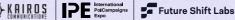# THE PERVASIVE INFLUENCE OF A.I ON GLOBAL POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS IN 2024

Global Elections and AI in 2024:
The State of Play in AI Campaigning
and AI Disinformation

KAIROS COMMUNICATIONS | IPE International PolCampaigns Expo | Future Shift Labs

About Future Shift Labs

Future Shift Labs is a pioneering global think tank and innovation hub dedicated to addressing the profound implications of technology on governance, society, and democracy. As a subsidiary research organization of *The Ideaz Factory Group*, Future Shift Labs plays a key role in advancing cutting-edge research and advocacy on artificial intelligence (AI) and its impact on political systems worldwide. It is also the initiator of *The Pervasive Influence of AI on Global Political Campaigns in 2024*, positioning itself at the forefront of efforts to understand and shape the future of technology in politics.

Founded with a mission to foster ethical innovation, Future Shift Labs brings together a diverse network of researchers, policymakers, technologists, and industry leaders to explore critical issues shaping the future. This initiative underscores Future Shift Labs' commitment to generating actionable insights. By conducting in-depth research, facilitating cross-disciplinary dialogue, and producing evidence-based recommendations, the organization addresses pressing global challenges while charting a responsible path for technological progress.

Kairos Communications

Principal Partner

Kairos Communications, a beacon of innovation and influence in the African communications landscape, stands at the forefront of shaping the continent's narrative. Headquartered in South Africa, this distinguished firm is not just a market leader but a trailblazer in fostering transformative dialogue, empowering democratic values, and championing innovation. As the principal partner and primary funder of *The Pervasive Influence of AI on Global Political Campaigns in 2024*, Kairos Communications exemplifies its unwavering commitment to advancing responsible discourse on the intersection of technology and global governance.

This vision is brought to life through the leadership of Dr. Israel Govender, a celebrated pioneer in political campaign strategy and corporate communications. **Dr. Govender, Founder and Chairman of Kairos Media Group**, has redefined the boundaries of strategic consulting, blending ethical stewardship with groundbreaking technologies to deliver campaigns that inspire, engage, and transform. From leveraging AI-driven voter insights to designing comprehensive solutions for politically sensitive environments, his leadership ensures that Kairos Communications not only meets the diverse needs of its clients but also shapes the future of media and governance across Africa.

International Political Campaign Expo 2025

Partner and Launching Platform

The International Political Campaign Expo (IPE) is a premier global platform dedicated to advancing innovation in political strategy, technology, and discourse. As a leading forum for political thought, IPE brings together leaders, experts, and organizations to explore the rapidly evolving dynamics of modern political campaigns, with a focus on the integration of cutting-edge technologies like artificial intelligence and big data.

In 2024, IPE played a pivotal role as the launch partner for the policy paper *The Pervasive Influence of AI on Global Political Campaigns in 2024.* This groundbreaking initiative highlighted IPE's dedication to examining the transformative role of AI in electoral systems worldwide. By serving as the platform for this critical policy paper, IPE reaffirmed its commitment to fostering informed, responsible, and forward-thinking discussions about the intersection of technology and democracy.

Through its work, IPE has become an essential catalyst for shaping the future of political campaigns, ensuring that emerging technologies are leveraged to enhance democratic integrity rather than compromise it. The platform serves as a hub for actionable insights, promoting collaboration among stakeholders and guiding the global discourse on the ethical use of AI in politics.

Underpinning IPE's success is its deep-rooted mission to ensure that modern political campaigns remain innovative, inclusive, and ethically driven in the digital age. With a focus on addressing challenges like misinformation, voter manipulation, and the misuse of technology, IPE provides a space for leaders to collaborate on solutions that uphold democratic values while embracing technological progress. **Glen Mpani, Managing Partner at Shikamo and IPE's visionary Host and Convenor**, continues to drive these vital conversations, shaping the future of political campaigns globally.

Pioneers

Nitin Narang

Founder, Future Shift Labs

Nitin Narang is a visionary political consultant, entrepreneur, and investor with expertise in technology, governance, and societal impact. As the founder of Future Shift Labs, he explores how emerging technologies shape political systems and democratic integrity. He led The Pervasive Influence of AI on Global Political Campaigns in 2024, a groundbreaking initiative examining AI's role in modern elections, including microtargeting, generative AI in campaigns, and disinformation. Under his leadership, Future Shift Labs published a policy paper advocating ethical frameworks for AI use in electoral processes, emphasizing transparency, accountability, and safeguards to protect public trust. Nitin's commitment to balancing innovation with democratic values makes him a prominent voice in AI governance. Additionally, he serves as the President of the All India Chess Federation, reflecting his multifaceted leadership approach.

Sagar Vishnoi

Co-Founder, Future Shift Labs

Sagar Vishnoi is a global authority on AI, policy, and politics, focusing on the ethical use of technology in elections. As Co-Founder of Future Shift Labs, he has championed responsible AI governance and policy innovation. He serves on the Global Advisory Board of the Apolitical Foundation and is a member of the Coalition for Responsible Evolution of AI. Sagar's insights have been featured in global forums like TEDx and top media outlets. His work emphasizes the need for regulatory frameworks that balance technological progress with democratic integrity. His contributions to The Pervasive Influence of AI on Global Political Campaigns in 2024 offer a detailed analysis of AI-driven campaign strategies and the risks of disinformation. His advocacy for ethical AI continues to shape global conversations on governance in the digital era.

About Author

Alisha Butala is a researcher and policy analyst with a strong academic background, holding an MBA and a Master's in Public Policy from King's College London. She has extensive experience working with India's Education Ministries, contributing significantly to the design of impactful policies and the promotion of sustainable educational development. Currently a Research Consultant at Future Shift Labs, She works across various sectors, including climate change, artificial intelligence, governance, and education. Her research integrates behavioral science to design practical, long-term solutions. Passionate about ethical innovation, she is focused on leveraging AI to address global challenges, with a particular emphasis on ensuring its responsible use in elections, governance, and public policy.

Dr. Christopher Nehring is a researcher, analyst and media expert and currently the director of intelligence at the Cyber Intelligence Institute in Frankfurt, Germany. He is an expert on disinformation and has been a visiting lecturer on disinformation, intelligence and media at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation's Media Programme South East Europe and at the Faculty of Journalism and Mass Communication at Sofia University. He worked as a senior analyst at the Institute for Global Analysis in Sofia and has been working as a journalist and editor for various media outlets (e.g. Deutsche Welle, Spiegel, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Tagesspiegel, etc.) since 2017.

Mateusz Łabuz is a researcher in the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg and a PhD researcher at the Chemnitz University of Technology. For seven years he was a career diplomat at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland. He lectures cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, disinformation and fact-checking at the University of the National Education Commission and the Pontifical University of John Paul II in Cracow. His main research interests are synthetic media, with a particular focus on deep fakes, building social resilience as well as cognitive warfare. He has published numerous analyses devoted to regulating deep fakes in the EU Artificial Intelligence Act.

US Insights by PolitiFact , played an essential role in supporting our data gathering and verification efforts during the U.S. elections. Renowned for its rigorous fact-checking methodology, PolitiFact provided reliable insights into candidate claims, policy debates, and campaign statements, ensuring the accuracy of the information we utilized. Its thorough analysis not only verified individual statements but also offered important contextual information, enabling us to better understand the broader political dynamics at play. This additional context proved invaluable in assessing political trends and the narratives influencing public opinion throughout the election cycle. Moreover, PolitiFact's commitment to transparency and accountability in verifying claims helped elevate the credibility of election-related discourse. By leveraging their platform, we were able to produce a more informed and precise analysis, grounded in reliable, well-vetted information during the election period.

Aastha Naresh Kohli, Head of Communications at Future Shift Labs, served as the editor of The Pervasive Influence of AI on Global Political Campaigns in 2024, a policy paper exploring AI's transformative role in modern elections. With a meticulous and collaborative approach, Aastha oversaw every stage of the paper's development, from conceptualizing its structure to refining its insights. This initiative was close to her heart, as she has witnessed firsthand the profound impact of AI on the global electoral landscape.

As editor, Aastha ensured the seamless integration of case studies, multidisciplinary perspectives, and actionable recommendations, making the paper both insightful and practical. She worked closely with the authors—Alisha Butala, Dr. Christopher Nehring, and Mateusz Łabuz—whose expertise in AI, disinformation, and governance enriched the paper. Aastha deeply admires their commitment to ethical innovation and their ability to distill complex issues into transformative solutions. She regards the paper's recommendations, particularly on fostering regulation and ethical AI use, as instrumental in safeguarding democratic processes and spurring innovation.

Abstract

This policy paper examines the significant role of artificial intelligence (AI) in the 2024 global elections, focusing on AI-driven campaigning and the spread of AI-powered disinformation. AI tools have transformed campaign strategies by enhancing voter targeting, personalizing messaging, and improving outreach, particularly in regions with linguistic diversity. At the same time, concerns about AI's role in spreading disinformation gained prominence, especially with the rise of generative AI (genAI). Through case studies from key countries, the paper assesses the real-world impact of AI disinformation during elections, providing valuable insights into its effects on democratic processes.The paper concludes by emphasizing the need for clear regulations, ethical standards, and technological solutions to safeguard democratic processes while fostering innovation.

What's in place?

Deep and comprehensive role of AI in the 2024 global elections, highlighting its impact on voter targeting, and outreach, alongside concerns over AI-driven disinformation, especially from generative AI through varied case studies revealing its effects on the democratic realm, calling regulations, ethics, and tech solutions to balance innovation, ethics and integrity.

After all, the paper includes key insights, comprehensive data, opinions on the basis of which the experts have concluded and recommended key changes towards an ethical AI standard in the evolving democratic process worldwide.

Top 5 Insights

1 **AI's role in changing the landscape of campaigning:**
2024 witnessed an encompassing play of AI, as it displayed a pivotal role in political campaigns, reshaping voter outreach and engagement through advanced targeting strategies and tailored messaging. For instance, in Hungary, advocacy group noÁr experimented with AI-powered tools to create engaging calls to action on social media. Japan went a little further; as its Governor Yuriko Koike utilized an AI version of herself, named "AI Yuriko", to showcase her achievements and promote her policies.

2 **Diverse Global Adoption:**
The integration and role of AI varied significantly across nations globally. The influence and impact of AI was tailored according to the country-specific needs. Amongst others, India and its incorporation of AI helped in creating "eye-catching content" to engage voters and stay aligned with evolving social media trends.

3 **Generative AI's two-fold Impact:**
Generative AI (genAI) emerged as both an enabler of effective campaigning and a source of widespread disinformation, leading to significant global concern about its misuse. The US for example, is classified as "severely polarized", ranked 3rd among 28 analyzed countries in terms of polarization. The level of trust in the US media is low and is ranked 1st in distrust in social media.

4 **Role of Russia and FIMI Activities:**

 Russian Foreign Influence and Malign Interference (FIMI) activities prominently leveraged AI tools for election interference, demonstrating AI's utility in spreading targeted propaganda. The use of GenAI such as "Doppelganger" by Russia was captured on many occasions leading to disinformation and eroding public trust.

5 **Regulatory Lag and Ethical Challenges:**

Many legal systems struggled to keep pace with AI advancements, leaving gaps in governance and raising ethical concerns about the misuse of AI in ways that threaten democratic standards and several case studies revealed varied forms of AI-powered disinformation, including deep fakes, manipulated audio-visual content, and automated chatbot-driven propaganda campaigns.

Overview of Methodology

Research Approach
Adopted a mixed-methods strategy to analyze AI's role in political campaigns, focusing on its transformative potential and risks like disinformation and voter manipulation.

Primary Data
Expert interviews with policymakers, campaign strategists, and AI specialists.

Secondary Data
Comprehensive literature review, analysis of policy documents, and case studies.

Case Studies
Examined AI's impact on elections in India, USA, and Argentina to highlight varying levels of integration.
Focused on applications such as voter targeting, generative AI tools, and deepfakes.

Regulatory Review
Analyzed frameworks from the EU, USA, and India to understand governance and compliance.

Ethical Considerations
Prioritized transparency, non-partisanship, and informed consent to maintain research integrity.

Policy Recommendations
Advocated for transparency in AI use, public awareness campaigns, and global standardization of regulations.

Acknowledgment

The policy paper The Pervasive Influence of AI on Global Political Campaigns in 2024 has been developed by Future Shift Labs which could not have been completed without the contribution of its partners. We extend our sincere appreciation to our principal partner, Kairos Communications, and our launch partner, the International Political Expo (IPE), for their vital contributions and unwavering support throughout this project. Their expertise and collaborative efforts have been instrumental in the successful completion of this initiative.

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This publication has been produced on 18th January, 2025 by Future Shift Labs as part of an ongoing research initiative exploring the impact of artificial intelligence on global political campaigns. The insights, analyses, and conclusions presented are the outcome of a collaborative research process guided by Future Shift Labs. While the report reflects a collective effort, the views expressed do not necessarily represent those of Future Shift Labs, its partners, or affiliated organizations in their entirety.

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Content

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1. Introduction

In the current digital landscape, artificial intelligence (AI) has become a significant component of political campaigns, altering the methods through which parties and candidates interact with electorates. Global elections in 2023 and 2024 have demonstrated a considerable increase in the application of AI in campaign strategies, as political entities utilized AI-tools to enhance outreach, improve voter targeting, and deliver tailored messaging to diverse demographic and ideological groups.

The use of AI in political campaigns in 2024 has varied substantially across countries, shaped by each nation's political history and culture, ideological foundations, regulatory frameworks, or access to technological tools. Variations in data privacy laws, ethical standards, and political norms influence both the scope and the strategies of AI usage in electoral contexts. Political parties and candidates thus adapt their AI-driven approaches to align with their respective legal and cultural frameworks, resulting in diverse applications of AI across national elections.

The year 2024 was not only the year of global elections, but also the year of the "AI disinformation scare"

The advent of generative AI (genAI) in combination with more than 50 global elections, ongoing wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, the rise of populism and the era of multi-crises, as some apocalyptic scenarios predicted, would lead to massive disruptions caused by genAI's ability to manipulate and deceive[1]. This "AI disinformation scare" was exemplified by the World Economic Forum electing AI disinformation as No. 1 global risk in its 2024 Global Risks Report[2]. Such fears circled mainly around popular AI applications AI chatbots such as ChatGPT, and their ability to flood the information space with cheap and abundant "fake news" and audio-visual synthetic media distorting our political reality[3].

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[1] Gold, A. & Fischer, S. (2023, February 21). Chatbots trigger next misinformation nightmare. Axios. https://www.axios.com/2023/02/21/chatbots-misinformation-nightmare-chatgpt-a; Metz, C. (2023, May 1): 'The Godfather of A.I.' leaves Google and warns of danger ahead. The New York Times (https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/01/technolo-gy/ai-google-chatbot-engineer-quitshinton) ; Bremmer I., Kupchan C. (2023). Top Risks 2023. Eurasia Group: New York.

[2] WEF (ed): Global Risks Report 2024 (https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2024/).

[3] C.f.: Goldstein J., Sastry G., Musser M., DiResta R., Gentzel M., Sedova, K. (2023). Generative Language Models and Automated Influence Operations: Emerging Threats and Potential Mitigations. arXiv:2301.04246.

AI campaigning and AI disinformation and manipulation are the two marking features of elections in the new AI era. This policy paper explores the topic "lessons learned" about the use of AI in political campaigning and disinformation and election interference of the past "year of global elections 2024".

The first part of this study will focus on the adoption of AI technologies in electoral processes, categorizing their applications and evaluating possible consequences for campaign strategies. It highlights how advanced tools are being used to enhance voter outreach, refine targeting, and deliver tailored messaging to diverse demographic and ideological groups. These developments offer both opportunities and challenges, requiring a clear understanding of their operational mechanisms and societal consequences. Especially since the legal systems of many countries have not kept up with the rapid development of modern technologies, which is why regulatory responses are delayed or even non-existent. Meanwhile, the implementation of particular solutions raises justified concerns about the possibility of violating democratic standards, especially when they are ethically questionable, or fall within a grey area of the law.

The second part devoted to AI-powered disinformation and global elections 2024 will focus on expectations and fears of AI disinformation vis-à-vis the forms, strategies and impact that AI disinformation actually had. In the face of widespread and extreme fears about the impact of genAI on disinformation and election interference, it seems necessary to cross-check and analyse these fears and expectations against the actual use and impact of genAI in disinformation during elections in 2023 and 2024. This is the objective of this part. To do so, this study will analyse a set of case studies of AI disinformation in global elections that took place in 2023 and 2024 from more than a dozen countries with regard to the role AI and AI disinformation played during the election. The analysis of AI disinformation will focus on the materialization of fears about election-related AI-disinformation (so-called "Information Apocalypse"), forms of AI-powered disinformation, the use of AI in Russian FIMI activities and future expectations in regard to election disinformation.

2. The Use of Generative AI in Political Campaigning 2024

(by Alisha Butala / Mateusz Łabuz)

2.1. Methodology

This study aims to deepen its analysis by combining existing research from news articles, academic studies, and other relevant literature with first-hand insights gathered through primary data collection. Central to this approach are qualitative expert interviews with political advisors and campaign strategists who have direct experience leveraging AI technologies in election contexts. These experts represent a range of global perspectives, though the policy paper will focus specifically on insights and findings that align with its core objectives and scope. These interviews adopted an open-ended format to allow for a comprehensive exploration of how AI has been applied in political campaigns worldwide. Key topics included the integration of AI into campaign strategies, its role in shaping voter behaviour, and the measurable impacts AI tools have had on the effectiveness and efficiency of political campaigns. Additionally, the conversations delved into broader issues such as the ethical considerations and regulatory challenges associated with using AI in electoral processes, particularly regarding transparency, misinformation, and voter trust. By engaging with professionals, this study gathered rich, nuanced perspectives beyond theoretical and secondary data.

> These findings not only illuminate current trends and technologies but also help to identify best practices for using AI to enhance campaign strategies, expand voter outreach, and foster greater engagement among electorates.

Moreover, these discussions contribute to a deeper understanding of how AI can be tailored to diverse political and cultural contexts, addressing both regional opportunities and challenges. Ultimately, the study seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice, offering actionable recommendations for policymakers, campaign managers, and other stakeholders to harness AI's capabilities responsibly and effectively in democratic systems.

2.2. Enhancing Campaign Outreach and Efficiency

The integration of AI in political campaigns is reshaping the way candidates engage with voters and manage their electoral strategies. As AI tools become more accessible and refined, political parties are increasingly adopting them to streamline their operations and enhance their outreach.

In **Hungary**, for example, the advocacy group **noÁr** experimented with AI-powered tools to create engaging calls to action on social media. Although the results were mixed, the initiative showcased AI's potential to enhance political messaging and extend its reach to a wider audience. Similarly, researchers in the US recommended that political campaigns explore AI's potential to create personalized messages for distinct voter segments. AI's capability to generate impactful content—such as speeches, press releases, and social media posts—has been labelled as especially valuable for campaigns with limited budgets, helping them connect more effectively with their intended audiences.

In other instances, AI was used to enhance linguistic inclusivity in political campaigns. In the US, for example, the **AAPI Victory Alliance** leveraged AI-powered tools to translate campaign messages into multiple languages, including Hindi, Tagalog, and Chinese. This AI-driven translation method significantly cut down on time and costs compared to traditional human translation services, thereby broadening the campaign's reach and engaging communities that may have otherwise been overlooked[6].

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[4] noÁr. 2023. "Home - noÁr." October 13, 2023. https://noar.hu/en/homepage/.

[5] Bueno De Mesquita, Ethan, Brandice Canes-Wrone, Andrew B. Hall, Kristian Lum, Gregory J. Martin, and Yamil Ricardo Velez. 2023. "Preparing for Generative AI in the 2024 Election: Recommendations and Best Practices Based on Academic Research." White paper. University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy and the Stanford Graduate School of Business. https://harris.uchicago.edu/files/ai_and_elections_best_practices_no_embargo.pdf.

[6] Bhattacharya, Ananya, and Russell Brandom. 2024. "Political Campaigns Embrace AI to Reach Voters Across Language Barriers." Rest of World, September 20, 2024. https://restofworld.org/2024/aapi-victory-alliance-ai-voter-outreach/.

An innovative application of AI was also seen during the UK general election in Brighton, where an AI avatar named "**AI Steve**" took on the role of a candidate and interacted with voters in real-time. The avatar engaged with residents on various issues such as LGBTQ rights, housing, waste management, and immigration. Beyond sharing policy proposals, it also invited public input, fostering greater participation in the democratic process[7].

Similarly, in Japan, Governor Yuriko Koike utilized an AI version of herself, named "AI Yuriko", to showcase her achievements and promote her policies. The AI avatar acted as a representative for Koike, who had a hectic schedule and played a key role in driving substantial social media engagement[8]. Mayor Katsuaki Kamiji also used an AI avatar to bridge communication gaps with the city's foreign residents, allowing him to address them in languages he struggled with, such as English[9].

Experts' Insights: Interviews with Political Consultants and Experts

1 **Indian Political Campaigns and AI:**

In a conversation with a political consulting expert involved in shaping campaign strategies for political parties in India, the role of AI in elections was discussed in depth. The expert highlighted various ways in which AI has been employed to address the distinct needs of the Indian electorate. One prominent example was the use of personalized video messaging. Given India's vast array of constituencies, each with its own unique local issues, AI was harnessed to create targeted messages that specifically addressed these concerns. This allowed candidates to directly engage with voters by focusing on topics that were most relevant to their region, making the campaign messages more engaging and impactful.

These examples illustrate how AI is being used in India to make political campaigns more data-driven, responsive, and targeted, ultimately helping parties and candidates connect more effectively with voters.

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[7] Grierson, Jamie. 2024. "Brighton General Election Candidate Aims to Be UK's First 'AI MP.'" The Guardian, June 10, 2024. https://www.theguardian.com/politics/article/2024/jun/10/brighton-general-election-candidate-uk-first-ai-mp-artificial-intelligence.

[8] Times, Japan. 2024. "Candidates Turn to AI in Tokyo Governor Race." The Japan Times, June 30, 2024. https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2024/06/29/japan/politics/tokyo-race-digitial-tools/.

[9] Gushiken, Sunao. 2024. "City Creates an AI-based Avatar Speaking English to Replace Mayor, in: The Asahi Shimbun Asia & Japan Watch." The Asahi Shimbun. May 23, 2024. https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/15247651.

AI was also used in India to enhance political rallies through video analysis. By monitoring the facial expressions and reactions of attendees, AI provided real-time feedback on how voters were responding to the campaign's content. This enabled political teams to make adjustments to their approach and messaging as needed, helping to create a stronger connection with the audience.

AI's Impact on Voter Behavior :

The expert also spoke about how AI-driven political advertisements are influencing voter behaviour, particularly in rural versus urban settings. In rural areas, where technological literacy is lower, AI-generated content like personalized videos and deepfakes is often seen as more believable and persuasive. Voters in these areas, who have limited exposure to advanced technology, are more likely to trust AI-generated messages at face value.

Furthermore, in rural areas, where local issues like agriculture and rural development are of great importance, AI-crafted content tailored to these concerns can significantly increase voter engagement and sway decisions. By addressing these localized issues, campaigns can more effectively capture voter interest.

In contrast, urban voters, who are generally more familiar with technology, tend to be more sceptical of AI-generated content, making it less impactful in urban areas. However, AI is still effective for targeting niche urban groups with specific concerns. These insights highlight how AI is reshaping political messaging, allowing campaigns to tailor their approaches to the unique needs and characteristics of different regions and demographics.

2 **Indonesian Political Campaigns and AI:**

When interviewing an expert from Indonesia, he highlighted how AI is playing a pivotal role in engaging younger voters, particularly Gen Y and Gen Z, through creative and innovative approaches. One notable example discussed was the AI platform Pemilu.AI, developed to support legislative candidates by creating personalized, data-driven campaigns. The platform integrates a wide range of information, including demographic, socio-economic, and political data,

enabling candidates to craft micro-targeted campaigns that resonate with the specific needs and aspirations of their electoral districts. This tailored approach not only enhances voter engagement but also allows candidates to address local issues more effectively,

leveraging AI to foster stronger connections with their constituents. By focusing on generational trends and localized concerns, the use of AI in Indonesia exemplifies how technology can modernize electoral strategies while driving more inclusive political participation.

AI has undeniably transformed political campaigns by increasing outreach and efficiency through precise targeting, personalization, and real-time adaptability. By analysing voter demographics, preferences, and reactions, campaigns can craft tailored messages that resonate with specific voter groups, broadening engagement and inclusivity. This targeted approach has reached traditionally underserved communities, addressing unique concerns and fostering stronger connections.

Despite these advancements, it is acknowledged that the use of AI in elections is still in its very initial phases. While AI has demonstrated effectiveness in streamlining campaign operations, enabling automation, and reducing manpower needs, the technology's full potential has yet to be realized. Limitations in implementation and the evolving nature of these tools make it challenging to draw definitive links between AI usage and voter turnout. Additionally, studying the in-depth impact of AI on voter behaviour, including its influence on decision-making and perceptions, remains difficult due to the nascent state of methodologies and data collection in this area.

Furthermore, though AI has enabled campaigns to allocate resources more strategically and engage with diverse electorates, its long-term effects on the democratic process and its ability to shape voter behaviour require further exploration. Ethical considerations, transparency, and trust will play a crucial role in ensuring that AI supports democratic values while minimizing the risks associated with its misuse. As campaigns continue to experiment with AI, a deeper understanding of its implications will be essential for leveraging its transformative potential responsibly.

2.3. Deepfake Technology and Political Advertising

The appearance of **deepfakes** in the information space has disrupted the stemic value of audio and visual media and led to questioning the paradigm of trust in the sense of sight. By generating a non-existent reality, in many cases impossible to distinguish by the recipients, deepfakes have undermined a social sense of trust in information and the foundations of how we perceive reality and facts[10]. This should not prejudge a complete demonization of deepfakes. Like with many technologies with breakthrough potential, the use of deepfakes will depend on the intentions of their creators or multiplicators.

In the last two years, a new trend in their applications has emerged. They are employed to increase the attractiveness of political candidates. It has significantly intensified at the turn of 2023 and 2024 and will most likely be used on an increasingly larger scale. As a rule, it takes a consensual form, most often by synthesizing the audio or visual content to eliminate the deficits of politicians' performances and present features perceived as more attractive[11]. Using deepfakes for political advertising purposes can contribute to expanding the audience of political messages by reaching new recipients and, in a very positive scenario, increasing the involvement of citizens in political processes.

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[10] Fallis D. (2021). The Epistemic Threat of Deepfakes. Philosophy & Technology. Vol. 34(4). pp. 623-643. doi: 10.1007/s13347-020-00419-2; Geddes K. G. (2021). Ocularcentrism and Deepfakes: Should Seeing Be Believing?. Fordham Intellectual Property, Media and Entertainment Law Journal. Vol. 31(4). pp. 1042-1083.

However, one needs to keep in mind that deepfakes are serving as a tool for presenting deeply false reality, and the line between false and real seems to be gradually diminishing. What we could undoubtedly consider false in the past is increasingly recognized as an element of reality, redefining the concepts of truth and authenticity, and thus influencing our perception of politicians and political processes, making it difficult to make informed choices that should be seen as one of the core values of democracy.

Distorted realities: A new line

So far, attempts to use deepfakes for political advertising have been limited and aimed at **motivating voters and reaching linguistic minorities**. India's political parties have used AI to create **fake audio, propaganda images, and parodies**. At the same time, AI was also helpful in reaching a wide audience by creating content in different languages and spreading both real and fake information. Already in 2020, Manoj Tiwari, an Indian politician, serving as a member of parliament used deepfake videos of himself for advertising purposes. His original speech was altered, so the video deepfake presented him speaking a dialect of Hindi and allowed him to reach an unspecified number of citizens, normally excluded from the discourse due to linguistic diversity[12] .

In 2024, similar solutions were used on a mass scale in elections in India at various levels, which resulted in attempts to use audio deepfakes to distribute translated voice messages (via phone calls) in which politicians addressed voters by name[13]. This has put India at the

[11] Pashentsev E. (2023). The Malicious Use of Deepfakes Against Psychological Security and Political Stability. [In:] The Palgrave Handbook of Malicious Use of AI and Psychological Security (Eds. Pashentsev E.). pp. 47-80. doi: 10.1007/978-3-031-22552-9_3; Chowdhury R. (2024). AI-fuelled election campaigns are here — where are the rules?. Nature. Vol. 628(237). doi: 10.1038/d41586-024-00995-9.

[12] Nilesh C. (2020). We've Just Seen the First Use of Deepfakes in an Indian Election Campaign. Accessed 15.10.2023, https://www.vice.com/en/article/jgedjb/the-first-use-of-deepfakes-in-indian-election-by-bjp.

[13] Christopher N, Bansal V. (2024). Indian Voters Are Being Bombarded With Millions of Deepfakes. Political Candidates Approve. Accessed 24.05.2024, https://www.wired.com/story/indian-elections-ai-deepfakes.

forefront of countries where political advertising with the use of deepfakes is employed without appropriate provisions regarding disclosing the use of AI. Deepfakes have of course also been used to attack opponents. For example, the Bharatiya Janata Party shared an AI-made video of one of Modi's main opponents, who was in jail, pretending to play a guitar and sing a Bollywood song[14]. Meanwhile, the Congress Party made a video mocking Prime Minister Narendra Modi by changing song lyrics to suggest he was giving the country to big businesses[15].

Additionally, campaigns that showed a variation of deepfake political advertising were also used in Pakistan and Indonesia. In Pakistan, supporters of the imprisoned Imran Khan produced deepfake videos to illustrate his written statements[16]. In Indonesia, in turn, the deceased dictator Suharto was digitally resurrected with the use of generative AI to encourage citizens to vote[17].

In the US, Francis Suarez, the Republican mayor of Miami, used video deepfakes to fuel his campaign for the 2024 US presidential election[18]. Yet, his campaign met with minimal interest and he eventually withdrew from the elections. In another case, the mayor of New York, Eric Adams, used deepfake-technology to produce audio files of himself for political advertising. His voice was used in "robocalls" (i.e. auto-dialling of pre-recorded messages disseminated by phone calls) to communicate with the city's inhabitants. There, Adams also spoke languages he did not know, including Mandarin and Yiddish, and reached an unspecified number of citizens with his campaign[19]. In yet another instance, Donald Trump used deepfakes several times and some of them, including photographs depicting him while praying, were intended as a promotion tool[20].

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[14][15] 2024c. "'Inflection Point': AI Meme Wars Hit India Election, Test Social Platforms." Al Jazeera, March 8, 2024. https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2024/3/8/ai-meme-wars-hit-india-election-campaign-testing-social-platforms.

[16] Shahzad, Asif. 2023. "Pakistan's Jailed Imran Khan Uses AI-crafted Speech to Lure Votes." Reuters, December 18, 2023. https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/pakistans-jailed-imran-khan-uses-ai-crafted-speech-call-votes-2023-12-18/.

[17] Chen, Heather. 2024. "AI 'resurrects' long dead dictator in murky new era of deepfake electioneering." CNN, February 11, 2024. https://edition.cnn.com/2024/02/12/asia/suharto-deepfake-ai-scam-indonesia-election-hnk-intl/index.html.

[18] Harrison M. (2023). Bizarre AI Deepfake Answer Questions on Behalf of Presidential Candidate. Accessed 15.08.2023, https://futurism.com/the-byte/presidential-campaign-ai-deepfake.

[19] Simon S. (2023). Opinion: Did he really say that?. Accessed 30.10.2023, https://www.npr.org/2023/10/21/1207749595/opinion-did-he-really-say-that.

[20] Novak M. (2023). Donald Trump Shares Fake AI-Created Image Of Himself On Truth Social. Accessed 15.10.2023, https://www.forbes.com/sites/mattnovak/2023/03/23/donald-trump-shares-fake-ai-created-image-of-himself-on-truth-social/?sh=4a0a38c871f6.

Deepfake technology and its application in political campaigning in their current form are still in an early stage and their effectiveness and impact on voting behaviour are still unclear. It seems that politicians and campaigners all around the globe are still in an experimental stage. The increasing quantity and quality of use cases and the growing capabilities of generative AI will reinforce the observed trends. Without proper involvement from state and non-state actors their excessive use can lead to the illusion of democracy, or create a **"deeply faked democracy"**. The increasing use of deepfakes for political advertising raises justified concerns about ethical limits and restrains of this technology. These trends could in future lead to undermining election processes or denying the idea of democracy based on awareness of choice.

2.4. Case Studies of AI in Political Campaigning: USA, India, Argentina and Beyond

After reviewing **election campaigns in 2023-2024**, we identified three particularly interesting case studies – **India, Argentina and the USA** – which we present in more depth. In this analysis, we point to certain social, political, media and technological landscapes. By comparing India, USA and Argentina we gain insight into how AI was leveraged within different political systems and cultural contexts. Our analysis, although not representative, shows that campaigns using AI on a large scale were not strongly correlated with geographic distribution, which may suggest their universality and the possibility of transplantation to other jurisdictions.

Our observations may serve as a starting point for analyses to detect particular social or political susceptibility to such campaigns that might catalyse selected phenomena. They could serve as a warning in regard to the use of AI for political advertising purposes, especially if the use is not regulated by law. Drawing attention to characteristic features related to technological **evolution, openness to innovation**, specific technologically-driven culture of society, social polarization and weakness of traditional media might be advisable. However, the diversity of environments in which the analysed campaigns appeared suggests that in the future no political environment will be completely free from AI-powered campaigns.

2.4.1 India

India is characterized by high linguistic diversity, reaching dozens of dialects. This can be considered a specific form of fragmentation, forcing politicians to look for new forms of dialogue with specific groups of voters. However, the polarization coefficient for the country is relatively stable and below the average of the 28 countries ranked by Edelman[21].

The level of trust in the media is low and amounts to **38%**[22].

India is also characterized by the highest level of AI skill penetration rate and one of the highest trust rates for the use of AI in the world. Technological advancement is not evenly distributed, and the Internet penetration rate is only 60%, which may encourage politicians to look for solutions not based on Internet communication, but on traditional telephone connections[24]. Due to the patterns implemented so far, linguistic fragmentation seems to be crucial, and experiments with addressing statements to specific voters also reveal attempts to target individual citizens.

> Technological advancement is not evenly distributed, and the Internet penetration rate is only **60%**

AI helped political parties navigate the nation's 22 official languages and thousands of regional dialects. It was used to create funny or misleading images and videos targeting opponents, boost politicians' images, bring back popular figures to support one party, and spread false stories about rivals. In the two months before the elections began in April 2024, over 50 million calls were made using this AI technology[25].

[21] Edelman (2023). Edelman Trust Barometer Global Report 2023. Edelman.
https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2024/3/8/ai-meme-wars-hit-india-election-campaign-testing-social-platforms.
[22] Newman N., Fletcher R., Eddy K., Robertson C. T., Nielsen R. K. (2023). Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Oxford.
[23] Fattorini, L. et al. (2024). Artificial Intelligence Index Report 2024. Institute for Human-Centered AI. Stanford University.
[24] Edelman (2023). Edelman Trust Barometer Global Report 2023. Edelman.
[25] Anadi. 2024a. "Deep Fakes, Deeper Impacts: AI's Role in the 2024 Indian General Election and Beyond." Uploaded by Global Network on Extremism and Technology. Deep Fakes, Deeper Impacts: AI's Role in the 2024 Indian General Election and Beyond (blog). September 7, 2024. https://gnet-research.org/2024/09/11/deep-fakes-deeper-impacts-ais-role-in-the-2024-indian-general-election-and-beyond/.

One major trend observable in India is using AI in meme culture. People are likely to use AI to create and share satirical images and videos. Memes can spread messages, including misinformation, and make extreme behaviours seem normal through humour [26]. The head of the INC's communications team for the 2024 election stated in an interview with Al Jazeera that leveraging memes has become a more impactful strategy for delivering the party's message on social media. Incorporating AI helps in creating **"eye-catching content"** to engage voters and stay aligned with evolving social media trends. "In an environment dominated by memes and sarcasm, maintaining a formal tone isn't effective"[27]. These trends refer also to the official campaigns conducted by political parties, which gradually enhances the aggressivity of messaging.

Above all, AI allows for direct interactions with the voters. An app for Sikkim's chief minister, Prem Singh Tamang, used a QR code that allows supporters to generate a selfie with the politician [28]. Shashi Tharoor, a minister from the Congress party, was interviewed with his AI avatar [29]. M. Karunanidhi, the former Chief Minister of the southern state of Tamil Nadu, appeared in an AI video at his party's youth wing conference and then a book launch of his friend and fellow politician's memoir [30]. Two things are unique about the high volume of AI-generated content in India. Firstly, the content is designed to appeal to emotions, is largely translated to regional languages, and tends to tug at the voters' relational bonds with their leaders, especially with resurrected politicians who enjoyed superstardom while alive and veneration upon passing. Secondly, this content is

[26] Ascott, Tom. 2020. "How Memes Are Becoming the New Frontier of Information Warfare | the Strategist." The Strategist. February 19, 2020. https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/how-memes-are-becoming-the-new-frontier-of-information-warfare/.

[27] 2024b. "'Inflection Point': AI Meme Wars Hit India Election, Test Social Platforms." Al Jazeera, March 8, 2024. https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2024/3/8/ai-meme-wars-hit-india-election-campaign-testing-social-platforms.2024.

[28] Shah, Fahad, and Munira Mutaher. 2024. "AI Companies Are Making Millions Producing Election Content in India." Rest of World, May 23, 2024. https://restofworld.org/2024/india-elections-ai-content/.

[29] Gupta, Nishtha, and Netheena Mathews. 2024. "India's Experiments With AI in the 2024 Elections: The Good, the Bad &Amp; the In-between." Tech Policy Press. September 25, 2024. https://www.techpolicy.press/indias-experiments-with-ai-in-the-2024-elections-the-good-the-bad-the-inbetween/.

[30] Christopher, Nilesh. 2024a. "How AI Is Resurrecting Dead Indian Politicians as Election Looms." Al Jazeera, March 7, 2024. https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2024/2/12/how-ai-is-used-to-resurrect-dead-indian-politicians-as-elections-loom.

distributed on unmoderated and unscrutinized platforms, often packaged by hyper-local content aggregators[31]. Additionally, AI was weaponized to generate explicit photographs of women. According to some experts, such usage is multiplying, objectification "in a patriarchal society". Moreover, it might be a reason why some women may choose to step back from being actively involved in politics in the face of the threat. Many Bollywood actresses went through similar kinds of attacks in November 2023[32].

2.4.2 USA

The US is classified as **"severely polarized"**, ranked 3rd among 28 analyzed countries in terms of polarization [33]. The level of trust in the media is low and amounts to 32%[34]. The country is ranked 1st in distrust of traditional media [35]. At the same time, it is one the most prosperous economies in the world and technological leader in many categories: ranked 3rd in Global Innovation Index; ranked 2nd in R&D, ranked 56th in ICT access, ranked 12th in creative outputs [36]. The US is also characterized by one of the highest AI skill penetration rates, but also one of the lowest trust rates for the use of AI in the world [37].

In the US, AI was employed for both constructive and deceptive purposes. Campaigners utilized AI to analyse voter data, optimize fundraising, and craft targeted communications. However, the election also witnessed the spread of AI-generated disinformation. An important

> The level of trust in the media is low and amounts to **32%.**

[31] Shukla, Vandinika. 2024a. "The Era of AI-Generated Election Campaigning Is Underway in India." Tech Policy Press. May 25, 2024. https://www.techpolicy.press/the-era-of-aigenerated-election-campaigning-is-underway-in-india/.

[32] Adami, Marina. 2024. "How AI Disinformation Might Impact This Year's Elections and How Journalists Should Report on It." Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. March 15, 2024. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/news/how-ai-gener-ated-disinformation-might-impact-years-elections-and-how-journalists-should-report.

[33] Edelman (2023). Edelman Trust Barometer Global Report 2023. Edelman.

[34] Newman N., Fletcher R., Eddy K., Robertson C. T., Nielsen R. K. (2023). Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. Oxford.

[35] Edelman (2023). Edelman Trust Barometer Global Report 2023. Edelman.

[36] Dutta, S., Lanvin, B., Rivera León, L., Wunsch-Vincent, S. (2023). Global Innovation Index 2023. WIPO. doi: 10.34667/tind.48220A.

[37] Fattorini, L. et al. (2024). Artificial Intelligence Index Report 2024. Institute for Human-Centered AI. Stanford University.

element was the amplification of meme content that was not of high quality but had great potential to engage the audience. The previously mentioned innovative forms of communication with voters via voice deepfakes did not play a significant role, but were an important signal of testing new solutions in the field of political advertising.

Additionally, some foreign actors used AI to create fake and divisive content aimed at influencing voter sentiment. This reinforced the information disorders accompanying the ongoing campaign and the efforts of domestic actors. Moreover, domestic instances of AI-powered audio deepfakes misuse occurred, such as mimicking President Biden's voice for misleading robocalls aimed at discouraging the voters from taking part in the primaries in New Hampshire.

2.4.3 Argentina

Argentina is classified as "severely polarized", and **ranked 1st among 28 analysed countries in terms of polarization**[38]. It is estimated that partisanship might be the highest in the world and this phenomenon has its own name: "la grieta" ("the crack"). These divisions were used as one of the topics of the campaign in 2023 and deepfakes aimed for further polarization – **"we vs they"**. The level of trust in the media is very low and amounts to 30%[39], which results in a strong spread of social media. The country can also be described as one of the least functioning economies in the world and regularly struggles with financial crises.

It is ranked 73rd in the Global Innovation Index, though the under performance is partly a result of disastrous institutional scores. Ranked 48th in R&D and 45th in ICT access[40]. The Internet adoption rate is way above the global average with 83% and the Internet consumption (daily time spent) is one of the highest in the world [41].

During the 2023 presidential campaign in Argentina, two leading candidates used AI-generated visualization on a mass scale. Many of them were created for pure

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[38] Edelman (2023). Edelman Trust Barometer Global Report 2023. Edelman.

[39] Newman N., Fletcher R., Eddy K., Robertson C. T., Nielsen R. K. (2023). Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism: Oxford.

[40] Dutta, S., Lanvin, B., Rivera León, L., Wunsch-Vincent, S. (2023). Global Innovation Index 2023. WIPO. doi: 10.34667/tind.48220A.

[41] Hootsuite (2022). Digital 2022. Global Overview Report. Hootsuite.

advertising purposes. The creations were mainly static in nature and were often stylized as products of pop culture, which in many cases allowed them to be distinguished from authentic creations. However, it revealed an interesting trend of implementing meme and artistic solutions based on synthetic media, including deepfakes, for political communication. Due to the sheer number of materials and the engagement from public opinion that produced its own deepfakes, Nicas called it "the first AI elections"[42].

2.4.4 Conclusion

Similarly to India, it is worth noting the mass distribution of fictional creations in Argentina, including references to pop culture, which were intended to promote specific candidates on the one hand, and to evoke negative cognitive associations with opponents on the other. Stylized election posters played an important role, in which AI acted as a catalyst for simple but powerful associations. In the US, the use of AI in the election campaign was more diverse. As in the case of India and Argentina, attention could be drawn to the formation of certain simplified associations (attempts to use cognitive bias, such as in the case of showing Kamala Harris as a communist). An important role was played by meme creations amplified by AI algorithms in social media.

Distribution channels differed slightly in each country, mainly due to the focus on Internet communication in Argentina and the US. The case of India, where telephone calls, including the WhatsApp application, were used on a mass scale, shows significant differences resulting from, on the one hand, political culture (relatively high social acceptance of robocalls in India) and the popularization of certain technologies and forms of political and social communication.

An important element was the resources available to the main actors of the election campaigns. Campaigners in the US utilized AI to aggregate data and adjust targeted communications. In India, while concerns about AI-driven disinformation existed, the technology was predominantly used constructively to connect with the electorate, which included targeting specific communities or even

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[42] Nicas, J. (2023). Is Argentina the First A.I. Election?. Accessed 15.10.2024,
https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/15/world/americas/argentina-election-ai-milei-massa.html.

individuals. The campaign in Argentina prominently featured AI-generated imagery to influence voter perceptions, and due to the negative tone of much of the campaign, it served to mobilize the electorate on the one hand, and reinforce social divisions on the other. In this context, the actions of political actors in the US revealed significant similarities, aiming to amplify emotionally charged content with high polarizing potential.

Another important factor is the approach to language issues, which in the case of the more linguistically homogeneous Argentine society did not play a key role. The axes of polarization in the case of India and Argentina ran differently, but in both cases, politicians explored the potential of social differences using AI. In the US attempts to use deepfakes for political advertising have been limited and aimed at attracting voters and reaching linguistic minorities. A limiting factor may be a more restrictive law, particularly with respect to robocalls. Tightening regulations in this regard in the future will likely be a derivative of the illegal use of President Joe Biden's cloned voice to discourage citizens from participating in the primaries in January 2024.

3. Laws, Norms and Regulations on the Use of AI in Elections

(by Mateusz Łabuz)

3.1. General remarks

This section examines how selected jurisdictions navigate data privacy regulations, electoral laws, and the ethical use of AI in political campaigns. The noticeable trend of regulating AI systems worldwide has an impact on how election campaigns can be conducted. However, the lack of universality of these regulations and global standards should be noted. Moreover, in many jurisdictions, AI regulations are not codified in a single holistic legal act, which makes navigation within the regulatory landscape difficult. The lack of precision and explicit references to electoral processes, **force reinterpretation of existing provisions**, which in turn may result in a weakening of the protective regime, and lead to abuse by political actors who might opportunistically exploit the development of technology for political purposes.

From the point of view of creating global standards, the actions taken by the European Union and individual states of the US are crucial, as they can serve as a model for other jurisdictions[43].

It is also necessary to continuously monitor the solutions proposed in various jurisdictions, with the reservation that they may differ significantly depending on political, social, economic and technological specificity. Individual cases of using AI for political

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[43] Siegmann C., Anderljung M. (2022). The Brussels Effect and Artificial Intelligence: How EU regulation will impact the global AI market. Centre for the Governance of AI: Oxford.

campaigning should not predetermine remedies, as excessive regulation may result in a decrease in innovation and limit the positive aspects of using AI in political processes. However, responding to incidents and increasing the awareness of policymakers and regulators should be important factors influencing the consistent development of safeguards that could guarantee freedom of making informed choices.

One may also plausibly argue that legislation would always stand in a lost position against a well-prepared and properly motivated opponent engaging in covert actions, including disinformation. This is a significant challenge from the point of view of democratic systems – the introduction of appropriate regulations must include not only systems of prohibitions and restrictions but also target the mechanism of amplification, which requires cooperation with digital platforms in order to mitigate risks. Consistent reinforcement of social resilience is also an important factor and a prerequisite for combating disinformation more effectively.

3.2. Overview of regulatory frameworks

The integration of AI technologies into political campaigning has clearly frameworks. **Adapting existing regulations involves difficulties in reinterpretation and, in some cases, results in the inability to identify appropriate provisions. Consequently, federal and state governments in the US have begun efforts to establish guidelines and regulations to ensure the responsible use of AI in political processes [44].**

[44] Siegmann C., Anderljung M. (2022). The Brussels Effect and Artificial Intelligence: How EU regulation will impact the global AI market. Centre for the Governance of AI: Oxford.

A strategy of reinterpretation was adopted by the US Federal Election Commission (FEC), which initiates discussions and actions on how AI technologies can impact election transparency and fairness in the US. In September 2024, referring to the Federal Election Campaign Act, the FEC adopted an Interpretive Rule to clarify that **52 U.S.C. § 30124** relating to fraudulent misrepresentation applies also to using AI[45].

In turn, in 2024, the Federal Communications Commission prepared a draft on **Disclosure and Transparency of Artificial Intelligence-Generated Content in Political Advertisements**. Its main assumption is to appropriately mark synthetic content used for political advertising, which would sensitize recipients to the possibility of manipulation. The Election Assistance Commission published specific recommendations in the "AI toolkit" that provides guidelines for officials with regard to strategic communications, and offers a SWAT analysis of the potential tools that might be used by election administration [46].

More than fifteen states enacted legislation devoted to the use of AI in election campaigns [47]. They are mostly based on transparency obligations, the system of generic disclaimers for synthetic media created and disseminated before the election. The idea behind the disclaimers is to inform the recipients about the use of AI. Such solutions are supplemented by targeted legal acts that directly refer to electoral processes.

> "A good example is the provisions of California's Assembly Bill No. 2655 of September 2024 (entitled "Defending Democracy from Deepfake Deception Act of 2024"). In addition to transparency requirements (disclosure of the use of AI to create the material), the law obliges the large digital platforms to block or label materially deceptive AI-generated content, such as deepfakes, intended to mislead voters during specified election periods. Moreover, candidates and officials can seek court intervention for noncompliance, which is aimed at ensuring swift enforcement of the provisions to protect democratic processes[48]. At the same time, it complements earlier actions taken by California already in 2019, when AB 730 was implemented, one of the first legal acts that prohibited sharing materially deceptive content in specific periods before the elections[49]."

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[45] NCSL (2024). Deceptive Audio or Visual Media ('Deepfakes') 2024 Legislation. Accessed 01.12.2024, https://www.ncsl.org/technology-and-communication/deceptive-audio-or-visual-media-deepfakes-2024-legislation

[46] US Election Assistance Commission (2023). AI Toolkit for Election Officials. EAC: Washington.

The EU's groundbreaking Artificial Intelligence Act, adopted in 2024, addresses political campaigning only in a subsidiary way, mainly in terms of regulating the use of synthetic media, including AI-generated texts and deepfakes. Additionally, under the AI Act, AI systems that might influence elections or voter behaviour, such as through targeted political advertisements or directly influencing voter decisions, should be categorized as "high-risk". These systems must meet strict requirements, including transparency, human oversight, and accuracy, and they are broadly classified within the section on high-risk AI systems and democratic processes. However, these requirements do not include AI systems to the output of which natural persons are not directly exposed, such as tools used to organise, optimise or structure political campaigns from an administrative or logistical point of view. Therefore, the AI Act will find specific applications in the context of elections, but it will also be supplemented with solutions adopted by individual Member States [50].

Relevant provisions may be interpreted from other EU legal acts. **The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)** governs the use of personal data in advertising, ensuring user consent and data protection. **The Digital Services Act (DSA)** obliges the transparency of digital platforms in terms of disclosure of the source of political advertisements and imposes limitations on microtargeting.

Significant provisions could be introduced with the adoption of the Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the transparency and targeting of political advertising, which requires, among other things, additional transparency requirements related to targeting techniques and ad-delivery techniques in the context of online political advertising for the use of AI [51]. Platforms and advertisers would be obliged to disclose detailed information about political advertisements, including the funding sources and targeting methods. A transparency notification would inform users about the nature and

[47] NCSL (2024). Deceptive Audio or Visual Media ('Deepfakes') 2024 Legislation. Accessed 01.12.2024, https://www.ncsl.org/technology-and-communication/deceptive-audio-or-visual-media-deepfakes-2024-legislation.

[48] California Assembly Bill No. 2655 (2024). Defending Democracy from Deepfake Deception Act of 2024. https://custom.statenet.com/public/resources.cgi?mode=show_-text&id=ID:bill:CA2023000A2655&verid=CA2023000A2655_20240917_0_CH&.

[49] Mihalcik C. (2019). California laws seek to crack down on deepfakes in politics and porn. Accessed 01.12.2024, https://www.cnet.com/news/politics/california-laws-seek-to-crack-down-on-deepfakes-in-politics-and-porn.

[50] Łabuz M. (2024). Deep fakes and the Artificial Intelligence Act—An important signal or a missed opportunity?. Policy& Internet. doi: 10.1002/poi3.406.

[51] Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the transparency and targeting of political advertising (2024). https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:9cec62db-4dcb-11ec-91ac-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_1&format=PDF.

origin of the content. Properly applied regulations can be a significant step towards regulating microtargeting practices, which is intended to protect democratic processes from the abuse of automation and analysis of sensitive data.

Singapore has introduced the Integrity of Online Advertising Bill to ensure the responsible use of AI and advanced technologies in political campaigns. The legislation prohibits digitally manipulated content, such as deepfakes, in online political advertisements, aiming to protect voters from being misled during the election period. It establishes strict rules for AI-generated content that misrepresents candidates, parties, or the electoral processes. This bill complements Singapore's broader efforts to combat online falsehoods, including the **Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act** (POFMA), addressing emerging challenges in the digital age [52].

The Indian government is considering legislation to regulate the use of AI and advanced digital technologies in political campaigns. A key provision of the proposed law is a ban on AI-generated manipulated content, such as deepfakes, that misrepresents candidates, parties, or the electoral process during elections. The regulations will apply to content shared during the official election period, requiring strict adherence to guidelines to prevent digital manipulation. To enforce compliance, the legislation includes severe penalties, such as fines or imprisonment, for creating deceptive AI-driven political advertisements, reinforcing India's commitment to free and fair elections [53].

3.3. Regulation of Deepfake Technology in Political Communication

The technological structure and potential widespread use of deepfakes raise legitimate concerns about the scale of possible misuses that pose threats to democratic systems and political processes. For this reason, the legislation of an increasing number of countries and organizations is attempting to regulate deepfakes. There have been several attempts to

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[52] Ministry of Digital Development and Information. 2024. "New Legal Measures to Uphold Integrity of Online Advertising During Elections." September 9, 2024.
https://www.mddi.gov.sg/new-legal-measures-to-uphold-integrity-of-online-advertising-during-elections/.
[53] Election Commission of India (2024). "Responsible and Ethical Use of Social Media Platforms and Strict Avoidance of Any Wrongful Use by Political Parties and Their Representatives During MCC Period in General Elections and By- Elections-regd." May 6, 2024. https://elections24.eci.gov.in/docs/2eJLyv9x2w.pdf.

regulate the use of synthetic media in the context of elections in the US at the federal level (including **DEEPFAKES Accountability Act reintroduced in 2023**). In most of the cases successive bills to counter the dissemination of manipulated content were either rejected or criticized due to legislative weaknesses. Several states have moved ahead of federal regulation by enacting or proposing laws to address specific AI-related concerns in elections. Texas and California were among the first US states that were able to introduce specific laws, banning a distribution of deepfake political content of malicious nature before the election [54]. Currently dozens of different bills are pending in different states, and they are dealing with different aspects of using AI during election campaigns (political advertising, impersonation, defamation).

The EU AI Act could play an important role in that respect, providing a framework for the protection system, which should then be consistently developed by state and non-state actors. The EU regulatory framework could pave the way for an international solution and influence national legislation. The AI Act clearly associates deepfakes with disinformation, proposing diverse obligations to mark synthetic materials in a way that is readable for machines and for humans. These solutions are complemented by the obligations imposed on digital platforms (at the EU level, in the Digital Services Act), in which the algorithmic amplification of deepfakes is supposed to be prevented by detecting, moderating, labelling, or even removing harmful content. The security system built in this way targets the whole communications chain, although it does not directly refer to the issue of political advertising.

The exceptions included in the AI Act guaranteeing the protection of freedom of speech and artistic expression are not exempted from the transparency obligations completely (reduced requirements), thus balancing two competing values protected by the EU – freedom of making informed choices and freedom of speech. The AI Act recognizes the potential conflict between them but still decides to counteract the harmful consequences of specific (disinforming) deepfakes.

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[54] Halm K. C. et al. (2020). Two New California Laws Tackle Deepfake Videos in Politics and Porn. Accessed 15.07.2024, https://www.dwt.com/blogs/media-law-monitor/2020/02/two-new-california-laws-tackle-deepfake-videos-in.

3.4. Voluntary "Codes of Conduct" on the Use of AI in Campaigning

Voluntary codes of conduct should be seen as the agreements between various stakeholders, including political parties, media platforms, or civil society organizations, to uphold ethical and transparent practices during election campaigns. These agreements are non-binding but serve as an important declarative framework for ensuring fair electoral processes, which might also comprise counteracting disinformation and strengthening trust in democratic systems and processes. They are being implemented in many countries, and the discussion of specific examples will be limited to EU actions.

Voluntary codes contribute to raising awareness and establishing best practices. For instance, transparency measures have improved public trust in political advertising on digital platforms. However, enforcement is a significant challenge due to their non-binding nature. Compliance relies on goodwill, and violations often go unpunished unless accompanied by more concrete legal frameworks.

An example of this type of action is the EU Code of Practice on Disinformation adopted in 2018 and strengthened in 2022[55]. It groups representatives of big-tech who agree on actions to counter disinformation. An important addition to these voluntary commitments was the AI Election Accord signed between the European Commission and selected big-techs in February 2024[56]. Work is currently underway to include the Code of Practice on Disinformation as a co-regulatory instrument foreseen under the DSA.

Another code of conduct was established for the 2024 European Parliament elections, and it specifically addressed the use of AI in political campaigning. This voluntary code, endorsed by all European political parties, aimed to uphold election integrity by promoting

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[55] European Commission (2022). 2022 Strengthened Code of Practice on Disinformation. Accessed 01.12.2024, https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/2022-strengthened-code-practice-disinformation.

[56] Munich Security Conference (2024). A Tech Accord to Combat Deceptive Use of AI in 2024 Elections. Accessed 01.12.2024, https://securityconference.org/en/aielectionsaccord.

transparency, fairness, and accountability in both online and offline campaign activities. The emphasis was put on preventing the deliberate deception of the public, which included, among others: *any type of deceptive content using audio, images or video and generated with or without AI to falsely or deceptively alter or fake candidates, officials or any electoral stakeholders.* The use of AI-generated content was only permitted when clearly labelled, whereas using watermarking, or content provenance tools was encouraged[57].

The key weakness of voluntary codes of conduct is their voluntary nature. Inconsistent adherence among stakeholders undermines their effectiveness, and in the worst-case scenario it may even lead to a further weakening of trust in democratic processes. Moreover, emerging technologies, such as genAI, complicate efforts to counteract disinformation or manipulation, especially when some phenomena are in the grey zone or not properly recognized. Therefore, it is necessary to find a balance between soft-law approaches based on **non-interventionism**, which the US has seemed to prefer for many years, and pushing for specific regulations strongly anchored in hard law and the concept of protecting values and users that the EU seems to support [58]. The former are criticized for excessive liberalism **("cyber-libertarianism")**, and poor effectiveness in enforcing regulatory advantage over tech giants. The latter are considered potential innovation blockers. A need to weigh proportionality and appropriateness might be a biggest challenge in this respect[59]. The discrepancy between the principled paradigms of regulatory activity of the EU and the US might be seen in that context. These differences are expressed by the emphasis on business development and innovation on the US side, which weakens the regulatory regime at the federal level, and the attachment to the fundamental rights of citizens on the EU side.

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[57] International Idea (2024). Code of Conduct for the 2024 European Parliament elections. Accessed 01.12.2024, https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/bebd9b72-fbb9-42f3-bcea-dbace7e0650f_en?filename=Code+of+conduct+for+2024+European+elections_final.pdf&utm_source=chatgpt.com.

[58] Heidemann L. et al. (2024). The European Artificial Intelligence Act. Overview and Recommendations for Compliance. Frauenhofer IKS: Munich.

[59] Neves I. (2023). The freedom to conduct a business as a driver for AI governance. UNIO EU Law Journal. Vol. 9(2), pp. 13-56.

4. AI Disinformation and Global Elections 2023 and 2024

(by Christopher Nehring)

4.1. Features and Forms of AI Disinformation

Researchers and experts have identified several qualities and features of genAI that make up its "super charging potential" for disinformation. GenAI can make disinformation:

faster (both in generating content as well as automatically distributing such content)

cheaper (e.g. by automating production and distribution, reducing human and financial resources needed)

more persuasive (e.g. by using super real deepfakes)

more customized (e.g. by using AI software for data analysis, identifying more effective messages and narratives for various target audiences)

more far reaching (e.g. by using AI bots and automation for distribution of disinformation or because of average social media users using genAI tools)[60].

Furthermore, genAI also has other, more complex features that have a significant impact on disinformation:

AI can **provide fake evidence** for any claim and thus reverse the burden of proof

The mere existence of genAI technology (e.g. deepfakes) create ample opportunity for **discrediting the authenticity and truthfulness** of any piece of information as "deepfake" or "AI manipulation" (so-called "liar's dividend" and "deepfake defense"[61])

Providing realistic and credible cover for "fake personas", bots, avatars, digital presenters etc. who spread disinformation (e.g. by creating credible background stories, human-like bodies, faces and profile images)

A **"perceived supercharging effect"**, i.e. a psychological conviction of disinformation actors who attribute special powers to AI generated disinformation.

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[60] https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12617; also: Simon, F. M., Altay, S., & Mercier, H. (2023). Misinformation reloaded? Fears about the impact of generative AI on misinformation are overblown. Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) Misinformation Review. https://doi.org/10.37016/mr-2020-127;

[61] C.f.: Delfino, R. (2023). The Deepfake Defense—Exploring the Limits of the Law and Ethical Norms in Protecting Legal Proceedings from Lying Lawyers, in: SSRN Electronic Journal (doi: 10.2139/ssrn.4355140).

Thus, genAI, at least in theory, not only has the technological **potential to increase the quantity and quality of disinformation content**, but also the ability to distribute and spread disinformation content much more effectively AND to trigger psychological reactions by recipients and audiences caused by their own expectations and emotions. These factors and features of genAI for disinformation, the detection challenge as well as wide-spread insecurity and mistrust about this technology is what formed the 2024 "AI disinformation-election-scare".

4.2. Methodology and Hypotheses on AI Disinformation

This analysis is based on the following hypotheses:

1 The most important features of genAI disinformation so far have not been in content creation, but in its spread ("engineered mobilization" and algorithmic manipulation)

2 Its most important impacts and effects were probably its psychological effects and consequences [62]. The mere existence of genAI and its possible use for disinformation have already led to widespread fear, uncertainty, mistrust and confusion. In other words, genAI and AI powered disinformation have so far not destroyed truth and reality, but have led new power to the age-old question of "what is truth, authenticity and facts?"

3 Despite not having been a "game changer", AI disinformation and information manipulation was still present at every election in 2024 and its quantity, quality and use is rapidly increasing. Quantity and quality of AI disinformation however varied from country to country.

4 As argued below, so far it seems that during no election did malign actors harness, use and combine ALL powers and **"super charging features"** of AI disinformation (e.g. speed, quantity, quality, personalization, distribution, automatization).

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[62] See in detail: Mateusz Łabuz / Christopher Nehring: Information apocalypse or overblown fears—what AI mis- and disinformation is all about? Shifting away from technology toward human reactions, in: Politics & Policy, 06 June 2024 (https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12617).

To verify these hypotheses, this study analyses selected case studies of AI disinformation elections from Europe (European Parliament, Germany, UK, Poland, Slovakia, Turkey, Moldova, Georgia, Romania), Africa (South Africa, Rwanda, Mauritius), Taiwan, the USA and places a special focus on the use of genAI in Russian foreign information manipulation and interference with regard to its war against Ukraine.

When doing so, it is surprising that:

1 There is no defined set of methods about how to measure the influence of AI disinformation on elections.

2 Most exaggerated fears and expectations seem to imply that a single deepfake or other AI disinformation would "swing" an entire election.

3 Most researchers and observers did not engage in data driven, forensic analysis to monitor and detect AI disinformation, but rather relied on known cases of AI disinformation (e.g. uncovered by fact-checkers and others). Thus, the full extent of AI disinformation during 2024 remains actually unknown [63].

The lack of clear definitions, thresholds, benchmarks and any other marker that clearly defines when and to which extent an election can be considered "influenced" or "interfered with" is a major methodological challenge in analysing AI's impact on disinformation and elections. Today, disinformation and manipulation attempts, especially from foreign actors like Russia or domestic far-right groups (and often in conjunction with each other), is more or less ubiquitous. Yet, despite extensive research, there is no benchmark or threshold disinformation needs to reach to be singled out as a decisive feature of an election outcome. Measuring the impact of disinformation is indeed very complicated (perhaps even impossible) to conceptualize: When, for example, should one start to measure (beginning of campaigning? Last six weeks before elections or only the last days)? Disinformation is an ongoing, omni-present process that may be intensified and redesigned during elections, yet pushing false information to influence political events has

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[63] C.f. for example: Sayash Kapoor & Arvind Narayanan: Deep Dive: We Looked at 78 Election Deepfakes. Political Misinformation Is Not an AI Problem. Technology isn't the problem—or the solution, December 13, 2024 (https://knightcolumbia.org/blog/we-looked-at-78-election-deepfakes-political-misinformation-is-not-an-ai-problem) who relied for the study on the data gathered by the "Wired AI Elections Project" (https://www.wired.com/story/generative-ai-global-elections/) which registered only 78 cases of AI use globally, which is only a fraction of known cases.

turned into a steady, everyday appearance. The long-term effects of disinformation about certain societal and policy issues on voting behaviour, even though evident, is nearly impossible to measure. Besides long-term versus short-term effects and impact of disinformation there is also the question how to single out the impact of single (or even several) disinformation narratives and content on voting behaviour on election day.

Within these challenges, singling out and measuring the impact of single pieces of AI-generated content, also proves nearly impossible.

It is surprising that despite the widespread fear and analyses of AI's impact during the global super election year 2024 no framework for actually measuring the significance of deepfakes and other AI content has been developed.

To come up with a solution to least measure the impact of last-minute deepfakes on election outcomes we developed the following approach [64]: Comparing and cross-checking the results of the last polls before the deepfake (e.g. last polls before elections) and the official end results. This approach, even though limited in its scope, allows at least a better understanding of shifts and changes in short-term voter behaviour. However, this method too fails to adequately catch long-term effects as well as other AI-powered forms of disinformation and interference (e.g. targeted information flooding with low quality content and disinformation narratives) which might be even more significant than its short-term effects.

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[64] Łabuz, M., Nehring, C. On the way to deep fake democracy? Deepfakes in election campaigns in 2023. Eur Polit Sci 23, 454–473 (2024) (https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-024-00482-9); and: Mateusz Łabuz / Christopher Nehring: Information apocalypse or overblown fears—what AI mis- and disinformation is all about? Shifting away from technology toward human reactions, in: Politics & Policy, 06 June 2024 (https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12617);

To navigate these methodological challenges, this study first of all not only consulted several AI incident databases [65] and cross-regional analyses [66], but also points to the fact that:

• the full extent of AI disinformation remains actually undetected.
• that (AI) disinformation is only one form of disinformation and of influence campaigns and election interferences.
• raises the question of whether the impact of AI disinformation can actually be accurately measured (as, for example, opposed to other pieces of disinformation or election interference).

4.3. AI Disinformation and Election Interference in 2023 and 2024

When cross-checking databases of AI-related election "incidents" (even though incomplete), it becomes apparent that most elections during 2024 saw incidents of AI disinformation, AI generated manipulative content or the use of the "deepfake defence"[67]. In terms of quantity of AI content including disinformation, the US Presidential Elections 2024, the Indian Parliamentary Elections, the Taiwan 2024 Elections and the Presidential Elections in Argentina 2023[68] stood out and were probably the elections with the most amount of AI disinformation.

Yet, despite these elections, particularly in the US, being marked by deep polarization, smear campaigns and the use of malicious deepfakes by both domestic and foreign

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[65] E.g.: AI Incident Database (https://incidentdatabase.ai/), EuvsDisinfo Database
(https://euvsdisinfo.eu/disinformation-cases/?text=Africa), the "Wired AI Elections Project"
(https://www.wired.com/story/generative-ai-global-elections/); AFP Fact Check (https://factcheck.afp.com/), the Deepfake Analysis Unit in India (https://dau.mcaindia.in/) and other Fact-Checking databases.

[66] C.f. for example: Christopher Nehring / Karen Allen: AI Disinformation in Africa and Europe: Comparisons and Best Practices, Media Programme Sub-Saharan Africa Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation, Johannesburg, 2025.

[67] C.f.: Delfino, R. (2023). The Deepfake Defense—Exploring the Limits of the Law and Ethical Norms in Protecting Legal Proceedings from Lying Lawyers, in: SSRN Electronic Journal (doi: 10.2139/ssrn.4355140).

[68] https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/15/world/americas/argentina-election-ai-milei-massa.html.

actors, in none of these cases did AI disinformation make a decisive difference: Neither did single deepfakes and other AI content manage to shape discussions and debates, to be the continuous objects of attention, nor did last minute deepfakes alter the election results as opposed to last polls and surveys. In the US, the winning side, i.e. Donald Trump and the Republican Party and their supporters, did undoubtedly more often use genAI technology (including discrediting deepfakes of Kamala Harris and Tim Walz[69], AI images of Harris' alleged membership card of the Communist Party of the USSR[70] or the use of the "deepfake defence" to dismiss support of Harris & Walz[71]); yet, so far no analyst or observer has claimed or found any empirical evidence of a correlation between the election outcome and the use of AI disinformation. Instead, long-term empirical research rather points to the fact that narratives and messages (where genAI is most often employed) did play a less significant role in influencing voter decisions than mobilization (e.g. of influencers and celebrities or online hypes) [72].

In Argentina, on the other hand, the winning candidate, Javier Milei, seems in fact to have been more often the victim of malicious AI attacks than his opponent – and still won the election.

And in Taiwan, domestic as well as foreign (China-assumed) actors heavily employed AI disinformation, including deepfakes, to launch massive smear campaigns against leading candidates. Yet, these attacks did not generate significant public discussion and mobilization and neither did they alter the election outcomes as the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), led by Lai Ching-te and less favoured by China, still emerged victorious in the presidential race. However, persistent narratives related to 'peace and war,' skepticism towards the US and anti-American sentiments have been deeply

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[69] https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/misinformation/kamala-har-
ris-deepfake-shared-musk-sparks-free-speech-debate-rcna164119; also: https://www.bloomberg.com/news/arti-
cles/2024-10-23/russia-smeared-kamala-harris-with-deepfake-video-microsoft-says.
and: https://www.wired.com/story/russian-propaganda-unit-storm-1516-false-tim-walz-sexual-abuse-claims/.

[70] C.f.: https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cn8jg11ynj7o.

[71] https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cx2lmm2wwlyo.

[72] C.f.: Raoul V. Kübler / Kai Manke / Koen Pauwels: I like, I share, I vote: Mapping the dynamic system of political marketing, in: Journal of Business Research Volume 186, January 2025 (https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.115014).

embedded in various media platforms, influencing national identity and geopolitical perspectives[73].

> It is important to note that AI disinformation (and also election interference as a whole) did not "swing" the elections most heavily marked by AI disinformation.

Yet, again, it needs to be stressed that neither the long-term effects of (AI powered) disinformation can be measured this way. Furthermore, noting that AI disinformation did not win or "swing" these elections is not to say that it did not have any impact at all (e.g. measuring whether the incidents of AI disinformation did not shift percentages and influence voting behaviour still remains impossible). It has also become evident that there are global spillover effects not only in disinformation narratives (e.g. the "stolen election" narrative), but also in the use of AI (e.g. for deep porn, discrediting live deepfake calls or fraudulent deepfake calls).

Contrary to the four elections mentioned above, there were also elections in 2024 that saw surprisingly little AI disinformation. Most notable amongst those were the Europe-wide **Elections for the Parliament of the European Union that span over 27 countries.** Here, as EDMO researchers remarked, the percentage of AI disinformation among the disinformation monitored during the months before the election was more or less constant at 4-5% of all monitored disinformation [74]. Other major Europeans elections, such as in France or Germany, for example, have seen only a low amount of domestic deepfakes, e.g. of German chancellor Scholz or opposition leader Friedrich Merz (both allegedly of "satirical" nature) [75] or of French president Macron [76], and a couple of instances of misleading AI images by far-right parties; yet, in both countries, military support of Ukraine and their stance towards Russia were far more often the target of AI disinformation than elections (see below Russia).

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[73] C.f.: Chen-Ling Hung et al.: AI Disinformation Attacks and Taiwan's Responses during the 2024 Presidential Election, ed.: Thompson Foundation, 2024 (https://www.thomsonfoundation.org/media/268943/ai_disinformation_attacks_taiwan.pdf).

[74] European External Action Service EEAS (ed.): Memo: Known information interference operations during the June 2024 elections for the European Parliament October 2024
(https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ac_24_5328), p. 10.

[75] https://www.lto.de/recht/nachrichten/n/lg-ber-lin-ii-15o579-23-olaf-scholz-bundeskanzler-deep-fake-afd-verbot-zentrum-politische-schoenheit and: https://www.br.de/nachrichten/netzwelt/deepfake-von-merz-was-bedeutet-er-fuer-den-bundestagswahlkampf,UUCtkLv.

[76] https://www.reuters.com/fact-check/macron-dancing-clip-is-altered-80s-nightclub-footage-2024-03-21/.

During the South African election, for example, several instances of deepfake videos endorsing one or the other candidate appeared [78]; in Zambia, a deepfake of the president circulated announcing his candidature in the next elections [79] and in Rwanda, Researchers from Clemson University Media Forensics Hub found that AI tools were used in a co-ordinated manner in Rwanda to generate texts at scale which were favourable to the government of Paul Kagame which were reposted across the campaign's accounts and re-posted on several

The analysis of election related AI disinformation outside the Global West also reveals interesting results. A new study [77] proves that 2024 elections on the African continent, for example, have seen all types and use cases of AI disinformation as described above and identified at least 17 instances of election related AI disinformation in 2024 in Africa.

platforms [80]. Here, AI was used as a multiplier tool aimed at producing content at scale and speed and across a variety of languages and disseminated across a number of online platforms. AI image generators were then used to generate visual content to go along with such posts.

In at least four other elections, however, **AI disinformation made a significant**, in some cases even a decisive difference. The most significant impact of AI disinformation was visible in **Mauritius:** Here, the ruling government tried to discredit a series of incriminating leaks and recordings about government corruption and illegal surveillance by calling them "AI fakes", i.e. using the "deepfake defence" [81]. This was used two weeks prior to the voting date and served as a pretext for a ban of all social media in the country. Yet, since the government could not produce any proof of its claims, this

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[77] Christopher Nehring / Karen Allen: AI Disinformation in Africa and Europe: Comparisons and Best Practices, Media Programme Sub-Saharan Africa Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation, Johannesburg, 2025.

[78] C.f.: Kirsten Cosser: Expectations versus reality: The use of Generative AI in South Africa's 2024 election, Africa Check, 17 July 2024 (https://africacheck.org/fact-checks/blog/expectations-ver-sus-reality-use-generative-ai-south-africas-2024-election).

[79] https://factcheck.afp.com/doc.afp.com.33Z363J.

[79] Wack, Linvill and Warren : Old Despots New Tricks – An AI empowered Pro Kagame/RPF Coordinated Influence Network on X, Clemson University Media Forensics Hub, 20, June 2024 (https://open.clemson.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1004&-context=mfh_reports).

[81] Delfino, R. (2023). The Deepfake Defense—Exploring the Limits of the Law and Ethical Norms in Protecting Legal Proceedings from Lying Lawyers, in: SSRN Electronic Journal (doi: 10.2139/ssrn.4355140).

undertaking backfired, the ban of social media had to be revoked and the government – according to polls a sure winner – actually lost the election [82].

Probably the most notable case of disinformation making a decisive difference in an election happened during the presidential elections in Romania: Here, the constitutional court annulled the first round of the elections after reporting by the national intelligence service about a massive disinformation campaign on TikTok as well as cyberattacks on election infrastructure. The latter were attributed to a foreign actor (assumed to be Russia) while a mixture of domestic (far-right) as well as foreign (again assumed to be Russia) actors were seen as the origins of the online disinformation campaign pushing the winning candidate Calin Georgescu. During this campaign, AI content (images) occurred, but it was widely acknowledged that neither these AI images nor content and narratives as such, but rather the massive collective mobilization of fake (bots) and real (trolls) accounts on social media were the most effective feature of this influence campaign [83].

Thus, the case of Romania was extraordinary because of two features:

• The use of AI-content did play a decisive role during these disinformation and interference attempts; and
• Whereas disinformation was undoubtedly present during this election campaign, neither the constitutional court nor the intelligence service presented hard evidence and proof that the unexpected surprise victory of Georgescu was caused by disinformation alone. Thus, we can say for sure that disinformation heavily influenced this election, but it may have done so only because key actors (intelligence services and constitutional court) turned it into the decisive factor of the election.

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[82] Mnisi Mauritius Ends Social Media ban ahead of elections, Human Rights Watch, 7 November 2024 (https://www.hr-w.org/news/2024/11/07/mauritius-ends-social-media-ban-ahead-elections); and: R.Kassenally: The Chilling Effect of Censorship, Self-Censorship and Surveillance in Mauritius, Democracy in Africa, November 2024 (https://democracyinafri-ca.org/the-chilling-effect-of-censorship-self-censorship-and-surveillance-in-mauritius/).

[83] C.f.: Digihumanism (ed): Digihumanism unveils massive astroturfing on TikTok biaising the Romanian presidential elections, 6.12.2024 (https://www.digihumanism.eu/publications-and-news/digihuman-ism-unveils-massive-astroturfing-on-tiktok-biaising-the-romanian-presidential-elections); also: Katja Christina Plate: Presidential elections annulled after hybrid attack, ed: Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Romania, December 2024 . (https://ww-w.kas.de/documents/252038/29447862/Presidential+elections+annulled+after+hybrid+attack.pdf/035f5f1c-105c-baae-ceb4-fff811081fed?version=1.0&t=1733910772418).

The 2023 elections in **Slovakia** saw probably one of the earliest and most significant uses of AI disinformation. Two days before the election and during a traditional 48 hours of moratorium on political campaigning and reporting, an audio deepfake spread on Facebook, Telegram and TikTok. This fake featured the candidate of the liberal Progressive Slovakia party, Michal Šimečka, and journalist Monika Tódová from the newspaper "Denník N" allegedly discussing a scheme to rig the election by buying votes from the country's marginalized Roma minority[84]. Particularly tricky about this disinformation attack was that it used only an audio file, thus circumventing Meta's ban of deep fake videos, and that it was spread so close to the election date and during the moratorium, thus making it harder to be effectively debunked in time before the election. The impact of this deepfake attack was also hard to assess: Most observers noted that it definitely had a direct impact on the election results, yet pre-election polls and final results all saw the same winner (however, given the prediction of a very tight race a final assessment of the impact remains very difficult). It is therefore unlikely that this deepfake "swung" the election, while still making a visible difference.

Another case of AI disinformation making a difference were the 2023 Presidential elections in **Turkey.** On the one hand, in May 2023, opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu accused Russia of interfering in the elections with an attempt to manipulate the public opinion by using AI-generated content [85]. Earlier the same year, the third candidate in the race, Muharrem İnce, withdrew after AI generated deep porn videos were spread on social media[86]. And in a third incident, the staff of the winning candidate Erdogan used an edited video (labelled as a deepfake by the media) that showed his main opponent, Kilicdaroglu, interacting with a representative of the banned Kurdistan Workers' Party, recognized as a terrorist organization [87]. Although it is impossible to assess accurately just how much of a difference (in percentage of votes) these instances had and given the fact that Erdogan's victory in the election was never really out of question (but only by how far), it was particularly the withdrawal of Muharrem İnce due to a deepfake porn attack that

[84] C.f.: Meaker M.: Slovakia's Election Deepfakes Show AI Is a Danger to Democracy, in: Wired, 2023 (https://www.wired.co.uk/article/slovakia-election-deepfakes).

[85] C.f.: Dallison P.: Turkish opposition leader accuses Russia of spreading conspiracies, deepfakes ahead of election, in: Politico 2023 (https://www.politico.eu/article/turkey-election-opposition-russian-interference-kilicdaroglu-erdogan).

[86] C.f.: Michaelson R.:Turkish presidential candidate quits race after release of alleged sex tape, in: The Guardian, 2023 (https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/11/muharrem-ince-turkish-presidential-candidate-withdraws-alleged-sex-tape).

[87] C.f.: Pelin Ünker / Thomas Sparrow: Fact check: Turkey's Erdogan shows false Kilicdaroglu video, in: Deutsche Welle (https://www.dw.com/en/fact-check-turkeys-erdogan-shows-false-kilicdaroglu-video/a-65554034).

significantly altered the election result. Thus, these deepfakes may not have decided and "swung" this election, but they did have a significant impact on its results.

In two other elections of 2024 the exact impact and influence of AI disinformation remains very difficult to assess: In both Georgia and Moldova, disinformation and influence campaigns during their 2024 (in Moldova also tied to a referendum about the future pro-Western and EU course of the country) reached new highs. In Moldova, pro-Russian actors in the country in conjunction with Russian FIMI-activities employed the entire range of the election interference playbook, from deepfake attacks to cyberattacks, pro-Russian proxies to massive buying of votes in the week before the election and referendum. The major target of disinformation campaigns (including deepfakes) was PM Maia Sandu that featured in several deepfake videos trying to smear and discredit her. Other AI content may have also played a role (particularly AI images and AI powered fake web portals), yet there was little concerted effort to identify it. So, while disinformation (and other influence and interference activities) are at all-time highs (also caused by the country's proximity to Ukraine and its NATO aspirations), it needs to be asserted that a) the exact amount of genAI use in these campaigns cannot even be nearly accurately assessed and b) that – despite all these efforts to "swing" the elections and referendum - Sandu and her referendum both won (even though by a tiny margin). That means that while (AI) disinformation and interference (i.e. extensive buying of votes during the last week of elections) were very present and did certainly influence the results in terms of percentage, they did not pivot final results [88].

Similarly to **Moldova**, the small country of Georgia saw a crucial election in 2024 that was also a vote on the future orientation of the country between Russia and the West. Again, the extent of disinformation was very high and far from being the only tool for influence. The elections showed a complex interplay between disinformation tactics and electoral dynamics. The use of AI technologies for creating deceptive content (mainly deepfakes and AI images) added a new layer to ongoing disinformation activities, yet they were far from being the most important tactic. One of the main targets for deepfake attacks was then-president Salome Zourabichvili and her refusal to recognize the victory of

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[88] C.f.: EPDE (ed.): Disinformation and Foreign Interference in Moldovan Elections, 11.10.2024 (https://epde.org/reports/disinformation-and-foreign-interference-in-moldovan-elections/); Vassilis Ntousas / Laurențiu Pleșca: Russian Meddling in Moldova, ed: GMF October 18, 2024 (https://www.gmfus.org/news/russian-meddling-moldova); also: https://brodhub.eu-/en/republic-of-moldova/.

[89] https://mythdetector.com/en/salome-zourabichvili-circulates/.

pro-Russian forces [89]. This between domestic political forces and foreign interference by Russia is complex and ongoing with pro-Western forces not recognizing the official outcome of the vote. Yet, again, there is not much empirical data and monitoring to accurately assess just how much of a difference coordinated online disinformation campaigns (including AI content) made in this election [90].

4.4. Non-Election related AI Disinformation: War and Major Events

Even though this study focuses on AI disinformation and elections, it needs to be mentioned that elections were – by far, even – not necessarily the main battlefield of AI disinformation in 2024. The fact that AI disinformation (particularly deepfakes) can make a difference and cause severe damages could be witnessed first-hand during various events:

> Olympia 2024, for example, became a massive target for (particularly Russia-attributed) FIMI and disinformation activities ranging from a deepfake documentary featuring a fake Tom Cruise that smeared the IOC to an engineered panic over bedbugs in the Olympic quarter to a fuelling of fears over terrorist attacks over the conflict in the Middle East[91].

In the **UK**, for example, deepfakes were used multiple times by far-right activists to smear politicians such as London Mayor Sadiq Khan, and/or incident violent riots by using deep-fake-technology to produce false statements and evidence related to issues of migration and criminal events. Here, the spread of deepfakes has repeatedly fuelled violent "offline actions" and, in the case of Sadiq Khan, even was the main point of reference for riots that

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[90] C.f. also: EDMO (ed): Anti-Western Propaganda and Disinformation Amid the 2024 Georgian Parliamentary Elections (https://edmo.eu/publications/anti-western-propaganda-and-disinformation-amid-the-2024-georgian-parliamentary-elections/).

[91] VIGINUM (ed.): Summary of the Information Threat to the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games, Paris, 2024 (https://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/files/files/Publications/20240919_NP_SGDSN_VIGINUM_Summary%20information%20threat%20Paris2024Games_EN_0.pdf); also: IOC: Disinformation and defamation campaign against IOC continues, 21.3.2024 (https://olympics.com/ioc/news/disinformation-and-defamation-campaign-against-ioc-continues).

involved more than 1000 people[92].

During the Europe-wide protests of farmers in late 2023 and 2024, far-right political parties and activist groups also produced and spread AI generated images depicting events that never happened, e.g. about a large rally and blockade in front of the Eiffel Tower in Paris. These images spread and created spillover effects (e.g. between French and German far-right actors)[93]. Another, seemingly unpolitical events too have become the focus of (politicized) AI disinformation. N*atural disasters and catastrophes* have, for example, become the subject of AI disinformation during 2023 and 2024. Hurricane Milton, which hit the US only weeks prior to the 2024 presidential election, was one striking example. Here, AI generated images featuring events that never happened circled on social media reaching several millions of viewers and were used to illustrate and boost false political claims[94].

A last topic of AI disinformation that, as argued below, was probably far more important than election related AI disinformation, was *war and military conflict*. Two conflicts – the ongoing wars in the Middle East and the Russian war against Ukraine – saw particularly much AI generated content, deepfakes and the use of the "deepfake defence". While use of genAI in Russian disinformation and FIMI activities is analyzed in detail below, some use cases of AI content and disinformation during the conflict in the Middle East will be discussed here: More ostensible than in any election, social media users siding with Hamas and anti-Israeli sentiment used genAI applications (mostly image generators) to create visual content (e.g. AI-generated ruins, bombings and child victims during the war in Gaza) that flooded social media discourses, leading to a biased framing and perception of events in the conflict[95]. Such footage even made it into photo stock databases providing visual content to media organizations on a global scale[96]. Another prominent instance saw the use of the "deepfake defence" by pro-Palestine social media users falsely claiming the image of child victim released by Israel government was "AI generated" in a heated debate that included up to a million online users[97]. Furthermore, as NATO

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[92] https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-68146053.

[93] C.f.: https://www.volksverpetzer.de/faktencheck/afd-ki-fake-bauernproteste-paris/.

[94] C.f.: https://www.newsguardrealitycheck.com/p/reality-check-101424-misinformation; also: https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/oct/10/russia-ai-hurricane-milton-disinformation.

[95] C.f.: E.g.: https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/-may/30/all-eyes-on-rafah-how-ai-generated-image-spread-across-social-media

[96] https://www.vice.com/en/article/adobe-is-selling-fake-ai-generated-images-of-violence-in-gaza-and-israel/.

[97] https://www.dw.com/en/fact-check-ai-fakes-in-israels-war-against-hamas/a-67367744.

analysts demonstrated, known professional Russian disinformation actors also engaged in pushing Hamas' and Gaza content and messaging (including AI disinformation) and incorporated similar narratives and visual content in their own messaging[98]. On the other hand, Israel-attributed private actors were also caught leveraging genAI to power automated fake news websites about the War in Gaza as part of Israeli information warfare to frame narratives in the US about the conflict[99].
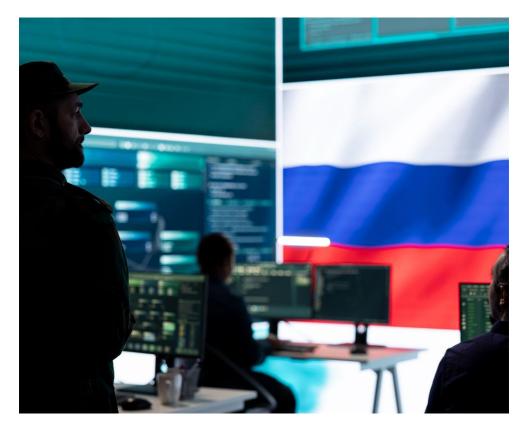
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[98] See: Rolf Fredheim: Virtual Manipulation Brief 2023/2: Verified Propagandists and the Hamas - Israel War. Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (https://stratcomcoe.org/publications/virtual-manipulation-brief-20232-verified-propagandists-and-the-hamas-israel-war/294).

[99] C.f.: https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/05/technology/israel-campaign-gaza-social-media.html.

5. Russia and its Use of AI for Disinformation and Foreign Interference

(by Christopher Nehring)

Amongst professional disinformation actors, Russian state entities exhibit the most extensive use of generative AI (genAI) in disinformation operations and FIMI (Foreign Information, Manipulation and Interference) activities. Over the past two years, more than 20 instances of genAI use by Russian actors have been documented, though this likely represents only a fraction of their overall activity:

5.1. Documented Use Cases of GenAI in Russian Disinformation Activities

November 2017: AI-generated visual content used by the Russian Ministry of Defense to depict alleged U.S. support for Islamists in Syria[100].

February 2022: Deepfake video of Ukrainian President Zelensky calling for surrender during the war in Ukraine[101].

June 2022: Probable live deepfake video call featuring Kyiv Mayor Vitali Klitschko interacting with European mayors[102].

October 2022: Deepfake live call impersonating a Ukrainian Prime Minister to a Turkish drone manufacturer[103].

2023: AI-generated images from video war games portraying supposed military advances in Ukraine[104].

Since September 2023: Over 150 fake news websites spreading disinformation about Ukraine and U.S. elections, attributed to John Mark Dougan, a former Florida sheriff[105].

November 2023: Deepfake video of Ukraine's military commander Valerii Zaluzhnyi launching a military coup[106].

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[100] https://www.bellingcat.com/news/mena/2017/11/14/russian-ministry-defence-publishes-screenshots-computer-games-evidence-us-collsion-isis/.

[101] https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-60780142.

[102] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/25/european-lead-ers-deepfake-video-calls-mayor-of-kyiv-vitali-klitschko.

[103] https://www.dailysabah.com/business/defense/turkish-drone-maker-baykar-to-counter-kamikaze-threat-in-ukraine.

[102] https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20230102-war-themed-video-game-fuels-wave-of-misinformation.

[105] https://www.newsguardtech.com/special-reports/john-mark-dougan-russian-disinformation-network/.

[106] https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/02/16/russian-disinformation-zelensky-zaluzhny/.

December 2023:
- Deepfake video featuring Hollywood celebrities discrediting President Zelensky [107].
- Live deepfake phone call impersonating African Union members to Germany's Economy Minister[108].

2023 and ongoing: Automated social media bots generating posts, comments, and profile images using genAI for political disinformation[109].

2023–2024:
- "Doppelganger" campaign with bots producing over 2 million pieces of content monthly, leveraging ChatGPT for translations and posts[110].
- Deepfake videos of Moldovan President Maia Sandu (discrediting and harmful statements)[111].
- Deepfake documentary starring Tom Cruise discrediting Olympia 2024 in Paris and the IOC [112].

February 2024: Deepfake video on French news channel alleging Ukrainian involvement in an assassination attempt against President Macron[113].

March 2024: Deepfake videos of Ukrainian intelligence admitting to masterminding terror attacks in Moscow[114].

April 2024: Deepfake audio of a supposed troll in Kyiv falsely claiming interference in U.S. elections to support President Biden[115].

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[107] https://uk.news.yahoo.com/elijah-wood-other-actors-were-223747765.html.

[108] https://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/robert-habeck-rus-
sische-trolle-legen-ihn-mit-fake-anruf-rein-a-5bfc1066-a1ba-4bae-8f3b- 7506d4b37c00.

[109] Virtual Manipulation Brief 2024/1: Hijacking reality: the increased role of generative AI in Russian propaganda
(https://stratcomcoe.org/publications/virtual-manipula-
tion-brief-20241-hijacking-reality-the-increased-role-of-generative-ai-in-russian-propaganda/307).

[110] EU Disinfo Lab: What is the Doppelganger operation? List of resources (https://www.disinfo.eu/doppelganger-operation/).

[111] https://incidentdatabase.ai/cite/666/; and: https://balkaninsight.com/2023/12/29/moldova-dismisses-deep-
fake-video-targeting-president-sandu/.

[112] https://www.theguardian.com/technology/article/2024/jun/03/russia-paris-olympics-deepfake-tom-cruise-video.

[113] https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/france-24-reported-ukrainian-plot-to-assassinate-macron/.

[113] https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/russian-ai-ukraine-us-are-behind-deadly-terrorist-attack-outside-moscow/.

[115] https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/15/us/politics/russia-disinformation-election.html.

May 2024:
- Fake news websites using AI chatbots under "Operation CopyCop."
- Deepfake video of White House Spokesperson about World War II
- Deepfake video of a U.S. Department of State spokesperson discussing weapon use against Russian cities.

July 2024: Deepfake video of a Bugatti employee falsely claiming Ukrainian First Lady Olena Zelenska purchased a luxury car in Paris[119].

August 2024: Deepfake video portraying the German Foreign Minister as a client of a fictional "callboy" on a Nigerian website[120].

September 2024: Deepfake video call impersonating Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba with US Senator Ben Cardin to produce discrediting statements[121].

October 2024:
- AI-generated screenshot of a U.S. vice-presidential candidate blaming Russia for Hurricane Milton[122].
- Deepfake video accusing Vice Presidential Candidate Tim Walz of sexual abuse (attributed to Russia)[123].

November 2024: Deepfake video falsely accusing Germany's Economy Minister of abuse [124].

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[116] https://www.recordedfuture.com/research/russia-linked-copycop-uses-llms-to-weaponize-influence-content-at-scale.

[117] https://factcheck.afp.com/doc.afp.com.34R94FA.

[118] https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/31/us/politics/deepfake-us-official-russia.html.

[119] https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/olena-zelenska-was-the-first-to-buy-the-new-bugatti-model/.

[120] https://www.rnd.de/panorama/fake-news-gegen-baer-bock-weil-sie-eine-frau-ist-VMP3KDNKANDX5PAXYGOHUMFV5I.html.

[121] https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/sep/26/ben-cardin-dmytro-kuleba-deepfake-ukraine.

[122] https://euvsdisinfo.eu/report/tim-walz-holds-russia-responsible-for-the-creation-of-hurricane-milton/.

[123] https://www.wired.com/story/russian-propaganda-unit-storm-1516-false-tim-walz-sexual-abuse-claims/.

[124] https://correctiv.org/faktencheck/2024/12/13/gezielte-kam-pagne-robert-habeck-sollte-mit-falschbehauptung-diffamiert-werden/.

5.2. "Operation Doppelganger"

The on-going, year long online disinformation operation known as **"Doppelganger"** that targets mainly Ukraine, USA, Germany and France is probably one of the best examples of how Russian actors use genAI to enhance their influence operations. This operation is a systematic and sophisticated online campaign and was first uncovered in the summer of 2022 by German media, Microsoft, and Meta[125]. Its main topic is the Russian war against Ukraine and Western military and political support for Ukraine and the primary audiences are social media users in Ukraine, the USA, Germany, and France. The campaign employs fake versions of world known Western news outlets, mimicking their layout, design, and style to fabricate fake articles about Ukraine, the war, Western military aid, and the societal situation in Germany and France. These fake articles are then widely shared through fake social media accounts (bots and trolls) using advanced obfuscation tactics, such as manipulating social media preview images and multi-level website redirections. The main objectives of the campaign are to influence public opinion, intensify political polarization, and erode public trust. In January 2024, for instance, the German Foreign Office revealed the discovery of a network of over 50,000 fake social media profiles on the platform "X" (formerly Twitter) within one month[126]. These profiles spread fake news in the "Doppelganger" style, aiming to amplify societal tensions in Germany and increase public dissatisfaction with the government, suggesting and pushing the narrative that the root of social problems lies in Germany's support for Ukraine.

Investigations have revealed the use of AI to generate social media posts, comments, and even entire fake articles published on these counterfeit websites. An investigation by the European External Action Service (EEAS) found that *"7 legitimate media outlets were impersonated, while 47 other inauthentic news outlets were used to promote FIMI about the*

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[125] C.f.: EU Disinfo Lab: What is the Doppelganger operation? List of resources (https://www.disinfo.eu/doppelganger-operation/).

[126] German Foreign Office: Technical Report on an Analysis by the Federal Foreign Office 5 June 2024: Germany Targeted by the Pro-Russian Disinformation Campaign "Doppelgänger" (https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/resource/blob/2682484/2-da31936d1cbeb9faec49df74d8bbe2e/technischer-bericht-desinformationskampagne-doppelgaenger--1--data.pdf).

elections. Thousands of inauthentic accounts on X and Facebook were used to drive traffic to over 100 articles that mentioned the elections. Over 1,200 posts were discovered on X during June 2024 that appear to follow the sharing pattern associated with Doppelganger. The focus of the posts was to cease support for Ukraine, discredit Western governments and political parties, and to generate fear around the decline of the West. Those posts generated over 4 million views [127]. OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT, found that Russian actors purchased multiple ChatGPT accounts through five separate email addresses with the aim to generate, edit, rewrite and translate content (e.g. posts and comments, but also automated responses of bots)[128]. In another instance, Microsoft cybersecurity experts monitored the Russian attributed group "Storm-1099", who is one of the driving forces behind "Doppelganger", to have included disinformation about Olympia 2024, as well as Israel and Hamas into the "Doppelganger campaign"[129].

5.3. Conclusion on Russian AI Disinformation

In most of these cases Russian state actors (e.g. intelligence services, embassies, consulates, state owned media) or state-affiliated actors (e.g. notorious PR companies tasked by the Presidential Administration or intelligence services such as SDA[130]) produced and spread AI content that most often dealt with the topics of the Russian war against Ukraine and/or military and other support by Western countries for Ukraine. Other examples saw discrediting AI content (mostly deepfakes) about leading European or US politicians to interfere with elections. Automated fake news websites targeting the US with fake content about Ukraine and US Elections (with a strong "spillover effect" to Europe and other world regions) like the "Operation Copy Cop"[131] were also one prominent tool. A third category of genAI use were to automate fake profiles on social media and the production of (rather simple) comments, posts, profile images and their translation into several languages[132].

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[127] European External Action Service EEAS (ed.): Memo: Known information interference operations during the June 2024 elections for the European Parliament October 2024 (https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ac_24_5328), p. 7.

[128] OpenAI (ed): Disrupting deceptive uses of AI by covert influence operations (https://openai.com/index/disrupting-deceptive-uses-of-AI-by-covert-influence-operations/).

[129] https://blogs.microsoft.com/on-the-issues/2024/06/02/russia-cyber-bots-disinformation-2024-paris-olympics/.

[130] See the internal documents of the SDA PR company and as well as extensive FBI investigation materials: https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-disrupts-covert-russian-government-sponsored-foreign-malign-influence.

[131] https://www.recordedfuture.com/research/russia-linked-copycop-uses-llms-to-weaponize-influence-content-at-scale and: https://www.newsguardtech.com/special-reports/john-mark-dougan-russian-disinformation-network/.

[132] Disrupting deceptive uses of AI by covert influence operations (https://openai.com/index/disrupting-deceptive-uses-of-AI-by-covert-influence-operations/).

Little is known for sure about the strategic objectives of genAI use in Russian disinformation, yet leaks, official investigations and cybersecurity analyses (e.g. the SDA leaks and investigations into "Operation Doppelganger"[133]) *suggest a rather erratic and unsystematized use of genAI by Russian actors*. Current data available did not reveal any special role assigned to genAI in Russian disinformation campaigns, but rather suggests that operatives and disinformation masterminds (e.g. John Dougan) themselves effectively use genAI deepfakes, automated posts and comments or AI translation when deemed helpful. Russian actors (including highly skilled and resourced intelligence services) still seem to be in an experimental phase without a precise "AI-for-disinformation strategy". Some groups, like "Storm-1679[134]"embrace genAI more often than others, yet there too the use of genAI does not follow an ostensive pattern.

Technical analysis of the genAI applications used in the cases listed above, wherever possible, reveals a rather surprising result: Despite Russian state actors obviously having long-term experience with AI and deepfakes and despite distinctly Russian AI developments and applications (e.g. LLM chatbots by Yandeks and Sberbank) and a push for Russian AI sovereignty by the Putin regime [135] in most incidents reported, Russian disinformation actors used popular commercial (and mostly US-engineered) products such as ChatGPT. However, there remain many blind spots of undetected AI use and content and little is known about how Russian actors utilize specific and customized open source or other AI applications (particularly to automate the distribution of content and automated social media profiles, i.e. "bots"). Furthermore, Russian actors often used easy-to-spot, low-quality AI fakes. The deepfake of Ukrainian president Zelensky, for example, was of surprisingly low quality and easy to identify, as were several of live deepfake calls attributed to Russia; in other cases, actors showed a lack of quality and control and repeatedly used automated copy-and-paste commands to power fake news websites without removing obvious signs of AI use (in some cases, the articles would even contain references to the initial prompts[136]). This lack of quality control and low-quality output further conforms to the lack of a coherent "AI strategy" in Russian disinformation and established procedures.

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[133] https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-disrupts-covert-russian-government-sponsored-foreign-malign-influence.

[134] https://blogs.microsoft.com/on-the-issues/2023/12/07/russia-ukraine-digital-threat-celebrity-cameo-mtac/

[135] https://oecd.ai/en/dashboards/countries/RussianFederation; https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2024/08/16/russian-defense-plan-kicks-off-separate-ai-development-push/ and: https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2020/08/developing-artificial-intelligence-in-russia-objectives-and-reality?lang=en.

[136] So for example the fake news websites run by Mark Dougan (Operation Copy Cop), c.f. in extenso: Insikt Group (ed): Russia-Linked Copy Cop Uses LLMs to Weaponize Influence Content at Scale", Recorded Future, 9.5.2024 (https://go.recordedfuture.com/hubfs/reports/cta-2024-0509.pdf).

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1. GenAI in Political Campaigning

Conclusion

The rise of AI in politics and governance reflects a paradigm shift in how echnology influences decision-making and public administration. This study on the use of genAI in political campaigning has shown that:

1. **Impact on Voter Behavior:** There is no empirical proof that the use of genAI has had a decisive influence on election outcomes. Yet, politicians and campaigners have shown their readiness to experiment and use AI to increase their chances of getting elected. AI has influenced rural voters in countries like India and Indonesia, where lower technological literacy makes AI-generated content more credible. In urban areas, such as in the U.S. and Japan, voters respond differently to targeted, issue-based • campaigns, demonstrating AI's ability to tailor messaging to different groups effectively.

2. **AI's Impact on Campaign Effectiveness:** The integration of AI into campaigns is still in its infancy. AI has demonstrably increased the effectiveness of political campaigns by enabling targeted and personalized .engagement. Its ability to analyse voter data and reactions in real-time has ness, ensuring that messages are both relevant and impactful. These innovations have allowed campaigns to reach and mobilize voters more efficiently, particularly in diverse and linguistically fragmented regions. Yet, low-quality content (e.g. memes) still plays an important role, the production of which reaches a mass audience.

3. **Transformative Role of AI:** AI is in the process of changing political campaigns, exemplified by platforms like Indonesia's Pemilu.AI and adaptive messaging strategies in India. This trend signifies the growing integration of AI into the political sphere, which reshapes traditional campaigning. These technologies allow for tailored communication that addresses regional and voter-specific needs,

creating stronger connections with diverse electorates. AI-driven apps can be expected to become a critical tool for parties, focusing on data-driven strategies and personalized voter engagement.

4 **Enhanced Outreach:** AI has expanded the reach of political campaigns by allowing for precise targeting of voter groups. This is evident in Indonesia and India, where AI has also bridged language gaps, and in the US, where AI-driven translation tools have enabled campaigns to engage a broader audience and encourage higher participation.

5 **Real-Time Adaptation:** With AI-driven tools like video analysis at rallies in India and avatar-based voter interactions in Japan, campaigns can make immediate adjustments to their strategies. This flexibility makes campaigns more responsive to voter concerns and preferences in real-time.

6 **Efficiency and Inclusivity:** By automating tasks such as translations in the U.S. and content creation in Hungary, AI has made campaigns more efficient, cutting costs and saving time. At the same time, it ensures that political messages are inclusive and can reach diverse demographics.

7 **Ethical Concerns and Challenges:** Additionally, the potential for AI to be misused, as demonstrated by disinformation efforts involving deepfakes, underscores the urgent need for clear regulations to ensure that AI supports democratic principles and safeguards public trust in the electoral process. At the moment, the regulations regarding the use of AI in election campaigns are fragmentary and in many cases unclear or incomplete - this requires a revision of the existing provisions and their adaptation to the new technological reality.

Recommendations

1 **Election Commissions and Oversight Bodies**
- Each country's election commission should define clear rules for AI usage in political campaigns.
- Guidelines should clarify permissible AI applications (e.g., voter outreach, campaign strategy) and restrict harmful practices (e.g., misinformation, voter manipulation).

2 **Deepfake Usage Advisory**
- Countries should issue clear advisories on deepfake usage to ensure ethical and transparent implementation.
- Deepfakes created with consent and used positively (e.g., simplifying communication) should be regulated to prevent misuse.
- Clear-cut guidelines will help eliminate ambiguity and reduce misuse concerns, especially in regions like India and Southeast Asia.

3 **AI and Data Governance in Elections**
- Establish regulations for the positive use of data analytics, segregation, and deployment in election-related AI applications.
- Define permissible levels of data usage, distribution, and integration for campaign development.
- Introduce norms to ensure AI usage benefits democratic processes while respecting privacy and fairness.

4 **Assessing AI's Impact on Elections**
- Acknowledge that AI has currently not had a decisive influence on election outcomes, but its use is rapidly increasing, it is here to stay and future impact cannot be ignored.
- Develop proactive measures to mitigate risks and prepare for AI's evolving role in political systems.

5 **Regulatory Frameworks for AI in Politics**
- Ensure comprehensive, forward-looking frameworks to promote ethical AI usage.

6 **AI Ministries and other Government Entities**
- These ministries will oversee the development, regulation, and ethical implementation of AI across sectors, including politics and governance.
- Their focus will include fostering innovation, setting standards, and ensuring AI serves public welfare.

6.2. AI Disinformation

Conclusion

A cross-check of fears and expectations of information apocalypse and AI disinformation "swinging" elections in 2024 against empirical data shows that the worst fears about the *impact of AI disinformation did not materialize*. As some observers already remarked, AI disinformation did not make a decisive difference in most elections. Despite this relieving result, a closer look and examination of empiric data does not support overly optimistic future scenarios:

1 First, it needs to be stated that at least in 4 elections (Slovakia, Turkiye and Mauritius and Romania in 2024) AI disinformation did make a significant or even decisive difference.

2 Second, AI disinformation was in one way or another present in at least half of all elections on the planet; its quantity is constantly and globally increasing and it is "here to stay" [137].

3 Third, deepfakes and other AI content may not have "swung" many elections, but that should not be confused with having no effects, impact or consequences whatsoever. AI fakes are, for example, often successfully used to incite disruptive "offline action", as for example in London, where a deepfake of Mayor Sadiq Khan led to riots and street fights [138].

4 Fourth, war, not elections, has been the main battlefield of AI disinformation in 2024! Ongoing conflicts such as the Russian war against Ukraine or the conflict in the Middle East, have seen much more and much more aggressive use of AI disinformation and manipulations.

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[137] C.f.: Katja Munoz: Influencers and Their Ability to Engineer Collective Online Behavior: A Boon and a Challenge for Politics, DGAP Policy Brief 11/2024 (https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/influenc-ers-and-their-ability-engineer-collective-online-behavior); see also the data of the "Upgrade Democracy Project" by the German Bertelsmann Foundation that – according to unspecified data - found AI disinformation in more than half of the 78 elections in 2024 (https://upgradedemocracy.de/en/superwahljahr-2024-superjahr-desinformation/).
[138] https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-68146053.

5 Fifth, no malign actor or disinformation campaign has, so far, made use of and combined all of the "super charging features" of genAI for information[139]. Actors have used genAI to generate content or to spread disinformation via automated AI bots, but not all at the same time.

6 Sixth, observers have been preoccupied with the use of genAI for the creation of disinformation and not with the way AI systems (and also genAI) are used for the spread of disinformation and for "engineered mobilization". Both in Romania and Moldova, for example, AI was not so much used for creating super convincing disinformation content, but for "cheap content" that was massively spread for algorithmic manipulation and mobilization.

7 Seventh, there are many unknowns and blind spots in our understanding and research of AI disinformation. We actually do not know the full extent of AI disinformation, but only the instances that were checked and debunked; data-driven and automated monitoring still does not take place. Furthermore, we do not have a basic understanding (or methodology) to examine and measure the long-term effects of deepfakes and AI disinformation. The actual impact of (AI) disinformation, e.g. on increasing societal polarization or the spread of political extremism, remains thus unknown.

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[139] Mateusz Łabuz / Christopher Nehring: Information apocalypse or overblown fears—what AI mis- and disinformation is all about? Shifting away from technology toward human reactions, in: Politics & Policy, 06 June 2024 (https://-doi.org/10.1111/polp.12617); c.f.: also: Vittoria Elliott: The Year of the AI Election Wasn't Quite What Everyone Expected, in: Wired, 26.12.2024 (https://www.wired.com/story/the-year-of-the-ai-elec-tion-wasnt-quite-what-everyone-expected/?utm_source=nl&utm_brand=wired&utm_mailing=WIR_Daily_122624&utm_campaign=aud-dev&utm_medium=email&utm_content=WIR_Daily_122624&bxid=655724bc01e1264fd50c157b&cndid=75779652&hasha=9f5be9dd6dc3c78e61ce391cf563fcbd&hashc=062242e83793a2b2248947a19c1d7bac17fa440bc3acefaf9fb7c501d5d7bf56&esrc=MARTECH_ORDERFORM&utm_term=WIR_Daily_Active).

Recommendations

The analysis of AI disinformation during the global super election year 2024 provides important "lessons learned" and references of best practices for the future.

1 It is important to *maintain the present level of vigilance and public as well as political awareness* of the threat posed by AI disinformation.

2 Currently, legal regulation (e.g. the EU AI Act or The White House Executive Order on Artificial Intelligence and several California bills on AI with their focus on transparency and the ban of malign or pornographic deepfakes) are the main point of reference when it comes to mitigating the risks of AI disinformation. In the future, holistic approaches consisting of legal regulation of all important stakeholders (state actors, online platforms as well as AI companies and developers), ethical guidelines and norms, technological solutions, information security measures and AI cyber and media literacy measures are needed.

3 Existing *transparency* rules (i.e. labelling and watermarking of AI content) are unspecific, and unenforced and have seen a "passing on" of the responsibility for labelling AI content from lawmakers to online media platforms who in turn passed it on to their users. In the future, online audiences will however *need much more detailed information about AI-generated, manipulated or altered content* (i.e. initial prompts, intention, nature and scope of manipulation, origin of sender etc.).

4 Technological solutions so far remain preoccupied and fixated on the detection of AI content; in the future, standardization and norms not only of detection procedures and AI labels but also minimum requirements for safety and risk mitigation built into AI applications (i.e. prompt filtering and storage, minimum safety layers, content moderation etc.) are needed.

5 Currently, lawmakers, tech companies, as well as media organizations and online platforms, show a strong fixation on technological risk mitigation (mainly via detection software); future approaches should be less techno-fixated and more human-centric, focusing on audience/user needs, reactions and their "upskilling"[140].

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[140] C.f.: Mateusz Łabuz / Christopher Nehring: Information apocalypse or overblown fears—what AI mis- and disinformation is all about? Shifting away from technology toward human reactions, in: Politics & Policy, 06 June 2024 (https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12617).

6 Thus, strengthening the resilience of audiences via AI and cyber literacy measures (including deepfakes and AI disinformation) and awareness building is equally important as advancing deepfake and AI detection technology [141].

7 States, but also organizations should not only focus on AI implementation strategies but simultaneously develop AI safety and (cyber-)security strategies and measures. Election infrastructure as well as political actors need to implement Deepfake and AI disinformation detection and response strategies.

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[141] C.f.: Habgood-Coote J. (2023). Deepfakes and the epistemic apocalypse. Synthese. Vol. 201. doi: 10.1007/s11229-023-04097-3.

SNIPPETS

Ongoing Vigilance in AI Disinformation
Governments should keep a close watch on AI-driven disinformation to protect elections from future interference. This monitoring must go beyond existing transparency laws, taking a broader approach that incorporates legal, ethical, and technological safeguards. By staying proactive and identifying emerging threats early, authorities can maintain public trust in democratic systems and protect the electoral process from manipulation.

Focusing on Public Education and AI Disinformation
Tackling AI disinformation requires more than just developing detection tools. It is crucial to invest in educating the public about AI's impact on media and politics. By improving AI literacy and resilience, people can better recognize misleading content and its effects. Complementing this with ethical standards and strong content moderation will empower voters to make informed decisions and ensure AI is used in a responsible, transparent manner.

Establishing AI Oversight in Elections
To regulate AI in political campaigns effectively, clear guidelines should be established to ensure its ethical use. These rules should define the boundaries for AI applications, prohibit harmful practices like misinformation, and ensure transparency in campaign strategies. Additionally, setting up dedicated oversight bodies, such as specific ministries or agencies, would help enforce these standards, fostering innovation while maintaining the integrity of the political process.

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