

Political Deepfakes and Democratic Trust: Assessing the Threat to Electoral Integrity in Pakistan

Dr. Hafiz Muhammad Javed¹, Muhammad Imran Khan², Dr. Ahsan Ullah Khan³

Abstract

Political deepfakes are a new problem in democratic politics in today's fast-changing world of generative artificial intelligence (Gen-AI). Deepfakes are synthesized or manipulated audio, video or images, which can cause political leaders to be made to say and do what never actually happened. This paper delves into the issue of political deepfakes and their impact on the trust and integrity of the electoral process in Pakistan, focusing especially on the General Elections in 2024. The paper presents an argument, based on the existing academic literature and official electoral documents, fact-checking reports and credible secondary sources, that the potential of political deepfakes is not limited to fooling individual voters. What is more important democratically is how they make people doubt what is "real" and lessen their trust in political communication, news, candidate and electoral institutions. The 2024 election in Pakistan has shown that AI manipulated and created political contents were employed in a context that already features internet misinformation, limited digital environments and high levels of political polarization. Election-boycott messages were also used in fake news portals (falsely claimed to be from a political figure), and politicians were also communicating using AI-generated content that they knew they were using. The paper also suggests that the regulatory provision in Pakistan's existing electoral and digital laws are insufficient as regards the unique features of synthetic political media. To ensure electoral integrity, it is essential to establish clear guidelines on the use of AI tools in electoral processes, implement swift fact-checking systems, promote digital and media literacy, ensure platforms' accountability, establish institutional oversight, and protect against anti-disinformation laws being used to suppress electoral misinformation. The paper calls for a new understanding of the political deepfakes as a technology problem, but also as an emerging threat to the epistemic premises of the democratic politics in Pakistan.

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Corresponding Author *

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Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) particularly its revelatory form generative AI (Gen-AI) are revolutionizing the modern information landscape and the communication of information to citizens by political actors. With relatively light technical know-how, Generative AI systems are now able to generate very realistic text, images, audio, and video. One of the most impactful uses of this technology is the creation of AI-generated or manipulated media that portray real people as saying or doing something that is not true in the case of political deepfakes. While the ability to deceive by using and creating synthetic media is nothing new, the realism, ease of access, scale and speed of such media has created challenges for political communication and democratic governance (Chesney & Citron, 2019; Westerlund, 2019; Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020).

¹ Qurtuba University D.I.Khan. javedhafiz232@gmail.com

² M.Phil Scholar University of Sargodha. mimrankhan2026@gmail.com

³ Qurtuba University D.I.Khan. khanahsan882@gmail.com

It is important to recognize the deepfakes phenomenon in the context of the entire shift in the modern information environment. The digital landscape has revolutionized the production, distribution and consumption of information on political issues. Social media differs from traditional mass media because it allows for information to flow quickly through a decentralized network with no longer a traditional gatekeeper--the professional journalist--for political information. Although this change has made politics more accessible, it has also enabled the spread of potentially misleading and fabricated information in less time than ever before (Lazer et al., 2018; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Previous research on the propagation of information online has shown that false information can spread further, faster and wider than the true information, in some cases at least, due to the fact that it leaves behind more novel content and emotion behind. As such, the recent proliferation of deepfakes is a further exacerbation of an ongoing issue in 'misinformation politics', namely the digitally mediated spread of misinformation (Vosoughi et al., 2018).

One of the political implications of deepfakes is that they can take advantage of the epistemic authority of audiovisual communication. A lot of people consider seeing and hearing a political leader to be more convincing than seeing and reading a text claim from somebody they don't know. Artificial video and audio can then make it seem as though there was actually evidence to support a claim even if there never was. Chesney and Citron (2019) state that the rise of deepfakes poses significant risks to democratic processes, and that they can be used to alter perceptions, tarnish reputations and disrupt elections, and foster a distrust of actual evidence. Likewise, Westerlund (2019) highlights the opportunities for political manipulation, fraud and disinformation that arise from the sophistication and ease of deepfake technology.

But the democratic implications of deepfakes cannot be boiled down to citizens taking at face value any and all fabricated videos they're exposed to. It is much more complicated to make the connection between deepfakes and political ideology. Milanese researchers Vaccari and Chadwick (2020) conducted an experimental study on synthetic political videos, and concluded that deepfakes were more strongly linked with uncertainty than simple deception. What's more important, this uncertainty lowered participants' trust in news spread via social media. This is especially important when it comes to democratic politics, as the potential for a deep fake could not only be from viewers mistaking real for fake information, but from viewers doubting the authenticity of information at all. Deepfakes could thus be a part of a wider crisis of epistemic confidence, in which citizens lack confidence of what they can reasonably believe.

As deepfakes become more prevalent, this problem relates to the wider literature on misinformation and the so called 'post-truth information environment'. But, according to Lewandowsky et al. (2017), misinformation can lead to problems when it is combined with political polarization, loss of trust in institutions, polarized media, and social polarization. Lazer et al. (2018) also view fake news as a systemic problem, one that is not just about the gullibility of individual people, but one that concerns individuals, institutions, media organizations and technological platforms. Wardle & Derakhshan (2017) explain the difference between misinformation, disinformation and mal-information, and show how today's information disorders can manifest in various types of information and communication. Deepfakes are a type of manipulated media that are extremely advanced and can create the illusion of an identity or a political actor's actions.

This is compounded by the swift dissemination of misinformation nowadays, via digital channels. Vosoughi et al. (2018), who analyzed the propagation of verified false and true news on Twitter, concluded that false news had more reach, speed, depth and breadth than truthful news. While the subject of their study was not specifically deepfakes, this is quite relevant to the synthetic political media as the success of a deepfake will not only rely on their technical realism but also their ability to spread in the current communication network. Likewise, Pennycook & Rand (2019) show the role of source-quality judgments and cognitive processes in dealing with misinformation in social media. These results indicate the need to study the psychological and social determinants of citizens' judgements of political information along with the technological manipulations themselves.

Empirical studies of the potential for political impact of deepfakes have also grown in number. In an effort to determine whether such deepfake videos can sway political opinions, Dobber et al. (2021) investigated how deepfake videos might impact attitudes. The researchers' conclusions, however, indicate that the synthetic media and strategic political messaging link is worthy of more research and scrutiny, as AI could be used to tailor fake political content for specific audiences. Other systematic evidence from more recent sources also suggests that political deepfakes have the potential to shape perceptions, create confusion, decrease trust in online news, and foster distrust in government, as well as the possibility that deepfakes are not more convincing than other types of misinformation.

Now the issue becomes even more important when political deepfakes are put into perspective of democratic deliberation. Democracy relies on citizens' ability to receive the information they need to assess political claims, discuss public issues, hold public officials to account and make decisions about elections, if they are able to trust the sources. According to Tenove (2020), the deepfake disinformation poses a risk to the democratic functions and tissues of the society, such as citizens' ability to participate in the democratic process and the informational conditions for effective political participation. Likewise, Helmus (2022) points out that synthetic media has the potential to be used in a manner that threatens democratic institutions and the public's trust in these media, especially when the malicious uses technological manipulation to exploit political divisions.

One of the other important implications is what is known as the "Liar's Dividend. When citizens realize that realistically realistic synthetic media can be created, the political actors can take advantage of this by claiming that real evidence is fake. Chesney & Citron (2019), point to this larger issue of "Trust Decay" and more recent research has focused on how the advent of deepfakes affords political figures a chance to disavow authentic evidence. In this case, the political issue is not simply one of getting citizens to believe something that is not true, but can be one of making citizens doubt the truth of any audio-visual evidence. Such a scenario has major implications for democratic accountability, as original logs of political wrongdoing could be deemed to be AI-generated fake logs.

This is important especially in the context of elections, as political deepfakes are particularly relevant. Voters have to make a judgement about both candidates and parties, policies and political narratives, in elections. False audio-visual content can disrupt this process in the ways like, by creating fabricated statements, fake endorsements, fake scandals, fabricated campaign messages, or false calls to vote or not to vote. Particularly when political waters are stirred, election-related synthetic media may be a new and growing problem, as identified by Diakopoulos & Johnson

(2019). Such content may be particularly significant because if it is a fake video it can be shared widely in the lead up to an election before it is possible for journalists, political parties, election authorities and fact-checkers to verify it.

Meanwhile, scholarship warns of the dangers of believing the outcome of elections will be decided by deepfakes. The evidence found suggests that the persuasive impact of political deepfakes is subject to a range of factors including the credibility of the source, partisan biases, political context, levels of media literacy, when the fake appears and whether it is challenged or verified (Dobber et al., 2021; Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020). This is an important difference between the two in the present study. Just because it is a deep fake doesn't necessarily mean that the election result was faked. Instead, the question is whether this content, in itself, provides opportunities to undermine electoral integrity, political trust, informed participation and confidence in electoral institutions.

An important case to explore these issues is in a Pakistani context. The digital political communication has grown in Pakistan in a rapid pace and citizenship's political communication via social media platforms is becoming a vital arena for political mobilization, campaign communication, political discussion and news consumption. Meanwhile, polarization, competing narratives, restrictions on digital communication and regular fears of misinformation have been intrinsic features of the country's political landscape. The potential ramifications of a deepfake can be significant because in these contexts, citizens might have deep partisan identities and be suspicious of opposing political information, thus making the effect of a deepfake more potent.

In Pakistan, the General Election of 2024 has become a stark reality, with deepfakes serving as a tool employed by politicians to manipulate images and alter narratives. The 2024 General Election in Pakistan has become a reality where politicians manipulate images and alter narratives by using deepfakes. In the run-up to the election, audio and video clips faked by AI misled the public about the calls by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders Imran Khan, Nadeem Haider Panjutha and Muhammad Basharat Raja for an election boycott. Freedom House said this could make PTI members think twice about voting. Meanwhile, PTI also used generative AI in its political communication, which saw an AI-generated video of Imran Khan speaking to PTI supporters.

The Pakistani case, therefore, highlights the key differences between artificial political communications and political deepfakes. AI's use is not by itself a bad thing in terms of democracy. AI can be used by political parties to improve the effectiveness of their communication, translate messages, copy a candidate's voice (with consent) or to create campaign material, provided that it is clear and transparent and does not intentionally mislead citizens. But when synthetic media are used to make themselves seem real or when they're intentionally made to mislead voters, the democratic issue comes to the fore. It is important to note this distinction because the opposition to politically generated AI content can't be confused with a ban on the expression of political content.

The 2024 Pakistani election also illustrates how deepfakes can be embedded in a wider information context with restrictions on digital communications. Access to the internet and social media was limited during times leading up to the election, and false and misinformation was rampant, Freedom House noted. Independent verification may be more challenging in such situations. With limited access to multiple sources of information, the ease of a manufactured political message to influence perceptions may be raised. On the other hand, if citizens have a high level of mistrust of political

institutions and media outlets, then corrections by the authorities could be seen as politically motivated.

This is a very challenging issue for electoral institutions. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has already realized the significance of digital communication in the electoral process in both the regulations and monitoring of media. However, the unique nature of generative AI raises regulatory issues that are not necessarily covered by traditional election laws and regulations. Deepfakes may be created without names, shared on various platforms, edited multiple times and spread on private messaging services. It can be difficult for an election authority to detect and confirm a manipulated video by the time it appears in their jurisdiction. When the election authority finds and verifies a manipulated video, it may have already reached a large audience.

The challenge is thus technically, politically, institutionally and epistemically complex. In terms of technology, the detection of a deep fake is challenging, as the generative technologies are continually improving. Synthetic media can be used in political disinformation campaigns or as a tool for political campaigns. As far as institutions are concerned, there needs to be a quick verification and response system in place within election authorities and regulatory agencies. Citizens need to be able to identify reliable information and fake information. It is then important to approach the question of synthetic media with the widest possible scope of questions surrounding trust and political communication, as well as the institutions charged with verifying information, as Paris & Donovan (2019) suggest.

The implications could be wider than just on individual voters, they could be on democratic institutions as well. Circulation of false information in the political sphere by citizens can lead to growing mistrust of politicians, media and election officials in particular and social media information in general. The worry is similar to that of Tucker et al. (2018), who argue that digital misinformation is a more general problem for democracy because it can have an impact on political actions, on public debate and on trust in democratic institutions. Likewise, Hameleers (2020) shows how misinformation can combine with the communication of populism and political mistrust in certain contexts to have far-reaching effects in polarized political situations.

But as the sophistication of AI-generated content grows, the challenge becomes even more complex. Earlier manipulated videos could have been easily detected due to the technical flaws that are visible. But, today's generative systems are capable of generating increasingly realistic faces, voices, expressions and speech patterns. The increasing availability of deepfakes poses new challenges for organizations and society as the realistic synthetic content could be manipulated, used in frauds and damage to the reputation of an organization or individual (Kietzmann et al., 2020). New technologies are increasingly becoming available, making it easy for even average political actors to create believable political misinformation.

However, policy intervention needs to be carefully thought out. Political deepfake countermeasures can pose threats to democratic freedoms when they are used to stifle political criticism and/or legitimate political dissent. This is particularly important in politically charged countries like Pakistan where there are already concerns about freedom of expression and access to information due to limitations on digital communication. Opposing fake political disinformation should never be used as an excuse to blanketly censor. Rather, regulation should be dedicated to transparency,

accountability, independent verification and demonstrably deceptive content, and uphold legitimate political expression.

In this backdrop, the present study focuses on political deepfakes and trust in democracy in Pakistan specifically highlighting the effects of these in relation to electoral integrity. It questions whether synthetic political media can have effects on citizens' perception, can add to the citizens' confusion in political information, can erode the citizens' trust in the political institutions, and can impact the citizens' participation in the election. The study also takes into account the level of preparedness of the current institutional and regulatory frameworks of the country to address the new challenge.

What's the worst that can happen to democracy, the central theme of this paper would suggest, is not that they will get a lot of people to swallow one bogus message, but rather that they'll get a lot of people to buy in to a lot of bogus messages. Instead, the greater threat they pose is in their ability to generate a long-term lack of certainty around political reality. As the boundaries between truthfully reported and false political information become increasingly blurred, voters' information bases and democratic accountability diminish. The argument is more important in the context of Pakistan, as the world has seen the use of artificial media in the political communication landscape during the 2024 General Elections.

Thus, political deepfakes should be considered not just as a technical issue, but as a new democratic governance and electoral-integrity challenge. The solution must be multi-faceted, and cannot be provided by any single player among the Election authorities, Political parties, Journalists, Technology platforms, Civil society, Fact-checking organizations, Researchers, and Citizens. In the era of generative AI, safeguarding the integrity of elections can no longer rely solely on the accuracy of counting but also on the citizens' ability to exercise their electoral rights - in an information landscape where political evidence can also be trusted.

Analysis and Discussion

Political Deepfakes as a new form of Political Discrimination

Political deepfakes are the most technologically sophisticated and powerful type of disinformation. Deepfakes can make what seems like real audio-visual evidence, unlike traditional misinformation, which can feature false text, misleading headlines, manipulated photos, or false claims. Even if a political leader has never made a statement, it is possible to get him or her to seem to do so, whether in a speech, by policy, or by endorsement, or to instruct supporters to boycott an election. One part of its significance is that it was seen as a means of communication that allows for evidence to be given. Citizens can consider the video as direct evidence as they are able to view the politician's face and hear what seems to be the politician's voice. But with the technological process, this is becoming more and more doubtful. The ability to produce believable fake media poses undeniable threats to a public sphere and to democracy, as Chesney & Citron (2019) state. But, it's also crucial not to overstate the power of deepfakes to persuade. Barari, Lucas, & Munger (2025) conducted recent experiments which indicate that political deepfakes may not be as believable as all other misinformation. They reported that their results suggest a deepfake is around the same level of believable as other types of fake media. The fact that this finding is quite significant is that it means that the threat does not have to be thought of as "deepfakes convince everyone. Rather, their threat

to democracy could lie in their relationship with the existing polarization in politics, lack of trust in the political polarity, frequent exposure, and uncertainty.

The Pakistani Electoral Context

There are key issues to consider during the 2024 General Election. The use of social media is growing as an important platform for communication in Pakistan, especially for political actors and citizens when they feel that conventional media outlets are stifled or biased. Electoral platforms turned to digital platforms in election time as important spaces for political mobilization and communication. Digital media and social-media influencers were included in the ECP's 2023 Code of Conduct for National Media in the electoral information environment. It banned content which was deemed to have a negative impact on national unity or law and order and gave the duty to monitor political news coverage to relevant institutions in electronic, print and social media. The ECP's subsequent General Elections Report also shows that addressing misinformation, disinformation and hate speech was a part of media training and capacity building in the lead up to elections. The Commission has trained 344 media personnel on National media code of conduct and 359 on responsible and inclusive reporting. The measures illustrate institutional recognition of the fact that the information environment is an important aspect of electoral integrity. But with the advent of deepfakes comes a more particular problem. The traditional rules on the electoral campaign typically concern political advertising, media behaviour, and false statements during campaigns. The distinctions can become more involved with synthetic media, in that they can create an apparent source of the political statement itself.

Deepfakes during Pakistan's 2024 General Election

This is an issue that is clearly demonstrated in the 2024 election. Deepfake audio and video spread prior to the election in which PTI leaders were portrayed as urging the voters to boycott the elections, according to Freedom House. This kind of material may deter people who are supporters from being able to get involved in the electoral game. PTI representatives also appeared to be victims of manipulated videos, which were recorded by fact-checking groups. In fact, Soch Fact Check pointed out a video where Sher Afzal Marwat urged people to boycott the elections and another manipulated video of PTI lawyer Naeem Haider Panjutha. These two types of cases are examples of the important mechanism that deepfakes can have on the electoral integrity: behavioral manipulation. If it's just a regular bogus political statement, it might influence attitudes but if it's a fake statement from a candidate, then it can offer voters a seemingly definitive direction. A fabricated boycott call will be able to impact turnout in an election and a fabricated endorsement will be able to impact preferences in an election. Importantly, it was not just malicious use of AI that was experienced by the Pakistanis. Interestingly, political actors used AI-generated content in their campaigning activity as well. PTI has been accused of using an AI-generated video of Imran Khan in a virtual political rally by Freedom House. It's important to note the difference here. Political communication that is created by AI is not necessarily deceptive. The democratic issue is where synthetic content is given the impression of being genuine or when synthetic content is knowingly put out to deceive the voters.

Threat to Democratic Trust

The biggest impact of political deepfakes might not be in gaining the attention of the public but on eroding trust. There needs to be some level of consensus if there is going to be democratic politics.

The members of a nation may have different ideas on values, policies and candidates in politics but still have a common belief about a certain occurrence. This common information base is put at risk by deepfakes. In this respect, the work of Vaccari and Chadwick (2020) is of great importance. In their experiment, they found that those who watched synthetic political videos had greater uncertainty and uncertainty led to a decrease in trust in news on social media. They believe that deepfakes can help foster an increased state of “uncertainty and cynicism in online civic culture.” The results are of great relevance to Pakistan. When citizens consistently come across invented videos of political figures, they can come to have a general distrust for political content. So, even if it is a true statement, it can be doubted. A claim by an opponent is possible that a politician is “telling the truth” but the statement was AI-generated. This is an informational instability in which citizens can't readily decide which political statements are true and which are false. This can be said to be an "authenticity crisis. No longer is the issue whether the statement is true, it's now whether I can know if that statement is true. The uncertainty can lead to a decrease in trust of journalists, political parties, election institutions and democracy.

Deepfakes and Electoral Integrity

Electoral Integrity is more than just an accurate count in votes. It also relies on the availability of citizens' free participation, access to accurate information, knowledge of political choices and the ability to make choices without systematic manipulation by the political system. Deepfakes can pose a risk to a number of aspects of electoral integrity.

Firstly, they can have an impact on voter turnout. Messages that are created to ask a supporter to boycott elections may deter voting. The Pakistani examples given in the document of boycott statements made by the alleged boycotts prove that it is not a theoretical scenario.

Secondly, they can hurt candidates' reputations. A fabricated video of a candidate making an offensive statement, whether in terms of violence, discriminatory content or anything else that can hurt the candidate, can spread quickly regardless of the fact that it may be incorrect. If a candidate's statement is fabricated in a video, whether it is offensive, violent, discriminatory or otherwise harmful, it can spread quickly before fact checkers can respond.

Thirdly, they can be used to manipulate political competition. Ethical communication skills are a factor that candidates must be able to communicate with while also facing actors who are ready to use synthetic content to deceive candidates. This makes it difficult to even the playing field when it comes to information.

Fourth, they have the potential to worsen political polarization. Existing partisan emotions can be manipulated and triggered by deepfakes. People might accept something when they know it's not accurate if it reinforces their political views and when they are warned, it's not accurate, they might reject it.

Fifth, they can lead to a loss of confidence in the results of the elections. Allegations of fake news media can further contribute to the overall message that elections are being rigged, an issue already of concern to citizens. The danger is not just on voting day, but on election night as well when voters embrace the election outcomes. A theoretical examination of deepfakes and democracy also reveals potential problems with political discussion, fair elections, consensus-building and trust in the fairness of elections.

The “Liar’s Dividend” and Pakistani Context

The most notable effect of the very common deepfake is that the notion of authenticity can be lost, as the real thing becomes the fake. This is known as "Liar's Dividend. If citizens are aware that realistic fabricated media can be created, politicians caught up in allegations of wrongdoing can respond that they have original recordings, which are created using AI. This makes for a paradox. The notion of fabricated evidence had to look real in order to be politically useful prior to the advent of deepfakes. As deepfakes proliferate, the knowledge that people have of synthetic media may become a political asset. It doesn't have to be proven that the evidence is fake, just that it is uncertain enough that it doesn't have as much impact. It is significant in Pakistan because in this country, politics is contested and therefore communication plays a significant role. The same event may be viewed differently by political supporters already based on their political party. Allegations of deepfakes can thus be added to the political arena. The technology may be used to establish consensus, rather than verify it, and probably makes competing claims about reality more intense.

The Existing Institutional Responses and their Limitations

There are already several mechanisms in place in Pakistan that are pertinent to misinformation and elections. The ECP has a national media code of conduct for digital media and the national cyber and communication system offers a way to address unlawful online content. Additionally, the ECP said it provided training to the media personnel on combatting misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech. But some of these measures have certain restrictions.

Firstly, deepfakes are technology that is in constant flux. As Gen-AI gets better, so will the detection systems.

Secondly, deepfakes can rapidly proliferate on social-media platforms, and it could be after they are viewed by many people that fact checking takes place.

Third, it can be hard to tell if the malicious deception is a satire or parody, or if it is a political creation or a legitimate communication with the help of AI.

Fourth, regulation is also a potential source of democratic dangers. In a context where the government has wide powers to limit online content, anti-disinformation laws could serve as tools for government to curb legitimate political criticism. There were many instances of limitations on internet access and content restrictions during Pakistan's 2024 election period, according to Freedom House. Thus, counter-deepfake policy should strike a balance between safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process and fostering free political expression.

Towards a Multi-Layered Response

There needs to be more than a technological solution to the political deepfakes. It is to be comprehensive and a series of complementary actions.

AI disclosure and labelling. Politicians and parties should be obliged to clearly disclose any political audio, video and images that are ‘realistic’ and produced using AI or heavily manipulated by AI.

Rapid Fact-Checking. Election authorities, journalists and independent fact checking groups should have rapid response mechanisms in place that can be used to investigate questionable political information in elections periods.

Digital Media Literacy. Citizens need to be given effective strategies for assessing questionable political information, such as verifying the source, time, context, and other independent sources.

Platform responsibility. Social-media companies need to enhance labelling, mechanisms for identifying the origin of the content, reporting processes, and a faster response to election-related fake content. Monitoring of digital political communication should be part and parcel of the election monitoring, not just of the polling stations and traditional media.

Protection of political expression. Anti-deepfake laws must be drafted with great care, with robust independent oversight, and avoid becoming tools to crack down on legitimate criticism, satire and political opposition.

Coordinated protocols across institutions. Protocols to respond to synthetic political media should be coordinated by the ECP, media, tech platforms, fact-checking organizations, civil society and academics. This is in line with the recent research literature. A recent systematic review of empirical research on political deepfakes identified that they can shape perceptions, induce confusion, decrease trust in online news and heighten distrust of the government, highlighting the need for more precise detection and increased cross-cultural and longitudinal studies.

Conclusion

Political Deepfakes pose a new threat to the democratic communication and electoral integrity of Pakistan. Their power isn't just in their ability to create believable fake video and audio recordings. Their greater peril is that they can bring a citizens' trust in the integrity of political communication into question. The need has been raised and is not hypothetical as can be seen from the experience of 2024 General Elections in Pakistan. The boycott messaging was used in a deepfake manner by the creation of content that was attributed to political personalities and political personalities with the help of tools for AI-generated communication went ahead and tried it, too. The developments are not only about the possible political value of generative AI, but also show the dangers of using it. The central democratic danger is then two-fold: People could be fed fake political information, and they could become disillusioned about real political information. The second threat is potentially more harmful as a basis for democracy is a degree of mutual trust in information, institutions and electoral processes. The existing electoral framework in Pakistan has started paying attention to the significance of digital information as exhibited by the ECP's media code of conduct and ECP's training programs on misinformation and disinformation. However, there is a need for additional institutional development of the unique features of the AI-generated media. Don't ban the use of AI to create political communication. Rather, it is imperative that Pakistan have a clear and ethical approach to AI communication that can differentiate between authentic and manipulated media. Combined, mandatory disclosure, independent fact-checking, platform accountability, media literacy, monitoring in the election period, and transparent regulatory process can help to diminish the threat. A healthy information environment, in which citizens can decide how to vote, is just as crucial to ensuring electoral integrity in the age of generative AI as is the integrity of the vote itself. Therefore, the challenge of political deepfakes should be seen as a new problem in democratic

governance that should be addressed jointly by the electoral institutions, political parties, media, tech companies, researchers and citizens.

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