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President Joe Biden
P.O. Box 58174
Philadelphia, PA 19102

May 16, 2023

Dear President Biden,

We are writing to urge you to pledge not to use deepfake technology to trick voters. We are sending similar letters to all announced candidates for president, as well as to the major political parties.

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) and deepfake technology -- a type of artificial intelligence used to create convincing images, audio and video hoaxes¹ – is evolving very rapidly. Every day, it seems, new and increasingly convincing deepfake audio and video clips are disseminated, including, for example, this audio fake of President Biden,² the video fake of the actor Morgan Freeman³ and an audio fake of the actress Emma Watson reading Mein Kampf.⁴

Deepfakes' quality is impressive and able to fool listeners and viewers. Generally, on careful examination it is now possible to identify flaws that show them to be fake.

But as the technology continues to improve, it will become increasingly difficult and, perhaps, nearly impossible for an average person to distinguish deepfake videos and audio clips from authentic media. It is an open question how well digital technology experts will be able to distinguish fakes from real media.

In upcoming elections, we face the prospect of candidates and committees using AI technology to create a video or audio clip that, for example, purports to show an opponent making an offensive statement, speaking gibberish, falling drunk or accepting a bribe. The video or audio clip would not purport to characterize how an opponent *might* speak or behave, but would convey deceptively that they actually did so, when they did not.

¹ Barney, N., & Wigmore, I. (2023, March 21). What is Deepfake Ai? A definition from TechTarget. WhatIs.com. <https://www.techtarget.com/whatis/definition/deepfake>

² Sellman, M. (2023, January 31). Emma Watson reads Mein Kampf on 4chan in Deepfake Audio Trick. The Times & The Sunday Times: breaking news & today's latest headlines. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ai-4chan-emma-watson-mein-kampf-elevenlabs-9wghsmt9c>

³ WGA, zach silberberg supports the. (2023, February 19). Joe Biden has really messed up big time pic.twitter.com/paghzwdcyi. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/zachsilberberg/status/1627438454756835329>

⁴ YouTube. (2021, July 7). This is not Morgan Freeman - A deepfake singularity. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oxXpB9pSETo&t=9s>

A blockbuster deepfake video released shortly before an election could go “viral” on social media and be widely disseminated, with no ability for voters to determine that it is fake, no time for a candidate to deny it, and possibly no way for a candidate to show convincingly that it is fake.

This is not a technology that advantages one candidate over another. Anyone will be able to use it to deceptive effect. That’s why all political players have an equal interest in preventing abuse of this technology.

Beyond the shared interest of all political candidates in not being victimized by a deepfake fraud, there is a broader public interest. Deepfake technology poses a genuine challenge to the future functioning of our democracy. If voters cannot trust the authenticity of what they see and hear online, it’s hard to know how our democracy can work.

The solution is simple: Every candidate should pledge not to use deepfake technology to deceive the public. At minimum, all deepfakes must be prominently watermarked so that anyone viewing or listening to them knows they are fakes.

We call on you to:

1. Commit immediately not to use deepfake technology to deceive voters;
2. Urge all independent committees and supporter equally to pledge not to use deepfake technology to deceive voters;
3. Call for rapid passage of legislation making it illegal to use deepfake technology to deceive voters.

Sincerely,

Robert Weissman
President, Public Citizen