

# The Impact of A.I.-Driven Social Media on Elections: Voter Autonomy & Government

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Published on February 12th, 2024

## Abstract

With platforms such as Google's AdSense Network and Meta's Business Suite so advanced that they can target and direct advertisements precisely to the individual, it is now easier than ever for political actors to influence voter behavior. Those networks run on AI algorithms, which have become so complex that not even inventors fully understand how ads are distributed. This use of A.I. raises concerns about the impact on voter autonomy and government legitimacy. This paper will discuss how this technique differs from recent revolutions in campaigning methods. A comparative analysis of political campaigns in the U.S. and Germany, two countries with different levels of regulation and privacy concerns, will show that AI-driven social media platforms challenge the very concept of democratic theory. Campaigns using A.I. solutions can potentially undermine the principle of democratic elections by limiting the ability of voters to make informed decisions and consent to a representative. As such, states that currently justify their legitimacy through democratic processes need to consider the impact of A.I. on said issues to ensure that political communication remains fair, universal, and legitimate.

Keywords: AI-driven social media platforms, political campaigning, voter autonomy, government legitimacy, democratic elections.

## I. Introduction

### *1.1 Political Indirect Democratic Theory and Voter consent-giving*

In his book *Politics* (2013), Andre Heywood concludes that the very principle of democracy is that everyone has an equal say and influence. Therefore, voting must be fair and universal.<sup>1</sup> In theory, politicians represent everyone and work to influence national policy in a way consistent with

their constituents' opinions. Political actors, therefore, campaign to convince individuals about the viewpoints and agendas they would represent, through which they generate votes. However, democratic legitimacy theory requires more than pure votes for input legitimacy. "Citizens should participate on the basis of well-informed judgements about what is best for themselves, their fellow citizens, and the political community as a whole."<sup>2</sup> Only

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<sup>1</sup> Heywood, *Politics*, October, 2013.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p. 141

then can they express authentic, autonomous preferences in their voting and understand what they consent to legitimize an administration.

Whether absolute autonomy in expressing authentic preferences is possible has always been questioned since information is continuously acquired from some source, prioritizing information in a certain way.

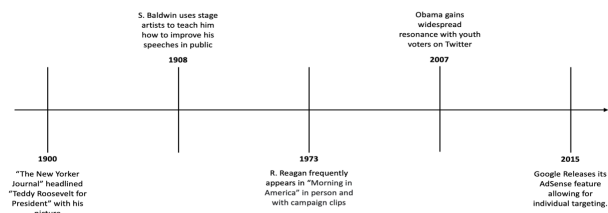
### 1.2 Evolutions of Political Campaigning and Campaigning Devices

In his research *Political Marketing Management and Theories of Democracy*, Mr Henneberg describes how T. Roosevelt placed pictures of himself in the press while running for office and how S. Baldwin, the U.K. Prime Minister, used stage artists to tweak his voice for radio transmissions.<sup>3</sup> Henneberg further examines how R. Reagan was the first to employ political television, and B. Obama's campaign was the first to realize Twitter's potential. Users quickly understood those drastic changes in devices employed in political campaigning: picture, audio, video, and internet. However, since their research, a lot has changed. Today, people need to be aware of the latest changes in political advertising. Since 2005, Alphabet Inc., now called Google, has added site-targeted advertisements to AdSense, which personalizes content depending on users' assumed interests.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, when a

new Meta Platforms Inc., from now on referred to as Meta, user opens Facebook, location services and third-party app activities are analyzed to predict user behavior and recommend content.

**Figure 1.**

A timeline of political campaigning revolutions



Notes. A rough timeline of campaigning revolutions supposed by Hanneberg et al.

### 1.3 Possible problems with A.I. generated Political Campaigns.

Because of the recent use of such seemingly insignificant campaigning devices, the author of this paper believes further research is needed to determine the influence of personalized advertisements on voter autonomy. The point at which information prioritization starts to hinder one's ability to vote authentically and at what point campaigning becomes illegitimate is crucial in deciding whether representatives are representing the public interest, on which the principles of indirect democracy theory base itself. Anyone using those services day-to-day might not make authentic decisions, undermining our ideal understanding of democracy.

<sup>3</sup> Henneberg, Scammell, and O'Shaughnessy, "Political Marketing Management and Theories of Democracy," *Marketing Theory*, June 4, 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Worldstream, *The Evolution of Google AdWords – A \$38 Billion Advertising Platform*, 2021.

Can the individual targeted through A.I. services understand the influence an advertisement has on them and, concurrently, have autonomy in consenting to a representative?

Ho: A.I.-driven social media platforms fundamentally undermine voter autonomy and, thus, government legitimacy.

H1: Voters are fully autonomous in their positioning and thus can fully consent to elations.

## 2. Methodology

This paper uses a comparative case study methodology to analyze different regulations and political campaigning methods in two countries. The U.S. and Germany both have shown different levels of privacy concerns, amounts of donations, and political misinformation.<sup>5</sup> According to V. Larcinesey et al., the U.S. is known for its tolerant privacy laws, permissive donation regulations, and prevalence of political disinformation.<sup>6</sup> In Contrast, T. Dobber states that Europe and especially Germany are more regulated, with limited user targeting and lower donation limits.<sup>7</sup> This subsident comparison shows whether A.I.-driven

social media platforms present challenges or opportunities for both governments.

However, one should recall that the U.S. and Germany are both developed Western democracies with high economic growth and living standards.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, any results of this analysis might not apply to nations with distinct political, economic, and social conditions. Such factors alter how A.I.-driven social media platforms interact with other nations. Less developed states may prioritize other concerns over voter autonomy and government legitimacy. The comparison between the United States and Germany is valuable for analyzing regulatory systems but should be applied cautiously to other political and social structures.

Additionally, this study employs secondary sources from several states to respect different viewpoints and belief systems. Secondary sources are crucial to this research since they provide a broader range of understanding of the issue at hand. However, it is essential to recognize these sources' probable biases and limits and try to account for them.

## 3. Digital campaigning approaches within the U.S.

### 3.1 *The potential of specific user identification and targeting an Introduction to Privacy Laws within the U.S.*

Search engines, website hosts, and website owners can secretly record U.S. users' web searches. They often save cookies with user behavior data to the user's web browser.

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<sup>8</sup> Church, "Exemplary Lives and the Normative Theory of Culture," *American Journal of Political Science*, April 15, 2019.

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<sup>5</sup> Yen, "Coexistence of Disposition Effect and House Money Effect," *Proceedings of the 2019 2nd International Conference on Information Science and Systems*, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Larcinese, Miner, Bandiera, Besley, Burgess, Cheswick, Durante, et al., "The Political Impact of the Internet in US Presidential Elections," *London School of Economics*, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Dobber, Ó Fathaigh, and Zuiderveen Borgesius, "The Regulation of Online Political Micro-Targeting in Europe," *Internet Policy Review*, December 31, 2019.

Multiple website hosts may share these data points across their network. Sharing lets platforms create detailed user personas and use A.I. algorithms to predict user behavior. J. R. Mayer et al. reveal that Google-listed US websites automatically share cookie data with Google's network without user consent.<sup>9</sup> Further, Meta receives cookies from websites with Facebook sign-in buttons.

**Figure 2.**

A List of data points collected by Google throughout its shared Data Network

Data points collected for Google users	
Username	
Phone numbers	Watched films
Payment information	Search keywords
Email addresses	Interactions with content
Contacts	Calendar data
Credit card information	Voice recordings
Location data	Advertisements clicked
Internet searches	Websites visited
I.P. addresses	Shopping habits
Mobile device identifiers	... and 43 more personalized data points

<sup>9</sup> Mayer and Mitchell, "Third-Party Web Tracking: Policy and Technology," IEEE Symposium on Security and Privacy, 2012.

*Notes.* An independent but biased organization acquires data points with a financial interest in portraying Google's Network as a threat to personal security. The data points have, however, been fact-checked by third parties. Cookies may differ from Meta's and Twitter's networks.<sup>10</sup>

*3.2 Advertisements tailored for the individual and sophisticated targeting tools.*

By collecting immense amounts of data points, services such as Google and Facebook can offer individual advertising abilities to customers.

1. Microtargeting creates ads tailored to everyone by analyzing all accessible data points discussed earlier.<sup>11</sup> During the 2016 presidential campaign, Trump's team created 10,000 posts, then microtargeted to users. Each ad was shown to a maximum of 500 people only.<sup>12</sup>

2. Geofencing: Social media companies also use geofencing tools to enable microtargeting further. They use geographic location data to predict specific behaviors and interests. The political party "Catholic Vote" used this tool to identify Google users who briefly visited Catholic churches. Those users were later microtargeted ads by Catholic Vote.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> AtlasVPN, "Google Collects Almost 40 Data Points per User," 2022.

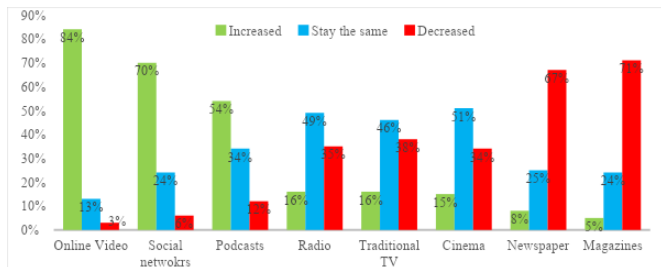
<sup>11</sup> Zarouali, Dobber, Pauw, and Vreese, "Using a Personality-Profiling Algorithm to Investigate Political Microtargeting: Assessing the Persuasion Effects of Personality-Tailored Ads on Social Media," Communication Research, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Giglietto, Iannelli, Valeriani, and Rossi, "Fake News' Is the Invention of a Liar: How False Information Circulates within the Hybrid News System," 2019.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

**Figure 3.**

Change in Advertisement Budget per Channel by U.S. Advertising Agencies.



*Notes.* Subsequently, a significant increase in digital Online Ads (alongside a decrease in analog Ads) for advertisement, in general, can be seen, as shown by Dickmann's study, which compares the spending of the top 10 marketing agencies within the U.S.<sup>14</sup>

### 3.3 Positive aspects of optimized user targeting

#### 3.3.1 Increased understanding of salient representatives.

In his book *Power: A Radical View*, Stephen Lukes has outlined "three faces of power", the second face being described as "the agenda setting power", which is the power of deciding the context in which information exchange takes place.<sup>15</sup> Trump used this strategy, as it was decided for users which of the 10,000 posts best addressed voters' most salient interests. Citizens who bought baby diapers online or were close to kindergarten received ads showing Trump's support for increasing the number of kindergartens in the area instead of seeing adverts about pension funds.<sup>16</sup> By advertising information that coincides with a voter's political interests, those individuals may have

<sup>14</sup> Dickmann, "Digital Marketing vs Traditional Marketing," Five Echelon Group, 2022.

<sup>15</sup> Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Lai, "Data Misuse and Disinformation: Technology and the 2022 Elections," February 2022.

a limited grasp of all political parties and policies but a great understanding of parties that prioritize their needs.

Microtargeting and the "Agenda Setting Face," therefore, allow voters a more profound political understanding of parties that best address their most salient needs instead of being overwhelmed by information that does not apply to them. Consequently, some argue that A.I.-driven social media platforms increase voter autonomy and government legitimacy according to the Democratic Legitimacy Theory standard.

#### 3.3.2 Budget-Campaigning: Increasing Deliberative Democracy.

Social media ads are significantly cheaper than traditional campaigns.<sup>17</sup> Digital campaigns do not require print or distribution, among other reasons, and are only for those with a potential interest. Supported by a study by Broockman, online campaigns increase candidate name recognition. Thus, political parties with a smaller campaigning budget can find and establish a target audience more quickly.<sup>18</sup> Parties are more effective in reaching their niche voter bases.

In his book, Heywood explains the importance of deliberative democracy within a country. Deliberative

<sup>17</sup> Silvestri, "Why Digital Marketing Is The Future - Influence Digital," Influence.Digital, November 29, 2022.

<sup>18</sup> Broockman and Green, "Do Online Advertisements Increase Political Candidates' Name Recognition or Favorability? Evidence from Randomized Field Experiments," *Political Behavior*, June 21, 2014.

democracy states that to best address all public needs within a state, great diversity among representatives must exist so that all fight to represent their constituent's needs.<sup>19</sup> By providing a platform of extreme discourse represented by numerous small, niche-representing politicians, deliberative democracy allows for more extensive debate and understanding of all interest groups as all representatives try to satisfy their niche.

During the 2016 presidential race, the Green Party used social media advertising to reach young voters dissatisfied with the two-party system, increasing support for Jill Stein.<sup>20</sup> An increase in "digital advertising expenditures" similarly increased the voter base of the Libertarian Party.<sup>21</sup> Their increased vote share pushed the two-party majority to adopt more environmentally friendly policies. The concept of deliberative democracy seems to accrete, as increased political representation led to a greater need to address all individuals.

By using A.I.-driven social media platforms for advertisements, more individuals are represented, thereby increasing the indirect democratic system.

### *3.4 Negative Aspects of Optimised User Targeting*

However, it can also be that personalized advertisements challenge a voter's ability to make autonomous, authentic decisions. Social media simplifies content, polarizes opinion, and challenges the authenticity of representatives. Those arguments undermine democratic theory and hinder voter autonomy during elections.

#### *3.4.1 A Narrow View of the Political Landscape and Hyper-Polarization.*

One negative aspect is that companies aim to "maximize profits, and populist advertisements that feature clear "us-against-them" or "good versus bad" messages generate the highest user interaction. Because Google and Meta charge advertisers based on interaction and not by the number of views, campaigns that generate high interaction are preferred accordingly.<sup>22</sup> Campaigns thus employ populist advertisements to reach a great audience.

Research conducted by Kruikemeister suggests that micro-targeting ads can narrow one's political understanding and perspective.<sup>23</sup> Voters who only understand certain viewpoints are a massive problem as it could lead to a hyper-polarized society where "your neighbors appear like your enemies".

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<sup>19</sup> Heywood, *Politics*, October, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Speri, "An Interview With Green Party Candidate Jill Stein," *The Intercept*, 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Williams and Gulati, "Digital Advertising Expenditures in the 2016 Presidential Election," *Social Science Computer Review*, August 8, 2018.

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<sup>22</sup> Strickler, "A "Sorted" America? Geographic Polarization and Value Overlap in the American Electorate," University of South Carolina, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Kruikemeier, Sezgin, and Boerman, "Political Microtargeting: Relationship Between Personalized Advertising on Facebook and Voters' Responses," *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, June 2016.

Unlike constructive diversity in representatives, this hyper-polarization could lead to negative peace or even violence, with individuals feeling condemned and mistrusting an opposition. Individuals are too emotional to make autonomous decisions and do not respect a group's authority, supporting ideas that do not align with their viewpoints.

For example, this inability for autonomous decision-making led to the 2016 January Insurrection which was only possible because of a massive mistrust in the authenticity of the government elevated through hyper-polarized microtargeted advertisements which employed simplistic and populist language to appeal to their supporters.<sup>24</sup>

The combination of populist language and microtargeted ads led to many being unable to make well-informed decisions, as their emotions were manipulated for political gain. In a journal, McCoy and Press supported this statement by calling the insurrection a direct consequence of hyper-polarization within the U.S.<sup>25</sup> "Severe polarization correlates with serious democratic decline" and not with the benefits proposed by Deliberative Democratic Theory.

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<sup>24</sup> Boone, Taylor, and Gallant, "International Reactions to the Capitol Attack of January 6th: A Media Frames Analysis," American Behavioral Scientist, May 4, 2022.

<sup>25</sup> McCoy and Press, "What Happens When Democracies Become Perniciously Polarized?" - Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2022.

#### 3.4.2 Opaque campaigning and the lack of authenticity.

Microtargeting also allows for opaque campaigning, as individual adverts make it difficult for fact-checkers to analyze all adverts and promises for accuracy. The mass of different ads to be fact-checked allows politicians to promise different agendas to individual groups.

Stephen Lukes' third ideological face of power occurs when a powerful actor influences the behavior of another actor or group without them realizing it.<sup>26</sup> Voter autonomy is massively hindered when representants fail to deliver "the duty to explain one's conduct," which hinders their accountability. According to Heywood's Democratic legitimacy literature, accountability is required for voters to be able to give their full consent.<sup>27</sup> Campaigns that manipulate or lie to voters do not present such accountability.

An article by NBC News concluded that by using Geofencing tools, Trump adjusted advertisements and political agendas based on the region where people lived.<sup>28</sup> I have already discussed the potential increase in understanding about parties addressing their salient agendas. However, more than 200 geofenced microtargeted ads directly contrasted with each other. They prioritized specific issues that applied to all communities differently, such as public schooling, taxation, or government spending.

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<sup>26</sup> Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Heywood, *Politics*, October, 2013.

<sup>28</sup> Timm, "Trump versus the Truth: The Most Outrageous Falsehoods of His Presidency," NBCNews, December 20, 2020.

Subsequently, Trump's accountability was not given. He was not an authentic representative of his voter base. Voters were manipulated and lied to in pretending to represent their interests. Voters must have complete autonomy to consent to an election, which justifies input legitimacy. It is impossible to support two opposing viewpoints in government. However, this realization hindered voters, as depending on their geographical locations, search histories, or media consumption, they only saw one of many opposing campaigns. Thus, micro-targeting opposing groups with different agendas violates democratic theory.

#### **4. Digital campaigning within Germany**

##### *4.1 Differences between the U.S. in the Democratic System and Individual Targeting*

Like the U.S., Germany is a mature Western democracy with high economic development and living standards.<sup>29</sup> A comparative case study helps me identify differences in electoral systems and respected policies to address voter autonomy and election authenticity in democratic countries.

##### 4.1.1 An Introduction to Privacy Laws within Germany.

The *General Data Protection Regulation* (GDPR) applies to businesses operating in E.U. member states.

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<sup>29</sup> Church, "Exemplary Lives and the Normative Theory of Culture," *American Journal of Political Science*, April 15, 2019.

Microtargeting services rely on fewer data points and are less precise.<sup>30</sup>

##### 4.1.2 The German Political System Can Focus on a Broader Audience.

In the U.S., the Electoral College, a body of electors chosen by the state legislatures is being employed to allocate several electors equal to its representation in Congress. This system goes back to 1787 when the Founding Fathers were drafting the Constitution as it allowed for the masses to vote regionally. Electors were then sent off to the capital to pass on the will of their states' people. In modern times, however, this system has been challenged as representatives can focus on gaining resonance with the majority while neglecting minority opinions.

In contrast, Germany employs a proportional system in which seats in the Bundestag are allocated to political parties based on the share of total votes. This affects campaigning methods, as will be shown shortly.

##### 4.1.3 Germany is New to Social Media Campaigning and Rich in Different Approaches.

*The Effects on Covid* by Zancaji et al. discusses Germany's outdated digital infrastructure and campaigning methods compared to the U.S.<sup>31</sup> During the 2017 election cycle, "door-to-door" campaigning and distributing leaflets

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<sup>30</sup> Ryngaert and Taylor, "The GDPR as Global Data Protection Regulation?" *AJIL Unbound*, January 6, 2020.

<sup>31</sup> Zancajo, Verger, and Bolea, "Digitalization and beyond: The Effects of Covid-19 on Post-Pandemic Educational Policy and Delivery in Europe," *Policy and Society*, January 28, 2022.



containing a party's core ideas were widespread among many parties. Heavy COVID-19 measurements restricted public interaction and thus required the adaptation of new campaigning strategies for the upcoming 2021 federal election. An article by Politico called Covid to have "jump-started" a new German era.<sup>32</sup> All parties have illustrated different visions of how digital, A.I.-driven social media might effectively reach voters.

#### *4.2 Different Approaches for Online Campaigning*

##### *4.2.1 Digital Q&As for Party Members to Show Authenticity.*

The digital Q&A model utilized by German political parties is an innovative application of social media technology in political campaigns. This concept entails the production of short movies and GIFs to highlight critical policy statements and the solicitation of queries from users, which politicians answered via short video responses.

As part of the campaign *Voting for CDU is Voting for Germany's Future*, candidate Armin Laschet discussed how the CDU plans to define Germany's future.<sup>33</sup> The video encouraged viewers to send questions over TikTok, Twitter, or Instagram, which were then shown on a screen in the background as Laschet answered them. Campaigning teams then combined short clips which got uploaded online to be seen by millions.

This strategy differs from typical campaign techniques in empowering citizens by providing a forum to interact directly with political leaders, ask questions, and receive responses. Users from all over the country could send tin questions. This aspect of direct citizen engagement aligns with democratic theory, which remarkably opened direct discussion. Politicians must provide opportunities for the public to test and exchange their thoughts. This way, voters can obtain more relevant information and better understand politicians' viewpoints. The authenticity of representatives is an essential part of Heywood's democratic theory literature and increases voter autonomy.<sup>34</sup>

However, the digital submission of questions also allows parties to pre-select and prepare difficult questions. Further, they might even delete specific questions or ban critical users from commenting.

Nalan D. calls "Germany's political town hall meetings [to lack] authenticity".<sup>35</sup> Moreover, it notes that these events can be heavily scripted, with politicians only answering questions that have been pre-screened and approved. This accusation relates to Luke's agenda-setting power, earlier defined as the context in which information exchange occurs.

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<sup>32</sup> Daaalder, "Germany Struggles to Adjust to a New Era," Politico, September 12, 2022.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>34</sup> Heywood, *Politics*, October, 2013.

<sup>35</sup> Balaban and Mustățea, "Users' Perspective on the Credibility of Social Media Influencers in Romania and Germany," 2019.

The Democratic Theory emphasizes the importance of accountability and transparency in a functioning democracy. Essential to the legitimacy of a democratic government is the power of citizens to hold their elected representatives responsible. Pre-selecting questions undermines this principle by giving the impression that officials are willing to answer tough questions but are instead cherry-picking the issues they want to address, which massively hinders their authenticity.

#### 4.2.2 Social Media influencers to sway political messages.

Utilizing influencers with similar beliefs can effectively reach voters with similar ideological beliefs. The Alternative for Deutschland (AfD), one of Germany's leading right-wing parties, has employed "young [influencers] who are pro-AfD and speak out against the Greens, and they are very successful with it", says political consultant and media expert Martin Fuchs.<sup>36</sup> Such included Boris Reitschuster, Lars Feld, and Philipp Missfelder.

In Germany, the *Telemedia Act* requires "influencers to label advertising as such if the commerciality is not apparent from the circumstances".<sup>37</sup> The *Telemedia Act* thus offers greater transparency and enables voters to consider whether economic reasons might influence an influencer's opinion. Consequently, it allows voters to

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<sup>36</sup> Breuer, "Like or Dislike: German Electioneering on Social Media," Deutsche Welle, 2021.

<sup>37</sup> Radtke, "Disclosure Requirements for Influencer Marketing in the U.S. and Germany," NYU Journal of Intellectual Property & Entertainment Law, January 23, 2023.

make more knowledgeable decisions regarding the authenticity of the messages they are receiving. In the United States, no such measures require the disclosure of surreptitious advertising.<sup>38</sup>

However, research by Kolbert indicates that "facts don't change our minds" and that this indication of potential bias, e.g., in this context, paid advertisements, does not considerably influence how people consider information.<sup>39</sup>

One way Germany is trying to solve this issue is to support information accuracy online. Funk is a German video-on-demand service operated by the public broadcasters ARD and ZDF.<sup>40</sup> Funk describes itself as a "content network" that financially supports independent content creators determined to produce factual, educational content for a target group between the ages of 14 and 29.<sup>41</sup> Through Funk, individual creators must not depend on commercial advertisement partners, which would affect the extent to which they can pursue criticism. Simplicissimus is an independent German YouTube channel that cooperates with Funk and freely discusses socially critical topics.<sup>42</sup> Their series *Politik in Deutschland* [Politics in Germany] discusses a spectrum of political

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<sup>38</sup> Saternus, Weber, and Hinz, "The Effects of Advertisement Disclosure on Heavy and Light Instagram Users," Electronic Markets, September 31, 2022.

<sup>39</sup> Kolbert, "Why Facts Don't Change Our Minds," The New Yorker, February 19, 2017.

<sup>40</sup> Funk.net, "Impressum," Funk, 2023.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Marx, "Simplicissimus Trennt Sich von Funk," Meedia, May 23, 2022.

individuals, parties, and respective authenticity.<sup>43</sup> Further, they “exposed” other German Youtubers, failing to comply with the GDPR.

These frameworks contribute to a higher level of voter autonomy and legitimacy in Germany compared to the United States. The German government realizes the importance of online transparency and supporting individual fact-checkers to ensure they can pursue their goals without corrupting their opinions. Subsidizing independent fact-checkers increases the authenticity of online information during campaigns and allows individuals to make informed decisions in the democratic process with greater autonomy.

#### 4.2.3 Participating in Viral Trends on TikTok to Increase Youth Awareness.

Another way for politicians to increase youth awareness is by building an online presence. “TikTok and its A.I.-enhanced technology have achieved enormous success and reshaped the user experience” for its “mainly young [target audience] aged 20-29.”<sup>44</sup> Historically, German elections have low youth turnout, demonstrating a substantial democratic problem. According to the German Federal Statistics Office, youth electoral turnout for 18- to 29-year-olds was 14%.<sup>45</sup> This is a massive problem for the

government’s legitimacy. A legitimate government should be responsive to all its citizens. If only 14% of the youth vote, thus resonating with the current government, the government needs to be representative of the interests and preferences of the entire population. Indirect democracy, which relies on the consent of citizens to govern, may not be given.

Campaigns, therefore, employ TikTok to raise awareness about parties. Die Linke (The Left) followed trends and videos that the algorithm boosted and shared to gain publicity, such as one for the *Ob Na Na* dance challenge. While this approach might sound silly, SocialBlade has recorded a 22% (40.000 Followers) increase between 2021-22.<sup>46</sup> Social Media Platforms such as TikTok can be a great tool to encourage a younger demographic group that has traditionally been disinterested in politics.

However, encouraging youth participation is not everything. As stated before, voter autonomy, e.g., having enough information to consent, is equally required to give legitimacy. TikTok’s algorithm prioritizes entertaining content over educational content. “The power of entertainment to enable [campaigns] to engage consumers” incentivizes politicians to create content that resonates emotionally with viewers rather than to provide them with detailed information about their policies and agendas.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> 26. Simplicissimus, “*Politik in Deutschland*,” YouTube, 2023.

<sup>44</sup> Yang, Zhao, and Ma, “*Analysis of the Reasons and Development of Short Video Application-Taking Tik Tok as an Example*,” 2019.

<sup>45</sup> Statistisches Bundesamt, “*2021 Bundestag Election: Greater Turnout of Young Voters - German Federal Statistical Office*,” January 26, 2022.

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<sup>46</sup> SocialBlade, “*DIE LINKE’s Instagram Monthly Stats*,” SocialBlade, 2023.

<sup>47</sup> Warc, “*The Power of Entertainment to Enable Brands to Engage Consumers*,” Biz Community, 2022.

Indirect democracy requires citizens to make informed decisions based on rational argumentation and the exchange of information.<sup>48</sup> Social media platforms like TikTok help increase youth awareness and political engagement. In doing so, however, concerns about the quality and accuracy of the information can be raised, undermining the principles of indirect democracy. Political decision-making based on pure emotional resonance instead of knowledge further devalues the input legitimacy given by the informed 14% of youth who decided to consent rightfully. Political campaigns should strive to raise youth awareness through individual measures but must ensure an accurate understanding for voters to make well-informed decisions.

## 5. Conclusion

A.I.-driven social media tools are used in both the U.S. and Germany and effectively reach potential voters. Due to specific critical differences between the U.S. and German governmental systems, their application changes.

The U.S. two-party system supposes a relatively narrow political landscape. Niche parties have successfully used A.I. tools to gain voters in specific instances. However, equally, they have led to a situation where micro advertisements and a lack of representative authenticity have led to an uninformed, hyper-polarized country whose opposing viewpoints do not lead to more constructive

decision-making but complete mistrust in the governmental system.

In Germany, the public is less divided than in the U.S. due to its application of a proportional representation system, which grants seats to parties in the parliament based on the percentage of their voting resonance. Combined with strict privacy regulations and the financial support of independent fact-checkers, the German system allows for greater authenticity of representatives and informed citizens who are more capable of conducting autonomous voting.

The fact that most people have yet to learn about the extent to which their interests can be analyzed to advertise relevant advertisements concerns me about the transparency of such advertisements and the consequent authenticity of representatives. Suppose one has no idea about political perspective because they only advertise their beliefs. How should one conduct “well-informed judgements about what is best for themselves, their fellow citizens, and the political community as a whole”, as proposed by Heywood, for an Election to be legitimate? Currently, A.I.-driven social media platforms undermine voter authenticity and, thus, the legitimacy of any administration that uses those tools in campaigning. The hypothesis, “A.I.-driven social media platforms fundamentally undermine voter autonomy and thus government legitimacy” seems justified for the U.S. The U.S. should adjust its political system to fit the German

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<sup>48</sup> Heywood, *Politics*, October, 2013.

system better, allowing for less hyper-polarization and greater deliberative democracy.

That is not to say the German system is perfect. Germany is still in a transitional phase, with long-term effects uncertain. An increase in voter turnout by tapping into youth social media platforms might increase the electoral turnout of their group. However, whether those votes are based on informative decisions required for them to consent to admission through input legitimacy can be questioned. An increase in the electoral outcome might only lead to misrepresentation of the input of informed youth, who would have voted either way.

These results show that A.I.-driven social media platforms have revolutionized political campaigns and seriously jeopardize voter autonomy and government legitimacy. The United States needs reform; it could be advantageous to move towards a system that lessens the negative consequences of hyperpolarization and strengthens deliberative democracy by modeling itself after Germany. However, caution is advised as even the German system, with its more robust regulatory framework and commitment to privacy, is not without its challenges and is still undergoing evaluation. This study underscores the necessity for a balanced approach in harnessing A.I. tools in political campaigns that safeguard democratic values while embracing technological advancements. As nations grapple with these evolving challenges, the ultimate goal should be to foster a political environment where A.I. aids in the promotion of informed decision-making, ensuring

that the essence of democracy is not only preserved but strengthened.

However, the limitation of this case study is that it only applies to both countries and shall not be used without further analysis to compare any other democratic systems not analyzed. Further, this paper predominantly refers to Heywood's Indirect Democratic Theory literacy. Absolute voter "autonomy" and representative "authenticity" seem impossible. Is anyone genuinely autonomous, best-informed, logical, and unbiased in their decisions? Of course not. Voters always receive information from somewhere and value it in a certain way, with some information or viewpoints biased over others. Political campaigns have constantly challenged voter autonomy as they try to sway votes. The only difference is that A.I. tools are more effective in reaching a more specific target group compared to traditional broadcasting. Governments will never reach complete autonomy and government legitimacy; the focus should be to strive for the highest form of authenticity and autonomy.

If information accuracy is ensured by having frameworks set in place with independent researchers analyzing and restricting advertisements before they reach an audience, A.I. tools could drastically enable voter autonomy and government legitimacy. As with most revolutionary changes in history, governments must first identify the problem before their administrations can implement policies to address such thresholds for a better democracy.

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