The effect of disinformation on democracy: the impact of Hungary's democratic decline

Jonathan REISHER[*]

Abstract

Hungary's democratic backsliding demonstrates that the Cold War era notion that more access to information will accelerate the spread of democracy is dying. For authoritarians, social media enabled disinformation is the weapon of choice because it challenges democratic institutional legitimacy. The popularity of the Sputnik V vaccine in Hungary indicates that, before Russia's invasion of Ukraine Russian influence was growing in the EU's backyard. By exploiting social, political, and economic inequalities in Hungary, Russia disinformation facilitated Victor Orban's consolidation of power ahead of the April 2020 elections. Democracies should adopt a new paradigm of state power projection that views robust domestic institutions as the way to confront the issue of social media enabled disinformation. Democracy's most effective weapon against disinformation is institutional legitimacy, socio-economic equality, and public participation in government.

Keywords: Hungary, Viktor Orban, Democracy, Disinformation, COVID19, Russia

Introduction

Much of the discourse related to disinformation on social media has focused on the critical work of understanding its technical and psychological implications. While these are vitally important components of the problem, more research is needed on the effects of social media on governmental legitimacy and the deterioration of democratic institutions (Rosenbach and Mansted, 2018). The COVID19 pandemic provides a unique example as people's interactions worldwide were dominated by the internet. Concurrently, nations were developing their pandemic policy responses and vaccinations. These circumstances provide state and non-state propagandists ample opportunity to foment discord about the role of government amongst social or political sub-groups (Roth, 2020).

Hungary presents a unique case study. Its membership in the European Union (EU) and its position as the only EU country to authorize Russia's Sputnik V vaccine has allowed Putin's Russia

[*] Jonathan Reisher is a master's student at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, United States, e-mail: jreisher@andrew.cmu.edu or at Jonathan.reisher@gmail.com.

and the democratic West to directly compete for influence in Hungary. Russian strategy has long been to divide European organizations and degrade the legitimacy of European institutions (White House, 2021). This divide and conquer tactic has repeated itself during the Cold War and more recently with the annexation of Crimea. Furthermore, information has been a historically dominate feature of Russia's arsenal (GEC, 2020). In the wake of the COVID19 pandemic, prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Hungary was a target for disruptive Russian influence campaigns seeking to prove the effectiveness of authoritarianism.

This paper argues that the rise of authoritarianism in Hungary is due, in part, to foreign influence operations aimed at undermining Hungarian democracy. The other cause of Hungarian authoritarianism is a function of Victor Orban's deliberate decisions to increase his own power at the expense of democracy. The paper begins by discussing topic of democratic institutions to evaluate social media's impact on representative governance. The next section discusses Viktor Orban and the political ramifications of the COVID19 pandemic. The following sections of the paper will show that the COVID19 pandemic gave Russia a new opportunity to degrade democratic institutional legitimacy and gain influence in Hungary. The analysis uses vaccine efficacy and vaccination rates in Hungary as a proxy indicator that Russian influence is increasing in Hungary. The paper continues by arguing that Hungary is in a critical stage of democratic deterioration given Orban's emergency COVID19 legislative powers and the upcoming 2022 elections. The paper also explores the implications of Hungary's democratic deterioration for the long-term viability of democratic institutions. Finally, the reader should keep in mind that the analysis presented in this paper ends in December 2021 and does not explore the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Hungarian Democracy.

1. Institutional Legitimacy of Democracy

Democratic governments do not always end in violent coups or dramatic revolutions. Increasingly, governments slowly deteriorate into authoritarianism (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p. 5). Democracy's primary components are its institutions and the legitimacy of those institutions. Together legitimate democratic institutions exercise the rule of law over the people to conduct the affairs of state (Przeworski, 2019, p. 3). Authoritarians wishing to co-opt democracy need only to fill institutions with adherents and redefine political norms to gain legitimacy from citizens. Also called "democratic backsliding," democratic deterioration is the gradual erosion of institutions and norms (Przeworski, 2019, p. 103). Like a lobster who does not realize it's being cooked, authoritarians

gradually apply heat and pressure until democratic institutions are subverted and the connective tissue of public legitimacy is severed.

1.1. Institutions- Democracy's Muscle

The elected members in a democracy are always far too few to properly administer a country. Therefore, effective institutions are vital for a democracy to function. Institutions are also crucial in democracies because they retain the human capital to produce the work required for policy development and implementation. Institutions also maintain the political norms of a government. Norms are necessary because, in theory, they control the power of individuals or parties to subvert a free and fair society. Constitutional documents and judicial precedent provide democratic 'guardrails' for acceptable political activities (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p. 112). Generally, all democratic institutions maintain two norms which are forbearance and mutual toleration. Forbearance is the exercise of restraint from antagonizing an opponent to the point they no longer wish to participate in democracy (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p. 106). Mutual toleration is the concept that if rivals adhere to constitutional rules, all sides accept that their opponents have an equal right to exist in the system (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, p. 101). Ultimately, these institutional guardrails are vital for bolstering a government system against a top-down overthrow by authoritarian leaders.

1.2. Legitimacy- Democracy's Connective Tissue

Since the Enlightenment, the concept of political legitimacy has evoked numerous philosophical debates about the morals and virtue of government (Rothstein, 2009, p. 311-313). However, Rawls and Ripstein's assertion that legitimacy refers to the justification of coercive political power and the public's obligation to comply is meaningful in a modern context (Fabienne, 2017). Another useful definition describes legitimacy as an expression of community recognition of a political system (Bekkars and Edwards, 2013, p. 49). While the concept of governmental legitimacy is complex, the public must accept democratic political systems. Otherwise, democracies are susceptible to bottom-up coups because the government institutions are no longer legitimate to the masses.

There are numerous sources of political legitimacy. The traditional form of legitimacy was the religious right of a ruler to exert power over their people (Hoffman, 2018). Other forms include legal, cultural, traditional, results, fact, or consent-based legitimacy (Fabienne, 2020). In the case of

democracy, consent-based legitimacy is by far the most important because it is predicated on the idea of public acceptance which is the public's freestanding judgment of government decisions (Fabienne, 2017).

Legitimacy as a system is derived from the input, throughput, and output of the democratic process. Input legitimacy refers to the participatory quality of the government process for voting and creating laws (Schmidt, 2013). Input-oriented legitimacy is also related to the concept of a participatory government "by the people" where normal citizens have a variety of ways to interact or join the government (Schmidt, 2013). Throughput legitimacy refers to the procedural aspect of government decision making that is transparent, fair, and accountable (Schmidt, 2013). Throughput legitimacy acknowledges the need of governments to use efficient decision-making processes (Schmidt, 2013). Finally, output legitimacy is based on the results of a government. Output legitimacy builds on the idea of a government "for the people" in that governments should generate meaningful solutions for citizen's problems (Schmidt, 2013). Thus, legitimacy should be thought of as a relationship between the government and the people.

In addition to its relational nature, legitimacy can also have a direct or indirect approach. Direct forms of legitimacy are exercised by the state and the elected representatives who are part of governing bodies. However, indirect legitimacy can be exercised by multilevel governance (Bekkers and Edwards, 2013, pp. 59-60). Many nations have a version of the United States federalist system where the national government exercises control over states or providences. Indirect legitimacy also occurs at the multi-national level. Organizations like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) exert influence in their member nations due to a collective agreement to make collaborative decisions (Bekkers and Edwards, 2013, p. 60). Indirect legitimacy demonstrates that the international community effects democratic legitimacy alongside domestic actors.

Democracy's reliance on legitimacy is fickle and delicate. Public opinion is susceptible to unforeseen and sudden changes. Additionally, the internet enables state and non-state agents to directly engage with foreign public audiences. That unfettered access can and does allow for the legitimacy of a government system to be challenged by other countries and by groups. If an adversarial country can influence the legitimacy of democratic institutions, then that hostile country can use a country's citizens against it. Finally, when the legitimacy of a government is undermined, people are far more likely to use violent means to overthrow illegitimate institutions (Rothstein, 2009, pp. 319-322).

1.3 Democracy's Legitimacy Problem

The decline of democracy is not a new topic. Think tanks like Freedom House have studied democratic backsliding for decades (Zselyky, 2021). Democracy's systematic weakness since the end of the Cold War has focused on input legitimacy. For example, after the fall of Saddam's regime, Paul Bremer's Coalition Provisional Authority prioritized voting (Rothstein, 2009, pp. 319-322). The principal idea was that if the Iraqi government was fully representative, output legitimacy or government effectiveness would follow. In contrast, authoritarians and populists alike contend that democracy's overemphasis on the democratic process has led to failure.

There are generally two kinds of democratic opposition. China's rivalry with the West has recently dominated state-to-state opposition. China's centralized 'state capitalist' model, led by a single party, prioritizes the output side of governmental legitimacy instead of individual rights (Morrison, 2017, p. 29). State-based competition, however, is characterized by competing institutions operating primarily within established international norms. The other form of democratic opposition is internal erosion. Autocrats and populists co-opt democracy's institutions while simultaneously reframing public opinion and attacking institutional legitimacy (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018, pp. 80-82). The anti-democratic movement in Central Europe started in the mid-2000s with Vladimir Putin's "sovereign democracy" and then spread to "ill-liberal democracies" in Poland, Hungary, and Italy throughout the 2010s (Zselyky, 2021). Furthermore, former Soviet Bloc countries, like Hungary, have lower public trust in government institutions than countries in the rest of Europe (Ghodsee and Orenstein, 2021). In former communist European Countries less than 30% of citizens trust the government (Ghodsee and Orenstein, 2021).

While structural attacks on democratic institutions and legitimacy are central to the anti-democratic movement, it is not the only element. Democratic institutions have also degraded due to public perceptions of inefficiency and corruption. The concept of institutional or political legitimacy is much like John Locke's economic principle of the invisible hand (Bekkers and Edwars, 2013, p. 48). There is an unseen, often ill-defined, force keeping a country's institutions legitimate to the people. However, attitudes around political legitimacy are also subject to changing social norms. To maintain public legitimacy, democratic institutions must reflect society. Absent the consensus that democratic institutions are legitimate, representative forms of government will not exist.

Another element that influences the public perception of democracy is the role of the social contract. In democracy the rules of the Enlightenment still apply. Rousseau in *The Social Contract* articulated that "the social order is a sacred right which serves as a basis for all other rights. And it is

not a natural right, it must be one founded on covenants" (Lazar, 2021). In non-authoritarian governments, an understanding exists between the government and the people. The understanding is that people agree to adhere to laws, even if they do not always agree with them, in exchange for capable, responsive governance. "Understandings" are codified in law and legal precedent, which serves as the basis for political cohesion and popular support for governing bodies (Berg, 1978, pp. 151-152).

Furthermore, Aristotle sharply delineated the 'good citizen' and the 'good man' (Perry, 1978, p. 39). Educated citizens understand that democratic rule often requires them to make concessions in their right to self-determination. Put another way, living in a democratic society means that an individual's optimal policy solution is not always society's optimal policy solution (Perry, 1978, pp. 39-40). Moreover, an effective social contract requires good governance and a public that is knowledgeable and engaged in politics. Absent public input, a government's only recourse is to resort to autocracy or oligarchy because the government's legitimacy is derived from the people.

1.4 Social Media: The Anti-Legitimacy Super Weapon

The last century has seen many technological innovations in warfare. In the information age, social media is a revolution in military affairs because it allows adversarial nations or actors to directly engage with citizens of rival nations. Direct state engagement of foreign citizens subverts the notion of national sovereignty as defined in the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia because sovereigns no longer have the exclusive preview over their citizens (Patrikarakos, 2017, p. 9). Additionally, the internet allows state and non-state actors to directly interfere with the function of democracies by attacking consensus, questioning voting, and stoking sectarian conflict within targeted segments of a population. While the internet and social media were not intended to be weapons of repression, they are consistently used to assault institutions, legitimacy, and the social construct in democratic nations (Baer-Bader, 2020).

Authoritarian degradation of democratic tents is enabled by social media companies that consistently use content algorithms that prioritize revenues (Orlowski, 2021). Social media profits from user engagement because it provides marketable data and advertisement opportunities (Orlowski, 2021). A specific example is Facebook's "angry" emoji, which in 2017 was weighted five times more than the other emotional post responses (Marrow, 2021). This suggests that Facebook was knowingly promoting divisive content to drive engagement. While the company has since provided equal weight to the angry emoji, Congressional testimony of Facebook insider, Frances

Haugen, asserts that the company has made a concerted effort to prioritize profits over safety (Marrow, 2021). Absent regulation there is little incentive for social media companies to facilitate civil discourse.

Another aspect of social media's profit maximizing algorithms is to establish reaffirming silos of information within sub-groups of a nation's citizenry. Facebook uses its 'community' concept to connect people with similar interests through solidified groups, whereas Twitter uses hashtags to connect users with related worldviews (Orlowski, 2021). Social media executives understand that users prefer to consume information that reaffirm their beliefs. Monetizing confirmation bias ensures that people will return to the platform when an event occurs to see how other like-minded people react. Eventually, the algorithms 'learn' a person's attitudes and avoids providing them information that conflicts with their ideas. This is very damaging to public discourse as is reduces a person's capacity to engage with opposing viewpoints (Orlowski, 2021).

A combination of reaffirming algorithms and partisan news platforms created segregate constitutions of knowledge with their own facts and value judgments of those facts.[14] In a society with very different conceptions of reality, there is little hope that the society can arbitrate between groups to form political solutions because they cannot agree on the nature of an issue (Rauch, 2021). As an example, climate politics in the United States is divisive because much of the debate centers around the issue of "is the climate changing" versus arguments over solutions.

Finally, Facebook alone has 2.8 billion global users (Chappell, 2021). However, social media platforms lack the capacity to monitor non-English conspiracy theories and disinformation. The primary reason is that platforms have prioritized disinformation mitigation efforts targeting American audiences (Chappell, 2021). Furthermore, social media platforms cannot accurately translate languages that have varied vernacular or use non-English characters. Researchers estimate that of COVID19 conspiracy theory videos in English, up to 70% of the Spanish versions of the video persist on Facebook (Vice News, 2021). Ignoring non-English disinformation enables it to flourish, unopposed in places like the Middle East, Europe, and Latin America (Vice News, 2021).

The disaggregation of information is optimal for personal liberties but corrosive for democracies. This is because democracies can no longer control the quality of information citizens consume without engaging in autocratic behavior. Conversely, democracies are held accountable for maintaining legitimate institutions and upholding the social contract even as the social media undermines the civic knowledge required for healthy interactions between a government and its citizens. This dynamic is simply unsustainable.

---

[14] Constitution of Knowledge is meant to denote that there are shared, unquestioned facts that exist.

2. Post-Soviet Hungary and the Rise of Victor Orban

Hungary remained under the yoke of Soviet control until 1989 after Gorbachev permitted Eastern European countries to pursue their own political and economic futures (Kulcsar and Domokos, 2005). In Hungary, the Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party was abolished and the country adopted a new constitution in October 1989 (Bunce and Csanadi, 1993, p. 247). The new constitution created a representative multiparty unicameral parliamentary system, free elections, and a separate judiciary system. The 1989 constitution also established individual and civil rights for all Hungarians, including ethnic minorities (Bunce and Csanadi, 1993, p. 253).

Hungary's first free elections in 1990 saw the consolidation of Victor Orban's Federation of Young Democrats (Fidesz) Party. Though the post-Soviet Communist Party remained dominant, Fidesz consisted of young Hungarians pushing to advance individual freedom and democracy (Schwartzbrug and Szijarto, 2019). The Fidesz party was founded in Budapest in 1988 by a group of students, including a young Victor Orban. Throughout the late 80s, Fidesz party chapters spread across Hungary as political clashes with police intensified. In the first democratic election, Fidesz earned only 22 of 378 seats, establishing it as a fledgling but energetic reform party (Schwartzbrug and Szijarto, 2019).

In 1990, Victor Orban, a law graduate of the University of Budapest and an Oxford scholar, was one of the first Fidesz Party Members elected to the National Assembly (Schwartzbrug and Szijarto, 2019). By 1993, Orban became the Fidesz Party leader. As party leader, Orban decided to shift the party center-right in the mid-90s to ally with right-leaning political organizations (Schwartzbrug and Szijarto, 2019). Through tactful coalition building, Orban created a Fidesz lead government in 1998, which placed him in his first term as prime minister. During Orban's first term as prime minister from 1999-2002, he pushed Hungary towards a free-market economy and facilitated Hungary's NATO membership (NATO Member Countries, 2022). After being ousted as prime minister, Orban led the opposition against the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSzP). During his time out of power, Orban oversaw Fidesz's march to the political right as government corruption and social policy disputes provided him an opportunity to gain supporters (Schwartzbrug and Szijarto, 2019). Additionally, the economic turmoil of the 2008 recession and accusations of deceit by the MSzP revitalized Orban and his Fidesz Party (Szikra, 2014).

Orban won reelection as prime minister in April of 2010, this time with a Fidesz supermajority in the National Assembly. Fidesz won 68% of the seats in parliament and 53% of the popular vote (Zoltan, 2021, p. 9). In 2012, Orban used his legislative advantage to adopt a series of constitutional

amendments that embodied conservative moral and religious beliefs. Additionally, Orban began to curtail the independence of the judiciary system (Szikra, 2014) and notoriously implemented the 2011 citizenship law which extended citizenship to Hungarian speaking peoples living in the pre-1920s borders (Toomy, 2018). During the 2010s, the Fidesz party became increasingly partisan and focused on degrading democratic institutions.

As the Arab Spring turned to Arab Winter, hundreds of thousands of refugees passed through Hungary fleeing the Middle East due to civil war, famine, and ISIS. The refugee crisis enabled Orban and the Fidesz Party to increase their rhetoric around nativist identity politics to bolster support for making radical policy changes (Schwartzbrug and Szijarto, 2019). Riding a populist wave Orban wielded his mandate to fundamentally change the Hungarian relationship with government. Orban began the process by slashing social programs, altering loan financing requirements, and implementing a flat tax that advantages the wealthy (Zoltan, 2021, p. 9). The constitutional loophole that allowed Orban's subversion of Hungarian democracy in many ways mirror's Hitler's leveraging of Article 48, or the "authoritarian gap," in the Weimar Constitution allowing the president to rule by decree (Przeworskit, 2021, p. 111). Orban is not Hitler. Still, the playbook is familiar in that democratic deterioration is often a constitutional process.

Historically, an economic crisis is the most common reason for democratic deterioration (Przeworskit, 2021, p. 22). The economic recession of 2008 was the pretext used by Orban and the Fidesz Party to institute subtle but dangerous institutional reforms that facilitated more radical, future changes to the political landscape (Przeworskit, 2021, p. 104). Altering the financial system and elevating identity politics was the second step that began the process of Hungarian democratic deterioration. The current phase, discussed in a later section, is using the COVID19 pandemic to further alter the social contract to justify authoritarian policies.

3. "Russian New Generation Warfare"

The concept of Russian New Generation Warfare (RNGW) demonstrates that the rules of war have changed.[15] Russian military thinkers contend that non-military means of achieving political or military goals are equal to or have exceeded the effectiveness of traditional weapons (McMaster, 2020, p. 40). Increasingly, Russia uses cheap forms of war like energy coercion, cyber, and information warfare to meet its political objectives (Vasilyeva and Huggler, 2021). RNGW affords a financially and resource constrained Russia the opportunity to interfere with a government's elections

---

[15] RNGW is a Western term to describe Russia's Information Confrontation

or policy objectives below the threshold that would typically elicit a military confrontation (Valeriano, Jensen, and Maness, 2018, p. 114).

The genius of RNGW is that it allows Putin to expand Russian influence and shape world events while maintaining anonymity when convenient. For example, days before the 2014 Ukrainian election, a pro-Russian group with ties to Russian intelligence called CyberBerkut compromised the country's central election system by rendering the tally system inoperable (Henin, 2021). Russian doctrine uses the term "information confrontation," or *informatsionnoe protivoborstvo*, instead of RNGW. This distinction is important because information confrontation denotes a peace or wartime effort to exploit social vulnerabilities in democratic societies that degrade social, political, and intergovernmental cohesion (Kurcharski, 2019, p. 3).

Russian use of information differs from Western conceptions of information operations or psychological operations. Russia's information confrontation encompasses the technical aspects of communication and extends into the sphere of human cognition (Kurcharski, 2019, p. 4). Additionally, Russia's information wars are both a defensive and an offensive measure to counter Western influence. Finally, Russia views information confrontation as an asymmetric, indirect deterrence measure against conventional American or NATO military power (Kurcharski, 2019, p. 4).

Consequently, RNGW, or information confrontation, has metastasized into an "ecosystem" of disinformation meant to weaponize public opinion against adversarial or democratic countries (GEC, 2020, p. 5). Russia uses a mixture of state media, proxy platforms, unattributed channels, social media pages, and bot farms to create and propagate falsehoods (GEC, 2020, p. 5). Functionally, the disinformation ecosystem usually contradicts other media components. State media can have one narrative and an unattributed page can create a counter-narrative simply to stoke partisan division (GEC, 2020, p. 6). Furthermore, the disinformation ecosystem has no need for consistency. The more chaos injected into a democracy's consensus-seeking dialogue, the better (Valeriano, Jensen, Maness, 2018, p. 111).

RNGW allows Russian disinformation practitioners to use a variety of tactics. The following is by no means an extensive list of RNGW tactics:

- "Active Measures" or *Aktivnye meropriyatiya* is a Soviet term to describe covert or deniable actions to subvert pro-democratic governments or organizations and support pro-Soviet entities (Galeotti, 2019).
- Troll Armies or the use of bots and humans, who knowingly or unknowingly, amplify, spread, or create false narratives (Henin, 2021).

- Impersonation is the purposeful emulation of a respected organization or personality to undermine credibility or spread fake news. In the future, deepfakes will play a greater role in impersonation (Henin, 2021).

- "Hack and Leak" is a tactic where cyber espionage uncovers harmful information about a person, company, or organization that is then leaked to the public. Troll armies then amplify the leak (Henin, 2021).

- "Ampligana" or amplified propaganda is the technique of amplifying a falsehood or a harmful narrative to such an extent that social media users experience confirmation bias, in that people begin to believe the lie because they see it everywhere (DiResta, 2019).

- Infiltration of domestic conversations which intends to steer or subvert organic public discourse towards divisiveness rather than consensus (GEC, 2020, p. 8).

- Hashtag hijacking, which is related to the infiltration of domestic conversations, in which RNGW practitioners co-opt a hashtag to represent a different narrative from the original purpose (Patrikarkos, 2017, p. 142-145).

- State-funded media, like Russa Today, is meant to compete with local media outlets under the auspices of propagating the "real truth" (GEC, 2020, p. 8).

3.1. RNGW in Hungary

Hungary is a prime target for Putin's Russia. As an Eastern European country with proximity to Ukraine, membership in the EU and in NATO, Budapest represents the ideal geopolitical pawn to disrupt alliances and degrade democratic institutions. Geographically, Hungary resides on the edge of the Great European Plain, which has historically been a superhighway for Russia's invaders. In the past 500 years, Russia experienced five invasions from the European plain: Poland in 1605, Sweden in 1618, France in 1812, and Germany during WWI and WIII (Marshall, 2016, chap 2).

Ideologically, RNGW has supported Orban and his Fidesz party by systematically weakening Hungarian democratic institutions, especially the judiciary and independent media. Increasingly, pro-Russian sentiment is split along partisan lines (Havlicek and Yeliseyeu, 2021, p. 138). In fact, Hungarian support for the EU is around 52% leaving a near perfect divide between the pro-European and pro-Russian supporters (Latvia Public Broadcasting, 2019). A divided Hungary is important for Putin as it provides an opportunity to fully transition Hungary from a Western democracy to a pro-Kremlin authoritarian state.

The polarization in Hungarian politics creates the perfect ecosystem for RNGW. Hungarian State media has replaced pro-Western sentiment with messaging on topics like Christianity, social conservatism, and anti-immigration with a tenor that reflects Russian, not EU values (Havlicek and Yeliseyeu, 2021, p. 140). The Fidesz dominated Hungarian Media Council has expanded state-media apparatuses in recent years by creating the Central European Press and Media Foundation (KESMA) which includes over 500 government influence media platforms (Szicherle and Kreko, 2021). Orban's steady shift toward a centralized information environment is not only Russian in form but provides Russian media and troll armies ample local voices to propagate disinformation. Homegrown disinformation is far more effective and manipulative than externally produced content (Szicherle and Kreko, 2021). Localized disinformation is far more effective because native content makers better understand the domestic audience.

Concurrently, Fedesz opposition members are increasingly forced to consume non-Hungarian media or obtain news over social media. Over 85% of Hungarians are internet users and over 67% of internet users have a social media profile to read news (Medve, 2020). Facebook is overwhelmingly the predominant social media platform in Hungary, with over 6 million users in 2020 (Medve, 2020). The opposition's reliance on social media for news provides the perfect scenario for RNGW because there are segregated media environments that are dominated by opposing political factions. This is not to say that Fidesz supporters do not use social media but rather that their most important news source is state ran media because it aligns with their values. Finally, as previously discussed, social media algorithms and overweighting emotional content ensure that supporters and opposition members never engage with opposing viewpoints and are bombarded with divisive content.

The divisive Hungarian media environment provides a tremendous opportunity for RNGW to engineer partisan Hungarian politics. Russian efforts increase the perceived legitimacy of President Orban's steady degradation of democracy and individual rights. A more authoritarian Hungary enables Russia to indirectly disrupt the EU and NATO at the strategic level. A divided NATO facilitates Putin's territorial acquisitions in the Crimea and the Donbas region of Ukraine by providing an ideological buffer state between Western Europe and Russia. An authoritarian Hungary also aids information confrontations across Europe and in the United States because it provides yet another example of democratic backsliding in contrast to authoritarian 'effectiveness.'

Domestically, there is a symbiotic relationship between RNGW and President Orban's consolidation of power. Orban has incentives to allow divisive social media enabled propaganda to flourish. Disinformation allows for a convenient pretext to attack democratic institutions by claiming illegitimacy, silence opposition, and rewrite the social contract through popular consensus (Roth,

2020). The COVID19 pandemic is the perfect black swan event for authoritarianism because it provides a public health pretext to implement rapid change.

4. COVID19 pandemic in Hungary

Orban exploited the COVID19 pandemic to justify the next phase of Hungarian democratic deterioration. Simultaneously, the pandemic created additional opportunities for RNGW to stoke partisan divides in Hungary by cementing ideological differences between political parties on the issues of vaccination, COVID19 mitigation measures, and the role of government during crisis.

In March 2020, the National Assembly passed, by a vote of 137 to 53, a coronavirus measure allowing Prime Minster Orban to rule by decree with no time limit placed on the expanded powers (Walker and Rankin, 2020). The bill also introduced a provision enabling Orban to sentence people to up to five years in prison for spreading COVID19 related misinformation. In advance of the April 2022 elections, Orban's administration has used the new law to spread his own misinformation about the opposition party (Deutsche Welle, 2021). Specifically, government media outlets accused the pro-opposition think tank Political Capital Institute of encouraging people to refuse vaccination. The reported purpose was to increase the COVID19 death toll and, by extension, increase criticism of Orban's handling of the pandemic. Orban also made personal statements about this case, stating that "evil has no bounds" (Deutsche Welle, 2021).

In addition to diminishing support for the opposition, Orban has used the pandemic to further disrupt free press (Deutsche Welle, 2021). Pro-opposition media outlets are concerned that the pandemic law could silence reports critical of Orban or the Fidesz Party. Limiting negative news reporting is crucial for Orban and Fidesz to retain their super majority in the National Assembly. While the law provides a legal avenue to trample free speech, a contrived government concern for misinformation provides the mechanism for Orban's suppression of free speech to seem genuine.

Furthermore, in July 2021, Orban's pandemic powers were used to suppress LGBTQ rights as part of his "Hungarian family values" messaging intended to increase conservative support. On its face, the law is intended to protect children against pedophiles and place parents in charge of sexual education (Gile, 2021). However, in practice the law contains clauses that ban any content with homosexuality or sex reassignment in minors. The sub context of the law links the LGBTQ people to pedophilia and increases stigma towards the LGBTQ community. The Orban Government maintains that such criticism is "fake news" and that the law does not target one social group above others (Gile,

2021). Ultimately, Orban has demonstrated he will use his COVID19 legislative powers offensively and defensively to justify persecution of minorities and opposition groups.

4.1. Vaccination as Proxy Indicator of State Legitimacy

The pandemic has enabled Hungarian democratic deterioration and elevated authoritarianism based on recent political events. However, what has the effect been on the Hungarian people's support for such measures and how effective has RNGW been in achieving Russian political objectives? This paper uses vaccination type by percent utilized as a proxy indicator for Hungarian public sentiment of state legitimacy.[16] Vaccines are a proxy indicator because Hungary allowed citizens to choose between six vaccines: AstraZeneca, Johnson&Johnson, Moderna, Pfizer/BioNTech, SinoPharm, and Sputnik V. Additionally, these vaccines are from different countries: AstraZeneca is from Great Britain, Johnson&Johnson and Moderna are from the United States, Pfizer/BionTech is a German and American vaccine, Sinopharm is Chinese, and Sputnik V is Russian. Finally, all but Johnson&Johnson are two dose vaccines.

Uniquely, the Hungarian Government is the only EU nation that allows citizens to take the Russian Sputnik V vaccine (Licskay, 2021). Because Hungarians choose the vaccine they receive, people select the available vaccine and the vaccine they are most comfortable with receiving. Vaccine "comfort," in this context, is a function of a person's perception that the country producing their chosen vaccine can produce an effective, safe product.

4.2. COVID in Hungary

State-affiliated media claims that as of November 2021, there are 5,777,331 Hungarians fully vaccinated against COVID19, or just under 60% of the population (Cseresnyes, 2021). According to the World Health Organization (WHO), Hungary has experienced 976,432 cases of COVID19 since March 2020 and 32,514 deaths (WHO, 2022). These numbers parallel the European Centre for Disease and Prevention Control data as well (European Centre for Disease Prevention, 2021).

A peculiar facet of the Hungarian pandemic is that the most significant spike in cases and deaths occurred after vaccines were available (See Figure 1.1 and 1.2). Hungary has instituted a series of indoor mask mandates, restrictions on travel, limits on indoor dining along with the other EU nations (European Centre for Disease Prevention, 2021). However, a combination of vaccine hesitancy, lack

---

[16] A proxy indicator is an indirect measure that approximates a value in the absence of a more direct measure.

of trust in authorities, and misinformation leaves Hungary at a 60% inoculation rate, well behind the EU average of nearly 75% (Reuters, 2021).

Figure 1.1. COVID19 cases peaked in Hungary after vaccines became available in January 2021
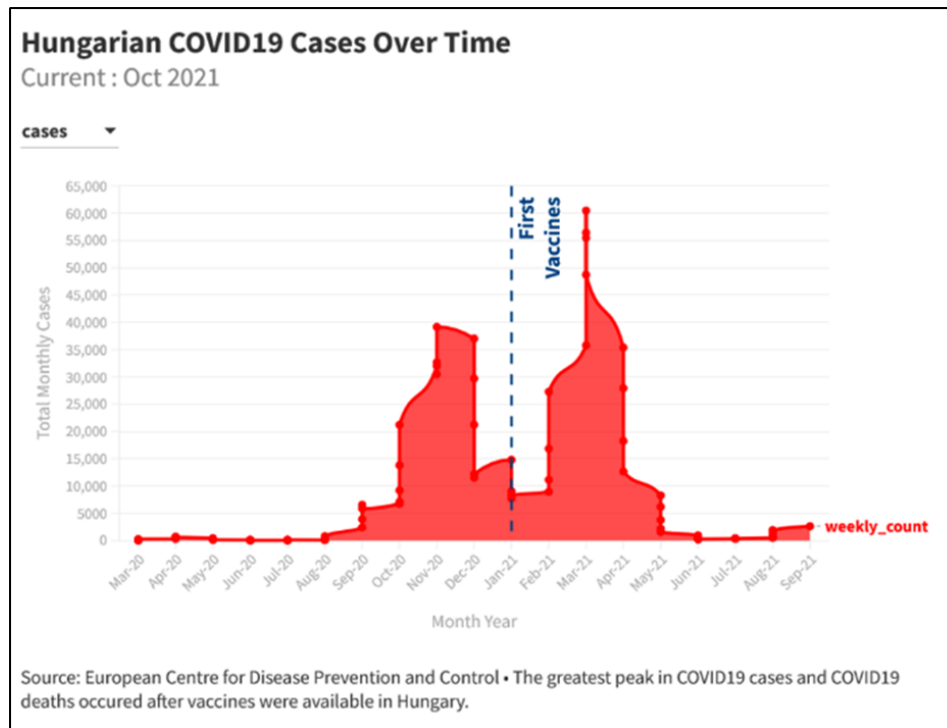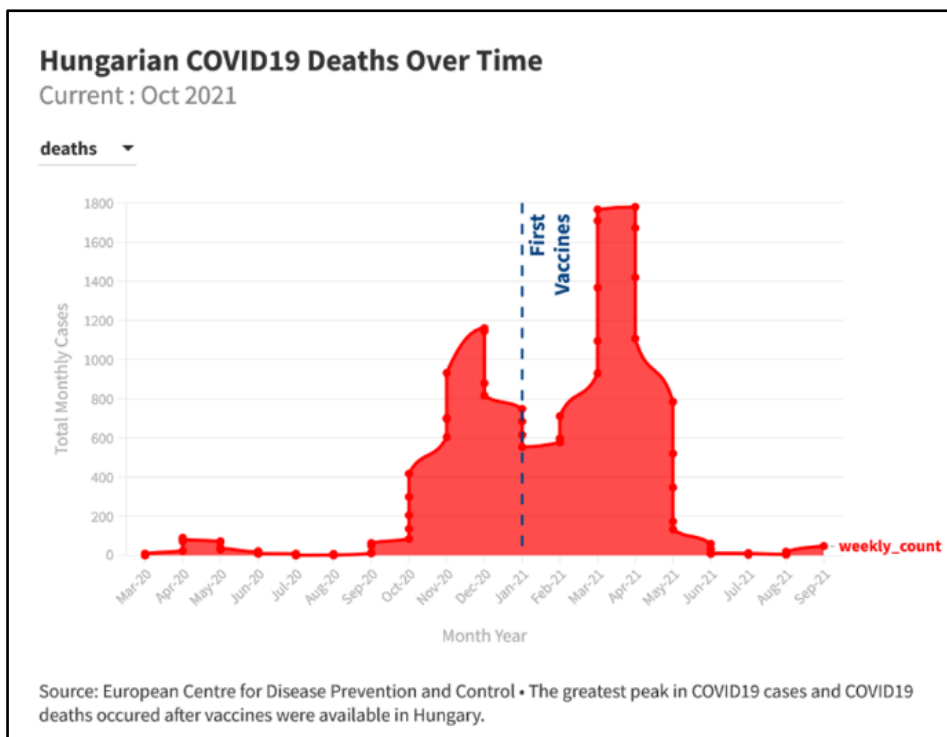

Source: European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control • The greatest peak in COVID19 cases and COVID19 deaths occured after vaccines were available in Hungary.

Figure 1.2. COVID19 deaths peaked in Hungary after vaccines became available in January 2021

Source: European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control • The greatest peak in COVID19 cases and COVID19 deaths occured after vaccines were available in Hungary.

The WHO reports that almost 11.5 million doses of the six available vaccines have been administered in Hungary. The most readily available vaccine has been the Pfizer/BionTech and the SinoPham vaccines (European Centre for Disease Prevention, 2021). However, the total numbers of vaccinations mask the percentage of each vaccine used. American-German and Chinese vaccine diplomacy efforts may seem aggressive. But Russian vaccine diplomacy is more effective if considering the percent of each vaccine used (See Figure 2). The Sputnik V vaccine has an 89.9% utilization rate as compared to Pfizer/Biontech's 85.6% and SinoPharm's 39.2% utilization rate. This data suggests that many Hungarians prefer Russian vaccines to Western or Chinese vaccines.

Figure 2. Shows the percentage of each vaccine utilization by type. Of the vaccines Russia sent to Hungary, almost 90% of them were used by October 2021
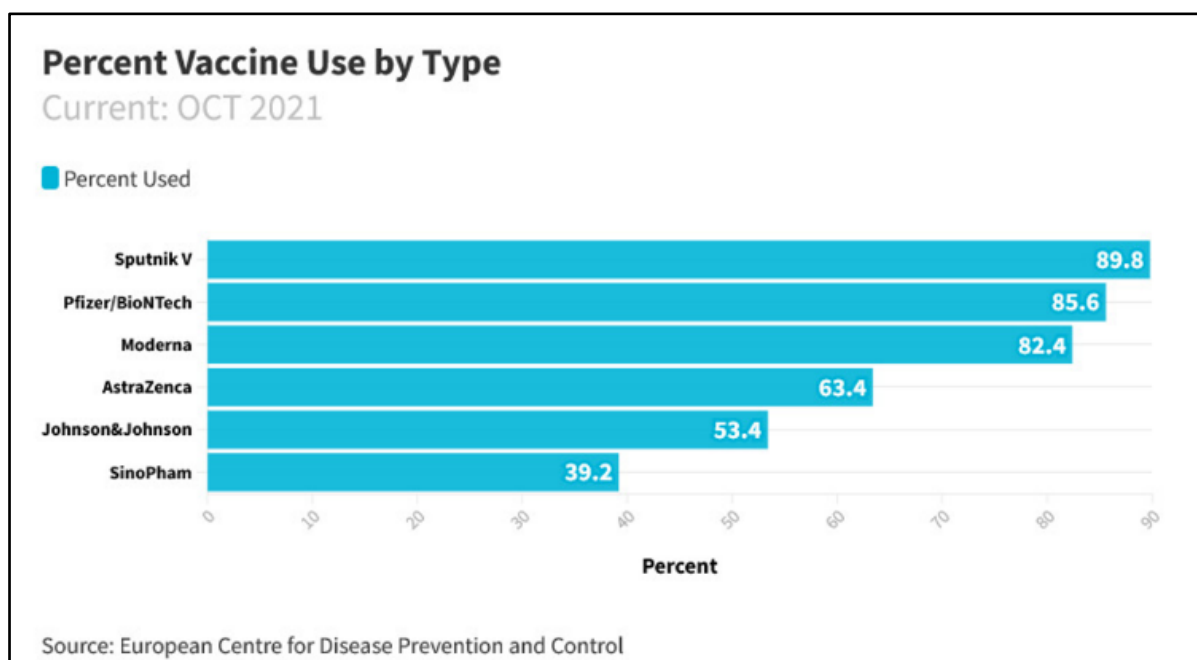
Additionally, when vaccination data is disaggregated to account for time, important patterns emerge. In February 2021, only 5% of Hungary's population was vaccinated. However, five weeks after introducing the Sputnik V vaccine, Hungary's inoculation rate increased to nearly one-fifth of the country's population (Reuters, 2021). This suggests that once Hungarians had choices, they flocked to the Russian vaccine. Additionally, Sputnik V's first doses were consumed in four months from February to May 2021, further indicating their popularity as they were rapidly utilized. In comparison, the first dose of the SinopPharm vaccine, available in January 2021, were consumed over five months. Moreover, other vaccines, like Pfizer/BionTech were consumed over a longer

period. (See Figure 3) If Sputnik V was less popular, the data should show a more even first dose distribution.

Figure 3. Shows a Steam Graph of 1ˢᵗ Doses which depicts each vaccine as a proportion of the total vaccines used overtime. Sputnik V was extremely popular in February to May 2021
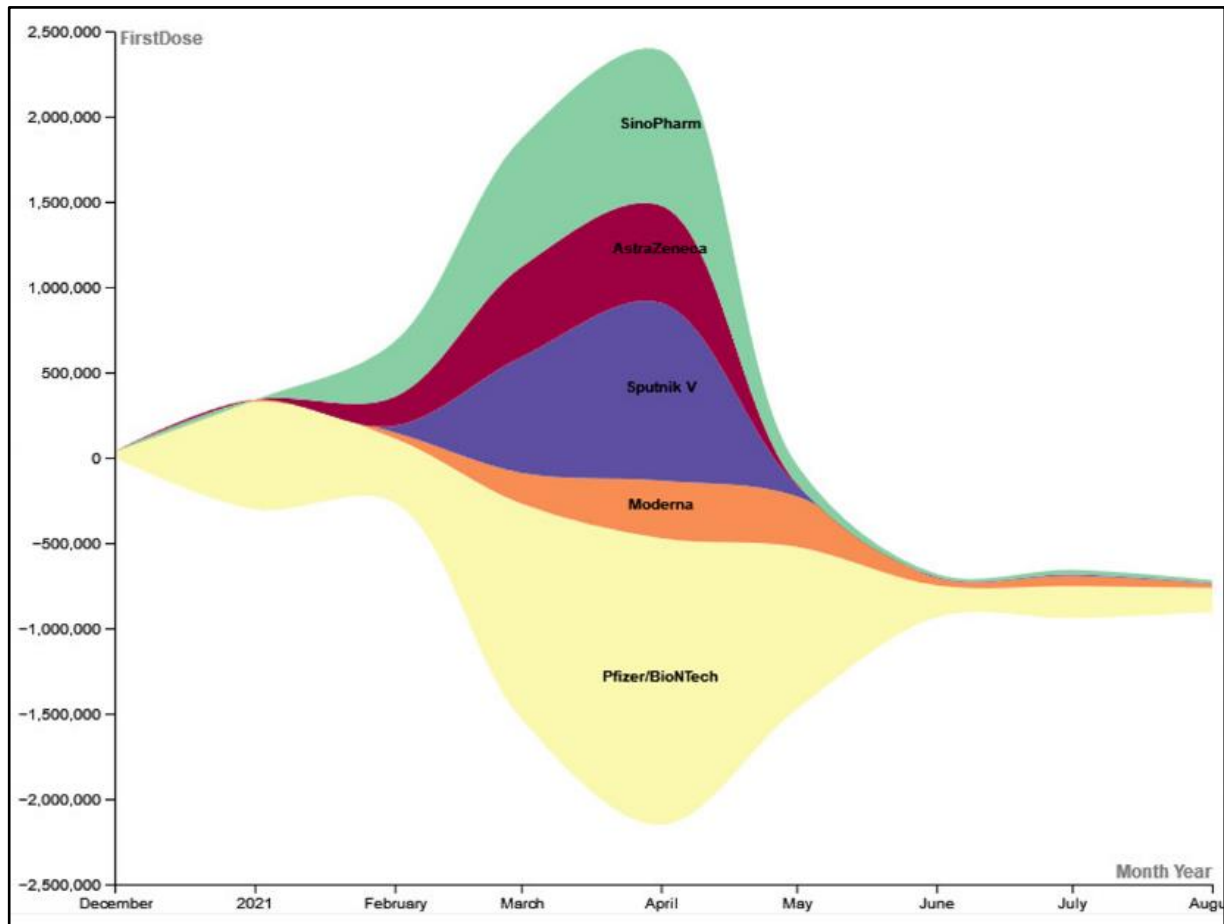
Source: Own Representation of European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control data

Admittedly, there are some limitations to using vaccines as a proxy for state legitimacy. While Hungarians were free to choose the vaccine they received, not every vaccine had equal availability. For example, Sputnik V had 2.1 million compared to Pfizer/BionTech's 5.4 million first dose vaccines available from January to October 2021 (European Centre for Disease Prevention, 2021). The lack of availability of Sputnik V could have limited the number of Hungarians inoculated with the Russian vaccine. However, Sputnik V remained a dominant national choice by the percentage used, not accounting for supply chain issues. Sputnik V's popularity demonstrates the ability of RNGW to simultaneously stoke partisan division and increase pro-Russian sentiments in Hungary.

In September 2021, Hungary signed a letter of intent to begin production of China's SinoPharm (Deutsche Welle, May 2021). Then in October 2021, Hungary backtracked and announced that they

would soon produce the Sputnik V vaccine thanks to increased cooperation and technology transfer with Russia (Deutsche Welle, May 2021). The Russian competition with China is a clear indicator that Putin wished to capitalize on the initial success. Long-term vaccine cooperation between Hungary and Russia would have allowed Orban and Putin to solidify the relationship into more formal relations. Hungarian Sputnik V vaccine production also hands Orban a critical policy victory ahead of the April 2022 elections. Critically, domestic production provides the Fidesz Party to claim to protect Hungarians from the virus without 'any' outside assistance.

5. Lessons and Reflections

This paper has reviewed the salient literature on social media, democratic institutions, and how RNGW has increased pro-authoritarian sentiments in Hungary. Furthermore, Russia has demonstrated an ability to leverage Victor Orban's authoritarian tendencies to create an ideological buffer state. The mechanism for Hungarian democratic backsliding is the ability of social media to alter the social contract between the government and the people. The altered social contract between citizens and the political system then enables Orban to degrade democratic norms like forbearance and mutual toleration to consolidate his power. The result is institutions that are staffed with Fidesz Party adherents rather than public servants and the freedom to create legislation that destroys civil liberties. The popularity of the Sputnik V vaccine is just one critical indicator of Russia's influence in Hungary. The next significant indicator will be the upcoming elections.

5.1 Lessons for Hungary

Hungary's backsliding democracy is entering a critical phase. The April 2022 national elections will either be a rebuke or embrace of Orban's brand of authoritarianism. A renewed Fidesz supermajority would provide Orban a mandate to continue his nativist march toward dismantling Hungarian democracy. With a supermajority in the National Assembly and the ongoing pandemic legislation allowing Orban to rule by decree, there will be very few remaining means for Hungarian opposition leaders to resist.

Hungary's situation also demonstrates that citizens play an active role in democratic backsliding. In addition to external actors, social media enables domestic authoritarian supporters to propagate anti-democratic sentiments. Historians have emphasized the role of despotic leaders in crushing democratic institutions, but they fail to appreciate that segments of a country's population

might also support autocracy (Norris, 2021). While Putin and Orban clearly play a role in Hungary's democratic backsliding, segments of the Hungarian population support the transition to a more nativist, conservative, and ill-liberal government. Unchecked, support will continue to grow until democracy deteriorates entirely to dictatorship and public opinion no longer matters.

A Fidesz win in 2022 could also embolden Putin's Russia. The technology transfer to produce Sputnik V would have afford the Kremlin additional opportunities to become intertwined in the Hungarian political and economic architecture. The more entrenched Russia becomes in Hungarian life, the more Hungary will become a liability for European stability. Political friction is critical for expanding RNGW further into Europe's democratic countries. Additionally, Hungarian dissent in NATO could prove decisive in delaying a response to Russian territorial aggression in the Baltics or Ukraine. At the very least, Putin's Russia gains one more authoritarian ally in their 'winner takes none' strategy of mutual misery.

5.2 How Democracy Fights Back

The world's democracies should view Hungary's backsliding toward authoritarianism as a warning. Hungary's political situation is not unique in that most democracies experience disruptions in institutional legitimacy. However, the addition of social media enabled disinformation represents a threat to democracy everywhere. For the ideas of representative governance and individual liberties to prosper, democratic governments must contend with information age threats.

To survive in the 21st century, democracy must view domestic institutional legitimacy as a function of its overall ability to project power. There cannot be a strict division between domestic and foreign policy because the internet connects humans globally. For example, military theory assumes that a nation will have unfettered access to its population. Domestic policy is important only because it helps project military power outside its borders to achieve a policy objective. Institutional power is the strength of a government's institutions to endure crisis, produce results for its citizens, and reflect changing public opinion. Institutional power can also be a perception. For example, some countries might feel that forfeiting individual rights is a worthwhile trade for government efficiency; thus, institutional power is not unique to democracies.

While institutional power assumes a realist approach to policy, the recommendation to include it as part of national power is more liberal in its implementation. The key to robust institutional power is to strengthen democratic institutional legitimacy by promulgating more responsive, equitable, and fair governance. This change in focus is decisive because disinformation thrives in segments of the

population that experience inequality, poverty, and substandard education. Together they create a situation where entire communities feel they must look outside established norms and the social contract to find a system that works for them. Examples of domestic policies that increase institutional power include:

- Decrease inequality among subsections of the population by race, ethnicity, gender, geographic disposition, or religious affiliation. Low inequality decreases the effectiveness of disinformation because public grievance is not identity or values based.

- Increase funding for public education to include programs that improve digital literacy. A more informed public can act as Aristotle's 'good citizen' that constructively engages in democracy.

- Increase public engagement with democratic institutions through constructive dialogue, voter protections, and decreased barriers to citizen election into government. A public with agency over institutions is harder to propagate disinformation in because citizens can make change within, rather than outside, of the political system.

The hard power and soft power constructs are still viable. However, for a nation to truly exercise smart power in the information age, they must recognize that institutional power is now an integral part of national strength because it insulates a country from subversion by disinformation and plays a complementary role to traditional forms of power.

Conclusion

Although the consequences of disinformation can be mitigated, disinformation is not a solvable problem (Valeriano, Jensen, and Maness, 2018, p. 212). Social media enables state disruptors like Russia to leverage a new form of political warfare known as Russian New Generation Warfare. Direct access to the populations of democratic countries allows nations like Russia to use disinformation to subvert democratic institutional legitimacy, rewrite the social contract, and undermine democratic norms. This strategy allows Putin's Russia to achieve with institutional power what he cannot with hard or soft power, creating a Hungarian ideological buffer state that is amenable to authoritarian ideas. Concurrently, Orban uses the threat of COVID19 related disinformation to consolidate power through silencing opposition and suppressing minority rights.

In sum, Hungary's case demonstrates that the Cold War era idea that access to more information would accelerate the spread of democracy is dying (Rosenback and Mansted, 2018). Furthermore, the internet's empowerment of individuals through unfettered access to information can be highly toxic

for democracies. More information does not equate to more freedom because the difference between trusted and malicious information sources becomes harder to discern when a person is overwhelmed with content.

Democratic backsliding due to disinformation is not a Hungarian phenomenon. Democracies from Ukraine, Germany, Norway, Latvia, Moldova, Canada, and the United States, among others, have experienced informational threats ranging from overt political warfare to electoral subversion. The events of the last decade demonstrate that democracy's battles against authoritarianism are no longer constrained to economic and philosophical debates. But instead, domestic institutional capacity to insulate citizens from adversarial propaganda and provide responsive, effective governance has become far more critical. Authoritarians know that if they cannot rival democracy in direct state-to-state competition, the internet allows them to subvert democracy from afar.

Disclaimer: The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official position of the Department of the Army, or Department of Defense.

References

Baer-Bader, J. (2020, June), *EU Response to Disinformation from Russia on COVID-19: Three Lessons*, German Council on Foreign Relations (retrieved from https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/eu-response-disinformation-russia-covid-19).

Beauchamp, Z. (2018, September 13), *It happened there: How democracy died in Hungary*, Vox (retrieved from https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/9/13/17823488/hungary-democracy-authoritarianism-trump).

Bekkers, V and Edwards, A. (2013), Legitimacy and Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Assessing Governance Practices, in: Bekkers V., Dijkstra G., Fenger M. (eds.), *Governance and the Democratic Deficit: Assessing the Democratic Legitimacy of Governance Practices*, pp. 35–60.

Berg, E. (1978), *Democracy and Self Determination*, London: SAGE Publications.

Bernstein, S. (2011), Legitimacy in intergovernmental and non-state global governance, *Review of International Political Economy*, 17–51. https://doi.org/10.1080/09692290903173087.

Bunce, V. and Csanádi, M. (1993), Uncertainty in the Transition: Post-communism in Hungary, *East European Politics and Societies*, 240–275. https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325493007002003.

Chappell, B. (2021, October 25), *The Facebook Papers: What you need to know about the trove of insider documents*, NPR (retrieved from https://www.npr.org/2021/10/25/1049015366/the-facebook-papers-what-you-need-to-know).

Consequences of the Collapse of the Soviet Union. (2017, October), Norwich University Online (retrieved from https://online.norwich.edu/academic-programs/resources/consequences-of-the-collapse-of-the-soviet-union).

COVID-19 situation update for the EU/EEA. (2021, October), European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (retrieved from https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/cases-2019-ncov-eueea).

Cseresnyes, P. (2021, November 16), *Covid Vaccinations Finally Reach 6 Million in Hungary. Hungary Today* (retrieved from https://hungarytoday.hu/hungary-covid-vaccination-6-million-coronavirus-vaccinated/).

DiResta, R. (2021, October 9), It's Not Misinformation. It's Amplified Propaganda, *The Atlantic* (retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/10/disinformation-propaganda-amplification-ampliganda/620334/).

DNH. (2021, October 14), Hungary to produce Sputnik vaccine soon! Daily News Hungary (retrieved from https://dailynewshungary.com/hungary-to-produce-sputnik-vaccine-soon/).

Deutsche Welle (2021, May 31), Coronavirus digest: Hungary to Produce China's Sinopharm Jab. DW.COM. (retrieved from https://www.dw.com/en/coronavirus-digest-hungary-to-produce-chinas-sinopharm-jab/a-57723883).

Deutsche Welle (2021, August 4), Hungary: Government uses vaccine campaign to lash out at political opponents. DW.COM. retrieved from https://www.dw.com/en/hungary-government-uses-vaccine-campaign-to-lash-out-at-political-opponents/a-57137738).

Reuters (2021, April 1), *Europe's vaccine hesitancy* (retrieved from https://graphics.reuters.com/HEALTH-CORONAVIRUS/EU-VACCINES/qmypmrelyvr/).

Fabienne, P. (2017), *Political Legitimacy*, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University (retrieved from https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/legitimacy/).

Fabienne, P. (2020), The Grounds of Political Legitimacy, *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*. https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2020.6.

Galeotti, M. (2019, June), *Measures: Russia's Covert Geopolitical Operations* (retrieved from http://www.marshallcenter.org/en/publications/security-insights/active-measures-russias-covert-geopolitical-operations-0).

United States Department of State (2020, August), *GEC Special Report: Russia's Pillars of Disinformation and Propaganda* (retrieved from https://www.state.gov/russias-pillars-of-disinformation-and-propaganda-report/).

Ghodsee, K. and Orenstein, M. (2021, November 8), *Why Won't Europeans Get Vaccinated? Project Syndicate* (retrieved from https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/explaining-low-vaccination-rates-in-eastern-europe-by-kristen-ghodsee-and-mitchell-a-orenstein-2021-11).

Gile, M. (2021, June 22), Hungarian Foreign Minister Dismisses "Global Fake News" Reports on LGBT Content Ban, *News Week* (retrieved from https://www.newsweek.com/hungarian-foreign-minister-dismisses-global-fake-news-reports-lgbt-content-ban-1603027).

Guarascio, F. (2020, November 19), EU warns Hungary against use of Russia's COVID-19 vaccine, *Reuters* (retrieved from https://www.reuters.com/article/health-coronavirus-eu-hungary-idUSL1N2I41ZM).

Havlicek, P. and Yeliseyeu, A. (2021), *Disinformation Resilience Index: In Central and Eastern Europe*, East Center (retrieved from https://east-center.org/disinformation-resilience-index-in-central-and-eastern-europe-in-2021/).

Henin, N. (2021, October 18), Foreign election interferences: An overview and challenges, EU DisinfoLab (retrieved from https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/foreign-election-interferences-an-overview-of-trends-and-challenges/).

Hoffman, M. (2018, September 26), Government Legitimacy and Religion, *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.662.

Hoffmann, A., Vleuten, A, and Noortmann, D. (2007). *Closing or Widening the Gap?: Legitimacy and Democracy in Regional Integration Organizations*, Taylor & Francis Group. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/cm/detail.action?docID=438507.

Hungary (2022), Media Landscapes (retrieved from https://medialandscapes.org/country/hungary/media/social-networks).

Hungary: WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19), Dashboard with Vaccination Data (2022). https://covid19.who.int.

Jacobson, V. (2020, May 19), Hungary's Road to Authoritarianism; Through the Demise of a Liberal Democracy and Free Judiciary, *Denver Journal of International Law & Policy* (retrieved from http://djilp.org/hungarys-road-to-authoritarianism-through-the-demise-of-a-liberal-democracy-and-free-judiciary/).

Kottasova, I. (2021, October 21), Vaccine hesitancy: These EU nations are still miles behind their neighbors, *CNN* (retrieved from https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/vaccine-hesitancy-these-eu-nations-are-still-miles-behind-their-neighbors/ar-AAP1yO4).

Kucharski, L. (2019, February 5), Russian Multi-Domain Strategy against NATO: Information Confrontation and U.S. forward-deployed Nuclear Weapons in Europe, Center for Global Security Research (retrieved from https://www.osti.gov/biblio/1635758/).

Kulcsar, L. and Domokos, T. (2005), The Post-Socialist Growth Machine: The Case of Hungary, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 29(3), 550–563. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.2005.00605.x.

Krekó, P. (2022, March 22), Viktor Orban Is the West's Pro-Putin Outlier, *Foreign Policy* (retrieved March 22, 2022, from https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/20/viktor-orban-is-the-wests-pro-putin-outlier/).

LaFrance, A. (2021, October 25), History Will Not Judge Us Kindly, *The Atlantic* (retrieved from https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/10/facebook-papers-democracy-election-zuckerberg/620478/).

Lazar, S. (2013), *The Anthropology of Citizenship: A Reader*, Wiley-Blackwell.

Levitsky, S. and Ziblatt, D. (2018, January), *How Democracies Die*, New York: Broadway Books.

Licskay, P. (2021, September 6), *Want to register for COVID vaccines in Hungary? Here is everything you need to know*, *Daily News Hungary* (retrieved from https://dailynewshungary.com/want-to-register-for-covid-vaccines-in-hungary-here-is-everything-you-need-to-know/).

McMaster, H.R. (2020), *Battlegrounds: The Fight to Defend the Free World*. Harper Publications.

Marshall, T. (2016), *Prisoners of Geography: Ten Maps that Explain Everything About the World*. Scribner Book Company.

Marrow, B. (2021, October 26), Facebook reportedly gave the angry emoji 5 times as much weight as a "like" (retrieved from https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/technology/facebook-reportedly-gave-the-angry-emoji-5-times-as-much-weight-as-a-like/ar-AAPYgIJ).

Medve, F. (2020, June 2), Hungary: Social media penetration by platform 2020, Statista (retrieved from https://www.statista.com/statistics/1115256/hungary-social-media-penetration-by-platform/).

Meijers, M. and Veer, H. (2019), MEP Responses to Democratic Backsliding in Hungary and Poland. An Analysis of Agenda-Setting and Voting Behaviour, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 57(4), 838–856. https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12850.

Merrill, B. and Oremus, W. (2021, October 26), Five points for anger, one for a 'like': How Facebook's formula fostered rage and misinformation, *Washington Post* (retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2021/10/26/facebook-angry-emoji-algorithm/).

Meserole, C. (2018, May 9). How misinformation spreads on social media—And what to do about it, *Brookings*, retrieved from https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/05/09/how-misinformation-spreads-on-social-media-and-what-to-do-about-it/).

Morrison, W. (2017), *China's Economic Rise: History, Trends, Challenges, Implications for the United States*, Congressional Research Service.

Norris, P. (2021, May/June), Voters Against Democracy: The Roots of Autocratic Resurgence, *Foreign Affairs* (retrieved from https://www.foreignaffairs.com/reviews/review-essay/2021-04-20/voters-against-democracy).

NATO Member Countries. (2022), NATO (retrieved March 22, 2022, from https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52044.htm).

Orlowski, J. (2020), The Social Dilemma, Netflix (retrieved from https://www.netflix.com/title/812542).

Parry, G. (1978), *Democracy, Consensus & Social Contract*. London: SAGE Publications.

Patrikarakos, D. (2017), *War in 140 Characters: How Social Media Is Reshaping Conflict in the Twenty-First Century*, Basic Books.

Peter, F. (2020), The Grounds of Political Legitimacy, *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, 6(3), 372–390. https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2020.6.

Pro-EU sentiment on the rise across Europe (2019, August 5), Public Broadcasting of Latvia (retrived from https://eng.lsm.lv/article/politics/politics/pro-eu-sentiment-on-the-rise-across-europe.a327794/).

Przeworskit, A. (2019, September 11), *Crises of Democracy*, Cambridge University Press.

Rauch, J. (2018), The Constitution of Knowledge, National Affairs (retrieved from https://nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/the-constitution-of-knowledge).

Rahman, R. (2021, October 25), "Facebook Papers" turn up heat on embattled social media platform, *The Hill* (retrieved from https://thehill.com/policy/technology/578375-facebook-papers-turn-up-heat-on-embattled-social-media-platform).

Rosenbach, E. and Mansted, K. (2018, October), Can Democracy Survive in the Information Age? Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs (retrieved from https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/can-democracy-survive-information-age).

Roth, K. (2020, March 31), How Authoritarians Are Exploiting the Covid-19 Crisis to Grab Power, *The New York Review of Books* (retrieved from https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2020/03/31/how-authoritarians-are-exploiting-the-covid-19-crisis-to-grab-power/).

Rothstein, B. (2009), Creating Political Legitimacy: Electoral Democracy Versus Quality of Government, *American Behavioral Scientist*, 53(3), 311–330. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764209338795.

Schmidt, V. A. (2013), Democracy and Legitimacy in the European Union Revisited: Input, Output and 'Throughput.' *Political Studies*, 61(1), 2–22. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2012.00962.x.

Schwartzburg, R. and Szijarto, I. (2019, July 24), *When Orbán Was a Liberal* (retrieved from https://jacobinmag.com/2019/07/viktor-orban-fidesz-party-youth-activism).

Szicherle, P. and Kreko, P. (2021, June), Disinformation in Hungary: From fabricated news to discriminatory legislation, Heinrich Böll Stiftung Brussels office - European Union (retrieved from https://eu.boell.org/en/2021/06/07/disinformation-hungary-fabricated-news-discriminatory-legislation).

Szikra, D. (2014) Democracy and welfare in hard times: The social policy of the Orbán Government in Hungary between 2010 and 2014, *Journal of European Social Policy*, Vol. 24.

The COVID-19 Vaccination in Hungary (2021, September 30), *The Borgen Project* (retrieved from https://borgenproject.org/the-covid-vaccination-in-hungary/).

The White House (2021), Interim National Security Strategic Guidance.

Toomy, M. (2018), History, Nationalism and Democracy: Myth and Narrative in Viktor Orbán's 'Illiberal Hungary', *New Perspectives*.

Valeriano, B., Jensen, B., and Maness, R. (2018), *Cyber Strategy: The Evolving Character of Power and Coercion,* London: Oxford Press.

Vasilyeva, N. and Huggler, J. (2021, November 3), Russia Cuts Gas to Europe and Amasses Military on Western Borders, *The Telegraph* (retrieved from https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2021/11/03/us-warns-significant-russian-military-movement-near-ukrainian/).

Vice News (2021, November 17), *Conspiracy Theories in Spanish-Speaking Communities*, Hulu.

Ullah, Z. and Chernova, A. (2021, November 8), Putin Signs Law Allowing Him to Run for Two More Terms as Russian President, *CNN* (retrieved from https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/05/europe/putin-russia-presidential-term-intl-hnk/index.html).

Walker, S. and Rankin, J. (2020, March 30), Hungary passes law that will let Orbán rule by decree, *The Guardian* (retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/30/hungary-jail-for-coronavirus-misinformation-viktor-orban).

Zoltan, A. (2021, September 8), *What Happened in Hungary*, Center for European Studies Harvard.

Zselyky, C. (2021), *The Antidemocratic Turn*, Freedom House (retrieved from https://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2021/antidemocratic-turn).