



SPECPOL

The Questions of foreign interference in national elections



Committee: **SPECPOL**

Topic: **The Question of foreign interference in national elections**

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Summary

Foreign interference in national elections encompasses a range of actions undertaken by external factors (foreign bodies such as governments, political organisations, or non-state actors) aiming to influence the political outcomes of a sovereign nation's electoral processes. The actions they employ include: cyberattacks on electoral infrastructure, the dissemination of disinformation or propaganda through media and social platforms, covert financial support for political candidates or parties (e.g. funding political campaigns), and other forms of manipulation intended to convert voter behaviour or undermine public trust in the electoral system to achieve their overall aim of a desired result through shaping the political landscape in favour of particular interests or weaken a country's democratic processes. Such interference poses significant challenges to democratic integrity, raising concerns about national sovereignty, the legitimacy of electoral results, and the protection of democratic institutions from external subversion. This means that this happens in many countries that have high-stake elections, like the U.S, China, Russia, India, Brazil and Turkey, because the outcome of their election holds significant impact on: national or international dynamics, security, and economic stability which have potential global consequences - which is also the reason why they usually attract substantial attention.

Consequently, nations often implement legal, technological, and diplomatic measures to safeguard their elections from foreign influence and to preserve the sanctity of the democratic process. Measures that have taken place so far have had varying degrees of successes and will continue to evolve over time, particularly as the scope and methods of interference have expanded-especially through digital means, so governments and international bodies continue to adapt and strengthen their strategies to protect democratic processes. Previous attempts include:

- **Legislation and Regulations:** Introducing or strengthening laws to curb foreign influence such as the U.S passing of the Foreign Affairs Agents Restriction Act (FARA), requiring individuals or organisations acting on behalf of foreign governments or entities to disclose their activities. An example of an internationally recognised measure is campaign finance regulations, which limits foreign donations or political spending.
- **Cybersecurity measures:** Protocols which have recently become stricter due to the rise of cyberattacks to protect electoral infrastructure including: securing voting systems, protecting data from hacking, and ensuring that election-related communications are not tampered with.
- **Monitoring and Oversight:** Election monitoring groups and government agencies closely observe elections to detect any foreign interference, ensuring electoral transparency. The OSCE is an international organisation in Europe which sends election observers to monitor fairness.
- **Public awareness campaigns:** Initiatives (launched by governments and civil society organisations to educate the public about the dangers of disinformation and foreign propaganda) promoting media literacy to help citizens critically assess the information they encounter, especially on social media.
- **Diplomatic measures:** Channels addressing foreign interference such as issuing sanctions or publicly condemn foreign governments/ organisations found to be involved in meddling. International agreements may also be pursued to set norms/expectations for electoral integrity.
- **Technology and social media regulation:** Governments have also worked with platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter (AKA X), and Google to ensure that they are not used to spread disinformation.

- **Intelligence and National Security Initiatives:** Intelligence agencies, such as the U.S.'s C.I.A and UK's MI5, track and assess potential threats and work with election officials, tech companies, and other nations to prevent, detect and counteract interference.

Definition of Key Terms

Non-state actor: Any individual, organisation or group that operates outside the framework of a sovereign state but still exerts influence on political, economic, or social issues such as multinational corporations, NGOs, or terrorist groups.

Dissemination: The action or fact of spreading something, especially information, widely.

Democracy: System of government in which power is vested in the people, who exercise it directly or through elected representatives, ensuring participation, equality, and the protection of individual rights.

National People's Congress (NPC): The highest legislative body in the People's Republic of China, responsible for making laws, approving policies, and electing key government officials, including the President and the Premier.

Geopolitical: Relating to politics, especially international relations, as influenced by geographical factors.

Major Countries / Organisations Involved

- **United States:** Presidential elections in this country are high-stakes due to their global influence in politics, economics and security
- **India:** As the world's largest democracy its elections, especially its parliamentary election, hold global significance
- **China:** While China's political system is not a democracy, leadership changes and major political decisions, such as the National's People Congress can have global implications
- **Russia:** Russian elections, particularly presidential ones, are significant due to the country's role in international geopolitics
- **EU member states:** Especially Germany and France have high stakes, not only for the countries themselves, but for broader European and global stability
- **Brazil:** As the largest economy in South America, their elections can impact the whole region's political and economic environment
- **Turkey:** Due to its geopolitical position it holds a more strategic importance its elections are closely watched, especially with the ongoing tensions in the Middle East
- **MI5** (Based in the U.K)
- **CIA** (Based in the U.S)
- **OSCE** (International organisation in Europe)

Timeline of events

Foreign interference has existed for centuries in various forms, methods, and levels of visibility. Historically, they date back to ancient empires where rulers might influence the influence elections, succession and leadership transitions through alliances, manipulation and coercion.

In the modern era, particularly due to the advent of mass media, foreign interference took a more structured form. During the cold war, both the U.S and the Soviet Union (Russia) were both heavily involved in supporting or undermining political movements and elections in various countries, particularly through propaganda, covert funding, and supporting sympathetic candidates. The goal was to align these countries politically with either Western or Soviet ideologies.

In more recent decades, with the rise of digital technology and social media, foreign interference has evolved further. Foreign powers can now use cyber tactics, spread disinformation, and manipulate social media platforms to influence voter behaviour- a significant example of this being Russian interference in the 2016 U.S presidential election. As global connectivity has increased, so too has the capacity for foreign actors to influence elections abroad, often targeting countries with significant geopolitical states. Thus, while foreign interference has historical roots, its modern forms are shaped by technological advancements, international politics, and the increased strategic importance of influencing other nations' domestic politics.