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AI and Election Misinformation

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Name: Period: Date:

AI and Election Misinformation

When Elections Meet AI

Democratic elections depend on an informed public. When voters can't trust the information they receive about candidates, policies, and election procedures, the foundation of democratic decision-making erodes. This vulnerability has always existed — propaganda, misinformation, and political manipulation are as old as politics itself. But artificial intelligence has introduced capabilities that make election misinformation faster to produce, harder to detect, and potentially more effective than anything democratic systems have had to contend with before. The 2024 election cycle — in the United States, India, Indonesia, Mexico, and dozens of other countries that held major elections — became the first to experience AI-generated election interference at scale. Researchers documented AI-generated candidate endorsements, fabricated scandal videos, synthetic voter suppression messaging, and coordinated AI-driven social media campaigns. The impact on actual voting behavior remains difficult to measure, but the capabilities demonstrated represent a serious

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What AI Can Now Do to Elections

Artificial intelligence enables several specific categories of election interference. Deepfake video can place a candidate in fabricated situations, saying things they never said, in places they never were, doing things they never did. In January 2024, an AI-generated audio recording that appeared to be President Biden's voice told voters in New Hampshire not to vote in the primary and to 'save their vote' for the general election. The robocall reached thousands of registered Democrats before it was identified as fraudulent. The actual attack took only the cost of a robocall campaign and an AI voice tool to execute. AI-generated images have been used to fabricate crowds at political events, create false impressions of candidate popularity, and manufacture 'photographic evidence' of events that never occurred. In the 2024 Indian elections, researchers documented thousands of AI-generated

images circulating on WhatsApp, many depicting political opponents in unflattering or compromising situations with no factual basis. Automated AI accounts, so-called 'bot farms' driven by conversational AI, can infiltrate political discussions on social media, pushing particular narratives, suppressing others, and creating the false impression that certain views are widely held when they may be fringe positions.

Voter Suppression in the Digital Age

One of the most dangerous applications of AI in elections is targeted voter suppression. Rather than broad propaganda campaigns, AI enables surgically targeted messaging that reaches specific voters with specific false information designed to prevent them from casting their votes. This might include false information about polling locations, incorrect voting dates, fabricated ID requirements that don't actually exist, or messages suggesting that lines are too long to make voting worthwhile. These messages can be targeted based on demographic data, delivered through multiple channels simultaneously, and made to appear as if they come from official election authorities. A voter in a targeted precinct might receive a text message with their official-sounding county clerk's name saying the polling location has changed; in fact, it hasn't. By the time the misinformation is corrected, some voters may have gone to the wrong location and missed the opportunity to cast their ballot. The New Hampshire robocall case prompted the FCC to issue rules specifically prohibiting AI-generated voices in voter suppression robocalls, and the Department of Justice opened investigations into its creators. But the incident illustrated how quickly a small, cheap operation could reach a large number of voters with false information.

Media Literacy as Civic Duty

The scale of AI-generated election content means that traditional fact-checking organizations cannot keep pace. In the 2024 cycle, researchers estimated that the volume of synthetic political content exceeded what human fact-checkers could review. This places a new and significant responsibility on individual citizens: developing the personal skills to evaluate political information critically before sharing or acting on it. Lateral reading — the practice of opening multiple browser tabs to check what other credible sources say about a claim before accepting it — is among the most effective individual-level defenses. Election-specific caution means treating any dramatic or emotionally charged political content with elevated

suspicion, being particularly alert to content that appears the day before an election (when there is no time for correction), and consulting only official election authority websites for logistical voting information.

Legal and Institutional Responses

Governments worldwide are moving to regulate AI in elections, though the pace of legislation varies significantly. The European Union's AI Act, which entered into force in 2024 and phases in through 2026, includes provisions specifically requiring disclosure when political advertising content is AI-generated. Several U.S. states have passed laws requiring AI labeling on political ads. Federal legislation remains incomplete. Technology platforms have implemented their own policies. Google, Meta, and YouTube have required disclosure labels on AI-generated political content and have committed to removing deepfakes designed to deceive voters. Enforcement, however, is inconsistent — the volume of content makes comprehensive review impossible, and content often spreads widely before removal. International election monitoring organizations have had to rapidly update their methodologies. Traditional election observation focused on physical polling place irregularities, voter registration manipulation, and vote counting. The addition of AI-generated disinformation to the threat landscape has required the development of new 'digital election observation' protocols — monitoring social media for coordinated inauthentic behavior, AI-generated content, and targeted suppression messaging in the days and hours surrounding elections. This is a new frontier that election security experts are still working to define. Public awareness of AI deepfakes has produced an unintended secondary effect that researchers call the 'liar's dividend.' When the public broadly knows that AI can generate convincing fake videos, politicians and public figures can use that knowledge as cover: claiming that real, unflattering videos are AI fakes. This creates a situation where AI deepfake technology damages public trust in authentic video evidence even without a single fake video being deployed. The mere possibility of fakes makes all video evidence less credible. The challenge of attribution — determining who created and distributed a piece of AI-generated election misinformation — is a significant obstacle to both legal and political accountability. Sophisticated actors can use anonymizing tools, foreign hosting services, and intermediary accounts to obscure the origin of synthetic content. When a deepfake of a politician surfaces,

determining whether it was created by a foreign government, a domestic political opponent, a random internet troll, or an automated bot farm may be technically impossible. This attribution challenge means that the chilling effect of election deepfakes is significant even when the specific piece of content is quickly debunked. Campaign finance transparency has become newly complicated by AI-generated political content. When AI produces political ads, social media posts, or video content, the attribution of that spending to specific campaigns or donors becomes difficult to trace, potentially undermining disclosure requirements that are foundational to campaign finance law. Regulators in multiple countries are working to develop tracking methodologies that can capture AI-generated political spending, but the technical and legal frameworks are still developing.

Key Information: AI and Election Misinformation

Detail	Information
2024 New Hampshire incident	AI-generated Biden voice in robocall told Democrats not to vote in the primary
Key AI capabilities in elections	Deepfake video, synthetic images, AI bot farms, targeted voter suppression messaging
Targeted voter suppression	False polling locations, wrong dates, fake ID requirements — delivered to specific voters
Lateral reading	Checking multiple credible sources before accepting a political claim
High-risk timing	AI content posted day before election — no time for correction before polls close
EU AI Act (2024)	Requires disclosure when political advertising is AI-generated
Platform response	Meta, Google, YouTube require AI disclosure labels on political content
Key limitation	Volume of AI content exceeds human fact-checker capacity

Case Study: Jordan's Election Night Video

Jordan is 19 and voting for the first time. Two days before her state's primary election, a video appears in her social media feed showing the candidate she supports apparently making a racist comment at a private fundraiser. The video is grainy but recognizable. It has been shared 40,000 times in the past six hours and is accompanied by outraged commentary from accounts she doesn't recognize. Jordan is upset and almost decides to stay home on election day. But she decides to look further before changing her plans. She searches the candidate's name along with the event date on three different news sites. She finds no news coverage of the incident despite it supposedly occurring at a public fundraiser. She finds a fact-checking organization's debunking published three hours after the video started spreading. She finds that the video's original posting account was created that same day. Jordan votes.

1. What specific red flags in the video's spread should have alerted Jordan before she researched further?

2. Which media literacy strategies from the reading did Jordan's verification process demonstrate?

Multiple Choice

1. What made the 2024 New Hampshire robocall particularly alarming as an example of AI election interference?

a) It used a deepfake video rather than audio, making it harder to detect

b) It successfully changed the outcome of the primary election

c) It demonstrated how cheap and easy AI can make voter suppression operations

d) It was created by a foreign government attempting to influence U.S. politics

2. Why is AI-generated election misinformation released the day before an election especially dangerous?

a) Social media platforms remove all political content 24 hours before elections

b) Election officials cannot issue emergency statements on the day before voting

c) Voters tend to be most emotionally invested in politics on the day before an election

d) There is no time for corrections or fact-checks to reach voters before polls close

3. What does 'lateral reading' mean as a defense against election misinformation?

a) Comparing the reading level of political content to detect AI writing

b) Checking multiple credible sources simultaneously before accepting a political claim

c) Reading only those news sources that publish lateral fact-checks beside their articles

d) Reading the same article from bottom to top to catch inconsistencies

Matching

Write the letter of the correct definition on the line next to each term.

Term	Definition
1. ___ Deepfake video	A) AI-delivered false information about voting procedures directed at specific demographic groups
2. ___ Targeted voter suppression	B) European Union law requiring disclosure when political advertising content is AI-generated
3. ___ Bot farm	C) AI-generated video that places a real person in fabricated situations, saying or doing things they never did
4. ___ EU AI Act	D) The practice of consulting multiple credible sources simultaneously to verify a claim
5. ___ Lateral reading	E) Networks of AI-powered fake accounts that amplify certain political narratives and suppress others

Fill-in-the-Blank

1. An AI-generated audio recording in 2024 mimicked President Biden's voice to tell New Hampshire voters not to vote in the _____ election.

2. The volume of AI-generated political content in 2024 exceeded what human _____ -checkers could review.

3. For voting logistics (polling location, hours, ID requirements), citizens should consult only _____ election authority websites.

Short Answer

Answer each question in 2-4 complete sentences.

1. Explain how AI-targeted voter suppression differs from traditional propaganda and why it is particularly dangerous to democratic participation.

2. Why does the reading argue that individual media literacy has become a civic duty, not just a personal skill?

3. Should social media platforms be required by law to immediately remove AI-generated political content, or does this raise free speech concerns? Explain both sides.