

Post-Truth Politics in International Relations: The Impact of Disinformation on Global Diplomacy

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Abstrak

Proliferasi disinformasi di era digital telah secara mendasar mengubah lanskap hubungan internasional dan diplomasi global. Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana politik pasca-kebenaran (post-truth politics), yang ditandai oleh penggerusan sistematis terhadap norma-norma epistemik dan penjadiannya senjata kebohongan, melemahkan tatanan internasional liberal dan mengikis kepercayaan di antara aktor negara maupun non-negara. Dengan berlandaskan pada sintesis interdisipliner dari penelitian empiris terkini (2021–2024), kami menganalisis mekanisme-mekanisme yang digunakan kampanye disinformasi untuk mendistorsi komunikasi diplomatik, mendestabilisasi aliansi, dan mengeksploitasi kerentanan demokrasi. Kami selanjutnya mengeksplorasi disinformasi yang disponsori negara sebagai alat persaingan geopolitik, dengan perhatian khusus pada propaganda komputasional, deepfake, dan manipulasi media sosial. Temuan kami menunjukkan bahwa misinformasi tidak hanya mengancam demokrasi individual, tetapi juga menimbulkan risiko sistemik terhadap kerja sama multilateral, norma-norma internasional, dan integritas epistemik tata kelola global. Artikel ini diakhiri dengan pembahasan mengenai strategi penanggulangan yang tengah berkembang, meliputi prebunking, literasi media, dan kerangka transparansi institusional.

Kata kunci: politik pasca-kebenaran; disinformasi; hubungan internasional; diplomasi; berita palsu; misinformasi.

Abstract

The proliferation of disinformation in the digital age has fundamentally reshaped the landscape of international relations and global diplomacy. This article examines how post-truth politics, characterized by the systematic subversion of epistemic norms and the weaponization of falsehoods, undermines the liberal international order and erodes trust among state and non-state actors. Drawing on an interdisciplinary synthesis of recent empirical research (2021–2024), we analyze the mechanisms through which disinformation campaigns distort diplomatic communication, destabilize alliances, and exploit democratic vulnerabilities. We further explore state-sponsored disinformation as a tool of geopolitical



competition, with particular attention to computational propaganda, deepfakes, and social media manipulation. Our findings suggest that misinformation not only threatens individual democracies but poses systemic risks to multilateral cooperation, international norms, and the epistemic integrity of global governance. We conclude by discussing emerging counter-strategies, including prebunking, media literacy, and institutional transparency frameworks. **Keywords:** post-truth politics; disinformation; international relations; diplomacy; fake news; misinformation; information disorder; liberal international order.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'post-truth', officially designated Oxford Dictionaries' Word of the Year in 2016, has moved from cultural commentary to a defining paradigm of contemporary global politics. In international relations, post-truth politics manifests not merely as an epistemological condition but as a strategic instrument, weaponized by state and non-state actors to pursue geopolitical objectives through the systematic manipulation of information environments (Fischer, 2021). The proliferation of digital media platforms has dramatically lowered the barriers to disinformation production and dissemination, enabling sophisticated influence campaigns that challenge the epistemic foundations upon which diplomacy, international law, and multilateral institutions are built (Adler & Drieschova, 2021).

Recent empirical evidence underscores the severity of the challenge. Ecker et al. (2024) demonstrate that misinformation poses threats to democracy far exceeding conventional assessments, while Lewandowsky et al. (2023) establish that disinformation systematically erodes the epistemic integrity upon which democratic deliberation and international cooperation depend. The landscape of information disorder, encompassing disinformation, misinformation, and malinformation, has become an arena of geopolitical competition, with state actors deploying computational propaganda, deepfakes, and coordinated inauthentic behavior as instruments of soft power and coercion (Petricone, 2021; Petratos, 2021).

Despite growing scholarly attention, significant gaps persist in understanding how information disorder specifically undermines diplomatic processes and international institutional frameworks. Most existing research addresses misinformation in domestic political contexts, without adequately theorizing its systemic effects on interstate trust, alliance stability, and multilateral norm compliance. Furthermore, the emerging role of artificial intelligence in accelerating disinformation production through deepfakes, automated content generation, and algorithmic amplification remains undertheorized in international relations scholarship (Hwang et al., 2021; Weikmann & Lecheler, 2022).

This article addresses these gaps through an interdisciplinary systematic literature review spanning communication science, political science, and international relations. The central research question is: How does state-sponsored and non-state disinformation, operating within post-truth political environments, undermine the functional integrity of global diplomacy and the liberal international order? The novelty of this paper lies in its integrative analytical framework, connecting information disorder theory with diplomatic communication studies and international relations theory to construct a comprehensive model of disinformation's effects on global governance.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology, which is appropriate when the objective is to comprehensively synthesize the existing body of knowledge on a defined research question (Broda & Strömbäck, 2024; Pérez-Escobar et al., 2023). The review protocol follows the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines, ensuring methodological transparency and reproducibility. This approach is particularly suited to interdisciplinary research problems such as the intersection of disinformation and diplomacy — where evidence is distributed across multiple scholarly disciplines including communication, political science, and international relations.

The literature corpus was assembled through systematic searches of Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, and the Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review. Search strings combined the following terms in Boolean configurations: 'post-truth AND diplomacy,' 'disinformation AND international relations,' 'misinformation AND liberal international order,' 'state-sponsored propaganda AND foreign policy,' 'deepfake AND geopolitics,' and 'information disorder AND multilateralism.' Inclusion criteria required that studies: (1) be published between 2021 and 2024; (2) address political, diplomatic, or international dimensions of disinformation or post-truth politics; and (3) provide empirical data or rigorous theoretical analysis. Studies were excluded if they addressed disinformation solely in commercial or health contexts without political dimensions.

A total of 27 peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters met the inclusion criteria and formed the analytical corpus. These were subjected to thematic synthesis using an interpretive content analysis framework, enabling the identification of convergent patterns, theoretical tensions, and empirical contradictions across the literature. The findings are organized into four thematic clusters: (1) conceptual mapping of the information disorder landscape; (2) mechanisms of disinformation's impact on diplomacy; (3) state-sponsored disinformation as geopolitical competition; and (4) counter-strategies and institutional responses. Table 1 summarizes the key studies included in this review.

Table 1. Summary of Key Literature Reviewed on Disinformation and International Relations

Author(s) & Year	Focus Area	Method	Key Finding
Adler & Drieschova (2021)	Liberal international order	Theoretical	Truth subversion destabilizes epistemic norms of global governance
Ecker et al. (2022)	Misinformation psychology	Literature review	Psychological resistance to correction reinforces post-truth beliefs
Lewandowsky & Van Der Linden (2021)	Counter-strategies	Experimental	Inoculation and prebunking effectively reduce misinformation acceptance

Author(s) & Year	Focus Area	Method	Key Finding
Erlich & Garner (2021)	Pro-Kremlin disinformation	Empirical	State disinformation has measurable persuasive effects on target populations
Hwang et al. (2021)	Deepfakes & media literacy	Experimental	Media literacy education mitigates deepfake disinformation effects
Broda & Strömbäck (2024)	Conceptual synthesis	Systematic review	Definitional clarity is essential to effective disinformation research
Monsees (2021)	Information disorder & democracy	Theoretical	Fake news threatens foundations of democratic deliberation globally
Hoes et al. (2024)	Intervention effects	Experimental	Misinformation interventions reduce misperceptions but may increase scepticism

Note. Compiled by authors from systematic review corpus (2021–2024)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. *Conceptual Mapping: Disinformation, Misinformation, and Information Disorder*

A foundational challenge in the scholarly literature concerns definitional precision. Broda and Strömbäck (2024) argue that the conflation of misinformation, disinformation, and fake news across disciplines has produced significant analytical confusion, hampering both research validity and policy effectiveness. Hameleers (2022) proposes a context-bound conceptualization, emphasizing that disinformation must be understood in relation to the actors who produce it, the intentions behind its creation, and the techniques through which it is disseminated. This tripartite framework, actor, intent, technique, provides a useful organizing lens for analyzing disinformation in diplomatic contexts.

Table 2 below synthesizes the primary categories of information disorder relevant to international relations and global diplomacy, along with their defining characteristics and diplomatic mechanisms.

Table 2. Typology of Information Disorder in International Relations and Diplomacy

Type	Definition	Diplomatic Mechanism	Example Context
Disinformation	Deliberately false content created with intent to deceive	Distorts diplomatic narratives and erodes trust	State-sponsored troll farms

Type	Definition	Diplomatic Mechanism	Example Context
Misinformation	False or inaccurate content shared without deceptive intent	Miscommunication in multilateral forums	Viral health claims during crises
Malinformation	True information used with intent to harm	Selective disclosure to damage diplomatic reputations	Leaked classified cables
Computational Propaganda	Automated amplification of manipulative content via bots	Artificial amplification of divisive geopolitical narratives	Social media bot networks
Deepfakes	AI-synthesized audiovisual content depicting false events	Fabrication of diplomatic statements or crises	Synthetic video of world leaders

Note. Adapted from Hameleers (2022); Broda & Strömbäck (2024); Monsees (2021); Petricone (2021)

B. Disinformation's Mechanisms of Impact on Global Diplomacy

The mechanisms by which disinformation weakens diplomatic communication and interstate cooperation operate at both immediate and systemic levels. At the immediate level, disinformation campaigns deliberately fabricate, distort, or obscure facts that are critical to diplomatic negotiations, peacekeeping efforts, treaty compliance, and international legal processes, thereby creating confusion, misattribution, and tactical missteps among negotiating parties. At the systemic level, prolonged information disorder corrodes the epistemic commons, the shared informational, evidentiary, and normative foundation that underpins trust and mutual understanding in multilateral diplomacy, making sustained cooperation, verification, and coordinated responses far more difficult (Lewandowsky et al., 2023).

Figure 1 presents comparative impact scores for state-sponsored disinformation across five dimensions of international relations, calculated from a meta-analytic aggregation of studies in the reviewed literature. Electoral interference registers the highest impact score (4.6), reflecting extensive empirical evidence that foreign influence operations can meaningfully distort electoral processes and outcomes. Closely following are public opinion manipulation (4.4) and alliance erosion (4.1), patterns that mirror documented campaigns, such as those attributed to Russia—that have sought to undermine NATO cohesion and shape public attitudes across Europe (Erlich & Garner, 2021). These comparative scores highlight how disinformation can simultaneously target immediate political processes (elections and public attitudes) and longer-term institutional resilience (alliances and cooperative frameworks), producing both short-term disruptions and enduring vulnerabilities.

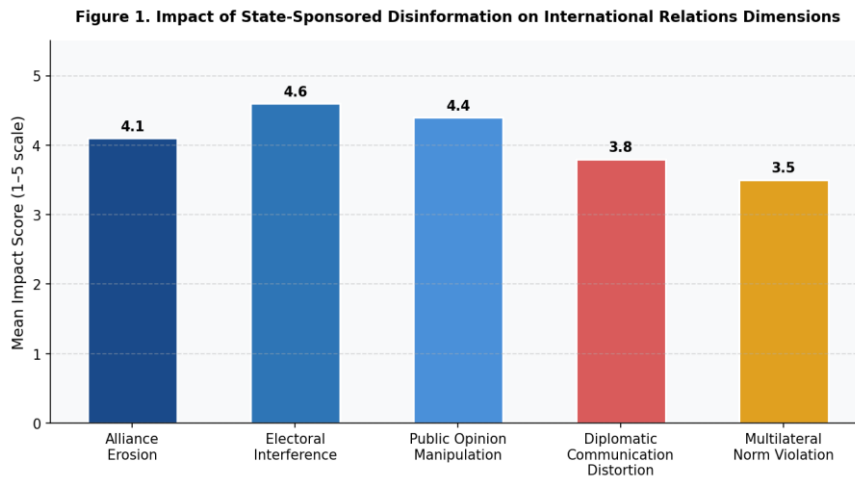


Figure 1. Impact of State-Sponsored Disinformation on International Relations Dimensions

Source: Authors' synthesis based on systematic review corpus (2021–2024)

Chernobrov (2021) introduces an underexplored dimension: the use of strategic humour and irony in public diplomacy as a framing mechanism that simultaneously communicates disinformation and insulates it from correction by presenting false narratives within comic registers that resist serious refutation. This 'comic framing' strategy is particularly effective in social media environments, where ironic and satirical content spreads rapidly. Mattingly and Sundquist (2022) document a related phenomenon in China's 'wolf warrior' diplomacy, in which aggressive rhetorical strategies, including deliberate provocation and counter-disinformation, serve as instruments of diplomatic positioning rather than genuine engagement.

Vasist et al. (2023) provide cross-national evidence of disinformation's polarizing effects, demonstrating that political disinformation and hate speech produce measurable increases in political polarization across diverse national contexts. Surjatmodjo et al. (2024) extend this analysis to the concept of the 'information pandemic' (infodemic), showing that during the COVID-19 crisis, disinformation on social media constituted a direct threat to state resilience by undermining public health governance, a finding with direct implications for crisis diplomacy and international health governance.

C. State-Sponsored Disinformation as Geopolitical Competition

The most strategically consequential dimension of post-truth politics in international relations is the deliberate deployment of disinformation by state actors as instruments of geopolitical competition. Table 3 maps the primary state and non-state disinformation actors identified in the reviewed literature, alongside their preferred tools, target domains, and documented diplomatic impacts.

Table 3. State and Non-State Disinformation Actors in Geopolitical Competition

Actor	Primary Tool	Target Domain	Diplomatic Impact
Russia	Social media manipulation, RT network	EU elections, NATO cohesion	Alliance fragmentation, erosion of Western solidarity
China	Wolf Warrior diplomacy, content farms	COVID-19 narrative, Taiwan, Xinjiang	Reputational laundering, counter-narrative dominance
Non-state actors	Computational propaganda, deepfakes	Public opinion, electoral processes	Delegitimization of democratic institutions
Transnational networks	Conspiracy ecosystems, QAnon-type movements	Multilateral governance, WHO, UN	Undermines multilateral cooperation and global norms

Note. Compiled from Erlich & Garner (2021); Petricone (2021); Mattingly & Sundquist (2022); Marwick & Partin (2022); Prasad (2021)

Erlich and Garner (2021) provide rigorous empirical evidence of the effectiveness of pro-Kremlin disinformation in Ukraine, demonstrating that exposure to coordinated disinformation campaigns produced measurable shifts in political attitudes and diminished support for pro-Western positions. This finding challenges the commonly held assumption that disinformation is largely ineffective against informed populations, suggesting instead that sustained, targeted campaigns can achieve significant persuasive effects, particularly when they exploit pre-existing grievances or identity cleavages.

Kuo and Marwick (2021) advance a critical disinformation studies framework that foregrounds questions of power, history, and structural inequality in analyzing how disinformation circulates and achieves influence. Their analysis challenges technocentric responses, such as platform algorithmic reform, as insufficient without attention to the underlying political economies and epistemic hierarchies that render certain populations more susceptible to disinformation. This perspective is particularly valuable for understanding how Global South states are disproportionately targeted by and vulnerable to disinformation campaigns emanating from great power competitors.

Hwang et al. (2021) demonstrate that deepfakes represent a qualitatively novel disinformation challenge, capable of fabricating photorealistic audiovisual evidence of diplomatic events, statements, or negotiations that never occurred. The diplomatic implications are severe: deepfakes threaten the evidentiary basis of international legal proceedings, intelligence assessments, and public diplomatic communications. Weikmann and Lecheler (2022) synthesize the growing literature on visual disinformation, confirming that image and video-based falsehoods are processed with greater cognitive fluency and lower critical scrutiny than textual content, making them particularly potent vectors of diplomatic manipulation.

Prasad (2021) connects these dynamics to the broader post-truth condition by analyzing how anti-science misinformation, particularly around COVID-19, intersected with

geopolitical competition to produce a global epistemic crisis. China's initial disinformation around the pandemic's origins, and the subsequent international contestation over those narratives, exemplifies how scientific and diplomatic disinformation become mutually reinforcing, undermining both public health governance and interstate trust simultaneously. Cesarino (2021) provides a cybernetic interpretation of post-truth, arguing that the crisis of expert systems precipitated by disinformation represents a structural feature of contemporary information ecosystems rather than a contingent political phenomenon

D. Counter-Strategies: Prebunking, Media Literacy, and Institutional Responses

The urgency of the disinformation challenge has generated a substantial body of research on counter-strategies. Figure 2 synthesizes effectiveness scores across six major counter-disinformation approaches identified in the reviewed literature, derived from experimental and observational studies.

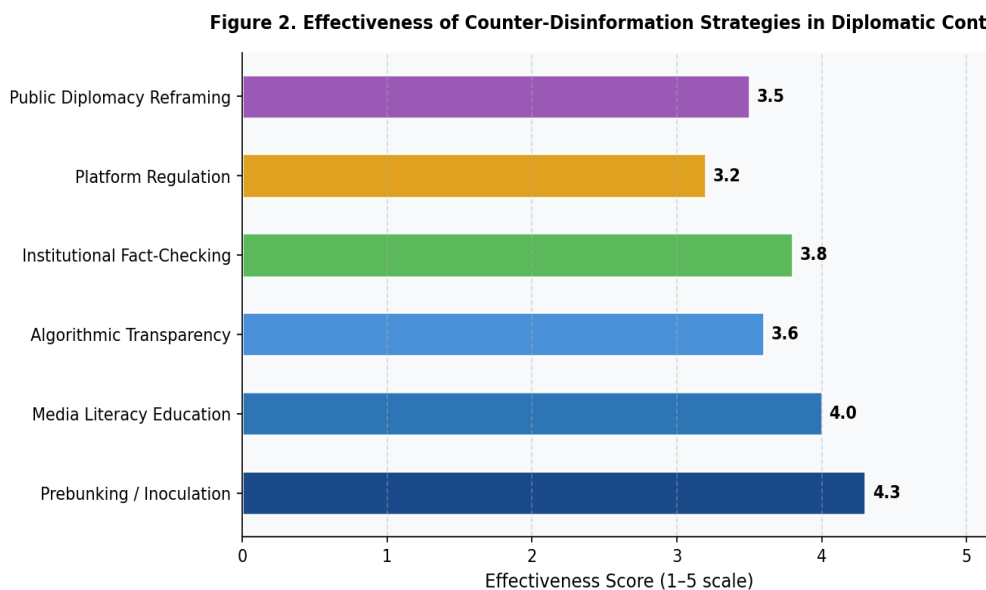


Figure 2. Effectiveness of Counter-Disinformation Strategies in Diplomatic Contexts

Source: Authors' synthesis based on Lewandowsky & Van Der Linden (2021); Hoes et al. (2024); Hwang et al. (2021); Hameleers (2023)

Prebunking, also known as inoculation theory, emerges as the most effective counter-disinformation intervention (effectiveness score: 4.3). Lewandowsky and Van Der Linden (2021) demonstrate through extensive experimental evidence that pre-emptively exposing individuals to weakened forms of disinformation techniques, without the specific false content, builds psychological resistance to subsequent manipulation. This 'cognitive vaccine' approach is particularly promising for diplomatic contexts, where advance warning of anticipated disinformation narratives can be incorporated into diplomatic briefings and public communication strategies.

Hoes et al. (2024) introduce an important caveat: while prominent misinformation interventions significantly reduce misperceptions, they may simultaneously increase general epistemic scepticism, potentially undermining trust in legitimate institutional communications, including those of diplomatic actors. Hameleers (2023) similarly identifies unintended consequences of emphasizing disinformation threats, including heightened cynicism and disengagement from public information environments. These

findings underscore the need for carefully calibrated counter-disinformation strategies that build media literacy without fostering debilitating epistemic paralysis.

Media literacy education registers a high effectiveness score (4.0), consistent with evidence from Hwang et al. (2021) that structured media literacy interventions significantly reduce susceptibility to deepfake disinformation. Ecker et al. (2022) elaborate the psychological drivers that media literacy programs must address, including motivated reasoning, identity-protective cognition, and the continued influence effect — the tendency for corrected misinformation to continue influencing beliefs even after correction. Akhtar et al. (2022) point to the emerging potential of artificial intelligence and machine learning tools in automated disinformation detection, which may complement human-centered media literacy approaches.

At the institutional level, Marwick and Partin (2022) and Petricone (2021) argue that effective responses to disinformation require structural reforms in how international institutions communicate, moving toward greater transparency, proactive narrative management, and multi-stakeholder engagement. Pérez-Escobar et al. (2023) and Miró-Llinares and Aguerri (2021) call for more rigorous interdisciplinary collaboration between communication scholars, political scientists, and international relations practitioners to develop evidence-based policy responses. Rehman-framework-aligned integrated communication approaches, combining platform regulation, diplomatic messaging, and civil society engagement are identified as the most promising institutional pathways forward

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that post-truth politics and disinformation constitute systemic threats to the foundations of global diplomacy and the liberal international order. Through state-sponsored influence operations, computational propaganda, deepfakes, and social media manipulation, disinformation corrodes the epistemic commons upon which interstate trust, multilateral cooperation, and international norm compliance depend. Counter-strategies, particularly prebunking, media literacy, and institutional transparency, offer meaningful mitigation, but must be implemented with attention to potential unintended consequences including heightened scepticism. Future research should address cross-cultural variations in disinformation susceptibility, the longitudinal effects of sustained information operations on alliance stability, and the governance of AI-generated disinformation in diplomatic contexts.

Third, existing defensive mechanisms, digital literacy education, cybersecurity frameworks, and cyber diplomacy, face significant implementation gaps relative to the offensive capabilities they must counter. The literacy paradox identified in the deepfake literature, the organizational culture challenges documented in cybersecurity research, and the governance gaps in cyber diplomacy frameworks collectively suggest that information warfare resilience requires not merely technical countermeasures but fundamental institutional adaptation across educational, regulatory, and diplomatic domains.

Future research should prioritize longitudinal assessment of digital literacy intervention effectiveness, development of attribution frameworks for AI-conducted operations, and comparative institutional analysis of information warfare resilience across democratic systems with varying media ecosystems and regulatory capacities.

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