

Countering Russian Influence in Europe and Eurasia

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Synopsis

The Russian Federation is using a combination of approaches to destabilize democratic or democratizing governments across Europe and Eurasia and encourage the rise of populist, anti-democratic regimes with authoritarian tendencies. The main objectives of these influence campaigns seem to aim at achieving predominance in Russia's "near abroad," weakening the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU), and regaining status as a world power. This is being accomplished through classical propaganda, hybrid and cyber warfare, economic pressure, cultural and religious identifiers, support for nationalist and separatist movements, outright military intervention and other methods from the Kremlin's geopolitical toolkit. Countries that transitioned to democracy in the early 1990s (the Baltics, Hungary, Poland, etc.) as well as those working toward establishing democratic governance (Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine – all of which experienced transitions based on multiple and popular street demonstrations) and even longstanding democracies in Western Europe and the United States (U.S) have all been affected. The Russian influence strategy is highly sophisticated and multi-pronged and therefore the response must recognize this and be strategic and well-coordinated across many sectors to be effective. While there is no single remedy to counter these actions, a recommitment to democratic principles coupled with guarding against and exposing cyberattacks and disinformation, promoting inclusivity and national dialogue, empowering societies to fight corruption in money in politics, promoting transparency in government and reinvigorating international assistance for democracy and governance can help counteract Moscow's campaign of malign influence against liberal democracy and human rights that continues to impact many countries – including Russia itself – across Europe, Eurasia and beyond.

This paper will examine the means that the Russian Federation is using to influence countries in eastern Europe and Eurasia to abandon or rethink their embrace of so-called "western liberal values" in the name of a Moscow-oriented political and economic orientation, based on conservative views and closed societies. Several different areas of influence will be examined including disinformation, cyberattacks, economic and trade relations, security considerations and power projection, cultural and historical linkages, and identity politics.

The Russian Federation's active role in the ongoing political development of the ex-Soviet republics and former client states in eastern Europe has accelerated in recent years. Over the course of Vladimir Putin's presidency, Russia has increasingly projected influence not only through economic and security relationships, but also by reshaping the internal politics of many countries through its support of populist movements and actions to undermine democratic politics. In some respects, this reinforces a trend in the region that has arisen over the past few years due to external migration, economic factors and a backlash against the progressive politics that have dominated the last decade, resulting in a turn to more nationalistic, populist leadership. Nonetheless Russia has carefully watched events unfold and skillfully stoked tensions through political support of nationalist politicians supplemented by the use of disinformation through various online platforms to exacerbate tensions and encourage hardline policies

on issues such as immigration and LGBT rights.¹ This influence has also taken the form of financial support provided to anti-EU and pro-Russian organizations and movements.

Fighting the Information War

The first area of influence to be examined relates to the control and manipulation of information, including sophisticated efforts to spread propaganda, conduct disinformation campaigns, influence public opinion and undermine state structures via cyber incursions. Russia is a **known perpetrator of cyber warfare** across Europe and Eurasia. It employs a playbook familiar to the U.S. – and now to Europeans – of attempting to infiltrate election systems (hard technology) as well as influencing public opinion through a relentless use of disinformation across social media before and during election campaigns (soft technology). This has become particularly clear in Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s indictments, with specific reference to the St. Petersburg-based Internet Research Agency (IRA). These efforts pointedly seek to undermine confidence in democratic institutions and influence public sentiment and government policies. Russia is not propagating an ideological war; it is not a left-wing or right-wing campaign, but rather an effort to undermine trust and confidence and initiate chaos and instability. One particularly audacious tactic poised for widescale usage is “deep fakes” or manipulated audio or video recordings that make a person appear to say or do something that they never said or did.² Most European and Eurasian governments are poorly equipped to counter those efforts.

Individuals with proven affiliation to the GRU (*Gosudartsvenie Rozvedchisnie Upravlenie*, or State Spy Agency) have been implicated in brazen cyberattacks on foreign critical infrastructure, including “energy, nuclear, commercial facilities, water, aviation, and critical manufacturing sectors”³ in addition to government entities. The attacks have included “staging” targets (third-party suppliers with weaker information technology safeguards used as “malware repositories” accessed via phishing emails) and “intended targets” (larger organizations and networks).⁴ Results of these incursions, which in many cases were probing attacks, indicate that the perpetrators – later tracked to Russia – had the ability to shut down entire power grids or even cause severe physical damage to others via overloads. The initial probing attacks of just a few years ago have turned into daily occurrences, with the scope of the attacks expanding. In 2016, Russian hackers were implicated in the hacking of U.S. political party emails, equipment providers for election commissions and state electoral systems and voter rolls.⁵

According to new reporting, the Department of Homeland Security and Federal Bureau of Investigation have determined that it was extremely likely that cyber intrusions emanating from the Russian Federation, and at the direction of the Russian government, probed election infrastructure in all 50 U.S.

¹ <http://www.humanrightsfirst.org/sites/default/files/HRF-LGBT-Blueprint.pdf>

² <https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-eu-election-meddling-major-effort/>.
See also the International Foundation for Electoral Systems’ working paper on *Social Media, Disinformation and Electoral Integrity*, <https://www.ifes.org/publications/social-media-disinformation-and-electoral-integrity>

³ <https://www.us-cert.gov/ncas/alerts/TA18-074A>

⁴ <https://www.us-cert.gov/ncas/alerts/TA18-074A>

⁵ <https://www.bushcenter.org/catalyst/democracy/zarate-cyber-attacks-on-democracy.html>

states “in an attempt to sow discord and influence the 2016 (presidential) election.”¹³ In approximately six of these states, these hackers were in a position to alter or delete voter registration data, as happened in Illinois.⁶ In other cases, the records were accessed but not changed. Similar efforts were undertaken for elections in Ukraine, the EU and the Netherlands to undermine the democratic process, with a particularly egregious example being the alteration of voter tabulation output in Ukraine in 2014, with a falsified result favoring a pro-Russia candidate being announced by Russian media even before the preliminary results were known.⁷ Ukrainian electoral officials intervened and prevented the false result from being officially announced. The aim of such efforts is to weaken the trust in the democratic process and institutions and cast doubt on their legitimacy as mainstays of democratic society. Further, such tactics can exacerbate political and social divisions in a country in a way that advances Russian interests, either through influencing the election of a pro-Russia candidate or sowing chaos and spreading distrust among Russian adversaries.

In France in 2017, Emmanuel Macron’s presidential campaign accused Russia of **hacking its servers** and assisting nationalist opposing candidate, Marine Le Pen. In 2015, the Russians were alleged to have hacked 16 gigabytes of information from the German Parliament. In both France and Germany, opposition parties backed by Russia challenged the established leadership. Specifically, the Alternative for Germany party received favorable coverage in Russian state media as it campaigned for closer ties to Russia. Most recently, Microsoft announced that it discovered massive phishing attacks against a variety of nongovernmental organizations in Europe ahead of the European Parliament elections in May 2019.⁸ It is true that such nationalist-oriented opposition has existed and played an increasingly important role in these countries for some time, challenging the liberal status quo and citing security and economic challenges as kindling, thus fueling the fires of nationalism. However, Russia has taken advantage and bolstered such efforts – for instance, with those of the Catalans in Spain⁹ – to sow division and weaken democratic governments and political institutions. According to the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service, Russia drives a wedge between NATO members, and the Kremlin constantly applies a strategy of divide and rule to undermine the unity of EU policy toward Russia.¹⁰

Another distinct form of interference that Russia has used is **targeted disinformation**, with the internet and social media providing an ideal platform to propagate misleading news and propaganda. For example, public dialogue on sensitive campaign issues, such as migration, has been influenced through use of internet “bots” that propagate and amplify radical opinions and promote populist agendas via

⁶ Here, according to the latest Department of Justice report, nearly 1 million voter registration records were altered, although records could be restored due to the “air-gapping” of voter registration data. <https://www.justice.gov/ag/page/file/1076696/download>

⁷ Russian Television 1 reported that Viktor Yarosh had been declared the winner, though later took down this information. <https://www.unian.info/politics/10368597-ukraine-should-prepare-for-more-russian-cyberattacks-ahead-of-2019-elections-expert.html>

⁸ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/emmawoollacott/2019/02/20/us-think-tanks-hacked-ahead-of-european-parliament-elections/#643205032119>

⁹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-spain-politics-catalonia-russia/spain-sees-russian-interference-in-catalonia-separatist-vote-idUSKBN1DD20Y>

¹⁰ GISS Annual Report 2014

popular social media sites. Such sophisticated efforts are believed to have impacted the 2016 U.S. presidential election, leading to an in-depth investigation by Special Counsel Mueller. Even more recently in the U.S., the now-convicted Russian agent, Maria Butina, was charged with overseeing an extensive, Kremlin-directed and financed operation to “to interfere with U.S. democracy”¹¹ and influence the 2018 midterm elections. Butina was convicted of having overseen financing for “Project Lakhta,” an umbrella Russian effort engaged in political interference operations, which included the IRA, a Kremlin “troll farm.”¹² In February 2018, Mueller levied fraud and conspiracy charges against 13 Russians and three Russian organizations linked to the IRA, accusing them of participating in an elaborate plot to use social media to interfere in the 2016 presidential election.

Although many in the U.S. were shocked at the audacity of the Russian effort, European democracies have long dealt with effects of such tactics in their elections. Upgraded cybersecurity in countries such as Finland and Estonia have seemingly proven effective at limiting interference during elections. However, the ability to filter out propaganda and false reports and news stories, at the risk of censorship, remains incredibly complex and demands a much more coordinated cyber-defense effort across Europe. For example, in September 2018 the European Commission announced a set of concrete measures to address potential threats to the 2019 European parliamentary elections, focused on strengthening election cooperation networks, online transparency, fighting disinformation campaigns and protection against cybersecurity incidents. Based on this a European Cooperation Network on elections was established to coordinate cooperation among member states. In April 2019 more than 80 representatives from member states participated in an exercise to test and strengthen their preparedness, particularly among election and cybersecurity officials, in the face of cyber-based threats to critical infrastructure. The effort helped to test and strengthen crisis management plans, improve cross-border cooperation, identify gaps and vulnerabilities, and improve communication with the public during a crisis.¹³ No major cyber intrusions were reported on Election Day.

Even where, as in Czechia, mainstream media is used to debunk false content appearing on social media, a significant number of the estimated 25 percent of Czechs who regularly read websites implicated in spreading false narratives have stopped consuming mainstream media where those corrections typically appear.¹⁴ The challenge of regulating social media content has thus become ever more complicated.

There are key counter strategies than can be employed to address cyber intrusions and disinformation, which every government should take seriously as a priority defense. These include conducting a risk assessment of cybersecurity measures at all levels of government, both hardware and software, and

¹¹ <https://thehill.com/policy/national-security/412287-russian-woman-charged-with-interfering-in-midterm-elections>

¹² https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/01/10/everything-we-know-so-far-about-russian-election-meddling-in-europe/?utm_term=.4b3f207de30c

¹³ <https://www.enisa.europa.eu/news/enisa-news/eu-member-states-test-their-cybersecurity-preparedness-for-fair-and-free-2019-eu-elections>

¹⁴ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/10/20/czech-elections-show-how-difficult-it-is-to-fix-the-fake-news-problem/?utm_term=.8f43d47deee5

assessing vulnerabilities and current preparedness to withstand illegal incursions. This should include an evaluation of current threats and present countermeasures. Electoral infrastructure should be prioritized to safeguard the country's democratic decision-making processes so that public confidence is not damaged. Importantly, workers in key government sectors at both the national and local levels should be trained in good cyber hygiene to minimize the possibility of online intruders from gaining access into the computer network via backdoor channels or coercion. Further, countries should set up national centers to detect and block disinformation while educating the public to scrutinize sources of information, particularly during electoral contests, to separate legitimate information from misleading sources and hate speech, all while protecting freedom of speech and an open media.

Authoritarian and Populist Vectors

A second category of interference and influence employed effectively by the Russian state has been its support for conservative, authoritarian leaders and political parties espousing populist ideals and appeals to compatriots based on a shared sense of culture, tradition or "morality." Direct, subversive actions to influence and undermine national elections have also been an effective tactic used by the Kremlin, often to boost authoritarian, pro-Moscow candidates.

The Kremlin has worked to assist many of Europe's nationalist parties and politicians.¹⁵ Results of the May 2019 European parliamentary elections showed gains both for far-right populist parties and liberal, pro-EU parties. While populist parties experienced gains, these were not as large as predicted in pre-election polls. The unity of these movements was not assured, given differences on issues such as migration and attitudes toward Russia. While increased representation in the EU Parliament signifies more political power, populist parties still lack the numbers to dictate a policy agenda, although they can play an obstructionist role.¹⁶

Russia's support of Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban, however, has been unprecedented in its scale and scope.¹⁷ Russia has invested heavily in the country, provided multibillion-dollar loans and favorable energy deals, and stoked right-wing hate groups through undercover support. Orban has taken over news media outlets, installed a system of oligarchs and taken measures to reign in Hungarian nongovernmental organizations. Although these challenges to democracy have developed organically, over the past several years Russia has taken advantage to heighten tensions and foment internal divisions in the country, through both influence over Hungarian media and support for right-wing political parties and movements.¹⁸ Orban himself has used Russia's attention to further his own aims, stoke nationalist fears and advance his policy agenda. The result of these efforts has placed Hungary at

¹⁵ <https://www.americansecurityproject.org/russias-involvement-in-far-right-european-politics/> and <https://www.ft.com/content/48c4bfa6-7ca2-11e9-81d2-f785092ab560>

¹⁶ <https://www.npr.org/2019/05/27/727293356/4-takeaways-from-the-european-parliament-election-results>

¹⁷ <http://theconversation.com/europes-illiberal-states-why-hungary-and-poland-are-turning-away-from-constitutional-democracy-89622>

¹⁸ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326998367_The_Kremlin's_Influence_in_Hungary_-_Are_Russian_Vested_Interests_Wearing_Hungarian_National_Colors

center stage in the increasing disaffection with liberal democratic values espoused by Europe, while giving Russia a propaganda and policy “win” at relatively low cost and effort. This anti-immigrant, pro-Russia agenda is not just limited to Hungary and other Višegrad countries, however, and has taken root among like-minded elements throughout eastern and, increasingly, western Europe. The approach follows a pattern of “Russian secret services systematically try(ing) to find or create tension within the society,” with Russia “using the (recent) refugee crisis to put pressure on the public and on governments to split the EU.” Further, Russia would then “provide financial, ideological and media support to populists opposing the migrants, and at the same time support leftist populists, based on historical and ideological ties.”¹⁹

Russia is **using international institutions** to complicate political, security and economic matters in Europe and Eurasia. It has blocked the geographic scope of the Special Monitoring Mission along the border between Donbas and the rest of Ukraine – a violation of the Minsk agreements – implemented under the auspices of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). It has also cut its funding to the organization, which in addition to human rights and monitoring, works to protect freedom of the press and conducts numerous election observation and assistance missions to participating states that contribute directly to the development of democracy. The Russian Federation has fundamentally objected to and systematically undermined this type of work since the early 2000s. Its objection to extend the OSCE mandate in Georgia, for example, has resulted in the absence of an OSCE field operations in the country for the last 10 years.²⁰ In 2009, Russia also vetoed the extension of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia, which thus ceased to exist.

Targeted disinformation efforts also serve the purpose of **stoking tensions among ethnic Russian minorities** around the region, from the separatists in Donbas to Russian communities in the Baltics, Central Asia and even in western European countries such as Germany. Former Soviet states with minority populations of Russian speakers are particularly vulnerable to Russia’s established **compatriot policy** aimed at supporting the interests of the Russian-speaking population and more importantly, influencing these populations and local groups and organizations of Russian speakers to support pro-Russia causes. Through its compatriot policy, Russia attempts to effectively influence the politics of its neighbors. Much of the disinformation relates to the perceived persecution of language and cultural rights by national governments, which in most cases these communities have been citizens of since independence. As countries have emphasized national languages, Russian speakers have been targeted by Kremlin propaganda efforts to interpret this as a threat, fomenting divisions between the Russian-speaking population and the authorities. The situation has been exacerbated by governments’ limited media outreach to Russian or other minority-speaking populations. In related cases, from the early days of the *Lad* movement in Kazakhstan to the use of language and religion politics in Ukraine and other breakaway regions, Russia has increasingly stoked discontent through public statements, implied economic retaliation or outright support for opposition groups to destabilize the host country. In Serbia,

¹⁹ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-019-0227-8>

²⁰ There must be consensus agreement among the OSCE’s 57 participating states for all matters of budgeting, appointment of leadership, mission mandates, etc.

this has taken on a cultural dimension, where, although language is not the main issue, shared cultural values and heritage prevail among fellow Slavs. By projecting a shared set of Orthodox values as continually under threat by Muslim fundamentalism or democratic liberalism, Russia buttresses a crisis mentality to push countries or regions closer to its orbit.

Taking things further, Russia even **attempted to overthrow** the government of Montenegro on the eve of a national referendum on determining NATO accession. In Montenegro, Russia has used tactics such as disinformation to gain influence in the country. The effort came to a head during talks on Montenegro's accession to NATO. Though these efforts were ultimately unsuccessful, a new strategy is now being pursued to "stoke political and ethnic divisions to destabilize Montenegro and preclude further Western integration."²¹ Russia has also worked to foment popular opposition in Greece and in North Macedonia on the latter's recent name change, which will likely now facilitate a path toward both EU and NATO membership.²²

Russia's objective in the western Balkans is to **block aspiring countries in the region from joining the EU and NATO**. In Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Russia worked to destabilize the country on the eve of national elections in October 2018 by using local media to "disseminate pro-Kremlin narratives, training a Bosnian Serb paramilitary unit, acquiring ownership in strategic industries, and supporting politicians and groups loyal to Moscow and hostile to the EU and NATO."²³

Milorad Dodik's election to the Bosnian presidency may embolden separatism in *Republika Srpska*. Putin has overtly supported Dodik and the rights of Serbs in BiH, while at the same time supporting Bosnian Croat nationalism as well. The U.S. has been tied to many of the more egregious narratives, with one accusing the Bosniaks and "American officials" with depriving the rights of Serbs and Croats to declare their own states.²⁴

Not long after elections to replace interim President Rosa Otunbayeva (a vote won by democratic-leaning Almazbek Atambayev) and the establishment of a parliamentary form of government, the Kyrgyz Republic began to drift back to a Russian model of strong presidential control. A break in relations with the U.S. was even achieved when the Kyrgyz Republic protested vehemently at the awarding of a human rights citation to a jailed ethnic Uzbek dissident, a setback in relations that the U.S. has yet to successfully repair. The subsequent onslaught of anti-U.S. propaganda was distressing to many of those who have spent years developing positive relations with the government and helping to strengthen the partnership with civil society. Here again the term "**foreign agents**" gained traction through

²¹ <https://www.stopfake.org/en/russian-influence-in-montenegro-disinformation-threats-and-attempted-regime-change/>

²² The Macedonian Parliament voted to approve the name change to "North Macedonia" on October 20, 2018, despite a plebiscite on the same issue failing one month before.

²³ <https://securingdemocracy.gmfus.org/russias-efforts-to-destabilize-bosnia-and-herzegovina/>

²⁴ Nikola Joksimović, "Ako Bosna kolabira, neće samo Srbi dobiti državu — šansa i za Hrvate," *SputnikNews*, October 29, 2017, <https://rs-lat.sputniknews.com/intervju/201710291113239861-bosna-intervju-tvrtko-milovic/>.

parliamentary edict, which resulted in serious restrictions to domestic civil society organizations that had been receiving foreign aid. This Russia-inspired term has become part of the mainstream lexicon in many former Soviet republics to denote *agents provocateur* with designs to upset the established order.

Russia has played an increasingly similar role in parts of the Middle East, Latin America and Africa, where its model of restricting or regulating civil society and consolidating authoritarian power under a “moral” dictatorship has found eager partners in countries such as Syria, Egypt and Venezuela.

Democracies must first and foremost strengthen electoral safeguards, including practices, procedures and laws in the aforementioned areas of cybersecurity and disinformation. They must also support the independence of the state’s central electoral commission and of entities responsible for tracking and enforcing political finance rules and regulations, as well as the judiciary’s role in adjudicating electoral disputes.

It is also essential to have independent domestic election monitors observing the work of the electoral authorities, political parties and campaigns to serve in a watchdog or whistleblower role to assure compliance of electoral stakeholders and contestants. Similarly, the civil sector must remain a partner of the electoral authorities, who share responsibility for oversight and enforcement. This extends to civil and human rights monitors, who can assess how level the electoral playing field is for all stakeholders and help assure that outside influences are not tainting the election process, undermining citizens’ equal rights, or contributing to a negative atmosphere in the elections on behalf of one or more local political contestants or generally to public mistrust. It is incumbent upon the state authorities and private, voluntary organizations to help widen the political space in society, strengthen political culture and promote inclusivity in the decision-making process, pushing back against state restrictions or other influences on domestic political processes emanating internally or externally.

Economic Ties and Financial Pressures

Russia exercises influence in various ways, at times intervening directly and militarily (such as in Georgia and Ukraine), through economic and security relationships by way of bilateral arrangements with its neighbors (via energy policy through natural gas and oil pipelines) and through new, regional organizations like the Eurasian Economic Union, Collective Security Treaty Organization and Shanghai Cooperation Organization. The use of such organizations helps Russia propagate its policy agenda from a dominant position while appearing to be but one voice in a collective approach. With growing **dependency on Russian oil and natural gas imports**, the countries of both eastern and, increasingly, western Europe find themselves vulnerable to Moscow’s geopolitical influence. Through state oil company Rosneft, Russia has made serious inroads as the dominant energy supplier to Europe, while European countries including Germany have found themselves more and more dependent on Russian imports, in the process making them susceptible to Russian political pressure. While Germany has officially endorsed stricter U.S.-led economic sanctions on the country, privately it has fretted over antagonizing Russia. The Nord Stream-2 pipeline has the potential to increase European dependency on Russian energy; as of 2016 Russian natural gas imports totaled 40 percent of total gas demand in Italy, 55 percent in Denmark, 58 percent in Czechia, 62 percent in Germany and Hungary, 64 percent in

Poland, 70 percent in Austria and 84 percent in Slovakia.²⁵ Energy resources make up around 70 percent of Russia's total exports and more than half of its budget revenues.

Russia has heavily influenced the Austrian government, which was brought down in 2019 due to a bribery scandal.²⁶ It has offered to include Slovakia in the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project – a \$12.4 billion project to build a gas pipeline from Russia to Germany, bypassing Ukraine – which could increase the EU's reliance on Russian gas.²⁷ It would appear that Slovakia is taking a pragmatic approach to the critical issue of energy supply, balancing the promise of reverse flow supplies from the west with new ways to access Russian natural gas, which still dominates the energy market and compels consuming countries to take a somewhat softer stance on contentious Russian political ambitions.

The impact of **financial and economic interference** is also widely felt. In France, Russian banks gave substantial loans to Marine Le Pen's National Front. There is evidence that Russian influence has extended to Italy, where the populist Five Star Movement has led opinion polls, and to Greece, where Russia has invested in Greek media and energy and cultivated strong support for the *Syriza* party.²⁸ Russia also uses a complex system of financial connections, business ties and a patronage network to exert influence across Europe, employing several "enabling" countries in which looser financial regulations permit greater Russian investment. Russian companies control up to 10 percent of the economies of such "enabling" countries, including the Netherlands, Italy and Austria. The liberal investment markets in these countries attract Russian funds and firms, and illicit financing contributes to the exercise of political influence, as these countries need to maintain good relations with Russia as a result of its penetration into their financial sectors.

Economic influence is concentrated in several sectors, with the key one being energy; dependency on Russian energy exports provides the Kremlin with political leverage. Illicit financial flows and money laundering are common tactics, with Russian economic influence particularly adaptive in Czechia, Montenegro and Romania, given their Euro-Atlantic orientation.²⁹ A common feature can be found in each country's degree of vulnerability to outside influence created by weak government and exploitative economic policies, particularly with relation to corruption. These gaps are manipulated by the Kremlin through strategies that serve to divide society and sow dependency.

Further, the increasing economic dependency on Russia as a source of energy supplies has in effect tied much of Europe to a Russian-dictated import model and price structure, with several pipeline transit countries, such as Ukraine, hopelessly indebted to Gazprom and other Russian state energy giants. Such dependency has affected the foreign policy of even the largest European economy, Germany, which was

²⁵ https://www.bakerinstitute.org/media/files/files/ac785a2b/BI-Brief-071817-CES_Russia1.pdf

²⁶ <https://www.ozy.com/fast-forward/how-russia-is-making-austria-ground-zero-in-the-battle-for-europe/94605>

²⁷ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/russia-proposes-slovakia-join-turkstream-143975>

²⁸ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/01/10/everything-we-know-so-far-about-russian-election-meddling-in-europe/?utm_term=.4b3f207de30c

²⁹ https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/190326_KP2.pdf

loath to support economic sanctions levied on Russia by the U.S. due to its need to maintain positive energy relations with its supplier.

In the Kyrgyz Republic, which was once hailed in the west as the “island of democracy” in Central Asia, Russian influence remains very strong. Upon winning the presidency in 2017, former Prime Minister Sooronbai Jeenbekov promptly paid a visit to Moscow to hold strategic political and economic discussions. Russia’s trump card in the Kyrgyz Republic, as it is in most of the other Central Asian republics, is that it is a destination country for thousands of labor migrants. The remittances sent back by these individuals accounts for a substantially large percentage of the gross domestic product of the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan in particular. In addition to their economic ties with Russia through the Moscow-led Eurasian Customs Union – a regional economic body rivaling the EU – the remittances sent back by Kyrgyz, Tajik and other labor migrants from Russia serve as a point of significant leverage that Russia exercises over the region. Although the Kyrgyz Republic experienced revolutions in 2005 and again in 2010 that on the surface saw authoritarian-leaning leaders replaced as a result of street protests, the 2010 transition was particularly noteworthy, as then-President Kurmanbek Bakiyev ran afoul of business partners in Moscow.

The west needs to continue to promote the virtues of a free economy, trade and increased foreign investment. For example, the recent, sudden changes in Moldova and the resulting blocking of Moldovan imports by the Russian Federation have created severe stresses as the new coalition government’s attempts to address corruption and promote democratic reforms while tackling a severe economic crisis. The “oil politics” Russia uses to pressure local economies, which could include a cutting of the flow of oil to Moldova via Ukraine, will cause a severe shortfall in energy supplies to the country. The west can and should support a “reverse flow” program of supplanting or supplementing energy resources through other countries including Romania in order to assist the fledgling yet determined coalition government. The government will find its anti-corruption agenda tested by punitive economic measures enacted by the Russian Federation, which had supported the previous government. A failure by international lenders, democratic European countries and the U.S. to support Moldova in this time of need could leave it in a precarious position to pursue its democratic reform agenda.

The west ought as well to support countries under direct economic threat or influence to engage in economic literacy activities to educate the population and create opportunities for small business and local investment. This can be greatly enhanced by pursuing international exchange opportunities for young entrepreneurs, students, economists and others who will study and work in established democracies. They will then return to their home countries with the knowledge and experience needed to contribute to economic development and create economic opportunities and new initiatives that break the ties of dependency.

Appeal of Values and Traditions

Some of the Višegrad states, namely Hungary and Poland, have increasingly turned away from a principles-based system focused on human rights, individualism, tolerance, inclusivity and multiculturalism. Instead, they are gravitating toward a Russian-inspired model of populism and

“traditional values.” The new model is also frequently characterized by widespread, often systematic corruption and an increasingly authoritarian political culture.³⁰ Hungary has been more inclined to welcome Russia’s role as a political and economic benefactor than Poland, although both states share a historical enmity with Moscow. Hungary’s increasingly hardline position on migrants is both a result of an emboldened authoritarianism and an atmosphere of intolerance propagated through negative media reports, which have at least in part been circulated by Russia to foment societal divisions.³¹ Poland as well has increasingly come to view migration in similar terms. While Poland has resisted Russian overtures in its politics, Hungary, via Prime Minister Orbán, appears to have embraced a very public relationship with Putin, which serves both leaders.

The impact has been pronounced: anti-immigrant and anti-EU Hungary, following a rise of conservative political sentiment, has been inspired by Russia and a vision of “illiberal democracy” under Orbán, whose populist Fidesz-KDNP party was reelected to a dominant position in the Hungarian Parliament in April 2018. In another sign that conservative politics has regained a dominant place in eastern Europe, in Poland, the ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS) has taken political control of public media and reformed the Supreme Court, placing it under strict parliamentary control, a move highly criticized by the Council of Europe’s Venice Commission and the EU.³² While this may not be directly attributable to Russian meddling in a country with historical enmity to Russia, Moscow has effectively used soft power to help encourage conservative values and attitudes in Poland. As such, while direct propaganda promoting a pro-Russia agenda would most certainly be met with hostility, Russian tactics to influence indirectly “manage to effectively penetrate both the far-right and fringe left groups of Polish society.”³³

Further, the effort is at first subtle and may fly under the radar, yet over time effective, as Moscow seeks to nurture discussions through key “influencers...on topics...which at first glance might not seem to have anything to do with Russia, but which in the long-term serve to achieve the strategic goal of strengthening the Russian position in the region and weakening Poland by provoking internal arguments within society and tensions with neighbouring countries.”³⁴ Finally, in a sign that threatening members of the media is an acceptable practice, Czech President Miloš Zeman has jokingly called for the liquidation of journalists, including “inviting them to dinner at the Saudi Embassy.”³⁵ While the inspiration for such attitudes may come from various corners, there is little doubt that the intimidation and suppression of a free media, and controlling the narrative, has been part of Russia’s strategy under President Putin.

Russia also **resists and propagandizes democratic (liberal) values**, organizations, assistance programs and an inclusivity agenda by stoking populist and nationalist tensions under the guise of threats to

³⁰ <http://theconversation.com/europes-illiberal-states-why-hungary-and-poland-are-turning-away-from-constitutional-democracy-89622>

³¹ https://www.politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC_NED_country_study_PL_20170428.pdf

³² <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/02/05/hungary-and-poland-arent-democratic-theyre-authoritarian/>

³³ <http://www.aalep.eu/instruments-russian-influence-poland>

³⁴ https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC_NED_country_study_PL_20170428.pdf

³⁵ <https://rsf.org/en/news/another-bad-joke-about-journalists-czech-president>

“cultural values” and “traditions,” which has emboldened populist actors in many states. In a recent interview with *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, Russia’s Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that to increase its soft power and influence, Russia works “with everyone in the post-Soviet space, we work with all systemic oppositionists.”³⁶ Toward this end, Russia has engaged in a bit of political mimicry, using soft power in a manner not unlike democratic states, but posing as a defender of morality. As such, Russia can present itself as a responsible international partner playing by rules expected of modern, 21st century governments, yet accuse democratic states of violating human rights (ethnic Russian language repression in the Baltics), supporting fascist governments (Ukraine) or backing terrorists (the Syrian anti-Assad coalition), while also declaring itself the defender of traditional European values.³⁷

Russia’s ongoing efforts to undermine political stability in BiH by **supporting populist leaders** demonstrate its dedication to blocking Bosnia’s full integration into European political and security structures. This strategy has proven consistent with Russia’s aims elsewhere in Europe and Eurasia to subvert democratic governments and societies. The Russian government also hopes that by conducting operations to influence public opinion throughout western Europe and the U.S., democratic governments, the EU and NATO will be too distracted with their own issues and problems to pay sufficient attention to matters in the Balkans, eastern Europe, the south Caucasus or Central Asia.

Governments in the “near abroad” countries are feeling extreme pressure as well, including the NATO-member Baltic states and those with whom Russia is engaged in proxy conflicts, namely Ukraine and Georgia. Even those countries more clearly in the Russian orbit such as Armenia and the Kyrgyz Republic have been subject to intense pressure, to the degree that political diversions are heavily discouraged and subject to Russian countermeasures. For example, the dramatic April 2018 “Velvet Revolution” in Armenia overtly received Russian acquiescence, which turned increasingly critical as the former ruling Republican Party and its Moscow-loyal leadership were removed from all power structures except the Parliament, until the early elections on December 9, 2018.

Russia has used cyber warfare and “traditional” modes of propaganda incessantly against Georgia since the 2008 invasion. Georgian Prime Minister Mamuka Bakhtadze calls Russia’s “creeping occupation and borderization in Georgia...relentless and ongoing”,³⁸ with former President Giorgi Margvelashvili deeming it “a direct threat to Georgia’s stability and national security.”³⁹ Social media and Russian television content aimed at Georgian citizens has increasingly employed the “**shared, traditional values**” enshrined by the Orthodox religion to malign so-called “alien (democratic) values,” which promote inclusivity in society, openness and acceptance of socially distinct groups, and decries the influx of foreigners as a threat to the long-standing value system of the Georgian people. These messages at least inspired the establishment of the nationalist party “Alliance of Patriots,” which took six seats in the most

36 Interview with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov

37 <https://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/anton-shekhovtsov/mimetic-power-russia-international-community>

38 <http://agenda.ge/en/news/2019/456>

39 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/07/12/before-trump-meeting-russia-quietly-gobbled-up-a-tiny-chunk-of-georgia/>

recent parliamentary elections and is one of only four parties represented in Parliament. The party leaders often visit Moscow and hold meetings with members of the Russian Duma. Although labeled “pro-Russian” and citing the common cultural values shared by the two countries, the party claims to support Georgia’s pro-European integration agenda, while at the same time advocating closer economic, cultural and political ties to Russia. It also has been proposing bills in Parliament limiting human rights and freedoms and removing anti-discrimination protections for women, gender and religious minorities. The ruling Georgian Dream party, run by billionaire oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, who is known to have strong financial ties to Russia, played a key role in the election of “independent” presidential candidate Salome Zurbishvili in November 2018. Ivanishvili intervened after an inconclusive first round vote to help Zurbishvili win in the subsequent runoff and appears poised to play a key role in Georgian Dream’s changes in the upcoming parliamentary elections in 2020.

When considering countermeasures, it is important to promote an inclusive agenda with respect to citizen’s decision-making and to include the voices of citizens and citizens’ groups in the process. This applies particularly to traditionally marginalized communities, who may lack representation or be underrepresented in government, including women, ethnic minorities and persons with disabilities. A public education campaign of tolerance and promotion of civic and human rights for all would help promote the inclusion agenda that many new democracies have lacked and has been exploited by actors with malevolent intent to foment societal division. Key in such a process would be ensuring that civic education is mandatory for school students, who will learn and understand the importance of equal rights and representation by all groups in building democratic societies. Empowering young people with critical thinking skills will better inoculate them against future attempts at disinformation and coercion and dissuade them from engaging in causes that seek to marginalize other groups or otherwise support exclusionary agendas or populist causes and rhetoric, which undermine the democratic process.

Hard Power Strategies

Russia is aggressively developing its oil and natural gas industries to fund its military expansion and modernization, which now includes sophisticated digital technology. While the Kremlin expands energy relationships and investment with countries as disparate as Venezuela, Vietnam and Cuba, Russia has slowly been rebuilding its military and projecting power outside of its immediate borders, as in Syria. The ease with which it intervened in Georgia and Ukraine stands out to other countries in the region as an example of the perils of internal weakness. Even if international sanctions intensify further, high energy prices will still afford Moscow the means to interfere in other countries’ internal affairs such as through its targeted, complex campaign to influence events in the west. It accomplishes this by “undermining political systems, delegitimizing governments, and destroy(ing) faith in democracy.”⁴⁰

Perhaps to leverage political pressure and underscore Armenia’s dependence on Russian military support – Russia maintains an air base in Yerevan and a motorized infantry division in Gyumri – Russia has **increased arms sales** to Armenia’s rival Azerbaijan in recent months. Although this has embittered

⁴⁰ <https://washingtonmonthly.com/2018/08/26/russias-new-highly-effective-weapons-of-mass-disruption/>

lawmakers from all Armenian political parties, it has served as a sobering reminder of Russia's ability to tip the military balance of the frozen conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh should it so desire. Some analysts in Armenia suggest that Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan is moving closer to Moscow, stating that Yerevan's contacts with Moscow have increased since Pashinyan came to power.⁴¹ Armenia's cooperation with both NATO and the European Union, which had been increasing through 2017, have declined or been cast in doubt, raising questions about the country's foreign policy intentions; Armenia's agreement with the EU, negotiated by former President Serzh Sargsyan, was overturned in favor of the Russia-led Customs Union upon objection from Moscow. At the same time, Armenia's commitment to a Russian-centric political and economic vector appear secure, which Pashinyan was quick to reassert in multiple meetings with Putin since the April change in government and his subsequent parliamentary victory in December 2018.

Although its relative market share is down, Russia is the number two exporter of arms worldwide, recently passing the United Kingdom for that distinction. While its major markets were India, China and Algeria, Russia has increasingly been supplying arms to Iran, Syria and to oil-rich countries in its near abroad such as Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, the latter to the chagrin of Russian protectorate Armenia. Russia has heavily armed separatist movements in Donbas, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and has exerted direct military influence in Transnistria (Moldova), Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, where it maintains military bases.

The situation in Ukraine is extremely volatile, where the country is facing a multifaceted threat from Russia in the form of **military occupation** in Crimea, support for separatists **and hybrid warfare** in Donbas, including supplying arms to separatists, a relentless propaganda campaign through all forms of media and severe economic pressure particularly in the energy sector. The seeding of revolt in Donbas followed a typical Russian model of divide-and-conquer, occupying the Ukrainian government with an intractable conflict, draining its resources and causing political upheaval in Kyiv. While the government has in some respects been able to isolate the Donbas occupation and Crimea annexation, the threat of its spread is ever-present. Russia further destabilized an already unstable political process by painting the Poroshenko regime as fascist and tying Ukraine's allies, particularly the U.S., to a Ukrainian effort to purge the country of shared history and values, including use of the Russian language and a common Orthodox religion. Ties were further frayed when, in December 2018, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church elected a new patriarch and unified the Ukrainian branches that had effectively separated from the Russian Orthodox Church under autonomous leadership. The move, which referred to the political schism between the two countries, effectively ended a centuries-old relationship under a common branch of orthodoxy led by a Moscow patriarch. With the election of a new president and political outsider, Volodymyr Zelensky, in April, the trajectory of this dynamic is unclear.

Russian propaganda further associates democracy in Ukraine and other countries with imposition of alien values and the rise of anti-Russian, pro-democratic elites seeking to impose a stranglehold on Russia through eventual NATO expansion. Like Georgia, Ukraine remains far from NATO membership

⁴¹ www.ru.krymr.com/a/vektor-armenii-rezko-menyaetsya-v-storonu-rossii/29531430.html

and must first find a modicum of political stability to address its significant internal challenges. In addition, energy politics continue to play a key role, with Ukraine heavily in debt to Russian state energy giants as it continues to serve as a key transit country through which supplies of oil and natural gas are sent to equally dependent countries in western Europe.

Addressing hybrid warfare and outright military aggression, most often realized through proxy, “nationalist” conflicts supported by “volunteers” and material by Moscow, is a challenging task. It requires a combination of technical defensive capabilities to safeguard vital infrastructure against online attacks as well as an active diplomatic effort with allies to exert political pressure on aggressors. To this end the west must practice smart diplomacy to address current issues while strengthening and expanding existing alliances to deter future aggression, including international monitoring of established borders, while at the same time offering economic incentives and alternatives to promote a pro-EU and pro-NATO orientation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Responding to the challenge of Russian influence is a formidable task and demands a multivector response to counter pressure points as part of a national security toolkit. Moscow has exploited many loopholes and incongruences, which are often a function of internal domestic competing interests and visions – driving an additional wedge between many already polarized constituencies. Technological advances that have lowered the cost of intervention aimed at disrupting the democratic process should also compel us to reexamine our own assumptions about democracy in an increasingly interconnected world. In this context, the west must pay closer attention to how headline-grabbing cases of Russian-originated political and electoral interference also connect to bigger debates about the sustainability of the democratic, liberal socio-economic model, and the sources of information citizens receive through a multitude of online sources and the need for critical thinking. We must also refocus attention on values, and ultimately our own declining commitment to the principles on which our societies are based. Accordingly, democratic governments must develop a better understanding of the basis and effects of the interference national governments need to counter. Although European and Eurasian countries might have to live with some level of exposure to the threat of external influence, they should be better able to gauge its actual significance. It is consequently also necessary that they invest in research programs that focus on external interference and its interplay with internal factors.

No matter how deep the threat or reality of Russian interference may be in the political, social and economic affairs of states in Europe and Eurasia, in the greater context of the retreat of democracy globally, democracies must endeavor to remain actively engaged in the region. They should support human rights and justice, open and competitive elections, educational opportunities for young people, upward mobility and equality for citizens of all backgrounds, responsible and representative politicians, free media, and transparent, accountable government. These ideals have been operationalized into impactful aid programming over the last 30 years, empowering citizens to transform their lives, communities and countries. While the road to liberal democracy is not straight or smooth and detours

and setbacks are common, the cause of democracy should not be abandoned or neglected, for it ultimately reflects the dedication and commitment to the principles it enshrines. Democratic countries can learn from Russia's subversive efforts in Europe and prepare accordingly for future incursions, which are essentially ongoing at one level or another but draw significant attention surrounding electoral and political processes.

Countering Russian influence on democratic development in Europe and Eurasia will take a commitment of time, input and resources, if not a multinational effort to dissuade, deter and defend against malign interference. Democratic countries will need to individually develop the necessary "toolkits," consisting first and foremost of cyber defenses to identify and address potential threats to their security before they can do serious damage, or to limit the potential damage. Another item in the kit must simply be practicing and strengthening democracy at home via support for an open and free media; decision-making opportunities inclusive of all citizens through expression of political opinion and civic participation; civic education and development of a democratic political and electoral culture; promotion of citizens' rights; anti-corruption efforts; promotion of rule of law and an independent judiciary; and strengthening of democratic institutions. It is important as well to strengthen economic relations oriented to the EU and free trade; nurture military and defense partnerships such as NATO that will promote collective security; and fortify political alliances based on shared, common goals of democracy, human rights, open media and accountability in government.

International organizations will have a role to play in continuing to strengthen democracy, defense, and economic and trade opportunities. Institutions such as the United Nations, the OSCE and democracy-implementing organizations, including the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) with its partners the National Democratic Institute and International Republican Institute, have a key role to play in supporting transparent, competitive and representative elections, nonpartisan political party strengthening and development of professional parliaments. For its part, IFES support for building and sustaining vibrant democracies contributes to inclusive political processes through enfranchisement of traditionally marginalized groups in society who have been underrepresented in government, including persons with disabilities, women, and ethnic and religious minorities. A greater focus on youth education, civic engagement and citizen responsibility helps to empower young voters and future generations of decision-makers and leaders. On the elections and political processes side, IFES' work on cybersecurity in elections, political finance reform, election dispute resolution, and professional development of election management bodies (EMBs) at all levels contributes to professional election processes, strengthening public confidence in the process and acceptance of results.

In the delicate and vulnerable area of cybersecurity, the already-formidable tactics used by Russian attackers continue to expand through the presumed unlimited resources of their government sponsors.⁴² The Russians are playing a long game, with continued attacks working to erode public confidence in popularly elected democratic governments leading to the rise of more conservative, Russian-friendly regimes. Each success emboldens the Kremlin, demanding a coordinated effort to repel and resist. Emerging democracies in Europe and Eurasia can learn from the efforts of the U.S. and

⁴² As reflected in the denomination of two Advance Persistent Threats 28 and 29 to Russian sources

European community to develop cyber defenses and countermeasures that will push back on Russia-initiated attacks and will need assistance in fending off such challenges.

Developing cyber warfighting and defense capacity alone will not be sufficient to limit the influence of the interference. Civic education must be paramount in any national strategy to counteract propaganda and false narratives perpetrated across social or traditional media. Teaching citizens, especially youth and young adults, to discern between genuine and misleading information is critical, along with maintaining an open press. These are difficult tasks to balance, but there needs to be a partnership between government institutions, civil society, media and educators to preserve and promote truth, encourage open discussion, and solicit buy-in and inclusivity from groups in society.

Perhaps such aspirations seem unattainable given the current pace of near-daily cyberattacks, separatist conflicts, military occupation, political and cultural influencing, and the economic realities of regional relations. To discourage further backsliding and buttress progress, there must be a recommitment to principles that underpin democratic values and institutions, together with the political support and resources that this entails. This must also include reminders and follow-up to key international obligations undertaken by Russia in the '90s. Dialogue must also be key in problem-solving locally. However, dialogue and compromise do not mean sacrificing the ideals of human rights, freedom of speech or freedom of expression, which Russia and its European and Eurasian neighbors have uniformly pledged to uphold. These principles need to be re-espoused and reinvigorated to give democracy the chance to take root and impact people's lives in this region.

For those in the international community engaged in supporting democracy and governance assistance activities, maintaining a consistent approach and message to local partners will be key: that democracy is under threat and its defining institutions need to be reinforced to safeguard the hard-won gains of 30 years ago. Russian attempts to influence the political course of neighboring countries is not likely to abate in the coming years, but rather intensify. There are several recommended actions⁴³ for governments and the international community to pursue to help safeguard against Russian influence in the political and social realms and support continued democratic development in European and Eurasian countries.

As suggested above, countries and international organizations supporting the development and sustainability of democracy, defense, and economic policies that embrace liberal, participatory and citizen-accountable approaches in eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics should pursue a multilateral, multipronged strategy. The strategy should be part of an international toolkit to ward off malign influences that threaten the independence of these countries and, in turn, increases their reliance on a restrictive model of government that threatens human rights and stifles personal freedoms. These recommendations include, but are not limited to:

- Classifying election systems as part of critical infrastructure and acting to protect them at the national and subnational levels by training EMBs and national security officials

⁴³ <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/05/23/russian-election-interference-europe-s-counter-to-fake-news-and-cyber-attacks-pub-76435>

- Addressing disinformation in the electoral sector by connecting EMBs directly with technology firms, conducting fact-checking, implementing voter education, engaging in strategic and crisis planning, and instituting cross-agency planning between the central electoral body and other state bodies⁴⁴
- Confronting disinformation generally through short-, medium- and long-term means
 - In the short term, governments can support civil society in conducting fact-checking and myth-busting, media monitoring and analysis, and ground-zero source attribution of fake news.
 - In the medium term, governments can focus on risk identification and mitigation, working with EMBs to find new ways to work with media, strengthen legislation against disinformation, and improve the tools to detect and report such cases.
 - In the long term, it is critical to promote education and raise awareness among the population through increasing support for good-quality journalism; building resilience against disinformation and improving digital literacy through civic education and training journalists; and supporting civil society to assist with voter education in combating disinformation.⁴⁵
- Delivering public statements on a regular basis to expose and deter threats and educate voters about disinformation campaigns and methods
- Promoting independent citizen fact-checking and investigative journalistic initiatives
- Training countries and their citizens to defend themselves against malfeasance by promoting media literacy and developing proper cyber hygiene
- Encouraging governments to work with media regularly and develop protective measures to address and forestall threats, especially via social media
- Supporting international cooperation, particularly the sharing of lessons learned and good practices in safeguarding against disinformation efforts and cyberattacks
- Continuing to support developed and developing or emerging democracies in creating more robust civic institutions resistant to malevolent, outside manipulation
- Promoting civic education courses for all education levels to teach young citizens about their rights and responsibilities in a democracy, including key elements of digital literacy and critical thinking
- Strengthening rights awareness among citizens in partnership with human rights advocates, including appropriate government offices, to raise awareness among the public of their responsibilities and threats to democracy, including disinformation, intimidation, abuse of state resources and other tools of malfeasance perpetrated by both external and internal actors

IFES is working to assist countries in eastern Europe and Eurasia to build effective leadership and transparent electoral processes fully accountable to voters. Through its “Regional Elections

⁴⁴ https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/ifes_working_paper_social_media_disinformation_and_electoral_integrity_august_2019_0.pdf

⁴⁵ https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/ifes_working_paper_social_media_disinformation_and_electoral_integrity_august_2019_0.pdf

Administration and Political Processes Strengthening Program” project, IFES is targeting several key sectors related to elections and political participation, civic engagement and rights awareness, all related to building and sustaining a democratic, inclusive form of government that will be better able to resist malign foreign influences. IFES’ efforts, working with local and international partners, contribute to developing and strengthening democratic leadership skills among politically active young people from political parties and civil society; increasing government oversight, political participation and institutional and public resilience to anti-democratic foreign influences; and strengthening election administrations’ leadership and effectiveness. The goal of this regional program is to promote cross-border learning and networking on a wide range of existing initiatives and to develop new capacity in political participation, government transparency and election administration.

Political interference, disinformation and cyber intrusion are intended to undermine public confidence in government, sow uncertainty and chaos, and promote an exclusive social and political environment. To address these challenges, IFES is working with election officials, political parties, national parliaments, civil society organizations, judges, other national and local authorities, young persons and students to develop the skills necessary to advance and sustain democratic processes, with active populations aware of their rights as equal decision-makers in society. In addressing this broad and ambitious agenda, IFES is: working to strengthen the leadership, integrity and institutional independence of EMBs at all levels; building EMBs’ capacity to deliver elections with integrity despite increasing cybersecurity risks through cybersecurity and cyber-hygiene training; educating citizens to be more aware of credible information and disinformation in elections through training in detecting and resisting disinformation and foreign influence campaigns and working with local media bodies; building civil society’s capacity to detect and advocate around political party finance irregularities, including foreign funding, through legal framework reform and political finance oversight activities; and supporting electoral justice systems to promote effective and fair investigation and arbitration of electoral processes.

Such initiatives will assist countries in the region to be able to more effectively mitigate new and emerging threats to deliver genuine, democratic and credible elections; build an active and rights-informed electorate able to discern and filter out disinformation; and support inclusion and equality of political and electoral actors in the often messy and chaotic process of democracy. This process, nevertheless, upholds a system of accountability to all citizens and maintains at its core the importance of personal freedoms and human rights for all citizens.



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