

BSAMUN 2025

**Confronting foreign
interference in national
elections**

Security Council

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INTRODUCTION

The security council is responsible for maintaining international peace and security. This year, delegates will debate two different topics, “Addressing the rising threat of violent non-state actors” and “Confronting foreign interference in national elections”. This research report will focus on the second topic, “Confronting foreign interference in national elections”.

Foreign electoral interventions (FEI) are attempts made by a government or non-state actors to influence the electoral process of another country. Unlike other forms of foreign intervention, like military coups or backing, FEI aims to achieve a certain political outcome in the affected country by influencing how its public vote rather than by directly imposing direct regime changes. Confronting foreign interference in national elections is absolutely crucial in safeguarding the democratic integrity of any nation. Elections serve as the backbone of a just and functional society, reflecting the will of the people and ensuring that they are heard and represented. When foreign influencers prevent elections from progressing in a fair manner, it creates a ripple effect, enabling corruption, disenfranchisement, erosion of sovereignty, and instability. Such foreign influence violates the affected country’s sovereignty — the right to rule — enshrined in the UN charter. This jeopardises international cooperation and security. As representatives of delegations in the BSAMUN’s security council, delegates will hold the responsibility to debate a resolution aimed at addressing the issue and for maintaining international peace and security. It is imperative that all delegates meticulously study and act in accordance with their respective states’ official standpoint.

KEY TERMS

Foreign electoral interference

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Sovereignty

The sovereignty of a state refers to the supreme and independent authority it has to govern, as enshrined in the UN charter. It includes the right to establish laws, etc. Foreign interference in elections violates a state's sovereignty and erodes international peace and security.

Self Determination

Self Determination in governance refers to the right of the people to freely determine their own political status and governance system without external influence.

Disinformation

Disinformation refers to the deliberate spread of false or misleading information with the intent of deception. In the context of foreign interference in national elections, disinformation is used to confuse, and gaslight voters to vote in favour of a certain candidate or party. Ways in which this is achieved are described in more detail further along the research report.

Influence operations

Influence operations are coordinated efforts to shape or sway opinions, perceptions, and behaviour of a certain target audience in order to achieve an objective. A popular and effective strategy of electoral interference.

Cyberattacks

Cyberattacks are malicious attempts to damage, disrupt, or gain unauthorized access to computer systems, networks, or devices which could be related to the electoral process. Again, a common strategy in foreign electoral interference.

GENERAL OVERVIEW

The methods of foreign electoral interference have evolved significantly, particularly with the advent of digital technologies and social media platforms. These methods can be broadly categorized into 3 main types:

1. Disinformation and information manipulation.

This includes disinformation campaigns through the strategic use of social media in order to spread false narratives or discredit political candidates. Actors may impersonate legitimate media outlets and news sources to spread propaganda and fictitious content. Actors may clone voices and create deepfakes of public figures. Nation-state actors pay online influencers, PR firms, or journalists to launder their messages for them. Foreign nation-state actors use social media platforms to spread selective narratives to specific audiences. Further examples of these scenarios can be found in the bibliography below. 2. Cyber disruption

This method involves hacking unauthorized electoral infrastructure, stealing and leaking sensitive information, or launching cyber-attacks to disrupt the electoral process.

Examples of this can be found in the bibliography below.

3. Political Grooming

This method involves cultivating relationships with political figures and/or parties to influence policy decisions. It may include financial support, etc. Accepting financial support from countries can lead to an erosion of a country's ability to set its own policies, create a dependency on foreign donors, fuel corruption, and potentially lead to compromised decision-making.

The motivations behind foreign electoral interference can vary. Some actors seek to promote candidates or parties aligned with their interests, while others aim to undermine the democratic process itself or sow chaos and division within rival nations.

Additionally, the rise of digital technologies has significantly amplified the reach and impact of foreign interference efforts. Social media platforms, in particular, have become powerful tools for spreading disinformation and manipulating public opinion at scale. The speed and virality of online content make it challenging for authorities and fact-checkers to respond effectively to false or misleading information. Countering foreign electoral interference online presents significant challenges. The borderless nature of the internet makes it difficult to attribute and prosecute interference activities. Additionally, the line between legitimate international political discourse and illegitimate interference can be blurry, raising complex questions about freedom of

speech and national sovereignty.

MAJOR PARTIES/COUNTRIES INVOLVED

United States of America

While the United States of America has been subject to countless foreign influences in their electoral processes, the U.S. has also been accused numerous times of being involved in electoral processes of other nations. Over the years, they have been involved in Italy, Japan, Brazil, Chile, Iran, etc.

The people's republic of China

The people's republic of China has become increasingly more active in foreign interference efforts. Some have been partisan, aimed at supporting pro-China candidates, while others have had more hostile intent, aimed at discrediting and sabotaging the target country's democratic process. China allegedly influenced countries such as Taiwan, Canada, Australia, United States, among others through numerous cyberattacks.

The Russian Federation

The Russian Federation has been under fire for influencing elections across the world since the very beginning of it. While Russia might be most commonly known for interfering in the United States, its influence has been found in 27 countries since 2004. This has gone beyond some of the more prominent examples, such as France and the US, to include countries in Africa such as Madagascar. Countries have blamed Russia for financing online advertisements, funnelling money to campaigns, hacking databases, and spreading doubt over election results. However, Russia generally continues to deny these allegations.

The Islamic Republic of Iran

Iran is highly relevant in the issue, known for their countless influence operations in the United States of America. Reports have shown that Iran has made efforts targeted at both U.S. candidates running for president, suggesting a goal of sowing chaos rather than partisan.

The European Union

The European Union has been one of the first to recognise the threats of foreign interference in electoral processes. They are therefore highly relevant, considering their preparedness and plans for resilience and prevention.

TIMELINE OF KEY EVENTS

2016

United States intelligence agencies concluded that the Russian Federation engaged in efforts to influence the 2016 elections through means such as disinformation campaigns cybersecurity attacks. The interference sparked major investigations, including the Mueller Report, which examined the extent of Russian activities.

November 2023

The European Union recognises the threats of foreign interference on electoral processes, specifically important elections in 2024. In a study published in November 2023, the EU stated that “it is unrealistic to expect the upcoming 2024 European elections to be immune” without any further safeguards.

December 2024

A second round of presidential elections were set to take place on December 8th, 2024 after no candidate achieved in absolute majority in the first round. However, on the 6th of December 2024 the constitutional court cancelled the elections, claiming that a Russia influence operation would impact the vote. After Călin Georgescu — a far right Romanian politician with aligning ideologies as Russia — was shown to have abruptly received tremendous support on social media platforms (tiktok) and polls after being predicted to be a minor candidate. "If Moscow can do this in Romania, which is profoundly anti-Russian, it means they can do it anywhere," Mircea Geoana warns. Russia denies any interference in the election.

December 2024

The United States has announced a new round of sanctions targeting Russia and Iran, citing alleged efforts to interfere in its 2024 elections. “The Governments of Iran and Russia have

targeted our election processes and institutions and sought to divide the American people through targeted disinformation campaigns,” Bradley Smith, the Treasury’s acting undersecretary for terrorism and financial intelligence, said in the statement.

UN INVOLVEMENT & RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS

UN electoral assistance since 1991: Since 1991, the UN has provided electoral assistance to over 115 countries. The organisation has helped organize and conduct elections in countries such as Angola, Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, Haiti, Kosovo, Liberia, Mozambique, Namibia, Sierra Leone, and Timor-Leste, as well as Afghanistan and Iraq.

Resolution ‘68/164’ adopted by the General Assembly on 18 December 2013: The General Assembly reaffirmed the obligation that every citizen has the right and opportunity to participate in elections in a fair manner.

Resolution ‘48/124’; Respect for the principles of national sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of States in their electoral processes: The General Assembly reaffirms the principles of equal rights, national sovereignty, self-determination, and non-interference in national affairs by addressing key points such as:

1. All people have the right to freely determine their own political status without external interference, as enshrined in the UN charter
2. Any external actions aimed at influencing national electoral processes violate international law principles
3. Acts of armed aggressions towards legitimate governments and/or elected leaders are condemned

Art. 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and Art. 1 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR): Many argue that the right to self-determination as enshrined in the above resolutions is violated when electors are unable to form opinions independently. Therefore, it prohibits even subtle means of foreign election interference, such as disinformation campaigns by foreign States.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO RESOLVE THE ISSUE

European Union Initiatives, March 2024: The European Union identified and recognised foreign electoral interference as a fast-expanding threat to international security and stability because of the low-cost and high-result nature of the interferences. On March 2024, the European Union outlined a plan of action for the EU's security and defense until 2030.

The East StratCom Task Force: The East StratCom Task Force (ESTF) was a task force launched in 2015 by the European Parliament to combat foreign disinformation, specifically from Russia. The ESTF was established in September 2015 as part of the EEAS with the goal of exposing attacks on the EU, its Member States, and its Eastern Neighbourhood, by spreading awareness of pro-Kremlin disinformation, information manipulation, and interference. In its EUvsDisinfo database, the Task Force has compiled, examined, and disproved more than 16 500 instances of disinformation to date.

United Kingdom's Defending Democracy Task Force: In 2022, the United Kingdom launched a Defending Democracy Task force with the stated aim of 'protecting the democratic integrity of the UK', to ensure that electoral processes are secure and resilient, and counter disinformation efforts.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Define what is considered as an influence: It is crucial that a consensus is achieved regarding what is considered as an influence in elections. While some argue it hinders self-determination and sovereignty, others argue that it is simply the freedom of speech.

Enhancing cybersecurity: It goes without saying that enhancing cybersecurity is of immense importance, seeing as it is one of the most common way of foreign interference. Not only should it aim to prevent foreign actors to hack into electoral systems, but also to detect when and which foreign actor attempted to influence the electoral process, in order to rightfully identify culprits.

Impose penalties: Imposing penalties on foreign actors attempting to influence electoral

processes, through sanctions or monetary payments, etc.

Education and awareness: One of the main factors contributes to foreign influence being such an immense threat, is online gullibility. It would be a creative solution to the problem by diffusing the threat to foreign influence operations have instead of attempting to prevent them completely - which is extremely difficult. Examples include developing comprehensive educational initiatives to inform citizens and students about foreign interference strategies, how to identify them, and that not everything you see online is true.

Social Media fact checking initiatives: Social media has been of the most common and most simple method of influencing national elections, simply because of its low-cost and high-effectiveness nature. Countries could implement fact checking initiatives which would detect false information and block/sensor it accordingly so that it does not have a chance to influence the public.

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