

March 2026

Propagandas Falsas: AI Influence in Political Advertisement and Its Consequences for Latinx Voters

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Executive Summary

The absence of comprehensive legislation regulating artificial intelligence (AI) significantly impacts the Latinx vote.¹ AI-generated content can be manipulative or misleading, and it disproportionately targets Latinx communities.² The lack of regulation surrounding political advertisements that utilize AI results in hyper-targeted, deceptive messaging that appears highly personalized and credible, making it difficult for voters to distinguish between fact and fiction. This is particularly harmful to Latinx voters, who comprised approximately 15% of the voting population during the 2024 election.³ Many of these voters lacked—and continue to lack—access to digital literacy education and reliable information about emerging technologies, such as AI. As a result, Latinxs are more susceptible to political advertisements containing misinformation designed to manipulate them.⁴ In light of recent successful legislation in many states, Congress should craft legislation that focuses on the disclosure and transparency of the use of AI in political advertisements.

Background

Artificial intelligence has existed for many years; however, its latest models, such as OpenAI's GPT-5,⁵ will change many aspects of society, including democracy and voting.⁶ Notably, political campaigns have evolved alongside new media platforms from radio to television to social media platforms on our devices.⁷ Traditionally, campaigns place ads on national and local television as it allows candidates to reach large audiences and still simultaneously target voters within their district.⁸ However, “traditional” political advertising has shifted with the era of social media, making it possible to engage with both young and older voters. Instead of the traditional advertising in which most viewers are of older generations, new technologies have enabled candidates to reach younger generations.⁹ Although this innovation is often deemed positive, campaigns' evolution with technology raises new concerns.¹⁰ The latest technology, along with the considerable labor and expenses, has driven campaigns to utilize AI to deliver their message; however, it has also created new challenges like “deepfakes.”

Deepfakes are visual, written, or audio content created by generative artificial intelligence systems. Such content is produced by feeding authentic images to algorithms, which then produce fake photos and videos.¹¹ In 2018, one of the first deepfakes in the political space was created by Jordan Peele. Peele raised awareness about the potential risks of artificial intelligence using the voice and silhouette of former President Barack Obama.¹² More recently, generative AI has been used to create an image of Donald Trump riding a lion that circulated during the 2020 election. At the same time, images created by artificial intelligence featured Taylor Swift in an Uncle Sam outfit while falsely purporting to endorse Donald Trump.¹³ Although some of this content may have had a satirical or parodic tone, litigation has resulted from several deepfakes during recent elections. For instance, Christopher Kohls, who goes by “Mr. Reagan” on X, was at the center of the AI debate as he posted a parody video of a Kamala Harris campaign in July 2024.¹⁴ This video, created by AI, mimicked Harris' voice to state that she was the “ultimate diversity hire.”¹⁵ Kohls sued California after the state passed several AI bills aimed at targeting

fraudulent campaign materials; Kohls argued and successfully blocked one such law by establishing that banning such practices would be unconstitutional and a violation of the First Amendment.¹⁶

Deepfakes and their effects on falsifying the truth have raised concerns that AI can be detrimental in the political space and could lead to misuse. A Pew Research Center study states that 57% of Americans expressed that AI will be used to create and distribute fake information about presidential candidates and campaigns.¹⁷ Similarly, Americans “expressed little confidence in major technology companies to prevent misuse of their platform to influence elections.”¹⁸ This concern is shared among voters from all parties and conveys that the companies responsible for these technologies must prevent this misuse.¹⁹ Even though only a few states have passed laws regulating their use by requiring disclosure,²⁰ no federal solutions have been enacted. While the Federal Communications Commission (FCC)²¹ and Congress²² have proposed governmental initiatives, these policies have not been implemented.²³

Today, there is a dilemma between protecting the First Amendment and providing voters with accurate information. However, there is widespread agreement among individuals and multiple voting rights organizations that AI-generated content could challenge the integrity of elections and the future of accountability measured in democratic governance.²⁴

Problem Analysis

The slow legislative efforts in the AI sector are attributed to the fast development of this technology and lawmakers’ difficulty in keeping up with it. Accordingly, the United States has failed to establish a framework to prohibit the abuse of artificial intelligence in the political sphere, as Congress has not yet passed legislation on the issue.

The lack of federal oversight in the AI space is evident in political advertising, specifically during the most recent 2024 presidential election.²⁵ Mainly, the population most negatively impacted by legislative neglect includes the Latinx community.²⁶ Companies or other candidates may use AI in advertisements to provide inaccurate information or translations on topics related to mail voting or deceased people casting ballots. Additionally, conveying information about the histories surrounding authoritarianism, socialism, and election fraud. These are vulnerable topics to many Latinxs and may cause confusion and misinform them. This misinformation could ultimately have an impact at the ballot box.²⁷ Due to the lack of AI literacy in the Latinx community, individuals often accept those advertisements without questioning their true nature, as they have become victims of a rise in scams such as AI bot calls and scams using fake government officials.²⁸ Because many communities are affected by this emerging technology, Congress must require transparency when it is used in political advertisements.

AI’s Impact on Advertising

Advertising remains the primary source of information for voters to gather knowledge about candidates and parties. It is also a method for gathering knowledge of ad exposure on voters’ attitudes and behaviors. ²⁹ During the 2024 U.S. presidential election, it was estimated that \$10.5 billion³⁰ was spent on political advertisements, which is 30% more than in the 2020 election.³¹ Due to the growing use of advertising to convey political messages, political ads have evolved from traditional media, such as television and newspapers, to social media platforms. At the same time, the form in which these ads are created has also evolved, as AI has played a key role in many areas, from drafting political emails and tailoring chatbot messages and conversations to shaping the content engagement on social media platforms.³²

AI can synthesize information and generate persuasive messages, tailoring them to specific audiences. This technology provides benefits to the industry by enabling companies to generate new content for political ads and fundraising solicitations.³³ Additionally, these tools are inexpensive and require minimal training, thereby

reducing the need for large digital teams and minimizing expenses. This technology is far more advanced than previous tools, such as Photoshop.³⁴ For this reason, this technology also poses challenges, as it can quickly and easily mislead and amplify misinformation among the electorate.

This technology can produce messages that are both relevant and comprehensive, persuading a diverse array of voter groups. However, the ability to convey information can be a significant pitfall, as there is a considerable potential to generate false or misleading content. For example, during the 2024 election, there were AI-generated portraits of Kamala Harris in Soviet garb and an AI clone of her describing herself as “the ultimate diversity hire.”³⁵ Yet, even with potential complications and production of misleading content such as “deepfakes,” many states and the federal government have not crafted legislation to require disclosure when AI is used in the production of political advertisements.³⁶

Failure of Disclosure of AI in Political Advertisements

In March 2024, Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) introduced S. 3875,³⁷ the “AI Transparency in Elections Act of 2024.” This bill requires the inclusion of a statement indicating that the communication is substantially generated by AI, in addition to the financial disclosure already required by law. Thus, this legislation was previously supported by Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska); however, there has been no recent bipartisan support to address this issue. Furthermore, in 2024, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) proposed the “Disclosure and Transparency of Artificial Intelligence-Generated Content in Political Advertisement.”³⁸ Even though the FCC is engaging in some efforts to regulate artificial intelligence presence, Former Chairwoman Rosenworcel states that the Federal Election Commission (FEC) must also act and regulate online federal political advertisements.³⁹

Although efforts are underway to regulate or disclose the use of artificial intelligence in these advertisements, the lack of legislation from Congress and federal agencies, such as the FCC and FEC, has made it difficult for voters to distinguish ads altered by artificial intelligence, specifically as AI technology is increasingly realistic.⁴⁰ Research shows that 1 in 5 individuals have fallen for a deepfake scam or know someone who has since 2024.⁴¹ Although this research did not focus on AI in political advertisements, it demonstrates AI’s prominence and the need for its disclosure.

Artificial Intelligence Affecting Latinx Voters

Latinxs have grown at an exponential rate among the major racial and ethnic groups in the U.S. electorate pool.⁴² It was estimated that Latinx people constituted 36.2 million eligible voters in the 2024 election.⁴³ Not only that, but due to the rapid increase in the Latinx population, candidates have been airing ads mainly on Telemundo and Univision to win their votes, as Latinxs are classified as potential “swing voters.”⁴⁴ Accordingly, there are ongoing efforts to persuade Latinxs to support different political candidates or parties, including some ads featuring false narratives portraying the Democratic candidates as communists.⁴⁵

The U.S. has become technologically advanced in recent years. Yet, Latinxs face special challenges, as they are far less likely than White non-Hispanics to have a desktop or laptop and home broadband. Furthermore, 33% had no regular access to the internet during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁶ In April 2024, 3,000 Latinx individuals were surveyed about their use of AI-generated tools, and the results showed that only 15% use such tools.⁴⁷ At the same time, the evolution of political campaign ads, facilitated by sophisticated generative AI tools, makes it possible to create hyperrealistic images, videos, and audio in seconds that clone human voices and spread rapidly to target specific audiences, potentially misleading voters.⁴⁸ Due to the lack of knowledge of AI among the community, most Latinxs utilizing these resources emphasized the need for stricter regulations and oversight of AI technologies.⁴⁹

Outreach to this group has been drawing increasing attention from political candidates and outside groups; therefore, there has been a push to deliver advertisements on different platforms in Spanish.⁵⁰ In the United States, there are 41 million Spanish speakers, including 21.6 million adult citizens.⁵¹ Simultaneously, research shows that immigrant Latinxs mostly get their news in Spanish, whereas U.S.-born Latinxs are less likely to do so.⁵² Given the high percentage of Latinxs who acquire their news in Spanish, much of the political content is designed to inform Latinx voters by utilizing AI to create and manipulate advertisements in Spanish.⁵³ These ads, instead of providing information and educating Latinx voters about the candidates and their policies, produced a stream of election-related falsehoods in Spanish, as more than half of election-related responses contained incorrect information, as compared with 43% of responses in English.⁵⁴ Also, it has been shown that “tech companies have not developed a symmetrical consistent system to take down misinformation in other languages the same way they have attempted to do for English language content.”⁵⁵ This polarization of information is due to the lack of content moderation on platforms, which are also the primary sources of information for Latinxs.⁵⁶ Spanish-language misinformation presents a particular risk: Latinxs who relied on Spanish-language social media were more likely to believe that a state erroneously declared a winner than those Latinxs who relied on English-language social media.⁵⁷

Simultaneously, experts corroborate that “[L]atinos in the U.S. are more likely to consume, spread, and receive fake news and misinformation online compared to the average population.⁵⁸ Because of this, Latinxs are overexposed in “high volumes to mis- and disinformation through the channels they use.”⁵⁹ The combination of overexposure along with a lack of AI and technology education makes these individuals a susceptible group to gather and spread misinformation among themselves and others.⁶⁰ Due to the lack of knowledge, Latinxs overall are susceptible to scams, and older adult Latinxs have an increased risk of being misled by AI voice scams, utility scams, and government scams.⁶¹ Specifically, there were AI scams targeting older Latinxs in which voice-cloning scams impersonated a public figure.⁶² For example, there was an AI scam impersonating Joe Biden that targeted elderly citizens to ask for their sensitive personal information.⁶³ In addition, the evolution of political campaign ads and the use of AI has enabled deepfakes, in which it is increasingly difficult to tell whether an image or voice from the individual is real or not; as a result, the authenticity of the image or a video under review is due to suspicion of being manipulated or created by artificial intelligence.⁶⁴

Even though the use of deepfakes has contributed to political activism and engagement, it has created dishonest discourse through false content that has sought to influence presidential elections since the Obama era.⁶⁵ Unfortunately, due to the lack of literacy and education related to AI-generative tools among Latinxs, many are still susceptible to misinformation and have fallen victim to false narratives surrounding the recent presidential election.⁶⁶

Conclusion

Several communities, including Latinxs, are at risk of being misinformed or subjected to disinformation and misled by inaccurate information. Although efforts have been made to mitigate its impact and impose such a requirement, many individuals oppose the regulation, citing First Amendment concerns.

On the other hand, many pieces of legislation have been successful at the state level. Congressional action is needed to provide a uniform framework for the responsible use of this technology in political advertising. Congress should consider requiring disclosure of AI-generated political ads to mitigate further harm to the Latinx community.

Policy Recommendations

Several states have addressed the issue of AI disclosure needs through their state legislatures. For example, Arizona prohibits AI-generated content 90 days before an election unless it includes a “clear and conspicuous disclosure” on the advertisement.⁶⁷ Furthermore, some states like Colorado require disclosure of AI usage in their digital files’ metadata.⁶⁸ Lastly, all disclosure initiatives⁶⁹ must create an exception for satire or parody to avoid First Amendment violations as in Kohls’.⁷⁰

Endnotes

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⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

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⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ These advertisements were specifically present in states with a larger Hispanic population such as Arizona, Nevada, Florida, and California; Ibid.

⁶⁷ S.B. 1359, 56th Ariz. Cong. (2023-2024), <https://www.azleg.gov/legtext/56leg/2r/bills/sb1359s.htm>

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