

Deepfake Cases in the 2024 Lok Sabha Election: Impact and Implications for Democracy

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Abstract

The 2024 Lok Sabha elections in India have been significantly impacted by the pervasive use of deepfake technology, raising critical concerns about its implications for democracy. This article delves into specific instances of deepfake utilization during the election, exploring their effects on voter behavior and broader democratic processes. It highlights how deepfakes have been employed to spread misinformation, manipulate voter perceptions, and discredit political opponents, thereby undermining trust in the electoral system. The response from regulatory bodies, including the Election Commission of India and the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Center, is examined, showcasing efforts to mitigate these threats. Furthermore, the article discusses the urgent need for enhanced regulatory measures and public awareness to combat the growing menace of AI-driven misinformation. The findings underscore the profound challenges that deepfake technology poses to the integrity of democratic elections, emphasizing the necessity for collaborative strategies to protect democratic values in the digital age.

The 2024 Lok Sabha elections in India have been marked by the extensive use of deepfake technology, raising significant concerns about its impact on the democratic process. This article examines specific instances of deepfake usage during the election, the resultant effects on voter behavior, and the broader implications for democracy in an era where artificial intelligence (AI) continues to evolve rapidly.

The Rise of Deepfake Technology in Elections

Deepfakes are sophisticated forms of synthetic media where a person's likeness is superimposed onto another's body or their speech is manipulated to create false representations. These have been increasingly used in political campaigns worldwide and found notable application during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in India.

Early Uses and Evolution

Deepfakes and other AI-driven illusions have been part of Indian political campaigns for some time. The BJP, for instance, used 3D hologram projections of Narendra Modi during the 2014 elections, allowing him to "appear" in multiple locations simultaneously. In 2020, Manoj Tiwari, a BJP MP, used deepfakes to address voters in different dialects, setting a precedent for more sophisticated uses in subsequent elections.

Impact on the Election

- **Misinformation and Voter Manipulation:** Deepfakes were strategically deployed to mislead voters and manipulate perceptions. A notable example involved a deepfake video of Amit Shah, where his

statements were altered to suggest that the BJP was against all reservations in India, rather than just specific unconstitutional ones. This misinformation could mislead voters about the party's policies, potentially swaying their voting decisions based on false information.

- **Erosion of Trust:** The widespread use of deepfakes has contributed to a growing distrust among voters towards political communications. With the ability to produce highly realistic but fake content, voters become sceptical about the authenticity of information they receive. This erosion of trust undermines the credibility of the entire electoral process, leading to increased voter apathy and disengagement.
- **Targeting Political Opponents:** Political parties have not hesitated to use deepfakes to discredit opponents. Instances have been reported where AI firms offered services to create damaging deepfake videos targeting rival candidates. These videos, often involving manipulated speeches or fabricated scandals, are strategically released to tarnish reputations and sway public opinion against the targeted individuals.

The Role of AI in Shaping Electoral Narratives

AI's influence extends beyond creating deepfakes to include voice cloning and other digital manipulations. These technologies can generate convincing fake speeches and messages, complicating the discernment of truth for the average voter. For example, during the 2024 elections, AI was used to clone voices of political figures to send personalized messages, enhancing the reach and perceived authenticity of campaign communications.

Government and Regulatory Response

Recognizing the significant threat posed by deepfakes, the Election Commission of India (ECI) and other regulatory bodies have implemented measures to combat their spread. The ECI has issued guidelines mandating the removal of fake content within a short timeframe and established monitoring committees to oversee media activities during the elections. The Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Center (I4C) has also been tasked with identifying and removing objectionable content online.

Broader Implications for Democracy

- **Manipulation of Public Opinion:** The ability of AI to create realistic deepfakes poses a fundamental challenge to democratic processes. By spreading false information, deepfakes can manipulate public opinion and influence election outcomes. The strategic use of deepfakes to disseminate misinformation undermines informed voting, a cornerstone of democratic societies.
- **Threats to Electoral Integrity:** The increasing sophistication of AI technologies threatens the integrity of elections. Deepfakes can be used to create convincing false narratives about candidates, eroding trust in electoral outcomes. This technological manipulation can lead to a broader disenchantment with the democratic process itself, as voters lose confidence in the fairness and transparency of elections.

Need for Enhanced Regulatory Measures

As AI technology continues to evolve, it is imperative for governments and regulatory bodies to develop robust mechanisms to detect and counteract deepfakes. This includes not only technological solutions but also legal frameworks that penalize the creation and distribution of malicious deepfake content.

Public awareness campaigns are also crucial to educate voters about the potential for AI-driven misinformation.

Conclusion

The use of deepfake technology in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections underscores the significant challenges it poses to democracy. By facilitating the spread of misinformation and eroding public trust, deepfakes threaten the integrity of electoral processes. It is essential for regulatory bodies, technology companies, and civil society to collaborate in developing comprehensive strategies to safeguard democracy from the perils of digital deception.