AI in Political Campaigns: Digital Democracy

Why?

This lesson equips students with a critical understanding of how AI technologies, increasingly prevalent in modern political campaigns, can shape public opinion and democratic processes. By exploring the ethical implications of AI tools like microtargeting, echo chambers, and social media bots, students learn to navigate the complex intersection of technology, ethics, and politics. Additionally, this lesson fosters critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills, preparing students to be informed and responsible digital citizens in an era where technology and politics are deeply intertwined.

Materials Needed	Time needed
● Simulation handouts printed out for student use - One per student pair	● Approximately 30 - 60 minutes

Objectives

- Students will be able to identify and explain key concepts related to the use of AI in political campaigns, including the key concepts and vocabulary below.
- Students will be able to analyze the ethical implications of using AI in political campaigns.
- Students will be able to critically evaluate real-world applications and consequences of AI in politics.
- Students will be able to engage in informed discussions and debates about the balance between effective political campaigning and ethical use of AI technologies.

Key Concepts & Vocabulary

- **Microtargeting**: Tailoring political messages to specific groups based on detailed data analysis.
- **Echo Chambers**: Social media environments where users encounter only similar opinions and beliefs.
- **Social Media Bots**:Automated accounts on social platforms, mimicking human activity to create the impression of public opinion.
- **Deepfakes**: AI-generated fake images, videos, or audio clips that convincingly mimic real people.

Lesson Components

1. **Before You Watch**: Connect lesson to background knowledge of AI in campaigns and get students' attention
2. **Video**: Show the pedagogy.cloud video explaining the ethical considerations in the topic of political campaigns using AI.
3. **Case Study**: Detail a real-world scenario that relates to the issue of AI use in a

political election.
4. **Simulation**: Lead students through an interactive activity exploring the possible ethical considerations
5. **Discussion**: Ask whole-class questions to reflect on experience and consider perspectives.
6. **Assessment**: Verify student understanding with an exit ticket

1. Before You Watch

Quick Survey: Conduct a brief classroom survey on students' social media usage and their encounters with personalized ads or content, leading into a discussion on how AI shapes these experiences.
- How many of you have noticed that the ads or content you see on social media seem tailored to your interests or recent searches?
- Have you ever encountered a political advertisement on social media? If so, did it seem relevant to your interests or concerns?
- Do you often see posts and content from a variety of political viewpoints? Or do they seem to be related to only one side of the debate?
- Have you ever suspected that you interacted with a bot (an automated account) on social media? (Does anyone have a story about this happening to them?)
- Do you feel that social media influences people's opinions on issues? Do you think people can be unethically manipulated by these influences?

While You Watch: Mention these topics and questions for students to look out for as they watch the video:
- What does "microtargeting" mean in the context of AI and political campaigns?
- Describe a real-world impact of AI in political campaigns mentioned in the video.
- Find an example in the video where AI's impact on politics can be both positive and negative.

2. Video Summary

The video explores the role of AI in political campaigns, highlighting tools like microtargeting, social media bots, and content manipulation, such as deepfakes. It delves into the significant impact of AI on shaping public opinion and creating echo chambers, while emphasizing the ethical dilemmas posed by AI's capability to mislead and manipulate. The video concludes by underscoring the need for responsible and ethical use of AI in politics, balancing technological advancements with the integrity of democratic processes.

3. Case Study

Distribute or read Case Study handout.
Summary: In the state of Greenia, Secretary of State candidate Jane Smythe's team employs AI techniques like microtargeting and social media bots, leading to ethical concerns and accountability debates. The campaign faces challenges including image manipulation, targeted misinformation, and the dismissal of a controversial speech as

a deepfake. In response, the Greenia state legislature drafts laws to regulate AI in political campaigns, aiming to ensure transparency, prevent misinformation, and maintain election integrity, highlighting the need for a balance between technology use and ethical campaigning.

4. Simulation

In the Secretary of State election in Greenia, a candidate wants to push the limits of the state's new AI campaign laws to harm opponents' campaigns while staying within legal boundaries. The advisor, concerned with ethical implications, must navigate these challenging requests.
- Have students get into pairs. One will represent the candidate, and the other will represent the advisor.
- Distribute a printout of the Simulation Handout to each pair. On it, there are six rules recently passed by the state legislature about campaigns using AI ethically.
- The student pairs should discuss each rule one at a time.
- The candidate wants to do everything possible within the law, so that person should push for more questionable methods.
- The advisor wants to remain ethical to avoid legal issues in the campaign, so that person should push for choices that stay further from the illegal tactics.
- The candidate has the final say in what tactic to use. That person should circle the chosen tactic, or else write in a different choice.
- Remind students that the candidate could get in legal trouble if tactics are too close to the legal lines set by the state legislature.
- When pairs have conversed about all six rules, and chosen tactics, bring them back to discuss each rule one at a time.
- Ask the students who represented the candidate to explain what they chose for each rule, and why.
- Ask the students who represented the advisor to comment on what they suggested, if it was different from the candidates' choices.
- If candidates seem to break the rules, let them know that they are in legal trouble, and will be fined and perhaps kept from running in the election.
- Also bring up the point that some of these tactics may be technically legal, but ethically questionable.
- Discuss the lesson with the discussion questions below.

5. Discussion

These questions are designed to be used in whole-class discussion. Ask questions that relate most effectively to the lesson.
1. Which strategies do you think crossed ethical lines, even if they were legal?
2. How might voters react if they knew about these tactics being used?
3. If you were a campaign manager, how would you balance the pressure to win with the need to maintain ethical standards in your use of AI?
4. What responsibility do politicians have to uphold ethical standards in campaigning?

5. What role does personal ethics play in this scenario? (How might a candidate's or advisor's personal ethics influence their decisions?)
6. Do you have any general rules that you think define ethical boundaries for using AI in political campaigns?
7. Do AI-driven campaign strategies impact the democratic process? Do they help or hinder the ability of individuals to make informed decisions?
8. How do you differentiate between manipulation and persuasion in the context of AI-driven political campaigns?
9. What could be the long-term consequences for a politician or political party that is found to have used AI unethically in their campaign?
10. What can be done to better inform the public about AI's role in political campaigns?
11. How do you envision the role of AI in political campaigns evolving in the future?

6. Assessment

Exit Ticket: Provide a prompt for students to reflect on their learning, such as:
- In one or two sentences, summarize how AI is used in political campaigns.
- How do you think AI in political campaigns could affect your future voting decisions?
- What was the most surprising thing you learned about AI in politics today?

Sources to Learn More

- Pros and cons of AI use in political campaigning - https://www.centreforpublicimpact.org/insights/good-bad-ugly-uses-machine-learning-election-campaigns
- Impacts on both candidates and voters - https://www.cfr.org/blog/artificial-intelligence-enters-political-arena-0
- Various explorations of the ways social platforms influenced voters during the 2016 US election - https://www.theverge.com/2016/11/14/13626694/election-2016-trending-social-media-facebook-twitter-influence

Case Study: Secretary of State Campaign

In the state of Greenia, Jane Smythe is running for Secretary of State. Her campaign, directed by an ambitious campaign manager, adopts advanced AI techniques to increase her chances of winning. This approach soon sparks ethical debates and concerns over accountability.

Background Information

Smythe's campaign, under the guidance of her campaign manager, leverages AI for microtargeting, dissecting voter data to tailor messages. They also deploy social media bots to widen their influence. Aware of the "echo chambers" created by social media algorithms, the campaign designs content that reinforces the existing beliefs of targeted voters.

Problem Analysis

The Smythe campaign faces several ethical challenges. They publicize images and video of her opponent with subtle modifications to make people think negatively. Targeted misinformation campaigns disproportionately affect minority communities, raising ethical questions about exploiting vulnerabilities. When a controversial speech by Smythe surfaces online, her campaign quickly dismisses it as a deepfake, exploiting AI's ambiguity to dodge responsibility. The combined use of microtargeting and social media bots amplifies these issues, creating echo chambers and an illusion of widespread support for Smythe, all while the true extent of voter manipulation remains hidden.

Legislative Response

In response to these tactics, the Greenia state legislature begins drafting legislation to establish boundaries and requirements for political campaigns' use of AI. The proposed laws aim to increase transparency in AI usage, mandate disclosure of AI-generated content, and set strict limits on microtargeting practices. Additionally, the legislature considers imposing penalties for campaigns that spread misinformation or manipulate images. These measures intend to preserve the integrity of elections and ensure voters are fully informed and not unduly influenced by AI-driven tactics.

Conclusion

Jane Smythe's campaign in Greenia presents a critical examination of the ethical dilemmas posed by AI in political campaigns. It underscores the need for balancing technological advancements with ethical campaigning and the role of legislative action in safeguarding democratic processes.

Questions

- What role should ethics play in a political campaign's strategy?
- How can voters ensure they are making informed decisions in an era of AI-driven political content?
- If you were a resident of Greenia, and found out about all of this manipulation, how would you respond? What if you had been a supporter of Smythe's campaign?

Simulation Activity: Navigating Campaign Ethics

In the Secretary of State election in Greenia, the candidate wants to push the limits of the state's new AI campaign laws to harm opponents' campaigns while staying within legal boundaries. The advisor, concerned with ethical implications, must navigate these challenging requests.

Roles
- **Candidate**: Wants to use AI to the fullest extent legally possible, even if it's ethically questionable.
- **Advisor**: Focuses on ethical campaigning, advising the candidate on the potential implications of each strategy.

Legislative Rules and Possible Tactics
Each of the numbered statements below are rules recently passed by the state legislature that place limits on the use of misleading AI in political campaigns. For each one, discuss between candidate and advisor. The candidate will make a decision on which idea to use, or come up with a different tactic.

1. **No Manipulation of Images or Videos:** Images or videos of political figures cannot be digitally altered to mislead voters.
   a. Ideas to Consider: Using filters on or lighting effects on images of either candidate, creating satirical cartoons of political figures, digitally altering an opponent's image.

2. **Disclosure of AI-Generated Content**: Any AI-generated content must be clearly disclosed to the public.
   a. Ideas to Consider: Having AI write opinion pieces without disclosure, AI generating campaign slogans, AI interacting on social media without acknowledgment.

3. **Limitations on Microtargeting Practices**: Microtargeting must not involve false information or exploit vulnerable populations.
   a. Ideas to Consider: Tailoring messages to specific demographics, predicting undecided voters' behavior, targeting vulnerable populations with misleading content.

4. **Prohibition of Misinformation or Fake News**: Spreading false information about political opponents is strictly prohibited.
   a. Ideas to Consider: Spreading negative but true aspects of an opponent's record, Having AI generating hypothetical scenarios about opponents, creating fake stories about an opponent.

5. **Restriction on Social Media Bots for Artificial Influence**: Social media bots must not be used to create artificial support or influence.
   a. Ideas to Consider: Using bots to retweet real supporters, creating fake profiles for positive content, bots engaging in political discussions.

6. **Respecting Voter Privacy and Data Security**: Personal voter data must be collected and used ethically and legally.
   a. Ideas to Consider: Analyzing public social media data, using AI algorithms to identify patterns in survey data, using AI to collect personal voter data without consent.

Video Script for Animator

Hello Young Innovators! Today we're discussing the ethics of AI in political campaigns. Title screen

Artificial Intelligence, or AI, is reshaping many aspects of our lives. This includes politics. In political campaigns, AI can analyze vast amounts of data, create personalized messages, and even influence public opinion. Understanding AI's role in politics helps us navigate its benefits and challenges in our democratic society.

Visuals Throughout - It's better not to use blue or red for the political data. use purple and green.

[Visuals: Show a bustling city with digital overlays representing data streams. Example image: https://i.imgur.com/2lKqdjH.png
Zoom in to a campaign headquarters with screens displaying data analysis and social media feeds. Example image: https://i.imgur.com/5HRMDgs.png
When we get into the room, Socrat is there facing the viewer, close to the "camera"]

First, let's explore AI tools commonly used in political campaigns. Microtargeting involves analyzing voter data to tailor messages to specific groups. Social media bots can spread these messages or even create a false sense of popularity. Then there's the creation of digital content, like videos, which can be manipulated for political purposes.

[Visuals: Illustrate a computer analyzing voter data. Example image: https://i.imgur.com/4DoLCJs.png Then show tailored political ads popping up on social media. Depict bots as small robot icons boosting a post's popularity. Example image: https://i.imgur.com/usboH8T.png]

AI's impact in politics is significant. For instance, campaigns can use AI to identify undecided voters and target them with specific messages and just the right time. This can help candidates get the word out and help people decide who to vote for.

[Visuals: Show a group of diverse animated voters, standing in colored circles on the ground, representing voters of the two main parties. There are a few people around the edges of the circles, representing undecided voters. Example image, but I wish it was zoomed in closer and had fewer people: https://i.imgur.com/SYdppq8.png]

Using AI in social media is also helpful for campaigns trying to figure out what messages resonate with voters. AI can analyze comments online to respond quickly to the issues people are facing right now.

[Split screen: On the left, a man wearing a colored shirt is looking grumpy and tweeting. Then on the right, a couple of people (political consultants, wearing suits) at a computer.

Something pops up on the monitor, and one of them types something into the computer quickly. Then the person on the left's phone vibrates and he looks at the phone and grins. A "like" thumbs-up appears on the monitor on the right side, and the two consultants give each other a high-five. Example image: https://i.imgur.com/4yALkSg.png]

AI in politics isn't without its challenges. Campaigns can manipulate images or videos to mislead voters, known as deepfakes. This sort of misinformation, spread rapidly by AI tools, can sway public opinion quickly and unfairly.

[Visuals: Display a video editing process where an image is altered. Transition to a deepfake video morphing into its original form. Show misinformation spreading like a virus among social media icons. Example image: https://i.imgur.com/aShymHy.png]

Another problem is that social media platforms can become echo chambers, where people only see content that aligns with their beliefs, thanks to AI algorithms.

[Shift to a person (female, medium dark skin) scrolling through a social media feed, surrounded by a literal echo chamber reflecting similar posts. The posts zoom past her. Example image: https://i.imgur.com/600fEg2.png]

The ethical considerations of using AI in politics are complex. While AI can engage voters effectively, it raises questions about privacy, consent, and the authenticity of political messaging. Different viewpoints exist: some argue for the innovative use of AI, while others caution against its potential to mislead and manipulate.

[Visuals: Show a debate between two people, one supporting AI innovation, the other expressing concern. Example image: https://i.imgur.com/c2c2iit.png except the debaters should probably be smaller, and the audience should not be so tiny.]

AI's role in political campaigns brings both opportunities and challenges. It's crucial to understand these dynamics to ensure a fair and democratic process. As technology evolves, so does the need for responsible and ethical use in the political arena.

[Visuals: Socrat walks between the two political debaters, and points to each of their cell phones one at a time, and they show him what they're looking at.]

Let's discuss: How do you think the use of AI in political campaigns might impact voter turnout and engagement, especially among younger voters?
Display question text: How do you think the use of AI in political campaigns might impact voter turnout and engagement, especially among younger voters?

Video Script for Narrations

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