Resilience on the Front Lines: Russia's Global Information War on Ukraine

About the lecture

This lecture is designed for university instructors, researchers, students, and other representatives of the academic community who are involved in conducting sessions about the information war in Ukraine or would be interested in doing so.

It provides a brief overview of the goals, tactics, and key narratives of Kremlin disinformation before and during the war. In particular, the guide is structured around three groups targeted by the Kremlin propaganda: Ukrainian, Russian, and Western audiences. The guide also highlights some of the Ukrainian initiatives, projects, and tools developed to build resilience and counter disinformation.

The guide comes with a series of case studies and presentation slides to support the conduct of the session and make it interactive and engaging. If conducted in full as planned, the session will last **approximately 90 minutes**. The guide is designed to be adaptable, and some case studies **may be omitted** depending on the focus of the session and the academic goals of the instructor/presenter.

Although the guide was written primarily for the foreign academic community, any individual or group organizing informational and/or awareness-raising events about the war in Ukraine will find useful information and practical insights in this guide.

Notes for the lecturer

This is a brief overview of goals and tactics of Kremlin disinformation before and during the war. The Kremlin continues to justify its aggression and violations of international law by promoting false narratives and curating disinformation for various audiences. What we have discussed today is just the tip of the iceberg. We believe that the best approach to mitigate its effect is to improve societies' abilities to recognize and respond to disinformation. We hope that this guide will help you recognize Kremlin disinformation and stay alert during the ongoing information war.

This lecture was created through a partnership between the Learn to Discern (L2D) project, which is implemented by IREX, and Filter, the national media literacy project of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine. Both projects receive support from the UK's FCDO Countering Disinformation and Media Development Programme. The content of this lecture does not necessarily reflect the views of or represent the official positions of the Government of the United Kingdom, Government of Ukraine, or IREX.

Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office

IREX

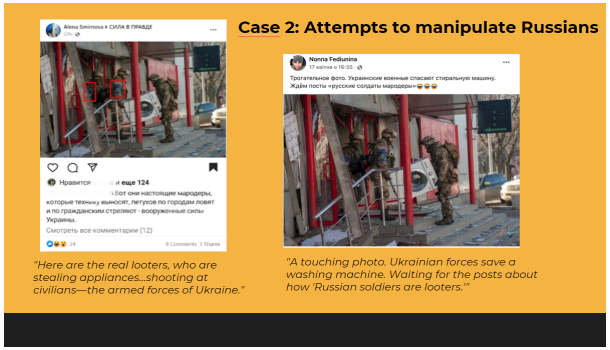
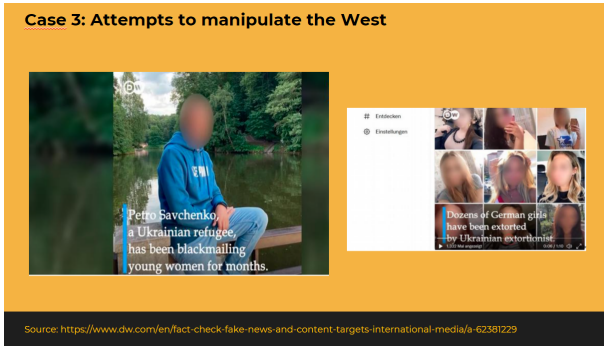
Фільтр
Національний проєкт з медіаграмотності

МІНІСТЕРСТВО КУЛЬТУРИ ТА ІНФОРМАЦІЙНОЇ ПОЛІТИКИ УКРАЇНИ

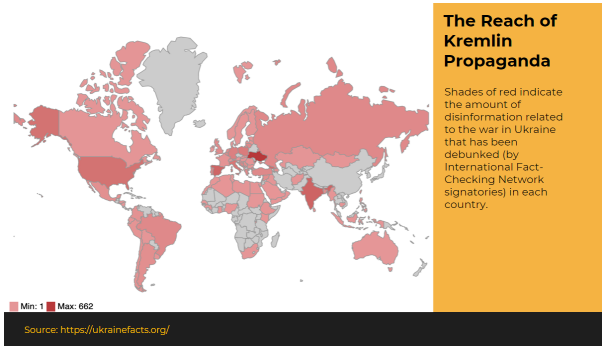
Lecture Overview
1. Introduction 2. Kremlin disinformation in Ukraine: Goals and tactics 3. Kremlin disinformation in Russia: Goals and tactics 4. Kremlin disinformation in the West: Goals and tactics 5. How Ukraine has been fighting the information war
Lesson Objectives
● Inform the audience about the key tactics, instruments, and narratives used by Kremlin propaganda before and during the war in Ukraine and explain their real-world impact ● Present Ukraine's experience in dealing with Kremlin disinformation ● Encourage critical evaluation of messages about the war in Ukraine and brainstorm ways to combat Kremlin disinformation

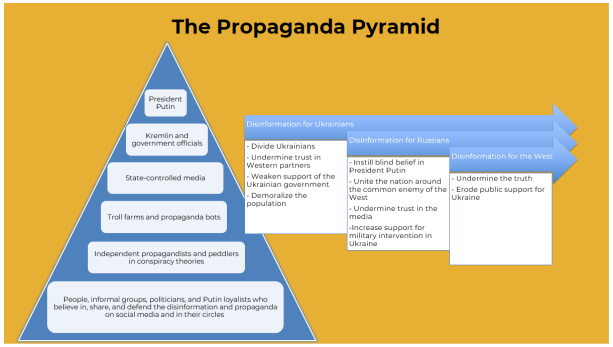
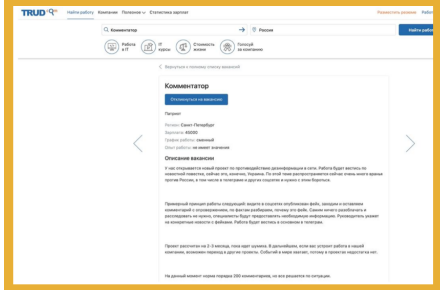
Section	Slide	Accompanying text
1.1	**Introduction**	1.1 Quiz: "Identify Manipulation" *Lecturer encourages students to evaluate messages about Ukraine and discuss the importance of context. Manipulation and propaganda sometimes are complete fabrications, but they often rely on grains of truth that are taken out of context. Ask students to think about which countries/areas they could be spreading, whom could they be targeting and to what extent they are fake or real.* Example 1. Attempts to Manipulate Ukrainians (SLIDE 4) **Description:** On June 17, 2022, it became clear that some people wanted to share some negative opinions and spread information about the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Dmytro Kuleba. The false reports suggested that Minister Kuleba asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Zbigniew Rau, to deport male Ukrainian refugees ages 19 to 60 from Poland.

	 	(SLIDE 5) As proof of this, a photo of Kuleba's letter to Zbigniew Rau was published. **Explanation:** The "proof" of Minister Kuleba's actions was based on an inauthentic photo of a letter. Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky did not issue an order to return men of draft age, and the photo of the letter reportedly received by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs is fake. On the official website of the President of Ukraine, there are no such documents in the "Decrees" or "Orders" sections. The Counter-Disinformation Center (CCD) of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine reported that the fake document first appeared on the website of the pro-Kremlin information agency "Red Spring", and was later spread by the Russian hacktivist Telegram channel "Joker DNR." ("DNR" is the acronym for the Donetsk People's Republic, one of the Russian-occupied regions of eastern Ukraine.) By creating and distributing such documents, pro-Kremlin propagandists sought to undermine trust in the Ukrainian government, as well as instill doubts in Ukrainians seeking refuge abroad.
1.1		Example 2. Attempts to Manipulate Russians (SLIDE 6) **Description:** A photo claims that Ukrainian soldiers are stealing from Ukrainian civilians. The caption reads: "These are real looters who steal machines and shoot at civilians – these are the Ukrainian Armed Forces." Russian accounts began distributing this photo right after numerous reports about Russian soldiers looting Ukrainian houses started appearing online.

	 	**Explanation:** The photo (SLIDE 7) was taken and posted a month before Kremlin propaganda began to use it. It belongs to the Associated Press and shows Ukrainian soldiers helping to relocate goods from a market in Kharkiv, which had been destroyed by shelling. By changing the context to make it seem like Ukrainian soldiers were engaging in looting, the Kremlin sought to discredit the military in the eyes of the population. Additional reading and source material from MythDetector.ge and StopFake.org: Fake: Ukrainian Soldiers Looting
1.1		Example 3. Attempts to Manipulate the West (SLIDE 8) **Optional Activity (10 additional minutes):** Read about this case in DW. Be ready to discuss the following questions: What was the aim of this Kremlin propaganda tactic? How effective do you think it was? How could you know that this was propaganda? **Description:** A Japanese Twitter account that focuses on the war in Ukraine shared a video reporting on an alleged criminal fugitive from Ukraine, archived here. The video, claiming to be published by the German news organization Deutsche Welle (DW), is about the case of a Ukrainian refugee, Petro Savchenko, who had been caught by the police in Germany. According to the video, Savchenko had been blackmailing women for months by threatening to leak nude images that he had secretly recorded with a hidden camera after

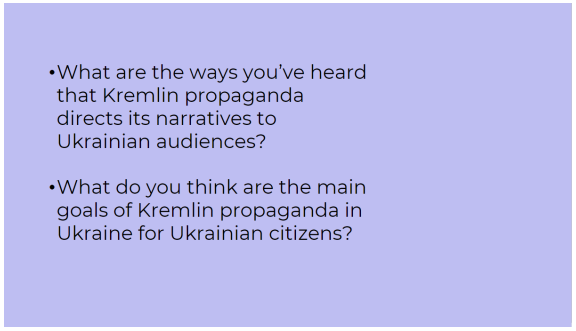
		meeting them at bars. The video claims that he was arrested and will now face charges. When asked by DW, a spokesperson of the Federal Criminal Police Office in Germany (BKA) said that they "are not aware of such a case." **Explanation:** In July, Kremlin propagandists fabricated this video, which was subsequently proven false. Moreover, they presented it as a story by Deutsche Welle, aiming to discredit the German public media outlet. Propagandists also exploited the status of DW as a trustworthy news organization to lend legitimacy to the story. This disinformation phenomenon is known as *spoofing*, in which a digital identity is faked to gain trust and credibility, according to Ingo Mannteufel, head of cybersecurity at DW. **Discussion:** Questions for audience: 1. How do we know that these examples represent attempts to manipulate audiences? *Their sources (pro-Kremlin social media accounts, ex: Joker DNR), lack of official verification (no other reputable news stories about the case), emotionally charged/controversial topic, formulated in a sensationalist way, or the fact that they have since been debunked (whether by media, police, or government sources).* 2. What is manipulative in each of the examples? a) *The letter was faked to make it seem like Minister Kuleba had asked Poland to deport Ukrainian refugees* b) *Although the photo was real, it was taken out of context and miscaptioned.* c) *The entire story was faked, along with its attribution to Deutsche Welle.* 3. Do we know where they originated? How can we know?

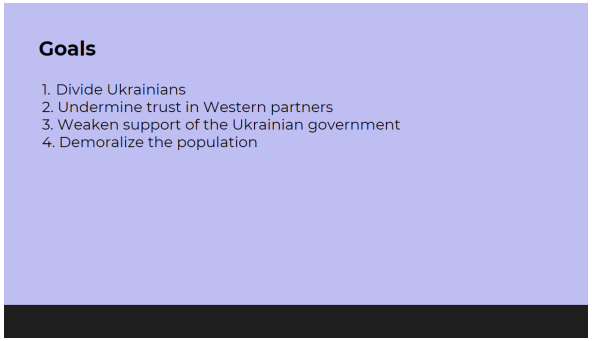
		In some cases, yes. For example, in the first example, we know it came from the pro-Kremlin Telegram channel Joker DNR, a channel dedicated to Kremlin disinformation. In the case of the third example, we only know where it first appeared, on a Japanese Twitter account. The account may have picked it up from a Kremlin troll or bot. Regardless, every case presented closely follows Kremlin propaganda narratives.
1.1		The cases illustrate how the Kremlin is responsible for wide-ranging disinformation to support its invasion of Ukraine. Each case we examined carries a different message, depending on the target audience. On this map (SLIDE 9) (see: https://ukrainefacts.org/), you can see the ubiquity of pro-Kremlin disinformation concerning the war in Ukraine. The shades of red represent the amount of disinformation that has been identified and debunked by fact-checkers in each country.
1.2	• How would you define disinformation? What about propaganda? Do you think there's a difference between the two? What about disinformation and misinformation?	1.2 Introduction (SLIDE 10) **Optional Activity (5-10 min) Ask your students:** *How would you define disinformation? What about propaganda? Do you think there's a difference between the two? What about disinformation and misinformation?* **Definitions (from First Draft News): (SLIDE 11)** - **Disinformation:** Disinformation is false information that is deliberately created or disseminated with the express purpose to cause harm. Producers of disinformation typically have political, financial, psychological, or social motivations - **Misinformation:** Misinformation is information that is false, but not intended to cause harm. For example, individuals who don't know a piece of information is false may spread it on social media in an attempt to be helpful. - **Propaganda:** Propaganda is *true or false* information spread to persuade an audience, but often has a political connotation and is often connected to information produced by governments. In the case

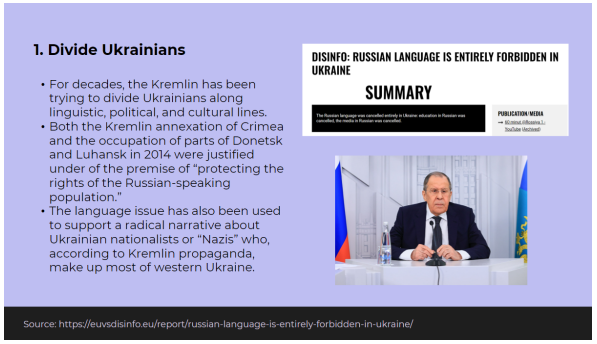
	Definitions: • **Disinformation:** Disinformation is false information that is deliberately created or disseminated with the express purpose to cause harm. Producers of disinformation typically have political, financial, psychological, or social motivations • **Misinformation:** Misinformation is information that is false, but not intended to cause harm. For example, individuals who don't know a piece of information is false may spread it on social media in an attempt to be helpful. • **Propaganda:** Propaganda is ***true or false*** information spread to persuade an audience, but often has a political connotation and is often connected to information produced by governments. In the case of the Kremlin's information war in Ukraine, propaganda often overlaps with disinformation. Source: https://firstdraftnews.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/infoDisorder_glossary.pdf	of the Kremlin's information war in Ukraine, propaganda often overlaps with disinformation. *Note that these definitions and terms are highly debated even among experts.*
	  **Job description of a "Commentator" on a job search site in Russia:** *"Your role is to refute disinformation. **You do not have to analyze anything yourself,** the texts for comments will be given to you by management, these messages will be prepared in advance by other specialists."* How does this ad talk about the job of being a troll? Why do you think someone would apply for this job?	While the rest of us are far from the tanks and bombs in Ukraine, we all are still participating in the information war. Propaganda has been integral to the Kremlin's strategy of hybrid warfare; without it, Russia would not have been able to launch the invasion of Ukraine. False narratives are generating "high numbers of channels and messages" with a "shameless willingness to disseminate partial truths or outright fictions," according to the RAND corporation, which describes Russia's propaganda model as "the firehose of falsehood." In this model, state media, propagandists, troll farms, bots, and a cyber army flood media with messages that manipulate truth and distort reality in an attempt to undermine the basis for the world's acceptance of a sovereign, peaceful Ukraine. The sheer quantity and quality of disinformation has helped the Kremlin prepare domestic audiences for the invasion and stalled Ukraine's EU integration progress. As scholar Masha Gessen describes, the Russian state and its propaganda machine form a feedback loop, as each level repeats and amplifies each other's messages. Attribution of misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda can at times be easy to place, such as a speech from President Putin, but the sources of manipulative narratives requires one to view a more complex propaganda pyramid as illustrated (SLIDE 12). Each level of the pyramid plays a part in the dissemination of Kremlin propaganda, aimed at politically legitimizing the Russian state and its actions.

		Putin's words set the tone for propaganda, while Kremlin officials take these messages to weekly meetings with state-controlled media to coordinate topics and talking points. Employees at troll farms, which intensified their work in the lead-up to the war, such as the infamous Internet Research Agency, run by Putin's chef and close confident Yevgeny Prigozhin, look to state media as they meet their daily quota of posts and comments each day. Disinformation is thus passed down as everyone from devoted Putin supporters to misinformed skeptics, possibly interacting with content written by bots and trolls, spread Kremlin propaganda through social media. Beyond those supported politically and financially by the regime, are masses of people who seemingly cannot be persuaded to an alternative understanding of reality. They are so convinced by the manipulation that they help propagate and defend it through misinformation. **Optional Activity (3-5 min):** You see a real job ad (SLIDE 13). It explains how the troll farms were openly recruiting in their efforts to hire paid trolls, in this job description taken from Trud job board. Discuss how this ad talks about the job of being a troll. Why do you think someone would apply for this job? **Aims of this lecture:** This lecture will examine goals, tactics, and narratives spread by and through the dispersions of the Kremlin's Propaganda Pyramid on Ukraine, Russia, and the West. As this lecture will show, the Kremlin curates its propaganda narratives for different audiences to justify its aggression in Ukraine. For many Ukrainians, Russians are complicit in the propaganda pyramid as a steady percentage (72%) of Russians still support the war and believe President Putin's lies about Ukraine. Russian soldiers are killing innocent Ukrainians; they are not "Kremlin soldiers." To blame only the Kremlin or Putin for aggression and disinformation would overlook the role of Russian citizens who peddle misinformation. While there is a strong argument to refer to "Russian

		disinformation” in the lecture for the reason of collective ownership of responsibility, the authors have chosen “Kremlin disinformation” with some reservations. This lecture will discuss how these narratives influence public opinion worldwide and how individuals can respond to them. It covers the key mechanisms of Kremlin disinformation during the war in Ukraine, which should aid lecturers and students' ability to better evaluate information and distill hoaxes from reality.
		2. Kremlin disinformation in Ukraine (SLIDE 14) **Historical Background (SLIDE 15)** Kremlin propaganda in Ukraine dates back hundreds of years to the Russian empire. In the 18th century, Russian empress Catherine II ordered the creation of a new history of the Russian empire that traced the empire’s origins to Kyivan Rus’, a state which was both the first east Slavic nation and the birthplace of Orthodox Christianity in the region. Reforming the history of the Russian empire around Kyivan Rus meant that Catherine could draw upon the rich cultural and religious heritage of Kyiv to cement her reign, avoiding the relatively short history of Moscow. This move has since served as a cornerstone of the current Russian narrative about the “brotherhood of nations” between Ukraine and Russia, in which Ukraine is seen as the “little brother” of Russia. Moreover, since the founding of the USSR, Russia has been systematically revising history by curating and spreading narratives that completely undermine Ukrainian identity and statehood. These narratives have not changed much over time; the annexation of Crimea in 2013, for instance, was justified by the statement that Crimea "has always been Russian" and represented "a sanctuary of Russian Christianity” since its annexation by Catherine II in 1783. Preceding Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Putin repeated this version of history in his February 21 speech, claiming that modern Ukraine was “entirely created by Russia.”







2.1 Goals

Optional Activity (additional 5 minutes): (SLIDE 16)

Ask the students two questions (Answers can be given verbally, in chat, or through Jamboard)

- What are the ways you've heard that Kremlin propaganda directs its narratives to Ukrainian audiences?
- What do you think are the main goals of Kremlin propaganda in Ukraine for Ukrainian citizens?

Next, proceed to the lecture and compare the students' answers with the Kremlin propaganda messages explained in the section. (SLIDE 17)

1. Divide Ukrainians (SLIDE 18)

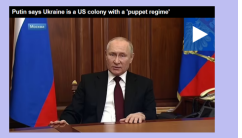
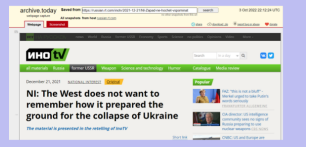
Context:

For decades, the Kremlin has been trying to divide Ukrainians along linguistic, political, and cultural lines. During most of the Soviet period, the Russian language was promoted over the Ukrainian language, which was associated with lower social status. Before and during the full-scale war, Russia reignited the language issue in Ukraine, claiming that the rights of the Russian-speaking population were being violated. Both the Kremlin annexation of Crimea and the occupation of parts of Donetsk and Luhansk in 2014 were justified under of the premise of "protecting the rights of the Russian-speaking population." In reality, there is nothing particularly unusual about the political or linguistic diversity of Ukraine, which echo similar trends all around the world.

Example:

The Kremlin falsely claims that Russian has been outlawed entirely in Ukraine, centering disinformation efforts around the April 2019 language law passed by Ukrainian parliament. The law "on ensuring the functioning of the Ukrainian language as a state language" established mandatory use of the Ukrainian language in most areas of public and communal life, including in mass media and education. However, the law did not forbid the use of Russian or other languages in private communication and religious ceremonies.

		Further Context: The language issue has also been used to support a radical narrative about Ukrainian nationalists or “Nazis” who, according to Kremlin propaganda, make up most of western Ukraine. The Kremlin thus divides Ukrainians into a loyal majority of “Little Russians,” conveying the imperialist view that Ukrainians belong to one larger Russian nation, and a perverse minority of “nationalists” ruled by politicians corrupted by Western influence and therefore obsessed with Ukrainian sovereignty (Source). These claims about the influence of Ukrainian nationalists in the Ukrainian government are deeply tied to the idea of the abuse of the Russian speaking population in Ukraine, and thus serve to further justify military intervention. On the contrary, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine has caused many Russian-speaking Ukrainians to begin using and learning Ukrainian. Further, many Russia sympathizers in Ukraine prior to the invasion are now opposed to ties with Russia (see IRI poll, June 2022). **Summary:** The myth of a divided Ukraine is one way that the Kremlin has sought to legitimize its claims to protecting the rights of ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine. By perpetuating the idea that Ukraine is not a united nation, whether through language or culture, Kremlin propaganda erodes the very principles of Ukrainian territorial integrity and the right of the Ukrainian people to independence. The more divided Ukraine is, the more susceptible the country is not only to Russian military intervention, but to the seeds of distrust sewn by Kremlin propaganda. **Optional Activity** (additional 10 minutes) (SLIDE 19): Work in groups of three and discuss the importance of labels. How does the term “Little Russians” and allegations of nationalism manipulate Ukrainian citizens who believe Ukraine should not become part of Russia? How do the terms manipulate Ukrainian citizens who have some positive sentiments toward Russia and the Soviet Union? What tensions does this labeling cause?

	•How does the term “Little Russians” and allegations of nationalism manipulate Ukrainian citizens who believe Ukraine should not become part of Russia? •How do the terms manipulate Ukrainian citizens who have some positive sentiments toward Russia and the Soviet Union? What tensions does this labeling cause?	
	2. Undermine trust in Western partners • Ukraine as a country exists only as a “puppet” of its Western partners • One of the goals of the network of pro-Kremlin TV channels which operated in Ukraine until their ban in 2021 was to undermine public trust in the EU and NATO. • During the war, the Kremlin has simultaneously attempted to sow despair and frustration among Ukrainians by convincing them of Western partners' betrayal   Sources: https://www.dailymail.co.uk/video/news/video-2619849/Video-Putin-says-Ukraine-colony-puppet-regime.html, https://archive.ph/gOFes	**2.Undermine trust in Western partners (SLIDE 20)** **Context:** A key narrative in Kremlin propaganda is the idea that Ukraine as a country exists only as a “puppet” of its Western partners, entirely dependent on the West and subservient to their political goals. For example, one of the goals of the network of pro-Kremlin TV channels which operated in Ukraine until their ban in 2021 was to undermine public trust in the EU and NATO. These channels, which were linked to the pro-Russian political party “Opposition Platform - For Life,” a party led by Putin’s personal friend Viktor Medvedchuk, spread narratives claiming that Ukraine was under the control of Western partners, such as the US or the IMF. Putin himself echoed these narratives just before the start of the war on Feburary 21, 2022, when he described Ukraine as a “colony with a puppet regime.” By exaggerating Western influence in Ukraine, Kremlin propaganda draws upon Soviet-era fears of NATO expansionism and aggression, threatening Russia’s perceived sphere of influence across post-Soviet Eurasia. During the war, the Kremlin has simultaneously attempted to sow despair and frustration among Ukrainians by convincing them of Western partners’ betrayal, in an attempt to demoralize the Ukrainian population and decrease its resistance to the invasion. This includes the idea that the West is willing to abandon Ukraine on a moment’s notice once it no longer suits its foreign policy objectives (in the case of the US, drawing direct parallels to the war in Afghanistan). These narratives leverage the current energy crisis in Europe with negotiations surrounding the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, as well as the

		long-standing geopolitical and ideological tensions between the US and Russia. Kremlin propaganda even goes so far as to claim that the West has sought to hasten the collapse of Ukraine ever since their support for the Euromaidan protests in 2014. **Example:** On September 11, 2022, the Russian television program *Vesti Nedeli* claimed it had a "confidential document" from the RAND Corporation, which alleged in a bizarre conspiracy that the US had planned the war in Ukraine in advance and had deliberately provoked Russia. Reporter Mikhail Antonov argued that the document, said to be dated January 25, 2022, outlined a US strategy to force Germany into applying sanctions against Russia, in an attempt to weaken Germany's economy. Antonov cited the German outlet Weltexpress as the source of the document, the first German outlet to publish the alleged report. Three days later, the RAND Corporation released an official statement, saying the supposedly leaked report was fake. This case highlights the ability of Kremlin propagandists to draw upon existing narratives in Western media, regardless of the veracity of the original source, to instill distrust in Western institutions and weaken international cooperation in Ukraine. **Summary:** Through portraying Ukraine as a puppet state dependent on a multitude of Western actors ready to betray the Ukrainian cause at any moment, Kremlin propaganda both once again calls into question Ukrainian sovereignty and seeks to decrease faith in Western tactics within Ukraine. It also diverts attention from the fact that ambitions for Euro-Atlantic cooperation are enshrined within Ukraine's own constitution, supported by years of security cooperation with international partners. The less faith that Ukrainian audiences and leaders have in Western partners, the weaker Ukraine becomes defending against Russia's full-scale invasion.

3.Weaken support of Ukrainian political leadership (SLIDE 21)

Context:

Kremlin propaganda has been working to diminish public trust in the Ukrainian authorities, claiming they are dependent on the West and too weak to lead the country. This has included attempts to discredit Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky, even going so far as to spread a rumor he is addicted to cocaine.

Kremlin propaganda attacks on Ukrainian leadership also go after other key figures within the government, seeking to wholly undermine the trust of Ukrainian citizens in their government. For example, at the beginning of August, the Security Service of Ukraine reported the seizure of a bot farm that had been spreading fakes about a supposed conflict between the Office of the President and the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Valery Zaluzhny, as well as promoting a campaign to discredit First Lady Olena Zelenska. Telegram channels that have been attributed by the Ukrainian government to the GRU, Russia's foreign intelligence agency, spread claims that the Ukrainian government was corrupt and unprepared for the war, and that oligarchs had "paid Zelensky for the right to leave the country."

Example:

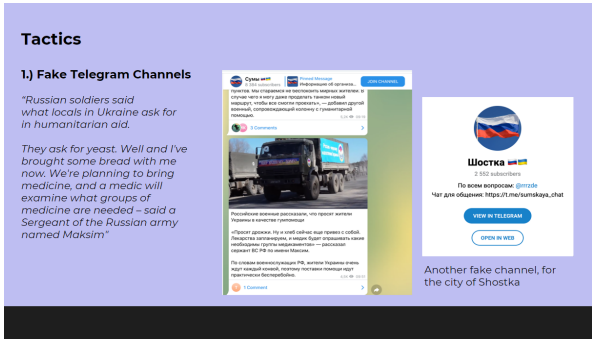
On March 2, the Ukrainian government's Center for Strategic Communication warned the Kremlin was likely preparing a "deepfake" video (an AI-generated video that is intended to fake the likeness of an individual) that appeared to show president Volodymyr Zelensky surrendering to Russian forces. A few days later, a fake and heavily manipulated video depicting Zelensky appearing to tell his soldiers to lay down their arms started circulating on social media and was placed on a Ukrainian news website by hackers.

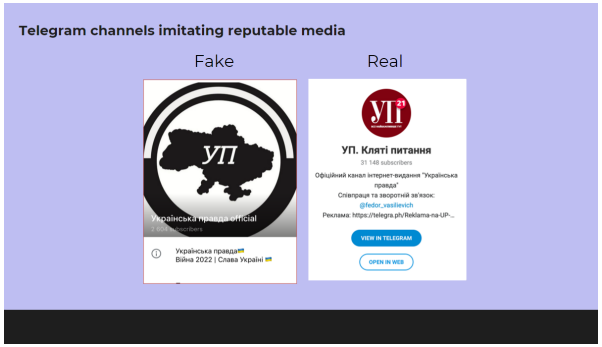
VIDEO: [A copy of the video on YouTube with subtitles can be shown to the class here in this France 24 segment (0:41-1:13)] (SLIDE 22)

The national television station Ukraine 24 confirmed that hackers managed to send the fake Zelensky message out on live television through the ticker (the scrolling text at the bottom of a news broadcast), and the video showed up briefly on the news station's website.

		Because of the warning from the Ukrainian government, the deepfake failed to unleash its intended confusion and mayhem. It was a "best-case scenario" for a situation like this. The Ukrainian government had engaged in extensive "prebunking," warning of the possible manipulated video before it emerged. Regardless of where it came from and its quality, however, the video could potentially make some people question the veracity of videos of Zelensky in the future. **Summary:** Eroding trust in domestic leadership and authority is a key tactic for the Kremlin in Ukraine, spreading internal discontent amongst Ukrainians to weaken opposition to the Russian invasion. Propagating blatant disinformation about Ukrainian leadership therefore allows the Kremlin to misdirect attention to Ukrainian politics and away from the external threat posed by the Kremlin.
		4. Demoralize the population (SLIDE 23) **Context:** Propaganda often relies on tactics that persuade people to give up on the possibility of finding the truth in media by making all media appear untrustworthy. A main tactic by Kremlin propagandists has been to instill fear and hopelessness in Ukrainians through social media, spreading disinformation about the Ukrainian government and supposed atrocities committed by Ukrainian forces. At the beginning of the full-scale war, the Kremlin tried to convince Ukrainians that they had been abandoned by their own president and government. For example, an operation to spread disinformation on social media by the Russian hacker group Secondary Infektion, suspected to have ties to the Kremlin, falsely claimed that Zelenskyy had committed suicide in his military bunker in Kyiv due to Ukraine's failures in the war. Attempts to demoralize Ukrainians also include false accusations of war crimes allegedly committed by Ukrainian forces on Ukrainian soil. For instance, the Russian Defense Ministry spread the claim that Ukraine was bombing its own

		POWs in Russian pre-trial detention centers to eliminate the evidence of Ukrainian surrenders and prevent POWs from speaking out against the Ukrainian government. Kremlin propagandists also exploit the economic vulnerabilities of Ukrainians, overplaying energy and food crises and blaming them on the shortcomings of the Ukrainian government. For example, just as the weather started cooling down, pro-Kremlin media spread the idea that Ukraine may be left without electricity and heating due to sanctions, writing that in Kyiv, "centralized heating was cancelled," with the mayor calling on residents to "buy warm things." **Example:** In the first month of the war, multiple pro-Kremlin social media posters and Russian state news sites spread the false claim that Zelensky fled Ukraine after the beginning of the full-scale Russian invasion on February 24. This claim originated from a statement from Russian State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin made on his Telegram channel on February 26. Volodin's supposed source was Ukrainian lawmakers who "tried to meet with [Zelensky] in Kiev." These claims were soon debunked by Zelensky himself, as he posted his first video with members of his cabinet in Kyiv the night of February 26, with the caption "We're here. We're in Kyiv. We protect Ukraine." Metadata from the video collected by independent analysts confirmed that it was recorded on its day of publication. **Summary:** Messaging surrounding the supposed failures of the Ukrainian government and the impending energy and food crises not only serves to demoralize Ukrainians to make them more susceptible to Kremlin propaganda and less willing to resist occupation, but to shift blame in the war away from Russia. Essentially, blaming egregious war crimes and economic destabilization on Ukrainian leadership shifts the moral paradigm of the war to one where Russia is a benign actor.

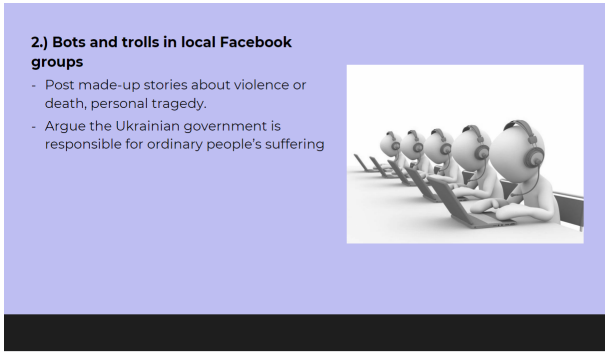




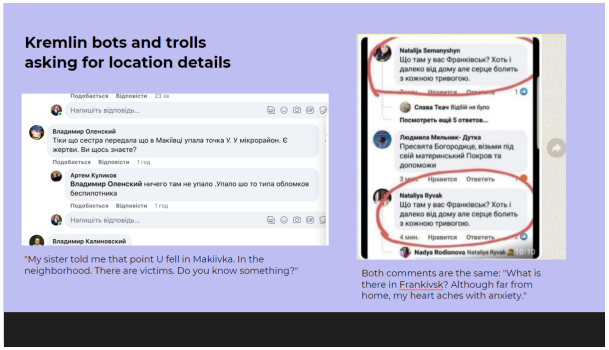
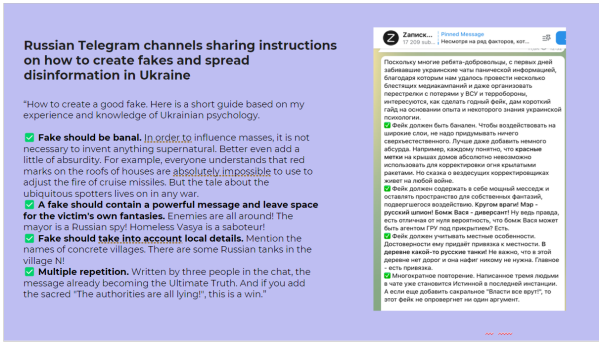
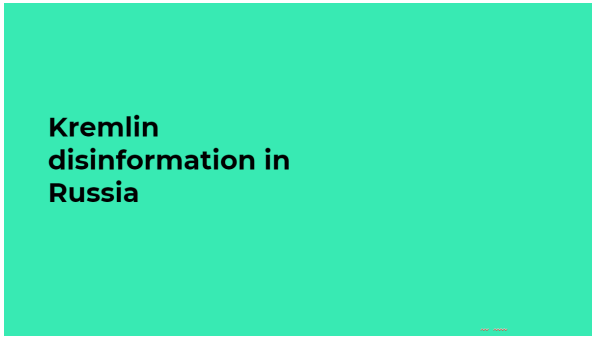
2.2 Tactics during the war (SLIDE 24)
With the start of the war, the Kremlin intensified its malign information efforts in Ukraine, relying on a variety of tactics that make full use of social media such as Facebook and Telegram to spread propaganda narratives.

1. Fake Telegram channels
Example: Sumy region. This slide shows two screenshots of fake Telegram channels (channels posting Kremlin disinformation while posing as local Ukrainian news sources) representing towns in the Sumy region in northeastern Ukraine. These channels post news as if the towns were already occupied by Russia, pushing the narrative that the Ukrainian army has abandoned them and that Russia will protect them.

Example: Telegram channels imitating reputable media (SLIDE 25). These screenshots show a channel "Ukrainska Pravda Official" pretending to be the well-known Ukrainian newspaper "Ukrainska Pravda" (a screenshot of their real Telegram channel is provided on the right of the slide).



2. Bots and trolls increase the reach and uptake of propaganda (SLIDE 26)
One of the reasons that these Telegram channels are so effective is due to the thousands of Kremlin bots and trolls tasked with amplifying their messages. Since the start of the war alone, the Ukrainian government has reported 1,500 Telegram channels and another 1,500 fake Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok accounts, including bots, for spreading Kremlin propaganda. The primary aim of these bots is to demoralize Ukrainians and diminish trust in Ukrainian leadership. Ukrainian experts observed that they post made-up stories about violence or death, promoting the message that the Ukrainian government is responsible for the suffering of ordinary citizens. The goal of these comments is to sow panic and provoke an emotional reaction, more importantly redirecting blame for atrocities from the Kremlin onto the Ukrainian government.

	 	Another tactic the bots and trolls use, according to the Center for Combatting Disinformation, is asking for location details in comments and local chatrooms (SLIDE 27). The Kremlin has been using this to find out about the extent of damage from their bombings and to adjust future airstrikes. The accounts thus become a convenient way to gather intelligence about the situation on the ground in Ukraine. Kremlin bots and trolls are often not difficult to identify. Profiles of the trolls and bots that spread these messages usually do not display any information, have one photo (typically a stock photo), and have little to no other activity on their page. Likes under their posts or photos often belong to Ukrainians who came across their comments and decided to support their "compatriots" by liking their posts or profile picture. **Optional post from Russian Telegram on how to spread fakes (SLIDE 28):** The Ukrainian Center for Combating Disinformation uncovered a Russian Telegram channel with over 250,000 subscribers, "Notes of Veterans," that was sharing instructions on how to create fakes and spread disinformation in Ukraine. These instructions were shared publicly and show the depth of knowledge Kremlin propagandists have regarding the psychology behind effective disinformation campaigns, particularly those targeted at Ukraine.
		**3. Kremlin disinformation in Russia: Goals, tactics, and key narratives (SLIDE 29)** **Optional Activity (additional 5 minutes) (SLIDE 30):** Ask the students two questions: 1. What are the ways you've heard the Kremlin propaganda directs its narratives to its domestic audience of Russian citizens? 2. What do you think are the main goals of Kremlin propaganda in Russia for Russian citizens?

- What are the ways you've heard the Kremlin propaganda directs its narratives to its domestic audience of Russian citizens?
- What do you think are the main goals of Kremlin propaganda in Russia for Russian citizens?

Goals

1. Instill blind belief in President Putin
2. Unite the nation around the common enemy of the West
3. Undermine trust in the media
4. Increase support for military intervention in Ukraine

1. Instill blind belief in President Putin

- Over the past two decades, Russian President Vladimir Putin has worked tirelessly on his personal image to achieve political legitimacy
- In these narratives, Putin is positioned as the authoritative masculine protector of Russia, someone who brings stability to the country through shielding it against an array of threats

Next, proceed to the lecture and compare the students' answers with the Kremlin propaganda messages proposed in the lecture. (SLIDE 31)

3.1 Goals

1. Instill blind belief in President Putin (SLIDE 32)

Context:
Over the past two decades, Russian President Vladimir Putin has worked tirelessly on his personal image to achieve political legitimacy. Images of Putin on horseback, practicing judo, arm-wrestling, and strolling bare-chested by a river in Siberia were spread throughout Russian state media in an attempt to portray him as a "macho" strongman figure. In these narratives, Putin is positioned as the authoritative masculine protector of Russia, someone who brings stability to the country through shielding it against an array of threats, whether that be Western democracy or Chechen terrorism.

Example:
In 2007, Russian newspaper *Komsomolskaia Pravda* published a a series of photos of Putin on his fishing trip with the prince of Monaco, followed by an article titled "Become Like Putin," containing advice for civil servants and elected officials on how to exercise in order to achieve a Putinesque physique. Just a year later, the song "One like Putin" was released, in which the female duo *Poyushchie vmeste* express their desire for a man like Putin, who is strong, sober, and would neither abuse nor abandon them.

Summary:
Encouraging blind trust in and admiration of Putin discourages Russian citizens from thinking critically about the policies and actions of his regime. By portraying Putin simultaneously the protector and father of the Russian nation, the Kremlin builds a narrative in which the centralization of power and crushing of political opposition is legitimized to the public.

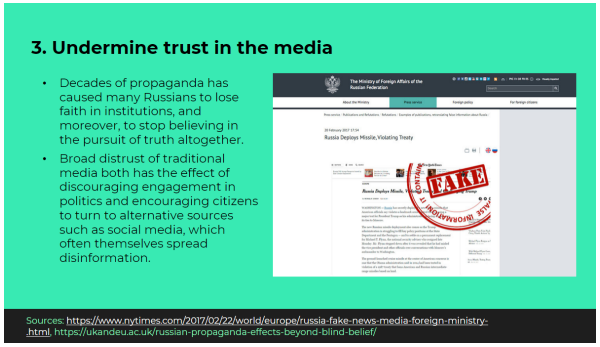
2. Unite the nation around common enemies – the West and NATO (SLIDE 33)

Context:
The demise of Western civilization is one of the Kremlin's oldest disinformation tropes, with variations of the narrative of "the decaying west" dating as far back as the 19th century. In these narratives, the Kremlin pushes the notion that Western civilization is collapsing due to its support for liberal movements such as LGBT rights and feminism. By forming a "values"-based disinformation narrative built on the concepts of conservatism and "family values," supported by the Russian Orthodox Church, Russia argues it serves as a moral counterweight to the moral decay and "decadence" of the West. Geopolitically, this means leading the opposition to liberal democracy and the role the US and other Western powers have on the international stage in promoting it.

Example:
This (SLIDE 34) 2015 political cartoon from Russian state news agency RIA Novosti depicts Europe's alleged moral decay, from Hitler, to sexual deviance, to a rabid hyena.

Activity: *Discuss the cartoon with your class. What does it imply about Europe's past and future? What sorts of "threats" to Russia might the Kremlin be trying to portray in this image? What does this say about how Russia sees itself?*

Summary:
By spreading narratives about the collapse of Western civilization, the Kremlin seeks to unite everyday Russians against the common enemy of the West, whether that be in the form of the US, the EU, or NATO. Not only is the West posed as an enemy in the typical "Us-vs-Them" fashion, but it also serves as a warning to Russians about what Russia could become without Putin as the protector of the Russian nation against liberalism and moral degeneracy.

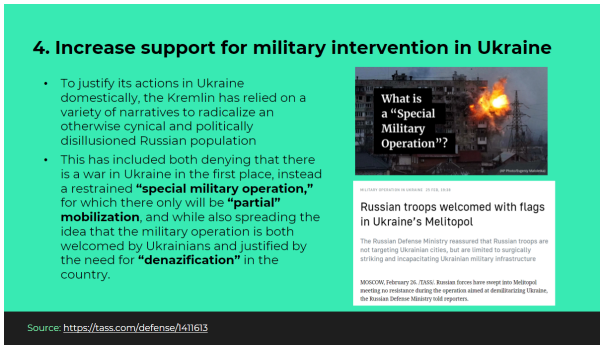


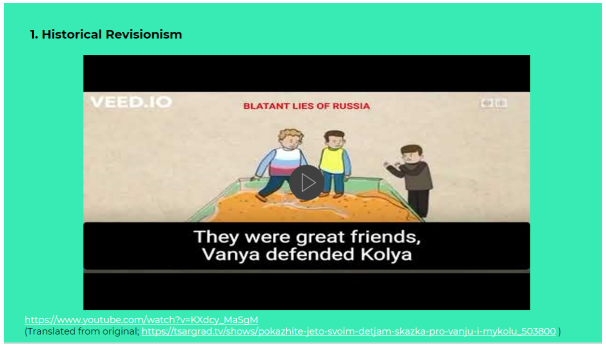
3. Undermine trust in the media (SLIDE 35)

Context:
A significant legacy of the Soviet Union which persists in Russia today is the industry and culture of manipulating the truth. Decades of propaganda has caused many Russians to lose faith in institutions, and moreover, to stop believing in the pursuit of truth altogether. In 2016, University of Birmingham researcher Dr. Maren Rohe conducted interviews with Moscow State University students who were fluent in either English or German and who often used international media in these languages. The students displayed an extremely critical stance towards all news, no matter the origin.

Example:
One of the ways that the Kremlin erodes the public's trust of the media is through declaring news it disagrees with as "fake." Even before the war, the Russian foreign ministry dedicated a section of its website to labeling articles from Western outlets such as The New York Times, Bloomberg, The Daily Telegraph and NBC News as fake. Since the start of the war in Ukraine, the Kremlin has only strengthened and expanded its laws criminalizing "fake news," particularly "false information" about the Russian army. A law passed in Russian parliament in March threatens those who spread false information about the Russian government with fines of 1.5 million rubles (around $23,000) and prison sentences of up to 15 years.

Summary:
Paradoxically, cynicism is useful to the state. When people stop trusting any institutions or having any values, they can easily be spun into a conspiratorial vision of the world. Broad distrust of traditional media both has the effect of discouraging engagement in politics and encouraging citizens to turn to alternative sources such as social media, which often themselves spread disinformation. If Russian citizens are disillusioned from politics, they are less likely to mobilize against the Kremlin in the event of an opposition movement. Depoliticized people also do not typically hold coherent opinions, and can

		believe contradictory accounts without noticing their incompatibility, a useful tactic for Kremlin propagandists to avoid scrutiny.
3.1		**4. Increase support for military intervention in Ukraine (SLIDE 36)** **Context:** Putin, now more than ever, must rely on Kremlin propaganda to bury the truth about the invasion of Ukraine to Russians. Indeed, in order to justify its actions in Ukraine domestically, the Kremlin has relied on a variety of narratives to radicalize an otherwise cynical and politically disillusioned Russian population, many of whom have Ukrainian family and friends. This has included both denying that there is a war in Ukraine in the first place, instead a restrained "special military operation," for which there only will be "partial" mobilization, and while also spreading the idea that the military operation is both welcomed by Ukrainians and justified by the need for "denazification" in the country. **Example:** All the justifications that Putin outlined in his notorious early-morning speech on February 24, 2022 were intensively discussed and repeated by hosts and guests of prime-time TV shows. To the extent that Russian television shows discuss casualties, they attribute them to Ukrainians, who, according to Russian state TV, use "human shields" and prevent their own citizens from fleeing through humanitarian corridors. **Summary:** The Kremlin seeks to radicalize Russians on the issue of the full-scale invasion in preparation for what the Kremlin likely sees will be a lasting war in Ukraine. This is essential for the Kremlin, as many Russians are at best apathetic, and at worst completely hostile to the idea of their fathers, sons, or brothers being sent to die in a foreign country at Putin's will. Moreover, manipulating Russians' perceptions of truth is a much less costly, and more effective, way of preventing a democratic uprising than violent suppression.



3.2 Tactics

1. Historical Revisionism (SLIDE 37)

When history does not align with the Kremlin's political objectives, Russian government officials and their proxy voices deny historical events or distort historical narratives to cast Russia in a more favorable light and serve its domestic and geopolitical agenda. Reinventing history is an old tactic used to support imperialistic ambitions and the narrative that Ukrainians and Russians are "one people."

Example 5: Propaganda cartoons (SLIDE 38)

(SLIDE 38) On this slide is a still from a cartoon created by the conservative pro-Kremlin channel Tsargrad TV in March 2022 to promote the "one people" narrative among Russians. The three-minute video shows children wearing t-shirts representing Ukraine, Germany, Russia, and the US. It starts with the inseparable friends Ukraine and Russia playing together in a sandbox and sitting next to each other at school before Ukraine leaves to hang out by himself, representing its independence from the Soviet Union.

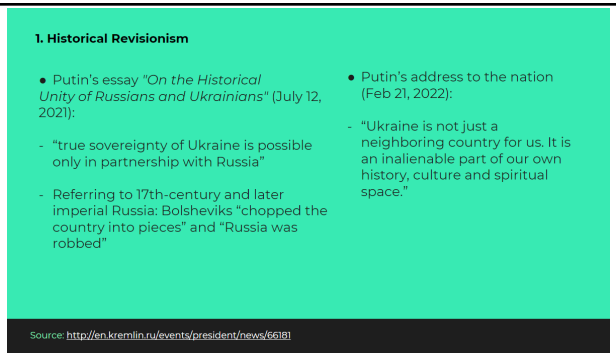
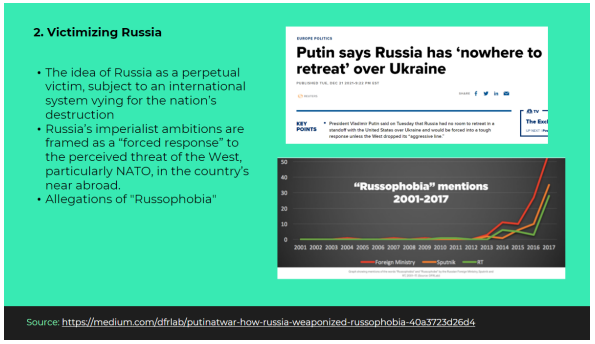
[VIDEO] Watch the cartoon with English subtitles

The video, which has since gone viral on social media, goes on to explain the war in Donbas and is captioned "How to explain to a child what the war in Donbas is and why Russia and Ukraine are fighting?" Directed at children, the cartoon aims to teach the youngest generation of Russians the Kremlin's version of the truth about the conflict in Donbas.

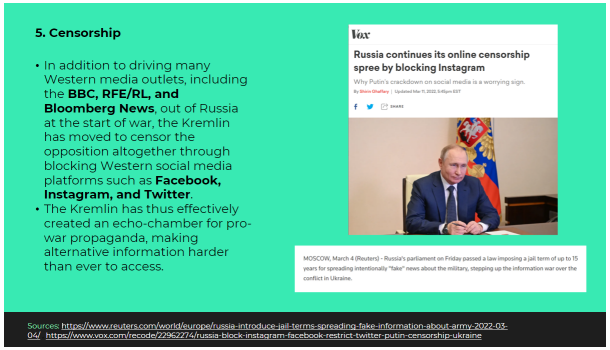
Activity: *Discuss the video with your class. What does the video imply about Russia's involvement in the conflict in Donbas? How would you describe how Ukraine is portrayed in the story?*

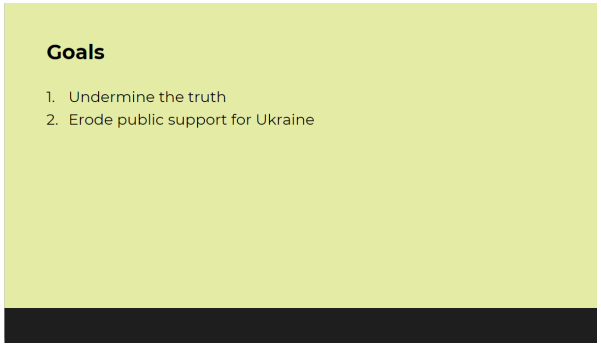
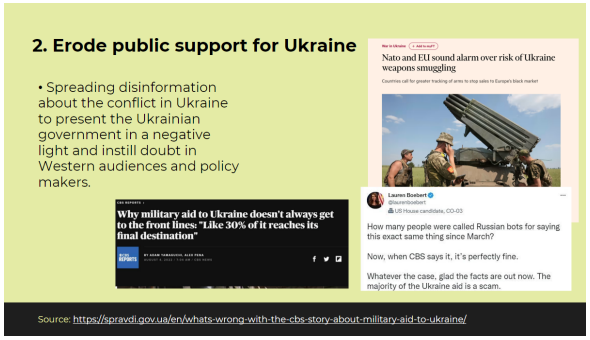
Example 6: Putin's essay "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians" (SLIDE 39)

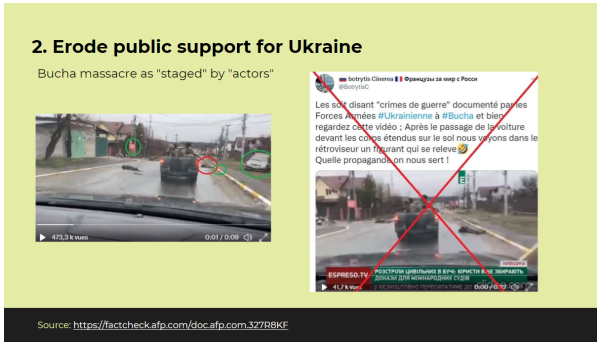
On July 12, 2021, shortly following the end of the first buildups of Russian troops on the Ukrainian border, Russian President Vladimir Putin published an

		essay titled "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians." The essay denies the existence of Ukraine as an independent nation, openly questioning the legitimacy of Ukraine's contemporary borders. Noting the large number of ethnic Russians in Ukraine, Putin compares the consequences of "the formation of an ethnically pure Ukrainian state, aggressive towards Russia" to those of weapons of mass destruction. Swedish economist Anders Åslund branded the article "a masterclass in disinformation" and "one step short of a declaration of war." The essay has been widely publicized and promoted by the Kremlin and is included in the list of mandatory literature for Russian servicemen.
		**2. Victimizing Russia (SLIDE 40)** To redirect blame for its aggressive actions, the Kremlin relies heavily on the idea of Russia as a perpetual victim, subject to an international system vying for the nation's destruction. In this narrative, Russia's imperialist ambitions are framed as a "forced response" to the perceived threat of the West, particularly NATO, in the country's near abroad. Moreover, Kremlin propaganda has doubled down on the claim that Western institutions are deeply "Russophobic," for challenging Putin's regime. Since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the use of the word "Russophobia" in Kremlin media has exploded, used to attack foreign critics of the Russian government. Referring to the Euromaidan protests in Ukraine that saw pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych removed from power in March 2014, Putin once again used the label of "Russophobe": "Nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes, and anti-Semites executed this coup. They continue to set the tone in Ukraine to this day." This narrative has only been amplified since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, as anti-Russian sentiment in Europe grows.

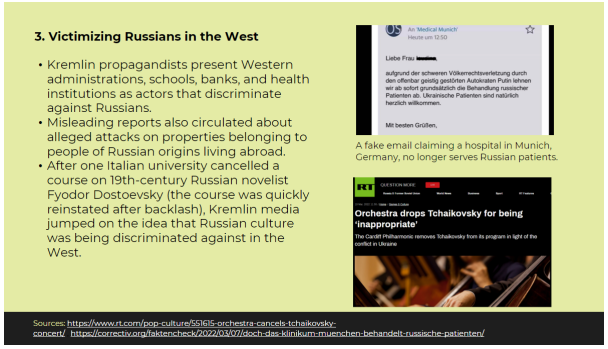
		3. Dehumanizing Ukrainians (SLIDE 41) Kremlin propaganda since the start of the war has used the tactic of systemically labelling Ukrainians as "Nazis" to minimize Russian war crimes and atrocities against innocent civilians in Ukraine. By systematically equating all Ukrainians with Nazis, Russian state media attempts to dehumanize the Ukrainian population and present them as a monolithic enemy, once again radicalizing Russian citizens against Ukraine. Example 7: RIA Novosti article: "What Russia should do with Ukraine." On April 3, the Kremlin-owned news agency RIA Novosti published an article titled "What Russia should do with Ukraine," written by Kremlin-affiliated film director and political philosopher Timofey Sergeytsev. Among other revisionist claims, the article states, "Ukraine may not exist as a national state. Any attempt to create it leads to Nazism." Notably, Sergeytsev uses the term "Nazi" extensively throughout the article to refer to anything associated with the Ukrainian government and authorities in Kyiv. The article creates a direct link between the terms "de-Nazification" and "de-Ukrainization," explicitly calling for the genocide of Ukrainians.
		4. Justification through religion (SLIDE 42) Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian Orthodox Church has evolved into an arm of the Kremlin, and as religious scholar Sergei Chapnin describes, one of Putin's own "propaganda tools." The Church has served an important role for the Kremlin in providing a moral and religious framework for the invasion of Ukraine, allowing propaganda to present the war as a type of holy crusade in which individual sacrifice is glorified. Patriarch Kirill, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, who has long been a key ideological ally of Putin, publicly supported Putin's war in Ukraine, calling it a "metaphysical" struggle against a "godless" international order. The church was also present in providing ideological support for the September 2022 "partial" mobilization in Russia, with Patriarch Kirill giving a sermon stating that Russian soldiers who die in Ukraine are committing a "sacrifice" that "washes away all their sins."

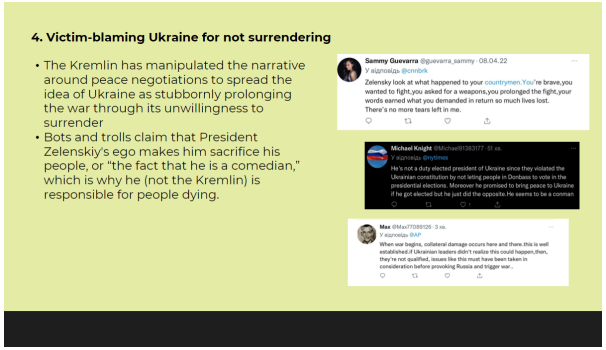
		**5. Censorship of Western Platforms (SLIDE 43)** One of the ways that the Kremlin amplifies its propaganda messages domestically is through blocking any opposition narratives that could challenge official accounts of the war in Ukraine. In addition to driving many Western media outlets, including the BBC, RFE/RL, and Bloomberg News, out of Russia at the start of war, the Kremlin has moved to censor the opposition altogether through blocking Western social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Although these sites are still available via VPN, for the average Russian they remain out of reach, overshadowed by the constant, easily accessible flow of propaganda messaging from Russian state media. At the same time, Western companies have withdrawn from doing business in Russia. TikTok and Netflix suspended their services in Russia, while Apple, Samsung, Microsoft, and other tech companies have pulled back or withdrawn entirely from Russia. The Kremlin has thus effectively created an echo-chamber for pro-war propaganda, making alternative information harder than ever to access.
	Kremlin disinformation in the West	4. Kremlin disinformation in the West: Goals and tactics (SLIDE 44) 4.1 Goals (SLIDE 45) **1. Undermine the truth (SLIDE 46)** **Context:** Unlike in Ukraine and Russia, Kremlin propaganda in the West seeks to confuse and overwhelm its audience, rather than convince. The logic follows that if there is enough doubt about what is true amidst a cacophony of wild and conflicting claims, people will be paralyzed into doing (and believing) nothing. In other words, rather than take a side, these campaigns create decision paralysis that leads to inaction. This "firehose" model of propaganda, as described by RAND, is "high-output, contradictory, and multichannel."

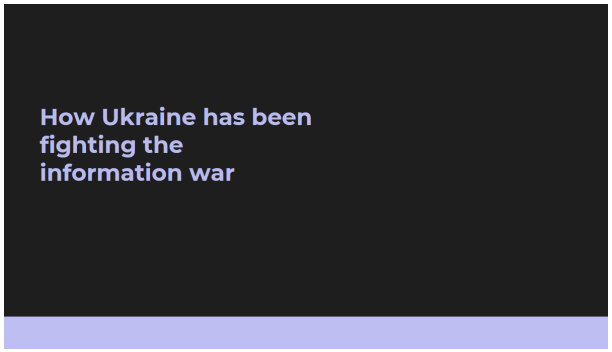
	 	**Example:** Often the Kremlin makes multiple contradictory and inconsistent claims to confuse audiences about the reality of contested events. One such example is the myriad of explanations offered for the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight 17, the passenger plain shot down over eastern Ukraine in 2014, killing nearly 300 civilians. Western sources at the time presented large sums of evidence indicating that pro-Russian separatists shot down the plane. Russia's Defense Ministry denied the allegations, first alleging a Ukrainian warplane was seen flying near the plane before it was downed, then that it had something to do with the US satellite flying over Ukraine at the same time, and later that it was shot down by a Ukrainian missile, not a Russian one. Russian state-controlled network RT suggested the plane was shot down in a failed attempt to assassinate Vladimir Putin. **Summary:** Exposed to a large amount of information at once, audiences become supremely malleable, and dangerously disengaged. This creates the optimal situation for the Kremlin, in which Ukraine is left isolated from Western support amongst an environment of public apathy.
		**2. Erode public support for Ukraine (SLIDE 47)** **Context:** When the Kremlin is not trying to confuse audiences into decision paralysis, it turns to spreading disinformation about the conflict in Ukraine to present the Ukrainian government in a negative light and instill doubt in Western audiences and policy makers. These narratives are aimed specifically at portraying Ukraine as opportunistic and exploitative of support from NATO, the US, and other Western actors. **Examples:** <u>Example 10: Weapons</u> Since the start of the war in Ukraine, the Kremlin has conducted a systemic propaganda campaign to discredit the supply of Western weapons to Ukraine.

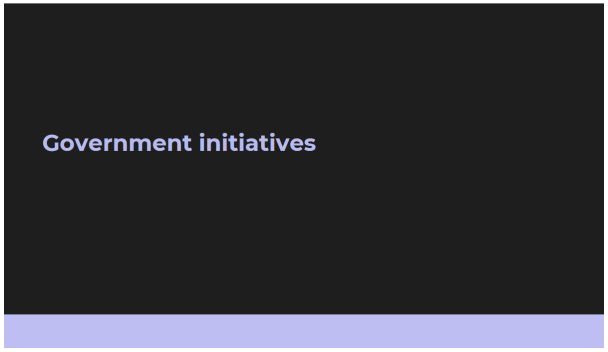
		One of these narratives, claiming that the majority of Western weapons sent to Ukraine were being trafficked, made it into mainstream news, when *The Financial Times* and CBS reported that Europol had allegedly detected signs of weapons smuggling from Ukraine on to Europe's black market. These stories prompted a strong reaction from critics of Biden in the US, who used it as evidence that the US president was wasting taxpayer money on Ukraine, and also was picked up by Russian state news. The spokesman for Europol, Jan Op Gen Oorth, later denied these allegations. He stated that the report was not about specific incidents, but only about the potential threat of a possible increase in the illegal circulation of firearms in the EU due to the war in Ukraine. Example 11: Bucha (SLIDE 48) In April, Ukraine accused withdrawn Russian troops of massacring over 450 civilians in the small town of Bucha outside of Kyiv. The Kremlin denied it, calling it a "heinous provocation," and claiming the evidence was staged with actors by the Ukrainian government. Pro-Russia social media users spread this narrative, citing a video which seemed to show one of the corpses raising his hand. The Russian Defense Ministry itself shared the video on April 3 on its official Telegram channel, claiming that one of the corpses can be seen moving his arm and another standing up in the rear-view mirror. Several users on social networks pointed out that the corpse in view was not moving (it was just a drop of rain on the windshield of the car in which the video was filmed), and journalists from AFP confirmed that the body in the video was the same they had photographed upon visiting Bucha on April 2. Example 12: Discrediting refugees (SLIDE 49) At the beginning of the full-scale war, Kremlin propaganda turned to confusing the public about the war in Ukraine and discrediting the plight of Ukrainian refugees, writing about Ukrainians who were allegedly "coming to Europe to destroy the European economy."

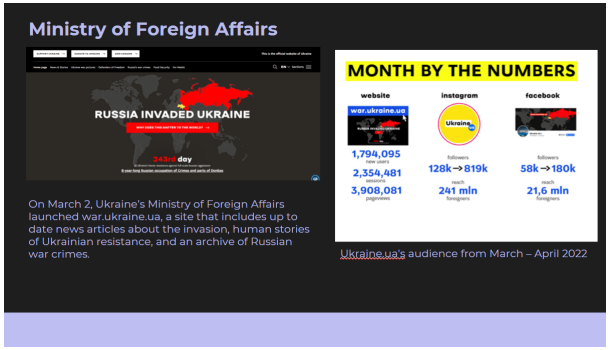
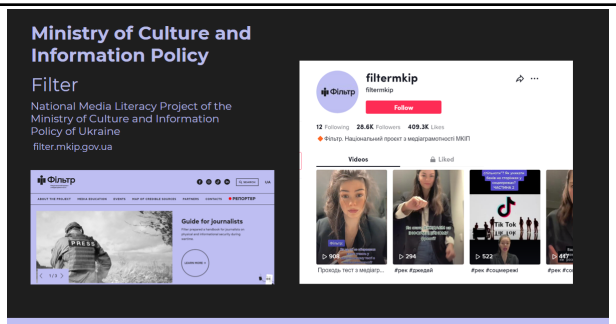
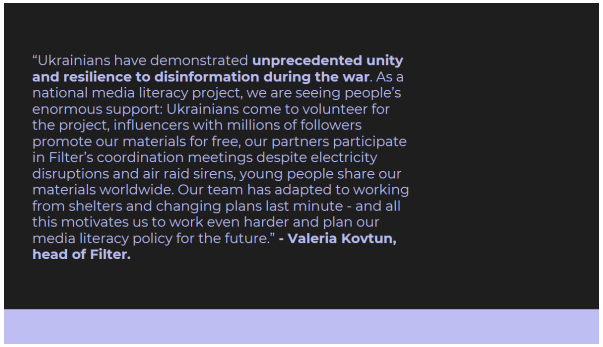
		Kremlin propaganda often weaponizes the likelihood of social media users taking information online at face value. For example, a video filmed by a man inside a littered, defaced train went viral on German social media. Accompanied by a caption claiming the litter was left by Ukrainian refugees, the video was widely shared – and later refuted by independent fact-checkers from the German non-profit Correctiv. The culprits were in fact football fans, and it was later confirmed the train was not used to transport Ukrainian refugees. **Summary:** By invalidating Western weapon supplies, support for refugees, and accusations of war crimes in Ukraine, the Kremlin seeks to undermine support for Ukraine in the West. Through this, the Kremlin hopes to again separate Ukraine from its Western allies, leaving the country vulnerable to the Kremlin invasion.
		4.2 Tactics (SLIDE 50) **1. Threaten with World War III and nuclear weapons** Although we cannot completely exclude the use of nuclear weapons from possibility, for many years, Kremlin propaganda has been using its nuclear capabilities as a fearmongering tactic to push the idea that Western countries are provoking escalation to World War III through their support for Ukraine. State propaganda TV shows in Russia regularly discuss the looming potential for World War III, with propagandist Dmitry Kiselyov stating in 2014 that in the event of nuclear war, Russia could "turn America into radioactive ashes." Russia's army even has its own TV channel that works 24/7 to tout Russia's military prowess. In this way, nuclear weapons have become a tool for Kremlin propagandists not only to reaffirm Russia's status as a great power, but to promote the narrative that Western intervention in Ukraine is reckless, dangerous, and motivated purely by political goals.

		2. Portray Ukrainians (and Ukraine) in a negative light (SLIDE 51) The Kremlin has worked extensively over the past decade to discredit the image of Ukraine among its western partners. For example, the war in Donbas was referred to by many experts as the Ukrainian "crisis," distracting attention from the real problem — Russia's occupation of those territories. Ukraine was also depicted as a failed state, an impoverished, corrupt puppet of its Western allies. The fact that the country has been at war for eight years has been often diminished or even ignored as the war was presented as an internal problem, rather than one created from abroad by the Kremlin. Kremlin propaganda also draws on Western efforts to combat right-wing extremism to promote narratives centering on neo-Nazis and ultranationalists in Ukraine. As the Ukrainian Center for Combating Disinformation states, "Comparing Ukrainians with Nazis is an outdated technique of the Kremlin to manipulate historical memory." These narratives are particularly salient in Germany because of the country's history. In Poland, Kremlin bots spread fake news about Ukrainian refugee women that came to Poland not because were fleeing Russian aggression, but to seduce Polish men.
		**3. Victimizing Russians in the West (SLIDE 52)** Kremlin propagandists present Western administrations, schools, banks, and health institutions as actors that discriminate against Russians. Debunked claims included that the University Hospital of Munich (LMU) no longer wants to treat Russian citizens, that Deutsche Bank and Postbank sanctioned all their Russian clients, or even that Russian children were kicked out of German schools. These fakes target Germany specifically due to the large amount (around 2.5-3 million) of Russian immigrants living in the country, many of whom have limited German language skills. Misleading reports also circulated about alleged attacks on properties belonging to people of Russian origins living abroad. A hoax claimed that fascists destroyed KVG buses in Hittfeld, Germany, because the owner of the bus company had Russian roots. Other decontextualized videos denounced damages to cars in Hamburg, Berlin and Hannover because the cars had

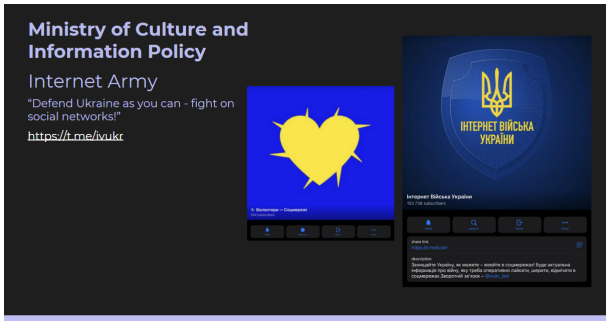
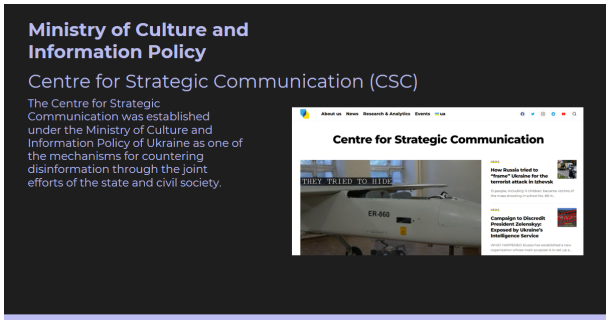
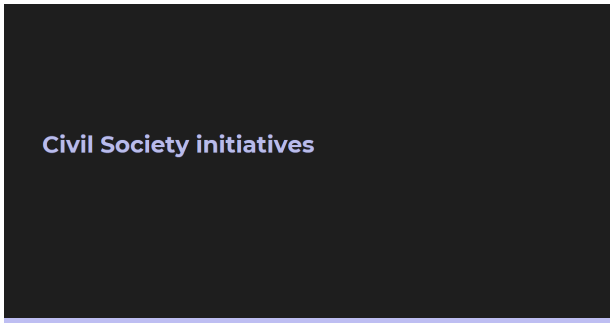
		Russian license plates or the car owners had participated in Russian demonstrations. In most cases, Ukrainian refugees were blamed for the vandalism. According to local police, there were “no indications at all” that the damages to the cars, all found to have German license plates, were related to the war. After one Italian university cancelled a course on 19th-century Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky (the course was quickly reinstated after backlash), Kremlin media jumped on the idea that Russian culture was being discriminated against in the West. Russian state media outlet RT, for example, was quick to pick up stories about Tchaikovsky concerts being cancelled and a Russian opera singer being fired for not denouncing Putin. By emphasizing the victimization of Russians abroad, the Kremlin attempts to shift attention from atrocities in Ukraine, reversing the moral paradigm to one where the West, and implicitly Ukraine, are the aggressors.
		**4. Victim-blaming Ukraine for not surrendering (SLIDE 53)** The Kremlin has manipulated the narrative around peace negotiations to spread the idea of Ukraine as stubbornly prolonging the war through its unwillingness to surrender. In the comments sections in articles from BBC and The Guardian, there has been a massive invasion of "experts" (bots and trolls), who have been consistently spreading various disinformation narratives. This includes promoting the need to surrender to save lives, with a very particular repeating detail: “It is President Zelensky who should stop this.” They claim that the president’s ego makes him sacrifice his people, or “the fact that he is a comedian,” which is why he (not the Kremlin) is responsible for people dying. This is even though surrendering is not a possibility for Ukraine if it is to continue existing as a sovereign state. As the Center for Combating Disinformation reported in August, the Kremlin promotes the idea that it is ready to negotiate with Ukraine and encourages the image of Russia as a peace-loving country. “The aggressor continues to

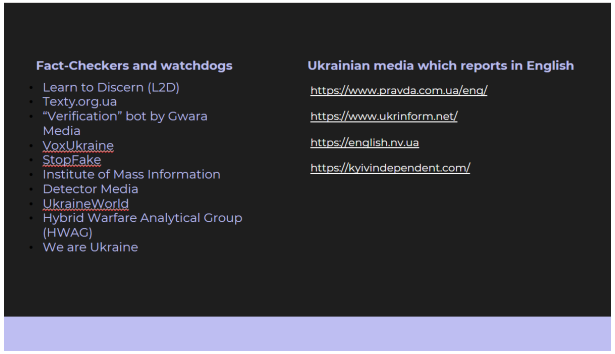
		misinform about the propensity for peace, emphasizing the signing of a peace agreement on the export of blocked Ukrainian grain. At the same time, Russia does not stop shelling residential areas of Ukraine and killing the civilian population," the Center wrote.
		**5.How Ukraine has been fighting the information war. (SLIDE 54)** The biggest effort to build Ukrainian information resilience was made by civil society organizations, supported primarily by Western donors. Some of them started their activities even before the 2013 Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity and the first Russian invasion in 2014, but after these events they became increasingly active. A wide variety of activities were implemented during these years, among them: fact-checking initiatives, websites dedicated to improving media literacy, online courses (for example, IREX's "Very Verified" course), trainings, integration of media literacy into formal education, information campaigns, and independent media development. Some of them were implemented in cooperation with government institutions, such as IREX's Learn to Discern media literacy program, which closely cooperates with the Ukrainian Ministry of Education. At the same time, there was a clear lack of coordination between different government institutions and lack of consistency in countering disinformation efforts especially because of frequent changes in government bodies. Just a year before the full-scale invasion, the Center for Strategic Communication, the media literacy project Filter, and Center for Countering Disinformation were created, along with better communication between government bodies. As a result, the Ukrainian government was able to respond to the full-scale invasion with a strengthened, unified effort to combat disinformation. **Optional Activity (additional 10-15 minutes):** Work in two or three groups for 5 minutes to brainstorm 3-4 possible initiatives the Ukrainian government could take to counter Kremlin propaganda. At the end of the discussion, the group representative should present their plan to the class.

		Kremlin propaganda failed to meet its goals in Ukraine not just because of the resiliency of Ukrainian civil society, but because of a concerted effort from the international community, Ukrainian government, civil society, local media outlets, and grassroots initiatives. Together, through the will of the Ukrainian people, this concerted effort prepared Ukraine for the Kremlin's information war by building trust as well as media and information literacy and allowing media and fact checkers to flourish and build credibility to counter Kremlin disinformation. Effective and transparent communication from President Zelensky, who has been supported with strong U.S. and British intelligence concerning Russia's plans also prepared the Ukrainian population for the incoming barrage of disinformation. After 2014, the Ukrainian government understood the threat from Kremlin disinformation was urgent, as did generous donors (FCDO, USDOS, USAID, Swedish and Canadian embassies, and OSCE to name a few). It opened the Ukrainian government to widespread support for civil society projects, such as Learn to Discern and the development of a national media literacy project under the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy, Filter.
		**Government Initiatives (SLIDE 55)** **<u>Ministry of Foreign Affairs (SLIDE 56)</u>** On March 2, Ukraine's Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched a website https://war.ukraine.ua/ that includes up to date news articles about the invasion, human stories of Ukrainian resistance, and an archive of Russian war crimes. Since February 24, the Ukrainian government has reached an audience of 433 million through its social media and digital outreach. "Every two to three weeks we change our main focuses, approaches, and narratives according to the situation on the ground. As our goal has been achieved, we set up new ones," said Iryna Borovets, MFA Director General of

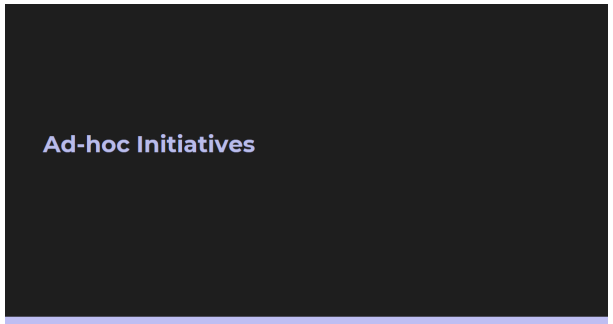
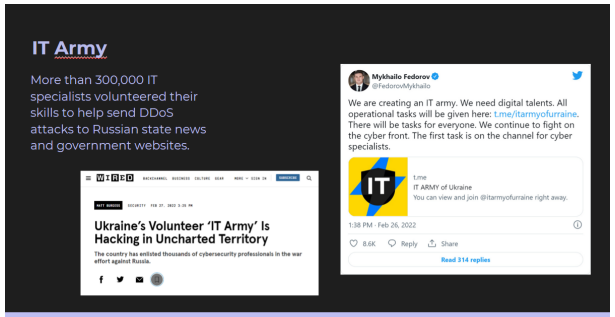
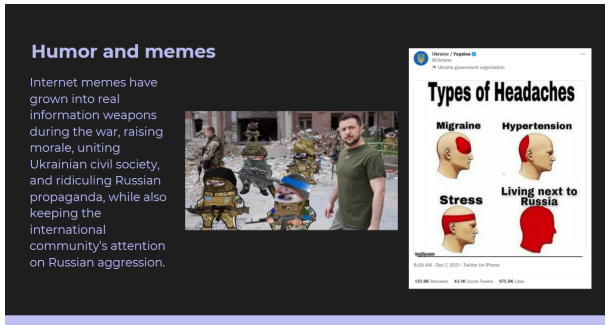
		Public Diplomacy and Communications Directorate at the UK-Ukraine Government Stratcom Dialogue.
	 	**<u>Ministry of Culture and Information Policy (SLIDE 57)</u>** During the war, the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine launched the platform United , which hosts a collection of public media and culture initiatives, including the Center for Strategic Communications, United News Marathon, and Filter. **Filter** Filter is the National Media Literacy Project of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine (MCIP). It was founded in 2021 to coordinate the efforts of the state, civil society, the media community, and international partners to develop media literacy in Ukraine. In response to the start of the war in Ukraine, Filter adapted its ongoing efforts to counter Kremlin disinformation through media literacy initiatives: - **Providing quick solutions.** ○ During the full-scale war, Filter conducted over 100 online and offline lectures on fact-checking and disinformation tactics with students, educators, local journalists, and activists. Filter's updated online platform provides viewers with an interactive map of credible local news sources for each Ukrainian region. - **Diversifying channels to reach more audiences.**

		○ Filter intensified its work on Instagram and launched its LinkedIn and TikTok accounts during the war. On TikTok, Filter promotes critical thinking, debunks historical myths and explains disinformation and propaganda tactics in a simple and creative way. In 3 months, Filter was followed by 23k users organically and its videos were watched by over 6 million users. Ukrainian bloggers, entrepreneurs, writers, singers, and more volunteered to share Filter's media literacy resources and materials with their audiences. *"Ukrainians have demonstrated unprecedented unity and resilience to disinformation during the war. As a national media literacy project, we are seeing people's enormous support: Ukrainians come to volunteer for the project, influencers with millions of followers promote our materials for free, our partners participate in Filter's coordination meetings despite electricity disruptions and air raid sirens, young people share our materials worldwide. Our team has adapted to working from shelters and changing plans last minute - and all this motivates us to work even harder and plan our media literacy policy for the future."* - Valeria Kovtun, head of Filter. (SLIDE 58) - **Working with already existing networks.** ○ After holding its youth Reporter competition, Filter maintained communication with its 80 participants and winners, schoolchildren from all around Ukraine. When the full-scale war started, Filter reached out to this community asking youth to submit stories and reports about how their towns and villages were affected by and dealing with the war. Ukrainians aged 15-17 turned into professional journalists: they were reporting on the situation on the ground, often from occupied territories, and sharing touching stories about local heroes. Filter in turn published all of these stories on its social media.

	 	For more information about Filter you can visit its online platform and its social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok). **Internet Army (SLIDE 59)** The Internet Army is a project initiated by the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture and Information Policy in partnership with the Ministry of Digital Transformation, consisting of over 150,000 volunteers fighting the information war on the side of Ukraine. One of their first popular tasks was to report pro-Russian Telegram channels spreading disinformation. Currently, volunteers' main task is calling on foreign officials to support Ukraine on social media. **Centre for Strategic Communication (CSC) (SLIDE 60)** The Centre for Strategic Communication was established under the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine as one of the mechanisms for countering disinformation through the joint efforts of the state and civil society. The Center's work includes countering disinformation and building resilience towards it through regularly reporting on the Kremlin's hybrid war, conducting information campaigns, and offering a public platform to develop solutions to combat disinformation.
		**Civil Society Initiatives (SLIDE 61)** **Media and information literacy – L2D (SLIDE 62)** Learn to Discern (L2D) has been Ukraine's largest and most successful program combatting disinformation and building resilience to Kremlin propaganda. It is actively cooperating with the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and Science, which has allowed the project to train thousands of teachers. The project has reached well over 100,000 people. Originally started with a grant from the Canadian Embassy, it grew and found support from the British Embassy and US Embassy.

		**Texty.org.ua** Texty.org.ua is an independent data journalism publication founded in 2010 which reports regularly on the war and monitors Kremlin sponsored disinformation. **Fact-checking bot launched by Gwara Media, a Kharkiv-based media outlet.** Available in Ukrainian and in English "Verification" is a Telegram channel, available in both Ukrainian and English, where people can send a news piece and have it verified either automatically through an algorithm or by fact-checkers. The bot works 24/7 and receives about 500 requests per day, with peak activity at 9,000 requests a day. In addition to responding to user requests, the team sometimes evaluates complex disinformation cases and then transmits the full analysis along with a disproof to major fact-checking channels such as Detector Media. **VoxUkraine** VoxUkraine is an independent platform led by Ukrainian economists and lawyers that publishes both analysis of Ukrainian economy and society and conducts fact-checks of Kremlin disinformation. **StopFake** StopFake is a Ukrainian non-profit fact-checking organization founded in 2014 as a volunteer effort and one of the first of its kind in Ukraine. The project also allows readers the opportunity to send suspicious news and photos for investigation through Facebook Messenger. As one of the most well-known fact-checking organizations in Ukraine, the organization is an official partner of Facebook. **Institute of Mass Information** The Institute of Mass Information (IMI) is an independent, non-profit, non-governmental organization, which has been working in the public sector since 1995 and implementing projects aimed at boosting the positive impact of the media on the establishment of civil society in Ukraine. The organization

		regularly organizes trainings for Ukrainian journalists and monitors freedom of the press in the country. **Fakes chronicle updates by Detector media** Detector Media is a Ukrainian NGO which regularly warns about the most dangerous fakes and propaganda cases in Ukraine through its "Fakes Chronicle" updates. Reports are published after extensive consultation with subject matter experts. The organization also publishes materials about how to identify disinformation and deepfakes. They also have a Twitter account which debunks fakes in both Ukrainian and English. **UkraineWorld** UkraineWorld is an English-language multimedia project which regularly publishes reports on the most popular Russian disinformation narratives relating to Ukraine. **Hybrid Warfare Analytical Group (HWAG)** HWAG works to explore and forecast new potential scenarios of the global hybrid warfare and help Ukraine and its international partners in developing policies and solutions to preempt and address them. They identify and analyze Kremlin information threats, to notify national, European and American stakeholders of the ways to negate its influence on democratic processes in their respective countries and regions. **We are Ukraine** We are Ukraine is a collective of Ukrainian crisis management and communications professionals with the goal of raising awareness about the Russian invasion of Ukraine. **Professional media** Ukrainian media and channels that report in English: https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/ https://www.ukrinform.net/

		https://english.nv.ua https://kyivindependent.com/
	  	**Ad hoc initiatives (SLIDE 63)** **IT army (SLIDE 64)** Two days after Russia's assault began, Ukraine's Minister for Digital Transformation Mykhailo Fedorov posted a call for developers, designers, marketers, and security specialists to join a volunteer "IT Army" coordinated via an official Telegram channel. More than 300,000 people volunteered their skills and joined the channel where the IP addresses of Russian state news and government websites to target with DDoS attacks (a type of cyberattack which seeks to disrupt services) are shared daily. Other missions have included reporting pro-Kremlin social media accounts that are spreading false information about the war. **Humor as an essential part of resistance (SLIDE 65)** Internet memes have grown into information tactics during the war for raising morale, uniting Ukrainian civil society, and ridiculing Russian propaganda, while also keeping the international community's attention on Russian aggression. TikTok videos with dancing Ukrainian soldiers attract millions of views. The Twitter account Ukrainian Memes Forces collects all the most viral war-related memes in Ukraine and has already garnered over 330k followers. Ukraine's internet army of 'NAFO Fellas', another grass-roots movement marked by users with Shiba Inu avatars, is dedicated to mocking posts that members consider Kremlin disinformation. Even governmental organizations sometimes divert from an official tone to more comedic messaging. For example, in a recent tweet, the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense asks Emmanuel Macron, President of France, for a "romantic gesture" in the form of weapons shipments. And even before the war, Ukraine's official Twitter would get into meme-fueled fights with Russia.

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