**The first AI election**

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On April 25, to the surprise of absolutely nobody, President Joe Biden confirmed that yes, he is running for re-election. Hardly had the words escaped Biden’s lips before the Republican National Committee dropped an AI-generated attack ad.

The RNC ad is thought to be the first ever political ad generated entirely by AI. Titled ‘Beat Biden’, the ad consists of a series of apocalyptic horrors Americans can expect if they are so foolish as to re-elect Old Joe: a Chinese invasion of Taiwan (image of a scary Chinese fighter plane), financial markets in ‘free fall’, “500 regional banks have shuttered their doors” (endless lines of depositors made penniless by Biden); 80,000 ‘illegals’ (long shot of scary Mexicans, Hondurans, Salvadorans, etc.) ‘surging’ across the US-Southern border – in a single day. ‘Officials’ ‘close’ the City of San Francisco, “citing escalating crime and the fentanyl crisis” (image of scary, heavily tattooed young guy smoking…something.). Erika Wittekind of The Mary Sue quips: “So obviously the RNC fed the AI bot a few weeks of 24-hour Fox News programming, and this is what it spit out. It’s familiar right-wing fearmongering made to look like actual news footage.”

Does AI watch Comedy Central? Stephen Colbert parodied the ‘Beat Biden’ ad fourteen years before it was made.

On March 4, 2009, The Colbert Report featured ‘Stephen Colbert’s Doom Bunker’, a spoof of the unhinged predictions made on Glenn Beck’s ‘War Room’. ‘Doom Bunker’ opens with a montage of a hurricane tearing homes apart, atomic bomb blasts, a planet-sized meteor hitting Earth, an army of skeletons emerging from a wall of flame, armed Middle Eastern terrorists, a pair of monkeys furiously mating, and men kissing. Colbert rattles off a series of increasingly alarming scenarios: the Dow Jones plunges below 1000, then drops below 250. Unemployment is at 40 per cent. Mexico has recaptured all of the US West of the Mississippi and “there is an armed insurrection in El Kansas.” ‘Doom Bunker’ even anticipates the Covid-19 pandemic in the form of the ‘Koala Pox’. It’s a perfect parody of right-wing fearmongering.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation says that 2024 is already being called the first AI election. Online, deepfakes are everywhere. (Deepfakes are AI-generated sound and images of things that did not happen.) You may have seen the deepfakes of Donald Trump violently resisting arrest by the NYPD, or shackled and in prison coveralls (the orange of the coveralls nicely coordinating with Trump’s hair). These are deepfakes now, but they may become true following Trump’s criminal indictments in Florida and New York State.

The DeSantis campaign tweeted deepfakes of Donald Trump hugging and kissing Dr Anthony Fauci, who right-wingers revile because Fauci informs them that Covid-19 is real. A deepfake posted to Trump’s Truth Social account depicts Florida Governor Ron DeSantis riding a rhinoceros (ie, ‘RINO’, ie, ‘Republican In Name Only’).

A deepfake parody of Ron DeSantis’ glitch-filled May 24 presidential campaign launch on Twitter Spaces features an angry, F-bombing DeSantis; sustained coughing; and endorsements of DeSantis from deepfakes of George Soros (who can’t figure out whether his mic is on), Dick Cheney, Hillary Clinton, Klaus Schwab of the World Economic Forum, Adolf Hitler, and Satan. The work of an unnamed troll, the parody deepfake was gleefully embraced by the Trump campaign.

Deepfakes like these aren’t meant to fool anyone. However, the most technically sophisticated deepfakes are indistinguishable from reality. That makes AI ideal for spreading disinformation and manipulating voters. A deepfake of Biden in a wheelchair made to suggest that Biden is too old and infirm to be president would deceive many people. There is an actual deepfake of a Biden speech incorporating voice cloning which makes Biden sound like he is attacking transwomen.

Deepfakes don’t have to admit that they’re fake. Teeny-tiny lettering in the upper left corner of ‘Beat Biden’ says that the ad was “Built entirely with AI imagery,” but currently federal law doesn’t require this.

Social media platforms claim that they restrict deepfakes. Facebook has announced that it will remove deepfakes, but Business Insider says Facebook’s policy has “loopholes.” YouTube says that it takes down deepfakes, but the platform allows content claiming that the 2020 election was stolen. Twitter labels deepfakes and prohibits sharing of “misleading media” which “deceive or confuse people and lead to harm.” In any event, YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook are working on their own generative-AI platforms.

The Biden Administration has drafted a Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights. The nonbinding document sets out principles such as transparency (“You should know that an automated system is being used”); nondiscrimination (some AI are as bigoted as their creators); and an option to deal with humans rather than AI “where appropriate,” an exception big enough to drive a truck through. These are meant to be protections for us carbon-based lifeforms, although the name ‘AI Bill of Rights’ sounds uncomfortably like it’s the algorithms’ rights that are being defended.

Biden’s first campaign video also features scary images – genuinely scary because they weren’t made with AI. The Biden video opens with the January 6, 2021 assault on the US Capitol by fascist-adjacent groups bent on overturning the results of the 2020 presidential election. It moves on to images of ‘MAGA extremists’, including Representatives Marjorie Taylor Greene and Matt Gaetz, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, and Donald Trump himself.

Excerpted: ‘AI and the 2024 Presidential Election’. Courtesy: Counterpunch.org