

Unpopular opinion: Gen-AI isn't putting elections in jeopardy. Humans might be

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The Mirage of the AI Election Apocalypse

When ChatGPT launched and GenAI flooded the public imagination, alarm bells rang.

Think tanks, journalists, and policymakers began issuing dire warnings: AI would distort facts, manufacture hyperreal candidates, and reshape voter behavior at an unprecedented scale.

Yet when nearly half of humanity cast votes during the 2023–2024 global election cycle, **that dystopia failed to materialize.** Instead, what we saw was a return of old ghosts: disinformation from known actors, systemic disenfranchisement, voter suppression, and political polarization, all decidedly human.

This isn't to say AI didn't play a role, it did. But **its influence was subordinate to older, messier, and more deeply entrenched threats.** The "AI Election Crisis" turned out to be less a prophecy and more a projection, a case of technological determinism wrapped in media hype.

Why AI Can't Hack the Voter Brain (Yet)



Political persuasion is often imagined as a button: press it with the right message, and voters flip. But social science paints a more sobering picture: **people are remarkably hard to persuade, especially in high-stakes contexts like elections.**

Most voters enter campaigns with stable predispositions: party identity, social group affiliations, long-standing ideologies. Decades of political science research show that these filters matter more than any new message, no matter how persuasive or personalized.

Even the most expensive, data-driven campaigns rarely shift opinions. Meta-analyses of U.S. elections reveal that the average effect of campaign advertising and canvassing is close to zero in general elections. Persuasion exists, but it's limited, context-dependent, and difficult to scale.

GenAI doesn't change that. In fact, it might be entering a saturated space, a noisy media environment where attention is fractured and trust is scarce. To persuade, AI would need not just better content, but a better way to earn trust, cut through noise, and override identity-driven filters. And that's a tall order, even for a neural network.



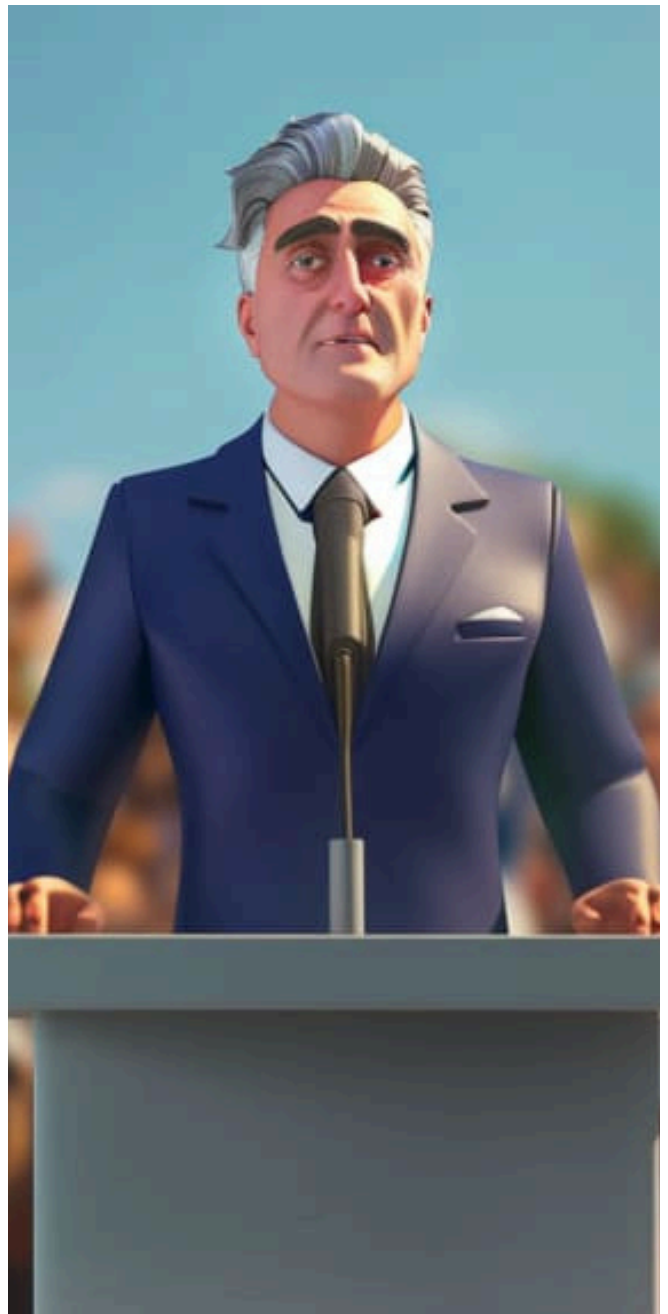
Flooded, Not Swayed — The Supply-Demand Mismatch

One common claim is that GenAI will overwhelm the information ecosystem, “flooding the zone” with misinformation so potent and abundant that voters won't know what's real. But this assumes that more content equals more influence. It doesn't.

We live in an era of information overproduction. **The bottleneck isn't supply, it's attention.** People don't consume everything they're shown. They filter, ignore, and select based on emotion, ideology, and perceived credibility.

The result? AI-generated content joins an already oversaturated stream. Unless it's extremely novel, emotionally resonant, or from a trusted source, it gets buried. Most AI misinformation doesn't go viral.

The deeper issue isn't how much content AI creates, but **how well institutions, platforms, and publics are able to process, vet, and contextualize what they see.** Misinformation is a demand-side problem as much as a supply-side one.



Trust Is the Real Moderator

Unless AI systems are paired with credible institutions, their persuasive potential will remain limited.

- The effectiveness of any persuasive message — human or machine — hinges on one variable: trust. People trust content from sources they already believe. They disregard, filter, or fight content from those they don't.
- This explains why **GenAI, for all its technical fluency, often fails to shift political opinion**. It doesn't yet carry social or institutional legitimacy. It's not a journalist. It's not a peer. It's a tool. And only 7% of global users rely on AI for political news.

The result? AI isn't shaping worldviews. It's mostly reinforcing or amplifying what people already believe. In fact, people are often skeptical of AI-generated information, particularly when the stakes are high. In studies, most users are better at detecting fake news than we assume — and err toward skepticism, not gullibility.

Misplaced Fears, Missed Problems



The fixation on GenAI risks becoming a dangerous distraction. While public discourse centers on fake videos and chatbot misinformation, older, more structural threats go unaddressed:

- Voter suppression laws
- Gerrymandering
- Biased electoral commissions
- Harassment of election officials
- Campaign finance opacity
- Attacks on press freedom

These are not “potential threats.” They are active, documented failures of democratic systems — and they outweigh any current AI risk.

Moreover, **GenAI’s misuse isn’t limited to elections. AI is being weaponized in gender-based abuse, such as deepfake pornography targeting women in public life.** It is also used in coordinated hate campaigns, algorithmically amplified on platforms. These are present-day harms with real-world chilling effects — not speculative scenarios.



Why the AI Panic Took Off Anyway

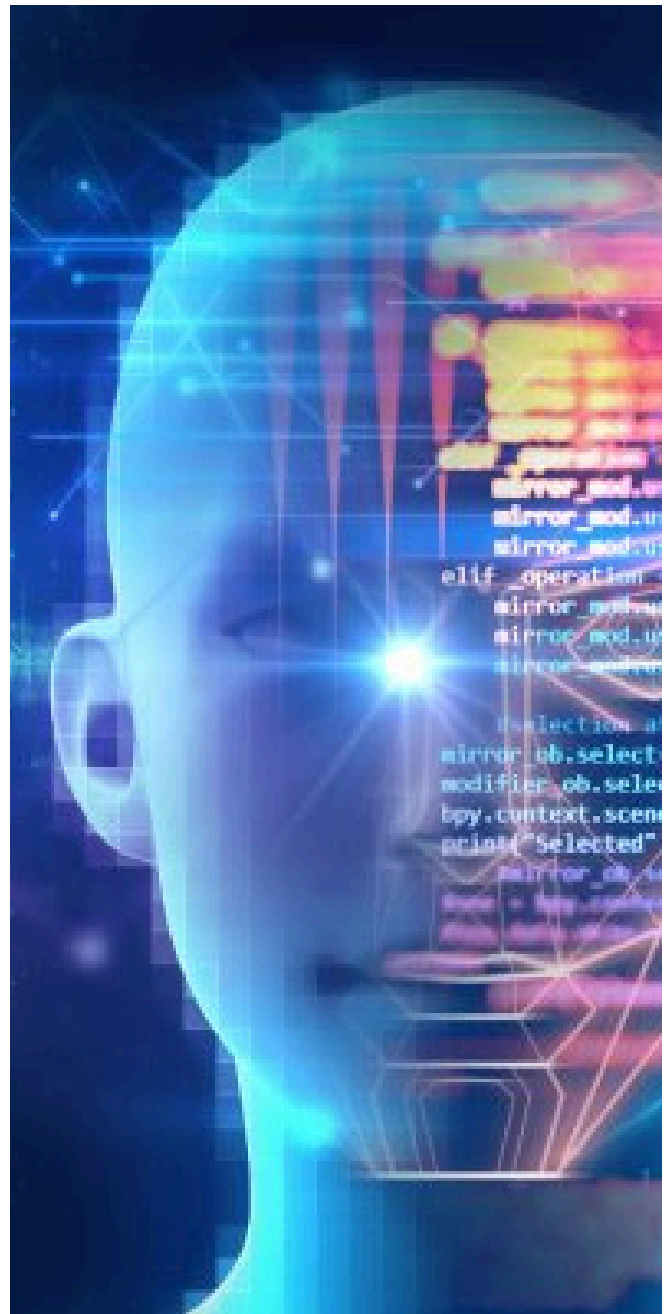
So why did this alarmist narrative about GenAI and elections gain such traction? Because it serves multiple agendas.

Tech companies benefit from the mystique. If AI is powerful enough to hack democracy, imagine what it can do for your business.

Academics and NGOs gain urgency, and funding, by framing AI as a “crisis in need of solutions.”

Politicians deflect accountability. AI becomes the scapegoat for misinformation and disillusionment that they themselves may have fueled.

All of this is compounded by the attention economy. Fear sells. Sensational claims get clicks. Moderation doesn't. The “AI will kill democracy” narrative outperformed nuanced takes in media, policymaking, and public discourse.



A Smarter Path Forward



AI deserves scrutiny. But not hysteria. A more strategic approach involves:

- Focusing on known harms — and addressing them with urgency
- Reinforcing electoral institutions, not just tech platforms
- Investing in AI literacy — not fear-mongering
- Holding tech companies accountable, especially around transparency, moderation, and misuse

Ultimately, **the goal isn't to shut AI down — it's to build governance and civic infrastructure that can withstand the shocks of technological change.** Because it's not GenAI that will define the future of elections. It's how we respond to it.

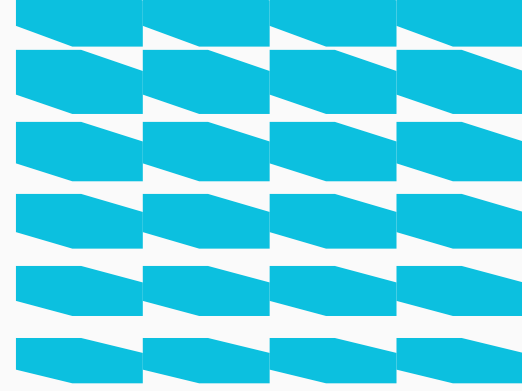
Beyond the Algorithm

At **PEC**, we believe the most effective communicators in a tech-saturated world are not louder, but sharper. In a landscape filled with hype and haze, clarity is power.



AI may shape the terrain. But it's humans, leaders, voters, institutions, who shape the outcome.





Thank you!

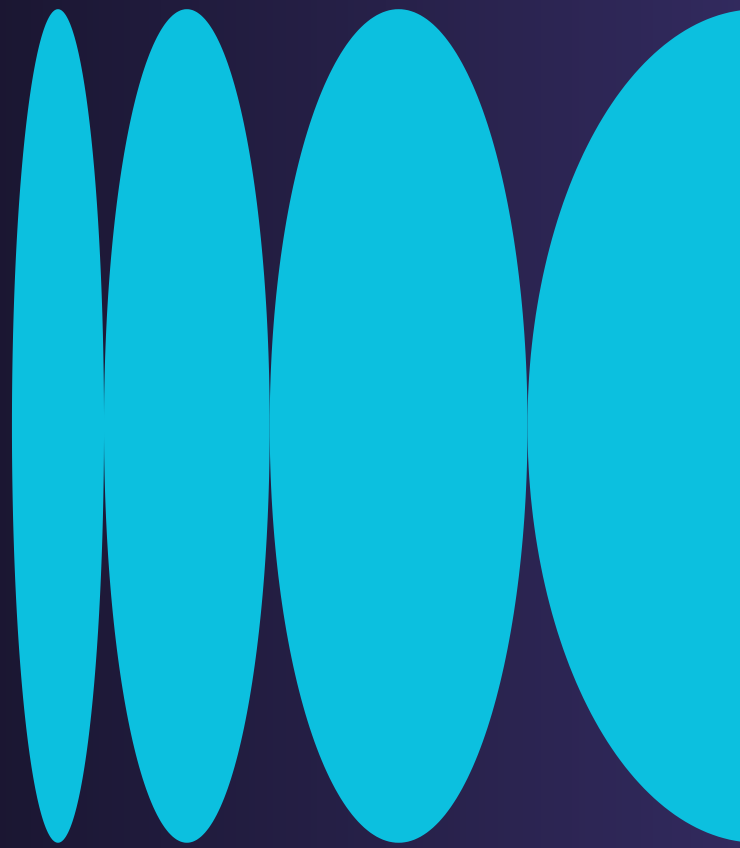
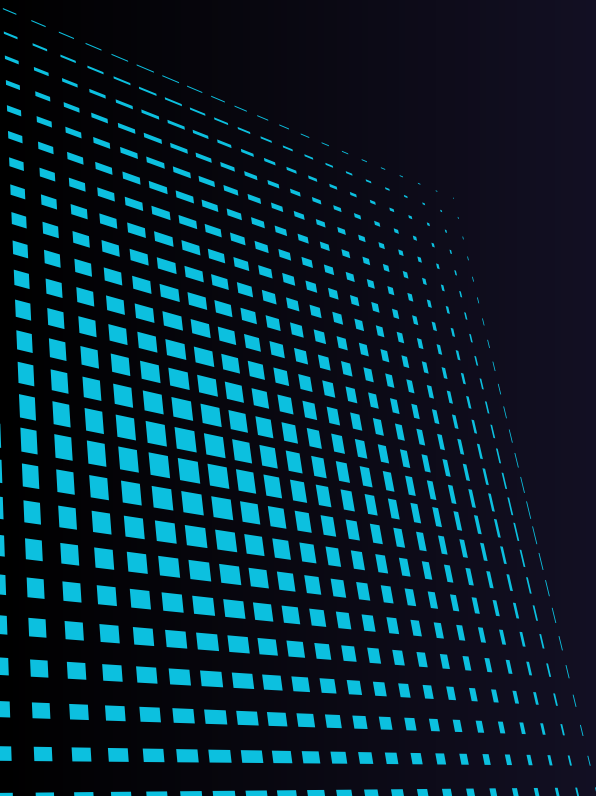
PEC helps companies, institutions, and communicators adapt to this paradigm shift — using AI not just to automate, but to augment insight and impact.

Want to build voice, clarity, and trust in times of disruption? Let's do it. With purpose. With data. With insight.

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