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AI In Nigerian Elections: Tool for Safeguarding Democracy or Weapon for Deepfakes and Disinformation

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Abstract

Background: The pervasive rise of deepfakes and disinformation poses a profound threat to democratic institutions, especially during electoral processes. In Nigeria, where electoral integrity is frequently undermined by misinformation and politically motivated propaganda, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) presents a viable frontier for safeguarding democratic values.

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Purpose: This study was conducted to investigate the multifaceted role of AI technologies in combating the dissemination of deepfakes and disinformation during Nigerian elections, and also enhancing the spread of these malicious media contents.
Methods: The systematic literature review was adopted by the researchers to draw lessons from existing literature and analyse same to find patterns that meet the research objectives. This was also to draw lessons from the past general elections in Nigeria considering relevant literature, case studies, and theoretical models.
Results: This study's results show the role AI played in aiding and fighting disinformation and deep fake, and how the country can leverage on this to improve future elections as preparations are on toward the conduct of the 2027 election. The study also shows that while AI holds considerable promise in identifying and mitigating false information, its success is largely on the role of fact checking organisations who have invested so much resource in combating the menace to improve the integrity and credibility of elections.
Conclusion: The researchers conclude by proposing workable and practicable solutions that if applied by electoral institutions and stakeholders would go a long way in ensuring a sustained and healthy political climate during elections
Novelty: Taking a cue from existing literature, this study provides insights as to ways the challenge of deepfakes can be tackled in Nigeria.
Keywords: Deepfakes, Democracy, Disinformation, Fake news, Elections,

Introduction

In democratic societies, elections are seen to be imperative owing to the platforms and opportunities offered to citizens to expresses their choices through the ballot. This also empowers them to hold them to account whenever they fall short of expectations in respect of public resource management. The citizens are also empowered to also ensure that leaders uphold the rule of law and become mindful of the interests of the majority of the public. Electoral periods usually see a number of efforts by candidates and their political parties in attempts to sway support of the electorate. Accordingly, deepfakes technology has become a factor in election circle. For instance, the technology is utilised in modern time to manipulate the electoral process. This is akin to the challenge of fake news dissemination that posed as threat to elections in different territories of the world. These techniques are growing in popularity and stakeholders with certain intentions are leveraging platforms to perpetuate the acts. An example is the use of bots in different areas of the world.

The manipulation techniques intended in the use of deepfakes is different from the case of fake news. The latter is also about false information intentionally put out there to mislead the audience. However, the threats from the two are same but deepfakes tend to portend much more serious threats to the system. The reason is simple, there is considerable amount of efforts that go into the manipulation techniques deployed through the use of deepfakes to the point that it is somewhat difficult to draw a distinction between AI-manipulated sounds and images and real recordings. The reality effect created with the use of deepfakes is seemingly perfect to the

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extent that research recorded most people faced with difficult when asked to distinguish between synthetically produced content and recordings that depicts real-world event. Researchers such as Barington et al. (2025), Darda et al. (2023) and Ghiurău and Popescu (2024) have shown evidence to back the claim on the difficulty of distinguishing between the contents.

The impact on democracy through electoral manipulation is a different issue of consideration considering the dangerous dimension assumed in recent times. According to van der Sloot and Wagensveld (2022), the use of deepfake technology to spread false and misleading information on the Internet space is a major issue that enabled electoral manipulations in the modern digital era. In some cases, the manipulations reflect in physical terms through the results. Political opponents or opposition figures are often the target of such activities whether at the national or local level of political shenanigans and gerrymandering. In some cases, the personality of candidates and their parties may be the target thereby reducing the amount of public trust on such a political figure. It is usually chiefly due to the harm done to the image and credibility of the person. Such individuals may even be eliminated from the race in extreme cases. In some other cases, the political/public life or career of the politician may disappear into oblivion on account of the damage to the image and reputation.

The level of integrity of the electoral processes in nation determined the extent of the sustainability of its democracy. Gabriel and Owa (2024) lent credence to the foregoing with emphasis on the importance of electoral integrity. However, recent elections have shown a rise in fake news, computational propaganda, increasing use of deepfake technology leading to the erosion of public trust in democratic institutions across Nigeria and all over the world. In this modern era, disinformation is spread and political narratives manipulated through the use of deepfakes. The idea behind deepfakes involves that in which an individual's image or video is produced in a way that another person's likeness is super-imposed in the output of the synthetic media. The idea is to deceive and make the fake appear as though real. The stakes are particularly high in Nigeria considering its struggle with a politically polarised environment and the factor of weak and fragile democratic institutions. Political unrest diminished credibility of the electoral process and outcomes, and the challenge of misleading the voters are some of the critical factors of consideration in respect of campaigns filled with disinformation.

There is also the challenge of the increasing sophistication of the systems including unethical use of artificial intelligence (AI) in our modern societies. AI applications and the proliferation of disinformation and creation of deepfakes pose a great threat to the integrity and credibility of elections across the world. It is even worse in countries with bad records of elections. For example, Nigeria is one of the countries with electoral system that is considered to be greatly vulnerable to misinformation, manipulation, weaponisation through synthetic media, and weak institutional oversight. These are all considered to undermine public trust in the electoral system including communication emanating therefrom herein referred to as political communication. Adebiyi et al. (2025) highlighted misinformation and weaponisation of fake

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news in Nigeria is a serious threat to public trust. Relatedly, researchers have also pinned the erosion of public trust on the dissemination and spread of fake news and misinformation (Inobemhe et al., 2020; Oputa et al., 2025).

Although artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, such as automated fact-checking, algorithmic surveillance, and deepfake detection tools, have been developed as countermeasures, little is known about their applicability, accessibility, and democratic implications in the Nigerian electoral context. Thus, this study tackles the urgent need to investigate the ways in which artificial intelligence is being used to lessen the impact of digital misinformation and assess if these developments are adequate, inclusive, and morally consistent with democratic principles. In addition to being technical, the issue is essentially political, posing concerns about transparency, control, and the changing role of technology in determining democratic legitimacy.

Statement of the Problem

In the African region, Nigeria is a major democratic force considering its large population. This places the nation as the largest democracy in the continent. However, Nigeria has struggled to conduct credible and transparent elections as it is faced with establishing trust worthy and credible electoral system. The nation and the African region in general require credible electoral system and processes for political stability. Mbaku (2024) lend credence to the foregoing with emphasis on the need for credible elections in the continent of Africa This does not, however, imply that the country has not made significant efforts at rebranding and repositioning its institutions. Despite the progress made in promoting democratic practices and values, it is seemingly taken aback by the AI evolution and use in the political space. This study assesses AI technologies and their impact on the electoral process – taking a look the both positive contributions and the inherent challenges. Researchers relied on existing literature and observation of previous elections conducted in the country to provide insights as to the issues in discourse. Accordingly, the paper provides a comprehensive analysis of available AI tools and how they can be leveraged to ensure credible elections in the country.

Objectives of the Study

The study's objectives were to:

1. Ascertain the effects of deepfakes and disinformation in Nigeria's electoral process
2. Evaluate elections in Nigeria in the context of the potential of AI in detecting and mitigating deepfakes and disinformation.
3. Examine the impact of AI in combating deepfakes and disinformation in the electoral process.
4. To ascertain the role of fact-checking organisations in improving electoral integrity.

Review of Related Literature

Though the field is continuously being appreciated and growing in popularity, scholarly attention has recently been dedicated to artificial intelligence, machine language and related studies. Maine and Esiefarienrhe (2024) carried out a study on AI and its impact while also considering its ethical implication on electoral processes. The rationale behind the study was

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to address the question of AI's ethical utilisation toward conducting smooth elections and ways this can be leveraged to improve electoral processes. According to the researchers, there is so much to benefit from the ethical use of AI in the electoral process and it is even more so when the electoral umpire shows signs of being ethically upright in AI use. The researchers relied on expert judgment and systematic literature review as research designs for the study. Various AI techniques and tools used for the purpose of ensuring credible elections were analysed in the study. The researchers showed various points that define AI's negative application towards influencing voters – and they identified automated bots, deepfakes, data privacy breaches, microtargeting psychological profiles of voters, voting pattern prediction, cyberattacks directed on electronic devices used for election purposes and more are the various ways AI influence elections in negative dimensions. The researchers recommended ethical AI use in elections which they said can be achieved through providing trainings for citizens on how AI can be used prior, during and after each polls. Training on ways to handle threats connected to AI was also recommended.

A related study was conducted by Gehringer et al. (2024) on how deepfakes influence elections. The researchers attempted to ascertain the discourse on the impact is mere alarmism or legitimate concerns. In the study, the 2024 was described as a year of the super elections on account of the more than 30 countries that conducted presidential elections and another 20 that held parliamentary polls. The researchers cited a several examples of deepfakes utilisation in electoral processed and warned of the powerful and negative consequences not yet measured. It was also revealed that these have grave consequences for political communication, political process and elections. According to the researchers, elections conducted around the world continue to face great danger considering the permeating influence of deepfakes. Accordingly, even information integrity is threatened due to the thin line between the real and unreal as anything could be "deepfaked." The researchers recommended that media and political actors endeavour to outline, publish and ensure the enforcement of ethical standards required for the use of AI in political encounters including campaigns, reporting, advertising and political communication in its entire form.

The focus of a study conducted by Adewumi (2024) was on the efficiency of elections in Nigeria and Africa within the context of AI. The researcher explored the potential benefits of AI in respect of enhancing accountability, transparency, efficiency, challenges and risks associated with implementing the systems in the global South. Furthermore, the study was also conducted to examine specific AI technologies adopted for electoral processes in Nigeria – and by this considered electronic voter register, biometric authentication system while also considering their impact on electoral fraud prevention and voter turnout during major elections in the country. The study further had its focus on the challenges faced by Nigeria's electoral umpire the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in the management of electoral database and what AI holds for process optimisation and streamlining. The researcher showed that the increase in the rate of adoption and use of AI technologies for electoral matters in the

continent in general and Nigeria in particular present unique opportunities and challenges at the same time. It is particularly the case for democratic government in Nigeria and Africa.

On a similar note, Ekpang et al. (2023) conducted another study with focus on AI and social media with particular attention given to the use of deepfakes during Nigeria's 2023 general elections. The researcher relied on responses from South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria with states like Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta and Rivers as geographic area of the study. Quantitative data analysis techniques were the basis for analysing the data from the survey. Findings of the study showed a massive use of deepfakes during the 2023 general elections as spotted in contents in form of "deepfaked" audios and videos and edited images. The perceptions of the voters were manipulated through these deepfakes just as some others were relied upon to defame the character of some political figures while mocking others. Accordingly, deepfakes elements were also leveraged to stereotype certain politicians in Nigeria during the period. Furthermore, the researcher showed that AI in form of deepfakes was prominently features across social media platforms and particularly presented to damage the reputation on image of some politicians in the country. This also involved the use of propaganda to depict some political figures as misfits not worthy of elective positions in the country. The researchers concluded that there was predominant use of AI in form of deepfakes to achieve negative intentions during the polls and recommended that laws be enacted to regulate the use AI particularly as it concerns deepfakes in the political sphere of Nigeria.

Deepfakes implications and impact on elections and politics of Nigeria was the focus of a study by Emovwodo and Ayo-Obiremi (2024) in which the researchers adopted a qualitative exploratory research design to assess the use, occurrences and effects of deepfake technologies in elections in the country. Drawing insights from the elections conducted in 2015and 2019, the researchers sought to investigate the implications of deepfakes on the politics and elections in Nigeria. The researchers identified the Internet and mobile technology as phenomena that greatly altered voter engagement and campaign strategies used in elections in Nigeria. The country is said have evolved through its use of technology for the conduct of elections as exemplified in the 2015 and 2019 general elections. With deepfakes being used for images, voices and videos manipulation, the study showed that the 2023 general elections there was a new dimension to the use of technologies to manipulate the electoral process in Nigeria. Furthermore, the researchers revealed that there was a greater level of use of deepfakes during the 2023 general elections toward manipulative intentions. The researchers showed that the findings are crucial for learning and that recommendations are useful for the electoral of system and make it better for future conduct of elections at various levels – federal, state and local.

In a study conducted by Tajudeen (2025), the focus was on assessment of the possible impact of AI on Nigeria's elections. The researchers recognised the growth seen in technologies and relied on the fact to examine ways AI could possibly impact elections in Nigeria. Accordingly, the researcher showed that advancement in technology as typified in AI and related innovations have had significant impact on the electoral process. Based on the diffusion of innovation theory the researchers demonstrated that AI portends both positive and negative consequences

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depending on the pattern of use of INEC and the enabling legislation created to guide its adoption and use. It was recommended that the umpire and different level of administration and governance should strive to create public awareness to educate the Nigerian voting public on the capabilities and operations of AI as it concerns elections and electoral process. According to the researchers, this will help curtail the likely impact of AI-generated disinformation and misinformation that presently characterise elections in the country.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the democratic innovation theory and technological determinism theory. Democratic innovation theory emerged in the late 20th and early 21st centuries as political scientists and governance scholars began to explore new methods of enhancing democratic participation beyond traditional electoral systems. Scholars such as Archon Fung and Erik Olin Wright contributed to its development by proposing "empowered participatory governance" and deliberative forums as innovative mechanisms to deepen democratic engagement. Among other things, the theory focuses on technological tools that aim to improve transparency, aid accountability and foster the engagement of citizens in the governance process.

This theory is based on the notion that with technological advancements, democracy should evolve to incorporate these modern developments. The democratic innovation theory is particularly relevant to this study as the inclusion of AI into the electoral process has seen both a safeguard through AI-powered fact-checking measures, and a likely threat to the democratic process of elections, through disinformation and deepfakes which affect the transparency of political communication and negatively influence voter choices. Democratic Innovation Theory backs up the view that innovative mechanisms such as AI technologies are important to enhance the credibility of the democratic process in this time and age.

In Nigeria, where the integrity of our Elections is threatened by disinformation and deepfakes, AI tools are a *democratic innovation* that saves the day, in a manner of speaking. Through fact-checking organisations that rely on AI-powered tools and innovations, disinformation and deepfakes are being detected and debunked, and this has a multiplier effect on citizens who end up being better-informed. This theory is also relevant to this research as it recognises that only when citizens are better informed and have a measure of trust in political institutions can they willingly participate actively in the democratic process of elections.

Technological Determinism Theory, which has its roots in works of scholars such as Thorstein, Marshall McLuhan in 1962, and later Neil Postman, holds that technological development is important in driving social change. As McLuhan's famous quote "the medium is the message," states, the media, not just the content they push out can influence how the society thinks and operate in a given setting. The theory is valuable to this study because it not only looks at AI as a tool used in elections but also as a transformative figure that redefines how the process, communication and democratic engagement of elections can go. In today's ever-changing world, and with the rise in digital technological innovations, AI can influence the outcome of

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political campaigns, how voters will vote, and even what the generality of the population would deem as the true reflection of candidates and their parties as they hit the polls.

The technological determinism theory helps us understand the threats deepfakes pose to the electoral process on one hand, and the countermeasures of AI in combating these threats on the other hand. The theory helps us appreciate how deepfakes created by sophisticated AI tools continue to alter the political landscape. In addition, the theory helps us to better come to terms with the fact that AI technologies that counter these threats to democracy are not simply created to respond to these growing threats, but that they in themselves herald a new technological order that will shape electoral outcomes and strengthen the trust of electorates in the democratic process and in democratic institutions.

Using the Nigerian examples, the theory tells us how these digital methods have gradually relegated and more like incorporated traditional methods into modern-day tech methods of verifying information, as the sophistication of deepfakes have to be matched with the sophistication of technologies to tell the truth. As disinformation technologies become more advanced, they influence not only the conduct of political actors but also the behavior of citizens, many of whom rely on social media for political news. The deployment of AI to combat these disinformation tactics illustrates how one technological wave (AI) is being used to control the effects of another (deepfake), reinforcing the deterministic nature of technological influence.

Methods

The study is based on systematic literature review. This was done in line with Nightingale (2009) to search and identify literature in researches that answer the objectives of a study. Accordingly, researchers of this study embarked on a search of literature across databases to provide answers to this study's objectives that border on AI and the impact on elections in Nigeria. Research Gate, Scopus and Web Science were the major data bases for this study. The rationale for this was to ensure that research on AI within the context of elections not warehoused on Scopus and Web Science can be identified due to the large base of Nigerian researchers with uploads on Research Gate. The inclusion criteria include the type of study, outcome measures and comparison while exclusion was date of publication. Studies earlier than 2015 were excluded from the final selection upon which this study's analysis was drawn. Consequently, the time frame for inclusion is 2015 – 2025 while exclusion is earlier than 2015 and this implies that studies from 2014 were not analysed for this study. The search and selection process is captured in the PRISMA diagram below:

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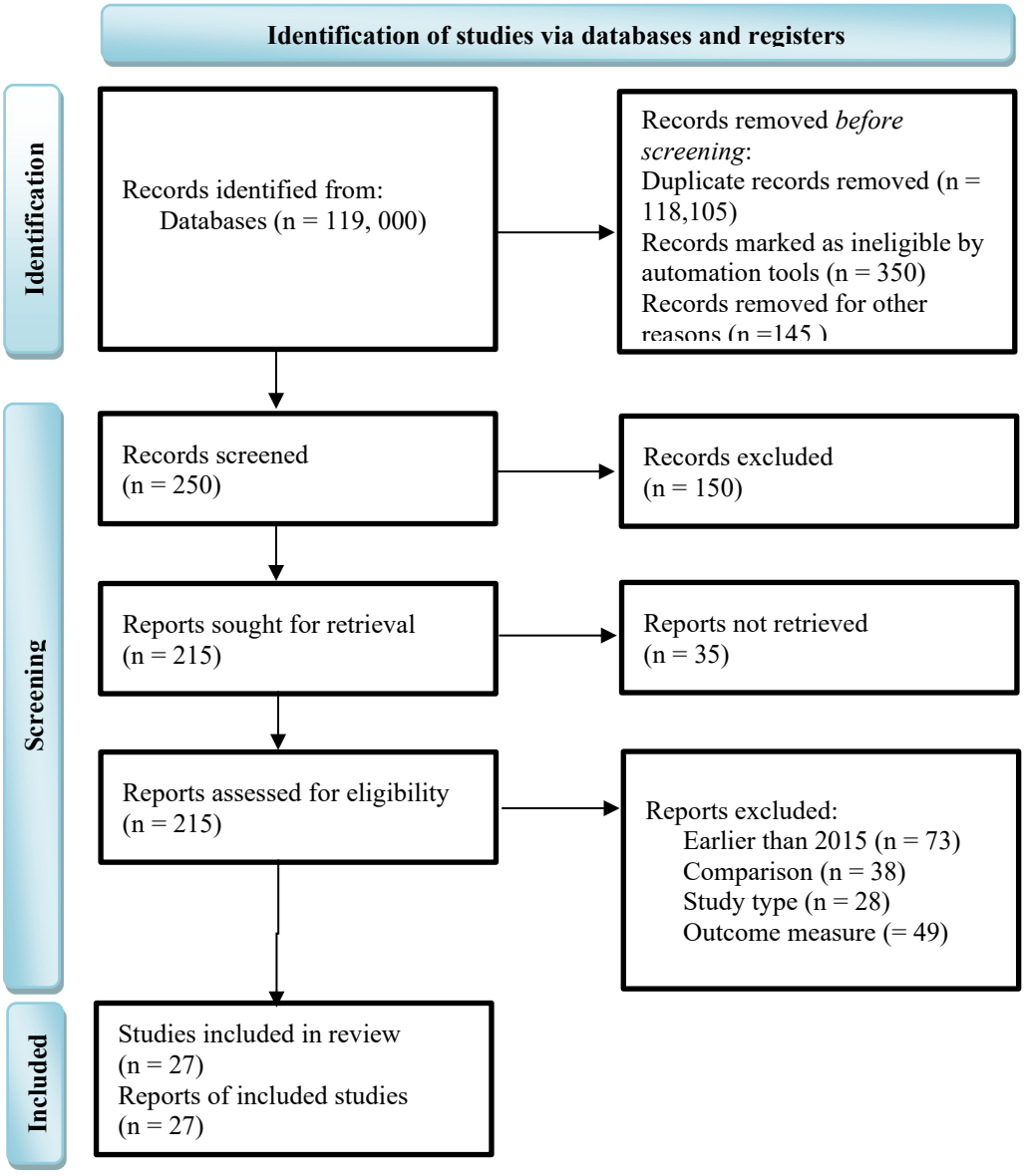

Figure 1: PRISMA flow diagram

Results and Discussion

Effects of Deepfakes and Disinformation in the Electoral Process

McGonagle (2017) defines Disinformation as "information that has been intentionally made up and circulated intending to deceive and mislead others into believing falsehoods or not questioning verifiable facts, it is disinformation that is presented as or is likely to be perceived as news." The dissemination of disinformation is not new; it has existed for a very long time in different forms. However, with the continuous evolution of modern IT technologies, it has now made it easier for people to not only access it, but also share it. Sivalo (2024) acknowledged that with social media, the spread of dissemination has seen a rapid speed. Disinformation impacts negatively on the integrity and credibility of democratic processes,

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especially as it limits the ability of citizens to make informed decisions and erodes their trust in political institutions. Left unchecked, it will go as far as undermining the very Electoral process that should have otherwise been credible.

When AI and modern technologies were introduced into the electoral process in Nigeria, it came with its fair share of complexities and uncertainties. The advent of deepfakes that have seen a more sophisticated approach to manipulating multimedia content have gone deep and now comes with more improved tools that do not mean well for democratic processes. Rafique et al. (2023) noted that these deep fakes employ the use of machine learning techniques to create images or videos in such a way that it is very difficult to say if it is real or not, because of how convincing it is made to look. In most cases, they portray individuals, especially notable public figures as saying or doing something they never did. As Tar and Ibrahim (2023) noted, these creations can go on to tarnish the hard-earned image and reputation of these ones, and even go as far as implanting fear and suspicion among the people. It has been difficult over time to identify and prosecute creators of such malicious content as they hide their identities. This trend undermines the very principles of democracy and threatens the electoral process, affecting the outcome of polls and public perception of individuals.

In Nigeria where the political climate is usually tensed during elections, disinformation often spread through deepfakes hugely influence electoral outcomes. For instance, a fabricated video could show a political candidate making statements that are generally deemed provocative or inciteful and this may influence his or her chances at the polls. As earlier established, these deepfakes can appear to be so real that any attempt to convince people otherwise would be met with resistance. The unregulated use of social media has further made this easier, and before factual information would be released to debunk the deepfake, it would have already gone viral. van Huijstee (2021) observed that as it is, deep fakes used in electoral seasons are now done with a view to discrediting political opponents and by means of algorithm amplification, these harmful contents are now easily and swiftly circulated, thereby making it difficult for debunking. At this rate, it is no longer a question "if" deep fakes affect elections. It is now a question of when, how and to what extent it does. Accordingly, Brown (2020) noted that with every election the method of using deep fakes assumes a new dimension. It can be used to defame a political opponent, blow minor rumours out of proportion, or go for topics that the public would readily react to with outrage.

Gehringer et al. (2024) recalled that among other negative effects of deep fakes in our electoral process is that it is done with the intent to denigrate, discredit, distort and utterly damage political rivals. Further, they are strategically created to be used in negative campaigning; meaning that it is not to persuade people to vote in their favour, but not to vote in the favour of the victim of such malicious content. And by so doing the people would be in fact voting for them (the creators or such deepfakes). At times, they are not necessarily done to be life-like, but so long as they send a message that relates with the people, the mission would be accomplished. Even when that content is flagged as being "produced with AI," some people

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would still choose to go along with it, since it touches on what they are most emotionally attached to.

Taking Lessons from Nigeria

It is not in doubt that deepfakes can have effects on voter behavior in the political process. In the 2023 general elections, this was brought to the fore. In a survey by the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) findings showed that out that about 15% of respondents had their voting choices influenced by what they later knew to be a deepfake encountered during the elections. This shows that undeniably, deepfakes can influence voter choices. A few instances from the elections in Nigeria would show to what extent deepfakes were brought into the political process.

The then presidential candidate of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Bola Tinubu in one of his speeches was seen and reported to have said "balablu." However, in defense of his principal, Mr. Dele Alake, Director of Strategic Communication of the political campaign said the video which went viral was manipulated and claimed it was a deepfake. In response, a fact check report by the CDD countered Alake's claims and proved the video was in fact true. Further, Folorunsho-Francis (2023) reported how a deepfake was used to fabricate a leaked audio phone conversation that allegedly took place between Peter Obi, Labour Party's presidential candidates in 2023 elections and David Oyedepo, the founder and head of Living Faith Church, was widely circulated. Upon its release it generated so much frenzy and controversy that affected public perception of the candidate.

In addition, Anjorin (2022) reported how a deepfake video was manipulated to spread lies. The original video was that of an interview where popular American artistes were brought to a panel conversation. In the original video, questions were displayed on a placard to which the guests were expected to comment on. However, in the deepfake video, the placard was manipulated to read, "Yes, it makes sense to Vote Peter Obi in 2023." This false content was quickly spread across social media platforms, generating likes, comments and shares in large numbers. Additionally, Emovwodo and Ayo-Obiremi (2024) recalls how another deepfake video which went viral on *WhatsApp* claimed Elon Musk, a billionaire in the United States endorsed the Labour Party candidate, Peter Obi.

Further, Emovwodo and Ayo-Obiremi (2024) equally calls to mind another notable example of how deepfake was used in the elections to whip up public sentiment. The researchers pointed to a manipulated audio recording purportedly between the Presidential and Vice Presidential candidate of the People's Democratic Party; Atiku Abubakar and Ifeanyi Okowa and the Director-General of the PDP's presidential campaign and Sokoto State Governor, Aminu Tambuwal. The deepfake conversation made it seem that the trio discussed strategies to rig the elections. However, Shibayan (2023) added that it took the effort of independent fact-checkers to prove not only that some words were doctored but that some parts of the purported conversation were not the real voices to those whom the deepfake said they were.

Davis (2024) referenced an investigation by the *BBC* which reported that as part of their campaign activities, some political players and their parties paid social media influencers to

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circulate deepfakes and distorted media content. Another example can be that of how Bola Tinubu's statement at Chatham House in London was doctored to say something entirely different from what he originally said and this spread like a wildfire across several social media platforms, heightening tense political discourse. These are a few of several cases of how deepfakes were used to sway public opinion either in favour of or against political candidates. These concerns of manipulation show how AI poses a huge challenge to electoral integrity and efficacy. Deepfakes rears its ugly head in the polity, especially with the kind of sophistication it is assuming that makes it easy to create and disseminate manipulated content of notable figures in the political environment. This issue is not only a Nigerian thing, as the African Council in a 2021 report warned that deepfakes have the capacity and potential to disrupt elections and undermine democracy and democratic institutions.

With the growing evolution of technology, especially as in this case being used in negative ways, there is a need for caution especially as Nigeria prepares for the 2027 general elections which is already seeing some reports of AI-generated manipulations. There is an impending threat of manipulated media and false narratives which may herald the upcoming polls, and this highlight the need for measures to strengthen electoral campaigns integrity and protect the democratic ideals upon which political system is Nigeria is built. Inasmuch as it can be agreed that deepfakes were prevalently used in the 2023 general elections, there was still hope, as AI was used in combating them. The next section looks at the efforts of various organisations in making this happen.

Impact of AI in Combating Deepfakes and Disinformation in the Electoral Process

Election is the backbone of true democracy as it gives citizens the chance to choose and determine who leads them, and as they do so, they are in their right to hold such elected leaders to account for how they protect their interest, manage the state and its organs in their power. According to Maine and Esiefarienrhe (2024), electoral processes are often times affected by corruption, lack of access to proper education, manipulations, and with the evolution of Artificial Intelligence, people are now more interested in bringing it to improve the electoral process. Though deep fakes have been made so sophisticated that it is now more difficult to detect, however, Mkparu et al. (2024) averred that by using content and context-based methods, AI can offer real solutions for identifying these manipulated contents.

Shedding light on the content and context-based methods, Mukta et al. (2023) noted that on the one hand, the content-based method analyses the facial features of individuals, their voice patterns, audio and visual artifacts with a view to detecting inconsistencies in such. On the other hand, the context-based method simply considers how credible the source and the information itself may be. Furthermore, Mukta el al also mentioned platforms like *Deepware* and *Sensity* as tools that help in verifying, especially as they use more advanced algorithms to accurately identity deepfakes. Though these methods can be challenging, recent advancements made in AI algorithms and resources can adequately cater to these concerns. Adee (2020) also identified platforms that use cloud-based AI to effectively analyse a large amount of digital content. These platforms include; *DeepTrace* and *Dessa.* In addition, edge computing

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technologies can make it possible for real-time detection of deepfakes content with the aim to mitigate their spread and circulation across online platforms. Since those who create these deepfakes continue to come up with new methods to perpetuate their agenda, AI which is used to counter these methods are also undergoing continuous modification and improvements.

To effectively counter disinformation, it is important to detect it on time. In like manner, methods to detect deepfakes have over time advanced rapidly. Tools that now recognise facial expressions and some inconsistencies that may not be seen by those viewing are being incorporated into this detection process. As threats increase, measures to counter them also increases and undergoes rapid improvements. AI technologies can now detect and identify pixel-level inconsistencies that the human eye may not see. These AI models are specifically trained based on a large set of data that consists of both fake and real content, only then can the authentic media and the fabricated media can be accurately identified and spotted. In a a study by Karandikar et al. (2020), the researchers came up with an AI-based system that was able to accurately detect deepfakes with an accuracy percentage of over 90% by analysing irregularities in facial movements and skin textures. By this, it is clear that AI even if being used negatively, is also instrumental in defending and deepening the electoral process from disinformation.

With the threats posed by deepfakes to our electoral process, AI is showing its potential and effectiveness is countering it's negative use. With the use of natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning algorithms, AI can be used in analysing the language and structure of social media posts and news articles in detecting patterns and identifying content that have the potential to be misleading or false in its entirety. Pilati and Venturini (2025) observed that AI can analyse text, images and videos to identify anomalies that signal disinformation, and only when it has been identified, can it be prevented from further spreading.

In nations that have fragile electoral systems, disinformation can utterly undermine democratic institutions and processes. In Nigeria, the 2023 general elections saw an unprecedented spread of dissemination that threatened the political landscape. To address this, civil societies and other groups had to collaborate with AI companies to adequately monitor and flag manipulated content that were made to target electoral candidates. These technologies went a long way to protect electorates from toxic information or disinformation, and tipped key players in the electoral process to these dangers. In the 2023 general elections, tools that were AI-driven were deployed by a number of organisations and media watchdogs to monitor, detect and debunk manipulated content. The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) for instance, reached a partnership with AI specialists, fact checking organisations and digital forensic experts to counter disinformation. They made use of machine learning algorithms to flag content deemed as suspicious, trace how it started and then raise the alarm. Their “Election War Room” deployed a dashboard powered by AI to promptly detect disinformation campaigns that were made to target presidential candidates, in addition to videos that had altered subtitles or audio messages created to mislead voters.

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A case in point was a deepfake video spread on *WhatsApp* by falsely depicting a presidential candidate as endorsing the candidacy of an opponent. The video was not so sophisticated, however it was manipulative in that it used linguistic mimicry and facial overlays that if not properly looked at could easily confuse someone. AI tools used by some fact-checking organisations such as *Dubawa* and *Africa Check* were instrumental in analysing the metadata of videos, identify anomalies in those videos and promptly alert the public on these deepfakes. These measures were key in reducing the impact of such deepfake videos on voter perception. Nigerian elections have also benefited from AI interventions. Also in the 2023 general elections, researchers identified *Twitter (X)* networks that were being used to spread disinformation. By means of trained AI models, several of these fake accounts were quickly identified and reported. By gaining from the general elections, it is clear that AI tools, though used to spread disinformation, were also positively deployed in protecting the integrity of elections by exposing deepfakes and in effect promoting credible political communication.

Role of Fact-checking Organisations in Improving Election Integrity

Moran (2018) conceptualised fact-checking initiatives as being very instrumental in the fight against disinformation and providing valuable services to both the journalists and citizens. These fact checks employ the use of AI, some of which are developed by fact-checking organisations themselves, to adequately detect and debunk disinformation and enhance their fact-checking capabilities. Without a doubt, politics and issues around that sector can whip up public sentiment. As such, it is wise to fact-check statements, claims and generally information on it because opinions formed on it by members of the society can informs actions and inactions to a large extent. When people form opinions and make decisions based on content they consume, it may lead them to make uniformed decisions that may result in unintended consequences. When political disinformation is circulated on social media platforms, it could negatively impact the opinion of the voting public and it can go on to determine what the outcome of elections would be.

Accordingly, Mena (2018) considered fact-checking as an important element to probe claims made by political players, institutions and even the media, in response to political disinformation and deepfakes. In the 2023 general elections, the Nigerian political system saw an influx in fact-checking websites and institutions. Fact-checking Organisations like *Africa Check, Dubawa, FactCheckHub and RoundCheck* have been active in monitoring deepfakes in Nigeria's elections, especially in the 2023 general elections. Jamiu (2020) described these fact-checking platforms as implementing notable efforts that provide journalists, researchers and students with the capability for verifying content. Fact-checking Organisations though effective on their own, still work in partnership with social media platforms to help improve the effectiveness of their efforts. The partnerships help the social media platforms to flag deepfake content spotted by fact-checking organisations and take them off their platform. For instance, Atoyebi as cited in Oyediji (2024) recalls that Facebook partnered with Nigerian fact-checkers to curb the spread of manipulated media on its platform. The benefit of this

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partnership is that deepfake content were swiftly identified and taken down, and advanced AI tools were used for this purpose.

Additionally, Oyedeji (2024) demonstrated that fact-checking organisations like *Africa Check* and *Dubawa* have employed the use of AI-powered software that can quickly identify and detect elements of manipulation such as anomalies and inconsistencies in videos. These sophisticated tools used by the fact-checking organisations were instrumental in analysing facial movements, inconsistencies in lighting, and pixelation, to determine how authentic or otherwise the contents are. According to Akewushola (2024), in the run up to the 2024 Edo State Governorship elections, a group - the Nigerian Fact-Checkers' Coalition (NFC) launched Election Situation Rooms to monitor and counter misinformation and disinformation from the elections. The aim of this group was to tackle disorder in information, detect, fact-check and debunk misinformation and disinformation that could incite violence, make voters apathetic and undermine trust in the electoral process. The coalition which was established in 2022, preceding the 2023 general elections in Nigeria is made up of fact-checking organisations like *Africa Check, FactCheckHub,* and *Dubawa,* and they all are signatories of the IFCN - International Fact-Checking Network.

Similarly, to further strengthen their credibility and improve the integrity of elections, other partners of the group include the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID), International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), Digital Africa Research Lab, FactsMatterNG, Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), RoundCheck, and several media houses like *Daily Trust, Premium Times,* and *The Cable.* The coalition equally made its mark in the 2023 general elections, by leveraging on their huge network of researchers, data analysts and social media specialists to counter disinformation and deepfakes in the elections. Following their effectiveness in the 2023 general elections, the model used by the coalition has been adopted in other countries like Kenya, Senegal and South Africa.

In addition, Suleiman (2024) considered the launch of *Dubawa* Chatbot as a significant advancement in the fight against disinformation in Nigeria. The reason is that this chatbot is easily accessible on *WhatsApp* and citizens can verify information in seconds. In unveiling the tool, a team member and head of Innovation at CJID, Monsur Hussain said the chatbot leverages on real-time internet data to provide accurate and timely responses to the enquiries users make. Hussain further said the *Dubawa* Chatbot has enhanced reliability compared to other AI tools like *ChatGPT* and *MetaAI.* During the launch, the Chatbot was able to confirm the news about Sanusi Lamido's reinstatement as the Emir of Kano, just hours after the event occurred, while other AI tools were not able to. By this evidence, it is clear that AI has the potential to fact-check social media content. The researchers of this study were able to explore this tool and found it to be effective. In addition, *Dubawa* also came up with an audio platform that monitors radio programs and extracts verifiable information from them. This tool caters to information that can be in form of audio. Also another platform that helps in combating deepfakes and disinformation is *FactCheckAfrica's MyAIFactChecker* which was also launched in 2022, and the platform includes a chatbot and a facility for voice search that makes

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fact-checking flexible. As Iniobong (2024) reckoned, this tool is instrumental in elections where misinformation can have negative consequences for democracy.

Furthermore, Wilkinson (2023) drew our attention to *Full Fact,* which is a UK-based organisation that fights misinformation through fact-checking. The organisation over the years, from 2015, was developing AI fact-checking technology, until in 2019 when they were given a grant through the Google AI Impact Challenge. In the 2023 general elections in Nigeria, the tools developed by *Full Fact* were deployed to fact-checking claims. 23 fact checkers were brought on board and received training and support. Wilkinson (2023) further reported that the tools, on a daily basis, presented an average of over 40,000 fact-checkable claims to users from over 80 media users. These claims were then filtered using sophisticated methods by means of keywords. To further enhance their work, *Full Fact* supported International Fact Checking Network (IFCN) members like *Africa Check, Dubawa* and *FactCheckHub,* and ahead of the 2027 general elections, these groups are poised to leverage on their gains in the 2023 general elections to keep truth alive!

Conclusion

With disinformation and deepfake technology rapidly taking over the political climate, it poses profound challenges to the integrity of political processes and electoral systems in Nigeria. Lessons learnt from the 2023 general elections in Nigeria showed the potential of AI in reducing and undermining democratic institutions and reducing them to subjects of mockery in the polity, by widely circulation disinformation and manipulated content powered through deepfakes. As Nigeria looks ahead to the 2027 general elections and beyond, there exists a serious need to come up with stricter measures to counter the spread of disinformation, as it has been known to negatively affect the electoral process. As deepfakes take deep roots, it becomes more difficult to counter it using traditional models, hence the need for more sophisticated software and applications, along with trained personnel to carry out this all-important task that shape our electoral systems and the society at large. Left unchecked, these products of deepfakes can affect public opinion on candidates, undermine democracy and democratic institutions and even go a long way in tarnishing their hard-earned reputation, such that even when debunked, that perception may have been too ingrained in the mind and hearts of electorates and they may still see that politician from such lenses. AI-generated deepfakes defame characters and this has seemingly become a safe way for smearing the reputation of candidates without fear of litigation.

Recommendations

1. In addition to the social media bill and cybercrime act, the legislature should enact stringent laws that directly names and addresses the making and distribution of deep fakes.
2. The Electoral bodies and political institutions can invest in AI-detection tools that could analyse content to detect manipulation of all kinds, and set up a special team to be on the lookout for deepfakes so as to counter it almost as soon as it is circulated.

3. The traditional media can also allot few minutes in their daily programming to reporting on the fact checks done by fact checking organisations, to further reach those who may not have access to social media, or may encounter such deepfakes on a later date.
4. The job of detecting and debunking deepfakes and disinformation especially in the electoral system should not only be reserved for fact checking organisations. Traditional media houses too could set up desks for such purposes and network with their likes to do this effectively.
5. The Ministry of Information and National Orientation and the National Orientation Agency should put in more effort in enlightening the public on the dangers of spreading such malicious content, and law enforcement agents should clampdown on frequent purveyors of deepfakes.

Authors' Contribution

Conceptualisation: WIO; Data curation: NTSU; Data Analysis: OEM; Writing original draft: KI

Conflict of Interest

Authors declare no conflict of interest

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