

Title:

The Impact of AI-Enabled Government Influence Campaigns on Democracy

Authors:

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Research Question:

What is the Impact of AI-Enabled Government Influence Campaigns on Democracy?

Abstract:

While political decision-making has evolved on many levels since the Greek *polis*, arguably, the most decisive recent factor in the evolution of political will formation is technological development in digital communication. Artificial Intelligence (AI) in its current form has already revolutionized government influence campaigns regarding their effectiveness, efficiency, precision and timeliness. These effects are only likely to increase exponentially with further development of AI. Increased surveillance capabilities, as well as a never-before-seen ease of data gathering and aggregation capability, have led to micro-targeted government influence campaigns that are hardly noticeable to voters and have decisive effects on election outcomes.

The effectiveness of AI-enabled government influence campaigns has severe consequence for organic political will formation. This article analyzes the effects of AI use for government influence campaigns. First, challenges and consequences deriving from the use of AI in government influence campaigns on organic political will formation will be theoretically assessed by applying Jürgen Habermas' concept of the relevance of access to information in the public sphere from his 1989 book "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere".

Second, the Russian use of AI in influence campaigns in Ukraine is described to demonstrate the effects of such campaigns directed against democracies. Russia is an aggressive actor in the distribution of disinformation and has invented many of the tactics, technics and procedures (TTPs) that other countries, such as China, have adopted. Applying the comparative method, with a most similar systems design, the effects of traditional government influence campaigns (via social media) on democracies will be compared to the effects of the AI-generated March 2022 Russian Deep Fake designed to create the impression that the Ukrainian President had surrendered. The comparison will demonstrate the very different implications for democracies that are targeted with AI-generated influence campaigns. It will be demonstrated that AI influence campaigns significantly influence organic, democratic will formation as they sow doubt in information accessed digitally and overwhelm the citizens with disinformation and misinformation, crowding out fact-based information needed for informed voting decisions. AI simplifies the creation and distribution of micro-targeted influence campaigns that can distract voters from relevant issues. The sheer volume of content leads to a saturation of the information environment, which can lead to an information overload experienced by voters. This information overload can lead to information suffocation that can then lead to information apathy, causing voters to turn away from current events – potentially leading to information paralysis. The long-term result can be loss of agency of voters. Based on these demonstrated

effects, the final section concludes with general implications of government use of AI for influence operations on democracies based on the case of Russian AI-enabled influence operations in Ukraine.