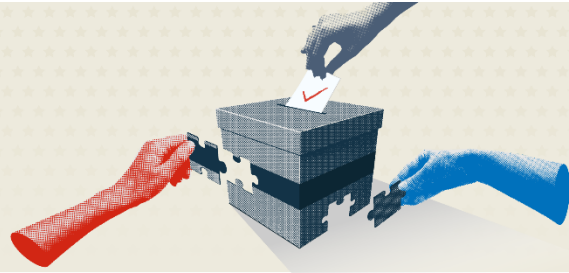


DEMOCRACY IN QUESTION

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THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION *Democracy in Question* podcast

“How do we protect our democracy from corruption and foreign threats?”

Thursday, October 24, 2024

Guests:

NORMAN EISEN
Senior Fellow, Governance Studies
Chair, Anti-Corruption, Democracy, and Security Project
The Brookings Institution

QUINTA JURECIC
Fellow, Governance Studies
The Brookings Institution
Senior Editor, Lawfare

Host:

KATHRYN DUNN TENPAS
Visiting Fellow, Governance Studies
Director, The Katzmann Initiative on Improving Interbranch Relations and
Government
The Brookings Institution

Episode Summary:

Foreign influence on our elections is as old as our country itself. However, as disinformation tools become more sophisticated with the advent of emerging technologies—such as AI—the threat of election interference and democratic backsliding grows stronger as well. But it’s not just foreign actors we have to worry about, as influence from abroad often means corruption at home. In this episode, host Katie Dunn Tenpas discusses how we can protect our democracy from foreign threats with Norm Eisen, a senior fellow and chair of the Anti-Corruption, Democracy, and the interconnectedness of foreign influence and domestic politics with Quinta Jurecic, a Brookings fellow and senior editor at Lawfare.

[music]

TENPAS: Hi, I'm Katie Dunn Tenpas, a visiting fellow in Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution and director of the Katzmann Initiative on Improving Interbranch Relations and Government. And this is *Democracy in Question*, a podcast about contemporary American politics and the future of democracy. In each episode, I'm asking my guests a different question about democracy so that we can better understand the broader contours of our democratic system. There's a lot happening in U.S. politics at the moment, including a highly contested presidential race. But in this podcast, I'm trying to get at the deeper questions of how democracy works or is supposed to work.

On today's episode, the question is, how do we protect our democracy from corruption and foreign threats? It's admittedly a large and difficult question. In previous episodes, I've explored how to build trust in elections, the role of disinformation in campaigns, etcetera. But there's another set of threats to democracy that are harder to see and harder to stop once they've gained traction in the body politic.

First, the erosion of transparency in democratic institutions through the slow but steady march of corruption. And second, interference in the very exercise of democracy, limiting the right and ability of citizens to vote, challenging and denying election results, and even foreign interference in our elections. These phenomena both lead to democratic backsliding, a condition some democracies around the world struggle to get out of.

So, what can we do to protect democracy from corruption and foreign threats? To help explore and answer this question, I've invited two of my Governance Studies colleagues to the show. First Senior Fellow Norm Eisen, a former U.S. ambassador to the Czech Republic and special counsel and special assistant to the president for ethics and government reform, also known as the ethics czar, during the Obama administration. He chairs the Anti-Corruption, Democracy, and Security project at Brookings.

And then I'll talk with Quinta Jurecic, fellow in Governance Studies and senior editor of Lawfare, who in her research looks at the many issues including disinformation, social media platforms, and the online information ecosystem.

Before I say hello to Norm, I want to let you know that this is the last episode of *Democracy in Question* before the 2024 presidential election. I plan one more episode to air after the election as soon as we know the results—and I hope it's real soon. The final episode will feature a discussion about the races for the White House and Congress. So, stay tuned for that. And if you haven't already, listen to our previous episodes at Brookings dot edu slash DemocracyInQuestion.

And now on with the show. Norm, welcome to *Democracy in Question*.

EISEN: Thank you, Katie. So honored to be with you. And there could not be a more important set of questions about our democracy than the ones you asked across the episodes of this podcast and the issues that we'll tackle today.

TENPAS: Well, thank you very much. I appreciate your time. I know that you're really busy. And before we actually dive into the heart of the issue, I just want to point out that you've had an incredible career both serving in the White House and the State Department. Can you describe what has led you to your current focus on anti-corruption, democracy and security?

[3:41]

EISEN: Well, it combines three strands of my professional life. I started my career as a lawyer, a partner, in a D.C. law firm representing business leaders, government leaders when they were accused of corruption. And I kind of turned that around and founded the anti-corruption NGO CREW, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, focusing on fighting corruption in the federal government. That's the anti-corruption part of the work and I've carried that forward, including in my Brookings scholarship.

The democracy piece of the work is really the result of that tenure that I had working as President Obama's special counsel, where my portfolio included democracy initiatives, like our effort to deal with the disastrous Citizens United decision that threw open the floodgates for money, including foreign money pumping into the American political system. And worked on those democracy issues also abroad when I was our ambassador to the Czech Republic.

And the security element of it comes from that foreign policy work, which I have again continued at Brookings. I sort of wrapped them all into one with the Anticorruption, Democracy, and Security program, ACDS, where we're currently conducting research on the interactions between those three workstreams.

TENPAS: Can you help our listeners by providing some context, like telling us at what point did foreign interference in America elections really become an important threat or severe threat? Was it after 2012? Was it the 2016 election? Can you give us kind of the historic arc of where we are and, you know, have things gotten worse over time?

[5:41]

EISEN: Well, attempted foreign influence on our elections is as old as our country itself. The early history of the republic includes French and British efforts to influence our governance, our politics, and our elections. And one inflection point came with the rise of Nazi power in the 1930s and the subsequent passage of FARA, the Foreign Agents Registration Act, which was in response to the untrammled ability of Nazi Germany, other malign foreign actors to take account of our American freedoms, First Amendment freedoms, including to influence our elections.

Certainly, matters peaked in the Hillary Clinton-Donald Trump contest in 2016 when we learned there was a sophisticated Russian hacking and disinformation effort. And we just had a very important inflection point with the Department of Justice criminal charges relating to a Russian government sponsored foreign influence operation. A vast one using U.S. influencers, and AI, and paid social media. And a very sophisticated effort that DOJ exposed with these charges. It really went all the way up to the top levels of the Russian government, including the presidential executive

office of Vladimir Putin. So, that's a mini history of foreign interference in U.S. elections.

TENPAS: Yeah. And would you say that it's only get gets worse over time and more sophisticated?

[7:43]

EISEN: They're probably well might be, let's hope there will not be, as impactful an intrusion as the Russian hacking and dissemination and disinformation, which I think had a powerful effect on 2016. And we still have to answer questions about the context of Paul Manafort, who served as Donald Trump's campaign manager with Konstantin Kilimnik.

That being said, the tools have become more sophisticated, like the ability to use a AI. So, that does lead to the spread of opportunity. So, the danger is increasing. Now our enforcement tools and our monitoring have also become stronger. So, it was gratifying to see DOJ unleashing those charges well before the election. It was a warning sign. And for those who read that indictment, really startling widespread efforts to penetrate disinformation into American social media networks and American minds.

So, yes, I would say that risk is growing over time. And we'll see. Let's hope we don't have the same impact in 2024 as we did in 2016.

TENPAS: And I'm assuming we're not powerless. I mean, DOJ has issued this indictment. What are their enforcement mechanisms? And just more generally, what can the United States do to prevent this?

[9:20]

EISEN: Well, DOJ has had a robust response. They exposed the networks. Some of the people who are involved are beyond the reach in that Putin's office, it was the first deputy chief of staff, Sergey Kiriyenko. We're not going to be slapping handcuffs on him any time soon, because he's staying away from the U.S. jurisdiction. But they were using American social media influencers as their tools, and they were paying them. Those influencers have said that they were not aware of the ultimate source of the funds or the direction. So, by exposing that network that has disrupted the disinformation.

Look the ultimate safeguard and all of this is the American people. People need to be educated consumers of information, including political information in this era of dis-, mis-, and now information.

So, hopefully the increased awareness to all of this will build up increased resistance backed up by DOJ using its formidable powers. There have been losses and some of the social media platforms are no longer as vigilant as they've been in the past for a variety of different reasons. And you know that if anything increases the danger that disinformation can spread.

TENPAS: And I don't mean to push you on this, but if, if their efforts are getting increasingly more sophisticated and you say part of the solution is increasing

awareness, like, I'm thinking that I might not be aware because they're conveyance of this misinformation or interfering in our election is done in a way that's really difficult for an educated person to detect.

[11:15]

EISEN: Well, you know, I do think that debunking the lies about Springfield, for example, which we can be reasonably confident were being driven in part by some of these bad actors—there was no in the press two-sidesing of it. People were very firm from the beginning that this is a lie, and it was exposed, and it was defined. So, we've moved a lot from the both-sidesism. There's much more to go.

That's why it's important, you know, I favor the fact checking presidential debates, fact checking in real time because you to interdict those lies and that disinformation when they're uttered. Once they start to circulate, half the damage has been done.

TENPAS: I mean, it does seem I'm thinking if I'm going to be a bad actor, like the chances of me getting caught if I'm living abroad somewhere and doing this on the internet and I've got sophisticated ways of blocking information, it seems like there's a there's low stakes for them in terms of being caught. Am I right or am I ...?

[12:23]

EISEN: Well, Mr. Kiriyyenko was caught by DOJ. Several Russian companies were caught. We shut down 32 internet domains. And so, there is apprehension. Yes, it is going to be more challenging to sweep everyone into that, particularly those who are abroad, the smaller players. That's why this safeguard of the American people preparing themselves to distinguish between disinformation and genuine information, and the role of the media to fact check that.

Our role in Brookings and the writing that we do. I've been doing a series of publications relating to the election trying to say what's true and false, trying to convey the nuance. As so often in other dimensions of American history, in our democracy the front line of defense is the American people.

TENPAS: And I know that ACDS has conducted and held conferences across the world. Can we learn from any of our allies about how they try to fight back against this? And are there some best practices out there that could help us?

[13:39]

EISEN: Yes. Yes. In the ACDS program, the Anti-Corruption, Democracy, and Security program, where we study the interrelationship between those three factors, we have done convenings around the world to talk about how disinformation in particular interacts with AI tools, which just allow a much larger automated scope and scale for disinformation attacks.

The best practices sometimes are are complex, but often they're surprisingly simple. One of the first ones that I learned was don't repeat the disinformation when you're debunking it. So, somebody is doing a tweet and that tweet has a falsehood in it, don't retweet it with a comment debunking it. Take a screenshot so you're not giving

currency. Or in the extreme case, just explain, hey, there's a false rumor going around of XYZ.

So, those kinds of tactics, large and small, are necessary to deal with disinformation. I testified about this in Congress. And I'm sorry to say that there was disinformation in some questions that some members of the majority were asking me in in Congress. And I called it out on the spot.

So, the best practices include not repeating the disinformation and being quick to interdict it. Don't wait for it to take hold. That puts a heavy responsibility on think tanks like Brookings, programs like ACDS, but on all of us as citizens of democracies.

TENPAS: And do you think that perhaps there are some that want to perpetuate disinformation, like it's in their interest to sort of restate this misinformation for political gain? And so, really, the problem becomes much more formidable because it's not just about international bad actors. It's about domestic politics and how people are using it to their advantage?

[15:55]

EISEN: Yes, but no one has has a monopoly on disinformation. I do think there's an asymmetry with some of the anti-democratic forces of the right being more prone to disinformation spreading and uptake. But I see crazy things all the time on the far left as well. There were some folks who were claiming that the Trump assassination attempts were not genuine. And I told them on social media, look, there's no reason to believe that so don't say it.

TENPAS: And generally speaking, when you think broadly about American democracy and the arc of American democracy, how nervous are you about the future of American democracy on a scale of 1 to 10? Like, where would you put yourself?

[16:44]

EISEN: Oh ... as I was doing my homework to get ready for the podcast, I was studying where others landed. And I'm in that rough vicinity. I joked when I was visiting with my colleagues thinking through the topics that the answer would be on a scale of 1 to 10, I'm at 11. That's not true! That's not true of course.

I am about as alarmed as you can be without the country having actually tipped over into an autocratic, Orbán style of illiberal democracy. So, I'd probably put myself in that 7-and-a-half, 8 category. If you press me, I would say 8.

I know that makes me a little more pessimistic than some of your other guests, but part of the reason for that, Katie, is that autocracy is already here. You see it in some of the inexplicable Supreme Court decisions like the immunity case giving a president imperial power to use his office to order even political assassinations. Many in Congress who continue to parrot this information about whether or not Donald Trump won the 2020 election. He lost that election, and people should say so plainly. And you see it in our states where in places around the country these

autocratic regimes have already taken hold. And you have governors who are imposing Project 2025 on those states.

So, we're in quite a perilous place and we need to address that. We need to learn from other democracies that have come to the brink and walked back from it—my old country, the Czech Republic; Poland, which had an autocratic regime. Recovered and stepped back. We don't want to go to the way of Orbán's Hungary.

So, sounding the alarm about the degree of peril is the first step towards addressing that.

TENPAS: And just one more detail about the Czech Republic as the example. What do you think encouraged them to step back from the brink and what lessons can be learned from that?

[19:06]

EISEN: The people got tired of the autocratic tendencies of the prime minister and the president. And they built a broad, big tent coalition. They were willing to put aside their differences.

And I think you're seeing something similar to that in the United States now with members of the Republican Party, who have no great policy fondness on many issues for their Democratic counterparts or for the Democratic ticket, setting aside those policy differences to unite around a shared commitment to democracy, including pushing back on corruption and pushing for security, the three values that we started with. These are often individuals who have had significant national security roles and who are repelled by some of the corruption we've seen in the past.

And so, you do see that big tent forming here. It remains to be seen if the tent is large enough to carry the day. And that's what we'll all be watching for and of course listening to that very last episode of your podcast post-election. I'd give anything to hear it now and know how things are going to turn out!

TENPAS: Well, cheers to a big tent, a bigger tent, actually, so that we can turn back some of this. And I just wanted to thank you so much for your time. And your project is so important at this moment in American history. So, thank you for all the work you're doing on that front as well.

EISEN: Very grateful to my colleagues in the ACDS, Anti-Corruption, Democracy, and Security Project at the Brookings Governance Studies. And very grateful to you, Katie, for having me on the *Democracy in Question* podcast.

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TENPAS: And now Quinta Jurecic, senior editor of Lawfare, where she offers sharp analysis in writing and on the *Rational Security* podcast about the intersection of law, politics, technology, democracy, and more. Quinta, welcome to Democracy in Question.

JURECIC: Happy to be here.

TENPAS: Yeah. So, this is a tough topic protecting democracy from foreign threats and corruption. Just tell me sort of your quick take on it and maybe if you could provide listeners with some sort of historical overview of how we got to where we are.

[21:34]

JURECIC: Clearly, the federal government is taking this very seriously as an issue heading into the 2024 election. We have seen a number of actions by the Justice Department as well as by the Treasury Department and Commerce Department pushing back against actions from Russia and Iran trying to meddle in U.S. elections by hacking, by social media influence operations, all that.

We've also seen a spate of indictments under the Foreign Agents Registration Act coming out of the Justice Department, which is aiming to target, as you say, you know, this issue of corruption—folks who are allegedly taking money from foreign actors without registering as such under the relevant statute.

And all of this is, I think, the federal government's way of saying this is an issue, but we're taking it extremely seriously. This is not something to sort of shrug and say, well, everyone does it. And so, we've seen some really high-profile indictments: of New York Mayor Eric Adams, for example, allegedly for taking money from the Turkish government; of U.S. Senator Robert Menendez for allegedly taking money from and doing favors for figures connected to the Egyptian government. And so, there's been a lot of activity on this front.

TENPAS: To what extent do you think that foreign interference is a red herring and that the real problem has to do with domestic politics?

[23:01]

JURECIC: It's very hard to desegregate these two questions. To your earlier question about how do we get to where we are today? Obviously, questions about foreign interference are very, very long running. FARA actually dates back to a World War II era effort to push back against Nazi propaganda in the United States. So, this is not a new concern.

What is new, I think, is a particular focus right now. Really, after the 2016 election, there was a great degree of alarm about Russian interference in the vote. And so, what we saw was this sort of enormous spate of interest on the part of social media companies, on the part of the Justice Department, on the part of the intelligence community to really take this seriously as an issue and respond to it.

And I think out of that, there were a lot of developments that I think were positive in terms of, you know, countering this problem. But there also became a focus on thinking of falsehoods, lies sort of polluting the information ecosystem as something coming only from abroad, that this was something that was coming from Russian trolls sitting in St. Petersburg sort of polluting the waters, if you will, of the political environment in the United States.

And I think what we've seen really clearly recently is that, you know, this is a problem in significant part because Americans are interested in receiving some of that false information. One of the recent indictments that we saw of figures, employees of Russia Today, RT, they were allegedly funding American influencers who already had big audiences and who RT, it seems, reached out to because they were already saying things that were in line with RT's position.

So, the problem is both on supply and on demand here.

TENPAS: And I imagine these people who were propagating this information for RT, is there a chance they didn't know that it was RT and they were kind of unwittingly doing this?

[25:08]

JURECIC: So, that's actually exactly what the indictment says. So, the indictment is against the two RT employees. And then it says that the U.S.-based influencers didn't know that this money was coming from a sketchy source. It is notable that this is a situation where someone sort of popped out of the woodwork and said, I'd like to give you a significant amount of money, you know, on the order of hundreds and thousands of dollars for not doing very much work. That might raise eyebrows. But the Justice Department has been very clear that they're not accusing the influencers themselves of anything criminal here.

TENPAS: And earlier in the conversation, you mentioned that 2016 seemed to be the year where we really sort of noticed this activity. And was 2016 sort of a confluence of technology being available to do this, a candidate that seemed to behoove some of our enemies by promoting that individual? Like I'm just trying to think about all the different forces, or at least the primary variables that led to where we are. Can you talk about that?

[26:10]

JURECIC: I think that's a great way of thinking about it. It's not any one one weird trick to interfere in U.S. elections. It's a confluence of a number of different factors that happen to come together in a particularly explosive way. So, as you say, we had a social media ecosystem that was increasingly important but not particularly well governed. And where the government was not communicating regularly with social media companies.

So, you had this experience where after the fact it turned out that the federal government had been aware of some Russian trolls on these platforms but hadn't really gotten in touch with the platforms ahead of time to say, hey, you know, you might want to think about whether or not you want to have this stuff on there. So, that's one component.

I think another component has to do with, as you say, the particular candidates at issue here. That the Trump campaign, according to the Mueller Report, was very happy to receive assistance from the Russian government. Of course, there's the famous instance where Trump, you know, stands at a rally and says, Russia, if you're listening, I hope you can find those 30,000 emails that are missing, sort of

inviting the Russian government to hack Hillary Clinton's email. So, I think there's a there's a willingness to take advantage.

And then, of course, that we subsequently see a real alignment of the sort of Trump wing of the Republican Party with positions that are in line with Russian government positions when it comes to the war in Ukraine, for example. And that's actually the same topic that these influencers who were allegedly funded by RT that they were speaking about. So, we have that.

I think we also have the press, which I think is an important function here. You know, when we talk about Russian election interference in 2016, a lot of time we think about it in the sense of the Russian trolls on social media. But it wasn't just that. It was also the hacking by the GRU—Russian military intelligence—of Democratic Party email systems and of the Clinton campaign, which then Wikileaks released. And there was a sort of spree of press reporting on those emails.

And that, I think, was really very, very clever on the part of the GRU insofar as it took advantage of certain pathologies in the American mainstream press of sort of, you know, if you put something out there that's its hidden information that's never been seen before, that there's a real desire to kind of jump on it and report on it right away. And that was effective, too.

And then the the last, well, maybe not the last piece, but one of the other pieces is the enforcement of FARA. As I've said, you know, I think FARA enforcement has really kicked up in recent years. That is really something that we've seen after the beginning of the Mueller investigation. The Mueller probe into Russian election interference kind of made a splash with a very high profile FARA prosecution. And a number of prosecutions followed after that. And they've kept coming.

But prior to that, it had been kind of quiet on the FARA side. And so, I think you could make an argument that the Justice Department is enforcing that law more aggressively now perhaps out of a sense that, you know, had it been enforced more aggressively before this, there might have been more guardrails against this kind of interference.

TENPAS: Yeah. And this is just a very pragmatic question. But, you know, I understand that enforcement has increased. The Justice Department recently had that massive indictment. But isn't it really difficult to prosecute people in other countries, and would there really be any meaningful sanctions that would prevent future behavior?

[29:53]

JURECIC: That's a fantastic question. And it gets to something that has caused a lot of debate. I remember when the Mueller investigation indicted all of these Russian trolls in St. Petersburg, all these GRU hackers. Those are people who are not going to be coming to the United States anytime soon. So, then there's this question of, you know, what's the point? Right? And I think you see absolutely the same thing here.

Clearly, the way that the Justice Department seems to be thinking about it is in the cybersecurity context it's sometimes called name and shame, that you indict a hacking group or so on and so forth so you can say, you know, we see you, we know what you're doing, we know how you're doing it. Stop it. Even if you can't actually, you know, arrest the individual because they're overseas.

TENPAS: But can you shut down the domain or can you limit their efforts?

[30:43]

JURECIC: Sometimes we do see that happen, but sort of along a separate route. So, actually, I believe in advance of the 2018 midterm elections, U.S. Cyber Command conducted an operation against the Internet Research Agency, the group that had conducted those trolling operations in 2016. So, they did, in a sense, turn off the lights there. But that was through Cyber Command, through the military, separate from the DOJ operation. DOJ can seize domains, for example, if it's run through a U.S. system. But there is a limit to what they can do just because of, you know, the lines on the map, where things are.

So, I think that the real function of these indictments of figures who are overseas, again, as the Justice Department sees it, is a kind of like public communication function. Saying, look, this is what these people were doing. This is how we know that they were doing that. And just so they know, in the future, if you try again, we will catch you and we will let everyone know.

TENPAS: So, that could be a deterrent.

JURECIC: Exactly. And also, you know, to help inform Americans who are trying to understand a really complicated information environment. Like, hey, you might be careful, you don't know if you know what you're looking at, where that came from, what the funding is behind it, all of that.

TENPAS: And is there also some cooperation with Interpol and our allies overseas to try to capture these individuals?

[32:09]

JURECIC: I don't know about Interpol. It is definitely true that the U.S. government has been collaborating with other allied governments in taking some of these actions. I'm not precisely sure about the indictments per se, but I will say that in some of these attributions, in some of these sanctioned efforts, you'll see that the rollout is done in coordination with a number of other governments, usually in Europe, I believe sometimes including Australia as well. So, you know, clearly a coordinated effort here.

TENPAS: And is it possible that these individuals who are doing this are not just targeting the United States, but maybe similarly situated democracies in other parts of the world? It's not just us, I'm guessing, right? They're not picking on us.

[32:58]

JURECIC: Well, to some extent they might be picking on us. I think it's a little hard to say. In some cases, I think the U.S. really is uniquely situated. When it comes to Ukraine, for example, depending on how Americans choose to vote in November, that could have immediate and significant implications for whether or not Ukraine continues to receive arms and whether or not Russia is able to succeed in the war there. And so, there is a sort of particular interest in targeting the United States.

That said, it's also true that European countries have faced similar efforts from Russia as well. So, we're certainly not alone here. There are some particular factors that may make us particularly juicy target, so to speak.

TENPAS: Right. And I imagine it goes well beyond elections per se. Like, obviously, this is a very consequential moment in the United States, but the interference could still continue in other ways, right?

[33:49]

JURECIC: That's absolutely right. I mean, and you know, when I was talking earlier about these FARA indictments of Senator Menendez and Mayor Eric Adams, those are not tied to national elections. The Adams indictment alleges conduct on behalf of the Turkish government that seems to have been aimed at assisting in Adams's election. But, you know, there's other conduct that takes place that's not particularly tied, that sort of, you know, benefiting from him being in office.

It's absolutely the case that, you know, this is not necessarily tied only to national elections. In the case of Senator Menendez, for example, certainly, there's a link in the sense that politicians want to get elected. The actor who is allegedly helping them presumably wants to help them get elected. But, you know, in the Menendez case, a lot of what is alleged and what Senator Menendez has been convicted on is conduct that involves the senator using his position on the Foreign Relations Committee to aid Egypt on a variety of policy issues that were of importance to the Egyptian government.

TENPAS: So, there's a difference.

JURECIC: There's yeah, when foreign actors trying to influence an election, a lot of the time it's because there's an interest in causing chaos, that's something you'll hear if you talk to people who focus this, you know, that there's a benefit in just making democracy look chaotic, disorganized, violent. But there's also sometimes a particular reason to want one candidate over another to be elected. And so, in that sense, there is, to some extent a link. But there are also these ongoing relationships, as with, you know, Senator Menendez on the Foreign Relations Committee where this is continuing even if it's not an election year.

TENPAS: Yeah. Yeah. So, in light of all of these developments, I always like to ask my guests, you know, how they're feeling about the future of American democracy. And I like to ask you to pick on a scale of 1 to 10, like, how worried are you about the future of democracy in light of this foreign interference and this corruption?

[35:53]

JURECIC: I've been puzzling over this one. It's a surprisingly difficult question. I would say I'll put it out like a 7, maybe. So, not, you know, all alarms blinking red. But I think there are a lot of issues for concern.

I think it's also important to keep in mind, these are issues that will continue past the election no matter what happens. I think really what we've seen since 2016 is that these are major structural problems.

TENPAS: That they're not going anywhere.

JURECIC: Exactly. Exactly. And that doesn't mean that there aren't things that can be done. I think that the FARA indictments, for example, are potentially really positive, as is this indictment of the RT employees. Those can do really important work.

But there are major issues that are going to need to be addressed even, you know, not during election years, that speak to our sort of amenability as a country to this kind of interference and, you know, why why it is that it seems like we're so open to it. And if it's working, why it is that it's working. And I think those larger structural issues are, as you say, they're not going away.

TENPAS: Yeah. And just to put your positioning on that scale in context, where do you think you would have been before 2016?

JURECIC: Oh boy. This is thinking, thinking back and the deep reaches of time. Yeah.

TENPAS: And part of the reason I ask is simply that I feel like there's been a huge accelerant since 2016.

[37:20]

JURECIC: Yes. If you'd asked me before 2016, or let's say before before the candidates announced that they were running in in for 2016, so before, you know, the primaries began in 2015, I don't know. I might have said like a 2 or 3.

TENPAS: Yeah.

JURECIC: It's definitely been cranked up there for quite a while.

[music]

TENPAS: Yeah, yeah. That's fascinating, troubling. I hope to have you as a guest again in the future where we can talk about your number going down.

JURECIC: Fingers crossed.

TENPAS: Yeah. Thank you so much for your time.

JURECIC: Thank you.

TENPAS: Great to talk to you.

Democracy in Question is a production of the Brookings Podcast Network. Thank you for listening. And thank you to my guests for sharing their time and expertise on this podcast.

Also, thanks to the team at Brookings who make this podcast possible, including Kuwilileni Hauwanga supervising producer; Fred Dews, producer; Colin Cruickshank, Steve Cameron, and Gastón Reboledo, audio engineers; the team in Governance Studies including Tracy Viselli, Catalina Navarro, and Adelle Patten; and the promotions teams in both Governance Studies and the Office of Communications at Brookings. Shavanthi Mendis designed the beautiful logo.

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I'm Katie Dunn Tenpas. Thank you for listening.