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Politics & Artificial Intelligence

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Learning outcomes

At the end of this topic, you should be able to:

- Discuss some of the reasons that political speech is important
- Critically examine the use of bots and deepfakes in politics
- Understand which questions about AI and their part in political life are still open



Related reading

Reading 1

Diakopoulos, N. and Johnson, D., Anticipating and addressing the ethical implications of deepfakes in the context of elections. *New Media & Society*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820925811>.



Outline

1. Overview
2. Political speech & its protection
3. What sort of AI is implicated in political issues?



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Overview of AI & Politics



Introduction

Politics and AI is all about speech

- Speech can be pictures, songs, text as well as speaking
- Specifically, political speech
- Whether it should be free and for whom
- Particularly speech's effect on elections

Q. When should AI-generated speech about political matters be allowed or encouraged or regulated or curtailed completely?



Political Speech

Political speech is seen as a special class of speech

- Seen as vital to the functioning of the political system
- In the US very little political speech can be restricted by the government
- In Australia has an “implied freedom of political communication” in the Constitution
- All of this is about government and citizens though, not companies...

Freedom-of-speech rights balanced with ideas of autonomy and non-interference



AI & Political Speech

AI-driven systems can interfere in politics and elections if they are

- allowed to generate political speech,
- or if they aren't allowed to and it's not detected

AI cannot participate in elections as a voter

- Neither can non-citizens
- Should the political speech of non-human (i.e. AI) speakers be treated in the same way as human speech (as non-citizens)?
- Or be regulated as because they are non-human?



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Political speech & its protection



Freedom of Speech

- In the US very little (human) speech can be restricted by the government
 - First Amendment rights
 - Although see the California Bot law for AI
- In Australia
 - Almost no speech has constitutional protection
 - However the High Court (Australia's constitutional court) has found that there is an "implied freedom of political communication" in the Constitution



Protection of Political Speech

- What is political speech ?
 - Speech act
 - About politics, politicians, policies, parties, parliaments
 - About governments at all levels
 - About candidates and elections
 - About the laws we live under
- Captures quite a broad range of topics



Protection of Political Speech

- Why protect it?
 - Marketplace of ideas
 - Distrust of government influence and interference
 - Allows for autonomy for citizens to make a free choice
- Benefits for speakers and listeners



The future of political speech - Optimism/Pessimism

According to Bruce Schneier:

'[o]ur future will consist of boisterous political debate, mostly bots arguing with other bots. This is not what we think of when we laud the marketplace of ideas, or any democratic political process. Democracy requires two things to function properly: information and agency. Artificial personas can starve people of both'.¹

Compare with:

'[a]fter The Blair Witch Project, people got used to found-footage movies. We can get used to Russia bots and identify the signal through the noise'.²

1. Bruce Schneier, 'Bots Are Destroying Political Discourse As We Know It', Technology <<https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2020/01/future-politics-bots-drowning-out-humans/604489/>>.
2. John Frank Weaver, 'Why Robots Deserve Free Speech Rights' *Slate*.



Liability

For humans, political speech may be limited by e.g.

- anti-terrorism laws
- anti-hate speech laws
- defamation law etc.

But difficult to assign liability or evaluate culpability of AIs under the law

- AIs don't have 'states of mind'
- court may not be able to determine whether a non-human acted with malice or recklessness
- could create an unfair regime where AI speakers were shielded from liability, while human speakers were not



Does AI political speech even count as speech?

For weak AI, possibly

- Its ultimately the product of human design/training/deployment
- “Unforeseeable” behaviours were designed in (if not consequences)
- Should then be treated as extensions of human speech
- Therefore, humans should be liable for any harms caused (as they are now)



Does AI political speech even count as speech?

For strong AI, probably

- If it's the audience that is important
- And if they get something from the speech



Does AI political speech even count as speech? (cont.)

'For constitutional purposes, what really matters is that the receiver experiences robotic speech as meaningful and potentially useful or valuable'.³

It comes down to acceptance:

'whether the speakers are accepted as such by humans, or whether they are seen to be acts by a machine due to its programming'.⁴

3. David M. Skover and Ronald K. L. Collins, 'Robots and Their Receivers' in David M. Skover and Ronald K. L. Collins (eds), *Robotica: Speech Rights and Artificial Intelligence* (Cambridge University Press, 2018) 32-47, 42.

4. Margot E Kaminski, 'Authorship, disrupted: AI authors in copyright and first amendment law' (2017) 51 *UCDL Rev.* 589, 609.



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Types of AI

What types of AI are
implicated in political
speech?



What types of AI are implicated?

- Bots
- Deepfakes
- Offensive cyber abilities that could deploy bots and deepfakes
- Anything that may produce speech artifacts could potentially be implicated
 - text or art or video or...
- Strong AI

All of these involve non-human speakers engaged in (potentially) political speech



Bots

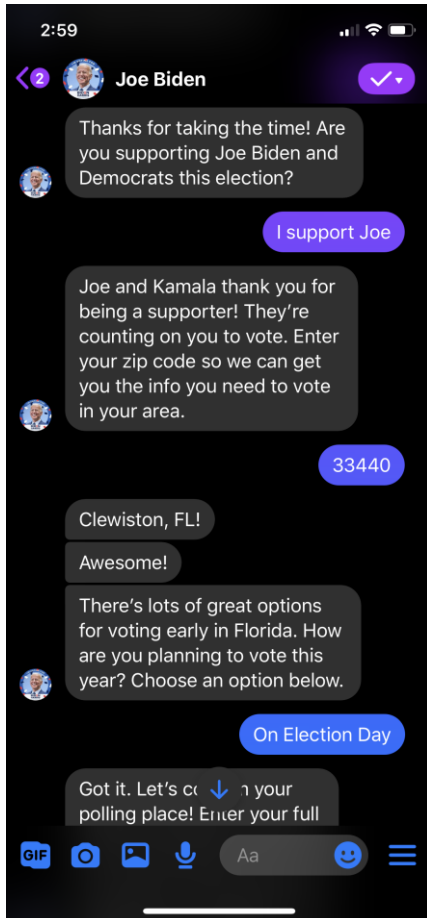
Bot - *“automated online account where all or substantially all of the actions or posts of that account are not the result of a person”* California Bolstering Online

Transparency (*BOT*) Bill SB 1001

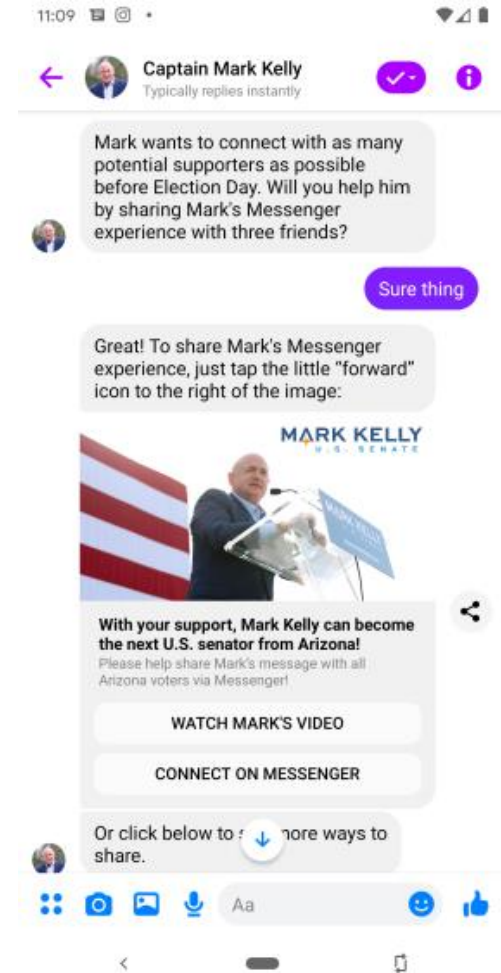
A confusion of bots

- Deception
- Propaganda
- Problems with polarization
- Harmless and useful?

Bots (cont.)



Source: Vishal Disawar <https://vdisawar.medium.com/digital-organizing-tech-2020-investments-and-learnings-d803cf6ba173>



Source: Venturebeat
<https://venturebeat.com/2020/11/30/how-mark-kelly-used-conversational-ai-to-help-win-a-senate-seat/>



Deepfakes

Harms listed by Diakopolous & Johnson

- Harms to viewers/listeners
 - Deception (e.g. <https://youtu.be/5DicGFsXyHo>)
 - Intimidation
- Harms to subjects
 - Reputational
 - Misattribution
- Harms to social institutions
 - Undermining trust in elections

You can read the story at this link to see how relatively simple it was to make a deepfake of the former Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull:

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-28/fake-news-how-hard-is-it-to-make-a-deepfake-video/10313906?nw=0>

Deepfakes

The following still is taken from a video created by researchers showing how an actor (on the left) can control the head pose and facial expressions in the video of a well known person (in this case former President Barack Obama). The link below allows access to a video with more details.



<https://gvv.mpi-inf.mpg.de/projects/DeepVideoPortraits/>

Influences and influencers

- AI generated “news” reports
- Evil nudges (emotional manipulation) and influence(r)s
- Feeling uncomfortable with non-human speech
 - Tay and Lee Luda



Lee Luda. Photo credit: Scatter Lab

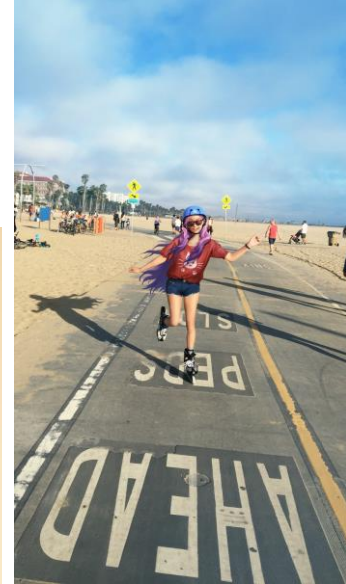
- The uncanny valley

The Uncanny Valley



Virtual influencers

Social media influencers (L to R) – Imma, Lil Miquela, Seraphina. All of these characters are computer generated but exert great influence on their fans.





Strong AI

- Could have opinions?
- Could power very convincing avatars
 - To influence
 - To deceive
- Could be allowed to vote?



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To conclude



Final thoughts

- The issues around fake news, false claims, voter influence via emotional manipulation or online micro-targeting etc. are not confined to AI speech, humans speech is also implicated
- So negative impacts should not be conflated with issues of non-human political speech
 - They pose a separate problem for democracies to deal with
 - AI is an enabling tool, it exacerbates the problems, not causes them

Q. Is a deepfake of Trump saying something untrue manifestly different to Trump saying something untrue?



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Thank you

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