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Artificial Intelligence, Electoral Communication, and Democratic Accountability: Young Voters' Perceptions during Albania's 2025 Parliamentary Elections

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Abstract

This study examines the role of artificial intelligence in political communication during Albania's 2025 parliamentary election campaign, focusing on young voters aged 18-25. Using a mixed-methods design, the research combines an online questionnaire with 360 respondents and four structured interviews with technology/media experts and parliamentary candidates. Quantitative data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, multi-response analysis, and reliability testing in SPSS, while qualitative interviews contextualized the strategic, ethical, and communicative dimensions of artificial intelligence use. The study conceptualizes artificial intelligence both as a visible tool for producing campaign content and as a less visible infrastructure linked to personalization, microtargeting, algorithmic filtering, and data-driven circulation. Findings reveal a significant gap between digital exposure and critical awareness: 59.5% of respondents reported being slightly or not informed about artificial intelligence use, while videos and animations were the most recognized forms. The Socialist Party was most frequently associated with such content, whereas fake news and manipulated information represented the main concern. The study argues that artificial intelligence can support electoral innovation, but its democratic value depends on transparency, accountability, media literacy, and data protection.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, political communication, parliamentary elections, young voters, Albania.

1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence has become an increasingly relevant component of contemporary electoral communication, reshaping the ways in which political actors produce,

adapt, personalize, and circulate campaign messages. In platform-based political environments, electoral communication is no longer limited to traditional media, public rallies, party statements, or direct contact with voters. It increasingly takes place through short videos, edited images, synthetic or modified audio, animations, memes, campaign songs, digital graphics, and algorithmically mediated forms of content circulation. These developments create opportunities for political creativity, audience engagement, and campaign efficiency, while also raising concerns about transparency, manipulation, authenticity, privacy, source attribution, and democratic accountability (European Commission, 2021; Esposito et al., 2020).

The 2025 parliamentary elections in Albania provide a relevant empirical context for examining these dynamics. The campaign unfolded in a media environment strongly shaped by social networking platforms, where political messages circulated rapidly through visual, audiovisual, satirical, and emotionally charged formats. Young voters aged 18-25 are particularly important in this context because they are highly exposed to digital political communication and often encounter electoral messages through social media rather than through traditional channels. However, frequent exposure to digital platforms does not necessarily imply the ability to identify AI-generated, AI-assisted, or algorithmically targeted political content, especially when such content circulates without clear labeling or source attribution (UNESCO, 2019; European Commission, 2021).

This article examines young voters' perceptions of artificial intelligence in political communication during Albania's 2025 parliamentary election campaign. It aims to identify how young people recognized AI-assisted campaign content, how informed they felt about its use, which political actors they associated with such content, and what concerns they expressed regarding manipulation, fake news, transparency, privacy, and personal data protection. The study focuses not on the technical verification of each campaign material, but on the perceptions, interpretations, and democratic concerns of young voters in an emerging electoral context where AI-assisted political communication remains underexplored.

The central argument of the article is that AI in electoral communication should be understood through a dual analytical perspective. First, AI functions as a visible tool for producing or modifying campaign content, including videos, images, audio materials, animations, graphics, and satirical formats. Second, it may also operate as a less visible infrastructure of electoral persuasion through personalization, data-driven targeting, platform circulation, microtargeting, and algorithmic filtering (Dobber et al., 2019; Papakyriakopoulos et al., 2018). This distinction is crucial because voters may recognize AI when it appears in visible audiovisual forms, while remaining less aware of the technological processes that structure exposure, repetition, and message personalization. Methodologically, the study uses a mixed-methods design combining an online questionnaire with 360 respondents aged 18-25 and four structured interviews with technology/media experts and parliamentary candidates. The quantitative component identifies patterns of awareness, exposure, attribution, ethical evaluation, and concern, while the qualitative component contextualizes the strategic, communicative, and

normative dimensions of AI use or non-use in the campaign.

By focusing on Albania, the article contributes to the literature on artificial intelligence, digital political communication, and democratic accountability in a relatively underexamined electoral setting. Its main contribution is to show that young voters' relationship with AI-assisted political communication is marked by a gap between exposure to visible campaign content and limited awareness of less visible mechanisms of personalization, targeting, and algorithmic circulation. The article argues that the democratic implications of AI in electoral campaigns depend not only on technological innovation, but also on transparency, labeling, data protection, media literacy, and citizens' capacity to critically assess political communication.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Artificial intelligence has become increasingly relevant to electoral communication because it enables political actors to produce, adapt, personalize, and circulate campaign messages with greater speed and precision. In this article, AI is understood in functional terms as a set of data-driven and automated tools that may support content generation, content modification, message distribution, audience segmentation, and political targeting (European Commission, 2021). This definition is appropriate for electoral communication because AI is not used only to create visible campaign materials, such as videos, images, audio content, animations, digital graphics, campaign songs, or satirical formats. It may also support less visible processes, including voter analysis, platform optimization, message personalization, microtargeting, and algorithmic filtering.

This distinction between visible and less visible dimensions of AI-assisted communication is central to the theoretical framework of the study. On the visible level, AI can function as a creative and communicative tool through which parties produce visually attractive, emotionally charged, and platform-adapted campaign materials. Such content is more likely to be recognized by voters because it appears directly in social media feeds and can be identified through images, sounds, movement, humor, or synthetic aesthetics. On the less visible level, AI may operate as a socio-technical infrastructure that structures exposure to political messages. In this second dimension, voters may not know whether their online behavior, location, interests, or inferred preferences are being used to determine which political messages they receive, how often they receive them, and in what emotional or informational context they appear.

Online political microtargeting is particularly important for understanding this less visible dimension. Dobber et al. (2019) conceptualize political microtargeting as personalized political communication based on the collection and use of personal data to deliver targeted messages to specific individuals or voter segments. In electoral campaigns, this practice may allow political actors to adapt messages to different audiences according to perceived interests, fears, identities, values, or political preferences. While microtargeting may improve campaign efficiency and help parties reach specific constituencies, it also raises democratic concerns when voters receive opaque, fragmented, or contradictory messages that are not visible to journalists,

regulators, political opponents, or the broader public (Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., 2018). In the Albanian context, this issue is especially relevant because young voters may recognize AI when it appears as visible audiovisual content, but remain less aware of the data-driven processes that organize their exposure to electoral messages. Algorithmic filtering is closely connected to microtargeting. In platform-based political communication, algorithmic systems influence the visibility of news, videos, advertisements, campaign messages, and political narratives by selecting and prioritizing content according to user behavior, engagement patterns, preferences, and previous online activity (European Commission, 2021). From a democratic perspective, algorithmic filtering is ambivalent. It may help users encounter content that appears relevant to them, but it may also narrow political exposure, reinforce existing attitudes, increase emotional polarization, and reduce contact with alternative viewpoints. For this reason, AI-assisted electoral communication should not be analyzed only as the production of synthetic or modified content, but also as the organization of political visibility through data and platforms.

The theoretical synthesis of this study combines framing theory, agenda-setting, political personalization, and affective intelligence. These theories are not treated as separate explanatory models, but as complementary lenses for understanding how AI-assisted communication may influence young voters' perception of electoral campaigns. Framing theory explains how political messages select and emphasize particular aspects of reality in order to promote specific interpretations, evaluations, or responses (Entman, 1993). AI-assisted visuals, videos, satirical materials, and edited representations of opponents may make political frames more immediate, memorable, and emotionally resonant. Agenda-setting theory is relevant because repeated digital circulation can increase the salience of selected issues, actors, accusations, or conflicts (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In platform-based campaigns, salience is shaped not only by traditional media, but also by repetition, shareability, and algorithmic amplification.

Political personalization further helps explain the leader-centered and opponent-centered character of digital campaigning. AI-assisted content may strengthen the symbolic visibility of individual political figures through stylized images, synthetic audio, edited videos, and emotionally charged representations. This may shift attention away from programmatic debate and toward personality, image, conflict, and symbolic confrontation (Norris, 2000). At the same time, affective intelligence theory is useful for interpreting why AI-assisted formats may be particularly effective among young audiences. Political content that produces humor, ridicule, enthusiasm, fear, anger, or anxiety can influence attention, memory, and political judgment (Marcus et al., 2000). AI can intensify these emotional mechanisms because it allows rapid production and adaptation of short, visual, and shareable materials designed for platform circulation.

However, the persuasive capacity of AI-assisted communication depends not only on emotional impact, but also on transparency and citizens' ability to evaluate political content critically. Transparency is a key normative condition in AI-assisted

electoral communication because voters should be able to know whether a message has been generated, modified, personalized, or distributed through automated systems (Esposito et al., 2020; European Commission, 2019, 2020). Without such transparency, voters may struggle to distinguish between authentic communication, satire, propaganda, manipulation, and synthetic or AI-assisted content. This problem becomes more serious when political messages circulate without clear source attribution or labeling.

Media literacy is therefore central to the study. Young voters are often digitally active, but digital familiarity should not be equated with critical media or algorithmic literacy. They may use social media frequently while still facing difficulties in identifying AI-generated content, recognizing source attribution, understanding personalized targeting, or evaluating the credibility and persuasive purpose of political messages (UNESCO, 2019; European Commission, 2021). This gap is especially relevant in Albania, where AI-assisted electoral communication remains an emerging and underexamined phenomenon. The theoretical framework of the article therefore rests on the argument that AI in electoral campaigns should be examined through a dual perspective: as a visible tool of campaign creativity and as a less visible infrastructure of persuasion. This perspective allows the study to analyze not only what young voters see, but also what they may fail to recognize about the technological mediation of electoral communication.

3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to examine young voters' perceptions of artificial intelligence in political communication during Albania's 2025 parliamentary election campaign. The use of mixed methods was appropriate because the study aimed to combine measurable patterns of perception with contextual interpretations of AI-assisted electoral communication. The quantitative component identified levels of awareness, exposure, attribution, perceived influence, and ethical concerns among young voters, while the qualitative component provided interpretive insight into the strategic, communicative, and normative dimensions of AI use or non-use by political actors.

Data were collected during and immediately after the 2025 parliamentary election campaign, in May-June 2025. The quantitative component consisted of an online questionnaire addressed to young voters aged 18-25. The questionnaire was distributed through digital channels, including social media platforms and student communication groups. The final sample included 360 respondents. Since participation was voluntary and the questionnaire was distributed online, the sample should be understood as non-probability and exploratory rather than statistically representative of all Albanian voters in this age group.

The questionnaire measured several dimensions related to AI-assisted political communication: respondents' level of information about AI use in the campaign; perceived forms of AI-generated or AI-assisted content; political actors associated

with such content; perceived influence on electoral decision-making; ethical evaluation of AI use; and concerns related to fake news, manipulation, transparency, privacy, and personal data protection. Most questions were closed-ended in order to allow comparable quantitative analysis, while one open-ended question enabled respondents to mention concrete examples of campaign materials they perceived as AI-generated or AI-assisted.

The qualitative component consisted of four structured interviews selected through purposive sampling. The interviewees included technology and media experts, as well as parliamentary candidates involved in the 2025 electoral campaign. The interviews were designed to contextualize the survey findings and to explore issues that are less visible to voters, including campaign optimization, data-driven targeting, voter mapping, personalized communication, transparency, labeling, privacy, political authenticity, and the ethical implications of AI-assisted campaign practices.

Quantitative data were processed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 29.0 (IBM Corp., 2023). The analysis relied on descriptive statistics, frequency distributions, multi-response analysis, and reliability testing through Cronbach’s alpha. These procedures were appropriate because the study aimed to identify patterns of perception rather than test causal relationships. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically, with interview material organized around recurring themes such as visible AI-assisted content, hidden technological infrastructures, data protection, political attack, authenticity, and regulatory ambivalence.

The study followed basic principles of research ethics, including voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality, and responsible data use. Survey responses were analyzed in aggregated form, and interview data were reported by professional category in order to preserve analytical relevance and ethical discretion.

4. Findings and Integrated Discussion

4.1. The Information Gap: AI Awareness and Media Literacy

The first major finding concerns the gap between young voters’ exposure to digital campaign communication and their level of information about AI use. The survey results indicate that most respondents did not feel sufficiently informed about the role of AI in the campaign.

Table 1. Young Voters’ Level of Information about AI Use in the Campaign (N = 360)

Indicator	N	%
Slightly informed	122	33.9
Not informed at all	92	25.6
Informed	86	23.9
Not sure	34	9.4
Very informed	26	7.2

As Table 1 shows, 59.5% of respondents reported being either slightly informed or not informed at all, while only 7.2% considered themselves very informed. This finding is theoretically important because it challenges the assumption that young voters' familiarity with digital platforms automatically translates into critical understanding of AI-assisted political communication. Although young people are frequent users of social media, their ability to identify whether a political message has been generated, modified, personalized, or strategically circulated through AI-assisted systems remains limited.

From the perspective of media literacy, the result suggests that digital exposure and critical digital competence should not be treated as equivalent. Young voters may encounter political content daily through TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, or other platforms, but this does not necessarily mean that they can recognize the technological mediation behind that content. In this respect, the Albanian case supports the broader argument that digital familiarity does not automatically produce media or algorithmic literacy (UNESCO, 2019; European Commission, 2021).

The democratic implication of this information gap is substantial. If voters consume political content without understanding its technological origin, authorship, persuasive purpose, or algorithmic distribution, their capacity for autonomous political judgment may be weakened. The issue is therefore not merely whether AI-generated or AI-assisted content exists in an electoral campaign, but whether citizens are able to recognize and critically evaluate it. The high share of poorly informed respondents points to a form of democratic vulnerability: young voters are exposed to technologically mediated political messages while remaining only partially aware of the mechanisms through which such messages are produced and circulated.

4.2. *Visible Tools versus Algorithmic Processes*

The second finding concerns the asymmetry between visible AI-assisted content and less visible algorithmic processes. Respondents associated AI mainly with audiovisual and platform-adapted campaign materials.

Table 2. Perceived Forms of AI Use in Political Campaign Communication
(Multiple Response Analysis, N = 360)

Indicator	N	% of respondents
Creation or modification of videos, such as campaign spots or animations	155	43.1
Creation of audio content, such as campaign songs or artificially generated voices	113	31.4
Creation or modification of photos	101	28.1
Creation or modification of digital graphics, such as posters or promotional materials	92	25.6

No sufficient information / do not believe AI was used in these forms	69	19.2
Personalization of political messages shown to voters	56	15.6
Automated communication systems, such as chatbots	34	9.4

Table 2 shows that young voters recognized AI primarily when it appeared in visible audiovisual forms. Videos and animations were identified by 43.1% of respondents, followed by audio content at 31.4%, photos at 28.1%, and digital graphics at 25.6%. By contrast, only 15.6% identified the personalization of political messages, and only 9.4% mentioned automated communication systems such as chatbots. This contrast suggests that AI was perceived mainly as an aesthetic and creative campaign instrument rather than as a data-driven infrastructure of political targeting.

AI-assisted electoral communication cannot be analyzed only through visible content such as videos, images, artificial voices, campaign songs, memes, or animations. It must also be understood as an infrastructure that may shape what voters see, how often they see it, and in what emotional or political context it appears. The low recognition of personalization and automated communication suggests that algorithmic mediation remains largely opaque to young voters.

The qualitative interviews reinforce this interpretation. The technology expert emphasized that *“the use of AI in the background for analyzing users’ social behavior remains still unknown”* (Technology expert, interview). This statement clarifies what the survey alone cannot fully show: some of the most politically consequential uses of AI may not be directly visible to citizens. The same expert linked hidden technological practices to voter analysis, turnout patterns, supporter identification, and data collected through patronage networks, arguing that such data *“can be processed using AI”* in ways that reduce time and increase campaign performance (Technology expert, interview).

This evidence supports the study’s dual analytical perspective. Young voters recognized AI mainly when it appeared as visible content, while the interviews suggest that AI may also operate through background processes of data analysis, voter mapping, message optimization, and targeted communication. This finding is consistent with the literature on microtargeting and algorithmic filtering, which emphasizes that political persuasion increasingly relies on personal data, inferred preferences, and platform-based selection mechanisms (Dobber et al., 2019; Papakyriakopoulos et al., 2018; European Commission, 2021). In the Albanian case, the gap between visible recognition and limited awareness of personalization shows that voters may see the surface of AI-assisted communication without understanding the infrastructure behind it.

4.3. Political Actors and Source Attribution

The third finding concerns political attribution and the visibility of party actors. Respondents were asked which political actors they associated with AI-assisted campaign content.

Table 3. Political Actors Associated with AI-Assisted Campaign Content
(*Multiple Response Analysis, N = 360*)

Political actor	N	% of respondents
The Socialist Party (PS)	151	41.9
Not sure which party, but have seen such content	98	27.2
The Democratic Party (PD)	87	24.2
Opportunity Party (PM)	81	22.5
Do not remember seeing AI-generated content from a specific party	61	16.9
Albania Becomes Initiative (NSHB)	20	5.6
Euro-Atlantic Coalition (KEA)	17	4.7
Together Movement (LB)	11	3.1
Other	5	1.4

As Table 3 indicates, the Socialist Party was the political actor most frequently associated with AI-assisted campaign content, mentioned by 41.9% of respondents. This result suggests that, in young voters' perceptions, AI-assisted audiovisual and satirical campaign formats were more strongly linked to established political actors with greater campaign resources and stronger digital visibility. However, this finding should be interpreted together with the fact that 27.2% of respondents reported having seen AI-related political content without being sure which party had produced it.

This uncertainty is analytically significant because source attribution is a core condition of democratic accountability. In electoral communication, voters must be able to identify not only the content of a political message, but also its producer, sponsor, purpose, and technological mediation. When political materials circulate across platforms without clear labeling or recognizable authorship, citizens may find it more difficult to distinguish between official campaign communication, satire, propaganda, third-party content, manipulated materials, and algorithmically amplified messages.

From the perspective of framing theory, AI-assisted materials may intensify the selection and emphasis of particular political narratives, opponents, conflicts, and emotional cues (Entman, 1993). The media expert's observation that some AI-related content was used "*to attack the political opponent, targeting the grey electorate*" (Media expert, interview) illustrates this mechanism in the Albanian campaign. Such content does not merely transmit information; it frames political competition through condensed, emotionally charged, and easily shareable visual narratives.

Agenda-setting theory is also relevant. Repeated circulation of AI-assisted materials may increase the salience of specific actors, accusations, narratives, or emotional themes (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In platform-based campaigns, salience is produced

not only by traditional media coverage or official party communication, but also by repetition, shareability, and algorithmic amplification. If voters remember the message but not the source, then platform circulation may produce visibility without accountability. This is particularly problematic in electoral contexts, where public scrutiny depends on the ability to trace political claims and campaign materials back to identifiable actors.

The finding also connects with political personalization. AI-assisted content may strengthen leader-centered or opponent-centered campaign communication by producing stylized images, satirical videos, symbolic representations, and emotionally charged attacks. This can increase the memorability of political figures while reducing attention to party programs, institutional accountability, or policy debate. In the Albanian campaign, the association of AI with established actors and audiovisual political attacks suggests that AI may reinforce both personalization and adversarial framing.

4.4. Ethics, Privacy, and Authenticity

The fourth finding concerns the ethical and democratic concerns associated with AI-assisted campaign communication.

Table 4. Main Concerns about AI Use in Political Campaigns
(Multiple Response Analysis, N = 360)

Concern	N	% of respondents
Fear of fake news or manipulated information	159	44.2
Possibility that opinions may be manipulated without awareness	106	29.4
Lack of clarity about how and why AI is being used	104	28.9
Concern about privacy and personal data	87	24.2
No particular personal concern	70	19.4
Fear that AI may create greater inequality between parties	49	13.6

Table 4 shows that young voters’ concerns were not merely technical, but democratic. The most frequently selected concern was fear of fake news or manipulated information, identified by 44.2% of respondents. This was followed by concern about opinion manipulation without awareness, lack of clarity about how and why AI is used, and concern about privacy and personal data. These findings indicate that young voters connect AI-assisted electoral communication with risks to truthfulness, autonomy, transparency, and informed participation.

This result is especially important because respondents did not necessarily reject AI as a campaign tool. Rather, their concerns emerged when AI was associated with

manipulation, unclear authorship, hidden persuasion, or misuse of personal data. The democratic problem is therefore not technological innovation in itself, but the conditions under which AI is used. AI-assisted communication may be democratically acceptable when it supports creative, transparent, and clearly labeled communication. It becomes problematic when it blurs the boundary between authentic and synthetic content, or when it enables opaque targeting, emotional manipulation, and unclear source attribution.

The qualitative interviews add a further layer to this ethical discussion by introducing the question of political authenticity. Candidates from newer political actors presented the limited use or rejection of AI not as technological incapacity, but as a deliberate ethical and communicative choice. The candidate from the Together Movement stated that AI *“was not a priority, and even less a necessity,”* emphasizing that the campaign relied on *“content built by real people, not by algorithms”* (Parliamentary candidate, Together Movement, interview). Similarly, the representative of the Albania Becomes Initiative described technology as *“a supporting tool, but not as a replacement for political truthfulness and human interaction”* (Parliamentary candidate, Albania Becomes Initiative, interview).

These accounts reveal that AI functions not only as a technical instrument, but also as a symbolic marker within political competition. For established parties, AI-assisted formats may signal modernization, efficiency, professionalization, and adaptation to platform-based campaigning. For newer political actors, however, limited AI use may become part of an authenticity strategy, emphasizing direct contact, human interaction, spontaneous communication, and proximity to citizens. This contrast suggests that AI in the Albanian campaign was politically ambivalent: it could be interpreted as a sign of innovation, but also as a source of skepticism when perceived as artificial, manipulative, or distant from voters.

4.5. Fragmentation of Perceptions and Regulatory Uncertainty

The fifth finding concerns the fragmented character of young voters’ perceptions. Reliability testing was used to assess whether selected item groupings could be treated as unified scales.

Table 5. Reliability Statistics for Selected Questionnaire Dimensions

Tested grouping	Number of items	N	Cronbach’s Alpha (α)	Interpretation
Exposure to AI forms	6	360	0.491	Low internal consistency
Concerns about AI use	5	360	0.324	Low internal consistency
Exploratory index: information, influence, ethical evaluation	3	267	-0.110	Not recommended as a scale

As Table 5 shows, the Cronbach’s alpha values were low: $\alpha = 0.491$ for exposure to

AI forms and $\alpha = 0.324$ for concerns about AI use. Methodologically, these values indicate that the questionnaire should not be treated as a unified psychometric scale. However, they also have substantive meaning. They suggest that young voters' perceptions of AI-assisted political communication are multidimensional, unstable, and fragmented across different dimensions: awareness, exposure, source attribution, perceived influence, ethical judgment, privacy, manipulation, and fear of fake news. This fragmentation reflects the novelty of AI as a political communication phenomenon in Albania. Young voters are not responding to a single, clearly defined object. Rather, they are evaluating a complex set of practices that includes videos, animations, edited images, campaign songs, personalization, algorithmic circulation, data-driven targeting, satire, and possible manipulation. The low internal consistency therefore does not simply represent a technical limitation of the survey. It indicates that AI-assisted electoral communication is not yet understood by respondents as a coherent category. Instead, it is perceived through dispersed and sometimes contradictory associations.

This finding helps explain the ethical ambivalence identified in the survey. Many respondents were neutral or uncertain in their ethical evaluation of AI use, while also expressing concern about fake news, manipulation, privacy, and lack of clarity. This apparent contradiction is analytically meaningful. It suggests that young voters may not reject AI in principle, but they lack stable criteria for distinguishing legitimate creative use from manipulative or opaque uses. Such uncertainty creates a need for clearer public standards, stronger media literacy, and more visible disclosure practices.

The qualitative interviews confirm this regulatory ambiguity. The technology expert expressed concern that strict regulation could hinder innovation, while the media expert argued that societies with limited media literacy require clearer ethical and regulatory standards, especially when AI-generated or AI-assisted content is not labeled. This tension captures a central governance dilemma: how to preserve the communicative benefits of technological innovation while protecting elections from manipulation, opacity, privacy violations, and loss of accountability.

5. Recommendations and Implications

The findings indicate that the governance of AI-assisted electoral communication should be approached as a matter of democratic accountability rather than merely technological regulation. In the Albanian context, institutional responses should prioritize transparency, labeling, and legal responsibility for AI-generated, AI-modified, or AI-distributed campaign materials. Clear disclosure mechanisms would strengthen source attribution and enable voters to distinguish between authentic political communication, satire, persuasion, and manipulation.

Political parties should also develop internal ethical protocols for AI use, particularly regarding personalized messaging, voter profiling, opponent attacks, emotional manipulation, and the processing of personal data. Such protocols should be

grounded in consent, proportionality, transparency, and data protection, ensuring that campaign efficiency does not undermine citizens' autonomy or informational rights.

A further implication concerns media literacy and civic oversight. Schools, universities, civil society organizations, journalists, and fact-checkers should promote AI literacy initiatives that help citizens identify synthetic or AI-assisted content, verify sources, and understand algorithmic circulation. This is especially relevant for young voters, whose digital exposure does not necessarily imply critical algorithmic awareness.

Finally, political innovation should remain subordinated to democratic authenticity. AI may support creative and accessible communication, but it should not replace direct engagement, programmatic debate, or accountable public interaction. Its democratic value depends on whether it enhances transparency, trust, participation, and informed voter choice.

6. Conclusion

This study shows that AI-assisted electoral communication in Albania's 2025 parliamentary elections functioned simultaneously as a democratic resource and a democratic risk. As a resource, AI enabled more rapid, visual, personalized, and platform-adapted forms of campaign communication, potentially increasing political visibility and youth engagement. As a risk, its opaque use intensified concerns about manipulation, fake news, privacy, source attribution, and limited algorithmic awareness among young voters. The central finding is that AI's democratic value depends less on technological sophistication than on accountability conditions. Transparency, labeling, data protection, media literacy, and ethical party practices are therefore essential for informed electoral participation.

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