economic ambitions in other countries, and it is in their interest for a certain candidate or party to win the elections in order to respond to them and achieve those ambitions. Indeed, some countries have begun to control the candidates and finance their campaigns in other countries so that the candidate, if he wins, will be their ally who will implement and serve their interests. These are the effects of the

power of money on political life and manipulating the fate of nations

Technological Vulnerability

Technological developments have revolutionized elections as online platforms allow for rapid communication, but they also expose vulnerabilities such as digital threats and technological weaknesses. What happens in cyberspace from espionage, cyberattacks, hacking and data breaches to electoral systems and disinformation campaigns threatens the existence of safe infrastructure to vote. In addition to the emergence of artificial intelligence, the great boom has occurred– its continuous updates and developments raise concerns. Deepfakes and offensive content fueled by artificial intelligence have significant effects on spreading misinformation. Artificial intelligence can create realistic and convincing images, audio clips, and video clips that modify the individual's voice or merge it into clips that were not originally a part of it. They are media that depict something that did not happen in reality, and some applications include deepfaking pornography, creating non-consensual and offensive images, and making some candidates vulnerable to fake revenge porn. It is being exploited by some actors to deceive voters, spread false news and narratives, damage reputations, influence public opinion, and create confusion about important issues. Artificial intelligence technology used by

some political actors to amplify disinformation or spread misinformation poses a serious threat to democratic principles, which depend on informed decision-making and responsible participation in societal life. The political career of a competent and qualified candidate to hold political office could end due to this misleading disinformation and misinformation, and unless there is strong governance and proactive measures that interrupt deepfake technology, deceptive content, and online safety, they will certainly achieve their goal.

The Impact of Social Media

Social media is a double-edged sword and its impact on the electoral process becomes stronger day after day. Social media platforms work to amplify political messages and enhance their algorithms, intentionally or unintentionally, for excitement, polarization, and misinformation. Echo chambers and filter bubbles contribute to that polarization. Misinformation spreads differently on social media compared to older traditional media such as television, radio, and newspapers. Its messages reach millions instantly, contributing to the rapid spread of false allegations. Social media platforms allow users to build their own networks by following or communicating with others. These networks influence the content users see in their feeds. When misinformation is shared within these networks, it can quickly reach a large

audience. Users tend to trust information from their connections, even if it is inaccurate. It's fast and viral: retweets, shares, and likes amplify content within minutes, and misinformation can spread before fact-checkers have a chance to intervene. Social media platforms use algorithms to manage content. These algorithms determine which posts appear in users' feeds based on engagement, relevance, and other factors. Unfortunately, these algorithms can inadvertently promote sensationalist or misleading content. Viral misinformation may receive more visibility due to engagement metrics, even if it lacks accuracy. There are also echo chambers and filter bubbles where social media platforms create echo chambers, and users are primarily exposed to content that aligns with their existing beliefs. This reinforces confirmation bias. Filter bubbles further limit exposure by personalizing content based on users' preferences. As a result, users may encounter misleading information that confirms their biases. Unlike mainstream news outlets, social media lacks strict editorial control. Users can freely share unverified information without checking the facts. The absence of gatekeepers allows misinformation to spread unchecked, especially during breaking news events. There is also the cyber army used by governments and parties with political interests, such as the Russian troll and the electronic flies in the Arab countries and the Middle East.

Millions of accounts on Twitter, Facebook, and other platforms publish a huge number of daily messages with a specific orientation or track some accounts and distort them to influence users. This manipulates their minds and directs public opinion. In short, the unique features of social media contribute to the rapid spread of misinformation, which contributes to controlling and manipulating the minds of users and then voters and influencing their electoral choices.

Conclusion

There are other means of manipulation and many factors that affect the elections and their results and cast doubt on their integrity. Democracy flourishes when citizens participate in decision-making. Vigilance against manipulation is necessary. Citizens play a vital role in protecting elections and ensuring the integrity of democratic processes, but what is the solution with the presence of these influences and how do we get rid of them? How can we raise a conscious generation that is confident about the future for itself and its children? Elections have committees, laws and regulations, but where? The fact that a candidate wins by 50% or 51% is not a success. Rather, he did not achieve the satisfaction of close to half of the participants in the elections. In addition, the elections do not achieve the participation of the entire people in decision-making. Rather, the

participants and those who vote are the ones who choose the candidate who will rule for a long time. So here they have infringed on the rights of others who are ignorant or who did not have the opportunity to participate. The question is: Are justice and equality achieved here in the electoral system? It may be said that we are always looking for potential strategies to protect democratic processes and protect the sanctity of our electoral processes, and we constantly develop them, but the result is that manipulation occurs, fraud prevails, and the outcomes do not reflect the aspirations of the people and their rights to self-determination. Therefore, correction must be made, and good experts and politicians who are far from political corruption must work. They must build an equally powerful alternative system that is truly representative and embodies democratic intent, while at the same time resistant to corruption and attracting and selecting good leaders. The hope and dream is that we will find this new path to full democracy.

Securing Digital Democracy: Implementing Safe and Reliable E-Voting Systems

By Maksym Mykhasuyta

Problem Identification

In the digital era, e-voting promises to increase voter turnout and streamline electoral processes. However, digital election systems pose significant security challenges that could disrupt the democratic process.

Cybersecurity Risks: e-voting systems are susceptible to hacking, denial-of-service attacks, and data manipulation. Such threats could arise from independent hackers or state-sponsored actors aiming to disrupt elections. A 2014 analysis of Estonia's i-Voting system uncovered vulnerabilities that could be exploited to manipulate votes, highlighting the potential risks of online voting. A similar cybersecurity analysis in Switzerland revealed critical flaws that led to the suspension of its online voting trials in 2019.

Public Trust: Public trust is paramount in election processes. Fear of hacking, tampering, and breaches can create skepticism among voters. Estonia has taken

measures to address these concerns, but public trust remains an issue globally due to misinformation campaigns, such as those influencing perceptions. These perceptions must be addressed proactively to ensure voter participation and confidence in electoral processes.

Digital Divide: Not all voters have equal access to technology, and digital literacy and internet availability disparities persist. In Ukraine, e-voting might leave behind older citizens and those in rural areas, highlighting concerns about potential disenfranchisement. Similar issues exist in other countries, where poor infrastructure and technical proficiency gaps could discourage online voting. The challenges posed by the digital divide must be addressed through targeted educational initiatives and internet access programs.

Accountability and Verification: e-voting needs more tangible evidence of paper ballots, complicating audits. Estonia employs cryptographic methods for vote verification, but this remains a complex challenge. The Council of Europe recommends remote verification systems to confirm votes, yet the technology still has technical hurdles and acceptance issues.

Legal and Regulatory Frameworks: Comprehensive legal frameworks are crucial for aligning digital elections with international electoral standards. Without proper legislation, issues like voter coercion and tampering can

arise. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) has proposed clear legislation and dispute resolution frameworks for Internet voting. A consistent global framework will help address challenges related to voter privacy and ensure that countries adopt standard protocols.

These challenges reveal the importance of thorough cybersecurity measures, legislative support, and public education to ensure a secure digital democracy.

Analysis Of Possible Solutions (Comparative Perspective):

Estonia: Estonia is renowned for pioneering internet voting (i-voting) nationally, allowing its citizens to vote securely online since 2005. Key features include:

Digital Identification System: Estonia's national digital ID card uses secure chips to authenticate voter identities. This robust system ensures the integrity of digital elections, providing a unique, tamper-proof method for verification. The ID card is widely trusted and forms the basis for secure authentication across all online government services.

Encryption and Verification: The i-Voting system encrypts votes during submission and counting. A verification system lets voters confirm their vote was recorded accurately, building confidence in the electoral

process. Comprehensive encryption ensures data integrity and protects voter privacy.

Regular Audits: Estonia conducts regular third-party audits and invites experts to identify vulnerabilities. These audits maintain public trust and improve electoral integrity.

Legislative Framework: Estonia has comprehensive legislation defining voter eligibility, privacy, and protocols for dispute resolution. This legal framework ensures a solid foundation for electoral transparency and digital identification standards.

Despite its successes, Estonia continues to enhance its auditing processes, refine cybersecurity education, and strengthen defenses against phishing attacks and other evolving cyber threats.

Ukraine: Ukraine offers a valuable perspective on electoral modernization despite geopolitical conflict.

Digital Voter Rolls: Ukraine digitized its voter rolls, minimizing administrative errors and enabling real-time verification at polling stations. This has streamlined the electoral process and improved the accuracy of voter information.

Anti-Corruption Measures: Transparency requirements for campaign financing have reduced oligarchic and patronage-based corruption, curtailing illicit influence over elections.

Monitoring and Cybersecurity: Ukraine's Central Election Commission collaborates with the OSCE to detect interference and monitor elections. They bolster cybersecurity around critical election infrastructure and rapidly respond to threats.

The First Steps: Recently, Ukraine has taken steps towards modernizing its voting system by launching a pilot program using the "Diia" (Дія) application. This approach involves using digital counterparts of essential documents such as passports, driver's licenses, COVID certificates, birth certificates, and other documents for natural and legal persons to facilitate voting for less crucial events, like national elections for Eurovision. It is essential to recognize that while the system has been implemented and tested, it is imperfect.

Also, Ukraine remains vulnerable to external interference due to geopolitical tensions. The country's efforts to establish a robust electoral infrastructure are ongoing, and international assistance will continue to be essential.

United States: The United States has taken varied approaches to secure elections due to its federal system.

Paper Trail and Audits: Many states require paper ballots or audit trails for electronic voting machines to verify results. States also use risk-limiting audits to detect

discrepancies. These measures bolster voter confidence in digital voting outcomes.

Cybersecurity Measures: The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) designates election infrastructure as "critical," emphasizing defenses like encryption and penetration testing. Federal and state agencies coordinate closely to mitigate cyber threats. Despite the challenges of coordinating across various jurisdictions, these efforts have made significant progress.

Combating Disinformation: The Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) helps voters identify misinformation through timely, accurate information. This coordination with tech companies helps address the rapid spread of false narratives. Despite these measures, the U.S. still struggles with polarization, misinformation, and voter suppression.

Recommendations and Opinions:

1. Cybersecurity Investment: Governments should invest in advanced cybersecurity measures to protect e-voting systems from hacking and data manipulation. End-to-end encryption and voter verification remain foundational. Regular third-party audits and red team exercises are crucial for identifying vulnerabilities. Cooperation between the public and private sectors can yield innovative cybersecurity solutions.

2. Digital Identification Systems: Implement secure, universal digital ID systems like Estonia's card to verify voter identities. A digital ID system should emphasize data privacy with robust encryption protocols to protect voter information. Governments must address concerns about data misuse to maintain public trust.

3. Public Trust Initiatives: Address voter skepticism through transparency and education. Engage civil society organizations and independent election monitors to verify system reliability. National election commissions should partner with technology companies to promote accurate information and counter misinformation.

4. Inclusive Accessibility: Make e-voting accessible across society. Training programs and subsidized internet access can ensure broad participation. Governments should assess digital literacy and develop initiatives to bridge the digital divide.

5. Legislative Frameworks: Establish clear legal frameworks addressing e-voting security, privacy, voter coercion, and dispute resolution. These frameworks should align with international standards to ensure fair and transparent elections. Clear legal guidelines also provide a stable foundation for technological improvements.

6. International Collaboration: Encourage cross-border collaboration to share best practices, establish security standards, and support emerging digital democracies. The

OSCE can coordinate with governments to develop standard protocols. Global efforts should focus on sharing knowledge and refining best practices.

Conclusion

Securing digital democracy requires balancing accessibility with stringent security. Estonia's holistic approach, combining digital identification, encryption, and verification, provides a practical framework. Diia's popularity in Ukraine demonstrates a desire for digital voting, but education and accessibility are necessary. The U.S. response to misinformation and infrastructure vulnerabilities emphasizes the importance of cybersecurity and trusted information.

By investing in cybersecurity, public trust, and international cooperation, countries can securely implement e-voting systems and ensure the integrity of digital democracy. With misinformation and interference transcending borders, coordinated international efforts remain essential. E-voting systems should continue to evolve through comprehensive audits and public engagement to maintain voter confidence and oppose the growing sophistication of cyber threats.

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Beyond the Ballot: Exploring the Merits of Representation by Lottery

By Sydney Poss

Have you ever been able to directly influence a governmental decision? Probably not. As citizens, we are told that our voices matter, and that voting in elections is the best way to contribute to politics. Democracy necessitates a government made up "of the people, by the people, and for the people." Yet, those elected to positions of power often do not reflect the demographics or the interests of those they allegedly "represent." Considering that our participation in government largely hinges on elections, we as "the people" must ask, are elections actually successful in representing people like us?

It is worth noting that the concept of electing officials is human-made. Elections are not intrinsic to the fabric of society, and they are relevant only in that we as people agree to perpetuate their relevance. The election system is simply the prevailing structure of governance within democracies that people have accepted and integrated within the fabric of society. In this essay, I ask that we look past the boundaries that define

contemporary politics. If we do, I contend that there are alternatives which might offer opportunities for democratic systems to be more encompassing of the needs of everyday people.

Representation via sortition is one such alternative. The basic idea is that a government "of the people, by the people" should consist of everyday people. In its simplest terms, the role of "politician" as we know it today would cease, at least in part, to exist. Instead, citizens would be selected at random to participate in governing bodies, structuring a system of "bottom-up" control. The full extent of logical and technical considerations of this idea are yet to be analyzed. In this essay, I will simply explore the potential of sortition to address current failures of modern elections. Sortition as an alternative to or as an addition to election systems might address current systematic shortcomings, regarding money politics and citizen representation, potentially providing a more ample foundation to bridge the relationship between citizenship and governance.

A study out of Pew Research Center found that 47 percent of those surveyed believed that "there's not much ordinary citizens can do to influence the government" (Pew Research Center, 2015). It is not hard to understand why so many people believe this to be true. While elections do allow citizens to cast a vote once

every few years, there is little else a person can do to ensure that their representatives will actually represent people like them. While there is a spike in the influence of the "everyday citizen" during election season, once actually in office, representatives no longer depend upon their constituents to keep them in power.

In its truest form, our government today is far from operating 'of the people, by the people, for the people.' The simple fact that politicians are politicians should prove this fact. It is the goal of politicians to gain political power by winning elections and then to maintain that power until the next election. The role of a politician is to win, and to consolidate power.

Considering these goals, what responsibility does a politician have to respond to constituents from other parties? In this sense, the goal of a representative strays far from representing. It is not difficult to see how everyday citizens then feel disenfranchised with elections.

The present-day individual might find the idea of sortition, representation based on a random lottery of citizens, unconventional. However, this structure of governance dates back to the birthplace of democracy, ancient Athens. In early Athens, most governmental decisions were made but by smaller representative groups of citizens that were chosen by lot (Bouricius, 2013). The

idea of electing officials was deemed intrinsically aristocratic, given that only those with status and money could win. This sounds familiar, no? In fact, Aristotle himself is quoted as writing "'It is considered democratic that offices should be filled by lot, and oligarchic that they should be elective'" (Qtd. in Sintomer, 2018).

An underlying idea within representation via sortition is that, because there are so many citizens to represent, there is no possible way of truly representing every voice; rather, satisfactory levels of representation and political equality stems from the understanding that all citizens who wish to participate have an equal chance and a high likelihood of serving in public office. Another fundamental underlying belief sustaining the legitimacy of sortition based representation is the notion that there is not any group of individuals within society whose capacities or experiences entitle them to a unique position of special or wide-ranging power within the community (Burnheim, 2006).

Representatives selected from a random lot of the willing public would address two of the most fundamentally flawed characteristics of modern-day elections: The extreme importance of money and status, and the severe lack of true representation. The inability of those selected by lot to be re-elected (in the way we

currently understand re-election) and the lack of election in general would simultaneously negate the need for continuous campaigning (and the finances that go along with it), while also eliminating the notions of "winning" and "losing" from political structures. Running for election requires time, money, and connections that the average person simply does not have. Doing away with the barriers and instead taking selective samples of the real population would undeniably result in a government run by people who represent "the people." The figures on representation within an election vs. sortition system are stark. In his piece *Should Democracy Work through Elections or Sortition?* political scientist Tom Malleson notes that:

> If the US Senate were to change overnight from an elected to a sortition house, The number of males would go from 79 percent down to 49 percent, while the number of females would go up from 21 percent to 51 percent; the number of white members would go down from 90 percent to 77 percent, and the number of black and Hispanic members would go up from 3 percent and 4 percent to 13 percent and 18 percent, respectively.
>
> Sortition members would be significantly younger [...] and less educated [...] the median

senator is worth $3,100,000, [...] These would be replaced by wage workers, caregivers, unemployed youth, retired seniors, and others— with a median net worth of $45,000. (Malleson, 2018)

This shift in demographics within the government should not be taken lightly. Policy considerations take on a whole new light when they are analyzed by individuals who truly understand them and who are impacted by them. Evidence shows that, racial minorities are more likely to support legislation that is important to such minorities compared to white politicians, female politicians are more likely to support feminist public policy, and working-class politicians are more likely to support progressive economic legislation than their upper-class counterparts (Malleson, 2018).

In taking this global learning experience class, I was able to hear from students and professors of other countries as they presented their own understandings of and experiences with democratic systems. Professor Strini Pillay of South Africa's Durban University of Technology discussed the structural shortcomings that currently plaque the country's election system. Three main areas of concern for Professor Pillay were the facts that:

1.) It is remarkably hard to convince youth (ages 18-34) to participate within the political process,

2.) Socio-economic disparities persist as issues of poverty, unemployment, and access to basic services remain largely unaddressed, and

3.) Minority groups are severely underrepresented within politics.

While these are three highly complex and nuanced issues, it is worth exploring how the introduction of a sortition system might work to counteract these challenges to democracy.

When it comes to the problem of youth engagement, or really the lack thereof, Professor Pillay believes that younger people are no longer interested in participating in government as they feel that their voices are being ignored. When citizen input is high and government output does not match, there becomes little incentive for everyday people to put effort into political participation. Perhaps if there was ample opportunity for youth to participate directly within governmental processes, the resulting policies and procedures would more accurately reflect the voices of all youth, leading to higher satisfaction with output.

A sortition system would inherently address the problems of socio-economic disparity and lack of diversity.

Fewer wealthy individuals from historically powerful social groups would maintain their chokehold of power. No longer would it be the elites or the powerful making decisions on behalf of everyone else, it would be those who know the struggle of living in poverty or of existing as a minority would be the ones deciding how to move forward.

Ultimately, it is the goal of this piece to examine some of the main components of a sortition based government structure. Recognizing that elections are historically not the only legitimate form of governance allows societies to see beyond existing boundaries that structure everyday life, and that are often blindly followed as intrinsic within some unseen social fabric. Considering the flaws inherent within our electoral systems and tweaking existing systems as we learn to reconcile with these flaws is absolutely critical to the proper functioning of democracy. If representation of the average person is something that a successful government hinges on, it is absolutely worth exploring if elections alone are the only avenues of achieving this goal. Much more scholarship is necessary to understand the complexities and nuances of sortition based governance. Who would participate, what regulations are required, and how to institute systems of accountability are all legitimate considerations. Core to the beliefs presented within this essay is the notion that unconventional ideas are worth exploring. In discussing

these concepts we make them more palatable. Those benefiting from current systems will never be the ones to question them. If "we the people" are not adequately represented, then perhaps it is time for "we the people" to consider alternative forms of governance.

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Comparison of Monitoring Tools During the Election Process in Ukraine, South Africa, and The United States to Prevent Electoral Corruption

By Sofiia Dvorianyn

It is important to define the term "electoral corruption." Despite its common usage, this term is defined differently by authors around the world. One might find it under the name of election manipulation, electoral malpractice, electoral misconduct, voter fraud, or vote rigging etc. For the purpose of this paper, an electoral corruption is any behavior which aims to undermine the integrity of an election process. With this paper, I hope to raise awareness about issues faced by South Africa, which might affect the outcome of its general elections of a new National Assembly, as well as the provincial legislature in each of the nine provinces on May 29, 2024.

South Africa

South Africa held its first democratic election on April 27, 1994, marking the end of apartheid era. In the following

years, South Africa embarked on a transformative journey, trying to ensure a proper administration of democracy. These efforts were underlined by the 1996 Constitution of South Africa, which was dubbed one of the most progressive constitutions in the world. It laid down the legal foundation for regular, free, and fair elections for any legislative body.

Despite the *de lege lata* requirements being laid down, the reality is often different. According to Transparency International's survey from 2019, 44% of South Africans think that all or most parliamentarians are corrupt. This comes as no surprise, when politicians are being regularly investigated for allegedly accepting bribes. This includes very high-ranking figures, such as a former chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Correctional Services. This Committee oversees, among others, the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development.

In January 2018, former president Jacob Zuma established the Judicial Commission of Inquiry into Allegations of State Capture, Corruption, and Fraud in the Public Sector including Organs of State, or locally known as the Zondo Commission. The scope of the work broadly encompassed any "*matters of public and national interest concerning allegations of state capture, corruption, and fraud.*" Naturally, this also included electoral corruption. Among the most important discoveries was the fact that

the South African State Security Agency used its resources to enhance the electoral fortunes of one of the parties and used its resources and intelligence to fight against a current president's presidential campaign. This commission ran for three and a half years, until June 2022, when it submitted its final report. The Zondo Commission was an amazing project which uncovered a systematic corruption at the highest levels.

South African NGOs also serve as a tool to monitor the election process. An initiative called Parliamentary Monitoring Group was founded in 1995, only a year after the first democratic elections in South Africa. Their aim is to provide accurate, objective, and current information on all parliamentary committee proceedings, including audio recording of the meetings. Such work is crucial in ensuring a proper administration, as it gives anyone with internet access a way to oversee the work of the government. This allows citizens to review, analyze, and question any inconsistencies that might be signs of electoral fraud. It also serves as a deterrent, as the recordings might be used as evidence against the alleged offender.

The Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa provides an independent and impartial monitoring of the whole electoral process–from the pre-election all the way to auditing the vote counting. This organization aims to train electoral staff, provide support with the

administration of elections, inform public about misinformation and fake news, as well as support inclusive political participation. Although the Institute was founded in 1996 in South Africa, its activities now span across the whole Africa.

The South African constitution establishes a mandatory monitoring tool to oversee the election–the Electoral Commission of South Africa. This body's goal is to ensure that elections are free and fair and to manage the electoral administrative tasks. However, even this body is tainted by corruption. In 2013, the public prosecutor found that the chairperson of the Commission was guilty of maladministration, had violated procurement regulations, and failed to disclose a conflict of interest relating to the lease of Commission's offices.

United States of America

The presumption when choosing the United States of America for this paper was that they have one of the most closely monitored elections in the world. Thus, the author expected that electoral fraud would be largely impossible. However, even in America individuals try to illegally influence the outcome of elections. Since 1982, there has been at least 1499 instances of proven voter fraud. Some of them include tens of individuals.

The same as with South Africa, the United States allow election observers to witness the electoral process. However, contrary to the South Africa, the system in the United States is much more decentralized. Election administration occurs largely at the county level, resulting in widely varying regulations across the 50 states and even across counties within a single state. These results from the States being a federal republic, much larger than the likes of South Africa and Ukraine.

On a federal level, the Federal Election Commission exists. It is an independent agency of the United States government that focuses on campaign finance laws.

Ukraine

Ukraine ranks on no. 104 out of 180 on the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index, which makes it the most corrupt country from the three analyzed in this paper.

During the Ukrainian parliamentary elections in 2012, a local NGO, Internews Ukraine, ran an election monitoring project called Elect.UA. This project included monitoring of media coverage and professional electoral monitoring on-site to oversee the electoral campaign and possible violations of or tampering with the results.

At the international level, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Co-operation in Europe under the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe launched a dedicated project in 2015. This project observed, among other activities, more than 14 elections in Ukraine.

Despite having a clear system of laws governing the declaration of donations to campaign funds, it is said that funds reported represent only a fraction of real spending.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The conclusion of this research came as a surprise. The original aim of this paper was to list and review monitoring tools that prevent electoral fraud in South Africa, the United States, and Ukraine, and recommend new tools to implement in South Africa. However, based on the research, South Africa seems to already have all the important tools in place. The laws not only provide for a right to free and fair elections, but also for independent bodies that oversee the elections. South African government also conducts independent audits into fraud allegations and identifies instances of electoral fraud. The citizens and international community support those endeavors, despite a low confidence in the government.

What seems to be the main issue for South Africa is the widespread corruption in the highest levels of society. Even the people holding the highest offices, including the president of the country and chairpersons of relevant committees, are regularly charged with counts of fraud.

South Africa should as its priority attempt to eradicate the corruption in general, before focusing on the electoral fraud. It seems that the judicial and criminal system dealing with corruption and fraud is not working as a sufficient deterrent. A legislative change that would introduce harsher punishments for these charges in public sector could be helpful.

The only thing I can recommend to South Africa based on my research is to implement better processes to audit and review the work of highly placed individuals. This might lead to increased confidence of its citizen in the government in the long run and ensure fair and unimpaired elections in the future. Such a systematic change will, however, require a lot of time.

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Populism and Democratic Vulnerabilities

By Yurii Tymovfi

In the 21st century, global populism has seen a dramatic increase as populist parties and leaders in Italy, Germany, Hungary, France, the United States, and more have gained increased support. The empowerment of populist leadership is more common in democratic states compared to authoritarian ones due to various institutional vulnerabilities that are present in liberal democratic systems. As such, with populism gradually take more control of liberal democratic systems around the world, we see democratic elections, campaigns, and institutions get undermined by populist politics, especially with the increased personalization of political rhetoric (Stanford).

Definitions

Before explaining the vulnerabilities of liberal democratic systems to populist strategies, it is first important to define what a liberal democracy is. According to the European Center for Populism Studies, a liberal democracy, broadly speaking, can be defined as "a liberal political ideology and representative form of government" which is characterized "by elections between multiple distinct political parties, *a separation of powers* into different branches of

government, [and] *the rule of law* in everyday life…" Within a liberal democracy, there is also the equality of all citizens and broadly inclusive citizenship which, paired with majority rule, allows for the votes of all citizens to count equally whether in a direct or representative manner.

As such, elections in a liberal democracy are formal decision-making processes among all citizens of a democracy to directly and equally choose which individuals will hold power in a public office. These elections should be conducted in a manner that allows for genuine competition among different political parties, and the electoral process itself should be free from any manipulation or coercion. In theory, the selected individual should reflect the majority vote. Furthermore, elections in a liberal democracy are conducted on a regular basis to allow for the rotation of individuals in publicly held positions (Cambridge).

It is important to note that: (1) *liberal democracy* and *democracy* are used interchangeably in this essay; and (2) not all liberal democracies are the same, but the characteristics mentioned above are generally present.

What Is Populism?

According to Dutch political scientist Cas Mudde, populism can be defined as an ideology "that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite,' and which argues that politics should be an

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expression of the *volonte generale* (general will) of the people" (Stanford). However, beyond this general "definition," populism can have a multitude of descriptions as the populist ideology attaches itself to different ideological foundations, political systems, and more.

Populism is very appealing to voters and politicians alike because it assumes that a select "people" have a "general will" (or common shared interest) that ought to be the main goal of politics. Furthermore, populism advocates for popular sovereignty and direct democracy instead of the expression of political ideas through democratic institutions (Stanford). On the one hand, populism is attractive to politicians because they can position themselves as the representatives of their own self-defined group of "people" and argue for the "general will" of that group in ways that circumvent current democratic processes and institutions. On the other hand, populism is attractive to voters because it gives people a sense of empowerment against the "political elite," who they view as being directly responsible for suppressing the general will of the people (HAL). It is important to clarify that "the people" and their "general will" doesn't have to be that of the majority. One of the dangers of populism, as we will see, is the ability for populist parties and leaders to handcraft their own group of "the people" and label it as the perfect representation of the whole.

Components Of Populism

As mentioned above, populism can take on a variety of different definitions and manifestations; however, certain components of populism can be found among many instances of the ideology. Specifically, I want to focus on the components of populist rhetoric and the personalization of politics. When populist parties and leaders make appeals to "the people," they often employ simplicity and personalization in their rhetoric. Simplicity acts as a way for populist elite to "play down the complexities and contradictions of their policies," thus allowing for the spreading of "bumper sticker" ideas that sound nice, but ultimately cannot be challenged on their face, *i.e.* equality for all, eat the rich, etc… (Global E). Furthermore, the personalization of political rhetoric and politics allows for a populist leader to associate their own image and personality with politics. This approach removes the specific policy details from a politicians' campaign or party, causing voters to choose leaders based on perceived images of the politicians themselves and not their policy standings (Global E).

Vulnerabilities Of Democracy To Populism

Democratic systems around the world are prone to certain shortcomings that inadvertently pave the way for populist leadership. First, democracies rely on all participants to recognize the legitimacy of the system. This means that

the winners of an election cannot prosecute the losers or change the laws and procedures of the democratic system to insulate themselves in power. Moreover, the losers of an election have to accept their loss without revolting and complaining that the electoral process was rigged or faulty. However, populist leaders tend to violate this democratic legitimacy by not only prosecuting the opposition, but by also undermining the system to ensure their own future survival (Stanford). For instance, after his election victory in 2010, Victor Orban, the Prime Minister of Hungary, transformed the electoral landscape of Hungary to ensure his own political vitality while making it almost impossible for any opposing party to rival his own (Journal of Democracy). Another example is Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the President of Turkey, who after his presidential election in 2018 began to transform Turkey's parliamentary system into a heavily centralized presidential system that gave Erdogan increased control of Turkey, especially the management of Turkey's electoral process and distribution of media (BBC).

Second, democracies rely on the free flow of information, speech, and opinion in order to achieve effective impartial voting, representation, and policy decisions (Stanford). However, populist leaders often seek to undermine the essential role of free press and free speech by utilizing misinformation, disinformation,

conspiracies, or just blatant lies. This populist strategy is empowered through the use of social media that allows for quick, un-checked posting (either through real people or bots) of the falsified information that the populist leader wants to spread. The best example of this was President Donald Trump in the United States. President Trump single handedly convinced a large portion of Americans that American news was "fake." However, it wasn't all American news that was "fake"; rather, it was only the news that said anything bad about President Trump that couldn't be trusted.

Finally, and most importantly, democracy implies majority rule, which, in the world that we live in, automatically means that some group (or even most groups) are going to be under- or un- represented. As argued in *The Dictator's Handbook: Why Bad Behavior is Almost Always Good Politics*, "…politics is about getting and keeping political power," so the focus of politicians is to keep the people who are directly responsible for their reelection happy, *i.e.,* the winning coalition (Mesquita and Smith, 2012). It is chiefly these failures of parties to represent constituencies and implement their needs that leads people to think of ruling powers as self-serving and in need of overthrowal. Populism becomes the remedy that this people seek and populist politicians become the opportunity seekers that exploit these sentiments.

Populism as a Danger to Democracy

Ultimately, populism in a liberal democracy can become dangerous when it does three things: (1) Breaks down formal institutions; (2) Redefines "the people"; and (3) Undermines values necessary for a democracy. As mentioned briefly above, populist leaders seek to turn away from formal institutions by labeling them as "deserving" of "the people" in hopes of removing any check on their own power. Among other things, this can bring about dramatic changes to a previously democratic electoral process like we saw in Hungary and Turkey.

Furthermore, redefining "the people" and whose "general will" must be the aim of politics can prove dangerous to a democracy as well. By defining "the people," populists must figure out who to exclude and include in a group. This opens the door for vulnerable groups to be ostracized from political society or allows for powerful minorities from being over-represented as "the people." In Ukraine, this took the form of Russophobia where there was and continues to be a large exclusion of any Russian culture or language from "the people" in Ukraine. This trend is completely dismissive of the fact that a lot of Ukrainian-born citizens grew up with Russian as their first language (or a mix of Russian and Ukrainian), but populist politics does not concern itself with such details.

Finally, going in hand with the other two points, certain democratic values and ideals are completely eroded under populist rule. For instance, tolerance of the out-group (not "the people") doesn't exist in populist systems since the out-group is blamed for how the in-group ("the people") was treated. Additionally, the value of accepting loss or defeat in the context of an election to ensure a peaceful transfer of power is also severely hurt in a populist system (Stanford).

Conclusion

As such, by considering the rise of populism and the vulnerabilities of our own democratic systems, we can see that there is a fine line between liberal democracy and a populist uprising. Like a rash left untreated, populism will continue to grow and grow unless our public leaders decide to apply the treatment: (1) start reflecting more sentiments of the constituents that aren't just responsible for a politician's reelection; and (2) have politicians limit their own involvement in personalized politics to curb the association of personalities and images with campaigns and elections over the association of policies.

Populism and the Threat of Autocratic Interference in Democratic Societies
By Andrii Vandzhura

Populism is one of the main threats to the democracies nowadays since it allows the polarization of the society by constituting a new unified popular subject which leads to the binary division of political space on two camps: so-called "we" and "them" (Roberts, 2021). Populism usually comes with autocratic ideas which challenge democracy, but in the name of democracy itself, some authoritarian leaders even come to power with the promise of building a more "authentic" democracy (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). An example of such a leader is Hugo Chavez who became a president of Venezuela in 1998 promising to use the country's oil wealth to improve the lives of ordinary people and fight the corrupt government officials. In 2006 "Chavista" regime completely took on the autocratic appearance and began arresting or exiling opposition politicians, judges, and media figures on dubious charges both with having the largest television station closed (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).

To this point, it is crucial to understand that not only does populism pose a great threat to the democratic

society, but it also enables autocratic regimes such as Russia to take advantage of the situation, interfere into the politics of democratic countries, thus weakening their position on the global arena. We will study the possible interference of autocratic agents in the politics of democracies to better understand the approach they use to even further polarize and destabilize democracies promoting their narratives and increasing their influence.

First we will discuss one of the most typical methods for Russia to destabilize the situation in the country, which is funding or helping out the extremists in democratic countries and bringing them to the mainstream politics. This enables Russia to obtain control over the politics in democracies and promote their interests through the extremists parties. For example, we can consider the 2016 U.S. elections case, when Russia ran operations targeting social media and executing computer intrusion of entities working on the Clinton election campaign. According to Mueller, Russian Internet Research Agency (IRA) used the bot farms on social media platforms both with hacking and dumping operations performed by GRU in order to incriminate Clinton and build up the support for more authoritarian Trump. The investigation also managed to establish that the Russian government perceived it would benefit from a Trump presidency and, therefore, worked to secure the outcome (Mueller, 2019).

Another example is the rise of the German far right party called "Alternative Für Deutschland" (AfD). For the last 2 years AfD has managed to double its support and even outnumbered the number of vote intentions of the SPD–historically one of the most significant political parties in Germany (Coi, 2023).

The AfD is known for its euroscepticism narratives and its opposition to immigration and modern feminism. Other party political views include the denial of climate change and reinstatement of conscription for able-bodied men starting from the age of 18. The AfD is proven to have a tight connection with Russia. For instance, the party is claimed to receive monetary payments along with political strategy recommendations from the Kremlin (Baumgärtner et al., 2024). Another example includes some of the party members that worked with Russian FSB agents to promote the interests of Russia concerning German military aid to Ukraine (Dobrokhotov et al., 2024). Other members of AfD have been observers on the so-called 2014 Crimean status referendum and were helping the Russia-related "Foundation for the Development of Modern Diplomacy" to lift the anti-Russian sanctions (Телебачення Торонто, 2023).

Another way for Russia to threaten the democracies is the distortion of the freedom-of-speech concept by setting up propagandist news channels and

media. A great example of this is "Novyny" media holding which operated on the territory of Ukraine and was financed from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine (Правда, 2021). The holding included so-called "Medvedchuk TV channels": NewsOne, 112 Ukraine, and ZIK that were designed to interfere in the internal affairs of Ukraine by disguising the pro-Russian propaganda as opposition and thus influencing the public opinion. The channel hosted interviews with pro-Russian politicians and spread the Russian narrative of so-called "civil war in the eastern territories of Ukraine" denying Russia participation in the Donbas war in Donbas region of Ukraine. In February 2021 the channel was prohibited by the National Security and Defense Council (NSDC) of Ukraine as such that operates in the interest of Russia (Правда, 2021b).

Another example is the Voice of Europe channel that operates in Europe. In March 2024 EU officials claimed they hit a pro-Russian propaganda network run by Viktor Medvedchuk that attempted to set up a Russian influence operation before the elections to the European Parliament. Some of the Members of EU parliament have been paid to promote pro-Russian propaganda on the channel (Haeck, 2024).

The aforementioned paragraphs describe ways how the autocratic states interfere in the politics and media space of other democracies and make use of the

democratic principles such as elections and freedom of speech by promoting extremists and setting up media that disseminate propaganda. Such actions directly threaten the democratic norms leading us to the discussion about the possible ways to counteract authoritarian states interference and reduce its effectiveness.

On the party level, the solution to the populism problem is not that straightforward, since that requires resisting temptation to nominate the extremists for higher office or even expelling them from the party (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). Of course in practice, this is a rather difficult decision to make, since usually this leads to the votes loss in elections, thus contradicting the incentives of the party. Another case is the emergence of extremists as significant electoral contenders. On this occasion mainstream parties should find a way to join with their ideologically distant political opponents for the sake of preserving the democratic order (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).

It should be however kept in mind that keeping the extremists out of mainstream politics doesn't necessarily secure the democracies from autocratic agent interference. Instead it just makes it more difficult for intruders to destabilize the situation. There are still measures to be taken against the informational resources that are set up by autocracies and spread the propaganda in their favor.

One of the possible solutions concerning the channels held by autocracies is to shut down such channels as it was done in Ukraine. However, this approach may cause some problems, since the direct shut down of such channels could be considered a violation of the freedom of speech. Instead we can consider the approach adopted by the Czech government concerning the Voice of Europe, namely sanctioning such channels (Haeck, 2024), making it infeasible for autocratic regimes to sustain them.

Another point of discussion is the social media that was extensively used by Russia to interfere in 2016 US elections. According to Mueller, 2019 Russia used botnets–networks of private accounts controlled as a group–to send specific automated messages. For example, 3814 Twitter accounts associated with the IRA have been identified, which in 10 weeks before elections posted around 175993 tweets from which 8.4% were related to elections. Twitter has also identified nearly 1.4 million people who may have been in contact with an IRA-controlled account (Mueller, 2019).

These problems call for expansion of some social media regulations. For example, legislators can consider issuing the law, supposedly, on "Protection of rights of digital services consumers" which obliges the social media companies to detect the botnets activities and ban

accounts that are directly the part of the botnet in case they threaten the state security. This is, of course, easier said than done, since making the law too restrictive might lead to the violation of freedom of speech and disputes between the social media companies and government, but in terms of security such law could help to severely reduce the effectiveness of authoritarian states information operations.

To conclude, in the work we have discussed why populism poses a threat to democratic societies both with polarizing the political landscape internally and enabling autocratic influence externally. Inference methods employed by authoritarian states range from supporting extremist parties and conducting informational operations to creating propaganda channels that disguise their motives under the banner of free speech. Addressing these challenges requires parties to resist the populist narratives even if that might lead to the loss of electoral support, while social media companies and governments should collaborate to regulate the botnets and limit propaganda dissemination. By countering such threats, democracies can fortify their institutions against the destabilizing influence of populism and autocratic regimes.

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Coping with the Russian Aggression and the Ignorant Collective West: Lessons Learned from the Russo-Georgian and Russo-Ukrainian Wars

By Roman Naumenko

Russian Aggression in Georgia

The conflicts between Russia and Georgia span both the 20th and 21st centuries, reflecting deep-rooted tensions and geopolitical struggles. The most notable conflict occurred in 2008, known as the Russo-Georgian War. This war was precipitated by long standing disputes over the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which sought independence from Georgia with Russian support.

In August 2008, escalations reached a peak when Georgia launched a military operation to reclaim South Ossetia, prompting a swift and overwhelming response from Russia. Russian forces invaded Georgia, leading to a brief but intense conflict that resulted in significant casualties and displacement of civilians. The war ended with a ceasefire agreement brokered by the European Union, but it solidified Russia's control over South Ossetia

and Abkhazia, which declared independence with Russian backing. The international community, however, largely does not recognize these regions as independent.

The Russo-Georgian War had profound consequences for Georgia, including the loss of territories, economic hardships, and a heightened sense of vulnerability to Russian aggression (Council on Foreign Relations). It also highlighted the limitations of Western support and intervention, as NATO and other Western entities offered limited practical assistance during the conflict. This act of Russian aggression was largely ignored by the international community, drawing uncomfortable parallels to the way Hitler's early acts of aggression were overlooked before his invasion of Poland.

Russian Aggression in Ukraine

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which began in 2014, has deeply affected my country and my life. The annexation of Crimea by Russia marked the beginning of a series of aggressive actions that have devastated Ukraine. This conflict arose from historical tensions and Russia's desire to reassert control over former Soviet territories.

In February 2014, following the Euromaidan protests and the ousting of our pro-Russian president, Russia moved quickly to annex Crimea, a strategic peninsula in the Black Sea. The annexation was executed with military force, and a sham referendum was held under

occupation. The international community condemned the annexation, calling it illegal and a blatant violation of international law. However, the world's response was limited, leaving us feeling abandoned.

The conflict soon spread to the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine, where pro-Russian separatists, backed by Russia, began an armed insurgency. The fighting has led to thousands of deaths, widespread destruction, and a humanitarian crisis. Despite numerous ceasefire agreements and peace talks, the conflict remains unresolved, with occasional escalations that continue to destabilize our country. Like in Georgia, the Western response to our plight has been inadequate. Sanctions against Russia and diplomatic efforts have not been enough to stop the aggression, making us feel isolated in our struggle.

With the start of the full-scale invasion on February 24th of 2022, the conflict reached its major turning point from being something that with years became casual, and to many our fellow citizens even felt like "far-across-the-sea," as it did not bothered them as much anymore, after the country managed to achieve some political and economic stability (Council on Foreign Relations). This time, the consequences have been catastrophic for far more Ukrainians than in the last 8 years. Millions of people have been displaced, hundreds of thousands died.

Western Response

The Western strategy of relying primarily on sanctions and diplomatic pressure, without substantial military backing, has revealed significant weaknesses. This approach has been ineffective in curbing Russian aggression in both Georgia and Ukraine. Despite imposing economic costs, sanctions alone have not compelled Russia to change its behavior or withdraw from occupied territories (Brookings) (Cambridge University Press & Assessment).

Ineffectiveness of Sanctions Alone

Sanctions have been the primary tool for the West to respond to Russian aggression. In Georgia, the response was mostly rhetorical and involved limited sanctions that did not deter Russia from solidifying its control over South Ossetia and Abkhazia (CSIS) (Atlantic Council). Similarly, in Ukraine, despite more comprehensive sanctions and some military aid, Russia's annexation of Crimea and support for separatists in Donbas continue unabated. Sanctions have had economic impacts, such as reducing Russia's access to Western financial markets and technology (Brookings) (Cambridge University Press & Assessment). However, these measures have not achieved the strategic objective of compelling Russia to withdraw or cease its aggressive actions.

Challenges of Diplomatic Pressure

Diplomatic efforts, including negotiations and ceasefire agreements, have often favored Russia or failed to enforce compliance. For instance, the 2008 ceasefire in Georgia, brokered by French President Nicolas Sarkozy, was largely violated by Russia without significant repercussions (Atlantic Council). In Ukraine, multiple ceasefire agreements under the Minsk protocols have failed to bring lasting peace, with violations continuing on both sides (Atlantic Council).

Need for Substantial Military Support

The absence of substantial military support has been a critical weakness in the Western response. In both conflicts, NATO and Western countries have been reluctant to provide direct military intervention or significant military aid due to fears of escalating the conflict and direct confrontation with Russia (Cambridge University Press & Assessment) (Rusi). This hesitation has been perceived by Russia as a signal of weakness, encouraging further aggression.

Moving Forward: What Do We Do?

To compel the West to take a more aggressive and proactive stance in defense against Russian aggression, Ukraine and its allies need to adopt several strategies:

Highlighting the Global Threat: Emphasize that Russian aggression poses a global threat, not just a

regional one. By framing the conflict as a defense of international norms and the global order, Ukraine can appeal to Western countries' broader interests in maintaining global stability (Atlantic Council).

Political and Diplomatic Pressure: Intensify diplomatic efforts to push Western governments to commit more military resources. This includes lobbying in international forums and directly engaging with NATO and EU member states to underscore the urgency and necessity of stronger military support.

Public Awareness Campaigns: Launch campaigns to raise public awareness in Western countries about the human and geopolitical costs of inaction. By influencing public opinion, Ukraine can create internal pressure on Western governments to act more decisively.

Strategic Partnerships: Strengthen alliances with key Western countries by participating in joint military exercises and enhancing interoperability with NATO forces. This not only improves military readiness but also signals a strong commitment to mutual defense.

Conclusion

The increased focus on military needs will undoubtedly impact daily life in Ukraine. Public services, infrastructure projects, and social programs may face budget cuts, leading to hardships in various sectors. However, this sacrifice is necessary to ensure national security and

future stability. The resilience of the Ukrainian people, supported by robust international aid and strategic self-reliance, will be key to overcoming these challenges.

By combining these strategies, we can better defend ourselves and encourage the West to take a more active role in countering Russian aggression. This multifaceted approach aims to secure Ukraine's sovereignty and contribute to regional and global stability.

I have seen firsthand the devastating impact of Russian aggression. Over the past decade, my country has faced continuous threats, resulting in loss of life, displacement, and economic hardship. The ongoing conflict has disrupted our education, strained our resources, and forced us to live in a constant state of uncertainty.

Despite these challenges, the resilience and determination of the Ukrainian people have been remarkable. We have adapted to new realities, learned to protect our homeland, and continued to pursue our dreams amidst adversity. Our struggle is not just for our own freedom but for the principles of democracy and sovereignty that resonate worldwide.

The sacrifices we make today, whether in increased military spending or reduced funding for other essential services, are investments in our future. The international community's support is crucial, but we must also rely on

our own strength and ingenuity to overcome this crisis. By standing firm and working together, we can build a secure and prosperous future for Ukraine and contribute to global peace and stability.

Elections, Democracy, Autocracy, and Challenges to Global Security
By Valeriia Fedorchak

Problem Identification

The imperfections of the global order and the lack of timely response mechanisms provide room for maneuvering for authoritarian regimes to assume central influence in the world. The sluggish bureaucratic system and the weakness of global leaders threaten world security, as authoritarian regimes amass their strength and pose a significant threat to our safety. The inability to respond promptly is clearly manifested in events that shook the world in 1914, 1939, 2001, 2008, 2014, and 2022.

Following the end of the Second World War, the United Nations was established with the aim of exercising control over global security and responding promptly to threats to humanity. However, as we have seen, the role of this organization was overestimated. The world continued to experience military conflicts and periods of instability. In 1949, NATO was established, which had direct levers of influence on global security in the form of unified armed forces. With regard to NATO, it can be said that it fulfills its role in maintaining peace in the countries that belong to it. However, it is also worth noting that we have not had the

opportunity to test NATO's principles in practice. The situation in Ukraine showed that the alliance is not prepared for a protracted war of attrition. Ineffective actions in 2008 and 2014 demonstrated the inefficiency of the organization's preventive policies. A good example is the process of cutting military budgets, while Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea were only increasing their military budgets.

> The reason for such polarized policies lies in the nature of these two currents: "*Democracies mostly tend to be peaceful nations with no intentions to attack their neighbors… But if we compare the situation when democracy has an autocracy as a neighbor, then not everything is peaceful. The simple reason is autocracies mostly tend to be aggressive and don't abide by international rules. An excellent example is China which has a border dispute with almost 17 countries in the South and Southeast Asian region on land and sea*."

States characterized by a democratic regime are more inclined to abide by laws and rules, with a higher level of bureaucracy and slow governance. Such countries build their policies around issues such as population welfare, improving quality of life, and reducing the likelihood of armed conflicts. At the same time, authoritarian states

exploit this weak position by increasing their financial capabilities through trade with such states, expanding weapons production, influencing the electoral processes of states, and installing puppets who promote their narratives.

World security is experiencing a complex period in its history, as the principles developed to prevent systemic crises no longer work and require transformation. Today, all aspects of global security are being threatened namely:

1) Economic (The situation with Ukrainian grain and the global food crisis)
2) Political (Interference in the electoral processes of the USA, Georgia, and other states by authoritarian regimes)
3) Environmental (Production of nuclear weapons, ecological disasters due to wars)
4) Military (Activities of terrorist organizations, armed invasions of sovereign states' territories)

The central problem lies in the outdated bureaucratic apparatus, which is not adapted to respond quickly and effectively to the challenges faced by democratic countries and global security in particular.

Analysis of Possible Solutions

The presence of a complex bureaucratic system that delays decision-making, inefficiently manages resources, and is unable to promptly address urgent issues leads to a whole network of problems at other levels.

1. Economic security: After the war started in Ukraine, the global food crisis began to escalate as the blockade of ports by such an agricultural giant as Ukraine could not go unnoticed. The endpoint of our exports is many countries where we see famine today. There has also been no analysis of an important issue: "Who are you trading with, and what does that country spend money on?" Freely convertible currency allows authoritarian countries to buy, produce, and patent weapons for future invasions, bribe corrupt politicians, interfere in the world's cybersecurity, and many other processes. Today, there are no effective tools to prevent a food crisis, control trade processes, and track the final direction of profit realization from such operations.

2. The dependence of democratic regimes on the political mood within the country: As evidenced by the elections in America, we could see how much global security could suffer. As soon as the electoral processes started there, the issue of military aid automatically moved to second place. This situation provoked an escalation of military operations and actions from Russia, as such weak actions by America clearly indicated that the supply

of support was suspended, and under the corresponding pressure, Ukraine would not be able to defend itself. Then the world saw Avdiivka, Chasiv Yar, Vovchansk, and other places where the occupier gained an advantage. The global community has not developed a common tool or course of action to prevent cyberattacks or legal responses to interference in the elections of other countries.

Georgia saw the true face of Russia in 2008. Today they are experiencing direct interference from pro-Russian politicians in its state apparatus, the adoption of anti-Georgian laws, and the destruction of identity. In 2008, the world was too preoccupied with its issues and turned a blind eye to the invasion by a terrorist country, which demonstrated one thing–you can do whatever you want if you have money, weapons, and a bit of courage. At that time, the appropriate response should have been initiating a sanctions package, sending peacekeepers to the front line, and the unanimous exclusion of Russia from the UN.

3. Environmental: Organizations are created to control nuclear threats and air pollution and manage

ecological challenges. As seen in the wars between Iran and Israel, Russia and Ukraine–the tools for response and control are not working as previously planned. No clear algorithm has been developed for responding to critical threats. The Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant, Chernobyl, the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Station, and many other energy infrastructure facilities have clearly shown that IAEA, the Red Cross, and other organizations simply do not function.

4. Military: Gray zones equal more wars, famine, and instability. The activities of terrorist organizations, which somehow obtain weapons, funding, and information–it's interesting to consider where it all comes from—the issue of impunity for authoritarian states for their aggressive policies. Somehow, we still have to convince the world that Russia is a terrorist country, and yet no tool has been devised to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons (as seen with Belarus and Iran). The world waits and thinks that authoritarianism can be combated with passivity. Still, such regimes only understand the language of force and fear, which in turn is conveyed through powerful military responses, total

trade blockades, sanctions, and isolating their economies.

Recommendations and Opinions

Today, to ensure global security, we need systematic and predictable steps. The main recommendations and potential solutions are:

1. Creation of alternative corridors for product export: Ensuring a reserve supply of food, raw materials, money, medicines, and all necessary resources for quick response in case of shortage. Control over trade operations and monitoring the final use of budgets (If a country sells gas or oil to buy microchips or weapons, such countries should be restricted in the context of purchasing such goods).

2. Working on cybersecurity and data protection: Separate bodies that are impervious to political processes within the country will be created, and they will handle issues of defense and world security exclusively. Reorganizing global organizations such as the UN, NATO, IAEA, and the Red Cross, which would assume the role of such management and control bodies.

3. Placing international observers and military contingents at all nuclear or strategic facilities:

Establishing a set of actions in case of threats to such facilities. Rapid redeployment of armed groups, imposition of sanctions, strikes on threat concentrations, including the declaration of war. This tool is controversial, but these are the methods that can truly ensure global security.

4. Resolving the issue of gray zones, creating a comprehensive tool for regulating armed conflicts: Establishing a military contingent that is not bound by NATO principles or any other organization and is not afraid of the word "escalation." And most importantly, reducing trade with aggressor countries, imposing sanction pressure on their economy. An example is the trade and financial embargo against Iraq, which, as we see, can have serious consequences with sufficient political will.

Conclusions

Today, global security is going through difficult times, as the tools that were supposed to guarantee peace and tranquility are not working in the mode that can solve these challenges. However, the only way to prevent future dangers is to address the issue with the outdated bureaucratic apparatus and adapt it into a quick and effective institution that can continuously and timely prevent the emergence and spread of global threats. Such

directions include the consolidation of efforts around economic, political, environmental, and military issues where gaps in the decision-making sector lie.

I.   Ajay Kumar Das (2022). Democracy or Autocracy: Which Guarantees Better Security?

II.   Where democracy is most at risk (2024)

III.   Global Peace Index (2023)

IV.   Why the War in Ukraine Threatens Global Food Security (2022)

V.   Einar H. Dyvik (2024). Countries with the highest military spending worldwide in 2023

The Rise of Misinformation and the Risk of Censorship
By Frank Speciale

In the modern age, the dissemination of information is rapid and far-reaching, thanks, in large part to advancements in technology. However, this ease of access to information comes with its own set of challenges, particularly the spread of misinformation. The problem of misinformation is particularly acute with respect to elections. The rapid spread of misinformation has negatively impacted political discourse and skewed results in many recent elections, in the United States and abroad. Understandably, some governments have attempted to crack down on the spread of political misinformation. But efforts to curtail misinformation can often lead to unintended consequences, including censorship. This essay explores the complex relationship between combating misinformation and maintaining freedom of expression, drawing on historical contexts, real-world examples, and the roles of satire and journalism.

The invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in the mid 15th century revolutionized the way information was distributed. Prior to the printing press, books were handwritten and scarce, making information a

privilege of the elite. The printing press democratized access to knowledge, enabling the spread of ideas and information on an unprecedented scale. However, this democratization also led to the dissemination of both beneficial and harmful content. Governments and religious institutions soon recognized the power of the press and sought to control it through censorship and licensing systems to prevent the spread of dissenting or misleading information.

The historical context is mirrored in the modern era with the advent of the internet and social media. Social platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have empowered individuals to share information globally with ease. However, just as with the printing press, this empowerment comes with the proliferation of misinformation and "fake news." In response, governments and platforms themselves have implemented measures to curtail the spread of false information. These measures often include fact-checking, content moderation, and, in some cases, outright bans on certain types of content.

One notable example of the tension between curbing misinformation and censorship is the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, false information about the virus, treatments, and vaccines spread rapidly across social media. In an effort to combat this, platforms implemented stringent policies to remove or flag

misleading content. While these efforts were aimed at protecting public health, they also led to accusations of censorship, particularly discourse over the governmental health policy and measures relating to COVID-19. Critics argued that these measures stifled "free speech" and prevented open debate about the appropriate response to the pandemic.

Another significant case is the regulation of political content. In many countries, governments have imposed restrictions on what can be published or shared online to combat election-related misinformation. For example, in the run-up to the 2010 U.S. presidential election, social media platforms increased their efforts to fact-check and remove false claims about voting procedures and election outcomes. While these actions were intended to ensure the integrity of the electoral process, they also sparked debates about the role of private companies in regulating speech and the potential for political bias in their enforcement.

The phenomenon of misinformation is not new. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, "yellow journalism" was a prevalent issue. Newspapers like William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* and Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* engaged in sensationalist reporting, often exaggerating or fabricating stories to boost sales. This practice contributed to the Spanish-American War,

demonstrating the dangerous impact of misleading information.

Efforts to combat yellow journalism included the establishment of ethical standards and the rise of investigative journalism. However, these efforts also led to calls for stricter regulations on the press, highlighting the delicate balance between ensuring accurate reporting and preserving press freedom. The parallels to today's challenges with misinformation on social media are clear: both eras grapple with the tension between controlling harmful content and avoiding censorship.

Satire has long been a powerful tool in news media, offering a way to critique and highlight societal issues through humor and exaggeration. Historical figures like Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who used his background in comedy and satire to comment on Ukrainian politics before becoming the country's president, demonstrate the significant impact satire can have on public discourse and electoral politics. Satirical programs like "The Daily Show" with Jon Stewart and "Last Week Tonight" with John Oliver have played crucial roles in informing the public while simultaneously entertaining them.

Jon Stewart's tenure on "The Daily Show" is particularly noteworthy. Through satire, Stewart addressed critical issues, often shedding light on media biases and government shortcomings that traditional news outlets

overlooked. Similarly, John Oliver's "Last Week Tonight" has gained acclaim for its deep dives into complex topics, blending humor with investigative journalism to inform viewers about issues ranging from net neutrality to public health.

The use of satire in news media serves a dual purpose: it educates the public and provides a check on power by using humor to expose hypocrisy and corruption. However, satirical content can also be misinterpreted or taken out of context, leading to further misinformation. This risk underscores the importance of media literacy, ensuring that audiences can distinguish between satire and factual reporting.

Media literacy is a crucial component in the fight against misinformation. Educating the public on how to critically evaluate information sources, understand the context of news stories and recognize the intent behind different types of content can empower individuals to make informed decisions. Media literacy initiatives can help mitigate the spread of misinformation without resorting to heavy-handed censorship.

For example, Finland has implemented comprehensive media literacy programs in schools, aiming to equip students with the skills to critically analyze information from various sources. This proactive approach contrasts with reactive measures like content removal and

censorship, offering a sustainable solution to the challenges posed by misinformation. Unfortunately, there is a risk that some governments and political systems (who are often the targets of satirical reporting) may see advancing the cause of media literacy as counter to their own interests, either because they are the source of misinformation or because they indirectly benefit from its spread. For this reason, multi-national organizations devoted to media literacy in the digital age may be a global solution. However, it seems unlikely that any such organization would be able to operate effectively in a country in which the government did not at least tacitly support the advancement of media literacy.

In countries without a free media, where free speech and freedom of expression are not guaranteed, it is essential that governments are not allowed to use "combating misinformation" as an excuse to further suppress speech and expression. In these situations, where the most likely perpetrators of misinformation are governments or government-sanctioned entities, organizations working to advance media literacy should focus on supporting the development of a free media. Even though those fighting to create a free media may still be guilty of spreading damaging lies and misinformation, until the populace has access to free media, increasing the quantity of speech must trump still-worthwhile efforts to

improve the quality of that speech through addressing misinformation or improving journalistic standards. Historical parallels, such as the impact of the printing press and yellow journalism, provide valuable lessons for navigating these challenges in the digital age.

Conversely, in countries where free speech and freedom of expression are already entrenched rights, while curtailing the spread of false information is essential, it is equally important to safeguard freedom of expression and avoid censorship. Satire in news media, exemplified by figures like Jon Stewart, John Oliver, and Volodymyr Zelenskyy, highlights the role of humor and critique in public discourse. These satirists have shown that it is possible to inform and engage audiences while holding power to account. However, the potential for satire to be misinterpreted also emphasizes the need for robust media literacy education.

The battle against misinformation is complex and multifaceted, involving efforts from governments, private companies, and individuals. In a perfect world, all actors would share the goal of fostering an informed and critical public that can navigate the complexities of the information landscape. By prioritizing media literacy and ethical standards in journalism, society can address the harms of misinformation without sacrificing the fundamental principles of free speech and open dialogue.

Utilizing New Media in Information Warfare: Lessons from the 2016 U.S. Presidential Elections and Risk Prevention for the 2024 Parliamentary Elections in Georgia
By Natia Popkhadze

Introduction

The very nature of hybrid threats is that they are disguised and deniable. We have seen a pattern of cyber-attacks against our countries, disinformation campaigns and attempts to interfere in our democracies. NATO must remain prepared for both conventional and hybrid threats: "From tanks to tweets" (NATO Press Office 2019) - The statement by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg above underscores the crucial role of new media in today's landscape. Equating Tweets with tanks highlights the power of new media and its influence, recognizing them as tools akin to traditional weapons used for adversary destruction.

The widespread use and impact of social media in human life has been notably highlighted during the Russia-Ukraine war. Social media has significantly altered the dynamics across various spheres, including military science.

The conflict between these nations unfolds extensively in both digital and physical realms, with the effectiveness of digital engagements influencing the course of the war, as evidenced by communications tactics and corresponding adversary responses. It is worth noting that the methodology was identical during the Russian-Georgian war in South Ossetia in 2008, except that traditional media was utilized as a tool of information warfare then. Importantly, this practice continues today.

What factors have turned the new media into a battleground?

In social media, information is disseminated like a virus: the reproduction of positive and negative content is equally viral; accordingly, communication in this space has assumed strategic importance, especially for actors who have strong influence on public life and political processes. The primary reason is that the 21st century has been dubbed the "century of constant war" (Khidasheli 2020), due to the rise of social media and the unrestricted flow of information, which have blurred distinctions between war and peace, ally and adversary. This changed the traditional, conventional nature of war and gave birth to a new space of war - the information field. The information-technological revolution changed and expanded both the tasks, actors and weaponry of war. In the new space of war, there is a struggle to influence the

opponent's political decision-making process, to weaken his ability to fight, that is, for the mind, as Messner called it "for the psyche of the peoples involved in the war" (Messner 1999). As a result, a breakdown of state communication with citizens news about the failure of the authorities can be carried out. Among the tools of information warfare produced in this field are disinformation and propaganda. It is worth noting that information warfare is not an independent means of waging war, but rather it prepares the ground for other instruments of hybrid warfare that a foreign country uses to create its own spheres of influence.

Based on the above, in situations where information is a primary source of power, events crucial to the state, such as elections, underscore the strategic importance of social media and "Mass Self Communications" in crisis prevention. The 2016 U.S. presidential election highlighted this, with allegations of Russian government interference. Looking ahead to Georgia's 2024 parliamentary elections, it's essential to anticipate potential threats in potential information warfare scenarios and implement appropriate preventive measures, drawing insights from investigations like the "Mueller report" on alleged Russian interference in the 2016 election.

What happened during the 2016 US presidential election?

"I was on the way to winning until the combination of Jim Comey's letter on October 28th and Russian WikiLeaks raised

doubts in the minds of people who were inclined to vote for me but got scared" (The Washington Post 2017). This quote is attributed to Hillary Clinton, the losing candidate in the 2016 US presidential elections. According to American sources, hackers associated with the Russian Main Intelligence Agency infiltrated the emails of key Democratic Party figures during the campaign, disseminating thousands of emails, some containing compromising information, on WikiLeaks and spreading them widely via social media, significantly impacting the candidate's reputation. The Russian government interfered in the 2016 presidential election in sweeping and systematic fashion (Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller 2019).

According to the report by the commission investigating alleged Russian interference in the presidential elections, led by Special Prosecutor Robert Mueller, it was found that in addition to hackers, trolls also played a role in influencing the pre-election process. Specifically, the actions of the Russian company "Internet Research Agency (IRA)," known as the "troll factory," were highlighted. These actions were purportedly financed by Yevgeny Prigozhin, the famous head of the Wagner Group who died last year in a plane crash after attempting a coup. The "troll factory" engaged in creating and promoting racially charged issues, gun ownership debates, and other politically sensitive topics in the United States via social media. These troll posts were designed to manipulate public opinion, sow societal discord, spread misinformation,

discredit individuals, and provoke societal conflict—reflecting principles espoused by Russian hybrid warfare theories.

It's worth noting the diverse arsenal employed by the "troll factory," which includes a range of media products such as photos, videos, infographics, memes, reports, news, interviews, and other analytical materials, along with the creation of groups on various platforms. Alongside trolls and fake news, today's new media tools also encompass bots. These automated accounts on social networks mimic real people, identifying key comments on platforms and then engaging in coordinated efforts to provoke contentious discussions and undermine opponents morally. It should be noted that within the framework of the above-mentioned investigation, a hearing was held in the US Congress, on which heads of social media platforms have voiced, that for example on the Facebook platform, in 2015-2017, The Russian Federation was behind thousands of posts and more than a hundred Facebook groups, which produced about 3,000 provocative ads and paid about $100,000 for their placement. The ads reached up to 126 million Americans; Google found more than a thousand political ads, with more than 300 thousand views; Twitter (under the new name X) submitted information about the discovery of 3,814 fake accounts – from these accounts 175,993 tweets were distributed, reaching 1.4 million people. The Mueller report emphasized that, "During the U.S. presidential campaign, many IRA-purchased

advertisements explicitly supported or opposed a presidential candidate or promoted U.S. rallies organized by the IRA." As early as March 2016, the IRA purchased advertisements that overtly opposed the Clinton Campaign. For example, on March 18, 2016, the IRA purchased an advertisement depicting candidate Clinton and a caption that read in part, "If one day God lets this liar enter the White House as a president – that day would be a real national tragedy." Similarly, on April 6, 2016, the IRA purchased advertisements for its account "Black Matters" calling for a "flashmob" of U.S. persons to "take a photo with #HillaryClintonForPrison2016 or #nohillary2016" (Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller 2019)."

The most crucial and dangerous aspect of this case is that the world now faces a new strategy and a weapon that operates without rules.

How can Georgia defend itself?

The main emphasis in NATO's strategy against hybrid threats and information warfare is on raising public awareness of hybrid threats. NATO relies on strategic communications – on holistic approach to communication, based on values and interests, that encompasses everything an actor does to achieve objectives in a contested environment" (Bolt and Haiden 2019). Information measures tend to focus on dissemination channels for information and the intangible expression of soft power and cultural influence, which includes:

Education - covering the academic, religious, ideological and political realms; establish or buy up existing media channels, media coverage can be influenced through advertising campaigns, pressuring journalists or launching disinformation campaigns; and create plausible deniability by establishing non-state and non-political institutions with opaque governance structures and financial arrangements (Gill and Hansen 2021). Accordingly, the standard of the organization is not to respond to propaganda with propaganda, but to fight with the dissemination of fact-based, genuine and verified information. The EU's Hybrid Threat policy focuses on awareness, monitoring, research, analysis, information sharing, and counter-attacks, strategically supported by communication tactics.

Given that the resources of the supposed information warfare adversary will always exceed Georgia's capabilities, the technological advancements, particularly the challenges posed by social media, present both an opportunity and a frontline defense dilemma for smaller, resource-limited countries like Georgia. The very rapid development of digital technologies and their penetration into all spheres allows any subject of communication to reach any specific person from the target group, as well as to influence public opinion using social media tools (Price 2014). It is clear that raising the level of digital Literacy and its related media and information literacy (MIL) is a precondition. MIL includes a set of competencies

that help people to maximize advantages and minimize harms and covers competencies that enable people to critically and effectively engage with: communications content; the institutions that facilitate this content; and the use of digital technologies. Capacities in these areas are indispensable for all citizens regardless of their ages or backgrounds (UNESCO 2021).

The successful example of Estonia, a country similar to Georgia, is based on awareness raising, however, it should be noted that one of the main pillars of defense is the concept of psychological defense, which is an opportunity to develop, maintain and protect the general values of social unity and security. "Psychological defense serves to protect the security of the state and society, avoid crises and increase public confidence in the actions of the state; it promotes the growth of confidence and will of the nation to protect Estonia - psychological defense and strengthening of constitutional principles leads to an increase in endurance, prevent anti-Estonian subversive actions and its consequences" (Khidasheli 2020). The Estonian guidelines for the psychological defense system encompass informing the population about risks, enhancing their awareness and crisis management skills, addressing emergencies, and fostering Estonia's international image.

Based on the above, leveraging Strategic Communications as a key tool to uphold societal psychological

well-being and resilience is crucial for Georgia's prevention strategy. It's essential in both the short and long term because failure to effectively counter information manipulation, disinformation, and other risks, combined with inadequate political leadership assessment, could undermine electoral integrity and destabilize the state.

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Elections in Georgia

By Mariam Vekua

The first multi-party and democratic elections were held in Georgia in February 1919. Another chose the founding assembly of Georgia. Elections were conducted according to proportional systems, party lists: 15 parties participated in it.

The first meeting of the founding assembly was held on March 12, 1919. On February 21, 1921, the assembly adopted the Constitution of Georgia, which worked for only four days, because on February 25, Russia occupied Georgia.

On April 14, 1991, the Presidential Institute was introduced in Georgia. By this time, the Supreme Council had already declared the independence of Georgia. The elections were not competitive; the absolute leader of the campaign was the Chairman of the Supreme Council Vida Gamsakhurdia.

The election was considered legitimate if the majority of the total number of voters took part. The candidate who received the support of more than 50% of the total number of participants in the elections would be elected. The representative of the Communist Party did not take part in the elections.

After 1991-1992, power was seized by a temporary military council. Since then, the military council has transferred power to the state council, due to the lack of a legal basis for its existence. Parliamentary elections were called in the fall of

1992. All the political forces active at that time took part in the elections, except for the supporters of the exiled president. These elections were held with a mixed system. The manner of conducting it was significantly different from other elections. 75 deputies were elected on the basis of the majoritarian electoral system, and 150 deputies were elected on the basis of the proportional system. The electoral threshold was 2%.

On August 24, 1995, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the Constitution, according to which, in the autumn of the same year, on November 5, the elections of the Parliament and the President of Georgia were held.

The right to participate was given to the party and political union that represented the signatures of 50,000 supporters, or that had a representative in the Parliament of Georgia on the day of adoption of the Constitution.

Elections were held by proportional and majoritarian system. 150 of the 235 mandates of the Parliament were distributed among the parties in proportion to the received votes, and 85 deputies were elected from the administrative units of Georgia. Due to the separatist regime in Abkhazia, elections were not held, so the Abkhazian deputation was extended its powers. Abkhazia's representation consisted of 12 deputies.

These elections were the first presidential elections in Georgia after the adoption of the Constitution. Presidential elections were held together with parliamentary elections. The

election was considered to have been held if the majority of the total number of voters took part in it. The candidate who received the support of more than 50% of the participants in the elections would be considered elected.

The election slogan of the ruling party, the Union of Georgian Citizens, was "from stability to prosperity." His main competitor in these elections was Aslant Abbasside's "Revival" bloc. 45 parties took part in the elections.

This was the second presidential election in Georgia after the adoption of the Constitution. The incumbent President Shevardnadze won again, whose main rival was Jumbler Patiashvili, who came second in the previous presidential elections. Besides them, 4 candidates participated in the elections.

Elections followed the Rose Revolution. After the 2003 elections, the falsified results caused a long protest of the population, as a result of which President Eduard Shevardnadze resigned. In turn, the Supreme Court annulled the results of the elections - more specifically, its proportional part, and left the results of the majoritarian elections in force.

Before the elections of November 2, 2003, salaries and pensions were not paid for months due to corruption in the state structures of Georgia. Murders, robberies, robberies and thefts took place almost every day, which is clearly visible in the newspaper chronicles of that time. Until the re-election was organized, the mandate of the 1999 convocation was in effect.

Elections were scheduled for March 28, 2004. Based on the court's decision, it was conducted only in a proportional manner.

This was the first extraordinary presidential election in the history of Georgia. The elections were held on January 4, 2004. Mikhail Saakashvili had 5 competitors, but the results were easy to predict - the election ended with the victory of the leader of the Rose Revolution - Saakashvili received almost 97% of the votes.

After the actions of November 7, 2007, the current president Mikhail Saakashvili resigned - in order to renew his mandate. Saakashvili left office at the end of November, and another extraordinary election was held on January 5. Saakashvili's main competitor was Levin Gachechiladze, who received about half a million votes, Arcade (Bari) Patarkatsishvili also participated in the elections, whose support was expressed in about 140 thousand votes.

The main competitors in the elections were the ruling party United National Movement and the United Opposition represented by nine opposition parties.

The Republican Party and the Labor Party of Georgia ran independently in the elections. A new party also appeared - the Christian-Democratic movement, which was founded by journalists actively participating in the political processes of that time from the TV Company, Imedi.

In these elections, 150 deputies were already elected

by the mixed, proportional-majoritarian system. On the proportional system, the electoral threshold was lowered from 7% to 5%, and in order to win in the majority elections, it was necessary for the candidate to receive at least 30% of the voters' support on the voting day.

For the parliamentary elections of 2012, Bidzina Ivanishvili, a new player, a virtually unknown figure to the public, entered the political field. The billionaire gathered a large majority of opposition parties around him. The pre-election campaign and the elections took place against a tense political background, and it was difficult to predict the results until the Election Day.

The changes in the constitution added importance to the processes, which significantly increased the importance of the parliament in terms of government staffing. The Georgian Dreamer won the elections, and the ruling party - United National Movement came in second place.

The 2013 presidential election was unusual in meaning. As a result of the constitutional changes, the powers of the president were significantly reduced. This led to a qualitatively different election campaign and lower turnout compared to previous presidential elections.

In the parliamentary elections of 2016, unlike the previous elections, voter turnout was low. The main competition was between the ruling team, Georgian Dreamer and United National Movement. The elections, as well as the pre-election

period, were tense in the country.

The pre-election period included several series of publication of private and secret records. Georgian Dream was divided into two parties - Republicans and Free Democrats.

2 weeks before the elections, there was a terrorist attack on the deputy of the United National Movement, Give Targamadze, in the city center. Although the politician and his driver escaped unharmed, passers-by were injured. One of them was in a coma for several weeks.

Georgian Dreamer won the constitutional majority in the elections. Despite the fact that several new parties appeared on the political field in the pre-election period, the only party, apart from Georgian Dreamer and Nationalist Party of Ukraine, which managed to overcome the 5% threshold, was the Alliance of Pro-Russian Patriots. Neither the Republican Party nor the Free Democrats could enter the Parliament of the 9th convocation. The secret notes, which were released in the spring, concerned the leaders of the Free Democrats.

Within 3 months after the elections, the main opposition party, the United National Movement, split into two. 21 out of 27 deputies created a new party, European Georgia

In the 2018 presidential elections, the ruling team, Georgian Dreamer, formally nominated a non-party candidate, Salome Zurabishvili. 25 candidates took part in the elections. The first three candidates were as follows - Salome Zurabishvili, Grigol Vashadze (United National Movement) and Davit Bakradze

(European Georgia).

In the first round of the presidential elections, the opposition candidates received a total of 953,744 votes, the most of which - 601,224 - went to Grigol Vashadze, thus he fell short of the favorite candidate of the ruling team by just 0.9%.

After the first round, in most places of the country, the banners of the presidential candidate were taken down and instead of them, the banners of the leaders of the Georgian Dream were hung. At the same time, the opposition's discrediting banners appeared, where the opposition leaders were depicted on the background of blood. Government media went into emergency mode. Although European Georgia supported the candidacy of Grigol Vashadze in the second round, it was not enough for his victory.

Intimidation of voters, use of administrative resources, negative campaign, harsh rhetoric, and violent incidents - this was the conclusion of the OSCE election observation mission.

The parliamentary elections of 2020 were characterized by massive violations and acts of intimidation. Regarding the year 2016, voters had a more or less pluralistic choice in terms of political parties, however, the main number of votes was distributed between the Georgian Dreamer and the United National Movement.

Apart from them, European Georgia, Lelo, Alliance of Patriots, Girchi, Citizens and Labor Party entered the parliament. The opposition parties did not recognize the results

of the elections, however, later some of them, Girchi and citizens changed their position and entered the parliament. The members of the list of the Alliance of Patriots, who called themselves European Socialists, also entered the parliament.

As for other parties, they still share that the 2020 elections did not reflect the will of the Georgian people, however, most of them entered the parliament after the April 19th Charles Michel agreement. Exceptions were European Georgia and the Labor Party, which did not sign the agreement either.

According to the April 19th agreement, the 2021 local government elections will constitute a kind of referendum for early elections. In case the ruling party fails to collect 43%, it is obliged to schedule extraordinary parliamentary elections. Despite signing this agreement, on July 28th the ruling party declared it null and void, saying that even if it won 1%, it would not call early elections.

Journalists play a key role in the election process. They are the main players in the democratic process. Their mission is to provide the public with information regarding the election process; about what is at stake in the context in which elections are held. Also information about the candidates and parties participating in the elections. Journalists should show a high sense of responsibility. They must refrain from manipulating public opinion, and they must not become manipulative themselves. To do this, they must ensure that the

information is thoroughly verified. Different parties and candidates should be given the opportunity to express their opinion fairly and impartially, to ask questions about programs, old promises and statements, about how they intend to solve the issues that are the daily concerns of citizens, and also about their basic social choices. The media should not play the role of spokesperson for the candidates, but describe their programs, decipher their statements and offer the context of the program to the voters, so that they can make a choice freely, based on the information that will be as objective as possible. Of democracy under the conditions, the journalist has the right to ask any question, which he deems necessary. This is his job and duty. However, at the same time, it is necessary to maintain correctness. Journalists working in Georgia on Election Day are motivated to cover absolutely every detail, not to leave out any person's interview or even complaints that come from the public regarding Election Day.

As for the journalist, she/he should: devote time to representatives of all parties. Respect the allotted time. To ensure complete neutrality, don't overdo it, don't let go of the reins, and "control the game" both in terms of form and content. If necessary, change the focus of the discussion, take the debate in the direction of the topic that is planned.

In Georgia, the same organization of the press and other means of mass information has the right to have no more than 3 representatives in the polling station at the same time.

On the day of the election, before the end of voting, the coverage of the election should be limited to the coverage of factual circumstances only, so that the information aired before the closing of the polling stations does not influence the results of the election. A media representative in the polling station must wear a badge confirming his identity and status. Due to the lack of this sign, the representatives of the election administration have the right not to let the journalist into the precinct. The media has the right to attend the sessions of election commissions. Accredited journalists have the right to be present at the polling station at any time on the voting day. They move freely in the territory of the election precinct and observed all the stages of the voting process without hindrance.

Media outlets have the right to freely take photos and videos during the voting process at one polling station for no more than 10 minutes, after which they either have to leave the polling station or they are obliged to occupy a special place allocated in the polling station. Based on this, we conclude that the rights of journalists are protected in Georgia from the point of view of discrimination.

The Georgian nation has come a long way from the point of view of the development of elections. It is true that all of this was very difficult for the Georgians because there were sacrifices and occupation, but the Georgian society overcame all this and won independence. Today, the Georgian society is

preparing for the parliamentary elections of 2024. Young people of the new generation confirm that they will participate in these elections and express their opinion because Georgians consider this to be their civic responsibility. Georgian society has always protected their cultural values, language, estate and faith that is why Georgia is preparing for elections and choosing the candidate who will bring them the possibility of peaceful life and independence.

New Generation's Political Views in Georgia and their Will to Join the EU
By Nano Gelantia and Anano Nozadze

In this essay, we will discuss Georgia's goal to join the European Union (EU) and the aim of deepening partnerships with its European neighbors. We will underline the steps Georgia has taken to acquire membership of the European Union. This is the undeniable will of the majority of Georgian people, however they have faced some obstacles such as the "Transparency Law" which was invoked in Russia in 2012, also known as agent's law. And this law has sparked rallies in Georgia, students and members of older generations have joined forces to show the world their European dream.

First Steps and Agreements
Georgia has expressed aspirations to join the EU and has taken steps toward closer integration with the EU through various agreements and partnerships. In January 2022, Georgia was classified as an Eastern Partnership country, a program aimed at fostering closer ties between the EU and six Eastern European partners, including Georgia.

Georgia and the EU have signed several agreements aimed at deepening political association and economic integration, such as the EU-Georgia Association Agreement,

which includes a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). The agreement has brought several benefits to Georgia since its implementation. Here are some of the key benefits: 1. Market Access; 2. Trade Facilitation; 3. Economic Growth; 4. Modernization and Standards; 5. Foreign Investment; 6. Capacity Building; 7. Enhanced Cooperation: Overall, the DCFTA agreement offers Georgia significant opportunities for economic development and integration with the European market, contributing to the country's long-term prosperity and stability.

Also from the 12 priorities for Georgia, here are some of the most important ones: **Economic Reforms:** Undertaking structural reforms to improve the competitiveness, sustainability, and resilience of the economy, including measures to promote investment, innovation, and entrepreneurship. *Regional Cooperation; Migration and Border Management*; *Education and Skills Development.* By prioritizing these areas and making substantial progress in each of them, Georgia can advance its European integration process and move closer to fulfilling the criteria for EU membership.

Candidate Status

On the 15th of December 2023, the EU Commission has granted Georgia the EU membership candidate status and Georgians have celebrated this small but important

achievement! This gives Georgians hope and motivation to work further on developing relations with EU and finally acquire the membership. Reactions to Georgia's EU candidate status likely reflected a mix of optimism, caution, and geopolitical considerations, but represents a significant milestone in Georgia's European integration journey.

But, we live in a paradoxical state. One month we celebrate our country's membership candidate status in the EU and the next month they invoke the Russian law which is automatically regarded as neglecting EU's 12 priorities for Georgia.

It is said that history repeats itself and in Georgia it happens quite often. It has been 35 years since the 9th of April demonstrations of 1989 in front of our parliament when Georgians demanded independence from the USSR and later on these protests resulted in a referendum in 1991 by which the population officially confirmed their dream. But the protest was brutally dismissed by Russian troops. Little does the government know that once they go against their people's will they are destined to fall off.

For decades now we have been fighting for freedom and independence, trying to improve human rights and everything that represents western values. The new generation has to fight as the previous one did but the current generation faces few difficulties. One is that the older people assume youngsters do not understand politics or life in general

therefore they refuse to listen to their future. The gap between generations creates a misunderstanding and makes it impossible for the two sides to cooperate in sociopolitical issues.

Remembrance of Euromaidan

The Euromaidan protests, also known as the Euromaidan movement, were a series of pro-European Union demonstrations that took place in Ukraine from November 2013 to February 2014. The protests initially began in response to the Ukrainian government's decision to suspend the signing of an Association Agreement with the European Union, opting instead for closer ties with Russia. At this point Euromaidan repeats itself every time any government tries to be autocratic and goes against its people's will. In a sense, Euromaidan has become a synonym of relentless fight for freedom and justice.

The Euromaidan protests were largely peaceful but escalated in late January 2014 when clashes between protesters and security forces turned violent. This resulted in numerous casualties and further fueled public outrage. The situation culminated in February 2014 when the Ukrainian parliament voted to remove President Viktor Yanukovych from power, following days of deadly clashes between protesters and security forces in the capital, Kiev.

The events of the Euromaidan movement ultimately led

to significant political changes in Ukraine, including the formation of a new government and the scheduling of early presidential elections. The movement also had profound implications for Ukraine's relationship with Russia and the European Union, contributing to a period of heightened tensions and conflict in the region.

The Euromaidan protests are considered a pivotal moment in modern Ukrainian history, symbolizing the aspirations of many Ukrainians for closer ties with Europe, greater democracy, and reforms to address systemic corruption and governance issues.

Ukraine's aspirations for EU membership remain a long-term goal, but the timing and prospects of any potential accession are uncertain. Like Georgia, Ukraine must meet strict criteria set by the EU, including implementing reforms to align its legislation and policies with EU standards.

Overall, Ukraine's relationship with the EU is multifaceted, involving political, economic, and strategic dimensions, and it continues to evolve amid ongoing developments in the region.

Protests in Georgia and Future Goals

As for Georgia, nowadays they call the protestors "criminal group Gen-Z" even though there are older generations by their children's side. The accusations about vandalism were completely false and it was used to arrest innocent people in

front of the Georgian Parliament. Additionally, public figures and sportsmen are being verbally harassed for expressing their opinions and are deemed traitors of the state. The absurdity continues to loom over Georgia's head. This shows the inadequacy of the government which cannot act up on its people's will so it harshly represses the rights of civilians

During the night from April 30th to May 1st, in Tbilisi, once again, a massive protest rally gathered near the parliament against the adoption of the law on foreign influence. Protesters entered into a confrontation with the police, who began to use special means such as pepper spray, tear gas, and rubber bullets unjustifiably against peaceful demonstrators. It's evident that the rhetoric of the current authorities in Georgia towards dissenters is changing noticeably. The dismissive attitude towards protesters, mimicking the behavior of Russian authorities, is causing concern. However, Georgians continue to fight, refusing to be part of the 'brotherhood of nations' with Russia.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the western orientation of Sakartvelo is unquestionable because the women, the children, and the students are fighting for the same cause as hard as they can. It would be unfortunate if all of this was in vain and civilians must receive reciprocity from the EU and the USA. Our main goal is to follow the 12 priorities, hold just elections, revoke the law

and strengthen the democracy which is shaky as of now and has no strongholds besides civilian will.

Finally, as the younger generation, we should create our own future and we must take matters into our own hands. The solutions seem to be in holding fair elections in October and from that point there will be two possible outcomes: 1) If the current government remains the same they must change their politics to pro-western orientation or 2) the government must be changed because as Thomas Jefferson has written in Declaration of Independence, "whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new government."

Therefore, we give incentives to our government to listen to their people and to our fellow citizens to stand together and join the European family where we belong. As Zurab Zhvania said: "I am Georgian therefore I am European!" –Today, our generation says: We are Georgians, therefore we are Europeans!

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Conceptual Design of Election: A Study of Political Parties in South Africa

By Thamsanqa (Thami) Mbokazi

1. INTRODUCTION

South Africa's transition from the apartheid government to democratic government had to have a document to protect all the citizens that live within its boundaries. The Constitution of South Africa adopted in 1998 has been the cornerstone that shapes the rights of the citizens. The South African government is made up by the political party that received fifty plus one percent (50+1%) that make it to be a majority party. Since 1994, South Africa has had six administrations, meaning there have been six (6) National and Provincial elections. The Independent Electorate Commission (IEC) is one of the Chapter 9 institutions responsible for ensuring that organs of the state live up to the ideals of constitutionalism and are held accountable for their actions, or inactions in this case, and they ensure that elections are free and fair.

IEC plays a role in registering the political parties that want to be part of the elections. Political parties shape the democratic landscape in the country by providing competition. Political parties enforce competition by competing for rule and the competition fosters accountability. For instance, IEC have political party funding where all political parties need to declare

the donations that they have received.

South Africa is coming from a dark past where the land of the native people was taken by the oppressors. Political parties like the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) have seven cardinal pillars and focus EFF on the expropriation of land without compensation. "During the 2019 general elections, the debate around the redistribution of land became more pronounced" (Matseke, 2021). This is clear demonstration that political parties shapes and develop policies and compete for votes through the policies that they promise people.

South Africa since has a multiparty system: political parties play an imperative role in the formulation of the government. For instance, if there is no outright winner, coalition governments needs to be established so that they can serve the people. Negotiating skills kick in that moment when there is no outright winner. Coalition governments in South Africa are not stable as it is evident through the local government that South Africa held in 2021. The hung council are not consistent. For example, the City of Tshwane—how many mayors it has had in the last two years? It has had more than four mayors. Coalitions want to lead a more inclusive decision-making processes, but due to greediness that political parties have for one another, they tend to not vote on any policy or budget that is tabled.

Among other things, since the country is diverse in culture and beliefs, political parties derive from the interest and

views of the marginalised people. Ordinary people have platform to choose political parties that serves their ideologies aligned with values.

1.1. Background

In a democratic state, it is imperative to allow the formation of political parties. South African politics was dominated by the African National Congress since the transition to democracy. The multiparty system in South Africa has made it possible to portray the diverse in political diverse. Pre-formation of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), most of the South Africans did not follow the parliament proceedings. This demonstrates how vital it is to formulate new political parties. However because in South Africa politics there is an element of greediness, there are some political parties that form because the factions that they originally belonged to lost.

New political parties have emerged significantly. In 2024, there will be more than one hundred, including independent candidates. South Africans are spoilt for choice, hence it is this point that it is vital to have a voter education. This will allow citizens to be able to choose the political party that they want to vote for so that it can change and develop South Africa. The political scene in South Africa, regardless of its multiparty system, is considered by the main presence of the African National Congress (ANC). The dominance has generated debates regarding the enthusiasm of democracy and the level of political opposition within the country. While

the ANC's historical significance and established infrastructure provide it with an extensive advantage, the overwhelming dominance of a single party can lead to a lack of meaningful opposition and analysis, which are indispensable for a strong democracy.

In the 2024 elections, South Africa brags over 100 registered political parties, reflecting the formal inclusivity of its political system. However, the reality of political competition is quite different, as only a few parties manage to secure significant influence on the national stage. The Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) are among these major players, alongside the ANC. This concentration of power among a limited number of parties highlights the challenges smaller parties face in gaining traction and competing effectively.

The struggle of small political party is real; the lack of media coverage makes it difficult for smaller political parties to get their message across. The bias of the South African Broadcaster (SABC) is evident during the launch of different manifestos. The Action SA will be competing for the first time in the National and Provincial election, but they have been getting the most coverage, above the EFF which is the 3rd biggest political party. This goes back to the funders, hence the IEC made a provision to declare funding. The Inkatha Freedom Party have been in the system since the start of democracy, but it has not shown the same level of growth.

2. CHALLENGES

Small political parties in South Africa face big challenges that hinder their ability to compete effectively in elections. One of the primary issues is the limited political leeway, as these parties have a challenge in gaining visibility and compete with larger, more established parties for voter support that have big funders. The dominance of major parties often overshadows the smaller ones, making it difficult for them to convey their messages to a broader audience. Furthermore, the financial constraints have an enormous barrier for small political parties to campaign and work the ground and convince people. Running an election campaign requires financial resources for activities such as advertising, organizing rallies, and voter outreach. Smaller parties often lack the funding necessary to execute these crucial aspects of a campaign effectively, further diminishing their chances of success, For instance, the African Transformation Movement (ATM) articulate the struggle of the marginalised groups perfectly but since they don't have financial muscles, they cannot adequately organise rallies.

Financial limitations serve as a challenge for small political parties to be able campaign. Lack of money causes these parties not to be able to conduct research about what policies can change people's lives. The speaking time allocated in parliament based on the number of votes from elections often becomes a stumbling block for parties to engage effectively in the debate.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper recommends that they must increase the political funding from the IEC, especially for the small political parties so that the playing field can be equal. Media must be neutral, not pushing the negative side of a certain political party.

The IEC must conduct a mass voter education campaign to teach and inform South Africans about the pivotal role in political participation because that leads to community participation.

The political funding objective is to promote fair competition among the political parties. It is recommended that political parties must declare every cent they receive from the donors, and also IEC must fund those political parties equally if they have seats in parliament.

Reflections on the 2024 Global Learning Experience

Zaza Tsotniashvili, Caucasus International University: Professor, Director of Media Programs

In today's interconnected global landscape, information has become a pivotal tool in shaping political narratives and influencing public opinion. This new theater of conflict, known as information warfare, poses significant challenges for nations worldwide. Countries like Georgia, Russia, Ukraine, the European Union, and the USA find themselves at the forefront of this emerging battleground.

The case of Georgia encapsulates the challenges of information warfare in a geopolitically tense environment. Situated at the crossroads of Eastern Europe and Western Asia, Georgia has historically been subject to external influences, particularly from Russia. The 2008 Russo-Georgian War highlighted a new dimension of conflict: the battle for information. Russia utilized media channels to disseminate narratives that justified its military actions. Accusations of Georgian aggression were broadcasted widely, creating confusion and eroding support for Georgia on the international stage. This marked a significant shift toward using media as a tool of warfare,

raising pertinent questions about the balance between state interests and media freedom.

Russia continues to be a central player in the realm of information warfare. The country's sophisticated use of cyber operations and media manipulation has been evident in numerous geopolitical confrontations. Moscow's approach often involves a mix of hacking, disinformation, and the strategic release of information to sow discord within target nations. The 2016 U.S. presidential elections saw widespread allegations of Russian interference, underlining the potency of such tactics. Social media platforms became battlegrounds where narratives were crafted to exploit cultural and political divisions, demonstrating how information warfare could potentially alter the trajectory of democratic processes.

Ukraine has been another focal point, especially since the 2014 annexation of Crimea by Russia. Information warfare has been a significant aspect of the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Russian-backed media outlets have been active in shaping narratives that undermine Ukrainian sovereignty and promote separatist sentiments. This conflict underscores the complexity of information warfare, where state and non-state actors engage in a continuous battle over truth and perception. Peeling away layers of misinformation is challenging, with

fake news and manipulated data muddying the waters for both domestic and international audiences.

The European Union faces its own set of challenges regarding information warfare, particularly from external actors looking to destabilize the political landscape. Efforts to divide member states or influence elections have been detected, revealing vulnerabilities in handling information threats. The EU has recognized the potential dangers of these tactics and has taken steps to develop collective strategies aimed at countering such threats. However, the diverse political and cultural landscape of the EU makes creating a unified response complex, requiring the balancing of national sovereignty with the need for collective security against information attacks.

In the United States, information warfare has become a national security priority. Beyond the high-profile cases of election interference, there are ongoing concerns about foreign influence in various sectors, from critical infrastructure to public health. Disinformation campaigns have gained traction, especially with the rise of digital platforms that allow for the rapid spread of false narratives. These efforts can have severe repercussions, undermining trust in institutions and leading to social and political polarization.

The global community recognizes the need to address the multifaceted challenge of information warfare. There is an ongoing debate about the role of governments, private companies, and international organizations in mitigating these threats. Technology giants, often at the helm of platforms susceptible to exploitation, are grappling with the balance between freedom of expression and the need to prevent harmful disinformation. Collaborative efforts, like the development of the EU's Digital Services Act, aim to impose stricter regulations on platform accountability.

Navigating the complexities of information warfare requires a multi-pronged approach. Nations must enhance their cyber defence capabilities, improve media literacy among their populations, and foster international cooperation to share intelligence and best practices. Sustained dialogue between governments, technology companies, and civil society is essential to develop robust frameworks capable of responding to the evolving nature of information threats.

In conclusion, information warfare presents an intricate challenge that transcends borders and ideologies. The cases of Georgia, Russia, Ukraine, the EU, and the USA illustrate how this modern conflict domain is reshaping international relations. As information operational strategies grow increasingly sophisticated, the

global community must remain vigilant and proactive, ensuring that the fight for truth and transparency prevails in an era where information is not just power, but a weapon.

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The purpose of the 3rd GLE was to extend beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge; it aimed to cultivate a deep, nuanced understanding of diverse cultures, perspectives, and global issues.

Students participated in cross-cultural exchanges, collaborative international projects and lectures, and topics as approved by the five participating professors. They were afforded the opportunity to engage with a range of worldviews, practices, and methodologies.

This GLE topics that were approved allowed for the development of critical thinking skills, as students were encouraged to analyse and synthesize information through multiple lenses. Furthermore, immersion in different cultural contexts enabled students to confront and reflect upon their own assumptions and biases, thereby enhancing their capacity for empathy and intercultural

sensitivity. Such experiences were integral to fostering a more holistic and informed perspective on the chosen topics.

In addition, the integration of the GLE as part of the Internationalisation of the curriculum, played a critical role in preparing students to navigate and address complex global challenges.

Preparation of the lectures was vital for producing adaptable and globally-minded citizens who would be capable of contributing meaningfully to international discourse and problem-solving.

The enhanced cultural competence and global awareness gained through these academic experiences not only enriched students' educational journeys but also bolstered their ability to engage thoughtfully and constructively in a diverse and evolving global landscape.

Finally, this GLE allowed students the opportunity to be exposed to an increasingly interconnected world, through encouraging independence, adaptability and resilience.

Special thanks to all professors that contributed to ensuring that students were exposed to this addition of the GLE, and to Professor Dick Farkas at DePaul University for facilitating this program.

Dr. Dmytro Sherengovsky, Vice-Rector for Outreach, Senior Lecturer of Global Politics, Ukrainian Catholic University

In the 21st century, the pace of technological advancement has accelerated, with digital and autonomous technologies becoming central to modern warfare. Cyber warfare, drones, and precision-guided munitions have emerged as critical tools in the arsenal of contemporary militaries. These technologies have not only enhanced the precision and lethality of military operations but have also expanded the battlefield into new domains, such as cyberspace and the electromagnetic spectrum.

The ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine illustrates the transformative impact of these technologies on modern warfare. Despite Russia's significant numerical and conventional military advantages, Ukraine has managed to mount a robust defense, largely due to its effective use of modern technologies.

The Transformative Role of Drones in Modern Warfare

One of the most striking examples of technology's impact on modern warfare is the use of drones. In the Russian-Ukrainian war, drones have proven to be a critical force multiplier, allowing Ukraine to compensate for its relative lack of traditional military resources. Despite Russia's overwhelming naval superiority, Ukraine's

deployment of marine drones effectively neutralized the threat posed by the Russian Black Sea Fleet. These drones, which are small, hard to detect, and relatively inexpensive to produce, have demonstrated that they can significantly disrupt traditional military operations. By targeting Russian ships, ports, and other critical assets, these drones have forced Russia to retreat from key maritime areas, thereby protecting Ukrainian territory and maintaining access to vital sea routes.

This shift from reliance on large, expensive naval fleets to smaller, more agile drone fleets represents a fundamental change in military strategy. It suggests that in future warfare, the balance of power could increasingly be determined by the ability to deploy advanced, autonomous technologies rather than by sheer numbers or traditional firepower. The effectiveness of Ukrainian drones against the Russian navy underscores the potential of these technologies to level the playing field in asymmetric conflicts.

Cyber Warfare and Information Operations: A New Battlefield

Cyber warfare has also been a critical component of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Both sides have engaged in extensive cyber operations, targeting each other's military and civilian infrastructure. Russia's cyberattacks, including those aimed at disrupting Ukraine's power grid and

communication networks, have been met with significant resilience, partly due to Ukraine's robust cyber defense strategies supported by international partners.

In addition to cyber warfare, information operations have played a crucial role. Russia has employed sophisticated propaganda and disinformation campaigns to undermine Ukrainian morale and international support. However, Ukraine has effectively countered these efforts through social media, digital communication platforms, and strategic narratives that have galvanized both domestic and international support for its cause. This battle for control over the narrative highlights the growing importance of information warfare in modern conflicts.

These developments indicate that future conflicts will likely be fought not just on physical battlefields but across digital and information landscapes as well. The ability to control and manipulate information has become as important as the ability to control territory, with cyber capabilities playing a central role in modern military strategy.

Multi-Domain Operations: Integrating Technology into Warfare

The concept of multi-domain operations reflects the integration of various technological domains—land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace—into a cohesive military strategy. The Russian-Ukrainian war is a clear example of

how modern conflicts are no longer confined to a single domain. Ukraine's ability to coordinate drone strikes, cyber-attacks, and traditional military operations has allowed it to effectively counter Russia's numerical and conventional advantages.

Such multi-domain approach has required Ukraine to innovate rapidly, using technology to connect otherwise unconnected battlefields. For example, the integration of drones with other military assets has enabled Ukraine to conduct precision strikes and gather real-time intelligence, significantly enhancing its operational effectiveness.

This shift towards multi-domain operations represents a major evolution in military thinking. It suggests that future conflicts will require militaries to be highly adaptable, capable of integrating diverse technological tools into a unified strategy. The Ukrainian experience demonstrates that success in modern warfare depends not just on possessing advanced technology but on the ability to deploy it flexibly and creatively across multiple domains.

The Dangers of Technological Warfare in the Hands of Authoritarian Regimes

While the impact of technology on warfare has significant implications for all nations, it poses particular dangers when wielded by authoritarian regimes. These regimes, unencumbered by democratic accountability, are more likely to use these technologies in ways that

undermine global security and erode democratic development.

Authoritarian regimes can use advanced technologies, such as artificial intelligence and cyber tools, to enhance their surveillance capabilities, enabling them to exert greater control over their populations. This can stifle dissent, suppress opposition, and entrench the power of authoritarian leaders. The integration of these technologies into military operations further strengthens these regimes, making it more difficult for democratic movements to challenge their authority.

Moreover, authoritarian regimes are more likely to use technological tools to destabilize other nations, particularly democracies. Cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, and economic coercion are all tactics that can be employed to weaken democratic institutions, create internal divisions, and undermine the credibility of democratic governments. These actions not only threaten the stability of individual nations but also contribute to a more unstable and unpredictable international environment.

The use of technology by authoritarian regimes also erodes international norms and the rule of law. As these regimes engage in cyberattacks, deploy autonomous weapons, and manipulate information on a global scale, they challenge the principles of sovereignty, non-interference, and the protection of human rights. This

erosion of norms undermines the international order and makes it more difficult to address global challenges, from conflict resolution to climate change.

Conclusion

The Russian-Ukrainian war provides a powerful case study of how modern technologies are transforming warfare. From the use of drones and cyber tools to the integration of multi-domain operations, these technologies have allowed Ukraine to resist a conventionally superior enemy and reshape the battlefield in its favor. However, the same technologies that empower democratic resistance can also be used by authoritarian regimes to erode democratic development and global security.

As we look to the future, it is crucial to consider not only the military advantages these technologies provide but also the ethical and strategic challenges they pose. Ensuring that these tools are used in ways that support peace, stability, and the rule of law will be essential to maintaining a secure and just international order.