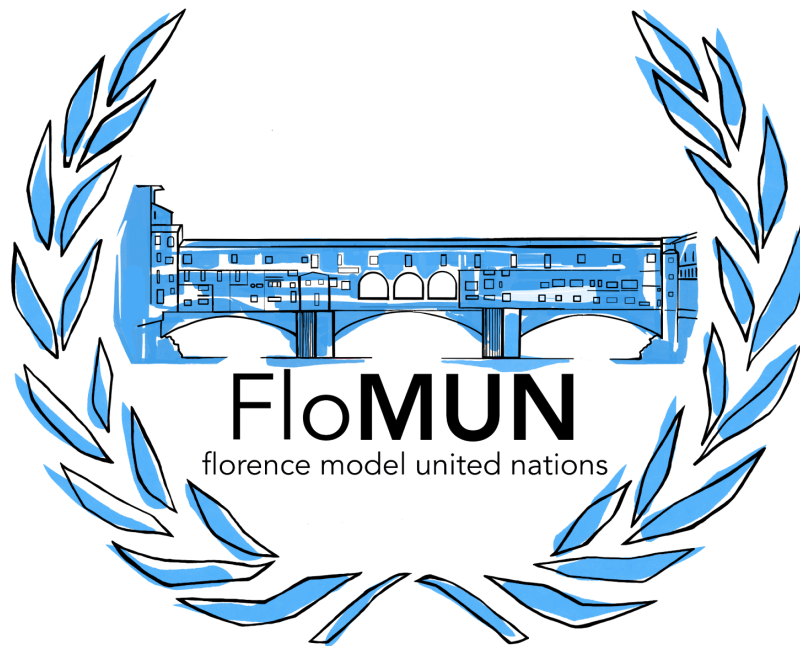




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SPECPOL

**Topic 1: Prevention of international interference and
disruption in democratic elections**

Chairs: Michelle Lu and Brendy Deng



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I. Committee Overview:

The Special Political and Decolonization committee (SPECPOL) is one of the six main committees of the United Nations general assembly. It is in charge of handling a range of political, security, and humanitarian issues, such as peacekeeping, decolonization, outer space and democratic disruptions. Because of this, it plays a highly critical role in global governance by addressing threats to international peace and political stability.

II. Background:

In today's world, democracies are under threat of international conflicts and growing technological disruption as international interference has continued to undermine democratic elections. Elections foster social cohesion, ensure accountable governance and empower individuals to shape their societies and voice their concerns. In an era of rapid globalization, conducting free and fair elections is crucial for maintaining democratic legitimacy. In the words of Michael McGrath, "Foreign interference in the context of elections and democratic debate happens when a foreign state or foreign actor undertakes or triggers a covert operation, directly or through proxies, which aims to harm the integrity of the democratic debate, institutions or processes." Foreign powers use disinformation and cyberattacks to try and shape another nation's public opinion. By doing this, they are making the elections unjust by purposely harming the electoral chances of another party or candidate.

While foreign interference is not new, the developing digital age has drastically increased its impact. Recently, in 2016, the Russian government has been accused of interfering with the United States presidential election. Through intense investigations, conclusions were drawn that the Russian government had waged a well-documented, sustained campaign to weaken the United States, using multiple tools and tactics, damaging American democracy and dividing American citizens, a campaign that still continues today.

Subsequently, the US intelligence community publishes a declassified joint report (ICA) declaring that Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign aimed at the 2016 US presidential election. This included strategies by the Russian government and its



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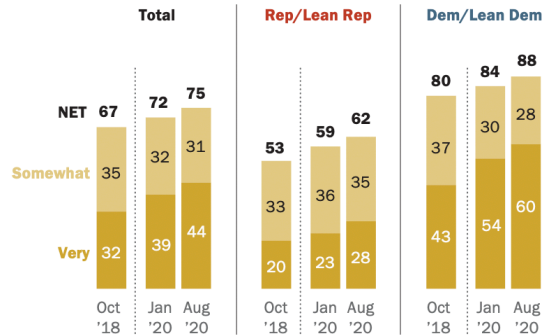
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proxies to further polarize public and political discourse while undermining the integrity of the electoral process. Russia's goal was to exacerbate the divisions already present in the country to destabilize its democracy. Russian social media campaigns included Russian intelligence officers who masquerade as Americans online, tricking the Americans into unknowingly participating in these protests. Russian government activity such as disinformation campaigns continued long after election day. Authoritarian interference does not begin and end with any particular election, it is an ongoing challenge. Furthermore, hacking was also involved. Operatives from Russia's military intelligence agency hacked into systems of the Democratic National Committee, stole emails and released them publicly through three different channels. These hackers targeted the election infrastructure of 21 US states and successfully penetrated a small number of them. However, Russian's tactics went beyond just cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns. Russian politician Maria Butina operated as a foreign agent in the US to establish a "back channel" with Russia. She was then arrested in 2018. An October 2018 Department of Justice indictment even stated that from December 2014 to around May 2018, Russian military intelligence officers "conducted persistent and sophisticated computer intrusions affecting U.S. persons, corporate entities, international organizations, and their respective employees located around the world, based on their strategic interest to the Russian government."

Ever since, the US has feared another foreign interference in regards to their upcoming presidential elections. According to a Pew Research Center survey conducted July 27-Aug. 2. 2020, 75% of US adults believe it is very or somewhat likely that Russia or other foreign governments will attempt to influence the presidential election again.

Growing shares in both parties expect foreign governments to attempt to influence 2020 election

% who say it is ___ likely that Russia or other foreign governments will attempt to influence the U.S. presidential election this November



Note: In October 2018, question asked about the "U.S. elections in November."
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 27-Aug. 2, 2020.

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Additionally, Romania even annulled their presidential elections for the first time in the European Union's history, due to alleged interference in the political debate and election campaigning.

III. Current situation:

The United Nations increasingly recognizes the threats posed by electoral interference. In a well functioning democracy, citizens can freely express their views, make critical choices and engage in open debate without malign interference. This is an important issue because it has far reaching consequences for human rights and democratic values; it weakens democratic legitimacy, increases political polarization, undermines public trust and escalates long term international tensions.

As of today, the European Union has taken measures to counter this threat. In December 2023, a Eurobarometer survey on citizenship and democracy was taken. 81% of EU citizens believe that foreign interference in democratic systems is a serious problem that must be addressed and 78% are concerned that they might influence people's voting decisions. The EU has several tools and mechanisms at its disposal such as foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) toolbox, hybrid rapid response teams, European cooperation network on

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elections, rapid alert systems and the European digital media observatory. In addition, the EU also has various laws in place to help counter foreign information manipulation and strengthen cybersecurity by regulating the use of new technologies in communication. These include: the digital services act, the artificial intelligence act, the critical entities resilience directive, the network and information security directive (NIS2 directive), the regulation on the transparency and targeting of political advertising and the European media freedom act. These measures are outlined in the Council conclusions from May 2024 on safeguarding electoral processes from foreign interference and the Presidency conclusions from May 2025 on strengthening democratic resilience. Furthermore, the EU's diplomatic service, the European External Action Service (EEAS) is also involved in the fight against foreign interference both within and beyond the EU.

IV. Key terms and Definitions:

- **Democracy:** A system of government by the whole population in which citizens select their representatives through fair elections.
- **International interference:** States or organizations deliberately interfering with the domestic affairs of another state to influence its government, policy or structure, often in their own interest.
- **Disruption:** A radical change in the way a system or process normally functions. In this case, it refers to actions taken to destabilize and interfere with the normal functioning of an election.
- **Cyberattacks:** Deliberate and malicious attempts to attack computer systems, networks or other online platforms in order to steal information and cause damage.
- **Disinformation:** The intentional spread of false or misleading information to influence public opinion.
- **Campaign:** An organised and planned series of actions carried out to achieve a particular goal, such as the public support for a specific candidate or party.

V. Relevant UN bodies:

- **UN Security Council:** The Security Council becomes relevant when international interference and disruption in elections lead to political instability, conflicts or threats to international peace and security, especially in fragile or post-conflict states.
- **UN Development Programme:** The UNDP aims at promoting the rule of law and supports countries in developing transparent, resilient and accountable electoral systems.

VI. Possible solutions:

- Strengthening international legal norms
 - Creating clearer global standards defining election interference as a violation of sovereignty
 - Holding responsible actors accountable through diplomatic, legal and economic consequences
- Improving national election infrastructure
 - Investing in secure digital systems, cybersecurity protections, transparent voting procedures
 - Technical assistance, funding mechanisms especially for LEDCs.

VII. Major Actors and their Relevance

- **United States of America:** The USA, as a global power, should expect foreign efforts to influence its politics and policies. In 2019, house democrats introduced the “Stopping Harmful Interference in Elections for a Lasting Democracy Act (SHIELD)” to combat foreign interference following the 2016 incident.
- **Russian Federation:** Russia successfully attacked the 2016 US presidential election and is frequently accused in international discourse.
- **People’s Republic of China:** China maintains a policy of non-interference in another nation’s internal affairs. However, they have previously engaged in propaganda and disinformation campaigns, although they claim the opposite.



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- **European Union:** The EU has expressed its views in regards to these global threats. As a result, the European commission has presented the “European Democracy shield” aimed at reinforcing the work under the European Cooperation Network on Elections to strengthen fair and free elections.

VIII. Guiding questions:

1. How can the international community define and legally classify election interference?
2. How can states protect elections without violating freedom of expression and privacy?
3. What role should technology companies play in preventing interference?
4. How can developing countries strengthen election security infrastructure?
5. How can the UN promote digital literacy and public resilience to disinformation?
6. Should countries be punished for international interference, if yes, how?

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