

The Big Read **US presidential election**

## Ukrainegate: Rudy Giuliani's new campaign against Joe Biden

Donald Trump's lawyer has new fixers in Kyiv to help revive claims discredited as conspiracy theory

Roman Olearchyk and Joshua Chaffin in Kyiv 2 HOURS AGO

During the partisan [impeachment saga](#) that convulsed Washington at the start of the year, even some prominent Republicans acknowledged they were uncomfortable with the way President Donald Trump created a parallel foreign policy structure outside the state department to [deal with Ukraine](#).

That separate operation was run by [Rudy Giuliani](#), the former New York mayor who is Mr Trump's personal lawyer, and was aimed at digging up dirt on Joe Biden.

According to businessmen, diplomats and politicians in Ukraine and Washington, Mr Giuliani has since relaunched his effort to prod the Ukrainian government into investigating [Mr Biden and his son, Hunter](#), and is working with a new set of local accomplices in Kyiv.

Mr Giuliani's activities, though widely discredited during the impeachment proceedings, have become newly relevant given [Mr Biden's decisive victories](#) in Tuesday's presidential primaries, which all but guarantee the former vice-president will be the Democratic candidate facing Mr Trump in November's election.

The former mayor's efforts, which have included interviewing potential witnesses and recruiting two former Ukrainian officials with close ties to Washington to help in his investigation, assures that the debunked conspiracy theory regarding Mr Biden that triggered January's impeachment will once again become a feature of the 2020 presidential campaign.



Joe Biden speaks to Ukrainian lawmakers in Ukrainian parliament in Kyiv in 2015 © STR/NurPhoto/Getty

Troublingly for Mr Biden, William Barr, Mr Trump's attorney-general, last month said he was maintaining an "open door" for Mr Giuliani to submit any findings to the justice department, raising the prospect that federal prosecutors could open an investigation into the presumptive Democratic nominee.

**As part of the fallout** from the impeachment investigation, the two most important fixers for Mr Giuliani in Ukraine — the Soviet-born émigrés [Lev Parnas](#) and [Igor Fruman](#) — were arrested on charges of violating US campaign finance laws.

As a result, Mr Giuliani has been forced to find new helpers in the country. They include Andrii Telizhenko, a former low-ranking official at the Ukrainian embassy in Washington whose social media feeds suggest he shares Mr Giuliani's fondness for whisky and cigars; and Andrii Artemenko, a former MP in Ukraine who now resides in Washington and has tried to reinvent himself as a bridge between Kyiv and the Trump administration.



Donald Trump holds up a newspaper, a day after the US Senate acquitted him on two articles of impeachment, at the White House in February © Mark Wilson/Getty

Together, they are pursuing some of the same claims made during the period last year when Mr Trump pressured the Ukrainian president to open an investigation into Hunter Biden: that Joe Biden, while still serving as vice-president, pushed Ukraine to fire its then prosecutor, Viktor Shokin, in order to thwart an investigation of Burisma, an energy company where the younger Mr Biden earned \$50,000 a month as a board member despite an apparent lack of experience.

But Mr Giuliani, a former federal prosecutor in Manhattan who took on the mafia before becoming New York mayor, is now seeking to prove a much broader case: that Burisma was but one asset in a post-Soviet Ukraine that a group of Democrats — which include Bill and Hillary Clinton and George Soros — has been milking for years to enrich themselves and fund their political operations.

Mr Giuliani's new fixers also claim that the Democrats' malign influence extends through a web of conspiracies to Naftogaz, Ukraine's state-owned oil and gas company, and even include a large US investment group.

If the claims by Mr Giuliani and his accomplices are to be believed — and there is so far scant public evidence to support any of them — the sums at stake are not the \$50,000 a month that Burisma was paying Mr Biden, but instead run into billions of dollars.



Igor Fruman (C) leaves federal court last October in New York © Stephanie Keith/Getty

“[The Democrats] are still using Ukraine to fight a political war in the United States,” Mr Telizhenko told Mr Giuliani in a recent interview broadcast on the former mayor’s [social media feeds](#). The two men were seated in leather wing chairs, before a fireplace, in a wood-panelled office that was arranged like a television talk show. “If this case gets uncovered — the real way — a lot of people are going to go down and they’re going to go to jail,” he added.

Mr Giuliani replied that the “crooked” US media was determined to bury the matter but added: “I think we’re getting through, and I would say you’re one of the primary reasons, Andrii Telizhenko. You’re a good man. You’re a brave man.”

While Mr Telizhenko and Mr Artemenko have gained Mr Giuliani’s trust, their credibility is questioned in Ukraine, where some political analysts view them as fringe figures.

Olexiy Haran, a Kyiv-based professor of political studies, doubts their reliability as sources. “If Mr Giuliani is really in contact with these people, then it highlights . . . that he is ready to contact with anyone to uphold his narratives.”

Although the two men have attempted to court the Republican elite, they have also begun to attract critical scrutiny. A Senate committee that has been investigating the Bidens and Burisma last week abruptly [postponed a vote to subpoena Mr Telizhenko](#) as a witness after its Republican chairman, Ron Johnson, acknowledged some “discrepancies” in his claims.

In private briefings, US intelligence officials told members of Congress they are examining whether Mr Telizhenko is a Russian asset, according to people briefed on the matter. Others who have observed the pair question whether they are working behind the scenes to further the interests of Ukrainian oligarchs.



Lev Parnas walks past the US Capitol to give a press conference in January. Parnas and his business partner Igor Fruman were important figures in Trump's alleged campaign to pressure Ukraine officials to gather information on Biden © BRENDAN SMIALOWSKI/AFP/Getty

Mr Telizhenko has rejected this and denies being a Russian asset, saying he was filing lawsuits in the US and Ukraine in response to reports making such claims. He says he used to work as an adviser for Pavel Fuks, a Ukrainian oligarch who used to be a big property developer in Moscow but has since ceased working in Russia.

Mr Artemenko also denied being a Russian asset or an agent for Ukrainian oligarchs, describing such labelling as “standard practice” with respect to anyone who is pro-Trump.

“I was never any oligarch’s man, never got money from them. I’m a self-made man . . . capable of upholding my own views,” Mr Artemenko says.

**The suspicion surrounding** the two men has been deepened by the fact that one of their chief aims appears to be to reduce the influence of the IMF in Kyiv. The fund threw a lifeline to Ukraine after its economy went into freefall in 2014 following Russia’s invasion and subsequent annexation of Crimea.

Mr Artemenko argues that a limited debt restructuring — supported by Washington — would allow the country to meet its obligations without the need for an IMF loan deal. Whether or not that is so, it would almost certainly benefit Igor Kolomoisky, one of Ukraine’s richest men. As a condition of its financial support, the IMF has demanded that Mr Kolomoisky plug [the \\$5.5bn hole in PrivatBank](#), the lender he controlled and which the government nationalised in 2016.





A photograph of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is displayed on a television near David Holmes, counsellor for political affairs at the US Embassy in Ukraine, during the impeachment inquiry hearing © Andrew Harrer/EPA-EFE

“Giuliani’s conspiracies fully contribute to the narrative of oligarchs . . . and pro-Kremlin forces in Ukraine,” says Daria Kaleniuk, head of Kyiv-based anti-corruption watchdog Antac, which is partly funded by Mr Soros’ Open Society foundation.

Antac has itself become a target of Mr Giuliani and his allies, who deride the organisation and a network of other NGOs not as a means to combat corruption and nurture democracy in Ukraine but as a weapon for the Democrats and their allies to wield against their rivals.

“I think it is a well planned campaign aimed to discredit civil society and many change-makers in government,” says Ms Kaleniuk.

But there are some in Washington and Kyiv — even those suspicious of Mr Zelensky’s motives — who do not discount the idea that an investigation of Mr Biden might be a worthwhile exercise. “I happen to believe there’s real evidence on the Biden stuff,” says one veteran Republican operative in the US capital who has dealt with Ukraine.

Igor Novikov, an adviser to [Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky](#), asks: “Do you have any doubt that Burisma is corrupt? Is there any substance to what Giuliani is saying? The only way to know is to investigate.”



Joe Biden and his son Hunter Biden at a basketball game in Washington. Last year Trump asked the Ukrainian president to open an investigation into Hunter Biden © Jonathan Ernst/Reuters

Mr Giuliani's efforts are playing out in a country caught between east and west, one that is mired in corruption and intrigue, and whose competing political factions have made a practice of boosting their domestic fortunes by forging [close ties in Washington](#).

As an official in Kyiv put it: "Ukraine's a fucking soap opera. Everybody's back-stabbing everybody."

An early practitioner of the Washington influence game was [Victor Pinchuk](#), an oligarch who became one of the biggest donors to the Clinton Global Initiative and who hosts an annual forum that has become an elite meeting ground for Ukrainian and western politicians and executives.

Some rivals in Kyiv are convinced Mr Pinchuk used his influence in Washington to their detriment, prompting Democratic administrations to scrutinise their business interests and limit their ability to operate in the US. With Mr Trump's surprise election in 2016, those in Kyiv who felt they had been shut out of Washington saw a sudden opportunity to reestablish themselves inside the Beltway — provided they had something to offer the new administration.

For Mr Parnas and Mr Fruman, it was the possibility of substantiating the alleged corruption of the Bidens and the Clintons — something that has long been an obsession of Mr Giuliani's, according to people who know him well.

"They're just the latest characters who thought they could manipulate the Americans for their own purpose — and Giuliani took the bait," says an observer of Ukrainian politics. Another adds: "We've got plenty of Parnases and Frumans here."

**In Mr Telizhenko**, aged 29, Mr Giuliani is relying on a political consultant and former low-level diplomat who has publicly echoed Mr Trump's unsubstantiated claims that Ukraine interfered in the 2016 US presidential elections.

Mr Telizhenko claims in 2016, when he served as a staffer at the Ukrainian embassy in Washington, that a Democratic party political operative asked him for help in digging up dirt on Mr Trump's campaign, specifically his campaign chief at the time, Paul Manafort.

Mr Manafort was [later jailed](#) for his activities working for pro-Russian politicians in Ukraine, including tax evasion and money laundering.

Mr Artemenko, a 51-year-old former MP and a businessman, is a veteran of the country's often brutal, politics. In 2002, he was jailed on fraud charges that he says were politically motivated, and which were later dropped.

Two years ago he made headlines after promoting to Trump officials a controversial peace plan in which Ukraine would agree to "lease" Crimea to Russia for 50 to 100 years as a compromise to end the war in the eastern Donbass region. As part of the deal, the west would also lift sanctions on Russia.

Soon after floating his proposal, Mr Artemenko was accused of treason by rivals and his citizenship was stripped by former president Petro Poroshenko on grounds that he held other passports — a violation of Ukrainian law. Mr Artemenko, a self-described patriot, is unapologetic about what he views as a realistic approach to make Ukraine a "Switzerland of eastern Europe" — a prosperous country that can sit comfortably between Russia and the west.

"We want to flip this country. We want real reform," he says, outlining plans to attract investment and technology into industries like aviation and agriculture.

It was at the 2016 Republican National Convention where Mr Artemenko claims to have become a convert to Mr Trump's team on seeing the party's then-nominee on stage. "I said, 'Wait a second: This is exactly what Ukraine needs!'" he recalls.

Also etched in his memory — with resentment — is a rousing speech that Mr Biden, then vice-president, delivered at Ukraine's parliament in December 2015, when he demanded that Mr Poroshenko fight corruption by overhauling the country's prosecutors office. At the time, Ukraine was fighting separatists in the east, its economy was teetering and it was desperate for Washington's help.

"He looked like the boss holding a meeting with his employees," Mr Artemenko recalls. "I was so embarrassed."

In November last year, he signed a contract with Mr Giuliani to assist him in defending his client, Mr Trump, against "false claims".

"He needed my help. He said the president needed my help," Mr Artemenko explains.

In an example of the almost incestuous nature of Ukraine's politics, Mr Artemenko says he met Mr Parnas and Mr Fruman for breakfast at the Trump International Hotel in Washington last year, before the impeachment scandal erupted.

He had known Mr Fruman for years from Ukrainian and Russian circles in Miami, where their wives are friends. But he had not previously encountered Mr Parnas, who soon launched into a boastful presentation about his connections in the Trump administration. "I can open any door at the White House," Mr Artemenko recalls him saying. He then asked about his guest's contacts in Ukraine.

Mr Artemenko politely declined, he says, and later warned Mr Fruman about the game he had joined, telling his friend: "It's not risky — it's dangerous."

