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On Artificial Intelligence's Impact on Politics

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Critical Question #36

By: Gabriel Mott

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Introduction

Despite its prevalence in popular culture, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is often misunderstood by the public. Usually trained by the wealth of data on the internet, AI models identify associations with words and images to create new content, whether text, audio, photo, or video. AI has already begun to take root in the political scene, with several deep fakes of politicians circulating and one scandal involving ChatGPT generating fake legal citations. Some politicians have already indicated their support for regulating AI, and some political precedent indicates it will likely move forward.

What is Artificial Intelligence, how does it work, and what can it do?

Perhaps due to its saturation in popular culture, Artificial Intelligence is not actually very strictly defined. IBM, the flagship computer company, [defines](#) it as “technology that enables computers and machines to simulate human intelligence and problem-solving capabilities.” Generally put, AI uses computer algorithms to generate new content, whether the medium be via text, photo, video, or rote data. All AI models are created by feeding on training data, and [statistically analyzing](#) it for patterns and associations. Once it can determine these associations, the AI model will project them onto new data, giving a desired output. For example, if you ask a conversational program to describe a typical American citizen, it will generate a response based on existing language correlations between descriptives and American citizens, giving more weight to the strongest associated descriptors.

AI models can do many different things. Some of the most popular come from Open AI, an Artificial Intelligence research company. Unlike many mainstream definitions, Open AI's [charter](#) defines Artificial Intelligence as “highly autonomous systems that outperform humans at most economically valuable work,” which is primarily outcome or function derived, while IBM's definition concerns the intrinsic properties of AI. Open AI's services include [ChatGPT](#) (Generative Pre-Trained Transformer), which provides text-based conversational interactions, [DALL-E](#), which creates an image based on a text prompt, and [Sora](#), which creates video from a text prompt.

How has Artificial Intelligence been used for political applications?

AI has already begun use in the political realm. Among the more tame applications are a series of culturally popular joke deepfakes— impersonations of a real person's face or voice. For example, one video depicting Joe Biden, Barack Obama and Donald Trump playing the video game Minecraft together gained over 4 million views on YouTube.

AI has also been used in politics without a joking intent, however, and this has had serious consequences. Notably, two lawyers were recently [fined](#) over their use of AI in court. They had asked ChatGPT to research case law for them, and ChatGPT (operating solely on advanced word relation and having no special qualification to identify or analyze legal text) generated fake

citations which the lawyers then attempted to admit into court. This has led some to some concern that it could set a precedent that individuals are not shielded from liability for the information they choose to trust with or from AI.

Further, Artificial Intelligence is currently being used to impersonate many prominent political figures, to the detriment of both parties. After Biden announced his re-election bid, the Republican National Convention released an [advertisement](#) depicting mass migration, crumbling infrastructure, and heavily armed police roaming the streets. These images were AI generated, and a small disclaimer read, “Built entirely with AI imagery.” in the top left corner. In January of this year, voters in New Hampshire were robocalled—automatically called by a computer—and received an AI impersonation of Joe Biden encouraging them not to vote in the primary election. The startup [ElevenLabs](#), which specializes in generative AI voice, [was likely used](#) to make the call. Finally, the Courageous Conservatives Super PAC aired a [radio ad](#) which made use of AI impersonations of Republicans Nikki Haley and Tim Scott, having them narrate their own political careers in an unfavorable framing.

How could the government regulate the use of Artificial Intelligence?

While AI is still new enough to not be heavily regulated by the government, politicians from both sides of the aisle have indicated preliminary support for regulating AI. Perhaps most prominently, President Biden said in his most recent [State of the Union Address](#) that one portion of his “Unity Agenda” is to “Harness the promise of A.I. and protect us from its peril. Ban A.I. voice impersonation and more!” On the other side of the political aisle, former Representative Will Hurd (who was at the time running for the Republican 2024 Presidential Primary) released a comprehensive [policy plan](#). With a number of policy directives focusing on legality and national security, Hurd [described](#) the promise of A.I. as follows: “Nuclear fission controlled gives you nuclear power — clean, cheap, limitless power...Nuclear fission uncontrolled gives you nuclear weapons that can destroy the world. And I think A.I. is equivalent.”

Especially coming after the deepfake robocalls, politicians have a vested interest in protecting themselves against AI, providing a credible mechanism for regulatory legislation to actually pass. Further, it tends to be the case ([such as with cybersecurity](#)) that both underregulation and overregulation of “human factors” decrease “organization[al] resilience.” Lastly, it is worth noting that new technologies usually receive some form of governmental regulation; such has been the case with the advent of radio, television, and the internet. Therefore, it seems likely that some form of regulation will soon come to pass with Artificial Intelligence.

Conclusion

Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems identify patterns and associations in existing data to create new text, audio, photos, and video. AI has been used to impersonate politicians and generate case law, causing scandal and attention. Indications from politicians as well as political precedent indicate there will likely be some governmental regulation of AI. Going forward, we encourage the reader to follow political news on AI, and especially to be wary of political messaging which may not be authentic. Generally, official party channels and reputable media sites can be trusted.