

**RESEARCH PAPER****Deepfakes' Challenge to International Politics: Sowing Political Discord****Sobia Kafayat**

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to investigate the effect that deepfakes (as an evolving phenomenon) can have on International Politics (as it currently exists). Deepfake is a form of artificial intelligence that produces realistic fake videos, pictures, images, or text. The term deepfake technology combines "deep learning" and "fake." Deepfakes can change the sources of original materials, such as voice, face, or images, by replacing one person with another. Deepfakes are becoming increasingly relevant in today's digitized world due to their ability to create highly realistic yet fabricated content that blurs the distinction between reality and fiction. Based on a characterization of contemporary global politics, this study draws evidence from case studies. The research is qualitative and uses the secondary method of research. Though divergence among actors might naturally exist, discord sown by deepfakes reinforces the divisiveness, thus impacting international politics adversely. Remedial measures do not fall within the scope of this study.

Keywords: Deepfakes, International Politics, Discord, Political Actors**Introduction**

Technology and politics have a very complex but very close relationship. To comprehend this relationship, one must know that technology emerges, evolves, develops, and advances out of the deliberate choices of political actors. Notably, while technology does not fall from the blue but is engendered at the will of political actors, it may sometimes get beyond the control of, and hence, counterproductive to, the actors that bring it out. Artificial intelligence (AI) powered digital media is a good example to understand this relationship in today's world.

Technology (AI) has transformed media and made it a powerful tool for disseminating information. Governments and political parties worldwide use media to build narratives, influence public opinion, and rally support. Digital media has become a powerful tool in today's world. Digital media is anything virtually presented on your screens, such as audio, video, articles, digital art, virtual reality, podcasts, music, and advertisements (Kakbra, 2024). Digital media has the power to communicate with its audience from anywhere; the same goes for the consumer, who can access it anywhere. All these things are part of our daily lives, and we consume digital media. That is why social media can impact every aspect of the world. Digital media is known as one of the greatest inventions of humanity because it has many positive impacts, such as learning new things, improving business through digital media, and getting real-time information; on the other hand, the rise of the use of digital media also has negative uses on which is people are getting addicted to this which causes to believe the many things they see online. Addiction to social media is primarily a function of its interface with Artificial Intelligence. A defining challenge of the digital age is the proliferation of deepfake technology and the dangers of media manipulation and disinformation. Deepfakes are the harmful use of computer-generated synthetic media, essentially intelligence-generated hyper-realistic media.

Fake videos, known as deepfakes, are produced using face-swapping machine learning and digital software. At their most basic, deepfakes use strong Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems to analyze and replicate human voice and face characteristics with high realism. Computer-generated fake videos combine images to create new footage

that pretends to show actions, statements, or events that never occurred. The outcomes may be highly persuasive. Deepfakes are extremely hard to spot unlike other types of false information (Karnouskos, 2020).

Deepfakes become very easy to make because of the free availability of AI-powered tools. Most deepfake applications are stand-alone software applications that can create or alter media without requiring a lot of sample data. Thus, a deepfake generator produces a deepfake in less than 30 seconds. However, training a machine-learning model to produce deepfakes rapidly and with such minimal input is far more complex. Many likeness or voice samples and hours and hours of video footage are needed to capture crucial details (Adee, 2020).

AI-generated deepfakes are dual-use technology. They have positive uses in entertainment, education, accessibility, art, creativity, marketing, and advertising. Deep-faking a celebrity is a common practice that involves making an ordinary person appear and/or sound like a well-known person. Occasionally, this is done as a light-hearted art, such as this TikTok user who makes deepfakes of Tom Cruise. Deepfakes are becoming easily relevant in the digital media landscape because of their power to create highly realistic media that is fabricated and able to blur reality and fiction. However, the malicious uses of deepfake technology far outnumber the positive ones. Because it can enable potentially harmful and even unlawful activities, deepfake technology has generated a lot of controversy. Deepfakes are powerful new tools that scammers can use, impacting public trust, political and social influence, cybersecurity threats, and legal and ethical challenges. They have negative uses in misinformation, disinformation, character assassination, fraud, scams, non-consensual pornography, and social engineering.

Deepfakes allow criminals to successfully pose as other people by altering images, sounds, and even videos. This creates the potential for a variety of fraudulent and illegal actions. Deepfakes can alter audio and video tracks, not just still images, to make a person appear to be someone else, which is particularly concerning. Thus, deepfakes could enable criminals to evade identity verification methods that are supposed to be more secure, such as liveness detection and biometrics.

Political actors, including state leaders, non-state actors, and governments, use digital media strategies to pursue their interests. Due to easy availability, deepfakes offer potent tools to sow discord, spread misinformation, and create distrust among political actors. Discord in the form of character assassination of famous political actors involved in unethical activities and making fabricated statements about political leaders can trigger tensions among political parties and different actors. They also spread misinformation, such as causing interference in elections and helping fuel propaganda.

Deepfakes can manipulate public opinion by creating false statements and actions of political leaders; deepfakes also contribute to the erosion of trust in media and government institutions. As deepfake technology becomes more sophisticated, it is difficult to distinguish between real and fake photos, videos, or statements, causing doubt among the public and political actors, which poses a threat to trust in media and information.

Increased public usage and greater political attention tend to make deepfake technology a critical issue in international politics. This is because their impact may unfold a diplomatic crisis by creating misunderstandings and escalating tensions among nations, leading to strained relationships among states. For instance, by producing and showcasing false orders by military leaders, security threats can be manipulated by sowing confusion among the public. Misinterpreted threats won't only impact national security but also impact international stability. Deepfakes can also be used for propaganda and disinformation by nations to support their goals, build narratives that support them, and influence public opinion, which can contribute to escalating tensions and cause instability.

Thus, Deepfakes can become powerful tools for malicious purposes. AI-generated deepfakes can potentially challenge democratic processes, undermine trust among political actors, and escalate geopolitical conflicts. Due to these challenges, it is required to study the impact of deepfakes on international politics, i.e., how deepfakes may be employed as political weapons for the pursuit of actors' interests in the international arena.

States have been increasingly concerned about its use because it can pose serious threats to states. Therefore, the kind of impact it might create on international politics in the short and long run needs a detailed inquiry. Only when the nature of impact is rightly known can political actors devise appropriate remedies to tackle it. This research aims to investigate the effect that deepfakes (as an evolving phenomenon) can have on International Politics (as it currently exists).

Literature Review

The paper "The Impact of Deepfakes on Elections and Methods of Combating Disinformation in the Virtual World" discusses how malicious deepfake technology use can result in human rights and freedom violations or even help criminal activities like financial fraud. It says that producing manipulated images can also be dangerous for democratic states and the values that underpin them. The article "Artificial Intelligence and Political Deepfakes: Shaping Citizen Perceptions Through Misinformation" highlights that political conspiracies spread quickly on social media in the post-truth era, creating false narratives and making it harder for the public to tell fact from fiction. Deepfakes are the newest form of false information, which presents misleading depictions of events. Research on deepfakes in political communications is scarce, yet they appear convincingly real as technology develops, so it is essential to investigate how they affect public opinion (Michałkiewicz, 2024).

The paper on "Potential threats of unauthorized use of political deepfakes during political elections: international experience" is based on innovative political technologies that leverage Artificial intelligence. This research aims to determine the dangers and hazards connected to the illegal use of political deepfakes in global communication. The author accomplishes this aim by analyzing the ideas surrounding the impact of political deepfakes on elections and identifying the risks and types of deepfakes in various nations' political practices. To alter the outcome of an election or discredit an incumbent politician, the author defines political deepfakes as a unique campaign that uses Artificial intelligence technology to damage political leaders' reputations (Momeni, 2024).

Another paper on "The Socio-Political Implications of Deepfakes in Developing Countries" explores how Deepfakes, artificially realistic media produced by deep learning and artificial intelligence, pose a significant threat to information integrity and political stability. Images and videos once regarded as trustworthy evidence are now being altered to disseminate misleading information and stir up unrest in the new era. Misinformation and manipulation of public opinion could cause fragile democracies to collapse, making developing countries particularly vulnerable to this threat (Lailoma Noor, 2024).

The article "Deepfakes in Cyber Warfare: Threats, Detection, Techniques and Countermeasures" focuses on deepfakes' worldwide risks to nation-state legal, political, and economic systems. The research looks into different approaches to deepfakes. Advances in deep learning and computer vision technologies, commonly called the deepfake breakthrough, have made it attainable to alter faces in still photos and videos with high realism. Deepfake recordings, the great majority of which target politicians or celebrities, have become much more common on the internet (Cinar, 2023). "AI Threats to Politics, Elections, and Democracy: A Blockchain-Based Deepfake Authenticity Verification Framework" says that technologies related to Artificial Intelligence (AI) are posing a growing threat to the integrity of international elections. The impact of AI on elections and

political processes has grown to be a significant concern as it continues to permeate many facets of society. This is because artificial intelligence language models are not neutral nor have objectives (Masabah Bint E. Islam, 2024).

The chapter on ‘Threats and Challenges by DeepFake Technology’ explores The development of deepfake technology as one of AI’s contributions. It has experienced an incredible ascent in the last few years and is still expanding at a breakneck pace. Because it can produce a near-accurate digital fabrication, this technology has caused people, businesses, and democracy to become concerned. DF makes it possible to create synthetic fake videos and images and fabricated media that can threaten political stability, business disruption, and people’s psychological well-being. Malicious users with ideological or geopolitical goals as economically driven individuals or businesses are feared to be tempted to use DFs to manipulate media chronicles, which could have serious social repercussions in the short and long term. Numerous security issues have been brought to light by the ongoing reports about the effects of these DF videos on people and organizations (Sareen, 2022).

Material and Methods

- Research Type: Qualitative
- Research Design: Descriptive-cum-exploratory
- Data collection/Sources: Mainly secondary sources: Identification of case studies of use of deepfakes b/w different political actors
- Data analysis: Recording the final impact known to have been created in each case. General conclusions are drawn based on observed outcomes in cases studied – this qualifies it to be a bottom-up (inductively) reasoned research.

Result and Discussions

Deepfakes And International Politics

“Traditionally, International Politics is the struggle for power between states in the international system” (Hans Morgenthau). But in the 21st Century, the Character of int’l politics has evolved with features different from its historical form. International politics is no longer state-centric. The state is still the central but no longer the unitary or the only actor. Political actors in 21st Century International Politics. The other actor’s which influence International Politics in 21st Century include:

- States: USA, Russia, China, UK, Germany, Australia, etc
- International Organizations: United Nations, World Trade Organization
- Non-governmental organizations: Amnesty International, Red Cross, Gates Foundation
- Multinational Corporations: Apple, Amazon, Ali Baba, Toyota, Microsoft, Open AI
- Transnational Networks: Al-Qaeda, ISIS, black lives matter, ban the bomb
- Media/Domestic Political Actors: CNN, BBC, RT, Aljazeera
- Individual actors: Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos, Mark Zuckerberg, Sam Altman, Jack Ma

If taken against the traditional state-centric character of international politics, DFs could ultimately be treated as one of the many technologies coming under states’ efficient control. However, in the evolving socio-technical context, when the character of international politics defies its traditional understanding, deepfakes becomes pertinent to understand the ways in which Deepfakes can/may challenge international politics.

The impact of deepfakes can be studied with the help of cases where deepfakes are used as political weapons. The criteria of selecting the cases are:

Selected from different issue areas that represent the phenomena of international politics

Issue Areas; Derailing Elections and Democratic Processes, Maligning Reputation of Political Figures, Impacting Outcomes of International Conflicts, Impacting Public Opinion about political rivals, Advancing gendered narrative through pornographic DFs of female politicians

Selection from different regions to represent all geographic zones

Analysing Cases of Deepfake-Use – Identifying Sources, Targets, and Outcomes

Matthew Miller Deepfake video

Matthew Miller's Deepfake video was circulating on social media in May 2024. Belgorod was erroneously stated to be a valid target for Ukrainian strikes in a Deepfake video featuring State Department official Matthew Miller (Malashenko, 2024). The video came up right after the U.S. announced its support for Ukraine to use its weapons. The intention was to spread disinformation & create confusion. To some extent, but not entirely, because it was debunked as a deepfake video. The video remained unchallenged for a few days. Both sides have different responses. The US officials quickly marked this video as a deepfake. US media outlets labelled this video as a deepfake used to spread disinformation, while Russian media posted it on their news channels w/o labelling it as a deepfake.

Vladimir Putin's peace declaration with Ukraine

Vladimir Putin's peace declaration deepfake was made to undermine trust in official communication sources and media (Check, 2022). The video isn't able to meet its intended goal. The video was identified as a deepfake in a few hours. The government's response was swift and precise by calling it a deepfake. Media coverage raises concerns about the potential use of this technology.

Rob Wittman deepfake video

The deepfake video of Rob Wittman's support for DPP during the Taiwan election was made to influence public opinion, create confusion, manipulate election results (Kong, 2024). The goal wasn't met because it was countered as deepfake. The video started circulating on 29th December and was marked as a deepfake till 1st of January. The US government marked the footage as a fabricated and false video. Media coverage on the dangers of disinformation¹.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy deepfake video

A deepfake video purporting to be of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has been posted on the compromised Ukrainian news website Ukraine. In the video, Zelenskyy declares that he will give up his weapons and return to his family (Olorunselu, 2022). The fake video was intended to create confusion among the Ukrainian population and military. The video does not obtain its goal because of its poor quality. The video was quickly labelled as a deepfake. The Ukrainian president called this video a 'Childish Provocation.' The media coverage highlights this as a part of an information warfare campaign and focuses on increasing visual disinformation through DF.

Tsai Ing-wen deepfake video

Social media sites and email inboxes started to spread "The Secret History of Tsai Ing-wen," which contained shocking—and untrue—claims that the president of the Taiwan became powerful through sexual promiscuity (Iyengar, 2024). Was intended to influence public opinion & manipulate election results, causing diplomatic tensions. The goal was unable to be met because of its quick identification. The government response was evident as it marked it as a deepfake.

Slovakia October 2023 Election

The DF video was intended to manipulate election campaign of a pro-Western candidate and influence democratic process (Curt Devine, 2024). The goal was somewhat met because it was not labeled as deepfake on time. So, it somehow spread disinformation. The video remained un-counteracted for two days because it coincided with electoral silence days. Government officials labeled it as deepfake. Media coverage highlights branch of political disinformation

Argentina elections deepfake

Mainstream politicians have used DF imagery to boost their election campaigns. The intention behind DFs was to use it in their favour and to discredit the other opponent (Herrera, 2023). It doesn't directly impact, but the candidate who uses DF more frequently wins the elections. The official response was concerning. The media raised awareness about DFs being used for disinformation.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz

According to a video released by left-wing activists featuring Chancellor Olaf Scholz, the far-right party AFD should be officially banned. The intention behind this deepfake was to disrupt public trust in the AFD party & highlight its dangers. The intention was met because they discussed the AFD Party. The video was debunked as a deepfake quickly. The government criticizes the use of deepfakes for political purposes. The media response highlighted the manipulative use of deepfakes.

Use of Deepfake by BJP Leaders

Deepfake video by BJP Leaders Manoj Tiwari (Jee, 2020). The intention behind the deepfake video was to connect to the border audience in a multicultural society. The intention was unmet because the candidate was unable to win the elections. The video was quickly debunked as a deepfake video. The video was quickly debunked as a deepfake video. Media response to these issues was mixed.

Deepfake video of Kamala Harris

The fake video of Kamala Harris spread on social media in which she was shown in a hit-and-run case that caused paralysis to a 13-year-old girl. The deepfake use to influence the election result and boost Donald Trump's campaign (Matishak, 2024). The intended aim was met to some extent. It was circulated on social media for a few days & spread very quickly. The videos were quickly debunked as deepfake. The official response to those videos was a strong response from the government. The official response to those videos was a strong response from the government.

Findings

The primary characteristics shaping the politics of the 21st century are Globalization, Multipolarity, Nonstate actors, Technological Advancement, Environmental issues, economic inequality, and Human rights. During the 20th century, states were the only primary actors in International politics. However, due to the change in political nature during the 21st century, states do not remain the only political actors that shape the world's politics. Due to the changes in political factors that influence International Politics, technological advancement, which has a dual-used nature, such as deepfake, may be perceived as a political tool.

Deepfakes may significantly impact international Politics. They can create false images, videos, and audio of political leaders and military personnel, confusing the public, government officials, and armed forces. In democratic societies, they can impact the democratic process by influencing public opinion through deepfake-generated misinformation and by interfering in others' domestic elections. Deepfakes also fuel or trigger geopolitical conflicts, undermining democratic relations among states. Deepfake technology poses several challenges, such as misinformation and disinformation, privacy violations, reputation damage, legal and ethical issues, deepfakes used for political manipulation, cyber security concerns (identity theft, phishing), Impact on public trust and media credibility, security threats, confusion and uncertainty in International affairs, and a technological armed race.

Deepfakes become challenging for state actors by undermining trust and credibility, disrupting diplomatic relations by fabricated statements, eroding public trust in leaders, manipulating public opinion, polarizing society and exacerbating tensions, undermining ruling parties' stance on issues, affecting the credibility of politicians/leaders, and making media less trustworthy – thus compromising state's control over information. Deepfakes are propaganda tools, and it is not as dangerous as AI-generated autonomous weapons, but they have destabilizing effects. Right now, it may not be a higher threat, but it will be increasing because of the use of technology in different parts of the world. Deepfakes' impact on international politics is not direct; it is indirect and consistent through the people because the primary purpose of deepfakes is to psychologically impact people and further build a narrative or perception that prevails in international politics. Broadly, it causes polarization, divergence, and destructive impacts among nations because of its inherently fake nature.

Broadly, deepfake technology can destabilize through manipulating public opinion, eroding trust, and undermining diplomacy. It can also legitimize conflicts into wars and discord by sowing confusion among political actors by creating fake videos of military and political leaders. Deepfakes can also exacerbate and disrupt elections, fuel propaganda, and provoke public outrage. Because of its inherently fake nature, it causes polarization, divergence, and destructive impacts among nations.

Conclusion

This research has tried to give an overview of the rising use of the AI-backed Deepfake technology by political actors, in order to gauge the impact these may bring on for the broader arena of international politics. By finding answers to the questions raised at the start, the hypothesis has been validated.

The rapid evolution of AI-driven Deepfakes technology is on the rise. The technology produces fake videos, audio, images, and text and can be used to spread disinformation, malign images, and influence public opinion. Deepfake technology is getting cheaper and more advanced, which will impact international politics because both state and non-state actors widely use it for good and bad purposes. States have been increasingly concerned about its use because it can pose serious political threats. After all, there is no proper

mechanism to detect deepfakes. The research on the impact of deepfakes on International Politics helps understand the threats posed by deepfakes and how to tackle them by making policies and educating people to understand the dangers posed by deepfakes and how to differentiate between what is real and fake. The audio deepfakes are more challenging to detect.

In conclusion, deepfake impacts are psychological, mental, and cognitive. This is how it has the potential to impact the masses. This indirect spread of disinformation impact can erode trust and damage information systems, impact democratic processes, undermining trust and credibility, disrupt diplomatic relations by fabricated statements, erode public trust in leaders, create confusion and uncertainty in International affairs, spread misinformation and disinformation by swaying public opinion, influencing election results by fabricated content, and geographical issues are also likely to be impacted by the deepfakes. The broader impact of deepfakes can cause polarization and divergence among states, by sowing political discord that can undermine diplomatic relations and destroy peace.

The impact of deepfake technology on international politics may be fully seen after a few years because the technology is evolving, and governments and international organizations are still trying to make regulations. As the use of deepfakes increase, detection techniques and tools have been invented. Also, government officials and traditional media are very aware of the deepfake threat. They swiftly report and debunk deepfake audio, videos, and images that mitigate their impact on international politics. But this is all just a case-to-case response. In the longer term a comprehensive plan that well addresses the ethical implications of deepfakes on society, with efficient implementation mechanism would be required.

So far, *Council of Europe's Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law* is the only existing framework, though not having global adherence. While raising public awareness and more attention to research and development in this field is most essential, there is also a need for policy and regulatory initiatives to counter disinformation at both national and international levels. Nationally, legislation that addresses issues of transparency, legal support to victims, and clear penalties for misuse is required. The *Deepfakes Accountability Act by the US* is an example of a law that protects national security. Governments must establish a global standard for transparency and cross-border cooperation, implement penalties, protect rights, and support research on deep-fake technology.

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