not taking that step, the book shares a weakness underpinning much of the literature on soft power, namely, does nation branding actually *work*? What exactly is its "constitutive impact" (p. 182)? How sustainable is the promotion of a cultural fragment tailored to the norms and desires of an external audience, hiding unattractive aspects through "pinkwashing" or "greenwashing"? And how do projected images and imaginaries connect with material realities? While this book does not develop substantive answers to such questions, it does provoke them. And by forefronting the concept of branding and raising awareness of the practice, it opens analytical doors and invites new lines of inquiry. As such, this book has plenty to offer and belongs on the shelf of everyone who wants to understand how states try to manage their identities and enhance their soft power.

Political Technology: The Globalisation of Political Manipulation. By Andrew Wilson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. 300p. £80.00 cloth.
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Vladimir Lenin once described Western democracy as "truncated, false, and hypocritical" (*Lenin's Collected Works*, translated by Jim Riordan, 1974). This quote aptly captures the mood of Andrew Wilson's serious and gloomy book, *Political Technology: The Globalization of Political Manipulation.* Wilson meticulously traces the systematic distortion of politics that began in Russia, even before Lenin's time, and has since become a global practice. Political technology—essentially political engineering—leverages social media and front groups. Its techniques such as computational propaganda, troll farming, and paid endorsements have transformed politics into sheer spectacle. Truthiness has supplanted truth. Mass culture has skewed political culture. Fervent partisan enthusiasts have replaced rational policy advocates. The primary activity of politics has shifted from advancing policy positions to affirming group identities. Politics is no longer about content; it is about performance. And the performance is increasingly dismal.

From this dark and messy tableau, which Wilson renders with masterful precision, emerges the book's central message: the truth-corrupting machinery of political technology, once the preserve of authoritarian regimes, now operates freely within liberal democracies. Even as elected officials dominate the internet and media, the real subjects of the spectacle are voters—masses of marionettes whose strings are pulled by agents distorting a plot devoid of objective meaning. Sometimes, it is the political leaders themselves, foully promoting divisive tales, who pull the strings. At other times, internal actors take the reins: Political Action Committees (PACs) in America, a monopolistic media authority in Viktor Orbán's Hungary, or the "cyber yodhas" that scorch the Indian internet. Foreign agents, including Russian hackers and obscure political consultants selling their polarizing wares, also play a role in marring elections.

The result is an inversion of the political process. Democracy is meant to be about demand—*popular demand.* Whether directly or representatively, the pure will and interest of voters should decide electoral contests and guide policy. Instead, democracy is increasingly shaped by the "supply" side of partisan factions that distort information and manipulate popular opinion in covert and often fraudulent ways to serve their own ends. The implications of this shift are huge, perhaps greater than even Wilson recognizes. Gone are Edmund Burke's necessary standards of civility without which the democratic polity descends into unruly factionalism. Vanished is Jean-Jacques Rousseau's ideal of the legislator as the educator of the "general will." Today, elected officials have become untruthful spokespersons for factional interests; they are simultaneously masters of deceit and puppets of larger players. "Manners are of more importance than laws," observed Burke. "According to their quality, they aid morals, they supply them, or they totally destroy them" (Edmund Burke, *First Letter on a Regicide Peace*, 1796). The vicious style of modern democracy has become its central threat.

The book reads like both a sequel and a prequel to the author's earlier work, *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World.* Building on theories of political communication and online propaganda, it departs from existing literature by demonstrating that the phenomenon has gone global, whether carried out by foreign exporters of political technology or its domestic adopters; whether to impose total control on the political system or to corrupt democratic discussion. Reflecting arguments made by scholars such as Kathryn Sikkink on the global diffusion of political norms and practices, Wilson shows how political technology methods spread across national boundaries, regardless of regime type. Alarmingly, democratic operators have adapted the ways of tyrants; political technology now grows at home.

The book achieves a synthesis of literatures on electoral manipulation, authoritarian resilience, and technology diffusion that fills a gap between disciplines. It offers valuable insights into how various nations and regimes employ political technology with varying effect. In Russia, the cradle of political stagecraft, the regime uses it to maintain stability, an argument that extends the work of Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way on competitive authoritarian regimes. As an expert in Russia and Ukraine, Wilson is well positioned to study how post-Soviet techniques have permeated and vitiated open societies. His account of

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Russian democracy's stillbirth is particularly engaging for its rich use of interview data. It traces how supporters of Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin used political technology to marginalize true reformers within a staged democracy. This account of Russia's failed transition will rile some readers, especially proponents of the view, led by Jeffrey Sachs, that Russian democracy could have been saved in the 1990s with meaningful Western, especially American, financial support (Jeffrey Sachs, *A New Foreign Policy: Beyond American Exceptionalism*, 2018).

The infiltration of political technology into liberal democracies is less familiar and ongoing. Here, the book's contributions to knowledge shine brightest. In the United States, the impact of dark money and political consultants expands upon research on the influence of money and interest groups in politics (Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page, *Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens*, 2014). While political technology in democracies cannot aspire to, nor ever achieve, the total control witnessed in Russia or China, its eroding effect on the quality of political discussion and institutions is notable. The deterioration of democracy, not only in former captive nations such as Hungary and Georgia, where some analysts expected it (e.g., Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* 76(6), 1997) but also in the bastion of liberty, presents a deeply troubling reality. It suggests that the decline of democratic institutions within a globalized information space is inexorable, if not altogether irreversible—precisely the opposite of prevailing liberal expectations during the heady atmosphere after the Cold War.

Chapter 9, the book's most important part, asks: "Does political technology work?" Wilson identifies several conditions for its effectiveness. Chief among them is substantial influence over media channels to disseminate propaganda and shape public perception—an argument that aligns with existing scholarship on electoral authoritarianism and the strategic use of repression (see, for example, Beatriz Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico*, 2006). Political technology works best when it exploits ethnic, political, or social divisions to distort opinions and steer votes. Institutional factors also play a role: the absence or weakening of democratic institutions and the diminishing of checks and balances facilitate successful manipulation. Political technology is opportunistic: it pounces upon social cracks and exploits institutional weaknesses. It must adapt to local cultural norms, too. Finally, there are the human operators themselves: armies of skilled professionals (often foreigners) who innovate and apply political technology to unsuspecting publics.

Wilson is a gifted thinker and a compelling writer. Among his book's many qualities is its conceptual richness. It describes the many players and elements of political engineering within diverse national settings. Beyond the familiar trolls and bots, readers encounter a wonderland of shadow parties, rent-a-mobs, pink slime, the Kochtopus, grechka firms, cyber yodhas, Russians in Israel, and Israelis everywhere. For such a heavy topic, the prose is refreshingly light.

The book does have limitations. The empirical analysis is overly descriptive; some sections paint only thin vignettes on important topics. A focused account of the conditions for political technology's success at the beginning of the book, rather than at the end, would have provided a clearer guide to the case studies. The role of civil society in countering political technology's effects merits further attention. Conceptually, the broad scope of political technology encompassing numerous techniques within disparate regimes—authoritarian, autocratic, hybrid, and democratic—risks overstretch. The depth of analysis varies: while Russia is extensively covered, other important cases, notably India and China, receive less scrutiny. These two nations feature in the same chapter, yet each warrants its own chapter, especially if Wilson is correct about the declining quality of the world's largest democracy.

Although comparative politics is the primary lens, the book could have engaged more deeply with broader theoretical debates, especially on the interplay between foreign and domestic forces. The book is too quick to reject realist accounts in international relations of Russia's centralization based on perceived external threats. By depicting Putin's wars in Georgia and Ukraine as diversionary adventures to reshape domestic politics, the analysis underplays the pressures of international anarchy on a leader who views the Soviet Union's demise as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century." Readers have much to learn from this book, even if at times they wish they learned more.

Perhaps this is asking too much of a book that already accomplishes a lot. Overall, Wilson offers valuable insights into political manipulation across diverse regimes, cultures, and eras. He wisely avoids timeworn topics such as social media and prudently warns us not to focus too much on the technology itself: human agents, not bots and algorithms, are the real culprits of discord. He avoids simple formulas and facile explanations; political technology is too complex a phenomenon and its related technologies too disruptive for such simplifications. The convergence of forces by which politics deteriorates when it meets modern techniques reveals the sophistication of his argument. Technology itself is not the main driving force; it compounds other factors, such as the decline of institutions (the old "estates") and existing social divisions. His approach avoids the pitfalls of technological determinism and technological irrelevance that have trapped other thinkers.

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Readers of *Political Technology* should heed two caveats. One is as old as Aristotle: no democracy ever fully achieves its ideals. The other is more recent: democracy was never predestined to sweep the globe after 1991; Russian political technology proved more easily exportable. Yet doubts about democracy's inherent limits should not overshadow a crucial question that arises on many pages: did democracy have to deteriorate so steeply? Wilson focuses more on the conditions of degradation than on measures to reverse it. Despite the book's prevalent gloom, it need not be all doom. Wilson's nuanced argument that technology is not the sole cause of institutional decay offers a basis for optimism. Other thinkers should build upon his excellent work to explore the potential of new inventions to restore virtue to politics and strength to democracy.

Advocacy and Change in International Organizations: Communication, Protection, and Reconstruction in UN Peacekeeping. By Kseniya Oksamytna. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023. 288p. $110.00 cloth.
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There is a vast scholarly literature on the evolution of international organizations (IOs) and on how IOs adapt in the face of new threats, challenges, and opportunities. The focus of this book is a related but different issue: it is concerned with how international organizations innovate or, as the author puts it, "How, when, and why do IOs expand into new areas and institutionalize innovative practices?" (p. 194). An important yet overlooked source of innovation in IOs, Oksamytna argues, is advocacy. "Change requires committed and capable advocates who are able to overcome resistance," she maintains (p. 1). *Advocacy and Change in International Organizations* offers an explanatory framework that provides valuable insights into the conditions under which advocacy succeeds, when it does, in effecting change, and the processes that lead to the institutionalization of new norms and policies. Oksamytna illustrates her analysis with meticulous investigations into the processes that led to the institutionalization over time of three important innovations in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping: strategic communications, the protection of civilians, and quick impact projects.

Oksamytna's explanatory framework is complex. Advocates—a term that encompasses a broad range of actors—effect change, she argues, through one of three strategies: social pressure, persuasion, or "authority talk" (discourse that emanates from an agent of influence or expertise). The conditions under which a given strategy succeeds (or not) are specific to each strategy across four categories: the characteristics of the advocates, the targets of advocacy, the issues advocates are seeking to promote, and the context in which advocacy is pursued. For instance, social pressure (e.g., shaming) requires a public forum to be effective whereas persuasion works best behind closed doors. Oksamytna identifies three pathways to IO innovation: top-down (e.g., member state-led), bottom-up (e.g., field-led), and outside-in (e.g., external expert-led). Ultimate success requires institutionalization, which may be gradual and can be slowed or even reversed by contestation.

Presented, as it is, in an initial stand-alone chapter, one wonders if the theory could not perhaps be more parsimonious. However, when viewed in the context of the three cases of UN peacekeeping innovation that Oksamytna employs to demonstrate the workings of her model, the value of the complexity—or, rather, the salience of each element of the framework—becomes evident. Oksamytna selects her cases from UN peacekeeping because in her view the institution is broadly representative of IO change: it is subject to contradictory status quo and reformist pressures; its governance arrangements are similar to those of other international institutions in important respects; and there is considerable scholarly debate as to the sources and dynamics of innovation.

The execution of the three case studies is masterful and I expect that scholars of UN peacekeeping will find them valuable in their own right. Oksamytna possesses an impressive command of the detail relevant to the emergence and, ultimately, the adoption of these three now well-established features of UN peacekeeping operations. The command of detail is achieved through interviews she conducted with UN officials, diplomats, and other individuals knowledgeable about the advocacy episodes, as well as examination of a very extensive array of UN documents, public and private archives, and memoirs of former UN officials—all of this alongside a comprehensive and wide-ranging body of scholarly literature. While one might have expected the inclusion of a case study of unsuccessful advocacy for the sake of comparison, the three cases exhibit considerable variation within and among themselves with regard to theoretically relevant aspects of the experiences. Additionally, Oksamytna entertains alternative approaches and explanations, which, notwithstanding their many valid and valuable insights, are all found to be wanting in one respect or another.

An explanatory framework with so many moving parts as this one naturally raises a number of questions. To begin with, are the three strategies mutually exclusive or do they/can they sometimes exist in combinatory, mutually reinforcing ways? With regard to the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), for instance (not one of the cases examined in this study), we know that "authority talk" (the International

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