

Research Article

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## Manipulated Realities: Deepfakes and the Erosion of Political Tolerance in Pakistan

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**Abstract:** This article evaluates how deepfake technology contributes to increased political intolerance throughout Pakistan. Deepfakes function as forceful political manipulation weapons because of the extreme expansion of digital media with AI-generated content, which causes social differences to increase and truths to become distorted information spreaders, confirming existing biases while harming leadership trust and creating The political climate of Pakistan, fostering the transformation of deepfake films to weaponize political attacks against opponents while bolstering opposing propaganda because partisan affiliations among locals already skew their political perspectives. The paper demonstrates the speed of wordless, emotionally manipulated false information that travels swiftly across social media filters, which gradually replace analytical thinking with impulsive responses. Data from this study shows that Pakistan needs media literacy along with regulatory knowledge and ethical technology practices to prevent deepfakes from damaging political tolerance and democratic conversation in the nation.

**Key Words:** Deepfake, AI-generated, Pakistan, Technology, Intolerance, Political

### Introduction

It becomes clear that deepfake technology and political intolerance are entangled and engage in complex and quite disturbing fashions, especially in Pakistan, where political processes are influenced and filled with ideologies and emotions. Deepfake technology upgrade makes it an incredibly powerful weapon that can fundamentally redefine people's vision of the world and, therefore, undermine such essential values as democracy and intensify inter-group conflicts. This chapter focuses on what political intolerance in Pakistan entails and how deepfake content influences this aspect. We will also look at how deepfakes work and how they influence the dissemination of fake news in the political process of Pakistan.

The emergence of Deepfake has added a new tool to manipulate politics in Pakistan; it solely suits those who, together with enmity between the communities, wish to deepen divisions. Political intolerance has been around for some time and is now being propelled by deep, fake pictures that create exquisitely realistic simulations of non-existent people, events, or ideas. This chapter also examines social polarization, psychological manipulation, and deception as tools by which deepfakes have further amplified political intolerance in Pakistan.

Deepfakes' impact on intolerant politics in Pakistan. With the help of case studies and comprehension of how various technologies are transforming Pakistan's politics, our understanding of how political behaviour is associated with digital disinformation gets better. However, deepfakes are engaging in an entirely different ballpark somewhere where human emotions like anger, fear, and mistrust are fundamental to political polarization. Thus, it is critical to understand how this technology plays a role in

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intolerance, much less for Pakistan, but also for other nations to learn from coping with similar political and societal problems. Deepfake technology is a two-sided tool during the development of advanced technology that alters the overall society. It is rather unambiguously optimistic about the trends in artificial intelligence, but it accurately shows that the truth can be managed. This technology brings new forms of threat higher than mere false information in a country like Pakistan, where the political climate is already charged with polarization. It has the potential to create political intolerance that has never been witnessed before due to the creation of mistrust, fear and tension.

Pakistan has a complicated political system and, therefore, has always been prone to media deception and fabrication. It is home to hundreds of different ethnic, religious, and political groups, who often have a hard time coexisting peacefully, and political intolerance remains a constant problem in Pakistan. Deepfake technology adds a dangerous sub-genre to this environment. They are fake videos of activists or other political opponents or any person who can be some sort of threat to the individuals, organizations, and institutions behind the deepfake creation. Because such technology takes advantage of pre-existing cleavages in society, it aggravates political intolerance and, consequently, societal polarization, which is destructive. Thus, in the world of high and still growing speed of development today, technology is transforming society, and not always for the better. Deepfake is regarded as one such innovation that is of great concern, particularly in the political sphere. Deepfakes can play people and blur the line between reality and simulation; they can even incite social revolt. These are fake movie trailers and sounds produced by artificial intelligence, but they look rather real. It impacts not only wealthy countries and huge companies; for example, in Pakistan's political conditions, it can have a fatal outcome. Deepfake technology also raises privacy issues around the world. While technology may be universal, most countries have very different legal protections for its misuse. The GDPR (the regulation which protects the fundamental rights and freedoms of natural persons, particularly their right to the protection of personal data) does not directly account for deepfakes in its provisions. Still, it accords great data protection and privacy rights. Nonetheless, there will be some relevant effects on the right to erasure and some data breach regulations.

Laws regarding privacy rights squarely fall under state dominion, and those laws significantly differ from one state to the next. For those incidents that include deepfakes, defamation and intellectual property laws have often been used, though ongoing debates remain on how best to legislate deepfake technology. Several countries, most recently China, have released regulations regarding mandatory disclosure of deepfake technology. More analysis has to be done to understand its effectiveness. This is a matter that is bound to cross the line from a legal point of view, dealing with worldwide human rights conventions, which protect one's privacy considerably (Kietzmann et al., [2020](#)).

## Literature Review

Deepfakes are practical recordings made using new AI strategies rather than traditional visual means. They usually show people saying and doing things they didn't say or do. Deepfakes have sparked concern in the blogosphere and news media that we are on the brink of an "infopocalypse" in which it will be impossible to distinguish between what is real and what is not. A few logicians (e.g., Deborah Johnson, Luciano Floridi, and Regina Reni) have now issued comparable warnings. Deep fakes are a particularly serious threat to information. By using the data transmission record as developed later, deep fakes reduce how much data the recording transmits to the viewer (Fallis, [2021](#)).

With stronger national legislation in place already, the creation of global treaties to regulate the use of deepfakes may also help to a certain extent protect people's rights in the age of a digitalized environment. However, implementing such policies on the international level is still a challenge, particularly in the regions, which lack proper and stable digital regulation (Citron & Chesney, [2019](#)).

Deepfakes are good for nothing other than destabilizing society when used in the creation of hatred, especially among different ethnic, racial or even political groups. The more complicated such digital manipulations become to recognize, the higher the probability of inciting violence in order that, in turn, produces additional human rights abuses, including hate crimes, false arrests or even mid-scale unrest (Kietzmann et al., [2020](#)).

Deepfakes endanger the credibility of reputable media, which would make it difficult for people to distinguish the truth. Besides the restriction on freedom of speech, this distortion undermines the public's ability to make informed decisions – especially where politics are involved. Deepfake technology may even contribute to making authoritarian states' social control even stricter and silencing dissent even more effectively than it is already being done.

Women suffer through emotional torment, demotion, and ridicule whenever such deepfake videos are unleashed on them. Seeking justice in most cases is often very hard, especially in areas where there are no structures that protect the law and the victims from such types of criminals. It could destroy professions, negativity affects interpersonal relations, and the after-movie effect leaves deep-seated psychological scars (Henry & Flynn, [2019](#)).

Deepfakes are a violation of privacy in a way more profound than conventional modes of surveillance. In contrast to ordinary impersonations, deepfakes are capable of creating completely fake scenarios in which victims are shown in demonic and otherwise depraved ways. This is, for example, the non-consensual posting of explicit sexual material involving people, particularly women, in which they were not only sexually harassed but added to pornographic content without consent. This carries a lot of meaning for them, especially their sense of self, reputation and overall wellness, and this also demonstrates the social/ emotional vulnerability that comes with such a lack of control.

Deepfakes in politics are a dangerous application since they weaken democratic forces by disenfranchising the electorate from their representatives and the process. Deepfakes could soon redefine the power dynamics of factions in volatile democracies where power is already tilted in favour of authoritarian leaders who are only too eager to seize the opportunity presented by this emerging technology. The threat of weaponizing deepfakes meant that, through manipulating public opinion, the government could embark on the systematic violation of individuals' rights under the veil of the state's security.

AI-powered Deepfake technology is alarming because such vulnerable groups of people as women and other minorities are most at risk of being targeted and attacked with this type of deepfake. Such populations suffer from severe emotional and psychological impacts, mainly when recourse to the legal system is not possible. When people begin to fear that others can take control of their identity or voice or their image on a social media platform, for instance, erosion of social trust sets in.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To examine and explore the modifications occurring in Pakistan's political environment because of deepfake technology.
2. To explain how deepfakes promote the diminishing political tolerance within Pakistani society.
3. To present relevant recommendations to boost public capabilities in detecting manipulated digital materials.

### **Research Questions**

1. How are deepfakes the cause of modification in Pakistan's political environment?
2. In what ways do deepfakes promote the diminishing political tolerance within Pakistani society?
3. What measures can be taken to protect political discourse from the divisive effects of deepfake technology?

### **Material and Method**

The study uses a qualitative approach. Incorporating analytical techniques to examine the impact of deepfake technology on political intolerance in Pakistan. Throughout the study, social construction theory is applied. This research focuses on understanding how new norms are established and how they influence the framing of laws. Data is collected from secondary sources to support the conclusions of the study. This data comes from various articles, books, newspapers, podcasts, etc.

### **Defining Political Intolerance in the Context of Pakistan**

Political intolerance, therefore, means a disposition to suppress or subvert dissent and a failure to tolerate other opinions politically. Political intolerance in Pakistan, mostly owing to the social embodiment of the



political factor, leads people to have unlimited devotion to their parties and an inability to accept any opposing opinions (Citron, 2019). Interference in politics includes historical relations, geographical location, and even an intense sensitivity when facing matters of politics among politicians. That means any piece of information that echoes group prejudice or portrays the opposing side negatively can easily go viral in such a context, aggravating social polarization.

Their political intolerance tends to intrude into the social and personal spheres in Pakistan. Splits within strong party loyalties are visible in aggressive arguments in group forums on social media platforms or in discussions with family members. Sophisticated audio-visual disinformation – a tool for presenting political rivals in false and unseemly poses that commit the vilest of sins against their person – thrives on this hostility; it fuels hatred and scepticism. Therefore, deepfakes offer political intolerance as a tool to build an emotionally convincing narrative of the enemy, which stabilizes group identity and turns dissent into fear or laughter. Attempts to halt the opinions of opposing political beliefs or regular disbelief in them are referred to as political intolerance. This intolerance in Pakistan has many facets, such as political enmity that lasts for decades, complex relations, essential elections, and more that keep people divided permanently. In Pakistani society, political intolerance happens in the form of animosity against others and being very devoted to one's party or organization when those who hold the other perspective are not only vilified but seen as threats to self or society.

### **Mechanisms of Deepfake Influence on Intolerance**

Deepfake technology is employed as such to raise political intolerance in this setting. What deepfakes offer is a realistic representation in the form of 'proof to worsen political and social tolerance for opponents by portraying them in fictitious scenarios that 'prove' existing hatreds or fears. The facts may be the subject of political legends that never really happened, but political personalities can be depicted in instances that are provocative or questionable. These digital fabrications escalate animosity in a society that is already divided politically because they give a reason for having hatred and distrust of those with different political leanings.

### **Deepfake Content and Political Polarization**

Since deepfake is a technology that can be easily bent to fit the beliefs and existing biases, it is very effective in a fully divided society. Fake photos, films, or audio samples mimicking politicians, parties or movements deepfakes inflame the gap between the two parties in Pakistan, where polarization is quite high. These deepfakes can be applied to demonstrate politicians making extremely radical statements and immoral actions and portraying attitudes that the public dislikes and distrusts. Thus, deepfakes turn into more than content in this regard; they also act as stimuli for further enmity between two political sides (Kwok, 2020)

Deepfakes are employed in Pakistan as political tools since the state has maximum opposition and hostility in political discussions. Material that portrays a leader of a competing party making a ridiculous statement or an immoral act is likely to go viral on social media ahead, separating followers of politics. Since a vast majority of individuals report receiving fake content but cannot always check the authenticity of such content, it is easy for such people to take such photos or movies at face value (Dobrobaba, 2022). This acceptance is highly effective, particularly in Pakistan, where official information is not trusted, and other narratives, which often trend higher, outcompete it. Therefore, deepfakes fuel feedback loops of polarisation where one side believes that the other side is becoming more hostile or devious: a notion insider by realistic but fake media. Deepfake technology is employed to enhance the levels of political intolerance in this context. Deepfakes provide people with tangible 'evidence' that further enhances political intolerance, as the deepfake presents the hated/hated figure in a scene that confirms the existing hatred or fear. Thus, political personalities can be depicted in episodes that may be compromised or charged with political prejudice even if they were never actually involved with the situation represented. These digital fabrications raise tensions in a society that is already polarised by politics because they give someone a reason to hate and distrust those with opposite political beliefs.

Deepfakes do nothing more than amplify the polarisation in Pakistan, where political cleavages run incredibly high, and media trust is rarely high. One gets the ugly possibility of a vicious cycle developing where both the producing and accepting parties attempt to create or accept information that is slanderous

against the other. Therefore, political extremism arises since everyone considers themselves right to be angry and distrustful, driven by stereotypes rather than civility. Since deepfakes contain psychological aspects, including emotion, bias, and trust, they are mighty tools for inciting political intolerance. As it has been noted, deepfakes create an extremely realistic Simulation of a message that enables viewers not to distinguish the truth from a lie (Kwok, [2020](#)). Their impact on political intolerance in Pakistan is increased by several mechanisms:

### **Social Trust Erosion**

More of these lead to further erosion of confidence as Deepfakes are added to a broader class of false information. If the audience cannot assume that the presented video proof is genuine, people will become tired of the other side, the media, and friends and relatives who share these films. This fuels a certain, albeit 'tolerance intolerant' level of politics that is far from simple opposition but that breaks the social contract and erodes the fundamental political capital that keeps society together.

### **Emotional Manipulation**

Deepfakes often employ emotions that viewers feel terrified, uncomfortable, or laugh at while they are watching. The self-confirmed and politically suspect viewers were most likely to believe a deepfake without further scrutiny and to repost the manipulated content to others, therefore spreading the changed material that fits with their political animosity or paranoia. As mentioned, deepfakes mimic the appearance of displaying behaviours that viewers would find either appalling or fearful, inducing anger, fear, or disgust. From experience, people tend to believe in deepfakes because emotions prevail over the intellect of individuals (Jimoh, [2024](#)).

### **Confirmation Bias**

Deepfakes are often created to support a given story by relying on the audience's bias. Political followers are vulnerable to accepting and sharing videos that align with the views that the group has against another group, which makes the hatred more concrete. Due to deepfakes, confirmation bias is even more challenging to avoid since the content most often aligns with what users want or expect to encounter. For instance, since it affirms their bias, a supporter of a particular political party would not hesitate to believe in a deepfake of his/her political party opponent involved in the wrongdoing. Because of this tendency, individuals are more often inclined to share information than to cross-check it (Debroy, [2024](#)).

### **Visual and Audio Realism**

High-quality deepfakes are achieved today, and very often, it becomes hard to distinguish between fake and authentic materials as they look almost like real ones, and this exploits human gullibility by trusting their eyes. This realism is, however, particularly commanding because people have more belief in the facial reality and voice-over text than the written document, as seen with deepfakes in the creation of new realities. The possibility of deepfake videos is like real videos since the videos are always realistic in their presentation. As you can see, even a brief acquaintance with deepfake material changes people's attitudes because people trust what they see. However, this has a particularly powerful effect in a country like Pakistan, where political animosities are felt so deeply and visual 'proofs' are long-lasting.

### **Loss of Trust**

Deepfakes thus cause a general distrust of all the media output as the technology continues to spread. As a result, the audience is overwhelmed, and, therefore, those political deepfakes promoted by individuals benefit from the distrust and scepticism that envelop the populace. A rejection of official information sources and an increased utilisation of skewed or other narratives may be a consequence of this loss. They help in creating an environment that leads to political intolerance. This makes it hard to distinguish between fact and fiction; all sorts of personal hatred towards the opposition can be made with reasons such as having been a victim of their actions. Some of the outputs of these dynamics are political polarization, vandalism of social relations, and deterioration of the ability to distinguish between the real world and its representations.





### Disinformation and Misinformation Through Deepfakes

When discussing the impacts of deepfakes, two important terms are asserted – misinformation and disinformation. However, these terms are not synonymous. While the terminology is slightly different, it can be easier to distinguish between the two, wherein misinformation is the passing of false information without necessarily intending to mislead, while, on the other hand, disinformation is the passing of false information to create a specific outcome. Deepfakes are one of the causes in Pakistan, where individuals share fake information with other people and sometimes they do it knowingly, while at other times, it may be due to ignorance. When discussing how deepfakes cause political intolerance, it is important to differentiate between misinformation and disinformation. Inaccurate information that has been spread accidentally is called misinformation, while inaccurate information that is spread intentionally is called disinformation. As both types of deepfakes can be promoted by politically motivated organisations or even persons, as well as accidentally, the first type of deepfakes is widespread in Pakistan's deepfake community.

### Disinformation through Deepfakes

Deepfakes used by adversaries in a politically charged environment influence the populace through disinformation. For instance, Deepfakes can be created to purposely turn people into hating a particular politician or party by portraying them as doing the wrong thing, like embezzling, defeating the young, disobeying societal or religious authority, or any other evil act. Leveraging the understanding that, due to the specific demography of the partisan and highly emotional audience, they will most likely believe it, competitors with ill intent, such as political opponents or other adversarial entities, may make these deepfakes available to slander other candidates. The poor trust in traditional media and heavy engagement in social media in Pakistan have made the nation a fertile ground for both disinformation and misinformation through deep fakes due to poor digital literacy, which cannot identify fake content. As deepfakes are extended to Mellankin's political schemas, the cutting lines between manual and truth become blurred, therefore creating a culture of political intolerance based on resentment, mistrust, and a feeling of being left (Jimoh, [2024](#)).

They are often made and shared by political actors or institutions solely to attack their competitors. One way to accomplish this would be to make videos of the incumbent Pakistani political leaders often found mudslinging against the opposition, corrupt, or sexually harassing. The idea is to make unsavoury news go viral about a party or a group rather than bring excuse-making with one person. TV viewers show a higher confidence level and willingness to share the misinformation when they are presented with a deepfake video that leans into their assumptions. Such tactics only serve to win over people's minds to think that their opponents are wayward, deceitful, and unfit to govern by undermining democracy (Debroy, [2024](#)).

### Misinformation through Deepfakes

Whenever individuals put forward deepfakes with ill intent, believing that the contents conveyed in the video are genuine, then misrepresentation happens. This is rife, especially in social networking sites where images or videos are uploaded with no caption or acknowledgement. Most of the people of Pakistan are not so experienced in the technological sense; hence, they lack the ability or money to detect deepfakes easily. Thus, fake news spread rapidly, and the community became adequately receptive and responsive to it. When people or groups assume a deepfake is real, their biases are perpetuated, and they come up with more reasons to hate their political rivals, thus increasing political intolerance (Kwok, [2020](#)). Both disinformation and deepfake misinformation collectively play a profound role in turning the political sentiments of the people of Pakistan. They build an environment where political opponents are responded to with suspicion, apprehension, and anger, which forms an intolerance cycle that is very difficult to break.

### Conclusion

Deepfakes are capable of worsening political intolerance in Pakistan because political divisions and animosities are intertwined with social and cultural aspects in the country. This spectacle overlays the nation's political theatre on top of a warzone in which specific truths and falsehoods are daily reconstructed and augmented through deepfake technology, designed to target the affective, perpetuate bigotry, and convolute truth and lies. As illustrated in the current chapter, deepfakes are not only a social,

psychological, and technological phenomenon, but they also impact political intolerance. As Pakistan's politics and society progress, efforts to achieve the goal of coping with the deepfakes' effects would need to be serious when working on developing a society that is more accepting and democratic.

Sometimes, it is proved that digital innovation amplifies the existing societal problem, and this situation clearly explains how deepfake technology fuels political intolerance in Pakistan. Highly realistic is the new generation of fake visuals – deepfakes, which have amplified political intolerance since they are much harder to distinguish from reality, appeal to emotions instead of reason, rely on prejudice, and blur the line between truth and lie. In this chapter, the author has focused on how deepfakes intensify political polarization, how they grow and thrive on confirmation bias and distrust, making political opinions become rigid and enemies out of the opposition. Solving the issues raised by deepfakes will call for much more than just an increased investment in technology and innovations to counter them, but this will first and foremost need a concerted effort in the promotion of tolerance and improved understanding of the usage of new media technologies in the political context of Pakistan.

The introduction of deepfake technology in Pakistan has drastically modified political discussions, thus intensifying the already existing excessive tensions between various groups. A manipulated digital content tool functions as a strong mechanism that reinforces discriminatory beliefs by creating bigger cultural fissures in communities plagued by frequent political violence. The roots of Pakistan's political intolerance between ideological, ethnic and institutional elements have received significant worsening through deepfake content, which distorts reality while shaping public perceptions. Deepfake films serve as effective misinformation distribution tools because they can generate compelling yet fictional stories, thus targeting users on passive news consumption platforms on social media. Videos that show politicians making controversial or unethical statements provoke strong emotional reactions, which result in higher political hostilities between opposing camps.

The unrestricted spread of misinformation causes political intolerance to rise, thus blocking constructive dialogue among people. The growth of deepfake distribution in Pakistan has become more severe because of the way digital echo chambers and media audience behaviour function. The engagement rules implemented by social media platforms boost visibility for sensational content, which includes deepfakes. Supporters of various political parties find themselves inside online circles showcasing information that backs their political positions and reduces their ability to accept alternative perspectives.

The rapid spread of deepfake content occurs because both fact-checking methods are insufficient, and public understanding of media is limited, thereby misleading audiences who experience increased political discord. Electronic media and conventional platforms work together to distribute deepfake information throughout society. Soon after sensational stories appeared, Pakistani television networks and their online news portals rushed to broadcast them while ignoring proper verification procedures to boost viewership. Damaged information becomes solidified in public understanding even when video evidence reveals itself as fraudulent, which makes the initial harm irreparably damaged. Politicised social media influencers make the situation worse by sharing fake information intended to benefit their political cause. Such reckless distribution of deepfake films by supporters of different factions strengthens their political opposition while increasing society-wide political intolerance. Due to its complex nature, deepfake technology represents an extreme threat to Pakistan's democratic discourse; therefore, the nation must handle this issue before political stability collapses.

Research conducted in this article shows that deepfake technology fuels hatred and societal divisions that transform Pakistani political discussions. Such phoney digital media content threatens democratic stability because it produces incorrect data while triggering intense feelings and distorting actual circumstances. Political fragmentation in Pakistan, together with deepfake technology, produces further scepticism about both leadership and democratic systems because Pakistani institutions already face a lack of public confidence.

Resolving the growing issue requires immediate steps toward both public deepfake technology education and the development of critical thinking abilities. The management of distorted content requires social media platforms to strengthen their guidelines for content moderation. The political situation in Pakistan will become more unstable and intolerant through deepfakes unless immediate action is taken.



The protection of democratic principles, together with political tolerance, depends on united action between politicians media outlets, and their public audience (Islam et al., [2024](#)).

### Recommendations

All schools must add digital literacy lessons to their curriculum, and citizens need community-level education about digital literacy. Citizens must verify sources of political information before sharing them because they need both media manipulation detection ability and internet content evaluation skills.

The laws demanding regulation of deepfake content creation for political attacks or public unrest need to be put into effect in Pakistan or made more stringent. The moral limitations which artificial intelligence generates in media content need proper legal recognition that does not undermine freedom of expression.

Pakistani social media enterprises should take additional accountability to scan their platforms for dangerous deepfake media content that they must remove. Digital platforms and government agencies can establish quick-response verification and identification systems alongside one another to authenticate political deception videos.

The establishment of respectful dialogue needs political influencers, together with leaders, to promote it. Combining the prohibition of political disinformation with deepfake usage allows society to establish ethical boundaries for elections.

Local fact-checking organisations should attain enhanced power, together with increased availability to the general public. Real information distribution, together with false information elimination, happens effectively through these channels, especially when dealing with sensitive political matters. The effort to spread danger alerts about deepfakes must be targeted at various audiences across all linguistic groups, including distinct societal demographics.



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