



What India's Elections Can Teach Us About AI

Marketing Research

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

India just wrapped up the world's largest elections during which we saw broad use of AI, offering insights for future election cycles and AI's possible role in them. The elections, which closed earlier this month, gave Prime Minister Narendra Modi another term but denied his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) party a parliamentary majority.

During the election cycle, political parties in India used AI in several ways, mostly without repercussions, and with little transparency. AI helped candidates and political parties scale their messaging to a diverse, multilingual electorate but also spread misleading information.

- AI helped parties generate satirical images and videos targeting political opponents, create content that boosted politicians' images, resurrect popular politicians and figures to support one party over another, and spread false narratives about rivals.
- Parties also leveraged AI to broaden the scope of their outreach to voters, especially those in far-flung areas or where language differences have historically posed access challenges.

The multifaceted use of AI in India's elections—ranging from seemingly simple to sophisticated use cases—offers valuable insights as we prepare for upcoming elections around the world. Individuals are using AI to create satirical images, videos, and memes, which can serve a dual purpose of disseminating influence messaging, even mis/disinformation, under the guise of humor. Some candidates are embracing the use of AI-generated digital avatars and voice cloning to enhance their messaging efforts. Political campaigns are seeking ways to use AI to improve their voter outreach and create political advertisements. Collaboration between AI developers and political parties or candidates will possibly expand—Indian AI companies that led the charge on AI-generated election content are now seeking to expand their business globally, including to Canada and the United States. Meanwhile, adversaries are using free and subscription AI tools to generate content and manufacture inauthentic engagement on social media.

As new AI capabilities emerge, partnerships and joint efforts are required to stay abreast of developing tactics and use cases. Nisos works with a variety of partners to combat harmful usage of AI within the context of elections, influence operations (IO), and from platform security perspectives, helping our stakeholders identify AI-generated and -altered content, develop technical mitigations, and properly contextualize and scope the impact of AI to the information environment.

OVERVIEW

India's six-week election cycle closed on 1 June and saw 642 million voters cast ballots. India has a history of using digital content in its political campaigns. In 2014, for example, Prime Minister Modi created a 3D hologram version of himself to appear at numerous campaign rallies.¹ In 2022, a political consultant created a doctored video for a BJP politician in Delhi by using lip-sync technology to encourage people to vote for the BJP. This year's election occurred against the backdrop of remarkable growth of India's AI market and heightened concerns around AI-generated content.

Nisos has been monitoring this year's Indian elections as a case study to analyze how candidates and political campaigns are using AI to disseminate messaging to a diverse electorate in multiple languages at scale. As democracies around the world prepare for how AI may be used to enable election-related IO, we also consider the productive potential that AI technologies offered to Indian voters this year. We identified AI-generated and AI-manipulated content presenting misleading information and false narratives, as well as examples where AI supported enhanced voter access and outreach efforts.

USE OF AI DURING THE INDIAN ELECTION

Election Candidates Used AI to Create Digital Content

Across the political spectrum in India, we saw political parties use AI to create video and audio deepfakes² as satire about other candidates, to enhance their own image, and to revive deceased public figures to speak to voters. Few repercussions, either from official action or the public, resulted from the dissemination of such content. Limited transparency around the use of AI-generated content created confusion among voters in some cases. Indian political parties also collaborated directly with AI developers and startups, spending an estimated \$50 million on AI-generated campaign material.³ Examples of AI-generated content include:

- **Satirical Content Targeting Opponents:** The BJP circulated an AI-generated video of one of Modi's leading opponents, who was jailed at the time, strumming a guitar and singing a verse from a popular Bollywood song.⁴ Another video showed a prominent Indian Muslim politician singing devotional Hindu songs. The opposition India National Congress party also posted a video parodying Modi by rewriting song lyrics to describe how Modi was handing over the country to business interests.⁵
- **Enhancing a Candidate's Image:** Indian influencers on social media with large followings generated their own content using AI, which candidates in some cases reposted. For instance,

¹ [https://www.theverge\[.\]com/2014/5/7/5691714/indian-politician-uses-holograms-to-reach-voters](https://www.theverge[.]com/2014/5/7/5691714/indian-politician-uses-holograms-to-reach-voters)

² We define "deepfake" as media that has been manipulated using AI technologies, often synthesizing different visual and/or audio clips to depict people appearing to say or do something that never occurred; [https://www.gao\[.\]gov/assets/gao-20-379sp.pdf](https://www.gao[.]gov/assets/gao-20-379sp.pdf).

³ [https://restofworld\[.\]org/2024/india-elections-ai-content](https://restofworld[.]org/2024/india-elections-ai-content)

⁴ [https://www.france24\[.\]com/en/live-news/20240403-ghost-in-the-machine-deepfake-tools-warp-india-election](https://www.france24[.]com/en/live-news/20240403-ghost-in-the-machine-deepfake-tools-warp-india-election)

⁵ [https://www.aljazeera\[.\]com/economy/2024/3/8/ai-meme-wars-hit-india-election-campaign-testing-social-platforms](https://www.aljazeera[.]com/economy/2024/3/8/ai-meme-wars-hit-india-election-campaign-testing-social-platforms)

Modi reposted an AI-generated video clip of him dancing with the hashtag *PollHumour* (Graphic 1).⁶ The video generated over 18.6 million views on X (formerly Twitter). An AI-generated avatar of Modi that individuals shared on messaging apps shows him addressing a series of voters by name.⁷

- **False Narratives:** BJP supporters posted videos with false narratives and misinformation about rival political party members. One account shared a video of Indian National Congress leader Rahul Gandhi with AI-generated audio announcing Gandhi’s resignation from the party (Graphics 2 and 3). Despite significant media attention and citations of this event in coverage of election-related AI, the original posts containing the generative AI audio only received approximately 9,000 and 3,000 views.^{8 9} Another video from late April using AI voice-cloning of Gandhi shows him being sworn in as prime minister.¹⁰
- **Digitally Resurrecting Popular Figures:** The BJP used AI to recreate the voice of a famous singer overlaid on videos of Modi campaigning.¹¹ The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam party in Tamil Nadu worked with an AI firm to create a video using AI to revive a deceased party leader and have him endorse the current state government (Graphic 4).¹² Another AI-generated audio clip featured a former politician who died in 2016 criticizing the current state government.¹³

⁶ [https://x\[.\]com/narendramodi/status/1787523212374393082](https://x[.]com/narendramodi/status/1787523212374393082)

⁷ [https://www.nytimes\[.\]com/2024/04/18/world/asia/india-election-ai.html](https://www.nytimes[.]com/2024/04/18/world/asia/india-election-ai.html)

⁸ [https://www.voanews\[.\]com/a/ai-deepfakes-social-media-influencers---india-s-mammoth-election-sees-it-all-7622336.html](https://www.voanews[.]com/a/ai-deepfakes-social-media-influencers---india-s-mammoth-election-sees-it-all-7622336.html)

⁹ [https://www.nytimes\[.\]com/2024/06/01/world/asia/india-election-deepfakes.html](https://www.nytimes[.]com/2024/06/01/world/asia/india-election-deepfakes.html)

¹⁰ [https://www.boomlive\[.\]in/news/rahul-gandhi-swearing-in-prime-minister-elections-lok-sabha-2024-voice-cloning-ai-25072](https://www.boomlive[.]in/news/rahul-gandhi-swearing-in-prime-minister-elections-lok-sabha-2024-voice-cloning-ai-25072)

¹¹ [https://www.aljazeera\[.\]com/economy/2024/3/8/ai-meme-wars-hit-india-election-campaign-testing-social-platforms](https://www.aljazeera[.]com/economy/2024/3/8/ai-meme-wars-hit-india-election-campaign-testing-social-platforms)

¹² [https://restofworld\[.\]org/2024/india-elections-ai-content](https://restofworld[.]org/2024/india-elections-ai-content)

¹³ [https://www.france24\[.\]com/en/live-news/20240403-ghost-in-the-machine-deepfake-tools-warp-india-election](https://www.france24[.]com/en/live-news/20240403-ghost-in-the-machine-deepfake-tools-warp-india-election)



Graphic 1: Screenshot of an AI-generated video Prime Minister Modi posted showing him dancing on stage at a concert.¹⁴

¹⁴ [https://x\[.\]com/narendramodi/status/1787523212374393082](https://x[.]com/narendramodi/status/1787523212374393082)



Graphics 2 and 3: X posts featuring generative AI audio of Rahul Gandhi announcing his resignation. The posts only garnered approximately 12,000 combined views.^{15 16}

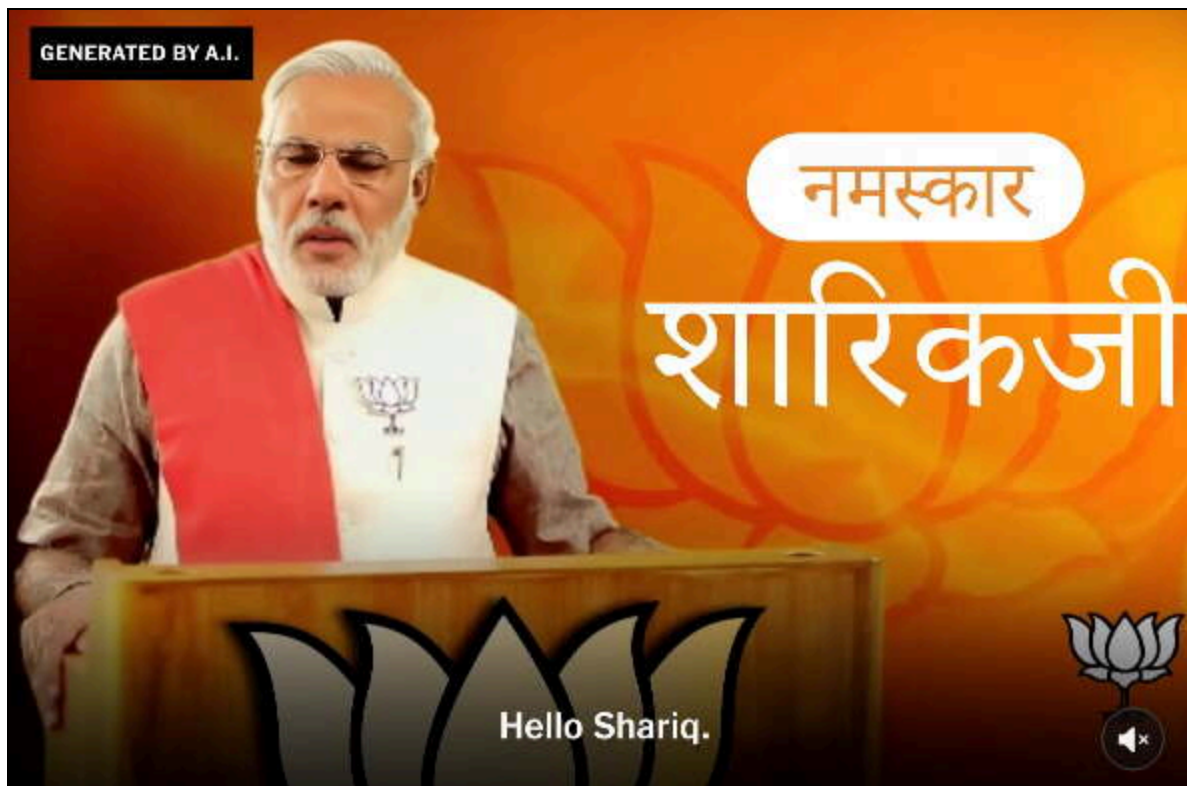


Graphic 4: AI-generated deepfake of former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu Muthuvel Karunanidhi, who died in 2018.¹⁷

¹⁵ <https://twitter.com/jpsin1/status/1778698965862744134>

¹⁶ <https://twitter.com/MithilaWaala/status/1778708651022426378>

¹⁷ https://twitter.com/rajiv_dmk/status/1748862602170757540



Graphic 5: Screenshot of AI-generated Modi avatar addressing a series of voters by name.¹⁸

AI-Enabled Access to Voters

AI applications enabled political parties to contact constituents located in difficult-to-reach places or where language has historically been an access barrier. AI also helped reduce the cost of outreach to voters, with one political consultant noting that using humans in call centers to make initial contact costs about 4 rupees per call, which was eight times more expensive than using AI.¹⁹ Other examples of AI use cases enhancing access to voters included:

- **Sending Personalized Messages:** Political parties used existing data about voters to send personalized messages from a voice clone of the local politician directly to voters’ cell phones.²⁰ Parties and candidates made more than 50 million calls using AI-generated voice-cloning technology in the two months leading up to the start of the elections in April.²¹
- **Disseminating Messages in Multiple Languages:** India is home to dozens of languages, and the Indian government developed an application called Bhashini to bridge language barriers. The BJP used the technology in December to create an AI-generated version of Modi’s speech

¹⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/18/world/asia/india-election-ai.html>

¹⁹ <https://www.wired.com/story/indian-elections-ai-deepfakes>

²⁰ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-04-19/india-offers-a-glimpse-into-the-rise-of-campaign-deep-fakes>

²¹ <https://www.wired.com/story/indian-elections-ai-deepfakes>

originally in Hindi to a Tamil-speaking audience.²² The BJP also created a series of X accounts that translate Modi’s speeches into other languages to broaden his reach.^{23 24 25 26 27}

Limited Government Regulation, Selective Enforcement

Specific legislation addressing AI was delayed until after the elections, and we expect to see additional movement on the topic in the coming months. India’s IT and Communications Minister indicated that the government would finalize laws against deepfakes and disinformation after the elections. The results of the election likely indicate that the ruling BJP, which received a lower share of the vote than expected, will need to build coalitions for governing and passing legislation which could in turn slow the passage of this legislation.²⁸

- An amendment to the IT Act could include specific rules to regulate AI companies and generative AI models. In May, the Indian government issued a non-legally-binding advisory to large tech companies that they needed to seek permission before launching new AI models.²⁹
- The Digital India Bill is meant to eventually replace the existing Information Technology Act and is broadly scoped to focus on cybersecurity, AI, and privacy.³⁰ Passage of the bill will likely require consensus-building with the new legislature as the ruling BJP failed to secure a majority on its own in the elections.
- In the absence of current and relevant legislation on AI, three Indian AI companies signed an ethical manifesto ahead of the elections in which the companies agreed to prevent the creation or distribution of harmful AI-generated content and hold themselves accountable for the ethical implications of their AI technologies.³¹ Several of the founders specifically noted that they had turned down requests for what they considered unethical usage of AI and only worked with customers they believed they could trust.^{32 33 34}

Political parties created and shared deepfake videos in the months leading up to the election without much scrutiny. During the last month of elections, however, the police arrested individuals, most of whom were associated with the opposition party, for sharing deepfake content targeting the BJP. BJP

²² <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/elections/lok-sabha/india/2024-polls-stand-out-for-use-of-ai-to-bridge-language-barriers/articleshow/108737700.cms>

²³ <https://twitter.com/NaMoInMalayalam>

²⁴ <https://twitter.com/NaMoInPunjabi>

²⁵ <https://twitter.com/NaMoInTelugu>

²⁶ <https://twitter.com/NaMoInTamil>

²⁷ <https://twitter.com/NaMoInBengali>

²⁸ <https://www.msn.com/en-in/money/news/new-govt-to-carry-forward-key-it-policies-to-adapt-to-evolving-digital-landscape/ar-BB1nWA0c>

²⁹ <https://techcrunch.com/2024/03/03/india-reverses-ai-stance-requires-government-approval-for-model-launches>

³⁰ <https://www.india-briefing.com/news/india-dpdp-act-to-be-enacted-after-2024-general-elections-32269.html>

³¹ <https://www.techpolicy.press/the-era-of-aigenerated-election-campaigning-is-underway-in-india>

³² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2024/04/23/ai-deepfake-election-2024-us-india>

³³ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/india-ai-changing-elections-world-rcna154838>

³⁴ <https://restofworld.org/2024/india-elections-ai-content/>

leadership, including Modi, used the opportunities to exhort the public to report synthetic media to the police, which had not previously been a point of emphasis for the BJP.

- Indian police arrested nine people for sharing a deepfake video in which government minister Amit Shah claimed to eliminate affirmative action policies.³⁵ At least six arrested individuals were members of the opposition Congress party’s social media teams, including the head of social media for the opposition India National Congress Party.³⁶
- Police in May also arrested a man for allegedly posting an AI-generated video of Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Yogi Adityanath.³⁷
- Modi publicly called the trend of using deepfakes dangerous and cautioned Indians against spreading deepfake videos because the laws are strict.³⁸ He also urged Indians who saw “fake videos” to contact the police.³⁹

APPLYING INDIA’S LESSONS LEARNED TO UPCOMING ELECTIONS

The use of AI in India’s elections was multifaceted and offers useful perspectives as we prepare for elections scheduled later this year, including in the United States. While regulations and approaches will differ by country, some of the trends we identified in India could shape the sharing of AI-generated content and future campaign approaches to AI.

- **Meme Culture Integrating AI:** Individuals are likely to use AI to create and spread images and videos for satirical purposes. In the information environment, memes can serve the dual purpose of disseminating influence messaging, including mis/disinformation, and normalizing “extreme behaviors” and perspectives through humor.⁴⁰
- **AI as a Campaign Tool:** Similar to parties that used AI to reach a broad swath of Indian voters, other campaigns around the world are applying the same tactics. The US-based political consulting firm Campaign Nucleus uses AI to gauge voter sentiment and send voters customized emails.⁴¹ AI also enables campaigns to scale messaging efforts in multiple languages and formats suitable for reaching communities with lower rates of literacy. If not abused, this application of AI has the potential to increase voters’ access to election

³⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/world/india/fake-videos-modi-aides-trigger-political-showdown-india-election-2024-05-05/>

³⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/may/04/india-opposition-social-media-chief-arrested-over-doctored-video>

³⁷ <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/noida-man-arrested-for-allegedly-sharing-deepfake-video-of-yogi-adityanath-5571472>

³⁸ <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/politics/modi-warns-against-misuse-of-technology-for-spreading-fake-content-891681>

³⁹ <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/elections/lok-sabha/maharashtra/rivals-unable-to-take-us-on-directly-now-spreading-fake-videos-pm-modi/articleshow/109700011.cms?>

⁴⁰ <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/how-memes-are-becoming-the-new-frontier-of-information-warfare>

⁴¹ <https://apnews.com/article/ai-trump-campaign-2024-election-brad-parscale-3ff2c8eba34b87754cc25e96aa257c9d>

information and participation. Campaigns in the United States have used AI to generate political advertisements, likely fueling discussions within the Federal Communications Commission regarding whether to require disclosure of AI content in political advertisements.⁴²

- **International Market for AI-Generated Content:** Companies offering AI-enabled platforms for creating and altering audio and visual content are emerging around the world and offering their solutions to global customers. India-based Polymath Solutions, which was a major player in generating synthetic media content for the Indian elections, has sought to expand its business globally, including to Canada and the United States.⁴³ Adversaries have also used publicly available free and subscription tools to spread mis/disinformation and use AI-enabled solutions to manufacture inauthentic engagement on social media.⁴⁴

De-Sensationalizing Content

In an effort to inform, researchers, fact checkers, and media outlets can sometimes inadvertently amplify AI content or incorrectly label digitally altered or edited content as AI. When identifying and debunking AI-generated and AI-altered content, we recommend diligence when scrutinizing the authenticity, context, and impact of possible harmful content. As new AI capabilities emerge, partnerships and joint efforts are required to stay abreast of developing tactics and use cases.

- **News Cycle Amplifying Content:** Some of the AI-generated and manipulated content we identified did not receive significant engagement, raising questions about impact and harm. Reporting on AI-generated content risks amplifying the content in question further. However, this is possibly mitigated by providing appropriate context and commenting on possible impact, reach, and user engagement with the goal of informing readers without overstating the threat.
- **Misattributing Content as AI Generated:** Numerous fact-checking websites and news outlets incorrectly labeled misinformation content as AI-generated, when it was instead simply edited or digitally altered with more conventional editing methods. One example includes a video of exit poll results for estimated Indian Parliamentary seats, in which the party numbers were swapped. The video was labeled AI-generated misinformation; however, AI was almost certainly not used. Mislabeling conventionally created misinformation as AI-generated creates possible confusion and risks undermining the impact of AI-generated content labels.

⁴² <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-fcc-proposal-require-ai-political-ad-disclosure-draws-split-views-2024-06-06/>

⁴³ <https://www.wired.com/story/indian-elections-ai-deepfakes/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.semafor.com/article/02/21/2023/venezuela-uses-ai-avatars-to-disseminate-propaganda>



Graphics 6 and 7: Original ABP News video displaying exit poll information for the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and the INDIA opposition alliance (left). Altered video containing exit poll results that swapped NDA and INDIA’s estimated Parliamentary seats; note the text for Parliamentary seats “353-383” under INDIA is misaligned (right).^{45 46}

⁴⁵ <https://x.com/abplive/status/1797142190042276283>

⁴⁶ <https://x.com/ShivamYadavjii/status/1797307295552119263>



Graphics 8: ABP news television channel incorrectly claiming the edited video contained AI-generated content.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ <https://twitter.com/ABPNews/status/1797445835879317791>