

## Campaigning in the Age of AI: Ethical Dilemmas and Practical Solutions for The UK and US



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**ABSTRACT:** The increasing integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in political campaigns has introduced significant advancements in voter engagement and campaign strategies, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States. However, this development also raises complex ethical concerns that challenge the integrity of democratic processes. This study examines the implications of AI in political campaigns, focusing on its applications in micro-targeting, AI-generated content, and voter behavior analysis. Drawing on case studies from the Brexit referendum and U.S. presidential elections, the analysis highlights how AI has been leveraged to enhance campaign efficiency through data-driven targeting and personalized messaging. While these technologies have revolutionized political communication, they also present ethical challenges, including manipulation, privacy violations, and accountability.

Findings indicate that AI-generated content, such as tailored ads and deepfakes, risks misleading voters and amplifying biases, thereby eroding trust in political messaging. Privacy concerns also emerge from the extensive use of voter data, often collected without explicit consent, raising questions about transparency and ethical boundaries. Additionally, the lack of accountability for AI-driven misinformation further undermines public confidence in electoral processes. The study underscores the urgent need for comprehensive regulatory frameworks and ethical guidelines to ensure the responsible use of AI in political campaigns. By addressing these concerns, stakeholders can safeguard democratic values while harnessing the benefits of AI for transparent and equitable political engagement. This research contributes to ongoing debates about the role of AI in shaping modern political landscapes and emphasizes the imperative of ethical oversight.

**KEYWORDS:** Campaigning, AI & Ethical Dilemma

### INTRODUCTION

Campaigning is an integral aspect of democratic electoral systems, serving as a crucial avenue for candidates to convey their policy agendas, influence public opinion, and galvanize voter participation (Grbeša, 2005). Within democratic frameworks, campaigns play a pivotal role in promoting informed decision-making, fostering transparency, ensuring accountability, and encouraging active civic engagement. The adoption of emerging technologies has significantly extended the reach and impact of political campaigns. However, the recent incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) into campaign strategies has notably reshaped the dynamics of political communication, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States, bringing forth both innovative opportunities and multifaceted challenges to the democratic process.

In both the United Kingdom and the United States, AI-powered tools have swiftly become central to contemporary political campaigns, offering advanced functionalities for voter data analysis, customized communication, and automated engagement. These technologies enable campaigns to craft highly personalized messages, anticipate voter concerns, and sustain continuous interactions with constituents through automated platforms. While AI significantly improves campaign efficiency and effectiveness, its application within political contexts introduces pressing ethical and practical challenges. The growing influence of AI tools on public opinion has sparked concerns over transparency, privacy, and equity in political messaging, highlighting a complex tension between technological progress and the principles of democratic accountability.

The integration of AI into political campaigning raises significant ethical concerns that challenge the core values of democratic systems. Key challenges include the lack of transparency in AI-driven processes, the potential for algorithmic biases in voter targeting, and the threats to voter privacy inherent in data-intensive approaches. In both the United Kingdom and the United States, these issues underscore the critical importance of aligning technological innovations with measures designed to protect democratic integrity. In the absence of robust ethical oversight, the use of AI in campaigns risks enabling voter manipulation, undermining autonomy, and diminishing public confidence in the electoral process.

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## Statement of the Problem

The incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) into political campaigning has fundamentally transformed the strategies employed by political actors to engage with voters, offering opportunities for increased efficiency alongside notable ethical concerns. In democratic societies such as the United Kingdom and the United States, campaigns are progressively leveraging AI-driven technologies for voter analysis, personalized messaging, and automated outreach. These innovations provide unparalleled precision in targeting voters, enabling highly tailored communication that appeals to individual preferences. However, the swift integration of AI into political processes introduces pressing ethical dilemmas with the potential to influence democratic practices both subtly and overtly.

A central concern surrounding the use of AI in political campaigns is the opacity and intricacy of its mechanisms, which often elude public comprehension and scrutiny. AI's capacity to shape political narratives and influence voter behavior—through methods such as micro-targeting and automated content generation—threatens core democratic values of transparency, fairness, and accountability. There is growing apprehension that AI-driven campaigns may exploit voter data without informed consent, introduce algorithmic biases that distort representation, and disseminate misinformation or manipulated media to sway public opinion. These practices undermine the integrity of democratic processes, casting doubt on the authenticity of political communication and raising critical questions about the extent to which they allow for informed, autonomous decision-making by the electorate.

Moreover, the regulatory frameworks in both the UK and the US have yet to fully address the ethical implications associated with AI in political campaigning. Existing policies often lack the specificity needed to govern the unique challenges posed by AI, leaving gaps that can be exploited. The absence of comprehensive guidelines risks creating an environment where political actors can prioritize campaign efficiency over ethical considerations, leading to outcomes that may ultimately undermine voter trust and democratic values. In this context, there is a pressing need for rigorous ethical frameworks and regulatory measures that can effectively govern AI's role in campaigning, ensuring that its deployment aligns with democratic principles and preserves the autonomy of voters.

## The Role of AI in Modern Campaigning

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has significantly transformed the landscape of political campaigns in the contemporary era, primarily through its capacity to enable highly personalized voter engagement and strategic targeting. As Viudes Fernández (2023) highlights, AI allows political campaigns to micro-segment the electorate, breaking down voter demographics based on individual behaviors, interests, and ideological leanings. This segmentation not only enhances the efficiency of targeting efforts but also ensures that campaigns can tailor their messages to resonate with specific voter subgroups, thus optimizing resource allocation and increasing the likelihood of voter mobilization.

A critical aspect of AI's application in political campaigns is its role in predictive analytics. According to Nickerson and Rogers (2014), AI-powered predictive models enable campaigns to forecast voter behavior with a high degree of accuracy. By analyzing vast quantities of data, these algorithms can predict the likelihood of a voter's support for a candidate, identify those on the fence, and determine how specific interventions, such as targeted advertisements or personalized outreach, might sway opinions. This predictive capability has revolutionized campaign strategies, shifting the focus from broad, generalized outreach to more nuanced and data-driven voter engagement.

Furthermore, AI has been instrumental in enhancing the strategic planning and execution of political campaigns. Tomic et al. (2023) note that AI-driven tools can improve the effectiveness of social networks by automating processes that allow campaigns to reach voters with tailored messaging in real-time. These tools enhance the power of social media platforms, enabling campaigns to deliver highly personalized content to voters, thereby increasing engagement and fostering stronger connections with the electorate. Kumar et al. (2019) argue that this personalized engagement is essential in contemporary political campaigning, as it helps to create, communicate, and deliver offerings specifically designed to resonate with individual voter preferences.

Despite its significant benefits, the integration of AI into political campaigns is not without challenges. The use of AI-driven tools such as chatbots and social bots has raised concerns about the potential spread of misinformation and the manipulation of public opinion. Thapa (2024) warns that these technologies, while facilitating engagement, can also be exploited to disseminate false information, which may distort voters' perceptions of candidates or issues. Similarly, Dias et al. (2021) emphasize the threat posed by deepfake technology, which can create hyper-realistic but entirely fabricated media, including videos and images, that could be used to mislead voters or damage political reputations. The rise of these technologies underscores the need for careful consideration of the ethical implications of AI's use in political campaigns.

Another pressing issue is the ethical concerns surrounding micro-targeting. Thapa (2024) raises alarms about the amplification of hate speech and the potential for AI to perpetuate racial and cultural stereotypes through targeted messaging. This technology, while effective in persuading voters, can also be used to exploit vulnerabilities and reinforce divisive narratives that threaten social cohesion. The ability to micro-target based on personal data also raises significant concerns about voter privacy, as well as the potential for manipulation based on voters' emotional and psychological profiles. The extensive use of big data and AI algorithms in campaigns has, as Tomic et al. (2023) argue, fundamentally altered the dynamics of campaign management and voter persuasion, placing significant pressure on regulators to address these emerging challenges.

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### **Ethical Dilemmas in AI Campaigning**

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into political campaigning has introduced profound ethical challenges, raising concerns about the integrity of democratic processes. Central to these concerns are issues related to privacy, transparency, and accountability; pillars essential to fostering trust in electoral systems.

A significant ethical dilemma stems from the collection and utilization of personal data for micro-targeted political advertising. As Nazeer (2024) highlights, AI-powered algorithms analyze extensive datasets, including individuals' browsing behaviors, social media activity, and demographic profiles, to create highly customized political messages. While these methods enhance campaign efficiency and precision, they also pose serious risks to voter privacy and consent. The opacity surrounding the mechanisms of data collection and application often leaves voters uninformed about how their personal information is being exploited to shape their political opinions.

The Cambridge Analytica scandal offers a stark illustration of the potential misuse of AI-driven data practices in political campaigns. Schippers (2020) illustrates how the unauthorized harvesting of data from millions of Facebook users was employed to influence political outcomes, igniting widespread condemnation. This incident highlights the vulnerability of personal data to exploitation and the lack of robust safeguards against such breaches. Moreover, it underscores the ethical risks associated with the unregulated use of AI in campaigns, particularly the undermining of voter autonomy and the erosion of informed decision-making processes.

In addition to concerns surrounding voter privacy, transparency in the use of AI in political campaigns has emerged as a critical ethical challenge. Akinrinola et al. (2024) emphasize the opacity of AI's involvement in creating and disseminating campaign content, which prevents voters from understanding how algorithms influence the messages they receive. This lack of transparency raises significant questions about the authenticity and trustworthiness of political messaging, particularly as AI-generated content, such as social media posts and targeted advertisements, may be strategically crafted to manipulate voter perceptions. The difficulty in discerning the sources and intentions behind such content further complicates the ability of voters to make informed decisions, as they may be misled by content designed to sway their opinions without their awareness.

Moreover, when AI systems are employed to produce content that is intentionally misleading or biased, it becomes even more challenging for voters to distinguish factual information from fabricated narratives. This situation exacerbates concerns about the erosion of democratic principles, as the integrity of political discourse is undermined by AI-generated misinformation.

Accountability is another significant ethical challenge posed by the use of AI in political campaigns. As Tomic et al. (2023) note, the rapid development of AI technologies has outpaced the regulatory and ethical frameworks designed to govern their use, creating difficulties in assigning responsibility for the harmful or unethical content generated by these systems. Traditional accountability mechanisms, which rely on human oversight, struggle to adapt to the complexity of AI-driven content, leaving unclear who should be held responsible for misleading or harmful political messages. Whether accountability lies with the developers of the AI systems, the political campaigns employing them, or the platforms distributing the content remains a contentious issue. This ambiguity weakens efforts to enforce ethical standards and contributes to a decline in public trust in electoral systems.

As AI continues to shape political campaigning, these ethical dilemmas underscore the urgent need for transparent practices, robust regulatory frameworks, and clear accountability mechanisms to preserve the integrity of democratic processes.

The integration of AI into political campaigns has continued to raise critical ethical concerns which necessitate comprehensive examination and robust regulatory interventions. Key issues, including voter privacy, transparency, and accountability, must be effectively addressed to uphold the integrity of democratic systems.

### **Case Studies in the UK and US**

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into political campaigns in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) has raised critical ethical concerns, particularly surrounding transparency, manipulation, and the preservation of democratic integrity. Both nations have experienced prominent instances of AI deployment in electoral processes, such as the Brexit referendum and recent US presidential elections. These cases highlight the complex interplay between technological innovation and the ethical challenges posed by AI in political campaigning, offering crucial insights into the risks and implications of its application.

### **AI Applications in UK Campaigns**

In the United Kingdom, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in political campaigns has become increasingly prevalent, with notable applications during the Brexit referendum and subsequent elections. AI technologies have been deployed to enhance outreach strategies, generate campaign content, and optimize voter targeting, presenting both opportunities for innovation and challenges to democratic norms.

One of the most contentious applications has been the use of AI-generated content, particularly 'softfakes', AI-created materials that resemble genuine communications but may present manipulated or misleading information. As Chowdhury (2024) notes, these tools enable political campaigns to engage with voters in innovative ways but also raise serious ethical concerns about the authenticity of political messaging. The potential for deception inherent in softfakes calls into question the boundaries of acceptable campaign tactics and the role of AI in shaping voter perceptions.

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AI's capacity for data-driven targeting has also been leveraged extensively, particularly during the Brexit campaign. The Vote Leave initiative utilized big data and machine learning algorithms to segment voters and deliver tailored messages to specific subgroups (Wogu et al., 2020; Tomic et al., 2023). By analyzing vast amounts of personal data, AI enabled highly targeted communication strategies, aligning campaign messages with voter beliefs, behaviors, and demographics. While this approach enhanced efficiency and effectiveness, it simultaneously sparked concerns about privacy violations and the ethical implications of such granular data use.

Generative AI tools have further been employed to streamline campaign operations, particularly in content creation. These technologies have been used to draft communication materials, such as personalized fundraising emails, enabling campaigns to scale their outreach while reducing costs (Foos, 2024). However, this efficiency comes with ethical questions regarding the authenticity and quality of AI-generated communication, potentially diluting the personal connection between candidates and voters.

Collectively, these applications illustrate both the potential benefits and the ethical dilemmas associated with AI in UK political campaigns. This calls for clear regulatory frameworks and ethical guidelines to ensure that AI technologies are used responsibly and transparently.

### **Ethical Concerns in UK Campaigns**

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into political campaigns in the United Kingdom has raised critical ethical concerns, particularly around manipulation, privacy, and public trust. These issues highlight the challenges of ensuring that AI technologies are used in a manner consistent with democratic principles.

A significant concern is the potential for manipulation and deception. AI-generated content, including deepfakes and tailored political messages, has the capacity to mislead voters by distorting facts and constructing narratives that deviate from reality (Chowdhury, 2024; Kane, 2019). These tools blur the boundary between legitimate persuasion and unethical manipulation, posing risks to the integrity of the electoral process. As the sophistication of AI technologies increases, distinguishing between genuine and fabricated content becomes increasingly difficult, amplifying the danger of deceptive practices in political campaigns.

Privacy violations also emerge as a central ethical challenge in AI-driven political strategies. The reliance on personal data for micro-targeting has sparked concerns about voter consent and data protection. As Foos (2024) highlights, campaigns often collect data from social media platforms and other digital sources without the explicit knowledge or consent of individuals. Such practices infringe upon voter privacy and raise questions about the ethical boundaries of data usage in political contexts. High-profile incidents, such as the Cambridge Analytica scandal, underscore the potential for abuse and highlight the need for stricter regulations on data collection and usage in political campaigning.

Moreover, the deployment of AI in political campaigns has contributed to the erosion of public trust in electoral processes. Allegations of unethical practices during the Brexit referendum, including the use of targeted digital campaigns, have intensified concerns about the legitimacy of election outcomes (Wogu et al., 2020; Kane, 2019). The perception that AI technologies can be exploited to manipulate voter behavior or disseminate misinformation undermines confidence in democratic institutions and processes.

These ethical concerns underscore the need for robust regulatory frameworks and oversight mechanisms to ensure that AI technologies are deployed in ways that uphold transparency, accountability, and voter trust. Addressing these challenges is essential for safeguarding the integrity of political campaigns and reinforcing the principles of democracy.

### **AI in U.S. Campaigns**

The application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in political campaigns has significantly shaped electoral strategies in the United States, enabling innovative approaches to voter engagement and campaign management. AI-powered tools have been instrumental in optimizing campaign efforts, but their use has also raised ethical concerns similar to those observed in the United Kingdom.

#### **Advanced Targeting and Voter Prediction**

AI technologies have been pivotal in micro-segmentation and voter behavior prediction, particularly in high-profile campaigns such as the 2016 Trump presidential race. As Kane (2019) and Viudes Fernández (2023) note, AI-enabled analysis of voter data allowed for tailored messaging aimed at specific demographic groups, enhancing digital outreach efficiency. This data-driven approach not only improved campaign strategies but also highlighted the capabilities of AI in influencing voter perceptions. The 2024 U.S. presidential elections saw a continuation of such techniques, with AI tools being used to generate personalized advertisements, messages, and fundraising communications that aligned with voter preferences and behaviors (LaChapelle & Tucker, 2023).

#### **AI-Generated Content and Virtual Engagement**

AI-generated content (AIGC) has emerged as a powerful tool in U.S. political campaigns. Haq et al. (2024) highlight how candidates have utilized AI to engage voters through personalized virtual messages or simulate appearances via deepfake technology. These innovations have provided new avenues for political engagement, especially when physical presence is not feasible, allowing campaigns to reach audiences more effectively. However, while these advancements enhance outreach capabilities, they also raise critical questions about the authenticity of such engagements and their impact on voter trust.

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## Ethical Concerns and Challenges

Despite its advantages, the use of AI in U.S. campaigns has prompted significant ethical concerns. One of the primary issues is the potential for AI to produce false or misleading content. Claims about AI-generated materials amplifying biases or perpetuating repetitive, unoriginal language in political ads have drawn criticism. Such practices risk undermining the integrity of campaign communication, particularly when AI is used to influence voter opinion through manipulative or deceptive tactics.

Moreover, the reliance on AI for campaign messaging has sparked debates about the transparency and accountability of these tools. As in the UK, the absence of comprehensive regulatory frameworks to govern AI usage in political campaigns leaves room for ethical breaches, including the misuse of voter data and the dissemination of biased or misleading content.

## Ethical Concerns in U.S. Campaigns

The ethical concerns surrounding the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in U.S. political campaigns align closely with those identified in the UK, with significant attention on issues of manipulation, privacy, and accountability. The increasing reliance on AI-generated content has raised questions about the authenticity and trustworthiness of political messaging. Kane (2019) highlights the risk of misinformation and voter manipulation stemming from tailored political ads crafted through AI algorithms. By exploiting specific voter preferences and psychological triggers, campaigns may influence voter decisions in ways that compromise informed choice. Additionally, the ability of AI to reinforce biases within campaign messaging presents another ethical challenge, as such biases can amplify divisive narratives and undermine the fairness of the electoral process.

Privacy concerns also feature prominently in discussions about AI in U.S. campaigns. Advanced AI systems often utilize extensive voter data, sourced from digital platforms, to develop targeted campaign strategies. The lack of transparency regarding the collection and use of such data raises ethical questions about voter consent and control over personal information. Past controversies, such as the Cambridge Analytica scandal, have underscored the risks associated with these practices, prompting calls for stronger privacy protections to mitigate similar violations in future campaigns.

The use of AI has also contributed to a broader erosion of trust in the electoral system. AI-generated content, which often blurs the line between genuine and fabricated communication, has heightened skepticism among voters about the credibility of campaign messaging. This mistrust is further exacerbated by the absence of clear accountability mechanisms for unethical applications of AI. The question of who is responsible for misleading or harmful content, whether it be the creators of the AI tools, the campaigns employing them, or the platforms hosting the content, remains unresolved, adding to public unease.

The ethical dilemmas posed by AI in political campaigns emphasize the need for regulatory oversight and the establishment of comprehensive ethical frameworks.

## Practical Solutions and Regulatory Recommendations

The rapid integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in political campaigns has necessitated the development of practical solutions and regulatory frameworks to mitigate associated risks and ensure ethical applications. Addressing challenges such as voter manipulation, privacy violations, and accountability deficits requires a multifaceted approach involving policy reforms, ethical guidelines, and international cooperation.

## Policy Recommendations

### 1. To address AI-related risks in political campaigns, robust policy measures are essential:

- i. **Transparency Laws:** Governments should mandate the disclosure of AI usage in political campaigns. Political actors and organizations should publicly declare the deployment of AI tools in voter targeting, message creation, and campaign management. Such transparency would allow voters to critically evaluate the sources and methods of political communication, thereby fostering trust in democratic processes.
- ii. **Privacy Protections:** The enactment of comprehensive data protection regulations is critical to safeguarding voter privacy. Policies such as explicit consent requirements for data collection and usage, stringent penalties for data breaches, and independent oversight mechanisms can curb the misuse of personal information. Drawing insights from frameworks like the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), both the UK and the US could enhance voter protections against invasive data practices.
- iii. **Accountability Frameworks:** AI accountability mechanisms should be embedded within electoral laws. Campaigns and developers of AI systems must be held liable for the ethical and legal consequences of their tools. This includes mechanisms to trace decisions made by AI systems back to their human operators and to ensure compliance with anti-discrimination and anti-manipulation statutes.

### 2. Ethical Guidelines for Campaigns

The ethical use of AI in political campaigns requires adherence to principles that prioritize democratic values. The following ethical guidelines are proposed:

- i. **Transparency:** Political campaigns must disclose the use of AI tools, including the nature of algorithms and datasets employed. This fosters an informed electorate capable of critically engaging with campaign content.

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- ii. **Fairness:** AI systems must be designed and deployed to avoid discriminatory outcomes. Campaigns should ensure that their AI tools do not reinforce biases or disproportionately marginalize specific groups. This can be achieved through bias audits and algorithmic fairness assessments.
- iii. **Respect for Voter Autonomy:** Campaigns should refrain from overly invasive micro-targeting or manipulative tactics that exploit personal vulnerabilities. Ethical standards must emphasize empowering voters to make informed decisions based on unbiased information.
- iv. **Avoidance of Harmful Content:** Campaigns must take measures to prevent the dissemination of harmful content, including hate speech, misinformation, and deepfakes. This involves proactively vetting AI-generated materials and establishing internal review mechanisms.

### 3. International Cooperation

Given the global implications of AI technology, collaboration between nations is imperative. The UK and the US, as key actors in AI development and democratic governance, are well-positioned to spearhead international initiatives to regulate AI in politics.

- i. **Establishing Global Standards:** Both the US and the UK could collaborate on formulating international standards for ethical AI use in political campaigns. These standards could address transparency, accountability, and the prevention of voter manipulation, serving as a benchmark for other nations.
- ii. **Promoting Multilateral Dialogues:** The UK and the US could facilitate multilateral dialogues involving governments, international organizations, tech companies, and civil society to exchange best practices and harmonize regulations. Forums such as the United Nations or the G7 could serve as platforms for advancing these discussions.
- iii. **Joint Regulatory Frameworks:** The establishment of bilateral agreements to monitor cross-border AI use in political campaigns can address challenges like misinformation propagation and data misuse. Collaborative efforts will ensure shared accountability for unethical AI practices affecting both domestic and international audiences.
- iv. **Research and Capacity Building:** Joint funding of research into AI ethics, transparency mechanisms, and privacy-preserving technologies can enable the development of cutting-edge solutions to mitigate AI-related risks.

## CONCLUSION

Without a doubt, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in political campaigning has ushered in an era of unprecedented opportunities and also challenges for democratic processes. While AI offers innovative tools for enhancing voter engagement, optimizing campaign strategies, and improving resource efficiency, it also raises significant ethical and practical concerns, including voter manipulation, privacy violations, and a lack of transparency. These risks threaten the integrity of democratic systems and reiterates the urgent need for comprehensive solutions.

To mitigate these challenges, policy recommendations such as transparency laws, privacy protections, and accountability frameworks are indispensable. These measures not only ensure responsible AI usage but also foster trust in electoral processes. Furthermore, the adoption of ethical guidelines emphasizing transparency, fairness, respect for voter autonomy, and harm prevention is critical in aligning AI-driven campaigns with democratic values.

The collaborative potential of the UK and US to lead global efforts in regulating AI in politics cannot be overemphasized. By establishing international standards, facilitating multilateral dialogues, and funding research, these nations can spearhead a movement toward responsible AI governance. Such cooperation not only addresses domestic concerns but also sets a global precedent for ethical AI usage in political contexts.

Conclusively, the future of political campaigning in the age of AI depends on the ability of policymakers, technologists, and societies to balance innovation with ethical responsibility. Through proactive regulation, adherence to democratic principles, and international collaboration, the transformative power of AI can be harnessed to strengthen, rather than undermine, democratic governance.

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