



## The threat of deep fakes

*Issues: Use of technology for misinformation, propaganda and populism and its impact on society and democracy*

**Context:** The protesters who created chaos in Capitol Hill on January 6 believe that the 2020 U.S. election was stolen by the Democrats. This is largely due to misinformation and disinformation of which deepfakes are a part. Several social media platforms blocked President Donald Trump's accounts after the attack.

### Deep Fakes: Fabricating content

Deep Fakes — synthetic media, meaning media (including images, audio and video) that are either manipulated or wholly generated by Artificial Intelligence — even have the power to threaten the electoral outcome of the world's oldest democracy. Several books caution us against the threats of AI-generated content comprising non-existent personalities, synthetic datasets, unreal activities of real people, and content manipulation. Deep Fakes can target anyone, anywhere. It poses many threats like

1. Deepfakes must be contextualised within the broader framework of malicious manipulated media, computational propaganda and disinformation campaigns;
2. They are used to tarnish reputations, create mistrust, question facts, and spread propaganda.
3. These are done so convincingly that it is hard to detect what is fake and what is real.
4. Policymakers must understand how deepfakes can threaten polity, society, economy, culture, individuals and communities;
5. The idea that the mere existence of deep fakes causes enough distrust that any true evidence can be dismissed as a fake is a major concern that needs to be addressed.

### Solution and tools

1. Deep fakes cause multi-dimensional issues which require a collaborative, multi-stakeholder response that requires experts in every sector to find solutions;

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2. detecting deep fakes is hard; journalists need tools to scrutinise images, video and audio recordings for which they need training and resources;
3. Existing laws are clearly inadequate to safeguard individuals and entities against deepfakes. Only AI-generated tools can be effective in detection.
4. Need new law to regulate intermediaries like Facebook, WhatsApp etc.
5. As innovation in deep fakes gets better, AI-based automated tools must be invented accordingly.
6. Blockchains are robust against many security threats and can be used to digitally sign and affirm the validity of a video or document. Educating media users about the capabilities of AI algorithms could help.

### **Indian Situation and legal paradigm**

1. India also faces the same problem. So far, it has not enacted any specific legislation to deal with deep fakes, though there are some provisions in the Indian Penal Code that criminalise certain forms of online/social media content manipulation.
2. The Information Technology Act, 2000 covers certain cybercrimes. But this law and the Information Technology Intermediary Guidelines (Amendment) Rules, 2018 are inadequate to deal with content manipulation on digital platforms. The guidelines stipulate that due diligence must be observed by the intermediate companies for removal of illegal content.
3. In 2018, the government proposed rules to curtail the misuse of social networks. Social media companies voluntarily agreed to take action to prevent violations during the 2019 general election.
4. The Election Commission issued instructions on social media use during election campaigns. But reports show that social media platforms like WhatsApp were used as “vehicles for misinformation and propaganda” by major political parties during the election.

### **Way Forward**

1. Adopt European best practices of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)
2. Enforce intermediaries responsibility in Hate speech, Deep fakes etc



3. A dedicated high tech agency and Cyber force to deal with the issue
4. Promote fact check websites
5. Include politically motivated Deep fakes in Electoral Corrupt Practices
6. Actions on Fake News by regular media houses

## A stress test for American democracy

*Issues: misinformation, propaganda and populism as threats to democracy*

**Context:** 6th Jan incident at Capitol Hill is a grim reminder that democracy, however deeply rooted, can't be taken for granted and needs constant nurturing and protection to prevent its descent into populism and mobocracy. One can draw parallels with India.

### A polarising election

The 2020 election was the most polarising one the U.S. has seen and what happened on January 6 was its reflection. The certification of the results by Congress will get Mr Trump out of the White House but Trumpism will be a tougher challenge to deal with.

### Trumpism

Trumpism is a term for the political ideology, style of governance, political movement and set of mechanisms for acquiring and keeping power that is associated with the 45th United States president, Donald Trump, and his political base. It is an American political version of the far-right, national populist sentiment seen in multiple nations worldwide in the late 2010s and holds aspects of illiberal democracy. It is particularly against Globalization thus has global ramifications also.

Purging America of Trumpism will not be easy, especially if Mr Trump does plan to run again in 2024. That is why there is talk of invoking the 14th Amendment provisions by which a simple majority in Congress can bar Mr Trump from running for any federal office.

### Populism and social media

Somewhat belatedly, Twitter and Facebook removed Mr Trump's accounts along with a number of other right-leaning platforms. This has led to legitimate

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questions about free speech, the monopoly of social media platforms, the viability of their economic model and who should determine policy in the digital public domain. The European Union is accelerating consideration of new rules to guide content moderation policies of social media networks.

### Conclusion

The U.S. is not the first democratic society to face this threat. Even as Mr Biden tackles the challenges of COVID-19 and economic recovery, his real challenge will be rebuilding the traditions of democratic discourse aimed at enlarging the centrist consensus. Deeply divided country and congress is the legacy of Trumpism that must be undone if U.S. democracy has to successfully graduate from its stress test.