

THE MEANING, ORIGINS AND RELEVANCE OF INFORMATION SOVEREIGNTY

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Increasingly, national mechanisms for ensuring information sovereignty have been gaining significance in Russia and Belarus, given the widespread use of the Internet in daily life, the growth of online audiences, and the integration of IT into many aspects and new areas of social interactions. The importance of information sovereignty was amplified by the progress of digital integration, and also by the activity of international organisations. For example, national security is mentioned as one of the tenets of digital integration in the Eurasian Economic Union's fundamental objectives for the advancement of the digital agenda until 2025. The primary focus of the information security concept now being created in the Union State is the members' territorial integrity. There has not been a common, widely accepted Concept of information sovereignty to date, calling for a comprehensive academic review of the underlying phenomenon in the modern state. An academic examination of information sovereignty and related topics, including their historical development and current understandings, is presented. We analyse the theoretical and normative interpretations of information sovereignty as they relate to the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus, and derive various insights that enhance the understanding of information sovereignty as a unique concept in political science, clarify its attributes and the three stages in the evolution of its understanding.

Keywords: information sovereignty; concept; doctrine; genesis; national interests; information security; threats; challenges; risks.

ИНФОРМАЦИОННЫЙ СУВЕРЕНИТЕТ: ПОНЯТИЕ, ВОЗНИКНОВЕНИЕ, АКТУАЛЬНОСТЬ

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В условиях возрастающего влияния интернет-технологий на повседневную жизнь, непрекращающегося расширения сетевой аудитории и проникновения цифровых технологий в новые сферы общественного взаимодействия особое значение приобретает создание в Республике Беларусь и Российской Федерации национальных механизмов, которые позволят гарантировать в этих государствах информационный суверенитет. Важность обеспечения и защиты информационного суверенитета возрастает в связи с процессами цифровой интеграции в рамках международных объединений. Например, Основные направления реализации цифровой повестки Евразийского экономического союза до 2025 года указывают в числе принципов цифровой интеграции сохранение национальной безопасности государств-членов. Разрабатываемая в Союзном государстве Концепция информационной безопасности направлена на защиту суверенитета и территориальной целостности участников Союзного государства. На сегодняшний день нет единого мнения о понятии "информационный суверенитет". В связи с этим возникает необходимость в научном

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исследовании феномена информационного суверенитета современного государства. Исследуются вопросы о понятии информационного суверенитета, его возникновении и актуальном состоянии. По результатам анализа теоретических и нормативных подходов к осмыслению информационного суверенитета в Республике Беларусь и Российской Федерации сделаны выводы, позволяющие получить полное представление о таком понятии, как “информационный суверенитет” (является отдельной категорией политической науки), его характерных признаках и трех временных этапах его развития.

Ключевые слова: информационный суверенитет; концепция; доктрина; генезис, национальные интересы; информационная безопасность; угрозы; вызовы; риски.

The term “information sovereignty” has been used by multiple writers in a variety of settings, making it challenging to assign authorship to a specific scholar. It is true that there is not a single, agreed-upon definition of information sovereignty in contemporary political science, instead, definitions range widely and are based on disparate political science theories. The aim is to review contemporary uses of the term “information sovereignty” in modern research. We look at its historical roots to know how information security has developed as a historical phenomenon, how political science has come to comprehend information security, and finally, information sovereignty suggests a definition of the term.

Many approaches to the study of information security have surfaced in recent decades and have been explored by numerous academics. For instance, A. V. Rossoshanskii discussed the major factors that turned information security into a prominent aspect of contemporary Russia’s national security [1]. Examples of data leakage that happened accidentally as a result of using contemporary electronic gadgets were considered by A. A. Efremov [2]. The antagonism among states in the information sector and some facets of state information policy, particularly those pertaining to the preservation of information sovereignty, were discussed by I. F. Kefeli and S. A. Malberg [3]. At the practical level, M. M. Kucheryavyi outlined a number of crucial themes that could possibly become essential components of the Russia’s national security and state sovereignty [4]. Information sovereignty was viewed by I. D. Levin as a component of state sovereignty, which he describes as one of the most difficult and contentious issues in politics and public and international law [5]. The phases, indicators, and protections of Belarus’ state sovereignty were examined by A. V. Shavtsova-Varfalomeeva, who also looked at the theoretical and legal underpinnings of sovereignty [6].

Exploring the origins and foundations of information sovereignty is essential to its research. Diverse perspectives on information sovereignty need to be investigated. The phrase “information sovereignty” derives from the well-established concepts of sovereignty and the sovereign state in political science and international affairs.

However, the definition of information sovereignty remains elusive and it is still hotly contested among academics, including in Belarus and Russia. Sovereignty (or *souverainete*) means supreme power when trans-

lated from either English or French [7, p. 13]. According to its conventional interpretation, sovereignty is also a political and legal reality that exists inside nation states and is primarily shaped by the dynamics of interstate relations. Sovereignty, together with its manifestations and subjects, emerged during the state-formation process. Because of this, sovereignty is distinguished by ongoing change across different historical periods of state formation.

Currently, the characteristic of sovereignty encompasses the state’s independence and supremacy, the integrity of its territory, and the unity of the people who live there. The attribute of sovereignty sets the state apart from other comparable political institutions and defines its place in society’s fundamental political structure.

There is a strong relationship between the concepts of power and sovereignty. This connection exists because those in positions of power inevitably possess unique privileges. In other words, power can be deemed sovereign if it exists inside a territory and it is not a subject to other influences or pressures. This indicates a certain sovereignty on the part of the authority bearer. According to Russian scholar M. Lebedeva, since every state possesses both economic and military might, most states are actually equal. And this implies that all nations, regardless of their size and area, are created equal before one another [8]. Despite the fact that this system is still in place today, some academics contend that in certain countries, sovereignty has reached its limit [9, p. 329–332]. Therefore, it is arguable that the concept of sovereignty can be traced to the time of the first states, which is to say in the ancient era.

Scholars like I. D. Levin have significantly advanced the theory of sovereignty [5, p. 144–146]. He defines sovereignty as a condition of total state authority connected to the monopoly and concentration of coercive power within the state. G. Grotius in his works emphasised that sovereignty is more about the ruler’s authority than the strength of the people [10]. N. Machiavelli elaborated on the methods of taking and exercising power, the functions of government, and the qualities expected of the “perfect ruler” [11]. J. Locke sought to theorise the necessity of sovereignty with his notion of inalienable rights in his theory of unalienable natural rights [12]. The conventional definition of sovereignty, according to J. Bodin, is the king’s robust and unrestricted power inside the state [13].

The French author J. Bodin made a significant contribution to the theoretical foundations of sovereignty when he first used the phrase in a broad scientific meaning in his writings in 1576. His argument suggests that sovereignty is the state's permanent power [13, p. 689–695]. This finding has been supported and expanded upon by other researchers in their publications. For example, sovereign power is described by A. V. Daisy as the sort of authority over which no other person or entity may exercise any particular control [14, p. 141–142].

As the 20th century came to an end, new perspectives on state sovereignty began to take shape. These reflected prominent trends in the evolution of state sovereignty and provided the background for the debate surrounding the principles of the emerging new international order. In the context of the sovereignty debate, there has been a significant amount of scholarly interest in the concept of strengthening relationships between states. This stance was supported in the 2002 recommendations on enhancing information security in response to recent challenges and threats made by Russian and Belarusian experts at the April 2022 session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the union of Belarus and Russia on the construction of the Union State. The crucial topic of national-type authorities, to which sovereign rights may frequently be attributed, was also covered in the seminar.

The notion of sovereignty as a political science concept should be thoroughly and frequently reexamined. It is important to keep up with the latest ideas about individual sovereignty and the fundamentals of state sovereignty¹. Due to globalisation, states' sovereign powers are changing and weakening. Many governments are finding that their sovereignty is less important than it once was, and some may even choose to limit their sovereignty on their own will [15].

Information sovereignty is realised inside the political framework, and political science is perhaps in the best position to answer questions and close knowledge gaps regarding the topic at hand.

It must be acknowledged that the concept of information sovereignty is recent, and originated rather later than the phenomenon of information security. Before becoming a distinct concept, information security underwent following phases of understanding.

First, in the 16th century J. Bodin develops the principle of sovereignty, defined as the absolute authority of governments.

Second, progressive developments of the 19th century and other events, like wars and revolutions, broaden the territorial reach of sovereignty; concepts of popular sovereignty and the values of state equality, nationality, and non-interference become elements of information policy and the information environment.

Third, with the development of computers and the Internet, state sovereignty is seen as potentially threatened, and the idea of data technologies' sovereignty is born in late 20th century to the present.

It is thus crucial to keep in mind that information sovereignty does not necessarily imply the independence of the state externally or domestically. The main stages of information sovereignty can be added to or changed at different time points in response to changing political environments, improvements in technology, and other factors. Here, we may suggest a few more time frames for information sovereignty:

1) the increasing demand for and knowledge of information by states, the development of nation states and the drawing of borders throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, and the current era's expansion of information technology and globalisation (21st century);

2) the establishment and enforcement of legal standards when the 1990s and 2000s saw the introduction of the first information security and privacy legislation, and the current era has witnessed the rise of regulations pertaining to information security and the fight against cybercrime;

3) establishment and maintenance of the national information space when the period of 2000–2010 was the era witnessed the growth of e-government and national information systems while the current era is marked by the advancement of cloud computing, the Internet of things, and the digitalisation of economic sectors;

4) the growth of the national information economy from the 1990s to the 2000s, when the first national IT enterprises were founded, to the present day, when startup ecosystems, digital marketing, and technology incubators have emerged;

5) strengthening information security from the 1990s to the 2010s, computer viruses, phishing, were among the top concerns and in the present day, institutions of public authority, businesses, and people have been strengthening their digital defences;

6) collaboration with international organisations when the 2000–2010s saw the creation of the first worldwide information security standards, and the current age has been marked by the growth of international legal and technological collaboration in the area of information sovereignty.

The role, scope and function of information sovereignty may certainly be rethought in light of the worldwide technological developments that have a direct impact on the condition and evolution of modern states and societies in the information realm. In addition to increasing information warfare and the advent of hybrid wars, the worldwide technical and technological revolutions that are taking place in the modern world give rise to new dangers, difficulties, and threats to governments'

¹Political science // Encyclopedic dictionary / U. I. Aver'yanov, A. P. Afanas'ev, V. S. Glagolev, I. I. Kravchenko, B. S. H. Nadinov, I. N. Puzin (eds). Moscow : Izd-vo Mosk. kommerch. un-ta, 1993. P. 288–292 (in Russ.).

information security and information sovereignty. Notable developments include the rising significance of communication in the exercise of state power, the competition for public opinion in the information sphere, and the rise of a novel phenomenon – hybrid wars – that stems from the extensive use of information influence technology on national information domains. We will go into more depth about these in our subsequent works.

Databases are becoming more prominent in state-to-state rivalry, providing useful information about these states' organisations and businesses. Meanwhile, the use of military force is waning somewhat since it is increasingly thought that obtaining intelligence through advantaged access is preferable to open combat [16]. The integrity and security of the state system are now threatened in new ways [17].

The Russian author M. Kucheryavyi noted that nations' transparency to information flows is what gives rise to the debate on information security, given the way national borders are eroding in a more expansive digital realm. States, societies, and even individuals may become less secure as data analysis, collection, and processing are getting easier [4].

Notably, the digital sphere poses fresh challenges to the way government tasks are carried out in the information age. This involves giving public authorities access to sufficient and trustworthy data pertinent to their purview. Information security is already starting to seem like a vague concept. The fundamental tenets of the UN Charter and other treaties are now binding for all governments.

The words "information sovereignty" are imprecise as they may be used in a variety of situations (legal, political, etc.) and interpreted differently by various people, such as academics from Russia and Belarus. Crucially, there are no specific definitions of information sovereignty in the political sphere other than the theories of individual scholars who have lately addressed the subject, such as M. M. Kucheryavyi [4], I. N. Panarin [18] and others.

Sovereignty is defined as two things in the Constitution of the Russian Federation and the Constitution of the Republic of Belarus: first, as the ultimate authority to govern (both declare the (multi-ethnic) people to be sources of power and holders of sovereignty), including the right to choose their own political, economic, and social systems, and second, as complete autonomy and freedom from outside interference.

The preservation of national interests in cyberspace and national control over information resources, such as data, software, and hardware, are implied by information sovereignty. Consequently, countries endeavour

to maintain their technological autonomy, prevent data breaches, and thwart cyberattacks.

As we may conclude from the above examples, information security is a political science concept that refers to a functional aspect of the sovereignty of a modern state. It is characterised by the existence of institutions able and willing to manage information in the interest of national security.

For many states today, information sovereignty is a crucial component of national security, and comprehending this idea aids in the development of appropriate information technology policies and strategies by state authorities.

For instance, Belarus recently developed its Concept of information security², approved by the Security Council of the Republic of Belarus, while Russia has had a comparable document, the Information security doctrine³, since 2016. In para 8 of the Concept of information security of the Republic of Belarus, information sovereignty is understood as "the inalienable and exclusive supremacy of the right of the state to independently determine the rules of ownership, use and disposal of national information resources, to implement an independent external and internal state information policy, to form a national information infrastructure, to ensure information security". The Information security doctrine of the Russian Federation does not define or use the term directly in the section "Terms and definitions", or elsewhere throughout the document. Only section 4 "Strategic goals and main objectives of information security" refers to it indirectly in the passage calling for "protection Russia's sovereignty in the information space by conducting an autonomous and independent policy in pursuit of the national interests in the information realm". Nonetheless, both texts stress how crucial information is in both Belarus and Russia.

Information sovereignty of Russia and Belarus rule mostly address the following three elements: the state's ability to control information within its borders, its capacity to defend itself from outside information attacks, and its capability to influence the information landscape in other countries.

From a jurisprudential perspective, information sovereignty refers to the state's ability and authority to regulate its policies both domestically and internationally. The foundation of such policies is upholding international law, respecting human rights, and the will of the people. From a political science perspective, already discussed above, the term refers to state sovereignty and denotes the ability of state institutions to conduct an independent information policy in the best interests of its citizens.

²Concept of information security [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://president.gov.by/uploads/documents/2019/1post.pdf> (date of access: 10.06.2023).

³On approval of the Doctrine of information security of the Russian Federation : Edict of the President of the Russian Federation of 5 December 2016 No. 646 [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://www.pravo.gov.ru> (date of access: 10.06.2023).

The concept of information sovereignty, which is already established in political discourse, has not received a clear interpretation in modern Russian or Belarusian scientific literature. This is understandable given the diversity of opinions regarding the concept's characteristics and meaning. It is assumed that the primary cause is the lack of clarity surrounding assessments of the changes that have taken place in the world in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, particularly in the global information space. These changes range from the digitalisation of knowledge, databases, and data banks to new information infrastructure and technologies, as well as their use by political actors in international information exchange and rivalry, including in the most extreme forms of hybrid and information warfare.

Given how governments and societies will be impacted by global technology progress and how it will affect the extent and functional elements of their sovereignty, it surely seems plausible that the concept of sovereignty will continue to be reexamined. Crucially, communication will become increasingly important in the exercise of state power, the competition for people's hearts and minds, and the emergence of novel phenomena such as high-tech hybrid warfare, all of which will affect each nation's information space (and will be covered in more depth in our further works).

The 21st century has seen a rapid progress in information, communication, and information technology, placing the information sector in a prominent position. In light of this tendency, several other observations may be made.

1. Sovereignty remains indivisible, yet states today manifest their power and independence in a range of diverse sectors of the government and the civil society.

2. Information sovereignty, as used in political science, describes a functional aspect of modern state sovereignty, including the capacity and capability of state institutions to carry out autonomous information policies that promote national security.

3. Information sovereignty is now an open and evolving notion that encompasses many expressions of modern conflict such as information warfare and hybrid wars. Three distinct phases have led to the evolution of the concept of information sovereignty: first, J. Bodin defined it as the principle of the ultimate power of states, second, the term changed due to progressive developments in the 19th century, wars, revolutions, and third, the rise of the Internet, and its perception as a potential threat to state sovereignty, followed by the emphasis on the sovereignty of information technologies at the close of the 20th century.

4. Today, information sovereignty is a distinct component of overall sovereignty that has a close connection to a state's national security in the information domain.

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