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1. Introduction

2024 is the biggest election year in history. Over 70 elections are slated to occur in countries home to 4.2 billion individuals, representing half of the global population (Standage 2023). These elections are set to be a litmus test for the state of democracy worldwide. A common concern among international media is the threat democracy faces from disinformation campaigns and foreign electoral interference through the use of artificial intelligence (AI). There has been a notable rise in incidents involving “deepfakes,” where AI is employed to create realistic images and voices that mimic real politicians. This form of fake news, which presents misleading information through figures resembling actual political leaders, significantly influences voter perceptions (Hong 2024). A pertinent example of this occurred last December when the Taiwan Ministry of Justice reported that YouTube adhered to the government’s request to take down a deepfake video alleging that Lai Ching-te had three mistresses, posted by a channel named “Eat Rice, No War” (Lau 2024).

Furthermore, authoritarian regimes, particularly Russia and China, are exploiting political polarization and dissatisfaction within democratic nations to undermine democracy by supporting disinformation campaigns (Hsu et al. 2024). A Taiwanese research institute discovered a network on Facebook and TikTok spreading pro-Beijing disinformation in Taiwan as part of its electoral interference strategy. This false narratives aimed to erode trust in the U.S. and discredit candidates from the Democratic Progressive Party, notably Lai, who are critical of the mainland (Kristof 2024). Taiwanese authorities reportedly arrested an online journalist, Lin Hsien-yuan, for falsely claiming to have conducted interviews or surveys with more than 300 citizens across eight polls. They suspected that Lin’s findings were “orchestrated by Chinese Communist Party officials in Fujian province,” and said they would investigate in accordance with the new Anti-Infiltration Act (Lau 2024). The disinformation campaigns and foreign electoral interference observed during the Taiwanese General Election in January 2024 offer vital lessons for South Korea.

As the efforts of foreign powers to erode public trust and democracy by exploiting political polarization evolve, South Korean democracy and its elections are increasingly vulnerable to such foreign electoral interference. In the lead-up to the 22nd National Assembly Elections in April, while no direct acts of interference have been detected, various forms of involvement are anticipated due to the substantial national interests at stake with the election results. In particular, Russia, China, and

North Korea may actively seek to meddle with the election. This kind of foreign electoral interference can deepen political polarization, influence the election outcome, and harm democracy by compromising the integrity of the electoral process. Proactive solutions and heightened vigilance are essential to address these challenges.

Nevertheless, not only is research on this issue sparse, but the tracking of electoral interference itself is not conducted in a timely manner. To fill this gap, this paper intends to provide essential data on foreign interference in elections and assess the current state of affairs. It will focus primarily on fake news and disinformation campaigns, which represent a significant aspect of foreign electoral interference. By analyzing an opinion survey, this research seeks to shed light on its existence, identify the primary actors involved, assess its impact, and understand its partisan dimensions.¹ The findings will also be used to explore the relationship between foreign electoral interference and political polarization. By offering these insights, the study aspires to be a valuable resource for further research and policy formulation on foreign electoral interference.²

2. Theoretical Review

This study begins by defining foreign electoral interference and summarizing the discussions found in key documents. It will then analyze the relationship between foreign election meddling and political polarization, drawing on insights from the literature review.

2.1 Defining “Foreign Electoral Interference”

Several terms, including “influence,” “meddling,” “intervention,” and “interference,” have been employed to characterize instances where a nation’s election is impacted by foreign entities. The phenomenon of countries attempting to influence the electoral outcomes of others is not new, with notable instances occurring during the Cold War. During this period, superpowers were often engaged in efforts to promote their own interests or oversee the elections of emerging democracies lacking robust electoral systems. Corstange and Marinov (2012) categorize foreign involvement in elections as partisan, where a foreign entity aims to support or hinder a specific party or candidate, or process-oriented, which involves foreign actors attempting to “support the rules of democratic contestation” (677).

Recently, the notion of partisan involvement has gained prominence in discussions on electoral interference, serving to delineate the diverse objectives and methods of foreign electoral activities. The array of terms currently in use reflects the lack of a consolidated academic framework addressing this trend. To minimize terminological confusion, this paper will adopt the term “interference,” recognizing its association with the predominantly negative effects on the electoral process and outcomes, aside from instances of process involvement. The choice of this term is also

¹ In January 2024, the East Asia Institute (EAI) partnered with Hankook Research to carry out an opinion poll on fake news and disinformation. This paper is based on the findings from this survey.

² The National Election Commission, National Intelligence Service, and Korea Internet & Security Agency declined to share information on foreign electoral interference.

informed by its inclusion of the concept of hindrance in its dictionary definition, making it apt for the context discussed. Levin defines electoral interference as follows:

... [A] situation in which one or more sovereign countries intentionally undertakes specific actions to influence an upcoming election in another sovereign country in an overt or covert manner that they believe will favor or hurt one of the sides contesting that election and which incurs, or may incur, significant costs to the intervener(s) or the intervened country (192).

However, this interpretation raises concerns because it primarily attributes these actions to state entities. In contrast, Hollis and Ohlin (2021) argue that the principal agents of election interference are often individuals or entities acting at the behest or under the direction of a state (6). Incorporating this perspective, this paper proposes a refined definition:

Foreign electoral interference is an act where individuals or groups, either independently or commissioned by a foreign government or its agencies, engage in activities aimed at influencing the electoral outcome of another nation to serve their own national interests, employing either overt or covert tactics.

2.2 Political Polarization and Foreign Electoral Interference

Foreign electoral interference often exploits disinformation because of its cost-effectiveness and high potential for impact. Disinformation campaigns typically benefit candidates aligned with the interfering state's interests while undermining those opposed to it. Moreover, these campaigns aim to exacerbate internal polarization, erode trust within the society, and compromise the integrity of the electoral system (Fontaine 2023). Such actions of electoral interference possess a distinctly partisan nature, emphasizing divisive issues and promoting polarized views on specific candidates.

Recent studies highlight the partisan aspect of foreign electoral interference. A study utilizing opinion polls has shown that U.S. citizens generally criticize foreign involvement and consequently lose trust in the democratic process. Tomz and Weeks (2020) specifically highlight that Americans are "more likely to condemn foreign involvement, lose faith in democracy, and seek retaliation when a foreign power sides with the opposition." This partisan nature of electoral interference is corroborated by findings from other case studies as well (Corstange and Marinov 2012).

Disinformation, a primary tool of foreign electoral interference, is often featured in studies addressing the partisanship of "fake news." The core theoretical discussion on disinformation centers around the concept of motivated reasoning. Typically, individuals exhibit directional motivated reasoning, described as "the most common way that people process political stimuli." This inclination leads to both confirmation bias, where individuals are prone to seek out information that aligns with their existing beliefs, and disconfirmation bias, which drives people to "counterargue information" that contradicts their beliefs (Flynn et al. 2017: 132).

A study examining the South Korean context through motivated reasoning theory found that a preference for specific political candidates significantly influenced the acceptance or rejection of fake news, with individuals tending to accept or refute information based on its favorability towards their preferred candidate (Roh et al. 2017). The findings indicate that higher levels of partisanship correlate with a greater acceptance of news congruent with one's political leanings and a rejection of discordant news (Lee 2015; Oh and Park 2005).

Further research focused on conservative political orientation and its effect on distinguishing fake news concerning North Korea, proposing that conservative ideology might be particularly susceptible to disinformation (Yoo and Yoon 2022). In essence, disinformation, as a facet of foreign electoral interference, is anticipated to be significantly shaped by political polarization, affecting both the interpretation of information and the perception of falsehoods.

3. Public Attitudes Toward Foreign Electoral Interference

To gauge basic public perception of foreign electoral interference, the survey inquired if respondents had come across false information related to domestic elections or politics on social media or other online platforms, seemingly originating from a foreign country. A total of 37.4% (466 individuals) confirmed encountering such information, whereas 62.6% (781 individuals) did not.³ Many participants' lack of exposure to disinformation is not surprising, given the relatively unexplored nature of foreign electoral interference in South Korea's electoral context. While there has been at least one noted instance, it failed to make a significant societal impact.⁴ Additionally, to draw comparisons with historical perceptions, the survey posed the question, "Do you believe there was covert electoral interference from foreign countries in past South Korean elections?" A majority, 61.0% (761 respondents), answered affirmatively, suggesting a perception of substantial foreign interference, despite the absence of recent, clear-cut cases. In contrast, 39.0% (486 respondents) did not believe such interference had occurred.

[Table 1] Foreign Electoral Interference: Past vs. Present

[Unit: % (# of Respondents)]

	Yes	No
Past Foreign Electoral Interference	61.0(761)	39.0(486)
Current Foreign Electoral Interference	37.4(466)	62.6(718)

³ Regarding the question, "Have you received or seen any news you believe to be fake in the past six months?" 44.7% (557 respondents) answered yes, while 55.3% (690 respondents) answered no.

⁴ On March 1, 2020, six weeks prior to the 20th General Elections, an anonymous whistleblower claimed online to be a Korean-Chinese individual living in South Korea, stating that they were paid to disseminate fake news and misinformation across various websites to foster a climate favorable to China. Lee Ji-yong, a professor at Keimyung University, claimed that nearly 30 million "paid online commentators" are spreading the propaganda of the Chinese Communist Party on the internet, with approximately half of them earning their livelihood through this activity (Kang 2023).

To the 466 respondents who reported encountering such information, the survey further inquired about the sources of this information. The options provided were: Internet (Portal, Facebook, KakaoTalk, etc.), Mass Media (Newspaper, TV, etc.), Social Spaces (Workplace, School, etc.), Private Gatherings with Friends or Colleagues, Offline Spaces (Public Protests, etc.), and Others. The Internet dominated as the source with 78.8% (367 respondents), followed by mass media at 9.9% (46 respondents), private gatherings at 5.2% (24 respondents), social spaces at 4.3% (20 respondents, correcting a mathematical typo), offline spaces at 1.5% (7 respondents), and others at 1.3% (6 respondents). This distribution suggests that the channels through which foreign electoral interference is disseminated closely mirror those of general disinformation, with the Internet leading the way, followed by mass media and private gatherings.⁵ Given its cost-effectiveness and broad reach, the Internet serves as the primary arena for foreign electoral interference, not just globally but also within South Korea.

[Table 2] Source of Electoral Interference and Disinformation

[Unit %]

	Foreign electoral interference	Disinformation
Internet (Portal, Facebook, Kakaotalk, etc.)	78.8	68.4
Mass media (Newspaper, TV, etc.)	9.9	13.5
Private Gatherings with Friends/Colleagues	5.2	10.9
Social Space (Workplace, School, etc.)	3.4	3.9
Offline space (Public Protests, etc.)	1.5	1.8
Other	1.3	1.6
Total	100.0	100.0

In addressing the question of whether covert electoral interference could influence South Korean elections, 20.22% (252 respondents) answered “Very likely,” 57.7% (720 respondents) chose “Likely,” 18.7% (233 respondents) selected “Unlikely,” and 3.4% (42 respondents) responded “Not likely at all.” This reflects a majority’s awareness of the potential risk of foreign electoral interference.

The primary concerns about foreign electoral interference included fake news and disinformation campaigns (71.1%) and the creation of polarized public opinion about specific candidates (70.6%). This was followed by financial support for particular candidates at 54.6%, and the hacking of voting machines at 42.9%.

⁵ Responses from participants who affirmed to the question, “Have you received or seen any news you believe to be fake in the past six months?”

[Table 3] How concerned are you about the potential methods through which foreign entities could interfere in South Korean elections?

[Unit: % (# of Respondents)]

	Not concerned at all	Not much concerned	Moderate	Slightly concerned	Very concerned
1. Hacking voting machines and etc.	8.7(109)	20.0(249)	28.4(354)	30.5(360)	12.4(155)
2. Campaigns on fake news and false information	2.0(25)	6.6(82)	20.3(253)	44.2(551)	26.9(336)
3. Formulating public preference on certain candidates	1.5(19)	4.9(61)	23.0(287)	43.4(541)	27.2(339)
4. Financial support towards certain candidates	2.1(26)	8.9(111)	34.4(429)	36.6(457)	18.0(224)

Respondents were asked to rank the top two countries most likely to interfere with South Korean elections. China occupied both the 1st and 2nd positions, with an overall percentage of 32.48%, followed by North Korea at 29.23%, the U.S. at 23.10%, and Japan at 10.30%. Russia, often associated with interference in U.S. presidential elections and other nations like Sweden, received a low ranking of 3.41%. While a majority believed that Russia, China, and North Korea would engage in interference, there was also a significant opinion suggesting that democratic nations such as the United States and Japan might do the same. This response exhibited a high level of partisanship and will be further explored in subsequent discussions on political polarization.

[Table 4] Countries most likely to interfere with South Korean elections

[Unit: # of Respondents(%)]

	1st	2nd	1st+2nd
China	391(31.4%)	419(33.6%)	810(32.48%)
DPRK	380(30.5%)	349(28.0%)	729(29.23%)
Russia	23(1.8%)	62(5.0)	85(3.41%)
USA	353(28.3%)	223(17.9)	576(23.10%)
Japan	80(6.4%)	177(14.2%)	257(10.30%)
Other	20(1.6%)	17(1.4%)	37(1.48%)
Total	1247(100.0%)	1247(100.0%)	2494(100.0%)

In response to the question, “How much confidence do you have in the government’s ability to thwart attempts by foreign countries to interfere with elections?”, the responses turned out as follows: 16.9% of participants (211 individuals) described their confidence as “Very low,” and 54.2% (676 individuals) chose “Somewhat low.” With 71.1% expressing doubts about the government’s effectiveness, this indicates a significant level of skepticism. A mere 1.8% (23 respondents) declared they had “Complete confidence,” whereas 27.0% (337 respondents) expressed “Moderate confidence.” Despite the global trend of establishing specialized agencies or forming public-private partnerships to address this issue and enhance public awareness, the South Korean government has not yet engaged in substantial discussions or sought public input on these strategies. A proactive approach at the governmental level is critically needed.

4. Current State of Foreign Electoral Interference and Political Polarization

4.1 Current State of Foreign Electoral Interference

The investigation into foreign electoral interference utilized two specific statements. However, the findings were limited due to the use of alternative questions, which emerged from challenges in finding an appropriate questionnaire. Incorporating recent, contentious, and well-known examples of foreign electoral interference would have enhanced the research, but such instances were unavailable. Consequently, the survey sought to explore partisan attitudes towards foreign entities by focusing on hypothetical scenarios possibly involving North Korea and the U.S., and their connection to electoral interference.

The two statements presented were as follows: (1) Evidence indicating North Korea’s cyber intrusion into the South Korean National Election Commission (NEC) was discovered, and (2) Most documents alleging U.S. wiretapping of South Korea, revealed in the leaked classified military documents, were falsified and inaccurate. Participants could respond with “Entirely true,” “Somewhat true,” “Somewhat false,” or “Entirely false.” A press release detailing the findings from NEC’s security audit in October 2023 revealed no evidence of North Korean tampering with the election system, rendering the first statement false (NEC 2023). Regarding the second claim, after a call between Kim Tae-hyo, the first deputy chief of the National Security Office, and the U.S. Secretary of Defense, the two countries agreed that the majority of the leaked information was indeed altered, challenging the accuracy of the second statement (Kim 2023).

For the first statement, 46.0% of respondents answered that it was either “Entirely true” or “Somewhat true,” while 54.0% deemed it “Somewhat false” or “Entirely false.” A similar pattern emerged for the second statement: 44.5% believed it was either “Entirely true” or “Somewhat true,” and 55.5% considered it either “Somewhat false” or “Entirely false.” Given that 46% and 55.5%, respectively, of participants selected the incorrect option, it underscores the public’s vulnerability to electoral interference via disinformation.

[Table 5] Response distribution for questions on false information and electoral interference

	Entirely true	Somewhat true	Somewhat false	Entirely false	Total
DPRK's cyber intrusion into NEC (False)	8.4	37.6	37.6	16.4	100.0
Falsification of U.S. classified military documents (True)	8.6	35.9	44.5	11	100.0

Regarding the overall accuracy of responses to both statements, 19.0% of participants (224 individuals) correctly answered both, 62.6% (780 individuals) were correct on only one statement, and 19.5% (243 individuals) were incorrect on both.

4.2 Relationship between Political Polarization and Foreign Electoral Interference

Typically, the primary method that foreign entities employ to interfere in elections for their national interests involves the dissemination of disinformation. The peril of such false information lies in the phenomenon known as “confirmation bias,” where individuals are prone to trust and accept information that corroborates their opinions and are dismissive of information that contradicts their initial beliefs. Essentially, in a context of political polarization, partisanship or political ideologies significantly contribute to an individual’s vulnerability to disinformation.

This tendency was clearly evident in the survey results. The majority of participants believed that foreign electoral interference disadvantaged the political parties they supported, while benefiting their opponents. When asked whether they thought foreign interference positively impacted certain parties, 73.8% (920 respondents) agreed, while 26.2% (327 respondents) disagreed. The survey asked the 920 affirmatives a follow-up question about which party gained an advantage, and conducted a crossover analysis with their preferred or supported party. Notably, those aligned with the Democratic Party (DP) predominantly thought the People Power Party (PPP) benefited from such interference, with 74.0% expressing this view. Conversely, 74.3% of PPP supporters or sympathizers felt the DP was the beneficiary. Over half of the respondents favoring the Justice Party perceived the PPP as the main beneficiary. Among participants without a party preference, 36.6% believed other parties were advantaged, followed by 35.1% for PPP and 27.8% for DP, indicating a widespread perception that foreign electoral interference skewed in favor of the respondent’s opposing parties.

[Table 6] Crossover Comparison: Parties Likely to Benefit from Foreign Electoral Interference
by Party Support/ Preference

[Unit: % (Frequency)]

		Parties Likely to Benefit from Foreign Electoral Interference				
		Democratic Party	People Power Party	Justice Party	Etc.	Total
Party Support/ Preference	Democratic Party	8.9(27)	74.0(225)	2.3(7)	14.8(45)	100.0 (304)
	People Power Party	74.3(217)	15.1(44)	2.7(8)	7.9(23)	100.0(292)
	Justice Party	20.4(11)	51.9(28)	9.3(5)	18.5(10)	100.0(54)
	Other parties	37.1(13)	48.8(17)	0.0(0)	14.3(5)	100.0(35)
	No party preference	27.8(57)	35.1(72)	0.5(1)	36.6(75)	100.0(205)
	I don't know	13.3(4)	23.3(7)	6.7(2)	56.7(17)	100.0(30)
Total		35.8(329)	42.7(393)	2.5(23)	1.0(175)	100.0(920)

The survey results, which explored perceptions of foreign electoral interference aligned with respondents' political affiliations, further underscored political polarization. DP and Justice Party supporters perceived the U.S. as the most likely interferer, followed by China and North Korea. Conversely, PPP backers identified North Korea as the primary source of interference, then China, with the U.S. trailing significantly behind in their responses—markedly lower than those of DP and Justice Party supporters. Participants affiliated with other parties or those without a party preference indicated that China was the most probable to interfere, succeeded by North Korea and the U.S.

[Table 7] Multiple Response Cross Table:
Countries Likely to Interfere in Elections by Supporting Party

[Unit: % (Frequency)]

	China	DPRK	Russia	USA	Japan	Others	Total
Democratic Party	49.8% (203)	39.5% (161)	7.4% (30)	62.5% (255)	38.2% (156)	2.7% (11)	(408)
People Power Party	80.5% (298)	82.2% (304)	7.3% (27)	24.3% (90)	4.6% (17)	1.1% (4)	(370)
Justice Party	52.7% (39)	52.7% (39)	9.5% (7)	59.5% (44)	23.0% (12)	2.7% (1)	(74)
Other parties	65.9% (29)	54.5% (24)	4.5% (2)	45.5% (20)	27.3% (12)	2.3% (1)	(44)
No preference	72.1% (207)	56.8% (163)	3.8% (11)	48.4% (139)	15.7% (45)	3.1% (10)	(287)
I don't know	53.1% (34)	59.4% (38)	12.5% (8)	43.8% (28)	15.6% (10)	15.6% (10)	(64)
Total	(810)	(729)	(85)	(576)	(257)	(37)	(1247)

To delve deeper into the interplay between political polarization and foreign electoral interference, the study focused on participants' ability to identify disinformation. The analysis categorized responses based on whether participants accurately identified both statements, only the statement regarding North Korea's hacking, only the statement about U.S. wiretapping, or neither. The category of respondents who inaccurately identified both statements served as the reference point for the analysis.

The independent variables included demographic factors (sex, age, area of residence, education), political variables (party support, personal ideology, evaluation of the Yoon Suk Yeol and Moon Jae-in administrations' performance, political knowledge), and political communication (engagement with political content on YouTube).⁶ Given that the four dependent variables are categorical and nominal, multinomial logistic regression analysis was employed to examine the relationships.

⁶ **Age** - Mean 49.12, Standard Deviation 16.214

Sex - Male 50.4% (628 people), Female 49.6% (619 people)

Area of Residence – Seoul 18.0% (225), Gyeonggi/Incheon 31.9% (398), Daejeon/Chungcheong/Sejong 11.1% (138), Gwangju/Jeolla 9.1% (114), Daegu/North Gyeongsang 10% (125), Busan/Ulsan/South Gyeongsang 15.3% (191), Gangwon/Jeju 4.5% (56)

Education Level – Below High School 40.6% (506), Higher Education (Undergrad and Above) 59.4% (741)

Personal Ideology - Progressive 27.2% (339), Moderate 45.1% (563), Conservative 27.7% (345) (On a scale of 0 to 10, 0 represents Extremely Progressive, 5 Moderate, and 10 Extremely Conservative. On this 11-point scale, 0-4 was coded as Progressive, 5 as Moderate, and 6-10 as Conservative.)

Yoon Suk Yeol Government Performance Evaluation – Scale of 0 to 10 (Mean 3.51, Standard Deviation 3.052).

Moon Jae-in Government Performance Evaluation - Scale of 0 to 10 (Mean 4.54, Standard Deviation 2.845).

Political Knowledge – One point was awarded for each correct answer to questions about the 2024 government budget, the number of National Assembly members, and the name of the Prime Minister. The mean of these points was used to determine the level of political knowledge. (Mean 2.31, Standard Deviation 1.08)

Party Support – DP 32.7% (408), PPP 29.8% (370), Justice Party 5.9% (74), Other Parties 3.5% (44), Independent/No

In the multinomial logistic regression analysis, incorrectly identifying *both* statements served as the reference category. Compared to this reference group, variables such as evaluation of government performance, personal ideology, and party support emerged as statistically significant for respondents who correctly identified both statements.⁷ These factors are indicative of political polarization. The analysis revealed a lower likelihood of correct identification among those who rated the Yoon administration's performance highly and supported the PPP. Conversely, there was a higher probability of accurate identification among respondents with positive evaluations of the Moon administration's performance and those identifying as progressive.

Compared to the reference group, the factors significantly influencing the accurate identification of only the statement related to North Korean hacking were the performance evaluations of the Yoon and Moon administrations and party support.⁸ This mirrors the findings for the group that correctly identified both statements, with the notable exception of political ideology. These indicators again highlighted the influence of political polarization. Notably, residents of the Daejeon/Chungcheong/Sejong area showed a superior capacity for accurate identification compared to those from other areas. Contrary to expectations, the Jeolla (Honam) region, presumed to be more adept at discerning disinformation due to a relatively favorable view of North Korea, did not emerge as statistically significant.

Relative to the reference group, the factors found to be statistically significant for the accurate identification of the statement concerning U.S. wiretapping⁹ included party support and political knowledge. Additionally, the area of residence and educational level also played a significant role. Similar to the patterns observed for those who correctly identified both statements or only the statement about North Korean hacking, the capacity for correct identification among PPP supporters was lower. Contrary to conventional wisdom, higher levels of political knowledge and education correlated with a diminished ability to accurately identify the statement. This unexpected outcome may reflect a more critical view of the government's stance among these individuals, or it might be

Affiliation 23.0% (287), Undecided/Unsure 5.1% (64)

Political YouTube – Very Often 1, Sometimes 2, Rarely 3, Never 4 (Mean 2.67, Standard Deviation 1.001)

⁷ For each one-point increase in the evaluation of government performance under the Yoon Suk Yeol administration, the likelihood of correctly identifying both statements decreased by 10.6%. Conversely, for each one-point increase in the evaluation of the Moon Jae-in administration's performance, the probability of accurate identification increased by a factor of 1.129. Individuals with a progressive political orientation were 1.990 times more likely to correctly identify the statements compared to those with other orientations. However, supporters of the People Power Party (PPP) experienced a 47.3% decrease in the likelihood of accurate identification.

⁸ For each one-point increase in the evaluation of government performance under the Yoon Suk Yeol administration, the likelihood of correctly identifying the statement related to North Korean hacking as false decreased by 10.4%. Conversely, for every one-point increase in the evaluation of the Moon Jae-in administration's performance, the probability of accurately identifying the same statement increased by a factor of 1.085. PPP supporters experienced a 50.3% decrease in the likelihood of accurate identification compared to supporters of other parties, while individuals residing in the Daejeon/Chungcheong/Sejong area saw a 2.722-fold increase in the chance of accurate identification relative to other regions.

⁹ The likelihood of accurate identification fell by 51.7% for PPP supporters and decreased by 17.1% with each additional point of political knowledge. For every year increase in age, the probability of correct identification decreased by 2%. Conversely, residents of the Gyeonggi/Incheon area were 2.373 times more likely to identify correctly compared to other regions, and individuals with an education level below high school were 1.458 times more likely.

indicative of how political knowledge intensifies confirmation bias. The precise reasons remain uncertain, highlighting the need for further research and analysis.

Compared to the reference group, political variables—especially political orientation—were all statistically significant. Support for a particular party was significant in three instances, while assessments of government performance under the current and former presidents proved to be statistically significant for groups that accurately identified both statements or only the statement regarding North Korean hacking. This indicates that political polarization significantly influences individuals' capacities to recognize and distinguish foreign electoral interference. Notably, individuals with conservative leanings were more susceptible, showing a reduced likelihood of accurately identifying disinformation.

5. Conclusion

Foreign electoral influence can deepen existing divisions and create new ones, exacerbating political polarization within the target country. This interference can also undermine the credibility of democracy by casting doubt on the integrity and fairness of elections. If the outcome of an election is perceived as illegitimate or unfair, it could lead to societal instability and even violence. The survey results highlight the partisan nature of foreign electoral interference and its perception as a significant threat to South Korean democracy.

In response, last December, South Korean Police and Prosecution Services announced plans to launch consultations among investigative bodies. They aim to identify election-related activities, such as spreading disinformation, malicious propaganda, accepting election-related bribes, and the involvement of public officials or groups, as targets for intensified oversight and thorough investigation to prevent electoral crimes (Hwang 2023). However, this initiative also suggests a concerning lack of preparedness for addressing interference effectively.

Four measures can be proposed to counteract foreign electoral interference: (1) Legislation, (2) Establishing a public-private partnership, (3) Enhancing public awareness of electoral interference, and (4) Institutionalizing international cooperation. The adoption of specific legislation is critical. Various nations have enacted laws to outlaw foreign electoral interference. For example, Taiwan's legislature passed the Anti-Infiltration Act in December 2019, making it illegal for foreign entities to engage in election-related activities such as lobbying, campaigning, or financially supporting disinformation campaigns (Lee and Hamacher 2019). Similarly, Ohlin (2021) advocates for the creation of a federal law in the United States to criminalize foreign electoral interference. A bipartisan consensus recognizing the severity of this issue is essential to initiate discussions and legislation. Also, while many governments today are either pressuring or legally obliging social media platforms to identify and disclose the origins of repeated content (Baines & Jones 2018: 16-7), fostering a cooperative framework instead of strict regulations could offer a more effective solution. Moreover, it is crucial to run Public Service Announcements (PSAs) that provide repeated, general, and non-partisan warnings about electoral interference during election periods (Posard, Reininger, and Helmus

2021). Lastly, establishing international cooperation among countries facing electoral interference is vital. Collaborative efforts are needed to devise preventative strategies against such interference. A proactive approach must be developed before the National Assembly Elections in April to safeguard the electoral process.

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