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Authoritarians don't deliberate: Cultivating deliberation and resisting authoritarian tools in an age of global nationalism

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Abstract

While research has demonstrated the effectiveness of deliberative practices applied to mini-publics, the extent to which these smaller, specialized communities of deliberation can be scaled-up or reflect national level practices of governance is in doubt. This gap in research is critical in today's age with the rise of global authoritarian politics coming at the hand of populist national parties. In this essay, we call on deliberative democracy scholars to examine the larger societal forces inhibiting deliberative practices by focusing on the changes in society which lead to the adoption and success of authoritarian policies and messaging strategies globally. In doing so, we take a macro view to explain how and why authoritarian practices are spreading transnationally by first, briefly explaining the differences between authoritarian and deliberative practices before developing a model of authoritarian communication technique based on Ellul's (1973) work on propaganda. We then apply this model to three case studies showing the modern evolution and spread of authoritarianism from nations such as China and Russia and the subsequent adoption of these techniques within the US. Finally, we suggest interventions designed to stem the tide of global authoritarianism.

Keywords

deliberative democracy, authoritarianism, propaganda, fake news

Authoritarians Don't Deliberate: Cultivating Deliberation and Resisting Authoritarian Tools in an Age of Global Nationalism

Around the globe existing authoritarian governments remain firmly entrenched while new populist movements with authoritarian impulses are making inroads in traditionally democratic countries (Karolewski & Benedikter, 2017; Quimpo, 2009; Schenkkan, 2017; Diamond, Plattner, & Walker, 2016). For instance, in Central Europe, recent electoral victories by Hungarian and Polish populist nationalist parties have led to constitutional reforms limiting the independence of the judiciary, tighter government control over universities, and political prosecutions (Karolewski & Benedikter, 2017). In Asia, the 2016 Filipino election of President Rodrigo Duterte resulted in the killing and silencing of journalists exposing government corruption and human rights violations (Asian Century Institute, 2016). Meanwhile in Myanmar, despite its election of democratic activist and Nobel Laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi, the country has experienced declines in freedom of speech, continued repressive legal frameworks enabling human rights violations, and the ethnic cleansing of its Rohingya minority (Fuller, 2015). In the Middle East, the bright promise of the Arab Spring has dulled, with countries such as Egypt once again returning to authoritarian governance (Hamzawy, 2017). Western liberal democracies too are falling victim to authoritarian politics, with survey data from Great Britain, France, Sweden, Germany, and the US showcasing increased intolerance and aversion to diversity and targeting of outsiders viewed as the “other” (MacWilliams, 2016). As Freedom House reported in 2017, 18 of 29 countries surveyed declined in their democracy scores (Schenkkan, 2017). Whether one looks at Eastern or Western Europe, South or East Asia, the Middle East, or even the Americas, the rise of global authoritarian politics is clear.

Today’s authoritarian spread poses unique problems for scholars and advocates of deliberative democracy. Perhaps most troubling is authoritarianism’s spread coming at the hands of democratic expression through populist nationalist movements (Karolewski & Benedikter, 2017; Schenkkan, 2017) with authoritarian parties adopting techniques of authoritarian rule from one another (Diamond et al., 2016). Although research into deliberative democracy has flourished since the 1990s (Chambers, 2003; Dryzek, 2000), with communication scholarship providing substantial theoretical and empirical work examining deliberative practices within deliberative mini-publics and larger national issue forums (e.g., Gastil, 2004; Gastil & Dillard, 1999; Grönlund, Bächtiger, & Setälä, 2014; Ryfe, 2002), the focus on mini-publics, especially those requiring moderators to lead discussion, ignores many of the larger, overlapping and multiplicity of sites where democratic participation occurs (Ercan & Dryzek, 2015). As such, deliberation

does not occur within a vacuum; it is influenced by larger societal concerns and national politics, and in today's age, even within a transnational context.

In this essay, we call on deliberative democracy scholars to examine the larger societal forces inhibiting deliberative practices by focusing on changes in society which lead to the adoption and success of authoritarian policies and messaging strategies globally. In doing so, we take a macro view to explain how and why authoritarian practices are spreading transnationally by first, briefly explaining the differences between authoritarian and deliberative practices before developing a model of authoritarian communication technique based on Ellul's (1973) work on propaganda. We then apply this model to three case studies showing the modern evolution and spread of authoritarianism from nations such as China and Russia and the subsequent adoption of these techniques within the United States. Finally, we suggest interventions designed to stem the tide of global authoritarianism.

Deliberative and Authoritarian Values: Contrasting Practices

Authoritarian practices and values are antithetical to deliberative politics. We can understand, in part, the differences in authoritarian politics from deliberative ones in two ways. First, deliberative democracy requires reasoned discourse. According to Gutmann and Thompson (2004) citizens and their representatives must justify their decisions by providing reasons for their actions while responding to reasons citizens give in return. Additionally, Gastil (2000) argues there is a moral requirement to treat citizens as active, not passive, participants in the process of governance with reasons meant to produce justifiable positions and express the value of mutual respect and consideration of alternative viewpoints. Authoritarianism, on the other hand, demands obedience, replaces diversity of opinion for conformity, and calls for uncritical and reflexive impulses leading to action, in place of reasoned discourse (Arendt, 1973; Ellul, 1973; Lasswell, 1927; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).

Second, deliberation relies on access to "good" information. As Gastil (2000) notes, "the basic purpose of deliberation is to make sound decisions" (p. 23) and sound decisions rely on information to make choices and arguments (Bowler & Donovan, 2003). According to Gutmann and Thompson (2004) deliberative democracy requires the reasons, provided by politicians, to be accessible and understandable by all citizens to whom they are addressed and to occur in public settings. In contrast, authoritarians attempt to control access to ideas and information to support their policies and legitimize their government (Byman & Lind, 2010; Kalathil & Boas, 2001). Thus, it is no surprise that those nations declining in their democracy scores are also seeing a restriction in their freedom of the press, crack downs on

civil society, and silencing of dissent. The advent of fake news and misinformation further undermines deliberative practices by eroding common consensus over what is “true,” or factual, leading to increased partisanship and polarization thereby empowering authoritarian messaging.

However, the problem is not just a communicative one. Populism and authoritarian messages are not a new phenomenon and yet in recent years we are seeing them spread nonetheless. While deliberation research has demonstrated the possibility of deliberative democracy in a variety of contexts (Grönlund et al., 2014), including online communities of deliberation (e.g., Dahlberg, 2001), deliberative habits and discussion through citizen/issue forums (Gastil & Dillard, 1999; Gastil & Levine, 2005; Ryfe, 2002), micro-level democratic practices (Grönlund et al., 2014; Smith, 2009), citizen juries, assemblies, and consensus conferences (Grönlund et al., 2014), the extent to which these smaller, specialized communities of deliberation can be scaled-up or reflect national level practices of governance is in doubt (Himmelroos, 2017; Niemeyer, 2014; Pateman, 2012). As Ercan and Dryzek (2015) noted, the practice or embodiment of deliberative democratic ideals has yet to keep up with its ample theorization and study, and this is especially true today with the rise of not deliberative democracy, but global authoritarianism. Thus, to understand why and how authoritarianism is spreading at the expense of deliberation practices, scholars must consider larger societal and global forces that lead to authoritarianism’s rise. To understand why this is true, we offer a model of authoritarian communication techniques based on Ellul’s work on propaganda explaining the context in which it develops and becomes accepted within society.

Ellul and Propaganda: Modeling the Rise of Authoritarianism

Ellul’s (1973) analysis of propaganda provides us with a model upon which to understand the rise of authoritarian practices today. According to Ellul (1973), “Propaganda is a set of methods employed by an organized group that wants to bring about the active or passive participation in its actions of a mass of individuals, psychologically unified through psychological manipulations and incorporated in an organization” (p. 61). Accordingly, propaganda is non-deliberative because citizens are treated as passive vessels and it undermines reasoned discourse. Propaganda works because first, the structure of modern society results in certain sociological effects on the individual’s psychology; this then leads to the circumvention of critical thinking and desire for propaganda; finally, these elements combine with a society’s media ecology in disseminating and conditioning citizens to act and behave in ways counter to deliberative ideals and in support of authoritarian propaganda.

According to Ellul (1973), the demands of modern democratic society lay the ground work for authoritarian rise through propaganda. Modern society's dissolution of local social bonds has resulted in individuals' feelings of alienation and social anxiety. Because of the complicated world we live in, individuals may not have the time or strength to critically understand all of the complex global and national events we face, and yet, we are expected to have opinions on these issues as members of democratic countries. Caught up in the mass, individuals come to feel weak and incompetent, thus craving a sense of strength and importance, which propaganda then provides. Thus, individuals crave the illusion presented to them through propaganda and accept it because it hides their incompetence. Because of their lack of control over larger societal forces people feel uncertain and dispossessed, with propaganda providing individuals with satisfaction, value, and comfort.

In contemporary society, we see the dissolution of national social bonds over concerns of global migration, trade, and terrorism which contribute to individual's social anxieties, and have been amplified and used by far-right and populist parties across Europe to intensify political conflict (Papademetriou & Banulescu-Bogdan, 2016). As Freedom House explains, many of the countries that have declined in their 2017 democracy scores are those experiencing long periods of economic stagnation, resulting in rising populism which "pits a mystically unified 'nation' against corrupt 'elites' and external enemies, and claims for a charismatic leader the power to voice the will of a nation" (Schenkkan, 2017, para. 5). The widespread impact of the dissolution of local bonds on individual's psychologies is demonstrated by recent survey data showing an attitudinal link of authoritarianism between European nationalist parties and Alt-Right Trumpism in the U.S. This attitudinal link is marked by intolerance and aversion to diversity, which seeks to maintain social order and norms, acceptance of authority, and a move towards conformity while targeting outsiders labeled as "the other" (MacWilliams, 2016). As MacWilliams (2016) states, the "preliminary conclusion from these surveys is inescapable: the electoral rise of Trumpism and the Alt-Right to the United States and populist national parties in Europe appear to share on common, measurable trait—a predisposition among supporters toward authoritarianism" (p. 2). Authoritarian predispositions tend to become activated among segments of the population who are not traditional authoritarians when those groups perceive a grave threat (Hetherington & Suhay, 2011).

While societal anxieties help predispose individuals in democratic nations to more likely accept authoritarianism, changes in our communication environment help support and entrench those values. As such, Ellul (1973) provides a taxonomy composing of three different communicative orientations of propaganda: vertical

vs horizontal, rational vs irrational, and agitation vs integration. First, propaganda is structured in two ways: vertically and horizontally (Ellul, 1973). Vertical propaganda reaches the individual within the mass; examples include traditional mass media such as newspapers, television, and radio, all of which have a top-down structure. Horizontal propaganda, however, comes from within the group, serving to encircle and entrap the individual. In doing so, the individual learns the dialect of the group and is led unconsciously towards a view or opinion already set up for them to believe. Social media and Internet technologies, which allow everyone to have a voice, are thus media that horizontal propaganda can propagate from within.

Second, propaganda encompasses two evidentiary standards: rational and irrational (Ellul, 1973). Messages designed to elicit the feelings and passions of an individual are irrational. From these feelings and passions individuals are compelled to act towards some vision of the future or social myths. However, propaganda is also rational because it provides reasons and justifications for feelings and actions. In this sense, propaganda plays an informational role by furnishing one with self-justifying reasons for one's beliefs.

Third, propaganda advances two goals: to agitate the individual to action and integrate the individual within the larger society (Ellul, 1973). The purpose of agitation propaganda is to mobilize people to destroy the established order by provoking crises. It subverts the individual's normal framework of understanding, that is the previous customs, habits, and beliefs, which are now obstacles to the new goals the propagandist desires. However, Ellul argues that individuals cannot exist in a perpetual state of enthusiasm and insecurity, making agitation propaganda short lived. Once the old belief structures are scrambled, integration propaganda serves to provide a new stability and order, creating new cultural norms and societal myths. Integration propaganda reintegrates the individual into society, forcing conformity and participation in the social body. A key part of this are myths that provide a "vision of desirable objectives that have lost their material, practical character and have become strongly colored, overwhelming, all-encompassing, and which displace from the conscious all that is not related to it" (Ellul, 1973, p. 31). Myths push us to action relying on what feels good, just, and true, and are particularly important when societies are undergoing profound changes, whether economically or narratively, in their understanding of their nation's role in the world. When comparing authoritarian practices globally, we can expect them to take control of their nation's media ecologies and disseminate their messages based on the types of propaganda outlined above.

One other element of Ellul's (1973) description of propaganda is useful when looking at our contemporary media environments. With social media, we are

witnessing a new wave of identity politics as defined by one's social or political group. According to Ellul, this element of grouping plays an important role in partitioning society, proving one group's excellence and another's evilness, further isolating individuals, and suppressing conversations within and across groups. As members of their group, individuals are provided with further evidence of their beliefs and greater justification of their actions, resulting in greater closed mindedness. Social media then becomes an important horizontal component of propaganda creating and risking further alienation and partisanship.

Evidence in support of Ellul's (1973) theorization of the adverse effects of partitioning has been found in the United States. In the high-choice U.S. media environment, active partisans can now choose political content that confirms their prior beliefs (Garrett, 2009; Garrett & Stroud, 2014). Exposure to information that confirms prior held beliefs has the potential to further intensify feelings of partisanship (Garrett et al., 2014) by reinforcing partisan identity (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2011). In other words, partisan identity and partisan media use form a reinforcing spiral, such that partisans are more likely to consume partisan media, partisan media then reinforces the partisan identity, and consequently these same partisans are then even more likely to subsequently consume more partisan media (Feldman et al., 2014; Slater, 2007). The advent of fake news exacerbates this problem, because within social media rumor and misinformation often go viral, spreading like a fever, across digital social networks (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013). Additionally, social media platforms have created conditions which allow for automated accounts, controlled by a single user or team, that appear in a digital discussion as a crowd all saying the same thing and reinforcing each other. These platforms provide a basic level of anonymity whereby some people pretend to be someone that they are not, a phenomenon best demonstrated in popular culture by the movie and television show *Catfish*.

Taken together, our model of Ellul's (1973) theory of propaganda suggests that authoritarianism occurs during times of social strife which leads members of society to accept authoritarian propaganda. In doing so, authoritarians ignore deliberative values of equality and inclusion while reasoning, and critical reflection and debate over policy is circumvented through ideographical or political charged images and the partisan partitioning of society. State policy then becomes identified with a charismatic leader and their new societal visions and myths, further preventing the challenging and debate of policies, all in contrast to deliberative ideals. To support these efforts, authoritarian parties take advantage of structural weaknesses in the media environment to disseminate their visions and policies, which in turn amplifies individual's psychological feelings of insecurity brought on

by the larger socio-economic context of their lives, enabling authoritarian entrenchment.

Messaging & Media Control Practices Utilized by Authoritarians

To understand how Ellul's (1973) framework on propaganda helps explain the rise of global authoritarianism today, we apply it to three cases studies. The first two, those being China and Russia, were chosen as both nations possess historical expertise in authoritarian control, leading to its modern use today. The third case is that of the United States. This was chosen as an example of how a traditionally democratic society with a freer, market-oriented media system can similarly be susceptible to the authoritarian propaganda. In all three cases, authoritarian control of politics draws from social-economic anxiety which when coupled with extensive media interference leads to the adoption of political mythologies or narratives designed to invoke conformity within the society to benefit authoritarian control. In doing so, authoritarians take control of their state's media system and overwhelm the audience with information linking the authoritarian's vision and policies to their citizens.

Case Study One: Authoritarian Technique in China

The Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) control in China has at times been tenuous. Following Deng Xiaoping's reforms in the late 1970s, the legitimacy of the CCP has been predicated on its ability to provide economic growth. While modernization of China has been largely successful, it also resulted in significant social upheaval including protests over environmental degradation and land ownership (Shirk, 2007; Steinhardt & Wu, 2015). To combat this, the Chinese government under the Hu administration tried to refocus government policy away from considerations of solely economic growth to include a "harmonious society" emphasizing social welfare as well. This attempt was largely viewed as unsuccessful, and concerns regarding future economic growth led current Chinese President Xi Jinping to reassert control over the media landscape and freedom of the press to promote further social cohesion and maintain Party strength. As He and Warren (2011) note, with Xi Jinping's assumption of office in 2012, much of the liberalization implemented in the past several decades in China has been reversed. Under Xi, there has been increased controls over party discipline, heightened pressure on dissidents, universities, and public spaces, a strong anti-corruption campaign, and a cracking down on foreign ideas. These actions can be understood as a move towards more authoritarian governance through control of information and the media.

Modern versions of China's influence in mass media include self-censorship, news reporting/framing techniques, ideotainment, and government instruction on news reporting. These tactics have proved successful at least in that they achieve Ellul's (1973) notion of conformity with media workers exercising self-censorship to avoid trouble (Lee, He, & Huang, 2007). Recent adaptations of CCP media control arose with the marketization of Chinese media (Stockmann & Gallagher, 2011) and reflect Ellul's (1973) description of vertical propaganda. Moving beyond using media as a "mouthpiece" for communist policy, CCP influence in the media began providing more compelling messages in accordance with state censorship demands while satisfying Chinese news consumers' interest in real-life stories and problems such as dispute resolution and rights protections. This "positive propaganda" approach makes visible CCP successes, shoring up its legitimacy. As Shen and Guo (2013) argue Chinese media helps legitimize CCP governance through its monopoly of power over framing key issues in the media, helping to consolidate national identity and Party ideology. Another approach is what Lagerkvist (2010) calls "ideotainment" which is more informative and less propagandistic, but still biased and politicized utilizing "colorful and entertaining animations designs and interactive performances with subtle, but at times overt, ideological constructs, symbols, and nationalistically inclined messages of persuasion" (p. 169). More traditionally, China's Propaganda Department and the State Council of Information Office have been two important agencies influencing China's domestic oriented control of information (Shambaugh, 2015).

Online, Chinese media influence tactics include controlling and monitoring systems such as firewalls, shutting down publications or websites, and jailing dissident journalists, bloggers, and activists (Xu, 2014). Through China's online army of Internet commentators, the Chinese government has been able to extend its control following Ellul's (1973) description of horizontal propaganda. Low-paid staffers are directed to make online posts countering oppositional opinions in Chinese cyberspace, guide opinion, and work against perceived enemies to influence public opinion (Lagerkvist, 2010).

While carefully controlling who can speak and on what topics, the Chinese government has also pursued what He (2006) has called "authoritarian deliberation." According to He (2006) "Chinese authoritarian deliberation is *authoritarian* in the sense that top leaders are not elected; therefore, deliberation takes place under one-party domination" (p. 134). Indeed, over the past few decades the Chinese government has experimented with and established numerous democratic institutions designed to provide feedback and information from its citizenry in promotion of state policy (Fishkin, He, Luskin, & Siu, 2010; He, 2006, 2014; He & Warren, 2011; Jiang, 2008; Stockmann & Luo, 2017). This feedback system, and

notion of authoritarian deliberation, operates on a “system of modern science and technologies, and must appeal to reason rather than force” (He, 2006, p. 135). This is reflective of Ellul’s (1973) notion of propaganda as a technique designed for propagandists to most efficiently create a society in service of government control and is anti-deliberative in that it treats citizens as more passive instruments in service of government policy. Similarly, Lorentzen (2014) argues that Chinese censorship takes a form of strategic censorship in that it permits some watchdog journalism in order to improve regime power and governance. Thus, it allows for investigative reporting on lower-level officialdom depending on the level of social tensions. This strategy allows for the regime to benefit from free media without risking overthrow.

A final means of authoritarian control in China is the use of myth providing a vision for a strong China. Two elements of Chinese President Xi’s vision for China in the twenty-first century revolve around the myth of “a great national rejuvenation of China” including a “return to strength,” and the “China Dream.” This introduction of myth represents Ellul’s (1973) explanation of how propaganda technicians create social integration and conformity of actions and beliefs through the furnishing of ready-made reasons, and information. The use of political slogans have been a powerful form of conformity within China with Schoenhals (1992) arguing that Chinese political discourse possesses a type of power in its formalized language that can be used to address a range of specific and general policy issues. The use of stock phrases within Chinese political discourse helps bind the population to a particular theory or foundation of political theory and reality while ambiguous enough to allow variation of the core ideas without needing entirely new slogans (Kluver, 1996; Schoenhals, 1992).

Within the China Dream narrative is discussion of China’s past cultural prestige, economic power, military strength, and affirmation of the CCP’s leadership role in attaining all of these areas of greatness presently and into the future (Hinck, Manly, Kluver, & Norris, 2018). In doing so, it provides a narrative form of integration propaganda, in that it promises a bright Chinese future based on its economic and cultural resources, while also including elements of agitation propaganda, by warning Chinese citizens of the perils of rejecting CCP authority, as other external and internal enemies threaten to destabilize China’s peaceful rise. Within this narrative CCP policies are argued to have helped China reemerge from its century of humiliation at the hands of foreign powers with the promise of a “return to strength” by 2049, aiding in developing Chinese nationalism and identity by fusing China’s future success with the CCP.

Along with Xi's China Dream, his larger political philosophy and power within China has led to the development of a cult of personality further legitimizing a return to more authoritarian governance. The rise of Xi's cult of personality has led online discussion of his leadership to refer to him as "Daddy Xi" and, with Xi Jinping Thought being accepted into official CCP political doctrine after his first term as president, further signals the development of his cult of personality and political power. As the *Telegraph* reports, there are love songs and odes to Xi, academic papers praising and justifying his political views, even cartoons and action figure of him (Phillips, 2014). A compendium of Xi Jinping words has even been published, reminiscent of Mao's Red Book, which includes Xi's metaphors and story-telling methods gushing profound truths and wisdom that penetrate people's hearts.

Case Study Two: Authoritarian Rise and Strategies in Russia

As is the case with China, Russia's concerns regarding disruptions within its economy and larger sociological context include moves towards greater authoritarian practices. For instance, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, Russia's political and economic reforms failed to live up to the promise of a strong Russian economic revival. Positive economic growth occurred during 2000-2010 coinciding with the high price of oil but stagnated with the collapse in oil prices and Western economic sanctions. In addition to economic decline, Russia's aging military and doubts over its role in the world have led to a nostalgia for Russian importance given its previous superpower status. Like in the case of China, the result has been increased media control and the development of new geopolitical narratives or mythologies designed to elicit feelings of a strong and prosperous Russia hurt by the hands of Western nations (Cooley & Stokes, 2018; Hinck, Kluver, & Cooley, 2018).

In today's Russia, we find Russian government influence penetrating its media reflecting Ellul's (1973) description of vertical and horizontal propaganda. First, a central aim in Russian state media control has been the creation of a single, controlled, information space for citizens (Schenk, 2012) exemplifying Ellul's (1973) notion of vertical propaganda. Russian media scholar Sarah Oates (2007) argues that virtually all Russian national TV channels are either directly or indirectly controlled by the state with all of the major newspapers largely reflecting the views of the regime as they are heavily subsidized through the government.

Second, Russian is actively developing its horizontal propaganda, evident in part through the Kremlin's "army of online trolls." *The New York Times Magazine* reports that "trolls" operating out of the Russian Internet Research Center promote

political conspiracy theories globally and create political events based in real life to promote Russian interests (Chen, 2015). Furthermore, social media platforms, such as Facebook and VKontakte feeds, tweets, and other messages reflect attempts at horizontal control often appearing citizen-generated even when orchestrated by state agencies. Russia's contemporary information environment is driving its propaganda messaging techniques, characterized as modeling a "firehose of falsehood" strategy (Paul & Mathews, 2016). This model utilizes high numbers of communication channels, such as the Internet, social media, journalism, and other media outlets to disseminate partial truths or outright fictions for the purpose of entertaining, confusing, and overwhelming its audiences; this practice aligns with Ellul's (1973) notion of effective propaganda being totalizing, utilizing every channel of communication to envelop its audience.

Third, the Russian government is augmenting its control of both vertical and horizontal media by cracking down on civil society and independent media. In 2007, the Committee to Protect Journalists reported that Russia had taken steps towards strengthening media laws to prevent the spreading of messages that could provoke social strife while consolidating the majority of broadcast and print media within the hands of Putin loyalists or through government subsidies of print media. These efforts continued during Russia's initial invasion of Crimea and Eastern Ukraine with Human Rights Watch (2015) noting that the Kremlin was "intensifying its crackdown on civil society, media, and the Internet, as it sought to control the narrative about developments in Ukraine, including Russia's occupation of Crimea and its support to insurgents in eastern Ukraine" (para. 1). Additionally, Russian Parliament and authorities have adopted laws and engaged in practices to increase anti-Western hysteria, arrested political activists, shutdown independent online media, stifled free expression, and encouraged anti-LGBT sentiment (Human Rights Watch, 2015). These attempts at othering or identifying an external enemy reflects the agitation propaganda outlined by Ellul (1973).

Finally, the Russian media has been projecting additional agitation propaganda methods as well as integrative ones. Russian media practices can be seen as in support of Russian integration propaganda as it develops new narratives in support of Putin's continued control of Russia. As McFaul and Stoner-Weiss (2008) argue, Russia's turn against the US back in 2008 provided a reason for continued support of Putin, even as the social contract between Putin and Russia's citizens unraveled, which promised economic growth in exchange for diminishing rights. Russia's economic contraction demanded Putin proffer a new justification for his regime, and the result was a narrative of Russia besieged by the hypocritical and morally decadent West. Furthering these narratives are Putin's development of a cult of personality with specific attention to brand himself through various stage-managed

events offering images of himself as a political brand emphasizing different personality characteristics for different target audiences (Hill & Gaddy, 2013). This identification of Putin as representing Russia, and thus Russia as Putin, further silences those criticizing his policy (Economist, 2016).

Other integrative mythologies can be seen from recent analysis of Russian strategic narratives embedded in its media through scapegoating of the West and further rationalizations of Russian decline (Cooley & Stokes, 2018; Hinck, Kluver, & Cooley, 2018). For instance, examination of Russian media reporting of Western economic sanctions demonstrated a narrative of Russian economic resilience in the face of Western sanctions (Cooley & Stokes, 2018). According to this economic narrative, failed US and EU economic policy caused a global economic crisis designed in part to keep Russia marginalized. However, part of this narrative includes portrayals of Russia as a strong, proactive, and resourceful enough nation to overcome the economic obstacles placed in its way with the potential to create a new global economic order. This narrative framework leads Russian citizens to view the economic actions taken by the state in a way that prevents political mobilization against the government by leaning on Russia's historical strength as a superpower nation, the lingering impacts of the 2008/2009 Great Recession, historical animosity with the US, and a fractured, ineffective Europe all the while placing the East as a place of emerging economic dominance.

Similarly, Hinck, Kluver, and Cooley's (2018) analysis of Russian media narratives regarding its role in global institutions and depiction of NATO found that these media narratives create an image of Russian strength despite economic, cultural, political and social setbacks that occurred with the breakup of the Soviet Union. Within these narratives, Putin is shown as the political figure driving this achievement, and under his leadership, Russia is gaining geopolitical respect. The "Euro-Atlantic" alliance, namely the US and the nations of the EU, are shown as consistently enacting policies that seek to undermine Russian strength and having engineered the current geopolitical order to benefit themselves, rather than the world as a whole. Within this worldview Western nations are morally adrift, concerned solely with financial and political advantage. The Russian state, in contrast to the West, is grounded in moral and spiritual values, and thus presents a "moral" alternative to the existing global order. These narratives help Russian citizens envision a dark and threatening world, one in which the decadent and aggressive powers of the US and its allies create chaos around the globe, ruining nations and regions for their personal financial and political gain, and thus support Russian policy against these states and institutions, legitimizing Russian policies of continued authoritarian governance (Hinck, Kluver, & Cooley, 2018).

Case Study Three: Authoritarian Rise and Strategies in the United States

While political parties in China and Russia have historical experience in authoritarian practices, the transnational flow of such techniques are now evident in the United States. The rise of Donald Trump as a political actor has been accompanied by his use of anti-democratic and authoritarian practices and communication, both throughout his campaign and in his presidency to date. Within this same time frame, Russian influencers have utilized authoritarian propaganda in the United States. Both Trump and the Russian actors have capitalized on feelings of anxiety associated with economic hardships and manipulated the American market-based media system to spread their messages.

In 2008, the United States experienced its biggest economic recession since the Great Depression. While the US economy has improved, the recovery has been sluggish and unevenly distributed across society creating a greater level of income inequality than observed prior to the recession (Casselmann & Flowers, 2014). As a result, leading up to the 2016 election most Americans believed that jobs were hard to find, and that their family was having trouble keeping up with the cost of living (Gao & Drake, 2015). These feelings of economic anxiety conceivably left U.S. citizens more open to being influenced by authoritarian propaganda (see Hetherington & Suhay, 2011).

Trump's political messages supported by Russian internet actors combined to create agitation propaganda horizontally through fake news. As Timberg (2016) argues, Russian trolls crafted and spread fabricated news stories that harmed the Clinton campaign and supported Trump. For instance, during the election these trolls created 129 events in the US related to the election, which were in turn seen by 338,300 different Facebook accounts of which 62,500 accounts indicated they would attend (Volz & Ingram, 2018); these messages even succeeded in organizing and promoting two opposing protests outside of an Islamic center in Houston, TX (Allbright, 2017). The flow of fake news didn't end with the 2016 election, with Russian trolls spreading memes associated with white nationalists and the "alt-right" movement (Arnsdorf, 2017), such as the #schumersshutdown as a moniker for the January U.S. government shutdown and the hashtag #releasethememo to support the idea that within the FBI there was a conspiracy aimed against the Trump administration (Zhao, 2018). The repetition of key ideas and lines of argument by Russian trolls made it appear as if many different people all agreed on an interpretation of a political situation, representative of horizontal propaganda, and helped envelop American audiences ostensibly emanating from the mass.

The spread of Russian fake news in combination with Trump's rhetoric of a corrupt media marks a form of agitation propaganda destroying American's traditional conceptualization of a free and impartial media. At his first press conference since the election, then president-elect Trump told a CNN reporter "You are fake news" (Jamieson, 2017). Since then, President Trump has regularly attacked the free press and has threatened legal and institutional punishments against the press (Follman, 2017; Snyder, 2017). Trump has even gone so far as to investigate whether libel laws can be strengthened in the United States to further undermine the reporting of stories that are critical of him (Grynbaum, 2018). These actions undermine the journalistic fourth estate that provides a check on governmental power by destroying the credibility of news organizations critical of his administration. To aid in this, Trump has regularly used the propaganda technique of card stacking, which involves repeated uses of deception, under-emphases of truth, and the over-emphasis of the desired narrative to stack the cards against the truth (Institute for Propaganda Analysis, 1937). Trump and his surrogates repeatedly use and emphasize the term, fake news, as a label and name, while under-emphasizing and dismissing any narrative that the administration perceives as critical. For example, Rush Limbaugh, a conservative firebrand radio host, said, "the fake news is the everyday news" (as quoted in Peters, 2016, para. 2), implying that all normal mainstream news could be considered fake. Additionally, Trump has labeled the story that he attempted to fire Robert Mueller, who is leading an investigation into Trump, as fake news (Barbash, 2018). These actions have led some to draw a comparison that Trump's behavior is "similar to the behavior of Russian dictator Vladimir Putin" (Budowsky, 2017, para. 1).

Taken together, this horizontally delivered agitation propaganda proves remarkably effective given the US market-based system of media control. While the U.S. system makes vertical propaganda attempts difficult for an authoritarian actor to outright establish, given the competing choices of media source and the prevalence of many voices within the U.S. news media environment, it also inhibits news corporations and social media platforms from preventing the spread of fake news for fear of being seen as censoring certain viewpoints or limiting the U.S. belief in freedom of expression. Thus, by discrediting mainstream news sources, Trump is creating the conditions whereby mainstream news sources are not useful for people, especially Republicans or Trump supporters, to gain political information while establishing new beliefs that, because of the supposed existence of partisan news organizations, only Trump-endorsed media reflect the true nature of what is occurring during his administration. This process works to create the conditions where a vertical propaganda structure could eventually be successful, even in the United States, like in the case of Trump's Twitter feed.

These actions combined with the nature of hyper partisanship in the US have enabled Trump to create new integrative narratives in support of his vision of American society. Donald Trump and his surrogates on the campaign trail have promoted several slogans drawing on individual emotions which agitate them to political action while simultaneously integrating them into myths and narratives against the Washington elite and concerns over immigration. For instance, the Trump campaign slogan “Make America Great Again” invites the audience to imagine a time when America was once great. While some may have difficulty imagining such a time, others are able to call upon a memory steeped in positive feelings of nostalgia and importance. The polysemic nature of this slogan is irrational, but at the same time it permits the audience to read rationality onto the message even granting them power over societal changes they might not understand or feel have wronged them.

Another Trump campaign slogan, “Drain the Swamp,” works similarly to promote emotion and agitate audiences to political action. “Drain the Swamp” promoted the notion that Washington, D.C. was a swamp of individuals who had been corrupted by the influence of power and money at the expense of normal, everyday Americans. This corruption narrative draws lines of conflict between “the establishment” politicians that work within the political system and those citizens who are governed by the political system. Such conflict narratives draw upon emotions to irrationally divide people who could be cooperating for the common good.

Both the “Make America Great Again” and the “Drain the Swamp” campaign slogans feed into the larger narrative that Donald Trump is the only person who can carry out these promises. The Trump as savior narrative supports his projected mythic ethos as the best dealmaker who wins in every competition, a brand of himself that Trump has promoted in the past with his book (*The Art of the Deal*) and his reality television show personality (*The Apprentice*). While this narrative of Trump is irrational, in that no single person can be responsible for making America great or ending all the problems of political corruption in Washington, D.C., it resonates for many in our current socio-political climate where individuals feel at loss in the mass, taken advantage of by larger corporations, politicians, and the forces of globalization, and therefore yearn for the power to make themselves or their situation great.

What stands out from the U.S. case is the flow of authoritarian strategies from outside the country supporting actions within the United States by the Trump administration in dismantling our sources of political information needed to make informed deliberative decisions. While the Russian Trolls and the Trump

administration are separate entities, they promote similar narratives inspiring strong emotional responses to agitate groups of people to political action. Whether creating fake news stories or perpetuating an idea that mainstream media is itself fake news, the combined result is the normalization of feelings of dispassion towards the current political climate and distrust of our democratic institutions. As one Russian politician described the efforts of Russian Trolls, “The point is to spoil [online discussion about politics], to create the atmosphere of hate, to make [online discussion] so stinky that normal people won’t want to touch it” (as quoted in Chen, 2015, para. 26). These messaging strategies emphasize the partisan nature of American politics, leaving some to feel negative emotions about the political system and subsequently be more likely to drop out of political discussions. Others feel anger and hatred for the political other, making their partisan identities more salient, and thus agitated to further participate in the political conflict on behalf of their partisan teams, potentially leading to the acceptance, even celebration of, new, authoritarian practices to do so.

Interventions & Resisting Authoritarianism

Today, like so many other nations around the globe, American democracy is under threat by authoritarianism. Deliberative democracy and its values, however, have the potential to halt the advance of authoritarian ideology without violent conflict by creating spaces where anti-authoritarian voices can interrogate authoritarian ideas and win the debate for hearts, minds, and policy. As Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) state, in order to “save our democracy, Americans need to restore the basic norms that once protected it. But we must do more than that. We must extend those norms through the whole of a diverse society. We must make them truly inclusive” (p. 231). Drawing from Ellul’s (1973) work on propaganda, then, we can help resist authoritarianism by promoting economic equality, reinvesting in programs promoting critical thinking, support and reform our traditional and new media platforms, and develop narratives in support of democratic principles. It is only through a holistic approach whereby we attune to our social and economic problems, our media system, and cultural myths that propaganda is resisted and authoritarianism is held at bay.

First, political action is needed in support of economic policies to ensure equitable distribution of resources to prevent general disillusionment of our political system. As Ellul (1973) argued, desire and adherence to propaganda begins with our social and economic anxieties. Thus, it is imperative that political action includes the forming of diverse and dissimilar coalitions that are united with the common ground of defending and upholding American democracy including addressing economic inequality (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). These coalitions, in the name of

democratic and socio-economic justice, need to be demonstrative of the bringing together of the “vital, steady, and deep relationships” within our immediate communities (Dewey, 1954, p. 214). When any group is left behind economically, the seeds are sown for authoritarians to draw upon drastic, agitative propaganda narratives uniting the disaffected group against our democratic institutions. As such, advancing policies to address social and economic inequality can help diminish resentment and unite large swaths of the American electorate in service of the health of our democracy (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018) and reduce the partitioning of society that leads to increased polarization (Ellul, 1973). According to Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) universalistic models and policies “have the potential to reduce the economic inequality that fuels resentment and polarization...[and] could contribute to the formation of a broad, durable coalition that realigns American politics” (p. 229).

Second, we must embrace deliberative democracy in all its communicative forms and practices in times of democratic crisis and in order to resist propaganda and authoritarianism, rather than abandon it in times of crisis. For example, promoting and investing in an education that embraces democracy, democratic values, and an informed citizenry are imperative (Biesta & Lawy, 2006). Information literacy, media literacy, and academic debate are important and valuable because they help people develop critical thinking skills, they help people become more informed, and are core to argumentation, which is thought to be foundational to democracy (Willard, 1989). Critical thinking skills, inquiry, and inoculation are strong adversaries against propaganda and authoritarianism (Banas & Miller, 2013; Dewey, 1954; Pratkanis & Aronson, 1992). Specifically, this means more debate, discussion, and persuasion by citizens for a functioning democracy (Dewey, 1954) with greater consideration to what information we have access to and how we evaluate it when making informed decisions. Further support of higher education funding, high school speech and debate teams, national issues forums, and citizen initiative reviews programs are all examples of existing programs where information literacy skills are being taught, and should receive continued support, in addition to new programs specifically focusing on the use and abuse of new media as platforms where people receive information. Through these practices, citizens can become informed and develop confidence in their abilities to enact their democratic duties thereby offsetting their insecurity and likelihood of blindly following premade positions which Ellul (1973) argues results in their desire and acceptance of propaganda.

In addition to designing new ways to learn about social media platforms, we must not forget the importance of more traditional sources of information. An informed and active citizenry that embraces democratic communicative values within a free

society must include an appreciation for and recognition of responsible and ethical journalism; journalists have been and will continue to be America's watchdogs and can help to challenge the risks and dangers posed to a democracy from propaganda and authoritarianism. In the US, America's strong journalistic practices serve as a major resource safeguarding its politics from greater authoritarian tendencies; indeed, it is institutions like the American media that separate the extent to which authoritarian techniques can penetrate the US political system from countries such as China and Russia. Because propaganda takes hold through vertical and horizontal channels (Ellul, 1973), the combination of an informed and active citizenry with responsible and ethical journalism (see Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990) creates an environment hostile to the spread and saturation of demagoguery and misinformation. This includes creating standards and holding people and organizations accountable, including outlets such as social media that facilitate information and "news." For example, while Facebook has implemented minimal standards (as an exemplary starting point) for the company itself, as well as standards for its users, to uphold in order to limit fake news and fake users, we need greater policy discussion and support for similar actions across a variety of media platforms.

Fourth, as a society we must also work towards developing, utilizing, and making more salient narratives, myths, and metaphors in support of deliberative and democratic principles grounded in the values of our constitution and that of a free society. According to Ellul (1973) myths are what push us to action. Thus, the narratives and metaphors that help make up our world views, and the larger societal myths which ground them, have the potential to give shape to our knowledge, relationships, understandings of democracy, our world, and our roles within it (Fisher, 1984; Lakoff, 1995). Such communicative strategies can challenge authoritarian myths and narratives if they are accessible to the masses, used to form diverse coalitions of people, and are applicable to the daily lives of individuals thereby allowing such communication to inform and influence our way of being in deliberative ways. As Habermas (1996) argues "ordinary language is the medium of communicative action through which the lifeworld reproduces itself" (pp. 353-354); in other words, it is the way we communicate every day, whether through metaphors, analogies, narratives, or other "ordinary language" that we as individuals can come together in a society to resist authoritarianism. As scholars of communication, we embrace political action and communication that upholds democratic values, processes, and institutions in order to resist authoritarianism and propaganda, because, ultimately, our democracy depends on it.

Finally, and importantly, these interventions are not just for the US but are applicable to other nations committed to stemming the tide of global

authoritarianism as well. By standing together and sharing our experiences practicing and enacting them we may begin to spread deliberative democracy rather than authoritarian practices.

Conclusion

The global spread of authoritarianism is related to the use of information technology to spread misinformation to preempt reasoned discussion, which takes advantage of widespread psychological predispositions created by sociological and economic changes, to curtail widespread deliberative political practices. In this paper, we developed a model of authoritarian political propaganda, based on the work of Ellul (1973), which utilizes contemporary information technology tools to take advantage of psychological predispositions created in part by social and economic changes. We demonstrated the contemporary use of vertical/horizontal, rational/irrational, and agitation/integration authoritarian propaganda through case studies of their use in China, Russia, and the US. Finally, we presented several prescriptions to create the social and economic conditions through which deliberative practices could be promoted to curb the global tide of authoritarianism. We hope that future studies of all methodologies can be trained on this most important topic, to more fully understand how and why global populations become more or less susceptible to authoritarian propaganda, and we call on deliberative democracy scholars in particular to broaden the scope of their inquiry to understand both the macro and micro influences that may make a community more or less likely to embrace deliberative practices so that we may help create a society bound together by reasoned and informed discussion both at home and abroad.

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