MANIPULATIVE TECHNOLOGIES IN ELECTORAL PROCESSES: CONTENT AND COUNTERACTION METHODS

Takhmina Mamadaliyeva
Lecturer at the Department of Social Sciences,
Tashkent State Transport University, Tashkent, Uzbekistan
mishel.96@bk.ru

Abstract
This article examines manipulative technologies in the electoral sphere as a set of methods used to influence voters and distort election outcomes. It emphasizes their role in creating a pseudo-reality and reinforcing dominant ideologies. Particular attention is paid to transitional societies, such as Uzbekistan, where democratic institutions are still in development. The study analyzes the essence, forms of electoral manipulation and offers recommendations to counteract these practices in the interests of information security and political system stability.

Keywords: Electoral manipulation, political culture, information security, transitional society, Uzbekistan, ideology, voter consciousness.

Introduction

Manipulative technologies in the electoral sphere represent a set of techniques and methods used to influence voters' consciousness with the aim of artificially shaping election outcomes. These practices are based on the use of informational-propaganda tools, organizational-administrative mechanisms, and other resources to distort political reality. In the political and cultural dimension, such technologies construct a pseudo-image of the social world (as described by Lippmann) and "manufacture consent," serving as a tool for entrenching dominant ideologies.[1] The issue of electoral manipulation is particularly relevant in transitional societies, where authoritarian traditions persist and political culture and democratic institutions remain in a state of transformation.

The aim of this study is to analyze the nature, forms, and content of electoral manipulation, to examine the Uzbek experience, and to develop recommendations for its mitigation in the interests of information security and the stability of the political system.

Methodology

This study employs a comprehensive methodological approach that combines elements of political analysis, content analysis, as well as comparative and institutional methods. The methodological framework is based on an interdisciplinary synthesis of political theory, sociology, information security, and legal studies, which allows for a holistic examination of the phenomenon of electoral manipulation as a threat to the sustainable development of the political system.

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[1] Липпман У. Общественное мнение. — М.: Институт Фонда «Общественное мнение», 2001.

Results

In the context of political culture, electoral manipulation is viewed as the deformation of voters' consciousness, shaped through propaganda and information technologies. Scholars note that modern manipulative practices are based on the dissemination of simplified images and appeals to emotions rather than rational arguments—following the concepts of W. Lippmann and H. Lasswell. According to Lippmann, a "pseudo-environment" is created, which replaces the real political landscape and enables the "manufacture of consent" among the population in alignment with the interests of those in power.[2] Lasswell emphasized the importance of the "five elements of communication": who says what, through which channel, to whom, and with what effect—an analytical framework that is critical for managing electoral information. Notably, international observation missions have reported that in countries with restricted freedoms, public opinion is often programmed through uniform messaging, as broader public discourse is actively suppressed.. [3]

Electoral manipulations often combine political and cultural tools: certain stereotypes of "patriotism" and "stability" are imposed, while the marginalization of the opposition is justified by invoking a "threat to statehood." This reflects the ideological function of manipulation: control over the voter is exercised through cultural codes, symbols, and narratives, substituting the ideology of genuine consensus with a fictitious representation of the "will of the majority.".[4] As researchers note, a lack of civil liberties during elections leads to electoral behavior being the result of mobilization rather than free expression of will..[5] In other words, political and cultural manipulation reinforces the weakness of political culture and hinders the development of the democratic ideal.

In transitional (post-socialist) societies, electoral manipulation often takes the form of a hybrid model of political technologies, combining both traditional administrative methods and modern media strategies. The key forms include informational and legal manipulation, organizational and administrative techniques, personnel-based tactics, as well as falsification and procedural violations at polling stations.[6] The content of such manipulations in transitional political systems is primarily determined by the goal of maintaining the stability of the ruling elite. In this context, the slogan of "public consensus" is often proclaimed as a legitimizing narrative.

Discussion

Uzbekistan, as a transitional country, demonstrates a distinctive pattern of electoral practice. In the early years of independence, elections were characterized by a formally mass nature: high voter turnout, the dominance of a single party, and obligatory support for a "unified course." Over time, reforms were introduced under the framework of the "New Uzbekistan" strategy. President Shavkat Mirziyoyev has repeatedly emphasized that in the past five years, the legal framework has been improved and the conduct of elections has reached a "qualitatively new level.".[7] Since 2019, a new Electoral Code has been adopted, introducing for the first time a mixed electoral system that allowed for the election of deputies through single-member

[2] Там же.
[3] Лассуэлл Г. Техника пропаганды в мировой войне. — М.: Изд-во МГУ, 1993.
[4] Чомски Н. О контроле над умами: идеология и средства массовой информации. — М.: Ультра.Культура, 2004.
[5] Линц Х., Степан А. Авторитарные и тоталитарные режимы. — М.: Весь мир, 2000.
[6] Авакьян С.А. Избирательное право и избирательный процесс в Российской Федерации. — М.: Юрист, 2012.
[7] Мирзиёев Ш.М. Выступление на заседании Центральной избирательной комиссии по итогам парламентских выборов // Официальный сайт Президента Республики Узбекистан. — 2024.

constituencies. The Central Election Commission (CEC) has reported active organizational preparations: during the 2024 parliamentary elections, 14 electoral districts and 10,761 polling stations were established.

Nevertheless, mechanisms for mobilizing the electorate in Uzbekistan still retain features of the past. State institutions conduct campaigns promoting "stability and reforms," while the media predominantly present a positive narrative. All five registered political parties participated in the elections; however, they acted as a "loyal opposition," refraining from challenging the government's main policy line. Observers noted the restrained nature of the pre-election campaigns and the near-total absence of genuine competitive discourse. The mere fact of holding elections was recognized as the primary achievement.

Official statistics highlight a record voter turnout (74.72%) and an increase in public trust: the Central Election Commission reported that more than 15 million citizens participated in the elections, and all five participating parties secured seats in parliament. .[8] These figures are employed in official discourse as evidence of the success of "democratic reforms" and the New Uzbekistan strategy. In public speeches and strategic documents, the authorities describe the political process as one that ensures the "people's spirit" of the elections and an open political space. The head of state emphasizes the continuation of policies promoting democracy and transparency, guarantees the functioning of a constructive opposition, and affirms freedom of speech.[9]

Conclusion

Countering electoral manipulation requires a combination of legislative and educational measures. From a political and legal perspective, several steps are essential: reforming electoral legislation to enhance transparency; imposing strict sanctions for the abuse of administrative resources and ballot fraud; strengthening the independence of electoral commissions; and ensuring fair procedures for the registration of candidates and political parties.

From a cultural perspective, the key lies in enhancing political literacy and civic responsibility among the population. It is crucial to develop voters' critical thinking, fact-checking skills, and understanding of the electoral process. Educational programs, media engagement, and information literacy play an important role in this regard. Presidential statements emphasize the importance of fostering a "spirit of openness" and instilling a deep sense of patriotism in citizens.[10] These statements reflect an understanding that stable political institutions are grounded in a mature political culture. Moreover, the promotion of freedom of speech and pluralism of opinions—as part of the presidential agenda—helps create an environment in which it becomes increasingly difficult to disseminate false narratives under the guise of the "will of the people."

In addition, the development of civil society and independent media can serve as a barrier against manipulative practices. Active participation by public observers, monitoring institutions, and the regular assessment of electoral integrity by international missions (such as the OSCE and the UN OHCHR) contribute to curbing abuses. Uzbekistan is already expanding international

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[8] Центральная избирательная комиссия Республики Узбекистан. Информация о результатах парламентских выборов 2024 года // Официальный сайт ЦИК. — 2024.

[9] Мирзиёев Ш.М. Послание Олий Мажлису и народу Узбекистана // Официальный сайт Президента Республики Узбекистан. — 20 декабря 2023 г.

[10] Мирзиёев Ш.М. Послание Олий Мажлису Республики Узбекистан, 20 декабря 2023 года // Официальный сайт Президента.

cooperation in the field of election organization and the broadcasting of live coverage. A key cultural and legal component also involves the integration of ethical standards into the conduct of authorities: evaluating results based on actual performance, ensuring accountability for violations—all of which are being announced and promoted by the country's leadership.

In the context of global informational competition, electoral technologies represent not only a political but also an information-related challenge. Manipulations during elections can destabilize society, creating "informational breaches" through foreign propaganda or fake campaigns. A reliable electoral system thus becomes a crucial component of a state's information security.

In Uzbekistan, the issue of cybersecurity in the media is already being addressed. Strengthening public trust in election outcomes—through the publication of detailed protocols and the implementation of electronic monitoring—makes falsification less likely and enhances the resilience of the information environment. Negative regional experiences demonstrate that public dissatisfaction with election results (as seen in Kyrgyzstan in 2020, Georgia in 2024, or Kazakhstan in 2023) can lead to a crisis of trust and public protests. Conversely, when electoral technologies are protected, competitive, and transparently monitored—including by international observers—this reinforces the legitimacy of governance and contributes to the stabilization of the political system.

Manipulative technologies in the electoral process represent a multifaceted phenomenon, deeply rooted in both political practices and societal culture. Combating them requires coordinated efforts: legal enhancement of the electoral system, improvement of media and political literacy among the population, and the development of open monitoring institutions. Uzbekistan has already taken several steps toward reform—for example, the adoption of the Electoral Code and the inclusion of independent observers.

It is significant that both the President and national legislation publicly declare a commitment to democratization and informational transparency. Comparative analysis shows that without eliminating technological abuses and without advancing political culture, any achievements risk being short-lived.

Ensuring information security and the sustainability of the state in the 21st century is inseparable from the integrity of elections: only transparent, competitive, and verifiable electoral technologies can guarantee social stability and public trust.

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