

Ethical Considerations: Generative Artificial Intelligence Technologies in Political Campaigns

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Abstract

This paper investigates the extent to which the use of generative AI (Artificial Intelligence) poses ethical dilemmas in political campaigns. By reviewing the newest literature on the topic, this paper examines the problems associated with the creation of ethics guidelines on AI-generated content (AIGC) use. In pre-existing guidelines, certain vocabulary such as “transparency,” “dignity,” and “freedom & autonomy” were most frequently repeated. This shows not just how prevalent these ethical issues are but also that proposed guidelines can become repetitive whilst AI’s ethical dilemmas still have to be dealt with. With the analysis of case studies in France, India, and the US (United States) we can see the impacts of AIGC on political elections within countries with diverse levels of AIGC regulation. France and India have looser regulations on AIGC - but the US, whilst lacking regulation in some states, has adopted the strictest measures in others. In the absence of harmonized legislation, international ethical guidelines have a key place in the discussion. This paper addresses the possibilities of incorporating AI systems that flag negative and unethical social media posts. The paper suggests a direction for private and public institutions to integrate new beneficial AI-based countermeasures in future political campaigns to mitigate harm. By combining these measures with bringing more attention to the creation of guidelines surrounding AIGC, ethical dilemmas can be lessened.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Artificial intelligence generated content (AIGC), Political campaigns, AI Ethics, Regulation, Guidelines

1. INTRODUCTION

2024 was labelled the year of elections by Time Magazine (Ewe, 2023). As major elections have been unfolding across the globe, one of the most significant and epoch-defining developments has been the increased incorporation of AI-generated content (AIGC) into political electoral campaigns. From personalized political news stories to deep fake videos, the use of AIGC is becoming a prominent electoral strategy. A striking example of this occurred in India, where the late chief minister Tamil Nadu appeared via video at his party’s youth wing conference in the form of a deepfake in 2024. The surprising element - the party authorized his resurrection as a political strategy. This political move not only captivated audiences but raised ethical questions. This trend is not confined to India alone. The 2016 U.S (United States) presidential election is often cited as a turning point in the use of machine learning and AI for political purposes, where data-driven strategies began to shape electoral outcomes. However, as we move into 2024, the sophistication of these tools has reached new heights, with Generative AI enabling the creation of highly realistic and tailored content that blurs the line between reality and fiction.

The word ‘AI’ has become ubiquitous recently, however, the term itself dates to the 1950s, and the invention of generative AI in the 1960s (Lawton n.d). That said, it was not until 2014 when Generative adversarial networks, AI models with two competing neural networks, were invented (Agarwal, 2024). These networks can generate realistic data samples such as audio, text, or even images that are identical to human-generated data and progressively train based on human-generated data to improve its

quality over time. The scale, scope, and complexity of the changes introduced by AI's incorporation into political systems can undermine democratic systems. Democracies rely on rational and free political discourse and the maintenance of an individual's sense of political 'autonomy,' as Jürgen Habermas argued. According to Habermas's discourse theory of morality, for political systems to be legitimate and ethical in the political dialogue, it is important to ensure that in theory, everyone can participate in an open, equal, and rational manner (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2023). It is yet to be seen how the introduction of machine-generated and potentially highly personalized political content would change the rationality of the discourse. Moreover, how the new possibilities of targeting individuals with AI-generated personal political messaging might affect their political autonomy - that is the ability to form independent opinions. This paper thus analyses the ethics of the rise of generative AI for different purposes in political campaigns. AIGC would offer novel ways for broadening electoral outreach, increasing politicians' participation, and proliferating disinformation - and this could have implications on collective public opinions (Ehsan Ul Haq et al., 2024). This investigation thus casts new light on the old problem of discourse ethics as one of the foundations of liberal democracies. This raises the puzzle: How far can AI Generated Content be used in political campaigns, while also being fair, and adhering to ethical practices? This question will be answered through case studies from the year of elections 2024, India, France, and the United States, based on the following structure.

The remainder of the paper is based on the following structure. The literature review provides an analysis of previous research that has been conducted such as arguments of the need to establish AI guidelines as well as counterarguments of the problems that pre-existing AI guidelines have. This is then followed by the Discussion which analyses case studies from India, France and the US and their different elections in these countries and how questions of ethical AI were raised. The last section, the conclusion, ends the paper.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Need to Establish AI Guidelines

By the year 2024, scholarly works examining the possibilities for ethical AIGC use in political campaigns have proliferated. The fact that numerous scholarly papers and experts have been discussing the issue and creating guidelines shows that there is an issue that needs to be addressed and there is currently not enough being done about it. So far, there have been many attempts by industry and governments to establish ethical guidelines addressing this subject (Nyholm, 2022, p 2). Utrecht University released a paper on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, sharing the different advantages and disadvantages of the pre-existing AI ethics guidelines. This shows there has been more global discussion around the topic, as stakeholders from technology companies to governments are being proactive about AI by involving various actors in the discourse.

Areas of Concern in Pre-existing AI Guidelines

What are some of the problem areas which AI use in politics could pose? Some of these relevant areas of concern addressing AI use have been highlighted by the following. Another paper that analyzed the pre-existing ethics guidelines surrounding AI design showed that from 84 sets of guidelines that were looked at, certain words and vocabulary were constantly repeated, showing the prominence of problems relating to 1) "transparency", 2) "freedom and autonomy" as well as 3) "dignity" and "responsibility" in up to 70 other ethics documents for similar guidelines (John, Ienca and Vayena, 2019, p 16) showing these as some of the most relevant areas of concern for ethical AI use. For example, the creation of 'predictable', reliable, and 'transparent' AI systems, including Generative AI models, has been stressed by the authors as a common interest of AI regulation (John, Ienca and Vayena, 2019, p 11). However, the process of the creation of those guidelines is not without problems itself.

Problems with Guideline Creation

Nyholm argues that elements of these guidelines could be biased because certain experts may have business interests (Nyholm, 2022, p 2). For example, Nyholm gave an example of there being a larger percentage of technology experts, causing the policies to be more catered to their priorities. Technology companies might prefer a more *laissez-faire* approach to AIGC regulation and guidelines due to a profit incentive, deprioritizing the establishment of clear principles. For example, The CEO of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg, stated that the public should be able to 'decide what is credible' from the information that they are being catered to on social media platforms, some of them potentially AIGC in origin. The relevance of this ethical dilemma is highlighted by the role of technology companies in standard-setting: These guidelines are most often created by certain private companies (22.6%) and governmental agencies (21.4%), followed by academic institutions (10.7%), non-profit organizations and even political parties (1.2%) (John, Ienca and Vayena p 3)

There are also geographical concerns of some world regions being under-represented in standards creation, and some being over-represented. This may pose problems in how AIGC affects future populations differently, or the specific biases it holds. There has been a significantly larger percentage of representation in more economically developed countries (MEDC) such as the US with 23.8% and the UK with 16.7% (John, Ienca and Vayena p 5).

Defining the right amount is important as there is still debate as to whether there are enough ethical guidelines about AI in society and which of those should be implemented or referred to. The importance of Nyholm's criticism was highlighted in, the UK House of Lords Report on Artificial Intelligence, stating how AI policy needs to be as balanced and unbiased as possible : "Artificial intelligence will change the way we all relate to the world around us....AI policy must be committed to for the long-term, agreed by consensus and informed by views on all sides' (UK House of Lords, p. 21)

In the paper by Haq, Zhu, Hui, and Tyson, contemporary trends and events in political campaigns, specifically in the era of AIGC were

analysed. A practice stated that is used across the world during times of political campaigning is "election silence" which is supposed to restrict political media advertisements and campaigning offline (Haq, Zhu, Hui, and Tyson, 2024, p1117). However, with online campaigning, it is much harder to put a stop to political activity. For example, circulating AI-generated content might still effectively continue to influence people's opinions even during the election silence period. As users' data is managed and manipulated, the rise of generative AI could further harness confidential information in political landscapes - this was the case in France where AIGC was being spread online. This leads back to not just the ethical implications of spreading disinformation online, but also whether using these tools to manipulate an audience is even ethical. Instances when malign actors have used new state-of-the-art AI technologies to influence the US 2016 elections have highlighted the dangers of malign AIGC use in elections campaigns. AI has been used to generate text that is able to mimic real news stories which poses risks of enabling malicious intent (Kreps, McCain and Brundage, 2020, p 2)

From this we can see the ethical dilemma being posed, as currently there is an increasing number of regulations being created, but questions of bias, particularly political bias that could harm the legitimacy of political campaigning internationally, still need to be tackled. It is still a controversial topic with several views on what is and is not ethical in AI.

3. DISCUSSION

What could be said about the adherence to ethical standards during the year of elections?

France

During the 2024 French parliamentary election, there was a series of AI-generated content (AIGC) posted by the far-right party Reconquest, specifically 23 generated images in 81 posts on Instagram, Facebook, and X all negatively portraying or dismissing topics like immigration, Muslims, and the European Union (Scott, 2024). All of these are clear examples of a direct use of AIGC and generative AI, but is it wrong? None of what these political parties in France or India did was illegal and didn't break any laws (White Case, 2024)

but both had a different impact on their targeted communities and society. In France, the fact that these political parties continue to use such techniques using AIGC shows the lack of regulation surrounding AI today. It could be argued that the after-effect it had on voters was a problem, as it could increase stigma and discrimination towards minority groups.

India

In India, the deepfake was authorized by the former chief's party, creating a precedent that this type of use of AI is ethical. On the other hand, the concerns of it being deliberately misleading need to be kept in mind at the same time. Therefore, the ethics of AI and discussion around it in the political world and in elections is vital. The U.S., however, presents a different kind of an approach to ensuring the ethics of AIGC use in electoral campaigns.

United States

Even though the United States Presidential Elections are still underway for November 2024, much can already be said about the way Generative AI has affected the 2016 elections, and the lead-up to the 2024 elections. Deep Fake videos of the Presidential Nominee of the Democratic Party have been circulated (Powell, Council on Foreign Relations, 2024). This should have been prevented by the guidelines of the social media platforms, which require AI-generated content to be disclosed by a clear demarcation, like platform X (X Help Centre, n.d). The US example showed the problem of how the *laissez-faire* approach to AI ethics on social media platforms offers little guarantees to the good practices being adhered to. In this case, the deepfake was not flagged.

On the other hand, measures have been adopted to combat the ethical dilemmas posed by AIGC use in campaigns, showing that there is room to mitigate the ethics challenges, and ensure that it poses fewer problems. Absent federal regulation, some states have outlawed the use of AIGC altogether, regardless of whether they are disclosed as AI-generated or not - for example Mississippi, Alabama, Hawaii, Minnesota, and Texas. Other states like Michigan, Oregon, Utah and Wisconsin require disclosure. These regulations correspond to improving transparency as one of the metrics of

ethical AI use and raise hopes that the standards will be adhered to.

Beneficial uses of AI

Although there have been many instances where the uses of AI have been considered unethical, there have also been counterarguments of a more beneficial use of AI in general as well as particularly in running political campaigns. For example, newer AI startups are providing these solutions which can be implemented by campaigners (Polonski, 2017). One example of this is Factmata, a startup that is aimed at building AI systems which are focused on upholding transparency and accountability in their systems (Geniusee, n.d). These same terms are said to be repeated in previous AI guidelines in the paper by John, Ienca and Vayena, 2019, p 16 (2019) and so by integrating it into AI systems itself is a possible solution to mitigating these ethical dilemmas. Factmata is an analytics product to identify narratives online as well as highlight what could misinform or cause harm to audiences (Nesta, n.d). Future research should take the potential of AI to be used positively to combat ethical challenges into account.

4. CONCLUSION

Determining the ethics behind using artificial intelligence and AIGC in the setting of political campaigns remains a complex issue. On one hand, there are many scholarly papers and experts from different fields discussing updating ethical guidelines. There is repetition in the vocabulary of these guidelines: highlighting the highest relevance of certain areas of ethical transgressions like transparency, freedom & autonomy, and dignity. This shows how prominent these issues are currently, and with the increasing use of AIGC, the ethical concerns are likely to only become more important with time. Moreover, ethical guideline creation is not without problems. Biases in guideline creation may create geographical imbalances, while not accounting for the more rapid development of technology in North America and Europe. Yet the use of AIGC in politics is a global issue.

Using case studies from France, India, and the United States we were able to examine the usage of AIGC in the political campaigns in different

political systems, examining the measures that have been adopted in these countries. For example, in France before the parliamentary election, there was an instance of AIGC use by a political party that was discriminatory but current legislation was not enough to address it. Months before the United States 2024 Presidential election there have been several uses of AIGC, including deep fakes, voice cloning, and AIGC political messaging circulated on social media - not all of it has been properly flagged. This shows that Big Tech companies alone cannot be left to moderate their platforms and create ethical guidelines or outright AI legislation. By the same token, measures are being adopted to counter this problem. One of the methods adopted by individual states in the U.S. has been to completely outlaw the use of AIGC in political campaigning. Whether this approach is sustainable over the long term is questionable. Social media content is circulated globally, and its spread is difficult to prevent. The ongoing move towards international guideline creation, involving global public and non-governmental institutions in partnership with technology companies is a positive trend that offers more hope.

Does that mean AIGC will erode the foundations of our democracies? Not necessarily. The advent of AI has introduced powerful countermeasures to improve the legitimacy of circulated information. There have been new start-ups tackling this while integrating ethical principles like improved transparency and clear accountability for content, training their AI systems to effectively flag problematic posts. The new AIGC-producing AI technologies, the likes of ChatGPT and image creators, could also be more responsibly developed. Although it is not a fully developed tool used in campaigns, this new research can help mitigate the ethical dilemmas of AIGC in the future.

Whilst there is still debate on the creation of guidelines surrounding AI, each country's laws and regulations will differ but with the amount of research and expert opinion that has been shared, there is no doubt that the use of AIGC can pose risks to certain people and communities at times of political election. Although the beneficial uses of AI are present, they have not progressed enough to counteract the negative uses of AI. More research

needs to be directed toward the positive and ethical uses of AI to combat unethical and opaquely sourced AIGC during election campaigns. As shown in case studies, using AIGC is a rising strategy that political actors use. These benign-seeming political marketing campaigns may pose threats to vulnerable members of the population. If not sufficiently addressed, the proliferation of AIGC may call into question the very legitimacy of political parties as by using AIGC such as images and deepfakes it could be seen as transparency violations and manipulation of citizens. A combination of legislation, international ethical guideline integration, and increasing governmental and institutional development of AI-based countermeasures to AIGC, can be a way forward.

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