

Democracy and Elections in the Age of AI



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The Question...

How might artificial intelligence affect elections and democracy?

The Answer...

We don't really know, but probably

1. ...enhances social media and the strategies of bad and good actors
2. ...with broader implications beyond information ecosystem
3. ...yet tech remains less important than the larger sociopolitical forces at work

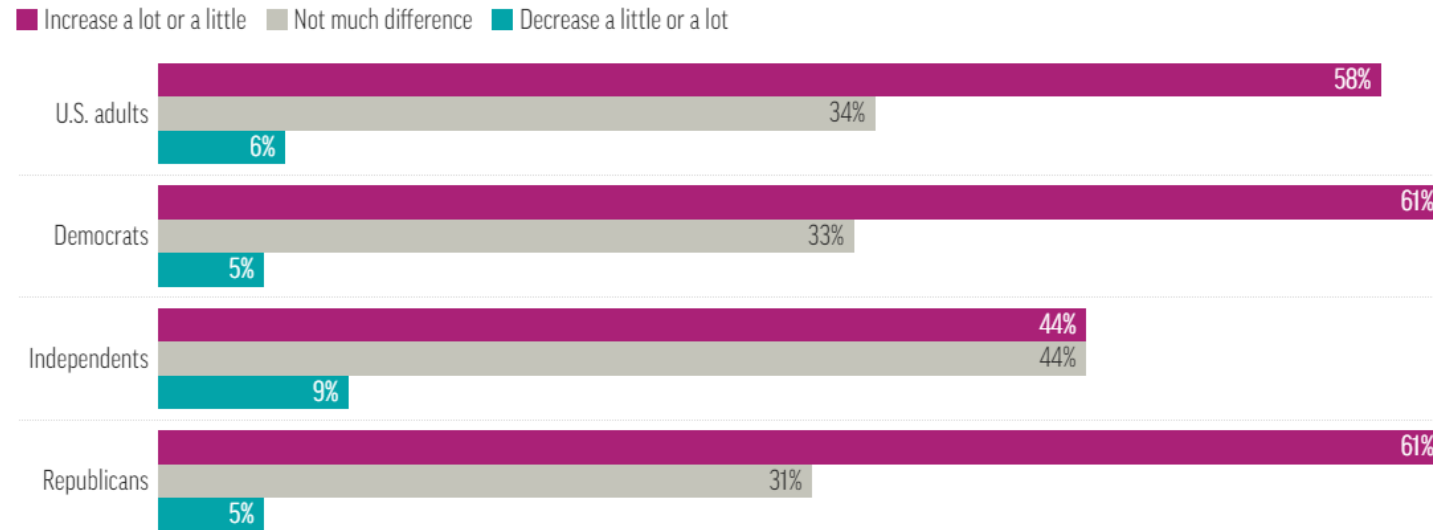


What the public thinks about AI and elections

Most US adults say AI will increase misinformation in the 2024 presidential election

A new UChicago Harris/AP-NORC poll shows Democrats and Republicans agree that artificial intelligence tools will increase the spread of false information during the election.

Percent who say AI tools will cause the spread of false information during the election to...



Do you think misinformation spread by artificial intelligence (AI) will have an impact on who wins the upcoming 2024 U.S. presidential election?

| | | |
|-------------------------|-----|-----|
| Yes, definitely | 510 | 23% |
| Yes, probably | 657 | 30% |
| No, probably not | 344 | 16% |
| No, definitely not | 135 | 6% |
| Don't know / No opinion | 557 | 25% |

Morning
Consult/Axios
August 10-13,
2023

AI's Disinformation Problem



AI's Disinformation Problem



☆☆ SUBATHON ☆☆
5684 0d 19h 19m 21s

A.I. DONALD TRUMP

A.I. JOE BIDEN

CHAT WITH
AI TRUMP & AI BIDEN PRE-ALPHA
www.MySentient.ai

☆☆ CHAT ☆☆
maple syrup filled big ass fake tiddies?
* [User Avatar](#): Can you remove me from Santa's naughty list. I stumbled into the womans changing room by mistake!
* [User Avatar](#): 🤔

AI Trump \$16795.54 AI Biden \$21493.63

🇺🇸 A.I. PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE (PARODY) 🇺🇸



Civox Demo with Ashley



The Impending Election Tsunami

Mexico

UK

EU Parliament

Taiwan

Indonesia

India

U.S.

54
national
elections

Technopolitical Landscape



• From Twitter to X

- Disrupts content moderation equilibrium
- Expands Overton window on trust and safety (for other platforms)
- Reduces cross-platform collaboration on emerging threats

• Industry-wide shift against moderation

- Reduction in trust and safety and election teams
- Chastened by political pressure – investigations/lawsuits – and previous mistakes (Hunter Biden laptop, lab leak)
- Move of newsfeeds away from politics

• Legal Uncertainty

- *Netchoice* Cases – Florida and Texas anti-bias laws
- DSA

And now... AI

- What do we mean by AI?
 - Just generative AI?
 - Deep fake obsession?
 - All algorithms informed by machine learning or A/B testing?
- What do we mean by elections/democracy?
 - Just the information environment?
 - Campaign ads?
 - Mobilization and persuasion?
 - Election administration?
 - Cyber security?
 - Other existential risks?

Are AI's Democracy Problems the Same as Social Media's?

| Problem | Social Media | AI |
|------------------------------|---|--|
| Disinformation | Amplification/Distribution | Generation |
| Manipulation (Persuasion) | Advertising/Microtargeting/ Echo chambers | Same but greater precision, lower cost |
| Privacy/ Surveillance | Platform data mining of user data | User (including government) data mining of population |
| Bias | Hate speech/newsfeed bias | Jailbreaking/ bias in content generation |
| Antitrust/ Platform power | Control over information (and advertising) ecosystem | Few LLMs (but see open source) |

AI's Disinformation Problem

- Lowers cost of production
- Greater sophistication for deception/confusion

| Modality | Cause for Concern | Reason for Caution |
|----------|----------------------------------|--|
| Text | flood the zone | production costs not the bottleneck; existing countermeasures may work |
| Image | impossible to detect (e.g. CSAM) | photoshop already pretty good but not ubiquitous in US campaigns |
| Audio | fake robocalls/recordings | existing laws regulate (?) |
| Video | persuasive deepfakes | mainstream media may serve as check (?) |

Overreaction as the Greater Danger

- Risk of drawing attention to otherwise harmless deep fakes
- Greatest risk is undermining of trust in all media, not impact of any individual lie
- Things are pretty bad already – AI's independent impact unclear



Reevaluating the Relationship: AI & Democracy

AI enhances the abilities of **all** actors (good, bad, foreign, domestic) in the electoral system

- **Communication**

- Content creation
- Targeting
- Persuasion/(De)Mobilization

- **Fundraising**

- **Get Out The Vote**

- **Election Administration**

- Polling place location and management
- Mail ballot resource allocation
- Signature verification
- Fraud detection



Reality Check

- Hyperpolarization and lack of trust (in information and institutions) are now deeply rooted – technology may exacerbate or slightly mitigate
- So long as elites propagate lies, their followers will believe them.
- Nevertheless, all of us who care about the pursuit of truth have an important role to play....

What is to be done...

• Disclosure, Transparency, and Verification

- Need to know how AI tools are being used and by whom (**including APIs and open source tools)
- Encourage watermarking and disclosure of AI-generated content –
 - Though both are technically difficult and not certain it makes a difference at the speed necessary

• Auditing for political/racial bias and accuracy

• Curb use of chatbots for critical election information (e.g., polling place location), but banning use of tools for politics is a fool's errand.

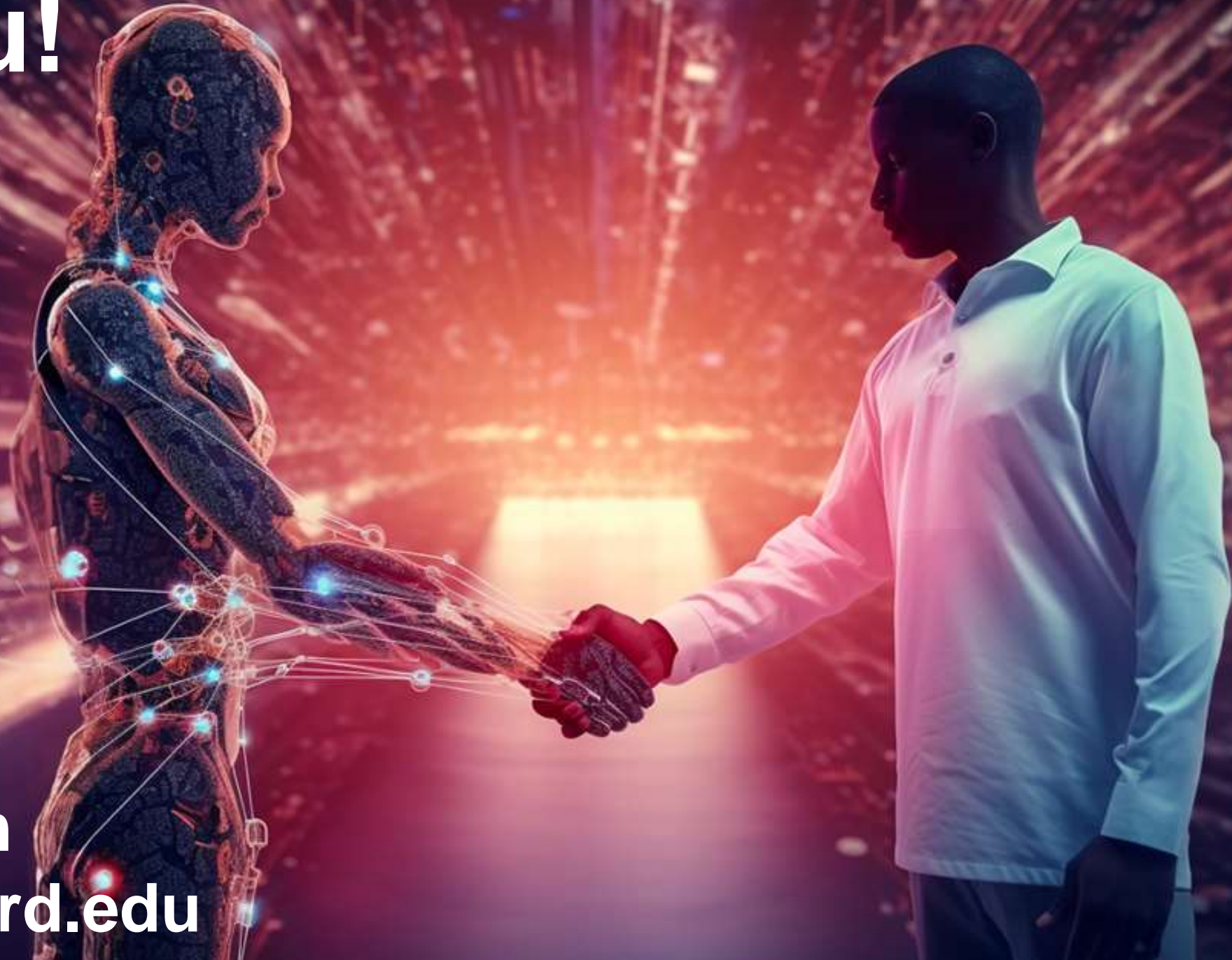
...and will it make a difference?



- E.O. Wilson

“We have Paleolithic emotions, medieval institutions, and godlike technology.”

Thank you!



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