

# First General Assembly

**Tackling the influences of foreign nations on national elections**

<b>Forum:</b>	First General Assembly
<b>Issue:</b>	Tackling the influences of foreign nations on national elections
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## Introduction

In the world of modern-day international politics, it became increasingly important that national elections be guarded against foreign interference. The ever-increasing connectivity of digital technologies has expanded the possibility for outside powers to manipulate electoral processes, thereby posing large risks to democratic legitimacies and domestic sovereignty.

This research report investigates these challenges and will highlight diverse approaches and programs that are being developed as a response. At its heart, this issue is about guaranteeing that election outputs genuinely reflect the will of citizens without interference from abroad. This involves navigating a complex web where cybersecurity, information warfare, and statecraft converge. We need new legislative frameworks on fighting foreign influence, that include the creation of new laws and regulations on political transparency and cyber security measures. Moreover, international cooperation through treaties and agreements is key towards setting standards along with guidelines aimed at repulsing efforts of interference. In examining historical precedents, present practices, as well as future prospects, this report seeks to provide an overall view of how national elections are and should be protected today.

## Key Terms

### Foreign electoral intervention

Attempts by governments, covertly or overtly, to influence elections in another country.

### Election security

Protection of all elements of election infrastructure, including election officials, voting equipment and technology, the vendor community, etc. It prevents possible election cybersecurity issues and helps mitigate election security threats (Fortinet).

### Information warfare

A concept involving the battlespace use and management of information and communication technology (ICT) in pursuit of a competitive advantage over an opponent (ECPS).

### Campaign-finance laws

Laws that regulate the amounts of money political candidates or parties may receive from individuals or organisations and the cumulative amounts that individuals or organisations can donate. Such laws also define who is eligible to make political contributions (Boatright).

### Propaganda

Information, ideas, opinions, or images, often only giving one part of an argument, that are broadcast, published, or in some other way spread with the intention of influencing people's opinions (Cambridge Dictionary).

## General Overview

To address how foreign nations affect national elections, it is important to have a good understanding of the historical background, the categories of foreign influence and the role of media and civil society. The only way we can come up with all-inclusive strategies geared toward safeguarding national elections as well as making sure that democracy continues to be fair and transparent is by looking at all of these aspects combined.

## History

Nowadays, foreign meddling in national elections is viewed as a contemporary issue. When cases arise of Russia funding several European political parties and politicians, these are labelled as dangerous and unprecedented. However, understanding how preceded these cases actually are is key to using improved preventative measures and recognizing the old pitfalls that led or could have led to disastrous outcomes. In the history of electoral interference in the United States and Europe, Russia has been the primary adversary. The origins of covert Russian electoral interference date all the way back to the first Soviet leader, Vladimir Lenin (Connolly). Specifically, through the international organisation his communist party founded, the Comintern. This organisation would fund communist parties around the world in order to provoke a global revolution that would abolish the privileges of the upper class and dissolve borders. Fortunately, this effort was unsuccessful, but it did succeed in causing widespread paranoia that the Comintern was interfering with elections in the United States and the United Kingdom.

After the Second World War, the global power dynamics underwent substantial changes. The Soviet Union gained enhanced control over Eastern Europe, and the United States, through initiatives such as the Marshall plan, had a great deal over Western Europe. Furthermore, after defeating Japan, they shaped the country in ways that continue to resonate today, like the privileges of the emperor being confined by the constitution of the country. In these first few years of peace after war, we see democracy being played with by the world's superpowers. The United States influenced elections in for example Italy. President Harry S. Truman ordered the CIA to help defeat communist candidates in the 1948 election (Ewing). The Soviet Union

meddled with elections in every nation they liberated, as to create their own communist sphere of influence.

Another interesting case is that of Henry Wallace, former Vice President of the United States from 1941 to 1945. Believing in the benign intentions of the Soviet Union, Wallace would hold speeches that would show his pro-Soviet views. He later founded the Progressive Party in order to participate in the 1948 presidential election as a third-party candidate. After offering his services as an agent of influence to the KGB chief in Washington, he managed to obtain what was essentially a letter of recommendation from Joseph Stalin (Michel). His supporters included members of the U.S. Communist Party and his Soviet allies. Despite his significant loss in the election, it highlights the Soviet Union's willingness to openly support candidates in the United States, not only covertly.

Throughout the Cold War, there were high tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union, with both nations trying to influence the most countries to support their ideologies. This led to both sides interfering with elections across the globe. For instance, when Nixon as a residential candidate expressed his plan to establish back channels with South Vietnamese partners leading up to the 1968 election (Michel), the KGB resident in the United States received instructions from the Kremlin to “propose diplomatic or propaganda initiatives, or any other measures, to facilitate Kennedy’s victory.” Although John F. Kennedy went on to win the election, the Soviet Union's efforts did not significantly contribute to his victory. They only managed to mobilise some communists in the United States to vote for Kennedy, but their numbers were too few to have a serious impact. This does come to show that in a healthy democracy with high turnouts in elections and enough citizens' participation, it would be incredibly difficult to sway public opinion without the new media.

Another interesting point is the shift in Russia's historical fear of Republican candidates in modern times (Connolly). Russia did everything in their power to prevent Nixon and Reagan from taking over the Oval Office. This was because of their hard-line stance against communism and willingness to advocate for America’s interests abroad through interventionism. However, the Republican Party changed its position on interventionism under Trump and started to promote protectionism. We see Russia supporting their campaigns, instead of the Democrats. This

illustrates how Russia does not necessarily favour one party in particular, but is willing to support different candidates based on who has a weaker stance on interventionism and has a less hawkish foreign policy.

After the Cold War, China also gained influence on the global stage. Already in 1996, the People's Republic of China had sought to make illegal contributions to the Democratic National Committee (Fund). Furthermore, the People's Republic of China has interfered in every election in the Republic of China, also called Taiwan, since the country became a democracy. We do see that the People's Republic has used more modern means when interfering in elections outside their proximity, being one of the first to use much more modern methods, such as hacking and social media. But in Taiwan, the People's Republic funds one particular party that they use as their mouthpiece.

### **Intervention types**

In general, we can make a broad distinction between overt and covert interventions. Overt interventions are those in which some significant acts of intervention are known to the average voter, whereas covert interventions are those in which all acts of intervention weren't known to the average voter (Harding). Examples of overt interventions are public promises / threats and pre-election concessions. For instance, the Kremlin overtly intervened in favour of Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich, by threatening to 'stabilise' the country and 'liberating' those regions which were supposedly ignored after the Revolution of Dignity (Polyakova). Then you have covert interventions, such as hidden provision of funds to preferred candidates and so-called 'dirty tricks'. Many covert interventions could have happened without detection by national security agencies. However, we do know that in recent years China, Iran, and Russia all have a preference for the Republican Party and through offshore accounts could have transferred money to their campaign funds (Landay and Hosenball). Dirty tricks include hacking social media accounts of public officials, creating or leaking forged documents which could be damaging to a particular candidate, etc.

### **The role of (social) media and civil society**

Traditional media, social media, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and watchdog groups all play a significant role in national elections. The media's coverage of campaigns and government can affect the way government operates and the success of candidates running for public office (Rice University). That is why the international news television network Russia Today was banned in many western countries. In the month before Taiwan's presidential election, a 300-page e-book titled 'The Secret History of Tsai Ing-wen' began to circulate on various social media platforms and email inboxes. This book contained misinformation and fabricated allegations about Taiwan's president gaining power through sexual promiscuity (Iyengar). This was Beijing's attempt to influence Taiwanese public opinion by spreading fake news on social media. In Georgia, a controversial bill, also called the foreign agent's law, got passed. Under this law, media and NGOs that receive over 20% of their funding from abroad will have to register as 'organisations acting in the interest of a foreign power', submit themselves to stringent audits, or face punitive fines (Demytrie). This is the work of an autocratic regime aiming to silence democratic opposition, which often originates from European or pro-European sources.

## Major Parties Involved

### People's Republic of China

The People's Republic of China has been the main perpetrator of election interference. It has meddled or attempted to meddle with the elections in the United States (McCarthy), Canada (Ljunggren), India (The Economic Times), Czechia (The Economist), and the list goes on. Especially under President Xi Jinping, the People's Republic of China has developed a much more hawkish foreign policy that tries to maximise their global influence through, among others, financial loans to developing countries and election interference.

### Russia

Moscow has already begun spreading disinformation about Joe Biden and other prominent Democrats to lessen U.S. military aid to Ukraine and U.S. support for NATO (De Luce and Collier). This is because Trump's Republican Party stalled aid for Ukraine and softened its stance on Russia (PBS News). Furthermore, by spreading propaganda, influencing media, and fabricating blackmail material on political candidates in their home country, Russia has the skills and experience needed to influence elections abroad.



## Timeline of Key Events

<b>March 2, 1919</b>	The Comintern is founded Vladimir Lenin
<b>1948</b>	The U.S. supports anti-communist parties in Italy's election
<b>1950s - 1960s</b>	The CIA engages in covert actions to influence the politics of countries such as Iran (1953), Guatemala (1958), and Chile (1969)
<b>1991</b>	The collapse of the Soviet Union marks a shift in geopolitical dynamics and foreign election interference tactics

## UN Involvement and Other Treaties

- Respect for the principles of national sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of States in their electoral processes, 20 Dec. 1993 (A/RES/48/124)
- Declaration on the Inadmissibility of Intervention in the Domestic Affairs of States and the Protection of Their Independence and Sovereignty, 21 Dec. 1965 (A/RES/21/175)

## Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

In 1993, the United Nations General Assembly passed the aforementioned resolution, emphasising that states should conduct their elections without external interference or influence, and ensure that electoral outcomes genuinely reflect the will of the people and remain free from external manipulation. Besides, there have been previous attempts made by some countries to address this problem. In Europe specifically, there has been great success with these endeavours (Brattberg). For instance, Sweden has created a hotline on Facebook where poll officials can report imitation government pages while major companies like Facebook, Twitter, and Google have joined the EU-wide Code of Practice on Disinformation. Consequently, the European Commission is drafting new legislation known as the Digital Services Act, aimed at governing online content, including measures to address hate speech.

Protection of elections from foreign interventions is a major issue of national security, with several member-state governments and the EU treating election systems and processes as critical infrastructure. Moreover, European governments are actively searching for ways to help political parties and campaigns protect themselves from cyber attacks by recruiting approved independent cyber professionals in France, the United Kingdom, and Germany. Additionally, they are training politicians, political parties and election officials so that they become more informed about possible interference by foreign states. In Sweden, the government prepared an elections handbook and offered hands-on training to increase preparedness and resilience against disinformation campaigns. Countries like Finland and Sweden have placed significant emphasis on enlightening their populations about misinformation risks, while encouraging media organisations to strengthen journalistic quality standards as well as practices in order to curb disinformation campaigns. The EU has fostered the creation of a pool of independent fact-checkers across Europe.

## Possible Solutions

Firstly, hubris should be avoided, so political parties and candidates should strengthen their digital security and anticipate possible attacks.

Secondly, administrative, independent, and non-political authorities should monitor elections and intervene if necessary, since measures taken by governments led by elected officials could be seen as politically motivated.

Thirdly, there is a pressing need for enhanced electoral transparency laws and greater proactive measures by national electoral commissions.

Furthermore, awareness should be raised on a global level, to prevent citizens from spreading fake news and propaganda further. This can also be done by making all hacking attempts public. Finally, nations should put pressure on digital platforms that are often used for election interference campaigns, such as Facebook and WhatsApp, to prevent these social media being exploited by foreign governments (Conley and Vilmer).

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## Appendix

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