**Fake it Till They Make it**

**The general election of 2024 witnessed a huge surge in the usage of AIgenerated content across the globe.**

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Former Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan addressed millions of people online in a virtual jalsa, recording video messages for supporters and voters to encourage them to vote. Interacting with supporters via his Facebook account, he sent personal messages to inform voters about the symbols—all while being behind bars for months. Sounds unbelievable? That is the power of artificial intelligence for political gains. The general election of 2024 witnessed a huge surge in the usage of AI-generated content across the globe.

The enormous threat to global democratic processes posed by the rapid spread of disinformation generated by artificial intelligence (AI), especially through deepfakes, is unprecedented. The recent report from Factcheckly, an independent fact-checking organization, underscores how AI is being utilized as a weapon to produce incredibly lifelike fake audio and video, disseminating misleading information, and swaying public opinion ahead of elections. This technological threat damages public confidence in the media, erodes the integrity of political discourse, and has the potential to incite violence by exploiting social divisions.

[LG institutions  urged to become self-reliant](https://www.nation.com.pk/22-Jun-2024/lg-institutions-urged-to-become-self-reliant)

Political players have fabricated damaging or deceptive content about their opponents using deepfakes, influencing voter perceptions and upsetting electoral processes from France to Pakistan. This digital deceit affects elections across continents and is not confined to national boundaries. To engender mistrust and confusion among voters, deepfake videos were directed against Pakistan’s two main political parties: Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Muslim League, Nawaz (PMLN). In one deepfake video, the key leadership of PTI can be heard announcing a boycott of the general elections, creating panic among Imran Khan

 Deepfakes have made headlines in neighboring countries as well. During the general elections of 2024 in India, deepfake technology targeted prominent stars like Aamir Khan and Ranveer Singh. The actors featured in videos criticizing the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and urging voters to support the Congress party. The public’s trust and individual reputations are seriously threatened by these deepfakes, leaving celebrities and the broader public open to criticism and backlash. Such manipulative strategies further undermine the election process by distorting public opinion and misleading voters by taking advantage of the popularity of prominent personalities.

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AI, however, has promising applications in politics. For example, Imran Khan’s party in Pakistan has successfully used AI to raise voter symbol awareness, making it simpler for them to recognize and support the party in elections. Moreover, politicians are exploring the use of deepfake technology to deliver speeches in multiple languages, allowing them to connect with diverse linguistic groups across the country. To gain support, Manoj Tiwari, the leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party, used AI to produce a deepfake video in which he speaks Haryani. Similarly, AI is credited in the audio recordings of New York Mayor Eric Adams speaking Mandarin and Spanish. This innovative use of AI fosters inclusivity and ensures that political messages reach a broader audience.

Conversely, the darker side of AI’s role in elections is starkly evident. AI has been exploited to create deepfakes of key politicians falsely announcing boycotts of elections, aiming to sow confusion and dissuade voter participation. Women in politics are particularly vulnerable, as deepfakes are used to malign their character by fabricating inappropriate images and videos, deterring female participation and damaging their reputations. These malicious tactics not only undermine the democratic process but also perpetuate gender discrimination and harassment.

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In Pakistan, the importance of media literacy cannot be overstated in combating the spread of deepfake disinformation. Citizens equipped with the skills to critically evaluate digital content are less likely to fall prey to false narratives. Educational initiatives aimed at enhancing media literacy should be a national priority, ensuring that individuals understand the potential dangers of deepfakes and how to identify them. Such programs can empower the public to demand accountability from media producers and tech platforms.

Equally crucial is the role of fact-checking organizations in maintaining the integrity of information. In an era where misinformation spreads rapidly, fact-checkers serve as vital gatekeepers, verifying the authenticity of news and debunking false claims. Their work is essential in restoring public trust in media and providing reliable information. Strengthening fact-checking efforts, especially during election periods, can help mitigate the impact of disinformation and safeguard democratic processes.

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To combat this, governments, tech companies, and civil society must collaborate to create robust detection technologies and regulatory frameworks. Public awareness campaigns are essential to educate citizens about the realities and risks of deepfake technology. Furthermore, international cooperation is crucial to address the transnational nature of this threat, ensuring that strategies and solutions are globally harmonized and effectively implemented. The fight against deepfake disinformation is a battle for the very soul of democratic integrity. As AI technology continues to advance, so must our efforts to safeguard truth and trust in our digital age.

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