

2nd BILMUN
United Nations Conference
Study Guide



GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The proliferation of Fake News

Winter 2023

Kusadasi - TURKEY



The UN General Assembly

History of the General Assembly

The United Nations General Assembly is the main organ of the United Nations which consists of all 193 Member states of the United Nations (UN General Assembly). The first meeting of the UN general assembly was held in It is one of the six main organs of the UN alongside the UN security council (UNSC) the Economic and Social Council (EcoSoc), the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the secretariat and the trusteeship council which was suspended in 1994 (UN Main Organs). The first meeting of the UN general assembly was held immediately after World War 2 in 1946 with 51 countries attending (History).

Israeli Prime Minister Uses a drawing of a bomb to talk about Iran getting a Nuclear weapon at the UN General Assembly in 2012¹



Function of the General Assembly

The primary purpose of the UN general assembly is to make policy for the UN as a whole address any issues affecting the international community which cannot be addressed by the

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/blog/2012/sep/27/binyamin-netanyahu-israel>



other UN organs or member states. Often the general assembly is used as a place where leaders of countries can meet on the sidelines and discuss important international developments or make bilateral agreements. Countries also often use their time at the General Assembly to discuss any issue that their country wishes to bring international attention to.

Voting in the General Assembly

Most resolutions passed by the UN general assembly are passed unanimously, with all of the states agreeing to a resolution (Resolutions of the 74th session). In these cases no country objects to the content of a particular resolution. In instances where some countries disagree there is a formal vote on the resolution where countries abstain (choose not to vote), vote in favor (vote yes) or vote against a resolution (UN General Assembly). In most cases a simple majority (more than half of the countries voting in favor) is needed for a resolution to pass in some cases on very important issues a two thirds majority is needed for a resolution to pass with two out of three countries voting in favor. For the purposes of this conference all resolutions will need a simple majority to pass.

Fake News

Fake news is not a new problem but it has become increasingly significant in recent years particularly after its role the United States presidential election in 2016, and the Brexit referendum in the UK in that same year. Cambridge Dictionary Defines fake news as “false stories that appear to be news, spread on the internet or using other media, usually created to influence political

views or as a joke”. This definition however does not fully explain how fake news is perceived today. In addition to the problem of fake news itself, the widespread sharing of fake news has

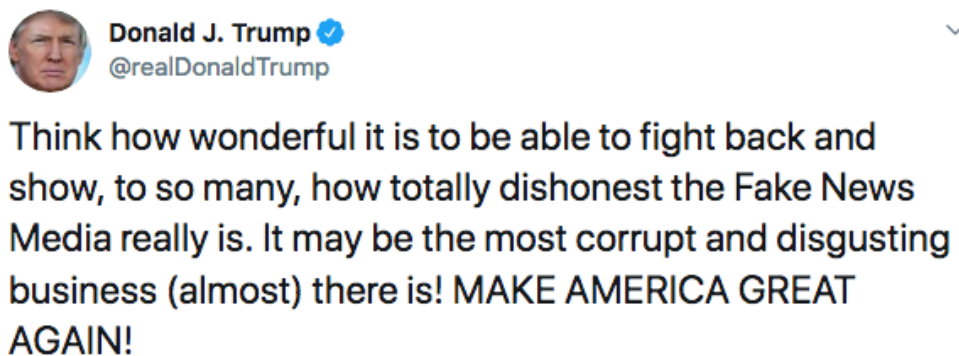


given less than honest politicians and other actors the ability to claim to even dispute facts from reputable news organizations.

One of US president Donald Trump's many tweets criticising unfriendly media coverage as "Fake News"²

Fake News and Social Media

The most common way that fake news is spread is through social media sites such as Twitter, Youtube and Facebook. These sites are very vulnerable to this type of misuse because traditionally they have not taken any responsibility for any "news" post that their users share. It makes it even more difficult for real media groups to respond because these sites use algorithms to aggregate unique content for each of their users to see. This means that each



facebook user sees posts that are not seen by people with different points of view or Facebook users in general.

Fake News and Politics

The most common way that fake news can be harmful is through its impact on political systems. During elections some organizations will display fake news articles to cause people to change

² <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/1160316831414067200?lang=en>



their vote or not vote at all. These articles can accuse targeted candidates of anything from sex crimes to corruption. Because the fake news is not spread to everyone it is very difficult for legitimate news organizations to respond.

Fake News Article lying about the number of deaths and cases of the Coronavirus ³



Fake News and Public Health

Fake news can also be very harmful in public health crises because it spreads false information which can cause people to panic instead of taking actions to protect themselves.

In early 2020

³ <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/janelytvynenko/coronavirus-disinformation-spread>



the World Health Organization, another part of the United Nations, warned of an “infodemic” of fake news related to the Corona virus (BBC). Some fake news articles and rumors have claimed

that things like Vitamin C boosters can prevent the virus. These false claims make people more likely to get the virus because they do not take steps that actually prevent the virus like wearing facemasks and washing their hands. Other Fake News articles can contribute to discrimination and paranoia.

Efforts to Respond to the Problem

Private sector facebook

Platforms like Facebook, Youtube and Twitter have taken some steps to reduce the spread of Fake News on their platforms. Facebook’s internal strategy for responding to Fake News is to make it more difficult for people to make money from spreading Fake News, creating new products which prevent Fake News, and labeling news items which are not true as fake or satirical (Facebook). Twitter and Youtube have taken similar approaches. These efforts are not enough to solve the problem because they require the social media sites to determine what is true and false which is not always easy or straightforward.

Individual Countries

Some governments such as Singapore have responded to the problem of fake news by passing laws mandating government sponsored fact checking agencies. This can lead to government censorship. In the case of Singapore the government passed a law requiring that news and social media sites issue corrections for information deemed false by the government (NPR Singapore). This allows governments to use these bills to censor media that they do not like by forcing companies to label it as false and apologize for it. Other countries such as Russia have used Fake



News as an excuse for obversely authoritarian measures such as a bill recently passed in Russia which criminalized fake news and information that the Russian government sees as Yegor Zhukov spent months in prison for posting videos about Russian corruption which the state deemed “disrespectful”⁴

“disrespecting” the state (NPR Russia). Overall government can play a role in preventing fake news but it is very difficult for governments to do so without restricting free speech and supporting authoritarianism,

Information and Democracy Partnership



On an international level one of the key steps taken by UN members in recent years is the “International Partnership for Information and Democracy” which was signed by the states of

⁴ <https://www.npr.org/2019/09/19/761596001/the-russian-student-who-has-become-moscows-new-face-of-dissent>



Andorra, Australia, Austria, Benin, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, India, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Lebanon, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, Norway, Senegal, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Tunisia and United Kingdom during the last session of the United Nations. This document established an organization of UN states that will meet once yearly to discuss issues related to fake news and assure a free open and fact based digital environment. This new UN organization is a start but does not yet solve the problem as countries have not yet taken concrete steps to accomplish these objectives. These 30 states also do not represent some of the most populated countries in the world and sources of fake news such as US, China and Russia.



Further Reading

1. UN agreement “International Partnership for Information and Democracy”

https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/international_partnership_for_information_and_democracy_cle012d91.pdf

2. UN Article on Fake News

<https://news.un.org/en/audio/2018/05/1008682>

3. Reporters Without Borders, 30 countries sign up to “information and democracy” partnership”

<https://rsf.org/en/news/30-countries-sign-information-and-democracy-partnership-started-rsf>



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<https://www.un.org/en/ga/74/resolutions.shtml>

4. Reporters without Borders

<https://rsf.org/en/news/30-countries-sign-information-and-democracy-partnership-started-rsf>

5. History.com “First meeting of the United Nations”

<https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/first-meeting-of-the-united-nations>

6. BBC “WHO says fake coronavirus claims causing 'infodemic'”

<https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-51497800>

7. Facebook “Working to Stop Misinformation and False News”

<https://www.facebook.com/facebookmedia/blog/working-to-stop-misinformation-and-false-news>

8. NPR “‘Fake News’ Law Goes Into Effect In Singapore, Worrying Free Speech Advocates”

<https://www.npr.org/2019/10/02/766399689/fake-news-law-goes-into-effect-in-singapore-worrying-free-speech-advocates>

<https://www.npr.org/2019/03/18/704600310/russia-criminalizes-the-spread-of-online-news-which-disrespects-the-government>