

SYNTHETIC POLITICAL PRESENCE: GENERATIVE AI, AUTHORIZATION, AND ELECTORAL COMMUNICATION IN THE 2024 ELECTIONS IN INDIA AND PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Generative artificial intelligence entered the 2024 electoral cycles in India and Pakistan through politically different forms of communication. This article asks how AI-generated and AI-assisted media were used in the two electoral environments, why those uses differed, and what the comparison reveals about political presence, authorization and democratic verification. Using a qualitative comparative case design and Digital Discourse Analysis of publicly documented campaign videos, posts, synthetic images and AI-assisted political communication, the study triangulates direct campaign material with institutional documents, fact-checking, digital-rights research and established journalism. Pakistan's most distinctive documented use was communicative continuity: Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf used a disclosed synthetic voice to reproduce the communicative presence of imprisoned former prime minister Imran Khan, including a January 2024 international virtual-convention message and a post-election AI "victory speech." India displayed a broader ecology. AI-supported translation and personalization expanded linguistic and audience reach; synthetic resurrection and generative imagery extended symbolic political presence; and unauthorized deepfakes of public figures created problems of provenance and attribution. The article develops synthetic political presence to describe technologically generated, reconstructed, translated or extended representation of an identifiable political actor without equivalent physical co-presence or an identical original performance. Its central comparative claim is that syntheticity alone does not determine political function: authorization and institutional context shape whether AI primarily sustains continuity, expands communication or disrupts verification. The study does not infer persuasion, turnout or electoral effects from circulation metrics. It concludes that electoral governance should distinguish legitimate synthetic representation from identity appropriation while strengthening disclosure, provenance, rapid remedies and verification capacity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Generative artificial intelligence has changed the production conditions of political communication. Synthetic speech, voice cloning, image and video generation, automated translation, and scalable personalization allow campaigns to produce recognizable political performances without requiring the represented actor to perform every message in person. The democratic significance of this shift cannot be captured by asking only whether an artifact is real or fake. The same technical capacity can preserve the voice of a politically constrained leader, translate a speech for a linguistically different audience, construct a symbolic image of leadership, or falsely attribute an endorsement to someone who never made it. What matters politically is how the technology is embedded in institutions, campaign organizations and systems of authorization and verification (Chadwick, 2017; Jungherr, 2023).

India and Pakistan provide a particularly useful comparison because both held major national elections in 2024, both have intensely platformized political communication, and both generated prominent examples of AI-mediated campaigning. Yet the political problems to which AI was applied differed. Pakistan's most visible generative-AI campaign practice developed around the imprisonment of Imran Khan and restrictions on conventional political presence. India's election unfolded at a far greater electoral scale and linguistic diversity, within a mature ecosystem of digital advertising, party social-media operations, regional political identities and commercial AI production. The comparison therefore permits analysis of how similar technological capacities acquire different political functions under contrasting institutional conditions.

The Pakistani case immediately complicates the dominant deepfake frame. PTI's synthetic Khan messages were not covert attempts to persuade supporters that a conventional recording existed. A verified January 21, 2024 upload on Khan's YouTube channel explicitly identified the message as using an "AI generated voice," while the February 9 post-election upload explicitly called

itself an "AI version" of a victory speech. The significance of these artifacts lies in the ability to make a politically recognizable leader communicatively present while he remained physically unavailable. They raise questions about authorization and authorship, but they cannot be analytically collapsed into unauthorized impersonation.

India presents a more heterogeneous pattern. Official government material documents the use of AI for real-time Hindi-to-Tamil translation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address at the Kashi Tamil Sangamam in December 2023, a practice presented as a model for future events. During the 2024 campaign, generative systems were also used for synthetic resurrection, personalized messaging, party-created memes and symbolic imagery. At the same time, unauthorized deepfake videos of actors Aamir Khan and Ranveer Singh falsely represented them as making partisan political statements. Reuters reported that the two videos together accumulated more than half a million views. The figure demonstrates circulation, not persuasion, but it shows the scale at which an attribution problem can become politically consequential.

A second Indian example demonstrates why synthetic political communication cannot be reduced to false speech. An Al Jazeera review of Meta Ad Library data found that the pro-Modi Instagram account Hokage Modi Sama promoted nearly fifty AI-generated images of Modi between February 27 and March 21, 2024. One sponsored image received more than 35,000 impressions, while the broader imagery portrayed Modi through heroic, religious and mythological symbolism. These artifacts did not necessarily fabricate policy statements; rather, generative imagery intensified a recognizable leadership narrative. The political issue is therefore not simply truth versus falsity, but the changing capacity to manufacture symbolic presence and emotional proximity at scale.

This article argues that the comparison is best understood through the concept of synthetic political presence: technologically generated, reconstructed, translated or extended representation of an identifiable political actor

through which that actor's communicative presence is made available without corresponding physical co-presence or an identical original performance. The concept is not intended to claim that generative AI creates autonomous political leadership. Synthetic presence depends on existing identities, organizations, audiences and political memories. Its value is analytical: it makes visible the partial separation of political identity, physical presence, authorship and communicative performance.

Authorization is the principal differentiating mechanism in this framework. Authenticity asks whether a representation corresponds to an original human performance; authorization asks whether the person or organization whose identity is represented consented to, commissioned or endorsed the synthetic representation. An authorized voice clone may not be an original performance, but it remains attributable to a responsible campaign. An unauthorized deepfake appropriates identity while breaking that line of responsibility. Authorization, however, is not a democratic seal of approval: authorized content can still be misleading, inadequately disclosed, hyper-personalized or manipulative.

The comparison of India and Pakistan yields three connected contributions. First, generative AI did not perform one uniform electoral function across the two cases. In Pakistan, the strongest pattern is the repeated reconstruction of Imran Khan's communicative presence while he was physically constrained. In India, the material is more diverse: AI appears in multilingual adaptation, personalization, symbolic imagery, reconstructed political figures, party communication and unauthorized impersonation. Second, the comparison shows that authorization is analytically distinct from syntheticity. Similar technologies can carry different political meanings depending on whether the represented identity has authorized the synthetic performance. Third, the analysis develops synthetic political presence as a way of explaining how political identity can be made communicatively available without corresponding physical co-presence or an identical original performance.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Hybrid media, mediatization and generative political communication

Political communication has long been mediated. The hybrid media system perspective emphasizes interactions among broadcast media, journalism, social platforms, campaign organizations and networked publics rather than a simple replacement of old media by new media (Chadwick, 2017). Mediatization scholarship similarly explains how political actors adapt their practices to changing media logics (Strömbäck, 2008). Digital parties and platform-centered political organizations intensified direct communication, personalization and organizational dependence on digital infrastructures (Gerbaudo, 2019). Generative AI extends this trajectory because it changes not only distribution but production: the voice, language, face or apparent performance of a political actor can now be generated or transformed after the fact.

Recent scholarship has begun to theorize this shift more directly. Guan, Guo and Yang (2026) propose "generative logic" as an extension of mediatization theory, showing how AI-generated political parodies create new forms of political reinterpretation. Their contribution is important because it rejects technological isolation: generative systems interact with political and media logics rather than replacing them. For the India-Pakistan comparison, this means that technical capability is only one part of the explanation. A voice-cloning system becomes politically significant through the institutional problem it solves; an image generator becomes significant through the symbolic narratives and advertising infrastructures into which its outputs are inserted.

This institutional view also guards against technological determinism. PTI's use of synthetic voice did not remove the conditions that constrained Khan's physical campaigning; it provided a communication workaround. AI translation can reduce a linguistic barrier without decentralizing agenda-setting. Generative imagery can intensify a leadership myth without creating the political identity on which the myth depends.

Technology affords forms of communication, but organizations, institutions and audiences determine their political meaning.

2.2 Deepfakes, uncertainty and the limits of the deception model

Deepfake research established an essential democratic problem: realistic synthetic media can fabricate evidence, damage reputations and create opportunities to deny authentic evidence (Chesney & Citron, 2019). Yet empirical work cautions against assuming that exposure produces straightforward belief. Vaccari and Chadwick (2020) found that synthetic political video can generate uncertainty rather than simple deception, and that uncertainty can affect trust in news on social media. Research on the liar's dividend further shows that the mere plausibility of manipulation can become politically useful when actors dismiss damaging evidence as fake, although the strength of that effect depends on the form of evidence and context (Schiff, Schiff, & Bueno, 2025).

These findings matter for the present comparison because the observable democratic problem in an artifact is often not persuasion but provenance. An unauthorized synthetic endorsement can force the represented person, journalists, platforms and citizens to determine who created the content, whether the depicted speech occurred, and which correction should be trusted. This burden exists even when many viewers ultimately reject the false content. The article therefore uses epistemic disruption in a deliberately bounded sense: a disturbance in the ability to establish the provenance, authorization and accountability of political communication. It does not claim that the selected artifacts caused a generalized post-truth condition.

2.3 Consensual synthetic media, "softfakes" and authorization

The rapid normalization of consensual synthetic content creates a problem that the deception-centered literature cannot resolve on its own. Ljepava, Tarabasz and Selakovic (2026) conceptualize "softfakes" as human-AI co-produced strategic communication that mediates

presence, voice and authenticity. Their work is directly relevant to authorized political synthesis because it shows that synthetic media can be intentionally used by legitimate communicators rather than only by adversaries. Pawelec and Łabuz (2026), however, challenge the implication that consensual synthetic political communication is necessarily "soft." They argue that AI-generated political visualizations can remain ethically and legally problematic even when consent is present. AI-mediated political presence itself is not presented here as an entirely new discovery. Recent scholarship already examines generative logic, softfakes, voice, presence and authenticity. The contribution is more specific: authorization is treated as a comparative variable and examined in relation to institutional context and the political function of synthetic representation. This makes it possible to distinguish an authorized voice reconstruction, AI-assisted translation, supportive third-party imagery and an unauthorized deepfake without collapsing them into a single category of synthetic media.

2.4 Synthetic political presence

Synthetic political presence is defined here as technologically generated, reconstructed, translated or extended representation of an identifiable political actor through which that actor's communicative presence is made available without requiring equivalent physical co-presence or an identical original performance. Recorded radio, television and video have long separated communication from immediate co-presence. Generative systems add a different capacity: parts of the performance itself can be synthesized from data, text or instructions. A leader may appear to speak words rendered by a model, appear in a language not personally spoken in that performance, or be visually reconstructed despite death or physical absence.

The concept has three boundaries. First, it requires an identifiable political identity or politically meaningful public figure; generic AI-generated campaign graphics are not sufficient by themselves. Second, it concerns representation, not autonomous machine agency: the political force of the artifact derives from human identities

and organizations. Third, synthetic political presence is analytically separate from authorization. The same representational capacity can be authorized, party-authorized, third-party supportive, unauthorized or unclear. That separation is essential for comparing the Pakistani continuity cases with Indian translation, symbolic reconstruction and impersonation.

2.5 Research gap and analytical expectations

Research on deepfakes, computational propaganda, mediated authenticity and generative political communication has expanded quickly. What remains less clear is why similar generative capacities take on different political functions in different electoral environments. Much of the literature either concentrates on deceptive deepfakes or catalogs the growing range of AI tools used in campaigns. That leaves a comparative gap: we know increasingly well what generative systems can produce, but less about how institutional conditions, campaign problems and authorization shape what those productions actually do politically. A second gap concerns responsibility. Consent and disclosure are often discussed, but authorization is less often used systematically to connect represented identity, organizational responsibility and verification.

India and Pakistan address these gaps because the contrast is substantive rather than merely geographical. In Pakistan, the evidence repeatedly returns to a leader whose physical campaign presence was constrained. In India, the evidence is spread across a wider set of functions and actors,

including translation, personalization, symbolic image production, synthetic reconstruction and unauthorized impersonation. The comparison therefore considers not only technology, but also the political problem being addressed, the identity being represented, the authorization relationship and the observable communication outcome.

3. Research Questions and Comparative Logic

RQ1. How were AI-generated and AI-assisted media used to construct, reproduce or extend political presence during the 2024 electoral cycles in India and Pakistan?

RQ2. How did authorization and institutional context shape the communicative functions of the AI-mediated campaign material examined in the two cases?

RQ3. What do these contrasting uses reveal about authenticity, accountability and verification in AI-mediated electoral communication?

The study adopts a strategically contrasting qualitative comparison. India and Pakistan are not treated as institutionally equivalent cases, and the purpose is not to rank their democratic quality or estimate national prevalence. Documented AI-mediated electoral practices are compared along common empirical dimensions: what was generated or transformed, whose identity was represented, who produced or authorized it, what campaign problem it addressed, how it circulated, whether synthesis was disclosed, what observable communication outcome followed and what verification response it generated.

Table 1. Comparative analytical frame

Dimension	Pakistan	India	Analytical significance
Electoral communication problem foregrounded in evidence	Leader access and physical/institutional constraint	Scale, linguistic diversity, personalization and highly competitive platform campaigning	Different political problems make different AI affordances valuable
Most distinctive documented authorized use	Synthetic Imran Khan voice and audiovisual messages	AI-assisted translation, personalization and synthetic reconstruction	Authorized synthesis can sustain continuity or expand reach

Dimension	Pakistan	India	Analytical significance
Prominent unauthorized risk	Disclosure inconsistency and uncertain third-party uses	Celebrity/public-figure impersonation and deceptive deepfakes	Authorization clarifies identity appropriation and responsibility
Primary comparative question	How can a constrained leader remain communicatively present?	How can political communication be scaled, localized, symbolized or impersonated?	Syntheticity alone cannot explain political function

Note. Author-generated comparative framework based on the documented materials discussed in the article; it does not measure national prevalence.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research design and scope

The study adopts a qualitative comparative case-study design informed by Digital Discourse Analysis (DDA). The final analytical corpus comprises 30 AI-mediated electoral communication items from India and Pakistan. The temporal boundary covers the 2024 electoral cycles and the immediately preceding campaign period where a documented AI practice was directly relevant to the coming election. PTI's December 2023 virtual rally is therefore included because it initiated a synthetic-voice practice that continued into the January 2024 international virtual convention and the February post-election message. Indian pre-election demonstrations of AI-assisted political communication are used as contextual evidence where they illuminate capabilities subsequently relevant to electoral communication rather than being treated automatically as campaign events.

The 30-item corpus includes campaign videos, AI-generated or AI-assisted speeches, synthetic voice messages, political advertisements, social-media posts, synthetic images and documented instances of AI-enabled impersonation. The material circulated through more than one digital and social-media environment, including YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and X. YouTube was the principal platform through which the selected

audiovisual material was accessed and examined, although some items originated on, or circulated simultaneously through, other platforms. Where the same underlying video, speech or synthetic representation appeared on several platforms, it was treated as one analytical item rather than counted repeatedly. Accordingly, the corpus represents distinct communicative items or events rather than a count of every platform appearance.¹

4.2 Material selection and evidentiary hierarchy

Material was selected purposively where it had a clear electoral or political-leadership connection, documented AI generation or AI-assisted transformation, sufficient contextual information for interpretation, and a traceable evidentiary basis. Direct campaign uploads and official institutional material are used where available. In addition to the 30-item analytical corpus, the study draws on secondary documentary material, including peer-reviewed scholarship, established news reporting, fact-checking sources, digital-rights reports, platform-related documentation, and relevant electoral, governmental and regulatory records. These secondary materials are not counted as additional corpus items. They are used in the literature review and discussion, and where appropriate to verify particular instances of

¹ The unit of analysis is the distinct communicative item or event, not each platform appearance.

Cross-platform copies of the same underlying message are therefore not counted as separate corpus items.

AI use, authorization, circulation, contestation and regulatory response.²

Verification forms part of the evidentiary procedure because provenance is itself relevant to the analysis. For authorized synthesis, greatest evidentiary weight is given to direct campaign acknowledgment or explicit disclosure. For disputed or unauthorized material, independent verification and corroborated reporting are used. Platform labels are treated as supplementary evidence rather than forensic proof, while official electoral and government documents support regulatory claims. This procedure keeps three elements analytically separate: the political artifact, evidence about how it was produced or authorized, and evidence about how it circulated or was contested.

4.3 Digital Discourse Analysis

Digital Discourse Analysis is used as a qualitative, multimodal and context-sensitive approach rather than as a quantitative content-counting exercise. Each item is read in relation to its verbal, visual, sonic and platform features. Available speech and transcript content are examined together with synthetic or cloned voice, visual representation, captions, disclosure cues, account identity, platform context, symbolic framing, intended

political function and available verification records. Attention is also given to how political actors are made present through AI, whether that representation extends an existing performance, reconstructs an unavailable actor, localizes communication for another audience, or appropriates an identity without authorization. Where an original artifact or stable reproduction is available, these multimodal features are interpreted directly. Where only a verified secondary description survives, interpretation is restricted to what the source can establish.³

The comparative reading is organized around five first-order dimensions: leadership representation; authorization and authenticity; emotional or rhetorical framing; technological framing; and democratic or verification implications. Patterns are first examined within each national case and then compared across India and Pakistan. This two-stage reading allows recurrent similarities and differences to emerge from the 30 items before they are interpreted at a higher conceptual level. The terms communicative continuity, communicative expansion and epistemic disruption therefore function as comparative syntheses of recurring configurations rather than as predetermined labels imposed on every item.

Table 2. From observable features to higher-order communicative functions

Observable configuration	First-order analytical questions	Higher-order function	Limit of inference
Authorized synthetic representation under physical/institutional constraint	Whose identity is represented? Who authorized it? Is synthesis disclosed? What constraint does it address?	Communicative continuity	Does not establish persuasion or democratic legitimacy

² Secondary documentary sources support contextualization and verification but are analytically distinct from the 30-item corpus. Their use does not increase the corpus count.

³ Digital Discourse Analysis is used here in a qualitative and multimodal sense: political

meaning is interpreted across language, voice, image, platform context, account identity, disclosure and circulation rather than through frequency counts alone.

Observable configuration	First-order analytical questions	Higher-order function	Limit of inference
Authorized translation, personalization or representational extension	What is localized or scaled? Does the same political identity persist across versions?	Communicative expansion	Reach is not equivalent to inclusion, support or participation
Unauthorized/contested synthetic representation	Is identity appropriated? Is provenance disputed? Who must correct or verify the claim?	Epistemic disruption	Circulation does not establish belief or electoral effect

Note. Functions may overlap. The classification is interpretive and comparative rather than a mutually exclusive quantitative coding scheme.

4.4 Authorization categories

Authorization is treated as a relational status rather than a moral judgment. Five statuses are distinguished where the evidence permits: (1) directly authorized or acknowledged by the represented person; (2) authorized or produced by an official party/campaign; (3) third-party supportive but not shown to be officially authorized; (4) unauthorized, where the represented person or responsible organization did not consent and the content appropriated identity; and (5) unclear/not established. For deceased-leader representations, authorization can only refer to the responsible party, campaign, estate or other identifiable rights-holder; it cannot be attributed retrospectively to the deceased person.⁴

4.5 Ethical note and study boundary

The analysis uses publicly circulated political material and does not involve interviews, experiments or private participant data. Misleading artifacts are described rather than unnecessarily reproduced. The prominence of YouTube reflects the accessibility and persistence

of audiovisual campaign material in the assembled corpus and should not be read as evidence that YouTube was the dominant site of AI-mediated campaigning in either country. Circulation figures establish visibility, not persuasion, turnout, participation or vote choice; views, impressions and reposts are therefore used only to document reported reach or circulation.⁵

5. Results: Comparing Electoral Uses of AI

5.1 Pakistan: synthetic presence as communicative continuity

The Pakistani material shows a concentrated pattern. AI was repeatedly used around one politically central problem: how could Imran Khan remain publicly and recognizably present while imprisoned and unable to campaign physically in the ordinary way? Synthetic voice did not simply add another campaign format. It allowed PTI to convert written or mediated material attributed to Khan into a performance that sounded like the leader and could be inserted into virtual rallies, campaign messages and the immediate post-election narrative. The dominant Pakistani pattern is therefore described as communicative continuity.

The December 2023 virtual rally is the starting point, not the whole Pakistani case. Contemporary reporting described a four-minute

⁴ Authorization and authenticity are treated as separate dimensions. Authorized synthetic content may still transform an original performance, while unauthorized content may imitate a real person with high perceptual realism.

⁵ Because the study examines publicly circulated political communication and does not recruit participants or access private participant data, ethical attention is directed principally to accurate attribution, provenance and the avoidance of unnecessary reproduction of misleading material.

synthetic Khan address produced from notes conveyed from prison and rendered with ElevenLabs voice technology. The message was integrated into a five-hour online rally and labelled as an AI voice based on Khan's notes. The Guardian/AFP reported that the virtual rally was viewed by more than 4.5 million people across Facebook, X and YouTube. This figure establishes the scale of reported circulation across platforms; it is not treated as evidence of persuasion, unique viewers or electoral effect. The production chain is analytically important: Khan's political identity remained central, but the final performance depended on intermediaries, party staff and synthetic voice generation. This makes the case more complex than a simple substitution of machine for politician.

The January 21, 2024 international virtual convention shows that this was no longer a single technological experiment. Khan's verified YouTube channel published a message whose title explicitly identified an 'AI generated voice.' The disclosure changes the political meaning. The audience was not being asked to believe that Khan had secretly recorded a conventional speech; PTI openly presented a synthetic performance as an authorized extension of his political voice. That makes the case different from a deceptive deepfake even though both depend on synthetic representation.

The February 9 post-election message extends the same practice into a different campaign moment. Khan's verified channel released an 'AI version' of a victory speech shortly after polling. The important outcome is communicative timing, not a claim about how many votes the video produced. An imprisoned leader was able to enter the immediate struggle over how the election result should be interpreted. Synthetic presence therefore operated before, during and immediately after the election as part of a continuing campaign repertoire rather than as a one-off novelty.

The Pakistani material also moves beyond the headline virtual-rally videos. Digital Rights Foundation documented constituency-targeted PakBadlo Facebook advertisements that used AI-generated Khan audio to support or name

particular candidates and raised concerns about inconsistent disclosure. This reveals a second function nested inside continuity: personalization. Khan's recognizable voice could be extended from national leadership communication into local candidate campaigning. The same practice that addressed physical absence could therefore scale a centralized political identity across constituencies. Taken together, the Pakistani evidence suggests a specific pattern: the represented identity is highly concentrated, synthetic voice is especially prominent, the organizational link to PTI is often visible, and the principal communication outcome is continued leader presence across moments in which direct physical performance was constrained. This does not mean that all Pakistani AI content was authorized or that AI removed the underlying political restrictions. It means that continuity around a constrained leader is the clearest recurring use in the material examined.

5.2 India: communicative expansion across language, scale and symbolism

The Indian material is different in both range and structure. AI was not concentrated around one leader's physical absence or one dominant modality. It appeared in multilingual adaptation, personalized outreach, automated or synthetic messaging, campaign imagery, party satire, reconstructed political figures and unauthorized deepfakes. The central difference is therefore not simply that India had 'more AI.' It is that AI was used to solve a wider set of campaign communication problems involving scale, language, segmentation, symbolism and competitive representation.

Multilingual communication illustrates the expansion logic clearly. Official material from the Kashi Tamil Sangamam in December 2023 documents real-time AI-assisted Hindi-to-Tamil translation of Modi's speech and presents the technology as something intended for future use. Because this event predates the formal Lok Sabha campaign, it is treated as contextual evidence of a capability rather than as a campaign artifact by itself. Its relevance lies in the communication problem it reveals: a national political actor can use AI-assisted translation to make the same

political presence available across linguistic boundaries without reproducing the original performance in each language.

The wider Indian material points to the same scaling logic in more explicitly electoral forms: personalized audio messages, automated calls, synthetic campaign videos and localized content in multiple languages were reported during the election period. These practices change the unit of campaign production. Instead of producing one speech for one audience, campaigns and political intermediaries can generate many variants around the same political identity. The gain is speed and adaptability; the unresolved question is whether localized delivery also makes political communication more accountable or merely more efficiently centralized.

Synthetic imagery adds another form of expansion. Al Jazeera's review of Meta Ad Library data found that the pro-Modi Instagram account Hokage Modi Sama promoted nearly fifty AI-generated images of Modi between February 27 and March 21, 2024. One sponsored image received more than 35,000 impressions. The same investigation reported that the page's 'Our Saffron Superhero' AI image had nearly two million likes, while a sponsored AI-generated image of Rahul Gandhi with farmers carried an estimated 7,000 impressions. These platform figures are used only to establish circulation, paid visibility and the scale of engagement reported for particular posts; they are not treated as measures of persuasion or voting effects. Their more important value is qualitative: generative imagery made it inexpensive to multiply visually elaborate versions of political identity and circulate them as campaign-adjacent symbolic material.

This example also shows why authorization cannot be inferred from political sympathy. Hokage Modi Sama was supportive of Modi, but support does not establish an official BJP relationship. The material is therefore treated as third-party supportive unless stronger evidence of campaign authorization exists. This prevents every flattering AI image from being attributed to the campaign while still recognizing that supportive synthetic content can shape the symbolic environment in which campaigning occurs.

The Indian evidence also extends political presence across time. Reporting during the electoral period documented AI-mediated representations involving deceased political figures, including M. Karunanidhi, while Reuters reported Congress candidate Vijay Vasanth's use of synthetic material involving his deceased father. These cases differ from Khan's imprisonment because the represented person cannot provide contemporaneous consent or perform the message at all. Responsibility shifts to the living campaign, party, family, estate or producer. Generative media can reactivate inherited political authority and memory, not only compensate for temporary physical absence.

5.3 India: unauthorized impersonation and epistemic disruption

Unauthorized impersonation creates the sharpest contrast. Reuters reported in April 2024 that AI-generated videos falsely portrayed actors Aamir Khan and Ranveer Singh as criticizing Modi and supporting the opposition Congress party. Both actors rejected the representations, and Aamir Khan filed a police complaint. The two videos together accumulated more than half a million views. That number establishes circulation, not belief. The more important outcome is that political speech was attached to recognizable identities without authorization, forcing denials, verification and corrective reporting.

This is where the Indian material moves from expansion to epistemic disruption. The apparent speaker and the responsible communicator no longer match. A represented person has to deny words they did not speak; journalists and fact-checkers have to reconstruct provenance; platforms may face removal requests; and voters encounter competing claims about whether audiovisual evidence is genuine. The political cost therefore begins before persuasion can be measured. Unauthorized synthesis creates a verification problem simply by making false attribution plausible enough to require correction. Party-created synthetic parody occupies a boundary position. AI-generated satire posted by an official political account may be clearly partisan and may not be intended as literal documentary

evidence, yet undisclosed photorealistic manipulation can still blur genre boundaries. The democratic issue becomes legibility: can a reasonable viewer tell whether a clip is parody,

campaign fiction, documentary evidence or an attributed statement? Disclosure and account context become part of the meaning of the artifact.

5.4 Cross-case synthesis

Table 3. Comparative findings

Empirical dimension	Pakistan pattern in the material	India pattern in the material	Comparative finding
Primary campaign problem	Maintaining communication around an imprisoned/physically constrained central leader	Reaching a large, multilingual and segmented electorate across dense platform environments	AI is recruited to solve different campaign problems
Represented identity	Strong concentration around Imran Khan	Distributed across parties, candidates, celebrities and historical/deceased figures	Pakistan is more leader-concentrated; India more representationally diversified
Prominent modalities	Synthetic voice, virtually audiovisual content, candidate-oriented messaging and AI imagery	Translation, personalized/automated messaging, synthetic imagery, reconstructed figures, parody and deepfake audiovisual content	The technological repertoire differs as well as political purpose
Physical presence	Frequently substitutes for or reconstructs unavailable leader performance	More often extends, localizes, multiplies or transforms available political communication	Continuity is more central in Pakistan; expansion more central in India
Language function	Present but not the defining pattern	Multilingual adaptation and localization are prominent	AI can solve linguistic scale as well as physical absence
Personalization	Leader identity extended into constituency/candidate messaging	Personalized messages, calls and localized content across a broader ecosystem	Both personalize, but organizational use differs
Synthetic imagery/symbolism	Reinforces leader visibility and campaign identity	Broader heroic, religious, mythic and historical representations	India shows greater visual-symbolic diversification in the examined material
Deceased/historical figures	Not a dominant pattern	Synthetic reconstruction of deceased political figures appears in campaign communication	Synthetic presence can extend identity across time, not only space

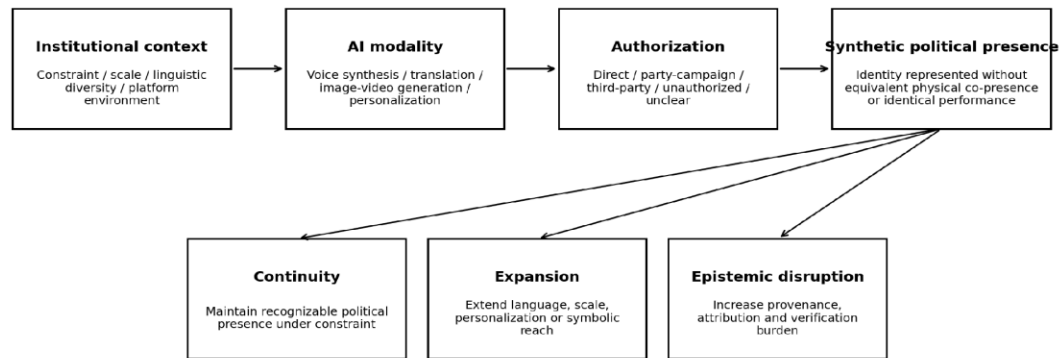
Empirical dimension	Pakistan pattern in the material	India pattern in the material	Comparative finding
Authorization	Headline PTI examples often traceable to party/leader channels; disclosure varies elsewhere	Ranges from official/party-linked use to third-party support, satire and clearly unauthorized impersonation	Authorization creates important variation within each case
Observable outcome	Continued availability of Khan's political voice and identity despite physical absence	Expanded linguistic/representational forms plus documented false attribution and corrective response	Outcomes differ in communication, not merely technology
Verification response	Disclosure/provenance especially important for synthetic voice and targeted messages	Denials, police complaint, fact-checking, platform scrutiny and electoral response visible in deepfake cases	Verification burden varies with authorization and content type

Note. The table summarizes functions visible in documented examples. It does not imply equal frequency or national prevalence.

The comparison produces several concrete differences. First, the Pakistani material is more concentrated around one leader, while the Indian material is distributed across leaders, parties, candidates, celebrities and historical political figures. Second, synthetic voice is especially prominent in Pakistan, whereas India displays a wider mix of translation, personalized messaging, imagery, synthetic reconstruction and deepfake audiovisual content. Third, the main Pakistani problem is physical and institutional access to a leader; the Indian material more often addresses linguistic scale, audience segmentation, symbolic production and competitive representation. Fourth, authorization is more consistently traceable in the headline PTI examples, while the

Indian material ranges from official or party-linked uses to supportive third-party production and clearly unauthorized impersonation.

The observable communication outcomes also differ. In Pakistan, synthetic media repeatedly returned Khan's voice and identity to campaign communication despite physical absence and extended that identity into constituency-level messaging. In India, AI increased the number of ways political identity could be localized, personalized, visualized, historically reconstructed or falsely appropriated. These outcomes are visible in the artifacts and their circulation records; they do not require an unsupported claim that AI changed vote choice. The comparison therefore rests on what the material actually allows us to observe before moving to higher-level interpretation. Note. Author-generated conceptual model. The arrows represent analytical relationships, not estimated causal effects.



Accountability and verification implications are interpreted from the relationship among context, modality and authorization.

Figure 1. Authorization-centered model of synthetic political presence

6. Discussion

6.1 What the comparison changes

The first lesson is that 'AI in elections' is too broad to function as an explanation. The same family of technologies entered the two electoral environments through different campaign problems. In Pakistan, synthetic voice became especially valuable because a central leader could not perform ordinary campaign presence. In India, the larger pattern concerns multiplication: one political identity or message could be translated, personalized, visually transformed, reconstructed or, in unauthorized cases, appropriated. Institutional context does not mechanically determine technology use, but it changes which affordances become politically useful.

Synthetic political presence is used as the paper's central concept because it captures what connects these practices without treating them as normatively equivalent. Khan's AI voice, Modi's AI-assisted linguistic extension, a reconstructed deceased leader and an unauthorized celebrity deepfake differ substantially in authorization and political purpose. What they share is narrower: each makes a politically meaningful identity present through a performance that is generated, transformed or reconstructed rather than simply captured as an identical original event. Once that common feature is identified, authorization and

context can explain why the practices acquire different political meanings.

6.2 Identity, authorship and performance are becoming partially separable

Political communication has never been purely individual. Leaders use speechwriters, campaign staff, editors, teleprompters and media professionals. Generative AI does not invent organizational mediation. It changes its sensory and evidentiary form. A campaign can now produce a performance that sounds like the leader even when the leader did not utter the final audio, or produce a translated performance that appears to preserve the leader's voice across languages. The audience may therefore encounter a highly personalized performance whose authorship is distributed across human and computational actors.

The PTI case makes this distribution visible because the leader's physical absence forces attention to the production chain. Notes or dictated material attributed to Khan are transformed into a script, rendered as synthetic voice, combined with visuals and distributed by party channels. The result remains politically attributable to Khan and PTI when authorization is clear, but the exact boundary between the leader's wording and organizational production becomes harder to observe. This is not necessarily deception. It is a new accountability problem:

political responsibility must attach to a chain of production rather than to the physical act of speaking alone.

The same issue appears differently in India. Translation can preserve political identity while changing language; synthetic resurrection can preserve symbolic identity while eliminating the possibility of contemporaneous consent; third-party generative imagery can strengthen a leader's symbolic environment without official authorization. The relationship between "who appears," "who authored," "who authorized" and "who distributed" therefore becomes a central object of political communication research.

6.3 Authorization is analytically necessary but normatively insufficient

Authorization matters because it restores a line of responsibility. When a verified campaign channel explicitly labels a Khan message as AI-generated, citizens can attribute the representation to an identifiable political organization. When Aamir Khan or Ranveer Singh is made to deliver political speech without consent, the represented identity is appropriated and responsibility is obscured. This difference is substantial and should inform both analysis and regulation.

Yet authorization cannot carry the normative argument by itself. Pawelec and Łabuz (2026) are correct to resist the assumption that consensual synthetic political communication is automatically harmless. Authorized content can manipulate emotional proximity, fabricate visual events, obscure the degree of script intervention or target audiences in ways that are difficult to audit. Disclosure can also be formally present but practically weak. A label in a caption may disappear when content is downloaded and reposted; a disclaimer in one language may not serve a multilingual audience; a late disclosure may follow rather than precede the persuasive content. Authorization should therefore be understood as necessary for accountable identity extension, not sufficient for democratic legitimacy.

6.4 Continuity is not political equality; expansion is not inclusion

The Pakistan case illustrates a temptation common in technology-and-democracy research: to interpret successful circumvention of a communication constraint as democratization. Synthetic voice undoubtedly expanded PTI's ability to communicate around Khan's physical absence, but it did not remove the political conditions that produced the absence. Nor does more efficient reproduction of a charismatic leader necessarily widen internal party participation. A technology can increase communicative continuity while leaving institutional inequality untouched.

The Indian translation and personalization cases create a parallel caution. A message rendered into Tamil or localized for a constituency may become more accessible, but accessibility is not identical to inclusion. The political agenda, speaker identity and message architecture may remain centralized. Generative systems can therefore produce localized communication without localized political power. The distinction matters because otherwise scale and linguistic adaptation are easily misread as evidence of democratic participation.

6.5 Epistemic disruption without a post-truth shortcut

The unauthorized Indian deepfakes show a democratic risk that does not require proving mass deception. The harm begins with misattribution. Once a recognizable person appears to make a political statement that was never authorized, corrective actors must reconstruct provenance. This consumes time and attention, and the correction may travel through different networks from the original content. In an election, timing matters because the informational value of a remedy declines as voting or a campaign event approaches.

The concept of epistemic disruption is intentionally narrower than "epistemic crisis" or "post-truth." The present study does not measure generalized trust or citizens' ability to distinguish all authentic from synthetic media. It identifies a recurrent artifact-level condition in which responsibility and provenance become contested.

Existing experimental literature supplies reasons to expect broader consequences for uncertainty and trust, but those consequences should be tested rather than inferred from view counts.

6.6 Verification inequality

The comparison also suggests a structural problem that can be termed verification inequality: unequal capacity to establish the provenance and authorization of political media. The concept differs from general media literacy because it concerns resources distributed across institutions as well as individual skill. Six dimensions are especially relevant: access to source evidence; access to technical verification tools; time available before a political decision or news cycle closes; language accessibility of labels and corrections;

institutional responsiveness to complaints; and access to platform data or metadata.

A campaign may hold the original script and production files. A platform may hold upload metadata and detection signals. A newsroom or fact-checking organization may have forensic tools and professional source networks. An ordinary voter may receive a compressed repost in a private messaging group with no original caption. These actors are not performing the same verification task. The present study does not measure this inequality directly; it proposes it as a research agenda arising from the cases. Future work can operationalize the six dimensions through experiments, user studies, newsroom research and platform-data access.

Table 4. Verification inequality as a future analytical construct

Dimension	Question for empirical research	Illustrative asymmetry
Source evidence	Who can access the original file, script or production record?	Campaign/producer may possess evidence unavailable to recipients
Technical tools	Who has forensic or provenance-verification capability?	Platforms/newsrooms may have tools ordinary users lack
Time	How quickly can authenticity be established before the political moment passes?	Corrections may arrive after viral circulation or voting decisions
Language accessibility	Are disclosures and corrections understandable in the recipient's language?	English-only labels may underserve multilingual publics
Institutional responsiveness	Can affected persons obtain rapid correction or removal?	Public figures and organizations have unequal complaint capacity
Platform data	Who can see metadata, ad targeting or distribution history?	Platforms possess information unavailable to researchers and voters

Note. This table develops a theoretical proposition from the comparative analysis; the dimensions are not measured as outcome variables in the present study.

6.7 Bounded novelty and implications for political communication theory

Recent scholarship requires a precise novelty claim. Guan, Guo and Yang (2026) already theorize generative logic in political mediatization; Ljepava, Tarabasz and Selakovic (2026) examine

AI-mediated presence, voice and authenticity through softfakes; and Pawelec and Labuz (2026) show why consensual synthetic political communication can still be ethically and politically problematic. The present paper therefore does not claim to have discovered the

general phenomenon of AI-mediated political presence. Its contribution lies in using authorization-centered comparison to explain how synthetic political presence changes political function across contrasting electoral contexts.

What this comparison adds is an authorization-centered explanation of variation. Four questions that are often collapsed into one are kept analytically separate: Is the representation synthetic or AI-assisted? Who authorized it? What political problem or campaign function does it address? What verification consequence follows? The India-Pakistan comparison shows why those questions need to remain separate. A disclosed Khan voice clone, AI-assisted translation, supportive mythologized imagery and an unauthorized celebrity deepfake may all involve generative systems, but they create different relationships among identity, responsibility and evidence. That is the paper's main theoretical contribution.

7. Governance Implications

The comparative analysis supports differentiated governance rather than a blanket prohibition on synthetic political communication. A disclosed, campaign-authorized voice clone used to communicate an approved message presents a different problem from an unauthorized deepfake endorsement. The regulatory objective should be accountable synthetic presence: recipients should be able to determine that a politically significant representation is synthetic, identify who authorized or distributed it, and obtain timely verification when those facts are contested.

India's governance trajectory illustrates how quickly the policy environment is changing. During the 2024 election, the Election Commission of India directed political parties toward responsible and ethical use of social media and required fake content brought to their notice to be removed within three hours. Subsequent ECI guidance moved toward explicit labeling of AI-generated or significantly altered campaign

material. In February 2026, India's amended intermediary rules came into force and introduced a formal definition of synthetically generated information. The precise obligations applicable to any particular political artifact depend on the final rules and platform context; draft proposals should not be treated as enacted law.

Pakistan presents a different legal trajectory. The Regulation of Artificial Intelligence Bill, 2024 was a private member's bill. Official Senate records state that it was neither passed nor rejected by the committee and ultimately stood withdrawn/disposed of. This does not mean that Pakistan has no law relevant to impersonation, online content or election communication. It means that the sources reviewed do not establish an enacted comprehensive AI-election framework equivalent to the specific synthetic-content developments visible in India.

The following policy principles are normative recommendations derived from the comparative analysis; this study does not evaluate their implementation or effectiveness. First, disclosure should be prominent, timely and linguistically accessible. Second, provenance mechanisms should complement visible labels because captions can be removed when content is reposted. Third, unauthorized political impersonation requires rapid complaint and correction procedures because election harms are time-sensitive. Fourth, platforms should treat verification as infrastructure rather than placing the entire burden on individual users. Fifth, campaign organizations using authorized synthesis should retain auditable records of authorization and material alterations so that responsibility can be reconstructed when disputes arise.⁶

8. Conclusion

The comparison of India and Pakistan shows that generative AI did not enter the two electoral environments in the same political form. In Pakistan, the strongest recurring pattern is the reconstruction and extension of Imran Khan's

⁶ The governance principles developed here are normative implications of the comparative

analysis. They should not be read as an empirical evaluation of the implementation or effectiveness of any particular regulatory regime.

political presence while his physical campaigning was constrained. The sequence from the December virtual rally to the January international convention, constituency-oriented synthetic messaging and the February post-election speech shows a practice becoming part of a campaign repertoire. In India, the evidence is more functionally diverse: AI appears in multilingual adaptation, personalization, symbolic imagery, historical reconstruction, party communication and unauthorized impersonation.

Synthetic political presence explains what connects these practices without flattening their differences. Generative systems allow political identity to be voiced, translated, visualized or reconstructed without an identical original performance. Authorization then becomes crucial. It distinguishes accountable identity extension from identity appropriation, although it cannot by itself settle questions of disclosure, truthfulness, targeting or manipulation. Institutional context matters because the same technical capacity acquires different significance when it is used to overcome physical constraint, manage linguistic scale, intensify symbolic campaigning or impersonate a political identity without consent.

The broader implication is that electoral AI should not be judged only through a real-versus-fake test. The more useful questions are who is being made politically present, who authorized that presence, what campaign problem the representation is solving, how it circulates, and who can be held responsible when its provenance is disputed. Grounded in the contrasting Indian and Pakistani material, this moves the paper beyond a generic account of deepfakes and offers a comparative framework for studying how generative AI reorganizes political presence and responsibility. Future research can test audience-level consequences, but the comparative contribution here is already clear: syntheticity alone does not determine political meaning; context, authorization and communicative function do.

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