

Foreign Interference in British Politics: How the Liberal Democrats Can Meet the Challenge

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The Brexit referendum was a watershed moment in British politics. Ten years on, the British political landscape is still very much carved out between 'Remain' and 'Leave'. Among Remainers, there are also beliefs that the campaign was heavily affected by influence from Russia and far-right figures in the United States. Nigel Farage, one of the leading figures in the Brexit campaign, was recently involved in an alleged case concerning unsolicited donations, and allegations about Reform UK's links with Russia and the Trump Administration continue to make newspaper headlines.

At the same time, far left politics is similarly highly susceptible to disinformation campaigns. Let us look at China and George Galloway's campaign as an example. Mr. Galloway hosted 'Taiwan Untangled', a documentary TV programme broadcast by China Global Television Network (CGTN). The series blatantly skewed the wording of the United Nations Resolution 2758. That resolution makes no mention of Taiwan's sovereignty, let alone China's claim on Taiwan, and yet China tries claim it does through misrepresentation. In effect, firstly, CGTN has used Galloway as a speaker from the UK to try to show its citizens that Europeans support Beijing's views. And, secondly, the CCP has sought to promote its 'One China policy' in Europe.

But mere suspicion is not healthy for a democracy. We must rise to the challenge

posed the breadth and depth of foreign interference in British politics.

Authoritarian regimes would not stop at interfering with our democratic process by meddling with our media. To make the matter worse, our challenges are effectively exploited by new media. Russian interference in the elections in Moldova, Romania and Georgia was warning signs for Western democracies. The money flow and alliance with far-right elements in the European hemisphere are much too prevalent in disinformation to discredit electoral results. And these operations strike from within our parliaments.

Just this week, The Economist reported on the alleged connection between a Swedish Democrats (SD) official and Russian authorities. [A Swedish investigative publication](#), had reported that a highly placed SD official was linked to Russian influence operations and had been involved in various networks in Sweden with links to Russian intelligence services.

Another example from within the UK: On 12 June 2026, the French government agency [Viginum](#) reported that an Israeli private influence firm was involved in election interference, including targeting First Minister John Swinney. According to the report, John Swinney and the SNP were allegedly targeted through accounts linked to BlackCore – (*"a tech company focused on shaping narratives"*) which French authorities accused of trying to smear pro-Palestine election candidates. Hundreds of fake accounts allegedly left coordinated comments on Swinney's social media posts.



Born in Hong Kong, Larry migrated to the UK for over 20 years. Larry works as a data analyst in Finance and Accounts in the City of London. He is also specially trained in Chinese History, earning his Masters in both the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) and the University of York.

At CUHK, Larry research areas are The Hong Kong Identity and the Structures & Mind of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). All these are very relevant today in a dangerous world as the CCP's goal is to expand its influence to replace our way of life - the liberal democracies based on a rules-based international order.

How does the CCP politburo function? What are their narratives in distorting cultural identities and history? Ask Larry, who is also an elected representative at Lib Dem's Foreign International Relationship Committee.



So what is our UK security capacity to tackle these challenges?

Fortunately, the legal system is in place. In terms of tackling state actors, meaning those who influence our political discourse on behalf of another country, the UK has one of the strongest systems in Europe. Under the Foreign Influence Registration Scheme (FIRS), organisations and individuals need to register with the UK authorities if they interact with state agencies or government-supported organisations from a country that is on the enhanced tier under FIRS.

However, the apparatus deployed has yet to allow the challenge to be met.

Currently only Iran and Russia are on the enhanced list of the FIRS. While even if President Xi, Putin and the Iranian regime may not essentially have 'Best-Friends-for-Ever' status, there is no dispute that President Xi exploits his triumvirate bloc to assert influence and distract attention in current global affairs. It is time for China to be placed on the Enhanced Tier of the FIRS – the system that was designed to meet Beijing's assertions.

Furthermore, prevention is the best remedy. To prevent our democracy from being infiltrated, UK legislation still lacks measures such as:

1. Stronger legislation against unsolicited donations, particularly significant sums that are unexplained and originate from crypto traders;
2. Stronger regulatory oversight and more severe penalties for violations of our electoral rules, from spending limits to rules protecting candidates from political intimidation.

Our party has taken a strong stance on this aspect. During the recent readings of the Representation of the People Bill, Lisa Smart MP took the lead in amending the Bill, including:

- banning those who are, or have been, members of a foreign administration, or advisers to a foreign administration, from donating money to a political party, think tank or campaigning body;
- prohibiting politicians (regulated donors) from receiving any payment from prescribed foreign state broadcasters;
- requiring parties to commission an annual independent investigation into donations they receive from foreign-owned UK entities, with the findings submitted to the Electoral Commission;
- requiring the Secretary of State to publish proposals for a Royal Commission to consider a cap on political donations and the effectiveness of existing campaign expenditure limits.

We will table the policy motion 'Defending British Democracy' during the Autumn Conference 2026. We are proud to work within the policy group throughout 2026. It aims to introduce policies such as imposing stricter electoral spending limits, strengthening regulations against foreign actors, and improving our electoral system so that it is less vulnerable to foreign interference.



We're not going to wait for changes across the pond. Nor are our spirits dampened by Trump. The LibdemsHK team are heading to Taiwan to strengthen ties with our sister party.

Liberal Democrats lead in working alongside democratic institutions from Taiwan on the world stage.