

Information Matters: Artificial Intelligence

No discussion about the current state of information is complete without considering the transformative potential of AI. Like any technology, AI itself is neither inherently good nor bad; its impact depends on how it is used. When applied responsibly, AI can be a powerful tool to strengthen democratic values, build understanding, and boost civic engagement. However, if used maliciously, AI can just as vigorously threaten and undermine these same goals.

One of the biggest dangers of AI lies in its ability to spread false information, which it does both directly and indirectly. For example, as we've already seen in this election cycle, AI can be used to create very convincing fake stories, images, and videos (e.g., like [this one](#)). These AI-generated communications are sometimes so realistic it can be hard for voters to know what's real and what's not.

Another less direct way in which AI facilitates the spread of false information is through the phenomenon known as the “**liar's dividend**”. This speaks to how, as a result of the sheer volume of fake content that now exists online, real news is occasionally wrongly dismissed as a fake (e.g., as what happened [here](#)).

Taken together, both of these phenomena present real challenges to our ability to recognize ourselves as belonging to a shared reality.

One of the main risks associated with AI is the way in which it lets users produce and disseminate content quickly, cheaply, and on a massive scale. AI's ability to analyze large datasets enables both legitimate and deceptive political campaigns to target specific groups with highly personalized messages and content. This kind of microtargeting lets bad actors more effectively tailor their messages, manipulating voters' specific fears, biases, and preferences, often without their awareness, raising concerns about informed voter consent.

These abilities are further amplified by the use of AI-powered bot networks and fake accounts, both of which can be used to overwhelm social media with false information, spread divisive content, harass people, and create a false sense of support or opposition to candidates and/or policies. Such tactics distort public discourse, deepen societal divisions, foster cultures of fear and intimidation, and ultimately encourage voters to retreat into echo chambers. The resulting fragmentation makes it harder to find common ground and weakens the social unity needed for a healthy democracy.

As this still relatively new technology continues to evolve, these and other elections-related risks it presents are becoming more complex. For this reason, it is important that government and industry leaders (including not only AI companies, but also social media executives) work together to establish reasonable standards and regulations to address these challenges that impact all of us. At the same time, it is vital that members of the public continue to educate ourselves and remain vigilant so we may safely navigate this technology and the new possibilities it affords us.