



International Monterrey Model United Nations Simulation

American School Foundation of Monterrey



European Council

Topic: Debating Russian meddling in European elections and establishing a proper course of action.

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I. Committee Background

The European Council traces its roots back to early 1961 as informal summits hosted by the leaders of influential European nations. This arrangement continued until the summits were established in 1975 and formalized in 2009 with the signing of the Treaty of Lisbon. The European Council is composed by the heads of government of all EU member states along with the President of the Council, and the President of the EU Commission. Usually, meetings are held in the Justus Lipsius Building in Brussels, Belgium and take place at least twice every six months. In these meetings, decisions are taken by consensus. According to the Treaty of Lisbon, the president of the Council is elected for a two and a half year term with the option of being re-elected for a second term. After every Council meeting, the president must brief the European Parliament. The current president, as of December 2019, is Charles Michel.

Even though the European Council possesses no formal powers, the influence of the heads of state is sufficient for its effective functioning. Its main purpose is to provide impetus for development and settle issues outstanding from discussions at the lower level in EU foreign policy, which includes the ratification of important documents and negotiations of treaty amendments. In addition to this, the Council exercises the power to appoint the President of the European Central Bank, currently Christine Lagarde, and the High Representative of the Union of Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell. Because of its influence and power, the European Council is regarded by many, as the Union's dominant political authority.

II. Introduction

Description and Definition of the Topic

According to the University of Pennsylvania, foreign electoral interventions, also known as electoral meddling, is defined as the “attempts by governments,” secretly or openly, to “influence elections in another country” (Shulman, n.d). There exists a variety of ways in which nations have accomplished “regime changes abroad,” “electoral intervention” being one of those methods. Nonetheless, throughout the past year, the world has become more aware of Russia's tactics and there is strong evidence suggesting that the country continues to interfere in elections all over Europe. The reasons why each interfering country meddles in another country's elections are unique to each situation. For example, some may be related to forming an alliance with the leader of their choice, and others may aim to weaken the affected country's government. Regardless, foreign electoral interference is a very dangerous thing because of the

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influence on politics it has around the world. “[People] are more likely to condemn foreign involvement, lose faith in democracy, and seek retaliation when a foreign power sides with the opposition,” (Tomz and Weeks, 2020). This means that when an interfering country aids another, people want to fight back, and immediately lose faith in the system. This makes the winner of the elections suffer, as their success in the elections is not viewed as legitimate by the country’s citizens.

The Problem

According to the Washington Post, Russia conducted both continued and sustained disinformation campaigns against Europe’s recent parliamentary elections. A European Union report found that Russia was seeking to influence voter behavior with the intent to suppress a certain turnout. What many find interesting, is that this is not the first time that Russia has been accused of meddling in other countries’ elections, for instance, in the United States presidential election of 2016, Russia was once again suspected to have meddled with the electoral process, seeking to damage Democrat Hillary Clinton and help elect her rival, Republican Doland Trump.

In a report which was published on June 14 of 2019, the EU said that Russian interference in parliamentary campaigns “cover a broad range of topics, ranging from challenging the Union’s democratic legitimacy to exploiting divisive public debates on issues such as migration and sovereignty” (Birnbaum and Timberg, 2019). The EU also argued that there were consistent trends of malicious actors using misinformation to promote extreme views to polarize local debates, including unfounded attacks on the EU. The same report also stated that major U.S. technological companies, such as Google, Twitter, and Facebook, had taken steps to combat Russian disinformation. However, the EU still believes that “more needs to be done, including greater transparency for ad hosts and more cooperation from fact checkers” (Finas, 2019). The Union planned to study the effectiveness and efficiency of the existing Code of Practice to propose further efforts and regulations since the “current rules weren’t deemed adequate” (Fingas, 2019). Currently, the Code of Practice offers guidance to social media platforms on “appropriate actions they should take to prevent bullying, insulting, intimidating and humiliating behaviours on their sites”, amongst other things (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 2019).

So far, Julian King, the EU Security Union Commissioner is seeing a trend where “rather than trying to do big scale hacking leaks, [Russia customizes] a carefully targeted approach that uses fake accounts and bots to accelerate and amplify divisive content that is already put there” (King, 2019). King also stated that an EU group charged with “tracking foreign disinformation found double the number of misleading items originating from Russia in the months leading up to the election.” Both King and other top EU officials have mentioned they would not “rule out additional regulation of social networks and platforms such as YouTube, which is owned by Google, to try to combat disinformation” (Birnbaum and Timberg, 2019).

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The co-author of the Oxford-EU report stated that “[he worries] about a vicious cycle in that voters who don’t have high-quality news elect poor-quality politicians,” who in turn may spread misleading information (Howard, 2019).

III. History of the Topic

Chronological History of the Topic

It is not the first time that the Russian Government has been involved in discussions regarding trans-national meddling. Since Russia formed part of the USSR, the country has faced allegations about its imposition in politics throughout Europe, however, through the years, Russia’s methods have changed.

The first time an accusation of this kind was leveled against the country was in 2009 when European leaders (including Václav Havel, Valdas Adamkus, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga and Lech Wałęsa) signed an open letter declaring that Russia would not “accept [their] complete sovereignty,” instead acting as a revisionist power and using “overt and covert means of economic warfare, ranging from energy blockades and politically motivated investments to bribery and media manipulation in order to advance its interests and to challenge the transatlantic orientation of Central and Eastern Europe” (Valdas). After the letter was published, investigations were conducted and found that Russians had been involved in military exercises, simulating nuclear weapons usage—directed to Poland in 2009 (Day), a British assassination in 2006 (Whitmore) and a cyber attack on commercial Estonian banks in 2007 (Krebs).

In 2014, both Ukraine and Hungary continued to experience unsovereign Russian involvement. Russians were accused of manipulating Ukraine’s central election commission in order to bolster their “far-right” views on European politics. Ukraine’s citizens suffered a series of cyberattacks whose emails were hacked along with other measures used to manipulate the votes. It was later discovered that the hackers behind these attacks were pro-Russian. Although the elections are seen as “genuine” internationally, Russians and Ukrainians see this election as illegitimate and completely disregard the results (Clayton, 2014, p. 14).

Though unrelated to European politics, the 2016 presidential elections of the United States of America represent yet another event where the country was accused of interference. Before the elections, hackers working under the name “Guccifer 2.0” conducted a “Russian influence operation” that stole “thousands of pages of documents [...] from the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee in Washington” and gave them to reporters in Florida (Lipton and Shane, 2016, p. 2, 8). This raised concerns among American citizens and party members as lots of their important classified documents were leaked. This later led to Hillary Clinton’s email account being hacked and over 19,000 classified emails being released to the public.

More recently, In March of 2017, the Netherlands received warnings from Dutch intelligence of potential Russian interference in their general elections. However, they managed to carry out their elections successfully with no sign of interference from Russia. Later that year,

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in the months of May and June, France was having their presidential election. Russia made bold and shameless attempts to interfere, however, “French security officials made admirable efforts to protect against interference” and no harm was done (Maurer 2018).

In June of that same year, the United Kingdom was hosting their snap election. Months before, in February 2017, “the NCSC’s head stated that the United Kingdom had experienced at least 188 cyber attacks—dozens of them serious—during the previous three months. Many were attributed to alleged Russian and Chinese attackers. However, with everyone on high alert, no overt disinformation campaign or cyber operation was detected during the snap election” (Maurer 2018). Due to the recent outbreaks of Russian interference, their focus shifted “primarily on protecting against cyber attacks rather than disinformation campaigns” (Maurer 2018). Russia had previously been accused of interfering with the Scottish independence referendum and Brexit. Even though there were alleged Russian efforts to interfere with the UK elections, the British government was aware of the situation and stifled the attacks. There have been several ongoing investigations regarding this matter by the UK Electoral Commission, the UK Parliament’s Culture Select Committee and Intelligence and Security Committee, and the United States Senate, however, no significant interference from Russia was detected regarding Brexit.

Accusations as recent as 2019 include: Italian nationalists offered millions of dollars from Russian funding (Nardelli), an offering of 10,000 Russian troops to the Catalan separation effort (Fonseca), training of far-right German military agents in the Russian Federation (Pladson), assassination of a Chechen refugee (Huggler), and an attempted pro-Russian coup in Montenegro (Walker). Currently, there are many ongoing investigations into Russian interference meaning that many more cases may be uncovered in the near future.

Historical Case Studies

2014 Scottish Referendum

Scotland’s somewhat rocky relationship with the United Kingdom has previously led to talks about Scotland leaving the UK and becoming independent. In 2014, a vote was held in Scotland on whether they should become an independent country or not. The 4 million people that voted ultimately decided that Scotland should not become independent with 55% of people voting “NO” and 45% voting “YES”. With such a close vote, interference becomes a very important topic, especially considering that a 50-page report on Soviet Interference in UK affairs “cites ‘credible open source commentary suggesting that Russia undertook influence campaigns in relation to the Scottish independence referendum in 2014,’” (Crichton 2020). Some of the methods used by the Russian government included harming the UK’s reputation in the eyes of the Russian people and sharing Russian propaganda in Scotland, which turned out to be “effective,” as “over 87,000 people signed a petition demanding a re-vote following the allegations of electoral fraud,” (Crichton 2020). Even former defence minister, Kevan Jones, stated that “all the evidence of Russian interference was there from the Scottish referendum,” (Crichton 2020). In the end, Russian interference with the Scottish Independence Referendum

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of 2014 caused lots of problems for Scotland, however no re-vote was ever done or even considered. Scotland remains strongly tied to the UK since that shockingly close vote.

2019 Ukraine Presidential Elections

In the past, Russia has been accused of interfering in Ukrainian elections as the relationship between both countries has been very poor since the independization of Ukraine from Russia and the Soviet Union in 1991 (Britannica, 2020). These cases include the elections of 2004, 2014, and most recently, 2019.

On the 21st of February of 2019, Ukraine's State Security Service, SBU, formally accused Russia of meddling in Ukraine's electoral process with the means of helping guarantee the victory of a specific candidate by creating illegal structures. Viktor Kononenko, SBU deputy head, stated that a group of Russian citizens and their Ukrainian collaborators had "used financial bribes to set up a network of people ready to vote for a certain candidate" and therefore "influence public opinion" (Reuters, 2019). He also stated that the activity is "illegal and implies an impact on the election results" as it involved several Ukrainian citizens who had been "cooperating with Russian structures for a long time" (Kononenko, 2019). Russian authorities have since denied such accusations, however, Kononenko says the organizers had hoped to buy the votes of 680,000 people to alter the election's result. The head of Ukraine's Cyber police department, Seriy Demedyuk, said that hackers controlled by Russia were "stepping up efforts to disrupt Ukraine's election" with "cyber attacks on electoral servers and personal computers of election staff" (Demedyuk, 2019).

Although there have been multiple denials, Russia is being repeatedly accused of meddling in political elections worldwide. According to Roy Godson, professor of government emeritus at Georgetown University, "[Russia has] a history of doing this" (Godson, 2017). USA Today states that Russia has meddled in the affairs of at least 27 European and North American nations since 2004 with "interference that ranges from cyberattacks to disinformation campaigns" (Druzhinin, 2019). When it comes to interference, Russia allegedly focuses on former Soviet Republics allied with the West. In this case, elections tried to be postponed, but were not as there were no official grounds or terms to do so.

2017 French Presidential Elections

On Friday May 5, 2017—exactly two days before the "second and final round of French presidential elections"—gigabytes of data hacked from nominee Emmanuel Macron's presidential campaign team were released online. However, months prior, a Russian-led disinformation campaign against La Republique en Marche's candidate, Macron, had already begun. The event known as the Macron Leaks were a combination of "real emails and forgeries," yet, the Kremlin failed in their attempts to interfere with the election and divide the French population (Conley & Vilmer, 2018). Two institutions at the time were identified as key players in the safe-keeping of France: the National Commission for the Control of the Electoral Campaign for the Presidential Election (CNCCEP) and the National Cybersecurity Agency

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(ANSSI), who made sure that the integrity of the elections are more protected than the United States' and the "protection of critical infrastructure" (Bulckaert, 2018). Another factor that led to the unsuccessful attempt to infiltrate the elections were several mistakes that the Russian team committed. Some fake emails were added to the leaked documents, yet the absurdity of the situation completely negated their credibility. Macron's team also denounced the hack through social media by calling it a "complete farce". According to Heather Conley of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), "fortunately for the Macron campaign, the fact that nothing compromising was found in the emails improved Macron's positive image as an authentic and 'clean' candidate, compared to earlier scandals involving another presidential candidate." Finally, the Macron campaign had also taken precautionary measures to counter hacking risks by favoring WhatsApp over Telegram, which is a Russian application, to "communicate confidential information" and "exchange open information" through email (Bulckaert, 2018).

Brexit Referendum

The 2016 Brexit Referendum was a public poll set to determine whether the United Kingdom (UK) and Gibraltar should remain a member of the European Union (Staff). Ultimately, citizens of the UK voted to leave the Union by a majority vote of ~52%. Questions emerged regarding the legitimacy of the ballot when then Prime Minister David Cameron postulated that Russia "may be happy" with the outcome of the referendum (Rosenberg). Although the investigation into Russian influence on the vote is still ongoing, some suspicious incidents have already been documented: Andy Wigmore, executive of the Leave.EU campaign was found to have met with Russian oligarch Siman Pvarekin with documents evidencing a monetary transaction (Cardalladr). Furthermore, Aaron Banks, proprietor of Leave.EU is currently under criminal investigation for receiving foreign funds (It is illegal to receive outside funding for UK political campaigns) (Townsend). Wigmore and Banks also meet with Alexander Udod, a Russian diplomat and suspected intelligence officer (Roig-Franza).

Other accusations levied against Russia include the use of fake-news campaigns on social media platforms through state-sponsored outlets (Disinformation) and the usage of 3,841 twitter bots sourced from Russia affiliated with the Internet Research Agency (A Russian telecommunication center) which sent a collective 10 million tweets in aims to spread disinformation on the Brexit referendum (Field).

Despite this information, the official investigation on the matter has not made any conclusions regarding government-sponsored Russian collusion. Although individual actors have been suspected of tampering with the poll, none of the suspicions have led to evidence indicating any of the attacks were created or paid for by the Russian government, thus leaving the investigation in its continued state.

Past UN Actions

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During the 1990s, the topic of Palestine becoming its own sovereign state was reaching new heights. Israel and many other countries were interested in Palestine's land and wanted to interfere with its affairs. This led the UN to begin a conversation about this topic and look for solutions to prevent it from happening again in the future. This issue led to the United Nations General Assembly to meet from July 14 to July 25—in 1993—to discuss the topic of citizen's rights and electoral interference either by the UN or by the governments of individual countries. The 193 participants voted on a resolution that was titled *Respect for the principles of national sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of States in their electoral processes*. The resolution stated that “all peoples have the right [...] to determine their political status” as well as “every State has the duty to respect that right” (GA resolution, 1993). In this context, State refers to a country's government; hence, countries may not interfere with elections, be it their own or other countries' elections. The resolution calls for other Charters that say sovereignty and independence are reasons for interference. The entire committee was aware of the ongoing issues with third parties interfering and decided that this was the best way to handle that.

In Libya, despite the many attempts to limit interference in the past years, it was reported that in 2020, foreign interference reached “unprecedented levels” (Besheer, 2020). For instance, an article published by the United States Institute of Peace stated that “Turkey and Russia are exploiting Libya as a battleground for broader competition.” Additionally, Russia has expanded their installment of private military contractors around Libya which they use for their own benefit (Hill, 2020). The United Nations has kept a close eye on this case and for that reason, Secretary General, Antonio Gutierrez, hosted a high-level virtual video-conference meeting with the Security Council—on July 8th, 2020—fully dedicated to discussing the issue with Libya and foreign interference. “More than 30 speakers participated in the meeting” to reach “a negotiated solution to the crisis in Libya” now that the matter is “more urgent than ever” (UN SC, 2020).

Some of the actions that are being taken into consideration for future conflict include the sanctioning of countries that send mercenaries to Libya. Since there are “high level[s] of direct foreign interference in the conflict in violation of the United Nations arms embargo,” the UN is looking for resolutions and commitments made by Member States to contribute with solutions for the problem (UN SC, 2020). The Secretary-General's Acting Special Representative and Head of United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), Stephanie Turco Williams, said that “all opportunities to unblock the political stalemate must be seized”, therefore, “undertaking de-escalation efforts — including the creation of a possible demilitarized zone” (UN SC, 2020).

IV. Key Players and Points of View

Russia

Although these are alleged accusations, Russia has been accused of interfering in over 20 countries which include: the United States of America, Lithuania, Estonia, Georgia, Spain, the

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United Kingdom, France, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan amongst more countries who happen to be allied with the West (Dorell, 2017).

Russian President Vladimir Putin has continuously denied the accusations imposed, however, these cases continue to come up year after year. For this reason, on September 25 of 2020, President Putin proposed a truce with the United States to “guarantee neither nation interferes in the other’s elections” (Simons and Strobel, 2020). According to the Moscow Times, Putin assured that after new and coming accusations that Russia would interfere in the recent 2020 US electoral process, Russia wanted to “exchange guarantees of non-interference in each others' domestic affairs including elections” highlighting the use of “information and communication technologies” (Putin, 2020). It is important to note that this pact only addresses US elections, which means that Russia does not accept nor deny foreign interference in other nations.

Germany

Germany, one of the strongest economic forces in the EU, is a probable target for Russian meddling. The nation has been of Russian interest in the past and action has been taken. The most recent incident occurred in 2017 when German officials expected Russian hackers to interfere with the elections. While it remains unsure why Russians did not interfere with such elections, analysts think that it was a strategic move by the Russian government. “It appears to be directed not just at Europe’s periphery, or at specific European nations like Germany, but at destabilizing the European project from the inside out: dismantling decades of progress toward building a democratic Europe that is whole, free, and at peace” (Stelzenmüller, 2017).

Since this date, German officials and analysts have continued to investigate and as of this year, they claim that they have found “hard evidence” of such meddling. German Chancellor Angela Merkel publicly stated that they had evidence of Russian hackers attempting to spy on confidential information within the German government. “I can say honestly that this pains me: on the one hand, I work every day for a better relationship with Russia, and when you see on the other hand that there is such hard evidence that Russian forces are involved in acting this way, this is an area of tension” (Merkel, 2020). The German government has yet to find a solution to the ongoing issue however they hope that recently surfaced proof can change something.

Italy

Italy has managed to remain in good standing with Russia since the signing of the Paris Treaties at the end of WWII. This privileged relationship has largely extended into modern times through Putin’s personal friendship with Silvio Berlusconi, an Italian politician who was in power from 2001 to 2006 and from 2008 to 2011. While there have been allegations made by third parties regarding Russian interference in the Italian electoral process, none of these have brought up any evidence that indicates these rumors being true (López-Fonseca). Moreover, no



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relevant Italian diplomat or politician has raised allegations of an accusatory nature towards Russia.

Because of their good-standing relationship with Russia, when interviewed about these issues, most Italian representatives have spoken in favour of Russia, claiming that there exists no evidence to prove that the Russian government has in any way interfered with European democracy (Townsend).

France

French elections have two rounds, which makes it more difficult for a “malign actor” such as Russia to determine which of the two candidates running are making it to the second round. The second round of voting makes it easier for the French population to shift their vote towards another candidate to block an “unexpected result after the first round” (Conley & Vilmer, 2018). Not only that, but the French media environment consists mainly of mainstream and reliable media sources, and is largely free of tabloid-style outlets and other websites that are commonly seen in the United States and the United Kingdom.

The country of France has played a significant role combating Russia’s meddling in European elections because they have experienced it on a national level. They have several advantages against electoral attacks seeing as they “have no electoral college,” their voting structure is slightly different than the United States’, and France’s population and the media has long been “ingrained with critical thinking” (Blue, 2018). Emmanuel Macron, the current president of France, experienced interference during his 2018 campaign and even expressed that Russia Today and Sputnik, state-controlled international television networks, spread “fake news” regarding his campaign on “several occasions” (Balmforth, 2018). He believes that these networks behaved like organs of influence and lying propaganda.

Another role that the French government had in combating Russian interference in their election was anticipating it before it even happened. France had an advantage over Russia in that it was targeted after they perceived cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns being launched in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States. These precedents raised government and public awareness. The 2016 American presidential election was also a defining moment. Prior to the U.S. election, awareness of Russian disinformation was mostly limited to Baltic and Central European states, however, after the U.S. elections, it became evident every country was vulnerable to disinformation as well. The French precedent has shown that a state can intervene and take measures effectively only if these measures are carried out by administrative, independent, and nonpolitical authorities.

Austria

“Austria’s bilateral relationship with Russia is between ‘friendly pragmatist’ and ‘strategic partner’” (Gressel, 2017). Although Austria has raised concerns of Russian meddling, it is constantly suggested that “Russia[’s] sanctions will likely remain unchallenged by Austria” (Gressel, 2017). However, the country does maintain a close eye and stays alert for any future

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attempt of interference by Russia given that “Vienna is a major target for Russian intelligence activities as well as interference in domestic politics” (Kremlin Watch, 2020).

The reason why Austria is not as concerned as other European countries is because of the interests Austria shares with Russia. Their relationship is built upon energy exports and Austrian diplomacy on Russia. Given the greater convenience, Austria remains skeptical about the EU sanctions against Russia.

Still, other member states of the European Union spark worry and concern since Austria will still remain part of the European integration projects. Having Austria still contribute and form part of future projects results in fear of potential interference from well-established relationships like Austria has with Russia. Because of the previously stated information, Austria’s behavior has been compared to “the habits of a small, isolated, and neutral country trying to get along in between rival political blocs” (Gressel, 2015). Although Austria continues to see Russia as a strategic partner, they do keep their distance and practice precautionary measures since they are well-aware of the recent and past unacceptable acts of interference from Russia.

V. Possible Solutions

Russian meddling and interference in European elections is an issue that stems from the very country that is responsible for these actions. Establishing a proper course of action requires several multifaceted measures in order to combat the issue as a whole.

A potential solution to tackle this issue is to create a new agency that will serve to protect European democracy and each country’s different electoral processes against cyberattacks and fake news. By implementing this, the European Union will be able to share information and spot trends through an early-warning system that will combat the tricky intersection of free speech, propaganda, and national politics. Also, by encouraging the government to put pressure on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, there can be a complete elimination of fake or spam accounts that might influence the results of an election. The creation of this agency should have the sole purpose of serving as a preventative measure to avoid future scandals; however, a plan should be considered in case these prove to be ineffective.

The main approach that Russia has when trying to interfere in foreign elections consists of spreading fake news that is harmful towards certain candidates. With this in mind, an awareness campaign aimed towards the voters would decrease the effect that Russian cyber attacks can provoke. This campaign could be carried out by the established government at the time of the election along with each parties’ political campaigns. As citizens get informed about possible attacks, the damage done can decrease in a considerable manner.

Another possible approach in case of interference is to develop contingency plans beforehand. If for any reason Russia does manage to intrude in activities of member state governments, a press statement would be prepared in advance of the cyber breach. That way, time will be saved and panic will be prevented. Having a party anticipate the cyber operations from Russia will undermine the attackers’ ability to utilize the stolen information. In addition to



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that, being prepared with potential legal measures that could be imposed is ideal for further restrictions regarding illegal content on social media. Creating a plan of action prior to a foreseeable situation of Russian meddling is essential to manage the outcome of the issue.

According to Business Insider, “paper voting systems are the safest method for elections, as they are less vulnerable to hacking and manipulation,” (Abadi, Jiang, & McCauley, 2020). Since paper ballots have to be cast in person and with a valid ID, voter fraud is much more difficult. With this solution, voting time could be extended to accommodate for the amount of people who want to vote. On the other hand, online voting and mail-in voting should not be kept out of the question, as people who are unable to vote in person should still be able to vote. A special process could be implemented for this to allow people to register for online voting. This way, online electoral interference can be kept to a minimum.

VI. Current Status

Despite several attempts to prevent and stop attacks, allegations against Russian prying and tampering in foreign affairs continue to grow. Most recently, in the 2020 United States Presidential Elections, the New York Times reported on October 21, 2020 that both Iran and Russia had obtained American voter registration data, which provided the first concrete evidence that both countries could try to influence voters. It would seem like Iran has learned from Russia’s 2016 tactics as it used voter information to send threatening, faked emails to voters. However, there was no indication that any election result tallies were changed or altered. In this case, there is no clear indication that dictates Russia tried to interfere (Barnes and Sanger, 2020).

US Government officials did not claim that voter registration systems had been hacked, leaving the possibility that perhaps the data was available to anyone who knew where to look. It would seem like the information obtained by both Iran and Russia was mostly public. What was mostly available were voters’ names, party registrations and some contact information which is publicly available. The director of US National Intelligence stated the data can be used by “foreign factors to communicate false information” to voters hoping to “cause confusion, sow chaos” and the doubting of American democracy (Ratcliffe, 2020).

Other news sources, including Vox News, reported that the voter information obtained by both Iran and Russia would be used to interfere in the last few days of the election or right after November 3rd to try and favor Trump. How big the impact would be is impossible to tell. According to Don Levin, expert on foreign election interference and author of *Meddling in the Ballot Box: The Causes and Effects of Partisan Electoral Interventions*, Russia had intervened in the 2016 US presidential election and it would do so again. In an interview and long discussion, both Jen Kirby, foreign and national security reporter, and Dov Levin, discussed the irregularities of foreign interference and even went back to times where both Russia and the US were known to interfere in each other’s politics since the end of World War II. Dov Levin argues that in the distant past, it would be easy to bribe a cardinal in charge of counting the votes to alter the result that favored your interests, however, in the modern era, having millions of

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people and thousands of ballot places around the country would make this impossible. Nonetheless, as digital election machines become increasingly common, it would be possible to hack voting machines across a country and change vote counts directly (Don Levin, 2020).

It is important to note that as technological advancement progresses and the possibility of spreading misinformation and false accusations widens, more and more actions to help prevent it are generated too. For instance, big technology platforms like Facebook and Twitter have taken steps to fight disinformation. Facebook alone took down a network of fake accounts linked to Russian military intelligence. It is also known that Facebook will not post political ads in the week before Election Day and that Google will reject all election-related ads after Election Day to prevent false claims. Twitter has also shut down accounts that attribute to Russian-sponsored entities (Jasper, 2020).

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