

Manufacturing Perception: Doctored Images and AI Propaganda in Sri Lankan Politics

About the Project

The Strengthening Resilience against Disinformation in Sri Lanka project is co-funded by the European Union and implemented by Democracy Reporting International and Factum. The project aims to reinforce Sri Lanka's democratic and electoral frameworks and protect human rights by prioritizing inclusivity and responsible political discourse on social media through monitoring and debunking online harmful content. Leveraging collaborative efforts of civil society organizations in Sri Lanka, this initiative capacitates fact-checkers and media outlets, creates counter-narratives, and strengthens the technical expertise of the Election Commission of Sri Lanka (ECSL).

Introduction

The increasing accessibility of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools and image editing technologies has significantly transformed the production and spread of political propaganda in Sri Lanka. Synthetic media, including AI-generated images, manipulated visuals, edited videos, deep fakes, and digitally altered memes, are increasingly being used to shape political narratives, ridicule opponents, provoke emotional reactions, and manipulate public perception.

Unlike traditional misinformation, synthetic content often relies on highly visual and emotionally charged formats that are easier to consume, share, and believe. These narratives frequently blur the boundaries between satire, political commentary, propaganda, and deliberate deception. In many cases, audiences encounter manipulated content without clear contextual labeling, increasing the likelihood of confusion and misinformation.



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paffrelmedia@gmail.com

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