

# Artificial Intelligence and Deepfakes in Indian Elections: A review of literature

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## Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology has opened up a plethora of opportunities and possibilities for its use and misuse. Stakeholders ranging from educationists, academicians, scientists, military strategists, and political actors—parties and leaders—are using AI technology.

AI entered the Indian political domain in the Delhi Assembly election of 2021 when a state unit of a national party used social media to float two AI-made fake videos of its Delhi president speaking in English and Haryanvi among millions of voters a day before polling. Since then, all political actors have been indulged in using AI to enhance their image and tarnish the characters of their opponents.

The rapid advancement in AI technology in recent years outpaced attempts to regulate or contain it against its misuse. The governments across globe are however attempting to mitigate its misuse and their negative attempts. The rise in flow of AI-created Deepfakes videos were at such a large scale that Government of India had in November 2023 issued an advisory to social media intermediaries for action against reported cases of misinformation.

It was reported that political actors spend millions on authorized AI use in 2024 election season. Against this backdrop, this article attempts to explore (mis) use of AI transforming landscape of Indian politics and how elections are being fought in digital space among political stakeholders with a focus on understanding the role of AI in political campaigns. The article using a literature review attempts to understand (mis)use of AI for spreading misinformation to manipulate the opinion of voters and aggravate vulnerabilities related to cybersecurity vulnerabilities.

In online exploration, research papers, journals, articles, and chapters were found using a dozen keywords, including Artificial Intelligence, Deepfakes, Social Media, Elections, India, Videos, memes, Indian General

Election focusing on usage in election campaigns.

This study attempts to explore the usage of Deepfakes in Indian Elections to better the understanding of domain providing a base for further research.

*Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Technology, Political Parties, Election, Social Media, Democracy*

## 1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the ability of machines and computers to imitate humans' cognitive functions that range from problem-solving to learning new things. AI is an umbrella term, that can be used for many things including machine learning, natural language processing, neural networks, pattern recognition, and text mining (Dwivedi et al., 2021 & Dua et al., 2019). Mijwel (2015) noted that the history of the term AI dates back to 1950 with the Dartmouth Summer Research Project on Artificial Intelligence at Dartmouth College, USA.

The AI rose to prominence in recent times with advancements in information technology (IT) paving the way for big-data analysis, storage, computation facility clubbed with speed to transmit information opening up door for plethora of opportunities and floodgates of possibilities for its misuse too. The opportunities ranged from its implications in education, healthcare, agriculture, infrastructure, defence, space science and other domains of society including facilitating in fulfilling Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) including healthcare access in rural and remote areas to promote people's well-being, reduction in poverty, zero hunger, peace, justice, strong institutions and increasing agriculture productivity. (Dwivedi et al., 2021).

Jack Karsten et al (2023) observed that AI technology has impacted all walks of life including finance, national security, health care, criminal justice, transportation, and smart cities. AI also entered into the sphere of politics as political actors- politicians, political parties, and campaign staffs have been among the early birds to tailor themselves following new technologies including television ads in the mid-20th century and very recently to cryptocurrency contributions (National Conference of State Legislature, 2024). The AI programs are such that they can fabricate multimedia (images, videos, and voices) appearing to be real in the blink of an eye and experts forecasted 2024 to become the first election year witnessing the widespread influence of AI, in poll period that would extend from pre to post of an election, with a focus on crafting and dissemination of messages about candidates and electoral processes. (Noti, 2024).

Explaining the danger of AI-used political ads, Noti (2024) noted that the potential of technology is such that it could generate “deepfakes”, which are realistic appearing false multimedia content. The phenomenon of such AI-enabled false content came to the limelight in 2017 when a Reddit user swapped the face of a porn actor with that of a Hollywood celebrity (Winter and Salter, 2020).

The danger of technology became evident in the USA at the start of the calendar year 2024 when emulation of the voice of President Biden was used for AI-generated robocalls attempting to discourage voters from participating in a primary in New Hampshire; an AI-generated fake image showing former president Donald Trump with a convicted sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein and a young girl began circulating on Twitter (Hasan, 2023). In his study, Hasan (2023) noted that deepfakes spread across the globe; Slovakia, Indonesia, India, Britain, Taiwan, Pakistan, and Belarus.

The AI-generated deepfakes were used widely during the democratic exercise of franchises in Asian nations including Bangladesh, Pakistan, and Indonesia, where internal political stakeholders were against opposition in elections in 2024 (Wee, 2024). Taiwan was the only exception among Asian nations, where Chinese state actors were blamed for using GenAI applications in an attempt to cause cognitive influence on Taiwanese voters before the election on January 13, 2024. (De Groot, 2024).

The Indian political actors also began using deepfakes for election campaigns during the Delhi assembly elections in 2020. The Indian political domain first witnessed GenAI videos in 2020 just a day before the Delhi Assembly Election. Around 15 million voters were sent two deepfake videos of then Delhi unit president Manoj Tiwari appealing to vote for the BJP in English and Haryanvi (Xavier, 2020).

The floating of deepfake videos during state assembly election in Telangana and Madhya Pradesh in 2023 created furore as they depicted events that never happened. There is no exact count of such deepfake media but according to an estimate, around 500,000 deepfake videos and voices were supposedly shared on social media sites globally in 2023 (Ulmer & Tong, 2023). The deep fake media (audio, video, image and text) in circulation is consistently increasing in 2024 as political stakeholders have begun using it across the globe. The AI technology was used to create images, audio, videos, reels to sway voters during recently concluded General Election, 2024. The misuse or malicious use of AI threatens the sanctity of democracy as it affects individual privacy eroding its fundamentals, manipulating public opinion, swaying elections and impacting individuals psychologically and emotionally and Deepfakes can also have an impact on memory (Sahota, 2024; Dubost, 2023).

## **2. Research Questions**

RQ1: How were Deepfakes used in the context of Indian Elections?

RQ2: What is the type and nature of Deepfakes used in Indian Elections?

## **3. Research Objectives**

- To explore and understand the usage of deepfakes in Indian Elections
- To find the nature and types of deepfakes used in Indian Elections

## **4. Methodology**

The study followed systematic reviews: search, evaluation, analysis, and synthesis, structure. (Grant & Booth, 2009). Elsevier's abstract and citation database, Scopus that is considered a reference in systematic reviews, is used as a pivotal tool for exploring prominent publications investigating the phenomenon of deepfakes across various domains.(Vandellos, et al., 2023). Several keywords including "Artificial Intelligence, Deepfakes, Social Media, Elections, India, Videos, memes, Indian General Election", etc were used as prompts to search these databases. Moreover, some articles were added to the study corpus from the Google Scholar search engine to complement some of the concepts analyzed. The number of freely available publications (N) found was 50 spread across several publications. The study incorporated articles meeting the inclusion criteria, such as articles published between 2020 and 2024, written in English, and featuring a structured format encompassing introduction, methodology, results, and discussion sections (Vandellos et al., 2023). After initial screening of title and themes 20 were excluded that include books, book chapters, reviews, dissertation, and thesis resulting into 30 articles for review.

## **5. Discussion**

In recent times, misinformation and disinformation have had an impact on elections around the globe. Russian trolls discredited Hillary Clinton during the 2016 US presidential election, which Donald Trump won. The 2016 US Presidential Election was the first instance of large-scale meddling in a national election that can be considered a watershed moment in the political history of the world as it kickstarted an unending cycle of undue influencing of voters with the help of technology for (dis)information. The advancement of AI technology further aggravated the situation as spreading misinformation and disinformation through social media platforms became very easy. This new AI technology provided a new weapon in hands of political actors-political parties and politicians for swaying elections across globe.

## **6. AI in elections across globe**

The AI generated deepfakes came to the limelight for their malicious use in the presidential elections of South Korea (2022) and Argentina (2023). A study conducted by Nelson (2024) found that a video spread on social media appeared to show President Yoon Suk Yeol endorsing a local candidate for the ruling party during the Korean election in 2022, which was very similar to what happened in the final weeks of campaigning in 2023 election in Argentina, where President-elect Javier Milei posted an image targeting his rival Peronist rival Sergio Massa as “an old-fashioned communist in military garb, his hand raised aloft in salute.” The fake image fabricated using AI technology got 3 million views on the social media post of Milei pointing towards gathering tractions and may have contributed to the bid to affect the election (Feliba 2023).

Similarly, other parts of the world witnessed election campaigns, where the stakeholders in coordinated efforts tried to influence voters; Germany’s 2021 national elections, the federal election of Canada in 2021, and 2022 France's presidential elections (De Groot, 2024). The research showed that such tactics evolved and transversed boundaries. An AI-generated audio of pro-western Michal Simecka discussing turning the election to his advantage and making an increase of 100% in beer price went viral just before Slovakia’s October 2023 election and the election result turned out that his party lost the election to the pro-Russian party (De Groot, 2024).

The researchers claimed the significant impact of the viral AI-created clip on the Slovakia’s 2023 election results. The usage of deepfakes in the political domain transversed to national elections in Asian nations at the start of the year 2024. The political players used Deepfakes in the election to Pakistan's national assembly. Imran Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) backed independent candidates used AI for campaigning to defy the ban imposed upon them in the election by organising online gatherings (jalsa), setting up Chatbots on account of jailed Khan and telecasted AI-generated speeches of Khan during the campaign (Shahzad and Shahid, 2024).

The rival parties of PTI also employed AI which was evident through the propagation of a deepfake video of former prime minister Imran Khan, declaring that his party wasn’t contesting the national election gathering 1,75,000 views (Ong, 2024). However, PTI-backed independent candidates were benefitted during the Pakistani election by this strategy as they won the highest 99 in a 256-seat national assembly preventing a majority government by any key parties (Al Jazeera, 2024). Similarly, this technology was used in national elections in Bangladesh, wherein pro-government forces and influencers promoted disinformation like an AI-generated anchor criticized the US, following the lines postured by Sheikh Hasina’s government ahead of polls;

a video showed an opposition leader in a self-destructive position while equivocating over support for Gazans (Parkin, 2023). The strategy seemingly helped Haseena, who won a historic fourth consecutive Prime Ministership in Bangladesh. (PTI, 2024).

In another election in neighbourhood of India, the voters were shocked and amazed to see the resurrection of late Indonesian president Suharto advocating for the political party in a deepfake video that gathered 4.7 million views on X alone (Ong, 2014). Moreover, Indonesian politician's 'cute cartoons' were made for campaigning to attract and influence voters. Similarly, The National Election Commission (NEC) in South Korea, where polling take place on April 10, identified 129 instances of election-related content utilising deepfake technology from January 29 to February 16 (Hyo-jin, 2024). A “deep porn strategy” was successfully employed against Muharrem İnce, who was forced to withdraw from the presidential race in Turkey as he faced severe reputational consequences (Łabuz & Nehring, 2024).

The technology also opened up an avenue for external forces to interfere in a national election as evident from Taiwanese presidential election in January that witnessed the use of deepfakes and AI-generated videos, images, and audio clips as tools of personality assassination and China was accused of bombarding Taiwan with fake news (Lau, 2024). Similarly, Russia has been blamed for spreading disinformation using fake online accounts and bots in the Europe, France, Germany, Poland and USA, where attempts were made to tarnish image of President Joe Biden and fellow democrats in advance of the election (Luce and Collier, 2024).

It is clear from the discussions that deepfakes are used election after election in nations across the globe starting from 2022 and this usage witnessed a sudden increase in 2024. Now, let us look at the situation in the largest democracy in the world- India, which underwent polls recently for 18th Lok Sabha in the parliament.

## **7. AI's usage in Indian Elections**

A national political party in India- Bharatiya Janta Party began using 3D hologram projections of Narendra Modi in 2012 for a concurrent “campaign” at different places allowing them to use digital strategies that were extensively used during the 2014 general elections, when data-driven decision-making, real-time engagement, and personalised messaging were embraced. (Sharma, 2024;Thakur, 2014). Consequently, India's political stakeholders began exploring AI-driven tools including machine learning, natural language processing (NLP), and predictive analytics to gain an edge in subsequent elections that helps in predicting voter behaviour and preferences, providing key insights into public opinion, and identifying key issues and potential swing voters helping political entities to tailor their messages and allocate resources strategically. (Tomar, et, al, 2023; Pandey & Kumar, 2020).

Election campaigns in India have been transformed from door-to-door outreach activities and wall posters publicities to AI-generated media (video, audio, and images) due to the easy availability of simple artificial intelligence tools and the campaign teams of political parties across the spectrum in India are sharing deepfakes to voters of concerned constituency through Whatsapp groups known as ‘scratch groups’ at hyperlocal level based on demographic details to influence them. (Sharma, 2024; Sherif, 2023). The spread of fake media were such that National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) witnessed a rise of 214% in cases relating to fake news, rumours in 2019-election year in comparison to 2018. (Vishwanath, 2021).

Indian political sphere witnessed the first use of AI during an election in Delhi Assembly election in 2020, wherein a day before polling, a video each in English and Haryanavi, of then Delhi unit President Manoj Tiwari appealing to vote for BJP was sent to 15 million voters via 5800 WhatsApp groups. In video, Tiwari was seen criticizing AAP national convenor and Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal while urging people to vote for BJP in the election. (Xavier, 2021). However, the AI-generated content circulation increased from the start of 2024 as Shah (2024) noted that a deepfake (watermarked) of world leaders such as former U.S. President Donald Trump and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un saying “Jai Shree Ram” was uploaded on Instagram after the inauguration of the Ram temple in January 2024 to showcase a positive image of India crafted at international level by the ruling party to usurp sentiments of voters.

Similarly, another video shared on the same platform showed an altered speech of the leader of the ruling party BJP praising a businessman to tarnish his image. (Shah, 2024). A political party with dominance in south of India, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) on January 21 in the year 2024 resurrected former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M Karunanidhi, who died in 2018, in Salem during a program, and a month later, Karunanidhi’s AI avatar in his trademark yellow shawl and dark glasses was launched at the autobiography launch of party veteran T.R. Baalu attempting to motivate voters and its cadres. (The Nation, 2024).

Following the DMK, the opposition party, All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) released an audio clip of its leader and former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa, who died in 2016. (The Nation, 2024). Similarly, the technology was used for ‘shadow campaigning’ in Telangana by political stakeholders. Communist Party of India (Marxist) released an AI-generated video of ailing former Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, 80, urging people to “save the country and the state.” (Sakunia, 2024).

Sakunia (2024) reported that in February, 2024, the Indian National Congress, used AI tools to make a parody video of a viral song “Chor” (Thief), wherein Prime Minister Narendra Modi was made singing it with altered lyrics that was paired with Industrialist Gautam Adani and shared it on Instagram. The BJP responded with an AI-generated video, wherein former AICC president Rahul Gandhi’s face had been superimposed on that of Tejashwi Yadav, an opposition leader in Bihar, making it to seemingly appear as if he was addressing to Mamata Banerjee, who broke ties with Congress-led INDIA alliance before elections. (Sakunia, 2024). In the first video shared by INC on Instagram, the attempt was to highlight alleged relations of PM Modi with industrialist with a connotation of showing him being anti-poor. The BJP, in its response, targeted Rahul Gandhi over the fragile opposition bloc.

To further their chances, AI-powered chatbots were launched to promote success stories of government policies and increase engagement on the prime minister’s official app — NaMo (Deeplina Banerjee, 2024).

In the period of the General Election, 2024, many reels (short videos) of Prime Minister Narendra Modi singing in regional languages, that was made using Genn AI, doing grounds on social media for engagements and connectivity with voters, which witnessed an adding up to this trend by several meme and political satire pages that used generate AI tools for creating content related to Indian politics. (Sakunia, 2024).

The BJP, keen on expanding its footprints in the south and east of the country, used the government of India’s AI-powered Bhashinito ensure real-time translation of PM Narendra Modi’s speeches into Tamil, Kannada, Bengali, Telugu, Odia, and Malayalam to mitigate language barriers. (Deeplina Banerjee, 2024).

Similarly, AI-created fake videos of Bollywood stars Ranveer Singh and Aamir Khan criticizing the Indian prime minister and lending their support to the Congress, the main opposition party, went viral during the 2024 General Election. (Landrin, 2024).

It was also reported that Meta- the parent company of WhatsApp and Facebook, approved 14 AI-generated electoral ads portraying the language of Hindu supremacists calling for the killing of Muslims and a key opposition leader and some containing false claims that the leader “wanted to erase Hindus from India.” (Deeplina Banerjee, 2024).



The state assembly elections in 2023 in India also witnessed some viral Deepfake videos that include video of Kaun Banega Crorepati over construction of Lord Mahakal Corridor, MP Congress leader Kamal Nath talking about dismantling of women scheme and a minister making claims that in case his government is re-elected youths would not get job. (Desai, 2023). These videos were circulated in an attempt to tarnish image of a political party or leader by opposition and to invoke sentiments in their favours.

Indian political parties have long back ago realised the influence of personality and emotion on their constituents, and they started using AI to bolster their messaging and as part of this strategies these political parties in India spent an estimated US\$50 million on authorized AI-generated content for targeted communication with their constituencies this election cycle. ( Shukla & Schneier , 2024).

Shukla (2024) observed that these AI-generated content has two purposes; first the content is designed to appeal to emotions, is largely translated to regional languages, and tends to tug at the voters' relational bonds with their leaders, especially with resurrected politicians who enjoyed superstardom while alive and veneration upon passing and secondly, this content is distributed on unmoderated and unscrutinized platforms, often packaged by hyper-local content aggregators. Many observers and commentators have been demanding for stricter regulation on AI-generated deepfakes as it poses a challenge for the democracies around the world especially in third and fourth world countries like India.

## **8. Conclusion**

Elections are an integral part of democratic processes and making informed choices are necessary for a thriving democracy. However, in this digital age there is a looming threat over these informed choices as misinformation, disinformation, fake news, and deepfakes have potential to alter the informed choices and many experts considered those as an attack on the heart of democracy. The review study, citing different researches originating across globe tried to point out about the usage of social media enabled election campaigns and the attempts of spreading disinformation that was facilitated by these technologies. The study provided insights through some examples like Turkey, Bangladesh and Pakistan that how these AI-enabled disinformation campaigns during election affected the democratic exercise of the franchise through impact on democratic discourse.

As deep fakes are part of developing technology, there is uncertainty over long-term consequences in democracy, especially in the electoral process, but early researches in this field pointed towards the necessity to engage all actors in the process.

In this age of information warfare, it is hard for politicians and political parties to run their election campaigns without using such strategies. It is now up to government agencies, civil society groups, and educational institutes to take steps like regulation, penalization and awareness to curb the menace and prevent society from sinking. While regulating or penalising, however, the agencies shall take care about not curbing the free speech that is the essence of the democracy.

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