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## Trump's political 'tactics' from the East

by [Anne Applebaum](#)



*U.S. presidential candidate Donald Trump's senior campaign adviser Paul Manafort (L) answers a question from a reporter as he walked into a reception with former Republican presidential candidate Dr. Ben Carson, (C), at the Republican National Committee Spring Meeting at the Diplomat Resort in Hollywood, Florida, April 21, 2016. (Reuters/Joe Skipper)*

When democracy arrived in the eastern half of Europe a quarter century ago, imported from the West, it did not come in its purest, most Athenian form. Of course the West loaned the East quite a few constitutional lawyers, as well as lots of idealists who could talk about judicial reform or give advice on how to organize an election. But on the heels of the idealists arrived another crowd of "experts": the spin doctors, the masters of negative campaigning and the public relations firms who had honed their craft in U.S. elections and were more than willing to sell their expertise in the East as well.

Famously, a group of California political consultants [claimed to have masterminded Boris Yeltsin's campaign to win the Russian presidency in 1996](#). Even if their role wasn't quite what they spun it to be, that campaign, like many that followed, certainly deployed what were generally called "American-style" campaign tactics. Rock concerts, hip "get out the vote" MTV campaigns – [none of that had been used in Russia before](#). In the years that followed, copycat campaigns popped up all over what had once been the eastern bloc.

But now we may be about to witness the opposite phenomenon: the flow of political influence from East to West. Donald Trump's new campaign manager Paul Manafort returns to U.S. politics after [many years spent working for Viktor Yanukovich](#), president of Ukraine until he fled the country in disgrace in 2014. We don't really know what, exactly, Manafort did for his Ukrainian client. But we do know how Yanukovich won the Ukrainian elections in 2010, and [how he ran the country](#). Perhaps Manafort can transmit some lessons from his experience for a would-be U.S. president.

To begin with, Yanukovich did undergo a profound "image makeover" strikingly similar to the one that Trump needs right now. Yanukovich was an ex-con, close to Russian-backed business interests in Ukraine. He had, in other words, "high negatives." But he cleaned up his act, stopped using criminal jargon and presented himself as a "reform" candidate, as opposed to the crooked establishment. Since everybody was genuinely sick of the crooked establishment, he won – despite the fact that he was no more honest than the people he'd said he was trying to beat. This of course, is what Trump is going to try to do: persuade people to support him because he is an outrageous, truth-speaking "outsider," even though in reality he's as much of an "insider" as it is possible to be. Manafort, with his deep experience in this particular con trick, can help.

On his way to power, and once in power, Yanukovich also became famous for the use of rented thugs, known as "[titushki](#)," who could be used to intimidate opposition protestors, journalists, or whoever needed to be scared off. These weren't police, and they weren't security guards. They were just guys paid by Yanukovich to rough people up and scare them. Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán's party, Fidesz, has recently made use of a similar method, [deploying skinheads to prevent their political opponents from registering for a referendum](#). We've seen prototype versions of this tactic already in use at Trump rallies. Perhaps Manafort, fresh off his experiences in Ukraine, can develop the concept further.

Some of Yanukovich's tactics might be harder to deploy, such as falsifying election results (though it's not like that never happened in the U.S.) or [abolishing the right to protest](#) (though Trump at times sounds like he wouldn't mind passing such a law if he could). But others are already in use. Pro-Trump troll armies, for example – fake Twitter accounts programmed to tweet the same message, a very popular tactic east of the Dnieper – are already in the field:

Another Yanukovich tactic — [paid supporters at rallies](#) — is already in the Trump arsenal too. Let's just hope that, if Trump wins, we won't need a Maidan revolution to put American democracy back together again.

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