

Research report
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The question of corruption in democratic elections

Introduction

Many countries have been victims of corruption in democratic elections, for example Belarus, Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Kingdom, Ukraine and the United States were all influenced by Russia. Democracy has been around for a very long time, it reflects an idea of equality and an idea of liberty. It reflects an idea of dignity, the dignity of the individual, the idea that each individual should have an equal vote, an equal say in the formation of their government. Democracy is not only a matter of structures, it is a state of mind, an activity even. The problem of a non-democratically chosen government is not necessarily the people in it, but the problem is that the public did not choose them.

Definition of key terms¹

Democracy

The belief in freedom and equality between people, or a system of government based on this belief, in which power is either held by elected representatives or directly by the people themselves

Democratic election

An election in which all adults can vote

Democratic

Based on the principles of democracy

Corruption

Illegal, bad, or dishonest behaviour, especially by people in positions of power

Troll-farm

An organization set up in order to publish a large number of messages or posts on the internet, that often appear to be from people who do not really exist, and that are intended to cause trouble, influence political views, etc.

Fake news

False stories that appear to be news, spread on the internet or using other media, usually created to influence political views or as a joke

¹ These are the definitions of the key terms as stated by the Cambridge Dictionary.

General overview

A lot of countries have been affected by corruption in democratic elections, like you can see in the introduction, 27 countries are already influenced by Russia alone. The corruption can be within the country itself or outside, from another country.

Different kinds of corruption

Within the country itself

Even within the country itself corruption happens in democratic elections, most of the time these are inferior to what happens when other countries get involved in the election. But dishonesty does still happen in the country itself, therefore undermining an important fundament of a democracy. The fact that the public can trust the politicians and the politicians trust the public.

Promising things through your election campaign that you have no intention of actually doing

Minor corruption that is done by politicians is them trying to convince the public to vote for them through saying they will get the public what they want. But when they are then elected, they never even look back on the things they said in their election campaign. That gives the public a feeling of betrayal and damages the trust of the public in the politicians and in the regime.

Using social media

Social media is used in many ways to influence voters, whether it is positive, negative or by showing them something they normally would not see. Fake news is often used to make others look worse; by planting lies about them online, but could also be used to make yourself look better.

Making others look worse

A lot of bad things about politicians are unravelled throughout the campaigning time. If you let your colleagues - or in this case rivals - look worse, people will be more likely to vote for you. This is because they will think that you are better, because of the fact that the other politicians did unacceptable things, even though these claims will not always be true, meaning fake news was used.

Making yourself look better

There is also the kind of politician that throughout their campaign makes sure to let the public see them go to, for example, an animal shelter or a homeless shelter. This makes the public feel as though the politician cares about the society and the people living in it. While most of the time the politicians would not go to a homeless shelter or do a lot of volunteer work. Therefore they arouse the suggestion that they care about the social problems of the people.

Buying votes

If politicians are really desperate and ready to cross the line and do something illegal to get a majority vote; they could buy votes from people or bribe the people who are counting the votes. Recent court cases in America revealed the tricks of an underground trade; conspirators allegedly bought off absentee voters, faked absentee ballots, and bribed people heading to the polls to vote one way or another. Most citizens who sell their vote will not even be able to get a tank full of gas from it.

From another country

Another country can mostly do the same as the country of the election itself, but most of the time the actions from another country have a bigger impact. This would happen out of the egoistic character of another country. If they have a better bond or more influence on one of the electable politicians, they could try to help him get the majority vote. Therefore helping themselves to a better negotiation status.

Making rivals look worse

Through making rivals of your favourable candidate look worse, the public is more intended to vote for your favourable candidate, because he seems the most trustworthy.

Making certain people look better

This has the same aim as influencing by making rivals look worse. In the end the country will only do it to boost their own status with that country.

Major parties involved

Russia

Russia has interfered in at least 27 countries their political elections since 2004. The interference has ranged from cyberattacks to disinformation campaigns. Russia started meddling in former Soviet republics allied with the West (for example Lithuania and Estonia) and then spread to Western Europe. Russia often uses troll farms to influence a lot of people without having to employ a lot of workers. Clint Watts, a former FBI agent and counterterrorism specialist said that Russia is doing this to make the institution of democracy look not credible, either the institutions are corrupt or you can not trust the vote.

The Kremlin said that it does not understand were the allegations from Microsoft about the influencing of the midterm elections of the USA in 2018 came from. Microsoft claimed that two hackers were linked to the Russian government. The Kremlin denies that they know anything about these hackers and is deeply shocked about the fact that there is no clear proof or basis on which Microsoft could have come to this conclusion.

USA

The elections of the USA have been interfered on multiple occasions, but one of the most recent was the presidential election of 2016 in which Donald Trump was elected as president of the United States of America. There are more reasons why Trump was elected instead of Hillary Clinton than only the Russian interference, but you should not forget that the Russian interference may have caused Trump to get the majority vote. Trump won by around 70,000 votes out of more than 120 million, this is such a slight majority that the influence from Russia might have been enough to tip the vote and see to it that Trump won the election.

France

Russia interfered with the presidential election of 2017 in France. The National Security Agency (NSA) confirmed that Russia meddled with the French election. Right before the election, 9GB of private emails from at that point the frontrunner, Emmanuel Macron, were released. The same structure (hacking and releasing one of the candidate's party's emails) had been used in the 2016 US presidential election. But this time it did not work, because Emmanuel Macron still won the presidential election two days later.

Possible solutions

What you need to remember is that democracy reflects an idea of equality, liberty and dignity. You should also be aware of the fact that corruption happens a lot, for many different reasons and that social media plays a big role in this. The whole world is connected

through social media, therefore it is possible for other countries to influence certain elections (outside of their own country).

It has occurred that elections were held too early, in a state that is new to democracy. This led to sectarian violence and enshrined extremist parties. We therefore suggest that you invest in voter education and in democratization.

Through social media and electronics, most documents are accessible for everyone or easily able to be hacked. Therefore it is not that hard to corrupt a democratic election. You will need to think of a way to ensure the safety of online documents, that could for example be through a better firewall or better online security.

On social media people are free to express their opinions and thoughts, this is a human right and therefore you can not stop people from expressing themselves online. But you will need to find a way to stop fake news from spreading and even better to stop fake news from even being made.

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