How Can We Know if Russia is a Threat to Western Democracy?
Understanding the Impact of Russia's Second Wave of Election Interference

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Since 2014, the Russian government has sought to influence at least twenty Western democratic elections via the distribution of junk news, theft and dissemination of emails; and measures to corrupt the vote count.[3] An enormous amount of information has recently come out about this campaign – particularly in the 2016 Presidential elections in the United States. The Mueller indictments, analyses of data provided by social media firms to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence,[4] and a number of academic and journalistic accounts[5] now give us a rich picture of the extent and character of Russian interference. However, relatively little effort has been made to assess the impact of this effort.[6] To what extent is Russia to blame for the recent rise of populists in the United States and elsewhere?

Given the wide range of factors shaping national elections, it is difficult to isolate the precise impact of Russian interference. Nevertheless, we can asses the plausibility of Russian influence by looking not just at the supply side – the extent and character of Russian efforts that have been the focus of most studies – but at the *demand* side – the extent to which Russian activities were simply redundant of major domestic factors (major domestic political parties, domestic media, electoral cleavages) already pushing in the same direction. Examining the degree to which Russian efforts were redundant provides a clue as to whether outcomes would have been the same absent Russian meddling.

Such an approach suggests that it is unlikely that Russian efforts had much of an impact in the United States. Efforts to use social media to mobilize Trump supporters, or increase polarization were already being undertaken on a much larger scale by the GOP and a significant network of rightwing media. At the same time, there is little evidence that non-redundant measures such as distribution of stolen emails or efforts to demobilize leftwing constituents had a noticeable impact on support for Clinton. More broadly, a preliminary look at other cases of Russian intervention suggests that almost all cases where outcomes favored Russian interests can be more easily explained by the actions of powerful domestic actors rather than Russian actions.

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[3] Number based on authors' research. For descriptions of interference, see Greenberg 2017; Howard et al. (2018); Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate (2018).

[4] See in particular, DiResta et al. (2018); Howard et al. (2018); Yin et al. (2018).

[5] Jamieson (2018); Shane and Mazzetti (2018).

[6] The most notable excpetion is the recent monograph by Kathleen Hall Jamieson (2018); see also Way (2015); Sides et al. (2018: 198-200); Way and Casey (2017, 2018).

Russia's Second Wave of Intervention

The Russian government has been heavily involved efforts to influence elections since the collapse of the Soviet Union.[7] However until 2015, such efforts were focused exclusively on the former Soviet Union. By contrast, the last four years have witnessed a dramatic expansion and transformation of Russian activities abroad. As we see in Table 1, there is credible evidence for Russian interference in twenty elections in the United States and central and Western Europe. Such interventions have mostly sought to enhance tribalism and polarization as well as to support anti system parties that oppose Western-dominated multilateral institutions such as NATO and the European Union. The Russian government has supported a coup attempt, funded right-wing parties, engaged in cyberattacks; and distributed stolen information. In several instances during the 2016 campaign in the United States, Russian agents organized public rallies.[8] Russia has also been behind the dissemination of fake news stories targeted at candidates and campaigns it seeks to undermine, from the Czech Republic, to the Netherlands, to France.[9] According to analysis by Yin et al. (2018), accounts operated by the Internet Research Agency shared fifty percent more junk news during the 2016 campaign than did typical Twitter users.

To what extent did such efforts actually affect outcomes? As we see in Table 1, a majority of elections (11 of 20) had outcomes that were fully or partially favorable to Russia.[10] But obviously, these results could be entirely the product of domestic contextual factors pushing in the same direction as Russian efforts. To gain a better understanding of Russian influence, we need to take into account both the extent of Russian activity as well as the domestic forces that either complemented or contradicted Russian goals.

Below, we examine the potential impact of Russian intervention in the 2016 US election. Recent analyses make a compelling case that Russian influence was plausible. Nonetheless, in our view, the weight of the evidence does not support the claim that Russia tipped the election in Trump's favor. In all but a few instances, Russian measures were drowned out by a range of domestic factors that supported Trump. Furthermore, levels of support for Clinton over the course of the campaign are not what we would expect if Russian actions were critical in shaping public attitudes.

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[7] Tolstrup (2014); Way (2015); Way and Casey (2017, 2018).

[8] Jamieson (2018: 134); Mueller (2018: 22-23).

[9] Kroet (2017); Muller (2017a; 2017b); Starks (2017); Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate (2018: 114). See the appendix for more information.
For example, RT and Sputnik spread fake news stories such as "the Lisa case," a false story about the rape of a 13 year old German girl named Lisa. Russian media also ran stories claiming 700,000 Germans left the country due to Chancellor Angela Merkel's refugee policy, that refugees had destroyed the oldest church in Germany, that Merkel was mentally ill, that highlighted alleged US and NATO aggression, radical Islam, and problems with migrants and refugees (Rutenberg 2017; Stelzenmüller 2017).

[10] Seven of 20 outcomes were victories for the Russian side; four were "partial" victories and eight were defeats.

Target Election	Date	Russian Intervention	Results	Russian goals	Outcome Favorable to Russia?	Congruence of Russian goals with major parties?
Table 1: Russian Election Interventions, 2015-2018[11]						
United States *Midterms*	11/06/2018	Disinformation	Democrats win U.S. House, Republicans extend lead in Senate	GOP victory	No	Yes[12]
Bosnia *Presidential*	10/06/2018	Disinformation	Incumbent moderate Croat candidate wins, nationalist Serb and Muslim Bosniak candidates win seats	Nationalist victory	Yes	Yes[13]
Macedonia *Referendum*	09/30/2018	Disinformation, finance protests	Name change approved, fails to meet turnout threshold, parliament still adopts change	No vote	Partial	Yes[14]
Montenegro *Presidential*	04/15/2018	Cyberattacks	Victory by pro-Europe/NATO candidate	Pro-Russia candidate victory	No	Yes[15]
Italy *Parliamentary*	03/04/2018	Disinformation	Victory by Euroskeptic far right parties	Euroskeptic parties victory	Yes	Yes[16]
Czech Republic *Presidential*	01/12/2018-01/26/2018	Disinformation	Victory by pro-Russian incumbent	Pro-Russia candidate victory	Yes	Yes[17]
Czech Republic *Parliamentary*	10/20/2017	Disinformation, cyberattacks	Victory by Euroskeptic populist party	Euroskeptic parties victory	Yes	Yes[18]
Spain *Referendum*	10/01/2017	Disinformation	Majority vote for secession, turnout low, federal authorities do not recognize results and impose direct rule	Yes vote	Partial	Yes[19]
Germany *Federal*	09/24/2017	Disinformation, possible funding for far right	Victory by moderate incumbent parties, far right AfD enters Bundestag	Euroskeptic parties victory	Partial	No[20]
Malta *General*	06/03/2017	Cyberattacks	Victory by pro-Europe incumbent	Opposition victory	No	No[21]
France *Presidential*	04/23/2017-05/07/2017	Cyberattacks, disinformation, history of	Victory by moderate Macron, historically strong performance by	FN victory	No	Yes[22]

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[11] Sources for the coding decisions can be found in the full codebook provided in the appendix.

[12] The Russian disinformation campaign was aimed at bolstering the messaging of the GOP.

[13] Nationalists were already popular and ruling each seat, and the nationalist Croat candidate actually lost.

[14] The name change was opposed by the former ruling party, VMRO-DPMNE.

[15] The largest opposition bloc, the Democratic Front, is pro-Russia and opposed to joining NATO

[16] The two major far right parties, M5S and the Northern League, campaigned on platforms that aligned with Russian disinformation and were already popular

[17] The incumbent was pro-Russia

[18] The Euroskeptic ANO party had the second largest vote share in parliament since 2013, and the far right SPD party was also popular.

[19] Domestic disinformation featured prominently, and Catalan lawmakers supported secession.

[20] Major parties supported the EU. The Euroskeptic, far right AfD failed to enter parliament in 2013 and the anti-NATO Die Linke had a small seat share.

[21] Both major parties were pro-EU and pro-Russia supporters were marginal

[22] The FN, established in 1972 and winning the second most votes in the first round, campaigned on a platform of Euroskepticism and opposition to immigration.

		funding for far right	Le Pen			
Bulgaria *Parliamentary*	03/26/2017	Disinformation	Victory by pro-Europe party	BSP victory	No	Yes[23]
Netherlands *Parliamentary*	03/15/2017	Disinformation, cyberattacks	Victory by pro-Europe incumbents	Euroskeptic parties victory	No	Yes[24]
Italy *Referendum*	12/04/2016	Disinformation, history of funding far right	Referendum fails, PM resigns	No vote	Yes	Yes[25]
United States *Presidential*	11/08/2016	Disinformation, cyberattacks	Victory by Donald Trump	GOP victory	Yes	Yes[26]
Bulgaria *Presidential*	11/06/2016- 11/13/2016	Strategy assistance to opposition party	Pro-Russian candidate victory	Pro-Russia candidate victory	Yes	Yes[27]
Montenegro *Parliamentary*	10/16/2016	Coup attempt, disinformation, cyber attacks	Victory by pro-Europe party	Democratic Front victory	No	Yes[28]
United Kingdom *Referendum*	06/23/2016	Disinformation	Voters choose to leave the EU	Yes vote	Yes	No[29]
Netherlands *Referendum*	04/06/2016	Disinformation	Referendum fails, low turnout, parliament still enacts	No vote	Partial	Yes[30]
United Kingdom *Parliamentary*	05/07/2015	Cyberattacks	Victory by ruling Conservative Party	UKIP victory	No	No[31]

Did Russia tip the election for Trump?

In important ways, the context of the 2016 election provided a favorable environment for Russian influence. First, most political science models – based on Presidential approval ratings, economic factors and the party's time in office – forecasted either a narrow Democratic victory or Trump win.[32] In the end, just under 78,000 votes in three states decided the election in favor of Trump.[33] Even small effects could have tipped the election. Second, a relatively high 13 percent of voters on election-day were either undecided or supported third party candidates. (By contrast, just four percent of voters was undecided on election day in 2012). In Wisconsin, Florida, Michigan, and Pennsylvania, a majority of these voters ended up supporting Trump.[34] As a result, relatively contingent factors at the end of the campaign likely tipped the balance.[35]

At the same time, other contextual factors likely mitigated the impact of Russian interference. First, a well-established GOP and an extensive network of domestic media (Fox News, talk radio) supported Trump in the general election. Russian assistance was not required

[23] Both major parties oppose sanctions on Russia, with the BSP more generally pro-Russia. Parliament also contains multiple pro-Russia, Euroskeptic parties (e.g., the Patriotic Front, Ataka).

[24] The PVV, a far right Euroskeptic party was polling even with the incumbent pro-EU party and rose from third to second largest party in parliament.

[25] The anti-establishment M5S party was the largest single party in Italian parliament at the time of the referendum and led the No campaign.

[26] The Russian disinformation campaign was aimed at bolstering the messaging of the GOP.

[27] Both major parties oppose sanctions on Russia, with the BSP more generally pro-Russia. Parliament also contains multiple pro-Russia, Euroskeptic parties (e.g., the Patriotic Front, Ataka).

[28] The largest opposition bloc, the Democratic Front, is pro-Russia and opposed to joining NATO

[29] All of the major UK parties supported remaining in the EU.

[30] The third largest (tie) party in Dutch parliament, the far right, Euroskeptic PVV backed a No vote.

[31] All of the major UK parties supported remaining in the EU.

[32] Prokop (2016); Sides et al. (2018).

[33] McCormack (2016).

[34] Silver (2017b). This was due in large part to the historic unpopularity of both candidates (Enten 2016a).

[35] In addition, Trump's lack of political experience meant that additional assistance from Russia could have had more of an impact than if Trump had been an experienced politician.

to amplify pro-Trump messages. Indeed, even the highest estimates of how much Russia spent[36] are a tiny fraction of the USD $2.4 billion spent on the campaign.[37]   Simultaneously, longstanding polarization and extremely strong partisanship meant that regardless of anything the Russians did, the vast majority Republicans would ultimately support Trump.[38] Finally, Russian messaging was not required to increase the level of misinformation and polarizing rhetoric in the campaign. Historically, candidates have relied on third parties to spread false rumors and to make explicit racist appeals. But given Trump's readiness to violate historical norms against explicit racism and lying, his campaign did not need third parties to engage in such rhetoric.

Russia's information war involved a two-pronged strategy. First, there was an extensive effort to mobilize rightwing support for Trump by posing as U.S. persons and posting pro-Trump messages on social media. Second, there was significant attempt to demoralize Clinton supporters and reduce support for Clinton. This involved a large social media campaign to discourage African American turnout and encourage leftwing support for Third Party candidates. This effort also included the theft and distribution of hacked emails from the DNC and Clinton campaign.

The campaign was implemented in part by the Internet Research Agency (IRA) that spent about 12 million dollars in 2016 (for operations in both Europe and the United States)[39] and trained over a thousand people to engage in influence operations.[40] According to the analysis by DiResta et al. (2018), election related material accounted for a relatively small share (11 percent) of its posts on social media.[41] However, these posts generated the most engagement. In the runup to the 2016 US election, the IRA generated 82 million election related engagements[42] on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.[43] Russian messaging reached as many as 126 million people on Facebook, 20 million users on Instagram, and 1.4 million on Twitter.[44] Between January 2015 and August 2017, IRA shared approximately 80,000 pieces of organic content (although not all of these related to electoral politics).[45]

How successful was this campaign? There is some evidence Russian efforts had a significant impact. Jamieson's (2018: 177) analysis of Google searches in the month before election-day suggests that Wikileaks garnered significant attention and generated two questions during Presidential debates held in October. Russia's impact on Twitter also appears to have been significant. According to analysis by the Oxford Computational Propaganda Research Project analysis, four percent of all election related Tweets included content generated by

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[36] In a September 28, 2018 indictment of Elena Khusyaynova for her role in the IRA campaign, federal prosecutors allege the 2016 operation cost $12 million USD (Holt 2018: 9) – however this includes operations in Europe as well as the United Stares.

[37] Ingraham (2017); Silver (2018).

[38] Sides et al. (2018: 153).

[39] Holt (2018). New Knowledge (2018: 6) cites a figure of USD 25 million but at least some of this was spent after 2016 and only a portion was spent on the election.

[40] Howard et al. (2018: 9); DiResta et al. (2018: 6, 15).

[41] They identify 686,000 out of 6.5 million total posts as related to the US election.

[42] Likes, comments, reactions, shares.

[43] DiResta et al. (2018: 78).

[44] DiResta et al. (2018: 6); Shane and Mazzetti (2018).

[45] Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, U.S. House of Representatives (2018).

Wikileaks or Russia.[46] Similarly, Russian trolls accounted for four percent of retweets of Trump.[47] This is a surprising level of impact for a foreign propaganda effort on a canvas as large as an American Presidential campaign.

At the same time, there is less evidence that other efforts had as much resonance. The 80,000 Facebook posts distributed by IRA account for just one of every 23,000 posts on Facebook.[48] Russia is not primarily responsible for the onslaught of junk news in the campaign. Relatively few fake news stories have been traced originally to Russian sources.[49] Furthermore, homegrown misinformation was "vastly more prevalent" than Russian misinformation in the runup to the 2016 election.[50] Pro-Trump conspiracies such as the claim that Seth Rich was assassinated for releasing Clinton's emails received significant attention on Fox and other rightwing outlets. Trump himself of course frequently distributed false news stories during the campaign. Finally, one of the main drivers in the spread of fake news is the fact that news articles that go viral can draw significant advertising revenue.[51]

Indeed, much of Russia's propaganda replicated messaging that was already omnipresent in the campaign – mimicking messages in the Trump campaign, and a wide array of rightwing media (Fox, Breitbart, talk radio) that have enormous influence on US politics.[52] IRA strategies to provoke rightwing anger were already a core part of the programming on a wide range of rightwing media. Russian efforts simply added to an already deafening cacophony of inflammatory rhetoric and misinformation. Jamieson (2018: 78, 122) argues that Russian trolls were effective precisely *because* they were redundant – a fact that she argues amplified Trump's campaign themes. Yet, given the billions of dollars that Trump got in free media,[53] it is not clear that Trump needed Russia to magnify his message.

At the same time, other elements of the Russian campaign were less redundant. First, analysis by New Knowledge suggests that IRA efforts showed a "very clear bias" in favor of Trump early in the primaries.[54] Given Trump's lack of support from within the Republican establishment, such support might have been critical. At the same time, New Knowledge does not indicate the scale of the Russia's support at this stage and another study of the same posts argues that Russian efforts were "not particularly oriented" towards Trump's campaign.[55] So it is hard to say whether these efforts were large enough to sway the primaries in Trump's favor. In addition, factors relating to Trump's campaign – namely his appeal to both racism and leftwing

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[46] Howard et al. (2017: 3). In a ten day period around the election, they identify 1,269,736 election related tweets; 55,751 of these relayed information from Wikileaks or Russian controlled sites.

[47] Jamieson (2018: 70).

[48] Solon and Siddiqui (2017). This fraction would be lower if we included only those FB posts related to the 2016 election; but higher if the Russian posts included all those related to the Democratic emails distributed by Wikileaks and if the denominator included only posts related to the election. Jamieson (2018: 33) speculates that the impact of Russian efforts was enhanced by targeting of core Trump constituents. But so far at least, there is little available evidence that Russian efforts targeted swing states (Howard et al. 2018: 20-21; Jamieson 2018: 32).

[49] Rutenberg (2017).

[50] Nyhan and Horiuchi (2017).

[51] Kirby (2016); Allcott and Gentzkow (2017).

[52] The presence of Fox News in the local media has been shown to increase the Republican vote share (DellaVigna and Kaplan 2006).

[53] Confessore and Yourish (2016).

[54] DiResta et al. (2018: 9).

[55] Howard et al. (2018: 33).

economic policies that had a large constituency in the Republican party – can probably better explain Trump's success.[56]

Other parts of Russia's strategy were also less redundant of measures undertaken by domestic actors. In particular, analyses of IRA efforts on Facebook and Instagram reveal a significant effort to demobilize African American support for Clinton – discouraging efforts to vote, and giving false information on how to vote.[57] In fact, IRA expenditures on Facebook ads targeting African Americans were greater than those targeting conservative causes and groups.[58] Archived posts from the Russian created "Blacktivist" show that its posts received more likes than an official Black Lives Matter account.[59]

This type of false flag operation was potentially critical because it was not as widely utilized by domestic actors as other forms of campaign activity.[60] And, indeed, African American turnout dropped precipitously from 66 percent of eligible voters in 2012 to 59 percent in 2016. At the same time, the reduced turnout can much more easily be explained by President Obama's absence on the ballot.[61]

In a similar vein, the Russian campaign contributed to Trump's election by supporting the defection of potential Sanders' supporters and supporters of the Green Party candidate, Jill Stein.[62] Stein met with Putin in late 2015.[63] Most importantly, Russia released emails stolen from the DNC in late July that fostered a widespread belief that the DNC had "rigged" the primaries in favor of Clinton against Sanders.

Support for Jill Stein may have provided critical assistance to Trump. Thus, the increase in her support between 2012 (when she also ran for President) and 2016 was larger than the margin of the Trump victory in Wisconsin and Michigan – suggesting that Russian support for Stein might have helped tip the balance.[64] Yet, Russian efforts do not seem to have swayed Sanders' supporters. Indeed, Clinton was able to attract a substantially larger share of Sanders' supporters to her side by election-day (79 percent) than Obama had been able to attract Clinton supporters in 2008 (70 percent).[65]

Finally, Russia's most important contribution to the Trump campaign was the theft and release of emails from the Clinton campaign in October. Heavily edited samples of the emails released by Wikileaks reinforced an image of Clinton as "two faced" and untrustworthy.[66] The emails received considerable attention, and motivated two questions in the Presidential debates – one on whether it was ok for a politician to be "two faced" and another on Clinton's supposed support for "open borders." Russian trolls used the emails to portray Clinton as a "sickly,

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[56] Sides et al. (2018: 69-96).

[57] Howard et al. (2018: 3); Jamieson (2018: 87-88, 104-5). Posts reminded African American voters about earlier reference to blacks as "super predators" while spreading false claims such as one that Clinton received USD $20,000 from KKK (DiResta et al. 2018: 17)

[58] Howard et al. (2018: 23). 30 of 81 Facebook pages created by IRA targeted African Americans (DiResta et al. 2018: 21).

[59] Levin (2017).

[60] Although the Trump campaign did engage in some black voter suppression (Jamieson 2018: 108).

[61] Sides et al. (2018: 180).

[62] DiResta et al. (2018: 11, 83); Jamieson (2018: 110, 114); Mueller (2018: 17).

[63] TASS (2017).

[64] Jamieson (2018: 115). At the same time, increased support for Stein may have been the result of historically low favorability ratings of the Democratic nominees rather than any support given by Russia.

[65] Sides et al. (2018: 159).

[66] Jamieson (2018: 187).

dishonest criminal."[67] By taking attention away from the Access Hollywood tape that came out on the same day, the stolen emails appear to have reweighted the news environment in favor of Trump (Jamieson 2018).

Given the significant number of undecided voters, it is likely significant that the emails took valuable attention – and journalist time – away from investigation of Trump scandals in the final weeks of the election. According to one poll, perceptions of whether Clinton was qualified declined by seven percent over the course of October after the emails had been released.[68] Jamieson also shows that watching the second and third debates with the two Wikileaks questions increased public perception of Trump as being trustworthy, a strong leader and having the temperament to be President.[69]

At the same, it is hard to find direct evidence that the DNC emails in July and the Podesta emails in October had a negative impact on Clinton's campaign. If these materials had an impact, we would expect Clinton support in polls to fall in the wake of their release – as it did following the release of the Comey letter in late October.[70] By contrast, the evidence of Russia's impact is far less clear. While Clinton's support dipped briefly following the release of the DNC emails in between the Party Conventions in July, it quickly rebounded.[71] And in the two weeks following the release of the Podesta emails, Clinton's support *increased*. Furthermore, public perception of Clinton's trustworthiness remained stable at about 35-40 percent despite Wikileaks' focus on Clinton's lack of honesty.[72] Given that the Wikileaks-inspired questions in the debate focused on Clinton, it is not clear that the positive impact of the debates on Trump was related to Russian interference.

It is perhaps most plausible that the emails assisted Trump by taking attention away from the Access Hollywood tape. However, Trump's sexism had already been well documented; and, more importantly, gender solidarity was shown to be weak among Republican women in 2016.[73] So it is not clear that the tapes would have ultimately hurt Trump in any case. Finally, Comey's letter at the end of October may explain the shift of the undecided voters to Trump on election day.[74]

In sum, while the Russian government engaged in a significant and multipronged effort to influence the 2016 election, there is little evidence of an actual impact. First, much of the campaign simply reinforced messaging that was already in abundance in the domestic media

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[67] Jamieson (2018: 156).

[68] Jamieson (2018: 229).

[69] Jamieson (2018: 235).

[70] According to FiveThirtyEight's Nate Silver, in the week after FBI Director James Comey's announcement that he had found new evidence related to the Clinton email scandal, Clinton's chances of winning plummeted from 82 to 65 percent. (Silver 2017a).

[71] FiveThirtyEight (2016).

[72] Enten (2016b); Jamieson (2018: 232)

[73] Sides et al. (2018: 186).

[74] Jamieson (2018: chapter 10) argues that Russian misinformation motivated Comey's decision to publicize the FBI investigation. She provides some evidence from Comey's memoirs that Russian disinformation motivated his decision hold a press conference in July 2016. However, she merely speculates that this press conference motivated his decision to go public about Anthony Weiner's laptop on October 28. She provides no concrete evidence linking the hacked emails to this momentous decision. At the same time, both the July press conference and Comey's decision can be directly explained by factors unrelated to Russian interference – most notably the hyper partisan atmosphere in Washington and the widespread assumption that Clinton would win the election.

environment. Given the prevalence of Fox News, Breitbart, and other rightwing media such as Infowars[75], Russian efforts were not required provoke Republican anger or promote distrust in Clinton. Aspects of the information campaign that were less redundant – such as support for Trump during the primaries, and efforts to demobilize the Democratic vote – do not seem to have been large enough to shape the outcome. Furthermore, Trump's support could easily be explained by his overt racism[76] and the decline in African American vote can be explained by Obama's absence on the ballot. Finally, voting patterns do not support the claim that Russian efforts demobilized Sanders' supporters while polling does not suggest that Russian efforts hurt support for Clinton.

Conclusion

How can we know if Russia is a threat to Western democracy? To begin answering this question, we need to look not just at the supply side – the extent and character of Russian efforts that have been the focus of most studies – but at the *demand* side – the extent to which Russian activities were simply redundant of domestic factors already pushing in the same direction. Are domestic factors sufficient to explain electoral outcomes in the United States and Europe over the last four years?[77]

Such an approach may provide clues as to whether and where Russian interference may have been important in Europe over the last four years. A preliminary look at other cases of Russian intervention suggests that almost all cases of success by candidates whose policies dovetailed with Russian interference efforts can be explained by the actions of powerful domestic actors (Table 1). In Italy, for example, domestic disinformation already featured prominently and was promoted by an already popular anti-establishment party whose policy platforms aligned well with Russian goals.[78] Similar dynamics were present in nearly all cases of Russian interventions since 2015.[79] The important exceptions are the victory of the German AfD in 2017 and the Brexit vote in 2016. In both of these cases the dominant factions of both parties were opposed to the outcome supported by Russia. This suggests that these may be the most fruitful cases to find strong evidence of Russian impact.

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[75] Nicas (2018).

[76] Sides et al. (2018: 69-96).

[77] This approach also helps us understand the impact of diffusion. The focus on the demand side tells us that international diffusion was critical in explaining the wave of rebellions in Europe in 1848 and the Arab Spring in 2011 when domestic factors were insufficient to explain political upheavals in these regions but less so in the spread of colored revolutions in the early 2000s when domestic factors can more easily explain the fall of postcommunist dictators.

[78] Nardelli and Silverman (2017); Alandete (2018); Horowitz (2018).

[79] See Table 1 and the appendix.

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