

Information Disorder and Global Politics

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Abstract

Information is a key variable in international relations, underpinning theories of foreign policy, interstate cooperation, and civil and international conflict. Yet IR scholars have only begun to grapple with the consequences of recent shifts in the global information environment. We argue that *information disorder* – a media environment with low barriers to content creation, rapid spread of false or misleading material, and algorithmic amplification of sensational and fragmented narratives – will reshape the practice and study of international relations. We identify three major implications of information disorder on international politics. First, information disorder distorts how citizens access and evaluate political information, creating effects that are particularly destabilizing for democracies. Second, it damages international cooperation by eroding shared focal points and increasing incentives for noncompliance. Finally, information disorder shifts patterns of conflict by intensifying societal cleavages, enabling foreign influence, and eroding democratic advantages in crisis bargaining. We conclude by outlining an agenda for future research.

Key Words: Information, misinformation, disinformation, international cooperation, conflict, artificial intelligence, democracy

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The global information environment is undergoing a profound transformation. Non-traditional news outlets, citizen reporting, and user-generated social media content increasingly compete with, and sometimes eclipse, news from legacy media. In theory, this abundance of voices could expand citizens' access to reliable information. In practice, however, social media algorithms and platforms privilege sensationalist stories that maximize attention capture. Content that elicits anger or emotional outrage is amplified, creating openings for misinformation to spread quickly online.⁴ Even traditional news outlets sometimes rely on clickbait headlines to generate interest, as many individuals consume and share stories without ever reading the underlying content.⁵

This new information economy has ushered in an era of “information disorder”⁶ that directly affects how citizens experience politics. Misinformation flourishes as social media amplifies false or inaccurate claims from citizens and political elites. Disinformation circulates freely, with strategic actors sharing “falsehoods spread as news stories...to advance political goals.”⁷ And malinformation, true information presented in a way that misleads, becomes a pervasive feature of politics. Artificial intelligence (AI) may intensify such dynamics, making it easier to manipulate opinions through deepfakes, reinforcing information silos, and targeting inflammatory content directly to individuals' news feeds.

The emergence of populist leaders like Donald Trump both reflects and accelerates these trends. Such leaders are particularly astute at using sensationalist claims to dominate the information environment. For example, Trump administration officials have exaggerated trade imbalances and lied about tariff revenue to justify tariffs on foreign countries;⁸ administration officials have also parroted Russian disinformation,⁹ calling Ukrainian President Zelenskyy a “dictator”¹⁰ and refusing to acknowledge that Russia started the war.¹¹

US officials have also taken actions that reduce the normative and regulatory constraints on information disorder. President Trump and his allies describe fact checking as censorship of right-wing speech, prompting companies like Meta, Google, and LinkedIn to shift away from such efforts.¹² The administration has also rolled back AI safety measures and opposed

⁴ McLoughlin and Brady 2024.

⁵ Sundar et al. 2025.

⁶ Wardle and Derakhshan 2017 use the term “information disorder” to describe three types of informational challenges: misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation (the public release of private information). We use the term more broadly to include a media environment with low barriers to content creation, rapid spread of false or misleading material, and algorithmic amplification of sensational narratives.

⁷ Bennett and Livingston 2018: 123.

⁸ Qui 2025, Partington 2025.

⁹ Wolf 2025.

¹⁰ O'Grady, Stern, and Morgunov 2025.

¹¹ Gould 2025.

¹² Pollet 2025.

efforts to regulate the tech industry.¹³ Absent meaningful safeguards, competition between big tech companies is likely to accelerate informational challenges.

The rise of information disorder presents a challenge for international relations scholarship, which has long emphasized information as a key driver of political outcomes. Canonical models of interstate conflict and cooperation emphasize information asymmetries, signaling, and the provision of credible information.¹⁴ Theories of democratic advantages in foreign policy require citizens to observe and process information in order to hold their governments accountable.¹⁵ But in an environment rife with digital falsehoods and message silos, these informational foundations are eroded.

This article argues that information disorder is likely to reshape a variety of important processes in international politics. After describing the emergence of this new environment and situating it in the literature, we examine three consequences for international relations. First, by disrupting how citizens access and evaluate information, information disorder may disproportionately destabilize democratic states. Second, information disorder may undermine international cooperation by degrading shared focal points, weakening institutional legitimacy, and lowering the reputational costs of noncompliance. Finally, information disorder may increase conflict, as it intensifies social cleavages, facilitates foreign influence, and erodes democratic advantages in crisis bargaining. We conclude by outlining an agenda for future scholarship.

I. How Production and Consumption Dynamics Create Information Disorder

In this paper, we use information disorder to refer to a media environment in which barriers to producing and circulating content are minimal, false or misleading material diffuses rapidly through digital platforms, and attention-economy dynamics amplify sensational, emotionally charged, and fragmented narratives at the expense of shared factual baselines. This environment began to emerge in the 2010s as social media platforms displaced traditional information gatekeepers. It has intensified in the 2020s as algorithmic curation and generative AI accelerate the creation and spread of false or polarizing content.

While the speed and reliability of information flows have been a concern for decades, two recent structural shifts distinguish information disorder from prior eras. First, the *production* of media content has become radically decentralized. Smartphones, social digital platforms, and AI allow a large and varied set of actors to create and disseminate information. As a result, the volume of global information flows has reached unprecedented levels.¹⁶ Scholars have documented rising levels of misinformation and disinformation,

¹³ Smith 2025.

¹⁴ E.g., Keohane 1984; Fearon 1995.

¹⁵ Putnam 1988; Schutlz 1998; Martin 2000.

¹⁶ Data from the global DE-CIX Internet exchange indicates global data traffic more than doubled since 2020; aggregate estimates suggest over 400 million terabytes of new data are generated daily (Intelligent CIO North America 2025).

especially on social media platforms where users create and share content via peer-to-peer networks.¹⁷ In countries where traditional media outlets were unreliable or captured by the state, the decentralization of news may expand access to political information and strengthen democratic accountability.¹⁸ In established democracies, however, a proliferation of media sources may expose citizens to more unreliable content than in prior eras.

A second structural shift concerns changes in media *consumption* patterns. Individuals increasingly use digital platforms and social media to retrieve information.¹⁹ Rather than actively seeking information through newspapers or scheduled broadcasts, they encounter news passively through algorithmic feeds, notifications, and peer sharing.²⁰ Incidental exposure fragments news diets, as individuals skim headlines and snippets rather than reading full articles.²¹ These habits, in turn, feed “attention-economy” dynamics that determine which stories are disseminated and seen.²² Engagement-driven algorithms prioritize content that is novel, emotionally arousing, and polarizing.²³ In part because they elicit surprise and outrage, false or sensational claims often diffuse more widely than verified reports. At the same time, personalized algorithms curate individualized feeds, reinforcing preexisting preferences and limiting cross-cutting exposure.²⁴

These changes in production and consumption create a fundamentally distinct information environment from previous eras. Individuals are bombarded by a much higher volume and variety of media content, increasing uncertainty and disengagement.²⁵ Rather than tuning into an evening newscast, citizens passively consume information curated by algorithms, which amplify misinformation, reward provocative content, and encourage polarized news consumption.

This dynamic has substantial implications for domestic and international politics. Citizens in countries subject to information disorder learn, perceive, and evaluate political information in new ways. While the implications of information disorder for political elites are less clear,²⁶ at a minimum, some leaders have learned to leverage these dynamics for political gain domestically and abroad.²⁷

¹⁷ Newman et al. 2024, Muhammed and Matthew 2022.

¹⁸ Allcott et al. 2020, Guriev et al. 2020, Ventura et al. Forthcoming.

¹⁹ Vázquez-Herrero et al. 2022.

²⁰ Hermida 2010.

²¹ Sundar et al. 2024.

²² Ciampaglia et al. 2015.

²³ Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral 2018; Brady et al. 2017; Paletz et al. 2023.

²⁴ Sunstein 2017; Bakshy et al. 2015; Vaccari and Chadwick 2020.

²⁵ Xu et al. 2024.

²⁶ Existing studies find that political elites, like the mass public, engage in motivated reasoning and can hold systematic misperceptions, though higher levels of knowledge can sometimes reduce susceptibility to misinformation (Broockman and Skovron 2018; Baekgaard et al. 2019; Christensen and Moynihan 2024; Pennycook and Rand 2019).

²⁷ Lasser et al. 2022; Mosleh and Rand 2022.

Political elites, national governments, and IOs generally agree that these structural transformations represent a qualitatively new and potentially dangerous development. The United Nations Secretary General has warned that threats to information integrity are “proliferating and expanding with unprecedented speed on digital platforms, supercharged by artificial intelligence technologies.”²⁸ Other prominent IOs, including the World Health Organization (WHO) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), have similarly raised the alarm.²⁹ Disinformation is now so common that in January 2025, the World Economic Forum labeled it the biggest short-term global risk.³⁰ But while the prevalence of information disorder is clearly documented, scholars have only just begun to probe how it will affect key aspects of international politics.

II. Research on Information and International Politics

International relations scholars have long pointed to information as a key driver of interstate conflict and cooperation. Structural realists argued that uncertainty about others’ intentions and capabilities is a fundamental constraint on state behavior.³¹ According to this view, the information-poor international environment limits cooperation and encourages competition among states, which can never fully trust one another.

Subsequent research reconceptualized information not as a fixed condition, but as a key variable. Scholars demonstrated how states can reduce uncertainty by drawing inferences from past behavior,³² constructing international laws and institutions,³³ and leveraging costs to credibly signal their intentions to others.³⁴ In addition to these institutional mechanisms, scholars also highlighted how governments tie their hands to overcome information asymmetries.³⁵ By endogenously generating information, states can reduce conflict and sustain cooperation.

The emergence of the internet and digital communication technologies in the 1990s transformed international politics from an information-poor to an information-abundant environment. Research identified how this shift empowers actors and institutions that can cut through the noise. Transnational activist networks, for example, mobilize pressure on target states by quickly collecting, distilling, and leveraging information.³⁶ States and IOs leverage performance indicators, rankings, and scorecards to focus international attention

²⁸ IISD 2024.

²⁹ World Health Organization 2025; NATO 2024.

³⁰ World Economic Forum 2025.

³¹ Morgenthau 1948, Waltz 1979.

³² Axelrod 1981, Tomz 2007a.

³³ Keohane 1984, Kapstein 1994, Simmons 2000, Powell and Mitchel 2007, Huth, Croco, and Appel 2013.

³⁴ Schelling 1960, Fearon 1994.

³⁵ Fearon 1995, 1997; Tomz 2007b.

³⁶ Keck and Sikkink 1998.

and drive policy change.³⁷ This scholarship highlighted the importance of messages that capture the attention of key audiences.

The contemporary environment of information disorder reflects a new phase in this evolution, demanding renewed scholarly engagement. International politics today is characterized not merely by abundance, but by the proliferation of information sources, a dramatic rise in persuasive misinformation and disinformation, and a shift to passive and fragmented news consumption patterns. IR scholars have only begun to explore the consequences of this transformed landscape. Recent empirical work documents how state actors wield information and secrecy as a foreign policy tool³⁸ and suggests governments can evade accountability by discrediting undesirable facts as misinformation.³⁹ Other work illuminates how misinformation shapes public attitudes and trust⁴⁰ and documents variation in the ability of fact-checking interventions to rebut these effects.⁴¹ Comparatively less attention has been paid to how these dynamics might shape central questions, including the stability and vulnerability of different regime types, multilateral cooperation, and interstate conflict. We develop our argument about these issues in the next three sections.

III. Regime Type and Asymmetric Vulnerability to Information Disorder

We argue that information disorder is likely to produce asymmetric effects both across and within countries. Democratic governance depends on the public learning about a leader's policy choices, assessing consequences, and rewarding or punishing accordingly. This accountability system is central to both domestic and international politics; international relations theory often points to a “democratic advantage” whereby democratic regimes enjoy more credibility, consistency, or restraint in foreign affairs precisely because they face domestic oversight.⁴²

When citizens are inundated with misinformation, fragmented narratives, and competing realities, the informational foundation of these mechanisms begin to erode. To sanction a leader for misbehavior, citizens must be exposed to new, potentially counter-attitudinal information. Yet if individuals rely on social media as their primary news source, they are far more likely to view content that reinforces existing beliefs instead.⁴³ Exposure to misinformation may also distort how citizens understand government policies, performance, and levels of popular support,⁴⁴ although the size of this impact continues to

³⁷ Kelley and Simmons 2015, 2019; Cooley and Snyder 2015; Kelley 2017; Morse 2019, 2022. Such indicators may also be subject to bias and political manipulation (e.g., Colgan 2019).

³⁸ E.g., Guess et al. 2019a, Carnegie and Carson 2020.

³⁹ Schiff, Schiff, and Bueno 2025.

⁴⁰ Nyhan and Reifler 2010, Ognyanova et al. 2020, Eady et al. 2023.

⁴¹ Nyhan et al. 2020, Pennycook and Rand 2019, Guay et al. 2023.

⁴² Fearon 1994; Schultz 1998; Martin 2000; Baum and Potter 2015.

⁴³ Sunstein 2017; Peterson and Kagalwala 2021. On specific platforms, see Levy 2021, and Huszar et al. 2022.

⁴⁴ Jerit and Zhao 2020; Bowles et al. 2025.

be a subject of debate.⁴⁵ Rising uncertainty, confusion, and misperception can weaken the political constraints that citizens impose on democratic leaders and create opportunities for elites to manipulate information.

Within democracies, populist politicians are particularly well suited to leverage information disorder for political gain.⁴⁶ Populists are often inherently skeptical of traditional media outlets and well-versed in exploiting alternative messaging, and social media makes it easy to spread antiestablishment narratives.⁴⁷ Such dynamics may increase the political prospects for populist leaders, compared to traditional candidates.

While information disorder poses challenges for all democracies, its effects will depend on a country's pre-existing media environment. If the previous media infrastructure was heavily siloed or censored, a flood of new media sources could enhance accountability. Access to social media platforms could also help citizens coordinate behavior and communicate with elected officials.⁴⁸ For democracies with a more transparent and mature pre-existing media environment, however, information disorder may destabilize traditional accountability mechanisms.

Autocratic countries are comparatively resilient to such dynamics. Countries like Russia and China already control the flow of information to their populations, filtering out negative content and reinforcing government narratives.⁴⁹ While the internet and social media may increase exposure to alternative sources, autocratic governments may also be particularly adept at deploying such tools to cement control. The Chinese government, for example, uses regime-directed social media posts to distract the public from political issues,⁵⁰ and has directed Chinese AI developers to build systems that espouse government lines on issues like the Tiananmen Square Massacre and Taiwan.⁵¹

Authoritarian states may also have offensive advantages in weaponizing information disorder against other countries. Domestic content tools can easily be turned transnational, used to intervene in other states and counter negative information abroad. China has used disinformation throughout the Asia-Pacific region, working to discredit Taiwanese politicians who support independence and to drive a wedge in US-Philippine relations.⁵² Russia has targeted former Soviet states and Balkan countries for disinformation campaigns,⁵³ as well as the United States. These types of foreign information campaigns are easier to launch against democracies, where transparency and freedom of speech make it more challenging to protect against such content.

⁴⁵ Some studies suggest fake news and reshapes have little-to-no effect on political opinions (Guess et al 2019b, Guess et al 2020, Guess et al. 2023a, Guess et al. 2023b).

⁴⁶ Guriev and Papaioannou 2022.

⁴⁷ Jerit and Zhao 2020, Zhuravskaya et al. 2020, Bowles et al. 2025.

⁴⁸ Larreguy and Raffler 2025.

⁴⁹ King, Pan, and Roberts 2013.

⁵⁰ King, Pan, and Roberts 2017.

⁵¹ Sprick 2025.

⁵² Voo 2024.

⁵³ Thomas and Franca 2025.

IV. Institutionalized Cooperation Amidst Information Disorder

A second major implication of information disorder pertains to international cooperation between states. We focus on three potential pathways that may affect cooperation: diminished focal points, increased incentives for noncompliance, and undermined trust and legitimacy.

Information disorder may weaken the ability of member states to negotiate international rules and standards that provide focal points for state behavior. Many international institutions are designed to coordinate expectations and reduce information asymmetries.⁵⁴ International rules provide legal and normative guideposts that influence not only government policies but also how citizens understand what constitutes acceptable government behavior.⁵⁵ But establishing these rules requires reaching a broad consensus about the nature of a specific problem and the requisite policy solution, and information disorder has the potential to undermine this process. It increases the viability of populist candidates, who may withhold or misreport scientific information and make elite-level cooperation more difficult.⁵⁶ Information disorder may also fragment how citizens in different countries understand shared challenges and threats, making it more difficult for governments to pursue cooperative solutions on salient issues.⁵⁷

Consider the case of climate change, a cooperation problem where misinformation and misunderstandings have long been obstacles to collective action. While the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has worked to build consensus on the science of climate change, its 2022 report notes that rising flows of misinformation are undermining the transmission of climate science to general populations.⁵⁸ For many years, fossil fuel companies and a handful of anti-climate scientists used misinformation to sow doubt, engender ideological polarization, and impede policy action;⁵⁹ however, with advent of social media, they can now reach considerably more people. In 2016, for example, one of the most popular climate stories on social media falsely alleged that tens of thousands of scientists had declared global warming a hoax.⁶⁰ In a prior information environment, the story may have struggled to gain traction; in 2016, it was shared more than half a million times. US polling data across time is also suggestive of information silos: although more Americans now believe there is a scientific consensus on global warming, Republican voters have changed their views considerably less than independents or nonpartisans.⁶¹ Because

⁵⁴ Keohane 1984.

⁵⁵ Chilton 2014; Kuzushima, McElwain, and Shiraito 2023.

⁵⁶ Carnegie, Clark, and Zucker 2024.

⁵⁷ Morse 2025.

⁵⁸ IPCC 2022: 58.

⁵⁹ Brulle 2014; Williams et al. 2022; Farrell 2016; Oreskes and Conway 2010; Dunlap and McCright 2011.

⁶⁰ Lewandowsky, Ecker, and Cook 2017.

⁶¹ Data from the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication, accessed at: <https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/visualizations-data/americans-climate-views/>, retrieved on 3 September 2025.

citizen support for curbing emissions is crucial for policy action in democracies, escalating flows of misinformation hurt both domestic and international progress.

A second way that information disorder may impact international cooperation is by reducing a state's incentives to comply with international rules. States are motivated to meet international commitments, in part, because of the political and reputational backlash that accompanies noncompliance.⁶² Information disorder allows leaders to fabricate circumstances that justify violations. Bolstering such claims with false news stories, doctored videos, and misleading facts may help shirk political costs that otherwise accompany rule-breaking behavior. Recent research shows that governments can mitigate domestic and international backlash by inventing persuasive pretexts for violations.⁶³ By undermining shared factual baselines, information disorder diminishes the normative and reputational constraints that encourage compliance.

Finally, information disorder may erode public trust in IOs, weakening their ability to operate in politically sensitive or contested arenas. Many IOs rely on public trust and legitimacy to deliver programmatic services. Examples include global health initiatives that surveil and treat infectious diseases, election observation missions that assess the fairness of democratic processes, and peacekeeping missions designed to stabilize post-conflict settings. These functions require that the IO be perceived as credible and impartial in order to acquire local support and secure participation from member states.

Information disorder threatens these core sources of legitimacy. When misinformation and disinformation circulate widely – casting doubt on IO motives, spreading conspiracy theories, or misrepresenting IO activities – they undermine an IO's credibility. Even false claims, when repeated or amplified in fragmented media environments, can sow suspicion and mistrust. As a result, IOs face more resistance from host governments, struggle to build local cooperation, and find their messaging dismissed due to perceived bias.

IO peacekeeping missions offer a clear illustration of these dynamics. Peace operations are deployed in highly contested environments where trust is scarce, making “local legitimacy” a crucial resource for IOs.⁶⁴ In addition to monitoring ceasefires and protecting civilians, peacekeeping missions must help local actors overcome commitment problems and mutual suspicion toward each other.⁶⁵ These efforts are increasingly undermined by disinformation campaigns designed to delegitimize IO interventions and deepen divisions between parties.⁶⁶ False allegations suggesting that UN peacekeepers are trafficking weapons, supporting terrorists, and exploiting natural resources have damaged UN peacekeeping missions in the Central African Republic, Mali, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.⁶⁷

⁶² Keohane 1986, Guzman 2007.

⁶³ Morse and Pratt 2022, 2025.

⁶⁴ Whalan 2017, Nomikos 2025.

⁶⁵ Ruggeri, Dizelis, and Dorussen 2012.

⁶⁶ Rydén et al. 2023.

⁶⁷ Trithart 2022.

V. Implications for Conflict Emergence and Escalation

Information disorder also may also have implications for conflict emergence and escalation. We focus specifically on mechanisms related to public attitudes and perceptions. A significant body of scholarship links public opinion and conflict, suggesting three key outcomes that could be affected by information disorder: intensified societal cleavages, enhanced opportunities for foreign influence campaigns, and eroded democratic advantages in crisis bargaining.

First, information disorder could increase the likelihood of civil conflicts by inflaming hostility and making it easier for strategic actors to sow internal discord. Research on political violence and mass atrocities finds that falsehoods, selective facts, and deliberate mischaracterizations of events are often used to inspire hate and fear, creating an environment more conducive to violence.⁶⁸ Social media platforms are likely to exacerbate such dynamics: more active social media use is associated with an increased number and severity of civil conflicts,⁶⁹ while exposure to hate speech online is associated with higher levels of hate crimes.⁷⁰ Governments looking to target an ethnic minority or marginalized population can exploit unconventional media channels to sow the seeds for violence. In Myanmar, for example, disinformation on Facebook played a significant role in state-sponsored violence against the Rohingya,⁷¹ and pro-military actors continue to weaponize social media platforms to silence dissent.⁷² Internal conflicts can easily spillover into neighboring states, leading to broader political crises.⁷³

Second, foreign governments can capitalize on information disorder to destabilize or sow discord. The digital technology revolution of the 1990s and 2000s introduced cyber-attacks as a form of non-traditional warfare, allowing cross-border interventions with little attribution. Directed disinformation campaigns are another such development. Technological advances like generative AI make it easier for foreign governments to create persuasive disinformation, and the social media ecosystem facilitates the viral spread of these messages. While online disinformation campaigns may not directly change foreign policy alignments,⁷⁴ they can affect public opinion,⁷⁵ exacerbate social and political cleavages, and heighten overall cynicism about politics.⁷⁶

Third, the erosion of democratic accountability discussed above may weaken democratic advantages in international conflict and crisis bargaining. Democratic peace theorists have

⁶⁸ Badar and Florijancic 2020; Albader 2022.

⁶⁹ Hunter and Biglaiser 2022.

⁷⁰ Wahlstrom, Tornberg, and Ekbrand 2021.

⁷¹ United Nations Human Rights Council 2018.

⁷² Advox 2023.

⁷³ Saleyhan and Gleditsch 2006.

⁷⁴ Lanoszka 2019.

⁷⁵ For example, a 2025 YouGov survey found that more than half of US respondents believe at least some Kremlin-originated disinformation about Ukraine (Woollacott 2025).

⁷⁶ Hameleers et al. 2021.

long argued that democracies are less likely to fight wars with each other, in part due to electoral accountability.⁷⁷ Scholars also theorize that democratic states are able to send more credible signals in crisis bargaining because leaders face domestic costs from backing down⁷⁸ or from threatening force in the first place.⁷⁹ If information disorder disrupts domestic accountability in democratic states, we are likely to see these advantages in conflict resolution and crisis bargaining deteriorate.

VI. Charting a Research Agenda

We conclude by outlining a forward-looking research agenda for international relations scholars. We focus in particular on unresolved questions that will shape the scope, intensity, and trajectory of information disorder and international politics in the years to come.

A key area of uncertainty is how information disorder affects the beliefs and attitudes of political elites. Elites generally have higher levels of education, news literacy, and political knowledge, which should help them identify falsehoods and protect against misperceptions.⁸⁰ Political leaders have access to intelligence reporting and other formal vetting channels, which could insulate them from false beliefs. In practice, however, leaders sometimes cling to misinformed beliefs that contradict intelligence community findings.⁸¹ Strong partisan attachments among elites may also offset knowledge and access to information, as individuals engage in motivated reasoning.⁸² Future research should more precisely identify the conditions under which elite perceptions are shaped by information disorder dynamics and examine the extent to which this emerging information environment impacts how leaders make foreign policy decisions.

More broadly, scholars should investigate how susceptibility to information disorder varies across ideological, institutional, and geographic dimensions. Studies find that right-wing actors spread more misinformation than left-wing counterparts, though whether this reflects demand, supply, or underlying psychology remains contested.⁸³ Globally, the impact of disinformation also often diverges. For example, Russian narratives about Ukraine fell flat in much of the West but resonated in parts of the Global South.⁸⁴ Political, social, and media systems most likely impact how information disorder affects foreign policy. Future research should disentangle the asymmetries between left and right, Global North and Global South,

⁷⁷ Russett 1994.

⁷⁸ See for example, Fearon 1994, Schultz 1998, Smith 1998, and Tomz 2007b, among others.

⁷⁹ Kertzer and Brutger 2016.

⁸⁰ Ashley et al. 2023; Jones-Jang, Mortensen, and Liu 2021; Kyrychenko et al. 2025.

⁸¹ For example, President Trump has openly questioned conclusion of the U.S. intelligence community on Russian interference in the 2016 election, COVID-19 origins, and Saudi Arabia's assassination of Jamal Khashoggi.

⁸² Eady et al. 2023; Jenke 2024.

⁸³ Lasser et al. 2022; Mosleh and Rand 2022; Greene 2024; Guay et al. 2025; Tornberg and Chueri 2025.

⁸⁴ Presl 2024.

or open and closed systems to better explain why some societies are more vulnerable than others.

Another set of questions concerns the durability of this information environment. Shifts in media production and consumption could alter the expectations described above, as could further advancements in AI. On the one hand, synthetic media (e.g., deepfake videos) is likely to accelerate many of the processes described above. But AI is also shaping information consumption in ways that could generate unanticipated effects. Chatbots that deliver news might offer a bulwark against misinformation, since they tend to summarize the conventional wisdom. Alternatively, chatbots' tendencies toward sycophancy could exacerbate media fragmentation and entrench misperceptions, as systems deliver content that conforms with users' pre-existing biases.

Scholars should also consider how institutions and norms endogenously adapt to information disorder. Structural shifts in the information environment may prompt unanticipated changes in social norms, behavioral patterns, or even cognitive capacity.⁸⁵ Concerns about the political impacts of information disorder could trigger counter-movements to combat these effects. Recent AI regulation initiatives in fora like the EU and G7 suggest the issue is entering the global governance agenda.⁸⁶ Similarly, domestic political procedures could emerge to slow or even reverse the dynamics described above.

Finally, there is a clear need for more empirical testing of the effects of information disorder on international politics. Scholars have made substantial progress tracking the spread of mis- and disinformation, as well as analyzing their effects on perceptions of the mass public. We have comparatively less evidence about how these dynamics filter into foreign policy decisions, interstate bargaining, global governance, or other important processes in IR. Observational studies can leverage temporal shifts in the information environment as well as variation across political systems, states, and leaders to investigate these effects.

Embarking on these efforts, scholars should consider their own roles and responsibilities while operating in a fragmented information landscape. The rise of information disorder is not just a scholarly puzzle but a political crisis. Understanding how the modern information environment shapes international outcomes is a first step, but we must also identify institutions, norms, and strategies resilient enough to withstand misinformation and disinformation. Scholars must also consider how they communicate their findings if they are to leverage their expertise and break through the noise in a world of information disorder.

⁸⁵ Shanmugasundaram and Tamilarasu 2023.

⁸⁶ Cupač and Sienknecht 2024.

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