

The Future of Political Campaigns: Misuse of AI in Spreading Misinformation by Social Media Campaigns and How It Will Reshape Democracy

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ABSTRACT

This study argues that transparency as a fundamental democratic principle does not remain as vital when new technologies are utilized in political campaigns. Furthermore, digital literacy and adaptable legal institutions are necessary to regulate AI abuse, reduce the gap between rapid technological advancements and slow policy responses. The future of democracy is not only determined by the level of technological advancement, but also by the desire of society to demand accountability over the actions of political actors to the ethical and legal regulations.

The development of social media and advanced technologies, fueled by AI, is rapidly transforming the political landscape of communication, and at a rate even faster than laws and policies can keep up with in response. While these technologies enable campaigns to reach larger audiences, customize messages, and engage citizens more productively, they lend themselves to manipulation for purposes of spreading misinformation and disinformation. Artificial Intelligence will be able to produce fake stories, develop artificial consensus, and shape the minds of voters on a large scale. When false information spreads, it makes people lose trust in significant institutions and puts fair elections in danger; by that people miss out on the accurate information that they need to make smart choices about political campaigns.

Keywords: Political campaign; social media; fake news; AI; democracy; digital technology; ethics

INTRODUCTION

Political communication in the twenty-first century has undergone significant changes. The previous styles of campaigning, which included advertising on television, mass rallies, and print media, have been gradually replaced by digital communication practices that are largely dependent on social media and recently, artificial intelligence (AI). These technologies enable the political actors to reach a wider audience, tailor their message, and interact with the electorate more effectively than at any other time in human history. According to Fuchs (2021), communication technologies are socially embedded systems of power, domination, and exploitation, so, they do not act as a neutral tool but determine social relationships, visibility, and participation in society (ch.1).

While these technological changes provide easier opportunities for people to be involved in politics, they also pose new risks: AI integrated into social media platforms can now create, disseminate, and amplify false political information at a speed and level of reach no human could ever achieve. With deepfakes, AI-generated audio, and automated bots becoming more common, it is getting harder for people to tell what is real and what is not which weakens trust in reliable information. *The Communication Age* highlights this challenge, warning that “practices like manipulation, propaganda, or extreme censorship raise ethical questions because of their tendency to rob people of the chance to make informed decisions” (Edwards et al., 2013, p. 19). Such elimination of informational certainty poses a big challenge to democratic participation.

Scholars have cautioned that we are entering an era where people can no longer be sure of differentiating between genuine political content and AI-generated misinformation. Nie (2024) captures this danger clearly, explaining that generative AI threatens democracy by “undermining epistemic agency and political agency, which are

essential for a functioning democracy.” This Intensified ambiguity is not simply a technological issue; it strikes at the core principles of transparency and accountability.

Although the idea of making political advertising more transparent is often discussed as the solution to AI-based misinformation, it still provides what could be called a paradox of transparency. Publicly disclosing all microtargeted political ads could add to the accountability, yet it also raises some ethical and democratic issues. As an example, complete disclosure of targeted ads may indirectly provide sensitive information regarding the political preferences, demographics or patterns of behavior of voters. Moreover, complete publicity of campaign targeting strategies may sabotage political competition by being strategy messaging templates made public to opposing campaigns. Too much transparency can thus contradict voter privacy and the rightful strategic freedom of political participants. This conflict demonstrates that transparency is not a solution as it involves delicate balancing between democratic responsibility, personal privacy and safeguarding of healthy political competition.

Misinformation and disinformation are often conflated; misinformation refers to false claims shared without intent to deceive, disinformation to false claims disseminated strategically to mislead, and persuasion to value-laden advocacy that may be partisan yet does not rely on falsehoods. Clarifying these boundaries is essential for both empirical measurement and proportionate regulation of AI-mediated campaigns.

This paper argues that transparency as a fundamental democratic principle does not remain as vital when new technologies are utilized in political campaigns. The current pace of AI and social media development is significantly exceeding the development of the laws and institutions that are supposed to ensure that political communication is fair and reliable. Due to this, democracies are becoming increasingly vulnerable to manipulation, declining levels of public trust, and decreased election integrity. This paper will analyze how AI-driven social media strategies erode transparency, consider how such shifts could affect voter understanding and the very legitimacy of democratic systems, and highlight an urgent need for stronger regulations and public education in order to rebuild openness in political communication.

METHODOLOGY

To investigate the utilization of AI in election campaigns and the subsequent impacts on democratic transparency, a qualitative research method has been utilized. Considering the exploratory nature of the research question, and the pace at which AI is revolutionizing the nature of political communication in electoral settings, a qualitative design is best suited to synthesise available research, policy documents and real-world cases (Gilardi, 2021).

Documentary analysis has been used as the central methodology of this study. The data for this research was collated from peer reviewed articles, books, official policy documents and reputable think-tank papers from 2013-2025. Specifically, relevant literature regarding digital politics (Fuchs, 2021; Edwards et al., 2013) and misinformation (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Ferrara et al., 2016), alongside contemporary articles detailing deepfake technology threats (Cooke et al., 2024; Jones, 2023) have been consulted. Policy papers, such as the EU AI Act (European Parliament, 2023) and U.S. AI Bill of Rights (The White House, 2022), have also been examined in this study.

In order to enhance the study and provide an evidence based analysis of the potential threats posed by AI-driven political campaigning, various case study illustrations have been included, namely, the 2024 Biden robocall incident (Kornfield, 2024) and the Slovakian deepfake election interference incident (Devine et al., 2024). This method serves as an effective tool for making theoretical claims more concrete, providing practical examples of the abstract concepts. Through the thematic analysis of data, trends regarding the eroding nature of transparency, lags in the legal system, and the security of the democratic system will be highlighted.

The document analysis involved critically assessing sources on their credibility, relevance and recency. By employing this methodology, a holistic understanding can be attained on how AI misinformation is reshaping election campaigns, despite the constraints imposed by the use of secondary data.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital media and AI have changed the nature of political communication overall, and many scholars believe that the transformation affects the way people perceive political information. Edwards et al. (2013) further states that the current communication technologies are not only providing messages but also determining the way people perceive truth and credibility. According to Fuchs (2021), social media platforms operate by collecting data all the time, which provides political actors with strong instruments to address voters more personally than ever before.

AI has strengthened these trends. Tools like sentiment analysis, chatbots, and predictive analytics now help political campaigns understand voters and adjust their messages in ways that just were not possible ten years ago (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). At the same time, more researchers are starting to worry about the impact AI-generated misinformation is having on democracy. Nie (2024) points out that generative AI can weaken people's ability to tell what information is trustworthy and can also damage overall political trust. Gilardi (2021) puts it further that digital politics are becoming less transparent and explains it by the fact that people are not always aware who created this or that political content and why it showed up on their feed.

As with other modern media technologies, they carry more than content; rather, they contain power relations through the definition of credibility and truth into how politics is seen and participated. On a continuous basis, social media platforms collect vast amounts of data to allow highly detailed targeting of users, amplified through the utilization of AI techniques, such as sentiment analysis, chat bots and predictive technologies (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Simultaneously, humans lose their capacity to judge what and who to trust due to the increasing proliferation of generative AI and the potential harm it could inflict upon democratic institutions and political trust (Nie, 2024; Gilardi, 2021). Meanwhile, the creation of "echo chambers" or "filter bubbles" restricts the range of perspectives, limiting deliberative processes (Sunstein, 2001; Sunstein, 2018; Pariser, 2011).

Studies on misinformation show that once false information spreads online, it becomes very difficult to stop. For example, research on WhatsApp found that users kept sharing misleading political images long after they had been corrected (Caniglia & Caniglia, 2023). According to Jones (2023), fake videos and audio can be persuasive, which means that individuals cannot trust what they observe and listen to. Cooke et al. (2024) further explain that deepfakes now make it harder for people to trust their own senses, since fake videos and audio often look just as real as authentic ones.

Despite many studies being conducted on AI and misinformation, very few concentrate on transparency and whether individuals are capable of distinguishing between sources of political information. This is significant because without being able to trace information origins for voters, politicians become very difficult to hold accountable for their beliefs and actions. While acts such as the EU AI Act (European Parliament, 2023) or the AI Bill of Rights (The White House, 2022) attempt to address this issue, regulations always tend to lag behind advancements in technology because technology develops at such a rapid pace. This is especially noted by Ziccardi (2013) to mean that new laws for digital development need to emerge constantly to keep pace with this fast growth of technology itself. Additionally, observations provided by RTS Labs (2024) and Campaign Innovation (2025) indicate that it is expected for campaigns to implement AI at higher levels within the near future.

The Technological Transformation of Political Campaigns

The shift from mass communication to digital engagement in political campaigns has changed the very basis of how political actors connect to the public. Whereas previous campaigns were heavily dependent on centralized broadcast media, through which the same message was communicated uniformly to wide audiences, modern political communication has become personalized, interactive, and constituted through data-driven digital infrastructures. According to Edwards et al. (2013), Communication Age is characterized by integration of communication, technology, and media which significantly influences the lives of people in their daily experience and interpretation of information (p. 3).

Social media platforms have now become the central hubs of modern political communication. They enable immediate message dissemination, real-time tracking of engagement, and strategy readjustments in accordance with algorithm performance. These platforms rely on complex data extraction practices that record user behavior and preferences. According to Fuchs (2021), social media platforms exist on the principle of constant data collection and commoditization of user data, which permits the exploitation and control of users based on capitalist power relations (ch. 1). This system has replaced broad messaging with micro-segmentation and personalization, reshaping how political influence is cultivated.

This change is centered on artificial intelligence. Based on large volumes of data, AI tools can analyze public sentiment, identify emerging trends and determine changes in voter behavior. Advantages of machine-learning models enable campaigning to predict political views and, in this way, provide highly personalized messages to individual voters. AI chatbots are able to conduct personalized conversations and predictive analytics enable campaigns to personalize their messages in real time. While these tools make campaigns more responsive, they also make them much more ambiguous, the creation and distribution of messages become invisible to the broader public.

There have been some recent situations that really show the strong and risky effects of AI tech on how politics gets talked about. A clear example happened in the 2024 U.S. primary elections, when several thousand voters in New Hampshire got an AI-made robocall which pretended to be President Joe Biden in which the call told people not to vote in the primary. According to Kornfield (2024), the robocall stated, "Voting this Tuesday only enables the Republicans in their quest to elect Donald Trump again." This incident has demonstrated how AI-generated audio can undermine electoral participation and distort democratic processes.

Another example is the AI-generated image of an explosion near the Pentagon in 2023 that briefly caused financial market volatility before being identified as fake (Cooke et al., 2024). The image spread quickly on social media, "causing widespread confusion and even a temporary dip in the U.S. stock market" (Cooke et al., 2024, p. 3). Even though the financial impact was small, this incident shows how convincing synthetic media can trigger real-world reactions almost instantly, making people question what is real. According to Fuchs (2021), capitalistic media systems distort social reality and hide the manipulation and ideology, making it more challenging to see the difference between what is truthfully said and what is created in appearance (ch.1). These examples show how AI and social media are not just transforming political communication but introducing unprecedented risks to truth, credibility, and transparency.

Mechanisms of AI Misuse in Political Campaigns

AI-driven technologies in political campaigns are promoted through varied mechanisms that reduce transparency and distort public understanding. One of the tools that is particularly discouraging among these is the creation of artificial content, deepfakes, and AI-generated audio. Deepfake technology enables the creation of speeches, events, or statements that seem to be real. According to Cooke et al. (2024), "people can no longer depend on their eyes and ears to reliably detect the synthetic content they might encounter in their everyday lives" raising serious concerns for elections (p. 9). The 2024 U.S. primary elections provided a vivid example when an AI-generated voice-clone of President Biden was used in robocalls that instructed voters to stay home. This case indicated that AI-generated lies could be directly and immediately aimed at voters, without any transparency and disclosure.

Misinformation is another means of propagation in the online world made by bots and automated networks. Social bots are accounts that behave like real people as they can post content, like and comment on posts, and even follow other users. When many bots work together, they can make certain messages or posts seem much more popular than they really are, which can influence how people see them and even affect public opinion (Ferrara et al., 2016).

Research also shows that these coordinated systems make false information spread faster and a lot harder to control. For example, during the 2018 Brazilian and 2019 Indian elections, false images on WhatsApp kept getting shared even after they were fact-checked. According to one study, 40.7% of the shares in Brazil and 82.2% in India happened after the content was already debunked (Caniglia & Caniglia, 2023, p. 2). This simply

implies that when a misinformation is introduced into a vast network of bots or organized groups, it may last longer before it can be stopped spreading to affect people before even accurate information has an opportunity.

The other reason why political information can be misleading is that various groups of voters usually receive quite different information on the same candidates or issues. This concept has been emphasized by Allcott and Gentzkow, who assert that individuals are "considerably more likely to read and share news articles that are aligned with their ideological positions" (2017, p. 221). Consequently, some individuals may only pick up on certain political messages, some of which might go unnoticed, and they could end up making opinions based on totally different facts as this term is called echo chambers. Such an information gap polarizes political divisions and reduces the chances for people to make decisions that are fully informed.

Lastly, fake news can go viral with the help of AI-generated information that evades common fact-checking and official protection. A good example was the 2023 parliamentary election in Slovakia, when a deepfake audio file caused a liberal candidate to appear to be discussing vote rigging despite it being entirely fake. According to Devine et al. (2024, CNN), "The fake audio emerged on the barely regulated messaging app Telegram two days before Slovakia's parliamentary elections and quickly jumped to TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook." As indicated in the case, the content created by AI can run out of control and such manipulation can eventually affect the voters in the critical days that precede an election.

Taken together, these mechanisms such as synthetic media, bot amplification, microtargeting, and opaque AI operations show that how AI-driven political communication undermines democratic transparency. With the further development of AI technologies and their increased availability, the threats of misinformation, manipulation, and the lack of people's trust will grow unless strong security measures are taken.

Consequences for Transparency and Democratic Integrity

AI misuse in political campaigns is undermining democratic integrity directly, through the erosion of transparency. When the public loses the ability to distinguish between real communications and AI-generated synthetic content, even the notion of a common reality comes under challenge. As Gilardi, 2021, noted, the internet's compatibility with democracy is fundamentally questioned when it becomes a channel for deception. This is exacerbated by real-time deepfake technology, where, for example, a synthetic video of a US Federal Reserve chair can be convincingly deployed (Jones, 2023). The result of this erosion is a deep mistrust of institutions, media and the result of elections. This creates a climate of global skepticism in which, as psychologist Sophie Nightingale explains, "People's ability to really know where they should place their trust is falling away. And that's a real problem for democracy" (as cited in Jones, 2023). Therefore there would be a severe information asymmetry where the citizens who are given fragmented or misleading information are not able to make good choices. It is not a mass phenomenon but it is strategically powerful and such content is often concentrated in certain demographic groups that are vulnerable (Gilardi, 2021, P.12).

There is an even greater threat in the abuse of AI in political communications in relation to new or less established democracies, where there are few or even weak institutional safeguards over accountability. It is possible that the independent media, courts, and regulators in such cases cannot sufficiently regulate AI-based disinformation campaigns since they do not have the resources or authority to do so. As a result, automated bot networks, deepfakes, and orchestrated misinformation can go viral with very little opposition.

In a polarized political society, where there is an ethnically divided society, or in post-conflict situations, with the use of AI-based misinformation, tensions can be created and the already frail democratic standards can be further compromised. When there are no well-established media literacy traditions among citizens or the freedom of the press is restricted, it is even harder to distinguish between the reliable information and the fake content. Furthermore, such institutional weaknesses can be exploited by foreign players to adopt methods of cross-border digital manipulation with a view of disrupting elections. Under these circumstances, AI-driven misinformation does not merely undermine public discourse, but it might even undermine the democratic consolidation and long-term stability in the political system.

Finally, these dynamics contribute to the weakening of public debate. Where social media was hailed once as an alternative to state-controlled media, it now creates algorithmically controlled spaces that narrow the diversity of perspectives. The concepts of "echo chambers" (self-selected) and "filter bubbles" (algorithmically driven) show that online environments can support existing beliefs while excluding discordant views that undermine the open dialogue so essential to a healthy democracy (Gilardi, 2021, p. 16 as cited in Sunstein, 2001; Sunstein, 2018; Pariser, 2011).

Legal and Policy Gaps

The main problem of combating the abuse of AI in politics is the high regulation delay, as the rapidness of technological advancement constantly exceeds the comparatively slow and more thoughtful policy-making. As Gilardi (2021) explains, "the fact that scholarly and media attention are sometimes out of sync might lead policy-makers to focus on solutions before there is a scientific consensus on the nature and scale of the problems" (p. 2). This loophole exposes the democracies to new dangers before a social agreement about the issue or solution has been developed. The current frameworks are still only starting to do this. One instance is the EU AI Act that suggests a risk-based categorization framework and focuses on human control; by suggesting the AI rules it will make AI systems safe, transparent, traceable, and non-discriminative (European Parliament, 2023). Nonetheless, the digital misinformation often has an international scope, so the national laws are not enough. A law passed in one jurisdiction can be only partially effective when there are such things as coordinated bot networks or disinformation farms in another country with less stringent laws or law enforcement.

Structured international cooperation is therefore necessary to make better regulation. The governments would form transnational surveillance coalitions to exchange real-time information on the bot networks, organized inauthentic actions, and fake media campaigns. Democratic states might enter into election protection arrangements by creating common databases of known harmful AI systems and cross-border quick-response systems. Additionally, international standards agencies might come up with common requirements in political ad transparency, algorithmic auditing, and AI traceability. Collaboration between cybersecurity support and technological platforms would also enhance detection units and enhance enforcement across borders. The absence thereof will result in regulatory fragmentation that will leave loopholes that can be used by bad actors.

In the same manner, the U.S. Blueprint of an AI Bill of Rights provides guidelines on the transparency, protection against algorithmic discrimination, and notification and description (The White House, 2022). Nevertheless, these models possess some essential flaws. They have enormous enforceability challenges particularly across borders and their extrapolation to the particular, high stakes environment of political campaigning is little tested and untried. The necessity of adaptability is the most significant; the laws should not be fixed. In the context of control of the internet, which Giovanni Ziccardi (2013) noted, strategies of control have to be renewed continuously in order to consider the shifts in the methods of the spread of ideas (p. 299). Thus, the legal frameworks should be crafted in such a way that they change dynamically with the AI innovations.

The Future of Politics and Transparency in Campaigns

The future of political campaigning will be in a more AI-based approach, where microtargeting is filled with more advanced systems that can constantly learn and provide voters with high levels of personalization (Campaign Innovation, 2025). Among them, there are AI avatars that will represent the candidates and will be able to question the voters in real-time, and events that are generated by AI that will replace the usual town halls. Nonetheless, these innovations have serious dangers. One of them is the lack of authenticity, as the voters, disgusted with automated communication, will seek out candidates who are capable of conveying the essence of humanity (Campaign Innovation, 2025). Moreover, extreme personalization has the potential to create strong voter manipulation, where voters just become exposed to information that reinforces their original opinions, creating polarization (RTS Labs, 2024). Regardless of these risks, there are possibilities of applying AI as a good thing. Despite the severe threat posed by AI, it has the opportunity to enhance democratic involvement and openness in the event that it is used in a responsible manner. The AI-based tools can support citizens in their navigation in the growing complexity of political information spaces. As an example, machine learning systems can be used to summarize long policy texts into an understandable format so that voters can learn more about the policy options and their party platforms. Political speeches and online claims can be analyzed through real-

time fact-checking applications which will flag the misleading or unverifiable statements in the speeches as they go round.

Moreover, AI-based detection systems are capable of detecting coordinated bot networks and trends of automated amplification making platforms and regulators faster in intervening. Browsing extensions and publicly accessible dashboards can assist in monitoring expenditures on political adverts and sponsorships, the source of targeting data, and help gain a clearer understanding of the campaign plan without invading personal voter privacy. At the same time, AI can be used as a democratic fortifier instead of a democratic vulnerability when incorporated both ethically and transparently.

The use of AI can be used in a responsible manner to enhance transparency with robust fact-checking services on par with real-time and open data tools that assist auditors track campaign finance and misinformation trends. The final issue is balancing between innovation and control; creating and requiring open AI systems, it could be possible to utilize their effectiveness and build audit trails that might help regain the trust of people. In the future of political communication, this means that it is not only necessary to constrain the misuse of AI, but also how to come up with governance mechanisms that promote responsible innovation without compromising on transparency, accountability and people's trust.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The multi-pronged approach is necessary to protect democracy in the era of AI. To ensure this, first, there is an urgent need to empower transparency criteria by making the use of AI in political communications and advertisements legally disclosed to the citizens, so that they receive the required notification and explanation promoted in the AI Bill of Rights (The White House, 2022). Second, we should increase the level of digital literacy among the citizens. Informing the citizens about ways of recognizing misinformation and how AI affects them is a crucial defense mechanism that creates societal immunity against manipulation. Third, governments need to revise legal systems to seal the prevailing gaps. It means formulating enforceable regulations that are highly specific to the political environment, and derived based on the risk-based model of the EU AI Act but in a way that they can be adjusted to the new threats. Lastly, one should be able to encourage the sense of accountability on an institutional level, where social media networks and political campaigners should be held accountable in terms of transparency breaches and misuse of AI technologies. According to Gilardi. (2021), “the “problem” of digital technology and politics is in the process of being defined, and the process is shaped by digital technology itself” (p.25). By that the solution needs to be formulated through active and ethical policy-making which must keep up with the technology itself.

CONCLUSION

The fast evolution of AI-driven politics is thus altering the very foundation of democracy itself: what was traditionally dependent on openness to information, shared facts, and accountability is being promoted by synthetic media, automated persuasion, and data-driven strategy. As illustrated within this paper, deepfakes to microtargeting operate invisibly to citizens by making it harder for them to know who is speaking to them, what is real, or why they are being targeted for particular messages. This directly impacts democracy's legitimacy and undermines voters' perceptions.

While governments and institutions have started to react to this need for regulation, they are still lagging terribly behind the development pace of these new technologies. Without regulations on this matter or education to properly respond to politics through democratic discussion rather than manipulation by algorithms, politics is threatened to become dominated by manipulation by algorithms rather than democratic discussion. By combining an evidence based approach with an accountable platform, transparency of AI, and media literacy democracies can mitigate the manipulation risks of AI and continue to permit legitimate persuasion political competition. The future of democracy is no longer dependent on just how advanced these new technologies become but also on whether or not new societies are willing to ask for accountability and ethics at this new level.

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