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POLITICAL DEEPFAKES AND MISLEADING CHATBOTS: UNDERSTANDING THE USE OF GENAI IN RECENT EUROPEAN ELECTIONS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Five main trends regarding AI and the 2024 European as well as British and French snap elections stand out:

- **Unreliability of chatbots.** Several research institutions and news organizations in Europe tested popular chatbots and were underwhelmed; the general consensus was that trustworthy answers are hard to come by and some answers include made-up information.

- **Creation of AI personas.** Political parties (especially right-wing parties like the Alternative for Germany and the National Rally in France) created AI personas online and relied on them for (fake) support.

- **High-profile politicians were prominently targeted with deepfakes.** Several prominent politicians, including German Chancellor Scholz, UK Prime Minister Starmer, and Marine Le Pen, the parliamentary party leader of the French National Rally, were the targets of deepfakes. Some of these deepfakes had more satirical undertones than others.

- **Foreign interference relied on LLMs.** Russian actors relied on large language models (LLMs) to promote pro-Russia content in attempts to influence public opinion.

- **AI weakened the belief in and practice of democracy generally.** Instead of fears about imminent electoral impact, there is a broader skepticism towards AI and democracy. For example, the Alan Turing Institute wrote that "the current impact of AI on specific election results is limited, but these threats show signs of damaging the broader democratic system."

NOTEWORTHY HIGHLIGHTS

Two reasons underpinned concerns about voter manipulation in Europe with Artificial Intelligence (AI) content in the 2024 European elections as well as British and French snap elections:

- **General proliferation of AI content online.** The European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) was concerned that large language models (LLMs) could be used for political campaigns.

- **Large reliance on self-regulation.** The main strategy in tackling generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) in these election cycles was self-regulation, for both social media platforms and political parties. While the European Union (EU) has a set of regulatory frameworks with stipulations for AI (DSA, AI Act, Regulation on the Transparency and Targeting of Political Advertising, Code of Practice on Disinformation, AI Election Accord, GDPR), enforcement is patchy.

Two unique findings stand out:

- **A hybrid AI politician.** In the UK, one candidate in the national snap elections used an AI-generated avatar in his campaign communications. The candidate proclaimed that he would vote according to what his constituents told the AI.

- **Advanced scrutiny as well as regulations in Europe.** One unique finding of this report compared to others in the series (such as those on India or Mexico) is Europe's wide-spread research scrutiny of AI, as well as its better regulatory frameworks. While this cannot forestall AI's potential negative impacts on politics or direct them in pro-democracy directions, the European environment benefits from robust democratic pushback against AI, both in society and among policy makers.

One important, underreported finding emerged:

- **The importance of ChatGPT for younger voters.** Reliable, informative numbers are hard to come by, but the widespread adoption of ChatGPT (and other, similar programs) emerges within the context of increasing tech-affinity amongst many youngsters. The political impacts of this overlap (both negative and positive) are underexplored. This report elaborates on one experiment in Germany: the Wahl-O-GPT tool, which was part of an initiative called "AI meets the European Parliamentary Election."

KEY TERMS

- *Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI)* refers to computer systems that draw on extremely large datasets to make statistical inferences about the relationship between words in a body of text or pixels from an image. From these inferences, GenAI systems can produce human-like content quickly in response to human-provided prompts.

- *Large language models (LLMs)* are a form of GenAI that are trained on billions of words of human-produced text. For example, ChatGPT is powered by an LLM.

- *Synthetic Media*, or "deepfakes," can be created by generative AI in the form of imagery, audio, or video.

INTRODUCTION

Imagine a scenario in which the public is thoroughly educated about the technological possibilities of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) and aware of the comprehensive arsenal of threats that can emerge from it during elections. Voters might come to assume that most—if not all—political campaign content they encounter was created synthetically, and that nonsynthetic media is the exception rather than the rule.[1] Discourse around the threat of AI alone might then impact how election integrity is perceived.[2]

This situation encapsulates what legal scholars Bobby Chesney and Danielle Citron call the liar's dividend—the idea that if anything can be fake, those who lie can "avoid accountability for things that are in fact true."[3] For elections, this spells trouble. If the seeds of doubt can be sown around anything, and if anything could be AI-generated, this gives cover to those who wish to maliciously attack their opponents.

Concerns around AI, elections, and the liar's dividend are well-founded: A 2024 survey on the impact of artificial intelligence by researchers at the University of Oxford that measured attitudes across Argentina, Denmark, France, Japan, the UK, and the US found that more than half of the people surveyed thought that GenAI would have "a large impact on political parties."[4] Research from Luminate from late 2023 found that among citizens who understand AI, more than 70% across the UK and Germany are concerned about the threat

of AI for elections (57% in France).[5] And a nationally representative survey of UK adults investigating exposure to deepfakes found that 82.7% had heard of deepfakes, 8.1% said they themselves had created them, and 34.1% said they had been exposed to deepfakes of politicians.[6]

There are multiple election stages in which GenAI content could make an impact: before an election, a person might share deepfakes in order to create distrust in the integrity of voting; on election day and during voting itself, goals might shift toward disruption and creating confusion; and post-election, the goal might be to discredit the integrity of elections itself.[7] The political scientist Andreas Jungherr, who has written about AI and democracy, warns of AI fearmongering in the context of elections. As he points out, raising the specter of AI threats can actually induce doubt about the integrity of elections in voters.[8]

Apocalypse and Glory

Narratives around GenAI are suffused with hype and run the gamut from apocalypse to glory, with little in between.[9] Such extreme narratives make it difficult to see reality between the snake oil vendors who promise that AI will save the world and the doomsday crowd who surmises that AI will be the end to all of humankind.[10]

GenAI does, of course, pose a real threat to elections. It has the potential to misrepresent citizens' voices—and, conversely, misrepresent elected representatives' actions to their constituents, sowing doubt and eroding trust in both directions.[11] According to Emilio Ferrara from the University of Southern California, the most pertinent threats in the context of elections are deepfakes, AI-powered botnets, targeted misinformation campaigns, and synthetic identities.[12]

But GenAI may also offer some benefits in elections. For those running political campaigns, GenAI provides a way to personalize fundraising emails and videos, and even to "have dynamic, digital conversations with voters at scale."[13] And voters who have felt unheard because they lacked the argumentative tools to convey their opinions may now, thanks to GenAI, feel empowered to participate in the political conversation.[14]

The following sections provide an overview of the use of GenAI as it has been reported across news media and civil society organizations during recent elections in 2024 in Europe that happened in quick succession: The European Parliamentary election in early June and two snap national elections, one in France in late June and early July and one in the UK in early July.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

From June 6 through June 9, 2024, more than 350 million citizens[15] across 27 EU member states were eligible to vote in the EU elections for their representatives in the European Parliament. Parliament, unlike other EU institutions and legislative bodies, is directly elected by EU citizens.[16]

Pundits predicted that deepfake audio and video content would have outsized effects on the elections. In the fall of 2023, the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) warned that large language models (LLMs) could be used for political campaigns.[17] A report by the European Parliamentary Research Service points out the political bidirectionality of AI: it can be used as both a tool for democracy (increasing political engagement, allowing campaigns to personalize communications, and communicating complicated subject matter related to policymaking) and as a tool against democracy (spreading false and misleading information such as deepfakes and potentially flooding the political zone of participatory processes).[18] Other possible perks of AI include increased security and data analysis, while additional risks and threats include "AI poisoning" (nefarious tampering with AI training data sets to produce differential outcomes), impersonation of political rivals, the propagation of bias, and easier access to tools of manipulation.[19]

Platforms and Parties Self-regulate

Prior to the election, tech companies issued statements about how they were preparing. Meta stated that they would have an "EU-specific Elections Operations Center" and were expanding fact-checking collaborations, building tools for labeling GenAI images created outside of Meta's platforms, and creating user labeling systems for AI-generated videos and audios.[20] OpenAI declared its commitment to "elevating accurate voting information, enforcing measured policies, and improving transparency," and promised to disallow chatbots that would deter people from voting, create tools that would prevent people from impersonating candidates or institutions through AI, and block the creation of deepfakes of candidates.[21] Cloudflare published a blog post explaining that between November 2022 and August 2023, it had "mitigated 213.78 million threats to government election websites in the United States," suggesting that, as in the US, the cybersecurity threat for the EU elections was real but manageable.[22]

Although the EU has a set of regulatory frameworks that include stipulations about AI (DSA, AI Act, Regulation on the Transparency and Targeting of Political Advertising, Code of Practice on Disinformation, AI Election Accord, and GDPR),[23] platform self-regulation was regarded as key in tackling GenAI during this election.[24] At the Munich Security Conference in February 2024, a group of large tech companies announced a voluntary pledge within the

industry "to combat deceptive AI content from interfering with elections both in the US and around the world."[25] The "Tech Accord to Combat Deceptive Use of AI in 2024 Elections" outlined how companies would tackle so-called "Deceptive AI Election Content," defined as:

> convincing AI-generated audio, video, and images that deceptively fake or alter the appearance, voice, or actions of political candidates, election officials, and other key stakeholders in a democratic election, or that provide false information to voters about when, where, and how they can lawfully vote.[26]

The signatories promised to engage in a range of activities, including continued work on provenance and watermarking, risk assessment, content detection and labeling on their own platforms, public transparency, collaboration with other companies in the industry, engagement with academics and civil society, and "supporting efforts to foster public awareness and all-of-society resilience."[27]

Like the platforms, large European political parties also came to a voluntary accord, known as the "Code of Conduct for the 2024 European Parliament Elections." On April 9, 2024, Věra Jourová, Commission Vice President for Values and Transparency, announced the Code of Conduct, saying that "[e]lections should set the stage for the competition of ideas, not dirty manipulative methods such as AI deepfakes."[28]

The party accord, initiated by the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (InternationalIDEA) in cooperation with European political parties and the Commission, is a voluntary code of conduct in which signatories commit to election integrity and fairness. While it outlined many important stipulations on political campaigning, the point most pertinent to GenAI was the following, in which parties committed to not create, use, or share

> any type of deceptive content using audio, images or video and generated with or without artificial intelligence to falsely or deceptively alter or fake candidates, officials or any electoral stakeholder. The use of artificial intelligence-generated content is only permitted when clearly labelled. Using watermarking and provenance signals is encouraged.[29]

Chatbots Misleading Voters

Journalists and academics have explored how AI chatbots fared when it came to election content. An initial report from civil society organizations AI Forensics and AlgorithmWatch tested Microsoft's Bing Chat (now rebranded as Microsoft Copilot). The study focused on elections in Switzerland, Bavaria, and Hesse, since those were among the first elections held after Bing Chat was introduced. Researchers concluded that Microsoft's AI chat tool was "an unreliable source of information on elections," as it provided answers that included factual errors and sometimes evaded questions altogether.[30]

As the EU election came closer, various teams of researchers and reporters ramped up their AI testing. Berlin-based nonprofit Democracy Reporting International asked a range of chatbots for information about the EU election[31] and found that the chatbots stayed neutral in their responses to political questions, but "none of them provided reliably trustworthy answers to questions voters may pose about the electoral process"; some answers included made-up information about election dates.[32] German investigative journalism outfit Correctiv tested Google Gemini, Microsoft Copilot, and ChatGPT in three different languages (German, English, and Russian) and came to similar conclusions: "Google's chatbot won't answer the simplest questions; Microsoft Copilot is confused about leading candidates; and ChatGPT suggests reading fictitious Telegram channels to stay on top of election news."[33] Researchers at the University of Oxford tested the chatbots Perplexity.ai, ChatGPT4.0, and Google Gemini to see what type of information about the election they would provide in France, Germany, Italy, and Spain. While they noted that they did receive some correct answers, they also got "answers that were only partially correct and a few that were entirely false."[34]

Subsequent sections take a closer look at three locales—Germany, France, and the United Kingdom—to further explore how GenAI was used in connection with the EU election and the national elections that followed it in quick succession.

EU ELECTIONS IN GERMANY

Olaf Scholz Bans the AfD Party–Or Does He?

Germany witnessed its first high-profile political deepfake in the fall of 2023, when a video of chancellor Olaf Scholz emerged purporting to show him announcing the outright ban of the far-right extremist party Alternative for Germany (AfD).[35] The Scholz video was created by an activist/artist group called the Center for Political Beauty, which describes itself as "an assault troop that establishes moral beauty, political poetry, and human magnanimity."[36] One academic points out that the Center intended the video to "raise awareness of the dangers of deepfakes and right-wing extremism."[37] Although the group may have been pursuing satire, and although observers noted that the deepfake was intentionally not made to appear convincing or real,[38] the Scholz government was not amused. Government spokesperson Steffen Hebestreit tweeted that the video was not real and that deepfakes were not fun but manipulative, for they created uncertainty.[39] The government tried to get the video taken down, and in response, the activist group uploaded a modified video which no longer used the logo of the chancellor's office, instead including text that marked it as a "Politische Schönheit Originals" video.[40] Later, the Regional Court of Berlin granted the government a preliminary injunction barring further distribution of the deepfake.[41]

Far-right Parties and GenAI

Alongside the Center for Political Beauty Scholz deepfake, German media also documented a local arm of the AfD party in Baden-Württemberg using AI to create fake party supporter imagery without disclosing the manipulation.[42] According to RedaktionsNetzwerk Deutschland, one example was an image of a "Tobias Mayer" from the municipality of Bad Boll in Göppingen, depicted alongside the slogan "Weil die Verspargelung der Landschaft überhand nimmt bin ich AfD Mitglied geworden."[43] This translates to "I became a member of the AfD party because the asparagus-ization of the landscape is taking over."[44]

In another report, this one from the German press agency Deutsche Presse-Agentur, local AfD representative Sandro Scheer confirmed that he had created an AI-generated image of a woman that appeared in the party's campaign communications under the name Dr. Stefanie Mueller, alongside text explaining why she had joined the AfD party.[45] Scheer confirmed that the image had been created with AI and the name invented, but that it was based on a real Dr. Stefanie who had joined the party with a motivation similar to that given in the text of the Dr. Stefanie Mueller ads. Scheer did not seem to see the use of AI as problematic; he felt that it was clear that it was an AI-generated image rather than a real person.[46]

Testing AI for Election-related Responses

In Germany, too, multiple experiments sought to explore how well-equipped GenAI chatbots were to respond to election-related prompts. For example, the Bavarian Public Broadcaster's BR24 tested how well ChatGPT agreed with 38 statements from Wahl-O-Mat, a political literacy and voting education tool provided to the public by the Federal Agency for Civic Education.[47] According to the broadcaster, while ChatGPT came to different conclusions across different tests, it tended to skew toward parties on the left.[48] German tech news platform Golem.de, who also tested ChatGPT, similarly found that it mostly aligned with parties on the left (i.e., the Greens, Volt, and Tierschutzpartei, though not DIE LINKE).[49]

In April 2024, German/Swiss nonprofit AlgorithmWatch tested GenAI image creation apps MidJourney, Stable Diffusion, and DALL·E to see whether it was possible to create AI-generated images of political candidates running for office in the EU parliamentary elections. In their report, the nonprofit wrote that it was still possible to create realistic-looking images of candidates (even if they did not necessarily look like the real candidates whose names they entered in the prompts), which they said meant that tech companies were not keeping to their self-imposed accord.[50]

AI as an Election Literacy Tool?

The 2024 EU parliamentary election was the first one during which Germans as young as 16 could vote.[51] One innovative and controversial initiative that emerged in Germany in the run-up to the EU parliamentary elections was the Wahl-O-GPT tool.[52] The tool, which caters to young people in the Rhein-Neckar-Kreis area in Baden-Württemberg, was part of an initiative called "KI Meets Europawahl," which translates into "AI meets the European Parliamentary Election."[53] Students who tested the Wahl-O-GPT tool could win tickets for a museum.[54] One of the companies who created the tool, Cosmonauts & Kings, wrote in a LinkedIn post that AI could help people make better and more democratic decisions, and that the tool would allow people to analyze party platforms and engage with their content.[55] They also stated that it could help people make informed election decisions.[56] The State Center for Political Education Baden-Württemberg was critical of Wahl-O-GPT due to concerns that it might share false or misleading information.[57]

FRENCH ELECTIONS: EU AND SNAP GENERALS

Following the enormous success of the far-right National Rally party in the European parliamentary elections in France, President Emmanuel Macron dissolved the parliament, triggering snap national elections that were held on June 30 and July 7, 2024. This move was described as a "risky bet, which could easily backfire."[58] It paid off for Macron: while far-right parties succeeded in the first electoral round, a broad leftist coalition called the *New Popular Front* defeated the far right in the second round by winning the most seats, though not a majority.[59]

Politicians Sharing Political Deepfakes

Like Germany, France also saw a case of a political deepfake related to the upper echelons of the government. In a surprising gaffe, Loïc Signor, spokesperson of President Macron's Renaissance party, posted a video in January 2024 that was altered with AI to make it seem as though Marine Le Pen, the far-right National Rally's parliamentary party leader, was giving her New Year's address in Russian.[60] The tweet included the hashtag #MarinePoutine.[61] Signor later suggested that his tweet was intended to make visible the close ties between the National Rally party and Russia, as well as to point out the risks of AI.[62] It stands to reason, however, that there are significant concerns when government officials share deepfakes, even if they claim to do so for educational purposes.

Influencer Deepfakes: The Invented Le Pen/Maréchal Nieces

The French elections (both the EU elections and the general snap election) saw a range of uses of GenAI. One case that stood out involved fabricated videos of young women on TikTok. In this case, videos of influencers were mashed up with youthful images of the faces of Marine LePen and Marion Maréchal to invent nieces for Marine Le Pen and Marion Maréchal (who is, in fact, Marine Le Pen's niece).[63] The three AI-created women, named in the videos as Amandine Le Pen, Chloé Le Pen, and Lena Maréchal Le Pen, do not actually exist, but their videos (which made reference to the EU elections) circulated far and fast on TikTok.[64] French broadcaster BFM TV reached out to the creator of the deepfakes, who stated that "there was nothing political about it," and that it was instead a "social experiment to demonstrate the dangers of disinformation and deepfakes."[65] Notwithstanding, the case must be understood as the GenAI creation of political influencers, since the three invented women communicated about politics.[66]

Foreign Influence Operations: CopyCop

Cybersecurity firm Recorded Future's Insikt Group identified the so-called CopyCop network as a Russian influence operation that was "using large language models (LLMs) to promote pro-Russia content in French disparaging President Macron and dissuading continued European support to Ukraine."[67] The CopyCop network copies French news websites, rewrites the content using GenAI to introduce bias, then makes the websites available under slightly modified URLs.[68]

Another documented influence operation in France that used AI was the Russian campaign targeting the 2024 Olympics. As part of this campaign, a fake Netflix documentary called "Olympics Has Fallen," narrated by an AI-generated voice clone of Tom Cruise, was shared on Telegram.[69] Microsoft encountered the campaign as early as 2023 and said that the campaign intended to "denigrate the reputation of the IOC [International Olympic Committee] on the world stage; and to create the expectation of violence breaking out in Paris during the 2024 Summer Olympic Games."[70]

The French Far Right and GenAI

In June 2024, a group of researchers, journalists, and other members of civil society came together at the University of Amsterdam's Media Studies department to investigate the French National Rally's undisclosed use of AI for images during the EU elections. They identified GenAI-created content of Macron, branded under the National Rally logo and lacking a label noting that the content was AI-generated.[71] It is concerning for parties to not disclose the use of GenAI in campaign materials, but the lack of watermarks or labels

indicating that an item was created using AI meant that the hosting platform was not holding to their agreement in the tech accord.[72]

A report by the nonprofit AI Forensics looked at France in the context of both the EU elections and the first round of the general elections. According to researchers, GenAI was "an integral campaigning strategy for the French parties Rassemblement National [National Rally], Reconquête, and Les Patriotes,"[73] all on the far right. The GenAI images identified by AI Forensics contained no disclosures indicating that they were created with AI—a point that researchers referred to as "critical negligence."[74] This same attitude of critical negligence is apparent in interviews with the people involved in creating political GenAI content: in an article in Politico, for instance, the leader for Reconquête's digital communications is quoted as saying "[w]e mainly use MidJourney—some say the generated images are inauthentic, but is a picture more authentic?"[75]

SNAP ELECTIONS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

On May 22, 2024, then-British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, much to the surprise of both the opposition and members of his own party, called snap elections in the United Kingdom.[76] The elections took place on July 4, 2024; *The Telegraph* referred to this as the "first 'AI election'" in the country.[77]

Keir Starmer Swears at His Staff—Or Does He?

Long before the July election, audio and video deepfakes of high-profile political actors were already circulating online. In the fall of 2023, for example, a deepfake audio file emerged on X/Twitter, purporting to be a recording of then-opposition leader (now Prime Minister) Keir Starmer swearing at staff.[78] Although it was clear that the audio was manipulated, X refused to take it down.[79] Other high-profile deepfakes had targeted London mayor Sadiq Khan and Rishi Sunak during his tenure as prime minister.[80]

Yet up until that period, according to observers in academia and government agencies, GenAI had not played an important a role in elections. As late as the winter of 2023, the United Kingdom's national election commission wrote that "there has not yet been widespread use of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in UK elections,"[81] and the Alan Turing Institute's Centre for Emerging Technology and Security wrote that "the current impact of AI on specific election results is limited, but these threats show signs of damaging the broader democratic system."[82]

The attitude was different in the runup to the 2024 elections. Researchers at the University of Oxford, interested in how chatbots would inform people about the election,

tested six prompts across three tools (ChatGPT4.0, Google Gemini, and Perplexity.ai), focusing on basic election information and on fact-checked claims. They concluded that the AI tools gave a "mixed performance": they had received some accurate responses with good sources and some that included only "partially correct or false and misleading information."[83]

AI Steve and a Channel 4 Experiment

The UK general elections were also the stage for a rather peculiar first: one candidate running for Parliament, Steve Endacott, used an AI-generated avatar in his campaign communications. Endacott, who was running for the constituency of Brighton Pavilion, appeared on ballot papers as "AI Steve";[84] Endacott said that he would vote according to what the majority of his constituents told the AI they wanted.[85] When the news agency Reuters inquired about the ballot listing for AI Steve with the Electoral Commission, the commission clarified that "if he wins, Endacott would be the member of parliament (MP), not any AI version of him."[86]

In another political AI experiment, the public broadcaster Channel 4 ran a program shortly before the election in which they exposed members of 12 households of undecided voters to either pro-Labor or pro-Conservative content on a bespoke social media app. The app's assemblage of content was a "mixture of real political messages alongside AI-generated fake material, deep fakes and general disinformation,"[87] including fake celebrity endorsements, hot-mic moments, and deepfakes. The show held a mock vote toward the end of the TV experiment, and almost all participants voted in line with the party they had been nudged toward in the experiment.[88]

CONCLUSIONS

This overview of recent European elections has showcased a few important observations about the use of GenAI in elections.

First, deepfakes have entered mainstream discourse, although they do not yet dominate elections. Although there were documented instances of GenAI use during the EU election, as one Hungarian fact-checking website put it, "the flood of deepfakes [...] has failed to materialize this time."[89] Initial evidence indicates that the EU parliamentary election was not the deepfake Armageddon that some media narratives had predicted. Yet across different parts of Europe, deepfakes of politicians have already become a critical part of the public debate, as evidenced by the Le Pen deepfake in France, the Scholz deepfake in Germany, and the Starmer deepfake in the UK. Allowing those who created and shared these deepfakes to get away with it by saying that they were jokes or were intended to

"raise awareness" around the issue of AI-generated misinformation ignores the problem that *doubt lingers*: when discourse gets muddled, voters start to doubt the integrity not only of particular deepfakes but of all political campaign communications—a real reason for concern.

Second, chatbots provide answers about elections, but some of them are false or misleading. Evidence from experiments across different parts of Europe indicates that not everything that chatbots write about elections is true. When voters use chatbots to engage with party platforms and help them make decisions, there is a real risk that they are making those decisions based on false or misleading information. For this reason, some have argued for a moratorium on the use of chatbots for elections.[90] Even literacy initiatives like Wahl-O-GPT, which look like compelling, new, innovative ways of engaging with political platforms, may pose risks, and these risks need to be considered.

Third, voluntary agreements do not do a good job of preventing deepfakes. Neither the (nonbinding) agreements of political parties nor the (nonbinding) agreements of technology platforms prevented the sharing of political deepfakes. According to the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensics Lab (DFRLab), the EU far-right coalition Identity and Democracy (ID) used GenAI in campaigns, violating the "Code of Conduct for the 2024 European Parliament Elections" that ID had signed onto.[91] Similarly, AlgorithmWatch reported that companies like OpenAI did not obey their own rules preventing the creation of realistic-looking candidate imagery for the elections.[92] These examples illustrate how crucial transparency and clarity are: When neither political parties nor platforms label content sufficiently clearly, it's a losing game for voters as the specter of doubt persists.

Fourth, platforms' voluntary commitments to provenance, transparency, and disclosure matter, but what matters even more is governments' ability to enforce agreements, effectively pressuring platforms to deliver on their promises of watermarking, detection, and mitigation.

In this paper, the 2024 European parliamentary election, alongside British and French national elections, provided a snapshot into the current use of GenAI in European politics. Perhaps this article's most important takeaway is this: while it is important to counter fearmongering narratives around GenAI, it is equally important to prepare for a time when voters may suspect that all political campaign content they encounter is synthetic. How does one foster trust in a political system when any given communication might be deceptive?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ENDNOTES

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2   Mateusz Łabuz and Christopher Nehring, "Information Apocalypse or Overblown Fears—What AI Mis- and Disinformation Is All about? Shifting Away from Technology toward Human Reactions," *Politics and Policy*, June 6, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12617.

3   Bobby Chesney and Danielle Citron, "Deep Fakes: A Looming Challenge for Privacy, Democracy, and National Security," *California Law Review* 107, no. 6 (2019), 1758.

4   Richard Fletcher and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen, "What Does the Public in Six Countries Think of Generative AI in News?" (Oxford, UK: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford, 2024), 4, https://doi.org/10.60625/risj-4zb8-cg87.

5   Luminate Group, "Bots versus Ballots: Europeans Fear AI Threat to Elections and Lack of Control over Personal Data," *Luminate*, September 19, 2023, https://www.luminategroup.com/posts/news/bots-versus-ballots-europeans-fear-ai-threat-to-elections-and-lack-of-control-over-personal-data.

6   Tvesha Sippy, Florence E. Enock, Jonathan Bright, and Helen Z. Margetts, "Behind the Deepfake: 8% Create; 90% Concerned: Surveying Public Exposure to and Perceptions of Deepfakes in the UK," preprint, submitted July 8, 2024, http://arxiv.org/abs/2407.05529. Even more interesting data from the same survey comes from a question in which participants were prompted with a finite list of specific political deepfakes alongside placebo deepfakes: Researchers found that about 5.7% of people in the UK have been exposed to political deepfakes (following a list of specific political deepfakes, and placebo deepfakes, and calculating the difference).

7   Sam Stockwell, Megan Hughes, Phil Swatton, and Katie Bishop, "AI-Enabled Influence Operations: The Threat to the UK General Election," *CETaS Briefing Papers*, May 2024, https://cetas.turing.ac.uk/publications/ai-enabled-influence-operations-threat-uk-general-election.

8   Andreas Jungherr, "Artificial Intelligence and Democracy: A Conceptual Framework," *Social Media and Society* 9, no. 3 (July 16, 2023), 1–14, https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231186353. Jungherr writes that "by transposing expectations regarding AI's supposed powers from industry and science to politics, the public may come to believe that AI is actually able to offset the 'organized uncertainty' of democratic elections. This alone could weaken public trust in elections and acceptance of election results" (p. 8).

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