Disinformation Threat Watch

The Disinformation Landscape in East Asia and Implications for US Policy

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Executive Summary

Purpose of Our Research

We chose to study disinformation in East Asia in order to better understand the global landscape of disinformation and gather lessons learned for U.S. policymakers. While the 2016 presidential election highlighted the impact of disinformation on American politics, disinformation is a global challenge and has a long legacy in Taiwanese and South Korean politics. Most academic research, however, focuses primarily on American or European experiences with disinformation in the past decade. By expanding our regional focus to Asia, we aimed to identify how disinformation has been used as a political tool and how other democratic countries have responded to this threat.

Understanding Future Trends in the U.S.

The disinformation threat landscape in Taiwan and South Korea foreshadows trends that may impact U.S. politics. Taiwan’s experience suggests that malicious actors will continue to leverage disinformation in increasingly creative ways. As distribution channels and tactics become more widely available, state and non-state actors enjoy reduced barriers to disseminating false information. Foreign interference in Taiwan’s mid-term and mayoral elections indicates that disinformation may feature in off-cycle years and U.S. state and local elections. The U.S. should anticipate that foreign actors will identify and manipulate cultural divisions with calculated precision, and that multiple countries will deploy disinformation as a foreign influence tool.

The prominence of misinformation and disinformation in South Korea’s domestic politics highlights the danger of creating a political culture that fosters rumors, speculation, and false stories. Unchecked, disinformation may become a regular feature of the campaign cycle with domestic politicians and interest groups engaging in a “race to the bottom” in order to
compete. Without a bipartisan effort to educate the American public and condemn disinformation, all parties may unintentionally create conditions in which it flourishes.

Finally, cross-sector efforts to combat disinformation in Asia demonstrate how a solution will require coordination across different industries, government entities, and groups in civil society. Individual parties face unique weaknesses and cannot curtail the problem alone. For example, the technology companies that host communication platforms have little incentive to change their terms of service to eliminate disinformation. Government cannot monitor, regulate, and prosecute all potential cases of disinformation without infringing on civil liberties. Civil society groups may develop innovative solutions, but often lack the platform or access to scale. An effective response will engage the strengths of many actors and recognize the limitations that each encounters.

**Recommendations for U.S. Policymakers**

Taiwan and South Korea provide useful lessons learned for Western democracies facing similar threats. This paper concludes with a series of proposals for U.S. policymakers to combat disinformation.

**Awareness**

- Alert the American people of a broader influence campaign, citing clear, accessible evidence to explain the threat and implications for American values.

- Adapt government communication strategies to media trends, identifying non-traditional distribution channels to increase awareness and message scope.

- Declassify intelligence to increase public trust in the government’s assessment.
Research Support

- Increase government transparency and facilitate public access to opensource intelligence that can be used for quantitative and qualitative disinformation research.

- Increase funding for Artificial Intelligence research, including research programs that harness AI to identify and block sources of disinformation should be encouraged.

- Encourage technology companies to collaborate with civil society groups who have developed technical solutions to reduce disinformation on social media platforms, including providing these groups with data, API access, or reduced operating fees.

- Enhance international coordination and support a global initiative to identify emerging threats and potential solutions.

Policy Action

- Mandate transparency around online and print advertising.

- Establish a strategy to combat foreign influence at large and clarify ownership at the federal and state level.

- Develop an interagency response plan to address disinformation as early and forcefully as possible.

- Build more formal agreements with social media companies to enhance collaboration, including special reporting channels for election-related disinformation, designated points of contact, and threat sharing.

- Empower journalists and citizens to independently validate information by encouraging greater transparency at all levels of government and avoiding rhetoric which broadly delegitimizes traditional sources of information.

- Support federal grants and technology training programs to build civil society’s capacity to combat disinformation.

- Lead a bipartisan effort to call out disinformation that threatens the integrity of American elections.
Introduction

In the past few years, disinformation has impacted elections around the world and forced policymakers to rethink the relationship between technology, media, and government. In France, hackers released dozens of real and fake emails designed to smear Emmanuel Macron’s 2017 presidential campaign. Over the past two years, Germany saw false stories about sensational migrant crimes spread throughout social media, and Great Britain identified Russian bots driving the 2016 Brexit debate on Twitter. In the US, independent reports have indicated that foreign actors exploited internet platforms to divide Americans along cultural and political fault lines during the 2016 presidential campaign. While we cannot quantify how this impacted the election outcome, it is clear that foreign actors exploited internet platforms in an effort to manipulate public opinion and disrupt the electoral process.

Disinformation is not a new phenomenon, but it has been transformed by social media and technology. Documented cases of disinformation date back to Ancient Rome when Octavian imprinted coins with slogans targeting Mark Antony in the Final War of the Roman Republic.1 More recently, KGB documents from the Cold War defined “dezinformatsiya,” or disinformation, as data designed to influence the mind of the enemy. While disinformation has featured in many historical conflicts, it has become more pervasive, insidious, and influential in modern society. Stories travel faster, reach a broader audience, and are increasingly disconnected from their original sources. Online news platforms have disrupted traditional media, and government officials and career journalists are no longer the sole information gatekeepers. As technology reshapes the way we communicate and consume news, foreign adversaries have adapted information warfare tactics to expand their influence over American politics.

Disinformation threatens American interests by undermining electoral integrity and trust in political processes. The lack of academic research on modern disinformation and overuse of the term “fake news,” however, impedes our ability to understand and respond to the threat. This report seeks to identify potential ways to further define and combat the global disinformation threat landscape by studying East Asian democracies. While disinformation is a relatively new priority for Western democracies, countries such as Taiwan and South Korea have spent decades battling influence operations from internal and external actors. As

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democracies, they share structural strengths and challenges with the US, such as the free-flow of information and protections for civil liberties. Based on interviews with over fifty government officials, journalists, and civil society members, the Taiwan and South Korea case studies outline the following disinformation characteristics:

- **Source(s):** Who is producing disinformation
- **Distribution channels and tactics:** What delivery mechanisms do threat actors use
- **Political impact:** How has disinformation affected domestic politics
- **Public opinion:** How does the public perceive the disinformation threat
- **Solutions:** What methods are societies using to combat disinformation

By highlighting lessons learned from Taiwan and South Korea’s experiences, we hope to equip US policymakers with a wider portfolio of potential solutions.

**Report Scope**

This paper defines disinformation as the intentional dissemination of misleading or inaccurate information. The term “fake news” pervades political speeches and public debate across the world, but there is little consensus on what constitutes fake news. Over the course of our research, stakeholders used fake news to describe a range of phenomena, including:

- Unsubstantiated rumors
- Exaggerated or partially true stories
- Reports that misconstrue or lack sufficient context

These instances may constitute misinformation, information that is misleading or incorrect, but they are not necessarily disinformation. Disinformation is systematic and intentional; it comprises a deliberate effort to influence public opinion through false stories.
**Why Taiwan and South Korea**

We chose to study disinformation in East Asia in order to better understand the global landscape of disinformation and gather lessons learned for US policymakers. While the 2016 presidential election highlighted the impact of disinformation on American politics, disinformation is a global challenge and has a long legacy in Taiwanese and South Korean politics. Most academic research, however, focuses primarily on American or European experiences with disinformation in the past decade. By expanding our regional focus to Asia, we aimed to identify how disinformation has been used as a political tool and how non-western countries have responded to this threat.

Additionally, Taiwan and South Korea featured multiple types of disinformation. In Taiwan, we learned about their societal struggle against foreign influence and observed their developing solutions. Just as Ukraine is often thought of as a testing ground for Russian influence operations, Taiwan is seen as the front line for Beijing’s sharp power. Alternatively, in South Korea, disinformation was most often disseminated by domestic political actors and the term “fake new” is used to discredit legitimate news stories. America has experienced disinformation from foreign and domestic sources and has witnessed an increasingly broad application of the phrase “fake news.” Choosing Taiwan and South Korea as case studies enabled us to study the full spectrum of disinformation operations and provide comprehensive insight for US policymakers.

Lastly, Taiwan and South Korea share similar democratic values with the US. In a democracy, any anti-disinformation initiative faces a tradeoff between civil liberty and civil protection. Both Taiwan and South Korea have strong legal and normative protections in place to defend free speech and promote a free press. Therefore, their approaches to countering disinformation are instructive for Western democracies that struggle to balance maintaining citizens’ rights with reducing the impact of disinformation.

**Research Methodology**

Our report is based on comprehensive secondary source research and firsthand interviews with major stakeholders in the field. The majority of our field research occurred during a two week trip to Taiwan and South Korea in January 2019.
Prior to our trip, we conducted a literature review of news articles, academic studies, and independent reports. Our review can be broken down into three categories: an overview of disinformation and computational propaganda, Chinese and North Korean analysis, and analysis related to recent events and the cultural and historical context of Taiwan and South Korea. We spoke to academic experts from the Harvard community, authors of existing disinformation studies, and Taiwanese diplomats in the United States. We then identified stakeholders to interview during our time in Taipei and Seoul.

This report synthesizes our findings from 30+ hours of interviews with over fifty government officials, military officers, journalists, academics, and civil society members in South Korea and Taiwan. Additionally, professors at National Taiwan University convened a panel on disinformation on our behalf which engaged experts from Taiwan and around the world via video-conference. We also spoke to Taiwanese and South Korean citizens and private sector stakeholders to identify the public perception of disinformation among non-experts. This research trip was funded by Harvard Kennedy School’s Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs.

After returning to the United States, we interviewed think tank researchers and US government officials to understand how our findings could support efforts to combat disinformation and inform future policy. We also spoke with experts on China and North Korea to confirm our interview findings and ensure that our research aligns with leading analysis on East Asian foreign policy.
A Typology of Disinformation

Disinformation originates from many sources with diverse interests and political objectives. While politicians may use terms like disinformation and fake news to describe a variety of controversial reports, our research findings highlighted the importance of distinguishing between different categories of false information. One former defense official in South Korea stated, “Mistaken reports and fake news are different. [The] government is wrong to treat them the same.” We agree; understanding the differences between various types of disinformation should inform how policymakers respond.

We identified three classes of disinformation in Taiwan and South Korea. This section will describe each category, provide an example, and identify its unique characteristics. Due to the important distinctions between different kinds of disinformation, we believe prescriptive policies must respond to specific categories of disinformation. Subsequent sections will build on this typology to characterize the threat in East Asia and provide lessons learned for US policymakers.

1) Foreign Influence Operations

*Disinformation generated or spread by foreign nation states to shape public opinion and impact political outcomes.*

**Example**

**A Storm of Disinformation:** After a deadly typhoon stranded international travelers at Japan’s Osaka Airport in September, 2018, false reports suggested that mainland China had successfully evacuated their citizens while the Taiwanese embassy had abandoned Taiwanese travelers. Mainstream media and online commenters heavily criticized Taiwan’s consular personnel, and Su Chii-Cherng, a diplomat in the Osaka consulate, committed suicide before the reports were publicly disproved. One of the viral stories included a doctored image of Taiwan’s ambassador to Japan, Frank Hsieh. It contained a real image of Ambassador Hsieh in a news interview, but added a blue banner with a false quote, “Even if all staff in the Osaka office die, I will not resign.” The banner appears to use a font that is only found on Simplified Mandarin Windows Operating Systems. Additional technical indicators suggested that the stories were spread by PRC-based internet users.

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Simplified Mandarin is spoken in Mainland China and is uncommon in Taiwan, where Traditional Mandarin is used. “Made-in-China Fake News Overwhelms Taiwan.” https://www.stopfake.org/en/made-in-china-fake-news-overwhelms-taiwan/
**Unique Characteristics**

- **Cultural Awareness**: Foreign influence operations rely on a foreign actor’s cultural and political knowledge of their target. This allows them to create credible disinformation that mobilizes vulnerable segments of the population. Without this knowledge, foreign actors struggle to disguise their efforts. The Osaka example shows how difficult this can be. China and Taiwan share many historical and cultural similarities, yet relatively minor oversights such as a non-native font or the incorrect use of a colloquial saying may alert domestic audiences to the presence of foreign influence.

- **Burden of Proof**: Civilian organizations often lack the forensic capabilities, intelligence resources, and access to technical indicators to attribute sophisticated foreign disinformation. Government agencies have superior resources but can be reluctant to disclose their sources and methods. As a result, researchers and citizens must take government officials at their word when they declare evidence of foreign influence. Public awareness of foreign influence is therefore dependent on trust in government.

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3 “Made-in-China Fake News Overwhelms Taiwan.”
2) Domestic Partisan Conflict

Disinformation generated or spread by domestic political stakeholders in order to mobilize the public.

Example

**Mad Cow Mania:** In 2008, mainstream media in South Korea falsely inflated the danger posed by mad cow disease in American beef. In response, over 10,000 citizens mobilized in Seoul to protest a proposal to ease restrictions on beef imports from the US. The protests led to a delay in the policy change and offers by the cabinet to resign.

![Protests in Seoul opposing US imports, May, 2008](image)

Unique Characteristics

- *Freedom of Speech:* Disinformation in this context often exists in a grey area of cherry picked data, unsubstantiated rumors, and quotations taken out of context. In a liberal democracy, political expression is highly protected and thus difficult to combat without infringing on civil liberties.

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• *Echo-Chambers:* The source of this disinformation is often public figures and institutions. This makes attribution easier than when dealing with foreign actors. However, these public entities develop followers who may accept their words as fact and ignore alternate sources of information that disprove the disinformation.

3) Suppression of Political Opposition

*Allegations of disinformation raised by political leaders in order to discredit legitimate criticism.*

**Example**

*The War on Fake News:* In 2018, President Moon’s administration declared a war on fake news following a rash of unfavorable news stories against his administration. Conservative critics characterize his actions as a tactic to silence legitimate opposition.7

Prime Minister Lee Nak-yon speaking about the government’s new policies to target “fake news”8

**Unique Characteristics**

• *Darwin’s Trap:* Researchers and policy makers risk overemphasizing the dangers and prevalence of misinformation and enabling politicians to discredit true stories or restrict press freedoms. Just as Darwinism was

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used as a pseudo-scientific cover for racist views, allowing politicians to “cry fake news” when faced with unflattering news coverage can be used as a pseudo-academic cover for silencing legitimate political opposition and discrediting important institutions.

**Case Study: Taiwan**

**BLUF**

Taiwan faces a systematic disinformation campaign perpetrated by the People’s Republic of China (PRC) aimed at influencing election outcomes and public opinion to advance Chinese interests. Increasing social and political polarization, as well as a sensational media climate, have amplified the spread and impact of disinformation. Taiwanese civil society has developed a range of creative solutions to combat disinformation, but individual organizations struggle to reach a broad audience and scale their limited resources.

**Political Context**

Taiwan has existed as a “de-facto” independent country since the end of the Chinese civil war in 1949. At the war’s conclusion, The People’s Republic of China—“mainland” China- and Republic of China (ROC)—Taiwan—both identified as the one true China, including claiming territorial authority over one another.

The 1992 Consensus\(^9\) marked a turning point in PRC-ROC relations and formed the basis of modern cross-strait relations, but disagreements over its meaning and validity persist to this day. Unlike her predecessors, Taiwan’s current President Tsai Ing-wen refuses to affirm the Consensus. Across the Strait, President Xi Jinping has pushed his own interpretation of the Consensus, calling for “one country, two systems.” President Tsai formally rejects this proposal.\(^10\)

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\(^9\) The 1992 Consensus emerged from talks held in Hong Kong in 1992 between mainland-based Association for Relations Across the Taiwan Straits (ARATS) and Taiwan’s Straits Exchange Foundation (SEF). Rather than a formal agreement, it refers to a “status quo” that emerged from these talks including cross-strait commercial relations and the “one China principle,” in which both sides of the Strait agreed that there was only one China but did not specify who it was.

Taiwan’s domestic politics reflect this tension over national identity. Political actors fall across a spectrum of pro-unification and pro-independence camps. The “Pan-Blue” camp favors stronger ties with mainland China and is led by the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), which ruled the island under martial law until 1987. The “Pan-Green” camp includes the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the heavily pro-independence Taiwan Solidarity Union (TSU). A third political force emerged on the scene after the 2014 Sunflower Movement. The left-wing New Power Party champions human rights and civil liberties and aims to formalize Taiwan’s independence through a constitutional amendment removing territorial claims to mainland China.

Mainland China exerts pressure in Taiwan’s domestic politics through its “United Front Strategy.” This strategy combines propaganda and psychological warfare with economic coercion and utilizes “constellations of companies, cultural organizations, and media outlets”\(^\text{11}\) to advance China’s strategic interests. The PRC provides financial support for specific political parties, religious groups, and media outlets. However, differentiating between private ownership of the Chinese diaspora and illicit state-funding complicates enforcement efforts. Organized crime also facilitates China’s influence operations, as do more benign soft power initiatives including student exchanges, pop culture, and economic incentives for Taiwanese companies to invest in the mainland.

**Disinformation Threat Overview**

**Sources and Goals**

Taiwanese authorities attribute foreign disinformation to the People’s Republic of China. President Tsai and the National Security Bureau publicly blamed PRC for spreading disinformation during the November 2018 midterm elections, which resulted in a substantial defeat for the DPP. In a speech in October 2018, President Tsai asserted:

> “Whether it be disseminating disinformation, illegally obtaining scientific and technical intelligence, maliciously damaging the information security system, intervening in the election process, or interfering with government operations, if there is irrefutable evidence of crime, the perpetrators will suffer serious consequences.”

\(^{11}\) J. Michael Cole (Editor in Chief, Taiwan Sentinel and former analyst at the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) in Ottawa), in discussion with the authors, January 2019.
President’s Tsai’s call for action galvanized an international response. In December 2018, six US senators led by Catherine Cortez Masto (D-Nev.) and Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) issued a letter calling on the Trump administration to investigate PRC influence.

PRC’s disinformation leverages social tensions to advance Beijing’s political and economic objectives:

- Politically, PRC aims to discredit the current administration, support candidates aligned with their interests, and promote a positive image of China in Taiwan.

- Economically, PRC wants to persuade the Taiwanese people that positive cross-strait relations will lead to economic prosperity, while the current adversarial policies threaten Taiwan’s economic future. PRC disinformation suggests that the current administration’s stance has caused financial hardship for the younger generation.

- Ultimately, PRC aims to reshape the political, economic, and social landscape to bring about reunification.

Channels and Tactics

Taiwan is a highly digital society with widespread internet, social media, and smartphone use. This interconnectivity creates a digital environment ripe for PRC influence campaigns. As Human Rights activist and researcher Jason Pan explained, “Internet and social media helped Taiwan democratize and is now being used to undermine it.”

Pro-PRC disinformation in Taiwan spreads via three main online avenues:

- **Open network social media and websites:** Facebook and Taiwan-based Professional Technology Temple (PTT), a Reddit-like online discussion platform, are among the most popular open social networks in Taiwan.

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13 Jason Pan (Human rights activist and researcher), in discussion with the authors, January 2019.
Facebook boasts a 97% penetration rate of the island’s internet users. Anti-DPP websites and YouTube channels also proliferated during the midterm election. According to interviews with security experts and civil society fact-checkers, Chinese disinformation tactics on these open networks mimic well-documented mainland domestic propaganda campaigns to control content on China’s internet. In addition to sharing false or misleading photos, videos, and links to news articles, the PRC uses social media trolls to amplify pro-China posts, suppress pro-DPP content, and flood internet forums with irrelevant stories to distract from unfavorable topics. PRC also disguises its influence by purchasing verified and popular social media accounts from their original Taiwanese owners and using them to spread disinformation.

Closed network social media: The private messaging application LINE, a Tokyo based subsidiary of South Korea’s Naver Corporation, dominates the Taiwanese market. Disinformation spreads through Line in the form of links to inaccurate news articles or misleading photos. “Good-Morning” memes are particularly popular among older generations and have become a main avenue for spreading false information. The private nature of the messaging app prevents researchers from tracking individual cases of disinformation.

Traditional media: Taiwan boasts one of the freest and most active media environments in Asia. Outlets compete to target polarized segments of society with twenty-four-hour sensational news coverage, often prioritizing scandal over factual accuracy. The PRC exerts direct influence through “pro-blue” media outlets such as China TV (CTV) and Chinese TV (CTiTV). According to Reporters without Borders, “the editorial line of some privately-owned media has changed radically [due to economic and political pressure from China] and it is no longer rare to find media outlets taking a line similar to the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) propaganda.” For example, in 2008 pro-unification businessman Tsai Eng-meng bought CTV and CTiTV news stations and The China Times, a leading Taiwanese Newspaper. His snack food company Want Want

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operates hundreds of factories in mainland China. According to multiple interviewees, these outlets have since begun producing overtly pro-China content. Pro-DPP media outlet *Taipei Times* described the Want Want media group as a “cancer” on Taiwan’s media landscape.17

PRC relies on two main tactics to flood these channels with disinformation:

- **Generation of unique content**
- **Amplification of Taiwanese-created misinformation**

According to experts interviewed by the authors, PRC-generated propaganda is produced manually but distributed using both manual and automated tactics. Evidence points to the active involvement of China’s ‘50-Cent Party,’ public employees—originally thought to be private citizens paid 50 cents per post—tasked with generating pro-PRC content and driving online conversations in favor of the Party’s position. The PRC also uses its resources to amplify the spread of misinformation generated by pro-unification Taiwanese citizens that promotes mainland interests.

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Impact

Stakeholders we interviewed disagreed over the extent to which foreign disinformation influences public opinion in Taiwan. Some attributed minimal impact and believe most users can easily recognize foreign content. Many interviewees believe it is easy to recognize CPC disinformation because it uses mainland expressions that are not commonly used in Taiwan and phrases in simplified rather than traditional Mandarin characters. Dr. Yi-Suo Tzeng, chief of Division of Cyber Warfare and Information Security at Taiwan's Institute for National Defense and Security Research, expressed concern that AI may improve the effectiveness of CCP campaigns in the future.

Others believed that the effect of disinformation depends on the content of the story how believable it is—and who it targets- how susceptible they are. Older generations have lower media literacy and are more vulnerable to misinformation. According to social media fact-checkers we spoke with, the younger generation is discouraged from correcting them due to cultural attitudes about respecting elders. There are also socioeconomic differences. Less-educated demographics lack technical skills and depend on Chinese economic support, particularly tourism, which makes them more receptive to pro-China content.

1) Undermine Taiwanese autonomy and democratic governance:

- **The Rise of the Kaohsiung Mayor**: Kaohsiung is a DPP stronghold district in southern Taiwan. The virtually unknown KMT candidate, Han Kuo-yu, ran on a platform of economic prosperity through increased relations with mainland China. Almost overnight, Han Kuo-yu became an internet sensation. A Taiwanese blogger18 tracked his rise on Google Trends. Within months, the mayoral candidate had more Google searches than President Tsai, the Taipei mayor, and Taiwanese celebrities.
  
  o 53.4M searches for Kaohsiung mayor
  
  o 14.7M searches for Taipei mayor

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18 Blog.joyhsu.com/1086
Evidence suggests foreign interference elevated the mayor’s online profile. One researcher created a YouTube video with randomly selected clips of Han Kuo-yu. It rapidly gained hundreds of thousands of followers, significantly outpacing the popularity of the creator’s other channels. When the researcher analyzed the channel’s analytics, he discovered anomalous demographic distributions. 80% of the viewers were male, compared to a normally even gender distribution on his other channels. Additionally, there was an unusually high rate of Android OS usage. Lastly, a poll taken of the viewers found that the majority of them could not answer questions related to commonly known information about Taiwan and the Kaohsiung region. Taken together, this evidence indicates that the channel’s traffic was largely automated and foreign. Supporters of Han Kuo-yu attribute his success to an effective social media campaign, spearheaded by his daughter, Coco Han.

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20 Min Hsuan Wu (Ttcat) (Deputy CEO, Taiwan’s Open Culture Foundation), in discussion with authors, January 2019.
2) Influence Pro-China Public Opinion:

- **Typhoon Tragedy:** Disinformation had a fatal impact in September 2018 when public outrage led a Taiwanese diplomat in Japan, Su Chii-Cherng, to commit suicide. After Typhoon Jebi struck Japan’s Kansai region, false reports that the Chinese consulate—but not Taiwan’s—sent buses to rescue stranded citizens at Kansai International Airport sent the media into a frenzy. Some outlets even inaccurately reported that Taiwanese citizens had identified themselves as mainlanders in order to board Chinese buses. In fact, the rescue buses had all been arranged by Japanese authorities and no nationality was given preference. Taiwanese investigators later traced the story’s origin to a false post by an undergraduate student in Taiwan. Taiwanese security officials discovered that accounts used to forward the message had Chinese IPs, suggesting that Chinese accounts played a significant role in the story going viral.21 It has been reported that the story became popular on Weibo among Chinese mainlanders before it reached Taiwanese social media signalling that it may have initially been intended as a domestic propaganda campaign.22

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21 Hans Tung (Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, National Taiwan University), in discussion with the authors, January 2019. Confirmed by Taiwanese security officials in discussions with the authors.

22 Olivia Yang (Program Officer, International Cooperation Department, Taiwan Foundation for Democracy), in discussion with the authors, January 2019; Ya-Wei Chou (Assistant Research Fellow, Domestic Affairs Department, Taiwan Foundation for Democracy), in discussion with the authors, January 2019.
3) Promote China-Taiwan Reunification:

- **Farmer Unrest**: In July 2018, an image of rotting pineapples went viral in Taiwan. The caption claimed, “The media is scared to report that Tainan’s pineapples has been discarded.” This built upon beliefs among pineapple farmers who believed that the price of pineapples had collapsed due to the DPP’s trade policies with China. In July, pineapple farmers marched in protest at the Executive Yuan. The Taiwanese Council of Agriculture later clarified that the photo had been taken in China and not Taiwan.

The yellow text corrects the false caption (in white) insinuating that DPP policies led to unsold agricultural products.

**Public Perception**

The Tsai administration has made it clear that it considers mainland China’s disinformation campaign to be a national security priority. However, the existence of highly polarized media filter-bubbles and the inability of the government to declassify the full nature of the threat has led to decreased attention and urgency from the public at large.

The government’s efforts to highlight PRC’s interference in the 2018 election did increase public awareness. While the government was clear in saying there was no doubt that disinformation could be traced directly back to mainland China, the lack of concrete evidence released to support their claims has emboldened critics who claim the administration is merely blaming its party’s loss in the election.
on Beijing. The government faces a challenge in balancing the need to protect sources and methods by keeping information classified and providing convincing evidence to the public. Journalists from both political camps have called for greater transparency from the government.

Lastly, segments of the population see PRC’s influence as a positive force in Taiwanese politics because they either support closer ties to the mainland or benefit from the political losses of the current government.

Solutions

Legal Solutions:

- **Prosecute the Spread of Disinformation:** A proposed amendment to the Civil Servants Election and Recall Act penalizes “systematic and mass spreading of disinformation aimed at causing a candidate to lose an election.” Disinformation about specific topics, such as disasters, may also be subject to additional penalties under proposed amendments to the Food Management Act, Communicable Disease Control Act, and Nuclear Emergency Response Act, among others.24

  - Pros: Clarifying the application of current legislation in the digital space will assist enforcement efforts.
  
  - Cons: This approach limits media freedom and free speech. The Committee to Protect Journalists expressed concerns that the legislation could be used by the administration to intimidate journalists and suppress unfavorable stories for political purposes.25 Pro-democracy opponents worry that “attempts to control information would make the government like mainland China.”26

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26 Hung-jen Wang (Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, National Cheng Kung University), in discussion with the authors, January 2019.
• **Legislate Media Responsibility:** A draft addendum to the Radio and Television Act requires media companies to “establish self-discipline measures to ensure content accuracy.”

  - Pros: Self-discipline of media companies places the responsibility on journalists, not the government, to judge content.
  - Cons: Competition among media companies may discourage compliance.

• **Regulate Political Advertisements:** Proposed modifications to the Presidential and Vice Presidential Election and Recall Act require media companies to discuss the source of funding for political advertisements and ban election-related advertisements paid for by foreign money.27

  - Pros: Concrete and limited action to remove foreign influence in elections.
  - Cons: Does not address other sources of disinformation. Low political feasibility because a large portion of politicians and the media are benefiting from the foreign money.

• **Regulating Technology Companies:** Inspired by recent legislation in Germany and France, a proposed addendum to the digital communications bill would require social technology companies to remove disinformation within twenty-four hours under penalty of fine. Additionally, in April 2019 President Tsai moved to ban Chinese-owned video streaming services in an effort to curb Beijing’s influence.

  - Pros: Mandatory obligations may be more effective than voluntary regulations, as public pressure on technology companies to mitigate the spread of disinformation has failed to produce results. Civil society members familiar with government efforts, recounted: “They all say, ‘We are

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a global company and have a global policy. We can't do anything special for Taiwan.”

- **Cons:** The regulation places private companies in the position of deciding what constitutes fact. The tight time frame for content removal may encourage companies to remove information that is flagged as false without a thorough investigation, infringing on free speech. Stringent regulation may also have economic costs and implementation challenges as technology companies have little incentive to tailor their global policy for a small market like Taiwan.

- **Restrict Foreign Social-Media Platforms:** In April 2019, President Tsai announced plans to ban Chinese-owned video streaming services in an effort to curb Beijing’s influence. This would impact platforms that currently operate in Taiwan, such as Baidu’s iQiyi platform.
  
  - **Pros:** Banning foreign-owned technology platforms increases the government’s control over domestic discourse. Companies headquartered outside of the country have been unresponsive to Taiwanese concerns, citing corporate terms of service that apply to all countries.
  
  - **Cons:** The government’s move exemplifies the challenge of combating disinformation in free and open societies. Banning entire services, while effective, is a clear example of censorship that undermines Taiwan’s democracy in order to save it. It will also have a limited impact, as most disinformation spreads through direct messaging applications and non-Chinese owned platforms.

*Improved Government Communication*

- **Rapid Response Agency Teams:** Recognizing that combatting a false narrative spread is most effective within the first forty-eight hours, the government has deployed rapid response teams which use a number of digital and traditional communications methods. For example, to combat disinformation spreading through LINE images, the administration has
begun generating their own LINE pictures to accompany official press releases.

- **Pros:** Rapid responses are effective because they utilize the same forms of media by which disinformation spreads. Press releases and other official government communications can be ignored by the public and may not trend on social or mainstream media in time to persuade public opinion.

- **Cons:** For communications to be effective, the government must build public trust and ensure they are reaching the right audience.

- **Increasing Transparency:** Minister Audrey Tang has spearheaded government efforts to improve communication with citizens. She seeks to “fight [dis]information with information.” Her main mandate of “open government” attempts to build public trust through radical transparency.29 She also works closely with civil society organizations to enhance coordination between civil society, parliament, and the administration.

  - **Pros:** Greater transparency about the scope and attribution of disinformation will raise public awareness. Greater transparency in government functions increases public trust.

  - **Cons:** Sharing sensitive information has national security implications. Opponents characterize Minister Tang’s call for “radical transparency” as unrealistic and likely to endanger sources and methods.

- **Media Literacy:** The National Academy for Educational Research (NAER) introduced a new curriculum in 2018 which included media literacy as one of nine core literacies.30 Minister Tang, who worked at NAER prior to her government appointment, explained that Taiwanese students were not historically taught the difference between fact and opinion.31 A professor at a top Taiwanese university emphasized

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29 Audrey Tang (Taiwanese Minister without Portfolio, 2016- Present), in discussion with the authors, January 2019.

30 Audrey Tang, in discussion with the authors, January 2019.

31 Billion Lee and Johnson Liang (Co-Founders, Project Cofacts, g0v.tw), in discussion with the authors, January 2019.
that even his colleagues have trouble distinguishing between what is fake and real online.32

- **Pros**: Media literacy education is a low-cost, long-term solution that addresses disinformation across all channels.
- **Cons**: Curriculum changes only affect future generations, not the current voting population.

**Civil Society Solutions**

- **Cooperation with Technology Companies**: Civil society groups acknowledged that social-media companies have an important role to play in combating disinformation on their platforms. However, they argued that technology companies should avoid direct intervention and instead support the efforts of civil society groups through data access and algorithm transparency.33
  - **Pros**: Civil society organizations are particularly robust and well-regarded by the Taiwanese public. They have a legitimacy and record of fighting in the public interest that predates Taiwan’s democratic government.
  - **Cons**: This approach does not address false information that is spread through private group chats and relies on technology companies’ willingness to devote sufficient resources to the issue.

- **Fact Checking**: A number of civil society organizations have adopted methods for fact checking information on open and closed platforms. Cofacts and Auntie Mayoo developed fact checking Chatbots that can be invited into LINE conversations. Watchout applied real-time fact checking subtitles to livestreams of three political debates during the last election cycle. Journalists at Taiwan Factcheck scan social media

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32 Hung-jen Wang, in discussion with the authors, January 2019.
33 Billion Lee and Johnson Liang, in discussion with the authors, January 2019.
for disinformation and released digital reports rebuking common false narratives.

- **Pros:** These innovative solutions utilize the technology to fight disinformation in real time.

- **Cons:** Digital society moves quickly, and adversaries like China have vastly more money and manpower.34

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34 Jason Pan, in discussion with the authors, January 2019.
Case Study: South Korea

BLUF

Disinformation has not clearly influenced the outcome of South Korean elections, but scandals that implicate political aides and intelligence officials may instigate a “race to the bottom” where the use of automated software to sway public opinion becomes more widespread. Although the South Korean government’s effort to combat disinformation has raised public awareness, their approach threatens civil liberties. Additionally, the increasing weaponization of “fake news” by domestic politicians undermines trust in public institutions.

Political Context

South Korea is among the world’s most affluent and technologically advanced countries, but a turbulent history and contested national identity have contributed to extreme political polarization. After the Korean War, South Korea experienced decades of military dictatorship and autocracy. The country’s democratic transition began in the late 1980s, and many consider the 1997 presidential election the start of mature democracy. Although South Korea is considered a modern, liberal democracy in the international community, Korean politics remain highly controversial. A succession of leaders have been accused of corruption and exerting undue influence over industry; with the exception of President Kim Dae-Jung, every modern president has been indicted or imprisoned following his or her presidential term. Institutions such as the media and intelligence services are perceived as highly partisan, and public trust in government is low.

Today, South Korean society is divided on issues ranging from gender equality, to the US military presence, to reunification with North Korea. The two main parties, the liberal Democratic Party of Korea (DPK) and the conservative Liberty Korea Party (LKP) dominate elections for the presidency and National Assembly seats. The LKP has historically pursued a close relationship with the US in light of the American military presence in South Korea, which they perceive as essential to Korean security interests. The DPK has criticized the LKP for making concessions to the US and pushed for South Korea to take a more active role in Korean Peninsula security, as well as championing more labor-friendly economic policies. Amidst fierce competition and animosity between parties, some elected officials have used all resources, including disinformation, to discredit their opponents.
Disinformation Threat Overview

Sources and Goals

Interviewees in South Korea expressed the greatest concern about domestic sources of disinformation. Based on a review of recent cases, domestic political stakeholders appear to leverage disinformation to achieve three primary goals:

- Inflate public support for a politician or party
- Amplify false narratives to spur mobilization
- Discredit legitimate opposition by designating it “fake news”

Channels and Tactics

With one of the world’s highest internet penetration rates, South Korea is an avid consumer of social media and traditional and online news.35 As in many other countries, technology has revolutionized news delivery and consumption, as well as person-to-person exchange. Trends in South Korea highlight the growing influence of technology platforms in the spread of disinformation.

Three common disinformation channels and tactics emerged:

- **Internet Chat Forums:** Online forums and comments are vibrant platforms for discussion, in part due to high participation and a lack of user anonymity. Historically, the South Korean government required citizens to log onto the internet using government-issued IDs similar to a social security number.36 While this requirement was recently removed due to identity theft concerns, some internet platforms still require users to sign on and post under their real identity. Based on this legacy, internet forums are seen as a legitimate platform for discussion are still highly influential today. Disinformation actors have used these forums to manipulate public opinion through the use of bots, paid posters, or volunteers. One common strategy involves corraling existing Internet interest groups, such as a K-Pop fan group, to post negative comments on a story.37

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36 Jin Park, Ph.D. (President, Asia Future Institute), in discussion with the authors, January 2019.

37 Researchers at The Institute for Democracy (민주연구원), in discussion with the authors, January 2019.
• **Social Networking Sites (SNS):** Many Koreans communicate through social networking sites, which include social media platforms like Facebook and YouTube and messaging applications like Korea-based KakaoTalk. Private messaging applications in particular contribute to the rapid spread of disinformation, with one former National Assembly Defense Committee staffer calling Kakao Talk the largest source of misinformation in the country.³⁸ Recently, the Korean government has criticized technology platforms for enabling the spread of disinformation, with current President Moon Jae-In calling for YouTube to shut down suspected fake accounts. Government officials, journalists, and civil society members, however, expressed deep concern over government attempts to influence company policy and have opposed regulation that could limit free speech.

• **Mainstream Media Stories:** Traditional news outlets, including major daily newspapers and public broadcast channels, have published misinformation and disinformation in the past. Some journalists attributed this to the fast pace of online news, which has incentivized sensational stories and decreased resources for fact-checking. Others expressed concern over increased government pressure to suppress negative stories. Many large media outlets have close ties with political parties, and the current administration has used the threat of tax investigations to influence media owners.

**Impact**

As in the case of Brexit and the 2016 US presidential election, it is difficult to qualify the impact of disinformation on political outcomes. Many interviewees, however, believed disinformation has had a significant impact on public opinion, as illustrated by the following examples. Additionally, the government’s response has had direct implications for civil liberties and the debate around media and technology regulation.

1. **Manipulating public opinion for certain politicians or parties**

   - **Druking Bot Scandal:** A liberal blogger nicknamed “Druking” has been accused of manipulating comments and likes on online news stories related to President Moon. The suspected blogger, Kim Kyoung-soo, was an aide to President Moon and worked on his election campaign. Kim is accused of using software to generate millions of fake comments and likes, creating the impression

³⁸ Former staffer at the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea, in discussion with the authors, January 2019.
of public approval for President Moon and the liberal Democratic Party of Korea.39

- **DNI Comment Scandal:** The former Director of National Intelligence Services, Won Sei-Hoon, was recently sentenced to prison for ordering a psychological warfare team to conduct an online smear campaign during the 2012 presidential campaign. Mr. Won was accused of directing psychological warfare agents to post online comments in support of conservative candidate President Park, as well as comments accusing then-candidate Mr. Moon of being a North Korean sympathizer. Although it is illegal to use the intelligence services to influence domestic elections, incumbents have abused National Intelligence Service (NIS) resources for political gain in the past.

2. *Amplifying public dissent*

- **Mad Cow Protests:** In 2008, widespread protests over the import of American beef paralyzed the Republic of Korea (ROK) government for three months. During high-level beef import negotiations between the Korean and American governments, a Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) investigative report asserted that American beef imports were tainted by Mad Cow disease. The misinformation spurred thousands of Koreans to protest against President Lee Myung-bak, with liberal politicians criticizing his conservative administration for caving to American interests. A subsequent investigation revealed that the MBC report contained many cases of misinformation and had no evidence of Mad Cow disease in American beef exported to Korea.

3. *Discrediting negative news stories and suppressing political opposition*

- **Seoul Ferry Accident:** On April 16, 2014, a South Korean ferry accident killed over 300 passengers, many of whom were high school students on a field trip. Then-President Park was heavily criticized for the chaotic rescue operation and high casualty rate. In response, President Park announced a crackdown on social media and declared her intent to prosecute those sharing “false rumors” on KakaoTalk.

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■ **War on Fake News**: In October 2018, President Moon announced a “War on Fake News” that purportedly aimed to limit the spread of disinformation. The initiative established a special committee on fake news and directed the prosecutor’s office to penalize people who spread disinformation. He also called on YouTube to remove some conservative accounts that criticized the liberal administration’s approach towards North Korea. The initiative received heavy pushback from both conservatives and liberals, as well as news outlets and media associations who released statements opposing the government’s approach.

**Public Perception**

Interviewees held mixed opinions on the threat misinformation poses to South Korea. Some expressed deep concern with the impact of misinformation on Korea’s political institutions. One former representative in the Korea National Assembly, who wished to remain anonymous, expressed concern with the proliferation of false or misleading news stories picked up by the mainstream media, saying “sound democracy should be based on sound journalism.” Former Ambassador to the United Nations Oh Joon characterized disinformation as a growing problem, citing the twenty-four hour news cycle and availability of online news platforms as major drivers of this trend. Ambassador Oh compared modern disinformation to earlier phases of his 30+ year foreign service career, saying it has become “more common and more impactful.”

In contrast, some journalists and younger government officials did not believe misinformation has had a significant influence on Korean politics. Ken Choi, an editor at Korea’s most widely-read newspaper the Chosun Daily, cited the open nature of democracy as an obstacle to disinformation. Noting that authoritarian states exert far greater control over information, he suggested “the more open society is the less you have fake news” because citizens have access to data to refute false narrative. Others suggested increasing media literacy among the younger generation will naturally reduce the impact of disinformation. Many journalists and civil society members were more concerned with government intervention than disinformation itself. They characterized President Moon’s “War on Fake News” as a direct threat to freedom of speech and freedom of the press.

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40 Oh Joon (South Korean Ambassador to the United Nations (UN) 2013-2016 and President of the United Nations Economic and Social Council 2015-2016), in discussion with the authors, January 2019.

41 Woosuk Kenneth Choi (Deputy Editor, Business Department, The Chosun Ilbo), in discussion with the authors, January 2019.
Solutions

Many people believed that the media and individual citizens have a responsibility to limit the spread of unsubstantiated rumors and false stories, but expressed deep concern about the role of government in combatting disinformation.

The following section outlines approaches to combating disinformation in South Korea:

Legal Solutions

- **Prosecute the spread of disinformation**: The Korean government has proposed various efforts to criminalize the dissemination of misinformation, including expanding or using existing libel laws to punish individuals who spread false stories.
  - Pros: The administration asserts this approach will lead to swift and decisive action, as well as deter producers of misinformation.
  - Cons: Criminalizing disinformation may suppress legitimate stories and curtail civil liberties, including freedom of speech and freedom of the press.

Media Regulation

- **Korean Communications Committee (KCC) and Korean Communication Standards Committee (KCSC)**: KCC provides standards and oversight for traditional media, while KCSC oversees online and social media.
  - Pros: KCC and KCSC enforce standards for media quality, and can help limit the spread of disinformation by compelling news organizations to issue corrections and apologies for false stories. After the mad cow protests, KCC required the news organization that produce the original report to apologize for spreading misinformation.
  - Cons: As government bodies, KCC and KCSC have been accused of enabling censorship and monitoring. KCSC has been used to suppress negative online posts about sitting presidents and to collect private information about social media users. Additionally, the mediation process may not be swift enough to effectively counter a viral story.
Civil Society Solutions

- **SNU Factcheck**: Seoul National University oversees a fact-checking platform that is integrated with the news section in Naver, Korea’s largest internet portal. SNU Factcheck partners with major media organizations across the political spectrum to identify false stories. Individual media outlets can rate the veracity of a flagged article and provide a statement to explain their rating.
  
  - **Pros**: Given their lack of political agenda, SNU Factcheck is perceived as a more neutral arbiter of truth. Partnering with media organizations across the political spectrum allows news consumers to view multiple perspectives on a flagged story.
  
  - **Cons**: The platform has struggled to attract users. SNU Factcheck identified their user base as a major growth opportunity and acknowledged that their current traffic falls short of their goals.

- **Platform Transparency**: Korean think tank Institute for Democracy calls for internet service providers (ISPs) to provide greater transparency into their algorithms to help individuals identify the spread of disinformation. ISPs could monitor trends, such as the number of comments made by a user in a set amount of time, to identify comment or news manipulation.

  - **Pros**: ISPs have access to many indicators of malicious activity and could help flag stories with unusual search history that appear to be trending due to a disinformation campaign.

  - **Cons**: ISPs are not incentivized to provide greater transparency, and it is unclear how the average internet user would interpret this information. Additionally, granting ISPs greater access to internet traffic content may jeopardize user privacy and data protection.

**DPRK Disinformation: Not a Credible Threat**

Most interviewees did not consider internationally-generated disinformation a major influence on Korean politics. In their opinion, foreign actors did not have the will or ability to launch a significant disinformation campaign. South Korea’s primary adversary is the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), or North Korean regime. While the DPRK possesses advanced cyber crime and warfare capabilities, their influence operations are often primarily directed at DPRK
citizens. The regime maintains some externally-facing propaganda, but the South Korean government blocks known DPRK sites and criminalizes the dissemination of pro-North Korea propaganda. While cases are rarely prosecuted, DPRK propaganda on the state-run website Naenara is relatively unsophisticated. Some Korean intelligence officials and DPRK scholars believe the regime propagates more effective disinformation by promoting negative stories about topics related to vital North Korean interests, such as the American military presence in ROK, and leaving pro-DPRK and pro-China comments on internet message boards.42

Open Questionnaire to Human Rights Schemers Issued

The Korea Association for Human Rights Studies on December 30 raised an open questionnaire, in which it said that this year 2018 has witnessed a great change in the world political trend and, in particular, warm wind of peace swept the Korean peninsula and the region, drawing the public attention.

The questionnaire said that the world has undergone amazing changes, but only the US and its followers remain unchanged in their mean and stupid ambition to stifle the DPRK.

Shortly ago, the US and its followers at a full-dress session of the United Nations General Assembly fabricated another “resolution on human rights in north Korea” malignantly slandering the dignity and system of the DPRK, while letting out abuses like “extensive and serious violation of human rights” and “probe into responsibility”, it noted.

The association, on behalf of the Korean people and conscience of mankind, made the following questions to the US and its vassal forces hell-bent on turning black into white and the UN playing a role of rubber stamp for the US against the international justice and impartiality:

1. Is there any country on the earth like the DPRK where the people fully enjoy political freedom and democratic rights as masters of society?

We’d like to ask if you have ever heard of such political terms as politics based on the people-first doctrine and politics of respecting and loving the people and the motto of prioritizing the interests of the people, holding them absolute and making selfless, devoted efforts for the good of people.

2. Can you pick out any country like the DPRK that has no jobless person and vagabond?

We’d like to ask if you, bat-blinds, have no nerve to believe that there is the country unique on this planet, where all the working people are living a creative working life to their heart’s content, free from unemployment and worry about job.

Examples of DPRK State Propaganda Published on the State Portal, Naenara, in February 2019

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42 In-Seung Kay (European Chamber of Commerce), in discussion with the authors, January 2019.
Conclusion

Democracies rely on public institutions, the free exchange of ideas, and an informed voting population that differentiates truth from fiction. By exploiting values like freedom of speech and a robust press, disinformation threatens democratic foundations and American interests. Additionally, technology has increased the effectiveness and reduced the costs of a large-scale disinformation campaign. Authoritarian regimes around the world are embracing disinformation as a low-resource, high-impact asymmetric tool to manipulate public opinion within and outside their borders. As Artificial Intelligence research progresses, technologies that harness deep fake capabilities and sentiment analysis will enable more precise targeting from malign actors. It is therefore critical that American policy makers define the scope of this problem now and take proactive steps to mitigate its effects. This paper concludes with a series of proposals that policymakers should consider to combat disinformation.

Understanding Future Trends in the US

The disinformation threat landscape in Taiwan and South Korea foreshadows trends that may impact US politics. Taiwan's experience suggests that malicious actors will continue to leverage disinformation in increasingly creative ways. As distribution channels and tactics become more widely available, state and non-state actors enjoy reduced barriers to disseminating false information. Foreign interference in Taiwan's mid-term and mayoral elections indicates that disinformation may feature in off-cycle years and US state and local elections. The US should anticipate that foreign actors will identify and manipulate cultural divisions with calculated precision, and that multiple countries will deploy disinformation as a foreign influence tool.

The prominence of misinformation and disinformation in South Korea's domestic politics highlights the danger of creating a political culture that fosters rumors, speculation, and false stories. Unchecked, disinformation may become a regular feature of the campaign cycle with domestic politicians and interest groups engaging in a "race to the bottom" in order to compete. Without a bipartisan effort to educate the American public and condemn disinformation, all parties may unintentionally create conditions in which it flourishes.

Finally, cross-sector efforts to combat disinformation in Asia demonstrate how a solution will require coordination across different industries, government entities,
and groups in civil society. Individual parties face unique weaknesses and cannot curtail the problem alone. For example, the technology companies who host communication platforms have little incentive to change their terms of service to eliminate disinformation. Government cannot monitor, regulate, and prosecute all potential cases of disinformation without infringing on civil liberties. Civil society groups may develop innovative solutions, but often lack the platform or access to scale. An effective response will engage the strengths of many actors and recognize the limitations that each encounter.

**Recommendations for US Policymakers**

Taiwan and South Korea provide useful lessons learned for Western democracies facing a similar threat. This paper concludes with a series of proposals for US policymakers to combat disinformation.

**Awareness**

- **Alert the American people of a broader influence campaign, citing clear, accessible evidence to explain the threat and implications for American values.** Taiwanese politicians have spoken publicly about Chinese influence in an effort to help the public understand and respond to the threat.

- **Adapt government communication strategies to media trends, identifying non-traditional distribution channels to increase awareness and message scope.** Government responses that are released on traditional media or read as a prepared statement will be less effective than those that align with the public's news consumption and behavior.

- **Declassify intelligence to increase public trust in the government's assessment.** These efforts should include information about the objectives of the influence campaign and foreign actor attribution methods. This will strengthen public knowledge and enable journalists to report on facts without resorting to sensationalism and conjecture.

**Research Support**

- **Increase government transparency and facilitate public access to opensource intelligence that can be used for quantitative and qualitative disinformation research.** Academic work on disinformation suffers from a lack of hard data and rigorous statistical analysis. Increased public
access to government intelligence and private sector data will improve the quality of research and lead to innovative solutions.

- **Increase funding for Artificial Intelligence research.** Investment in cyber forensic capabilities will mitigate the risks posed by deep fake capabilities and AI-enabled disinformation. Additionally, research programs that seek to harness AI to identify and block sources of disinformation should be encouraged.

- **Pressure technology companies to collaborate with civil society groups who have developed technical solutions to reduce disinformation on social media platforms, including providing these groups with data, API access, or reduced operating fees.** Civil society groups in Taiwan and South Korea struggle to gain access to the tools necessary to implement their solutions, which are often controlled by American social media companies. US officials should encourage American companies to work closely with domestic and foreign civil society groups.

- **Enhance international coordination and support a global initiative to identify emerging threats and potential solutions.** Smaller countries like Taiwan lack the international power to fight foreign influence alone, but they can provide innovative solutions. International cooperation allows for collaborative problem solving and collective action. Additionally, public support legitimizes a targeted democracy's claims of foreign influence.

**Policy Action**

- **Mandate transparency around online and print advertising.** Many election-related advertisements in Taiwan were funded by Chinese-backed organizations or individuals. Requiring companies to verify and publish the origins of an ad campaign, through legislation like the proposed Honest Ads Act, would help reduce foreign election interference.

- **Establish a strategy to combat foreign influence at large and clarify ownership at the federal and state level.** Review existing pockets of expertise, such as the DHS Taskforce on Foreign Influence, the FBI's Foreign Influence Task Force, the CIA's Counterintelligence Center, and the State Department's Global Engagement Center, and centralize efforts to identify and respond to disinformation.

- **Develop an interagency response plan to address disinformation as early and forcefully as possible.** Create rapid digital response teams
within federal agencies and share best practices with state and local
election officials.

- **Build more formal agreements with social media companies to enhance collaboration.** This may include special reporting channels for election-related disinformation, designated points of contact, and threat sharing.

- **Create dialogues and policies that address citizens’ concerns and rebuild trust in responsive government.** Disinformation capitalizes on entrenched domestic conflict and legitimate grievances.

- **Empower journalists and citizens to independently validate information by encouraging greater transparency at all levels of government and avoiding rhetoric which broadly de-legitimizes traditional sources of information.** The most effective validation techniques will include stakeholders from multiple parties, such as South Korea’s SNU FactCheck initiative that sources truth ratings from media outlets across the political spectrum.

- **Acknowledge legal and technical obstacles to the government’s ability to respond to disinformation to highlight areas for civil society involvement.** Utilize federal grants and technology training programs to build civil society’s capacity to combat disinformation.

- **Lead a bipartisan effort to call out disinformation that threatens the integrity of American elections.** Focus on disinformation cases with objective election process inaccuracies, such as a malicious campaign telling voters they could vote via text, rather than political or social themes.
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