

Seeing is believing: visual misinformation at election time

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Context

- 2024 was the “year of elections”.
 - This involved 72 countries and potentially 3.7 billion citizens.
 - However, these elections occurred at a moment of great concern for the health of democratic institutions (Diamond, 2015; Bermeo, 2016).
- Recent election cycles have seen growing concern about misinformation in electoral politics (Anstead, 2021).
- The development of visual AI tools has heightened these worries.

Probable outputs

- Paper examining the content of the visual misinformation dataset (currently in working paper version).
 - The primary purpose is to examine the comparative use of visual disinformation – across national contexts and by production method.
- Paper looking at mainstream media coverage of visual disinformation.
 - This will use a second dataset of press coverage of the topic across the four countries.
- Paper more focused on theories of visual misinformation, and particularly the types of aesthetics it employs, especially on the far / Fascist right.

Our project: data gathering

- Following ethics approval from the LSE, we set up two dummy accounts in each of the case study countries (Belgium, UK and USA – with France added after the snap election was called on 9th June).
 - One account was oriented to the political left, while another account was aimed at the political right.
- We harvested examples of visual misinformation that appeared on these account feeds.
- Important to note, this data cannot claim to be representative but offers a snapshot.

Our project: data gathered

	Country			
	Belgium	France	United Kingdom	United States
Election date	9th June	30th June (round 1) & 7th July (round 2)	4th July	5th Nov
Data-gathering period	10th May - 19th June	10th June - 17th July	1st June - 12th July	10th Sept - 15th Nov
Total examples gathered	24	76	161	142
Political orientation (%)				
Right-wing account	83	79	59	87
Left-wing account	17	21	41	13
Social media platform (%)				
Instagram	50	40	13	18
Facebook	4	17	39	20
X	42	38	26	39
TikTok	4	5	22	19
Truth Social	NA	NA	NA	4

Seeing is believing?

- One of the core concerns voiced in 2024 was the realism of AI-manufactured visual misinformation.
- The assumption seemed to be that realism = threat.
- But how sustainable is that assumption in 2024?

“Three weeks out from polling day, a new report warns of the dangers of ‘realistic fake footage that is cheap to create and spread across the internet’ impacting the UK general election.”

The Centre for Policy Studies,
2024

Seeing is believing?

	Country				
	All	Belgium	France	UK	US
Visual misinfo type (%)					
AI generated	49	38	47	41	60
Doctored images	23	4	1	49	8
Credibility (%)					
Not credible	60	79	62	76	38
Somewhat credible	15	4	8	10	25
Credible	25	17	30	14	37
Genre (%)					
Satirical / humourous	39	17	12	52	42
References meme culture	39	33	34	53	38

Seeing is believing?

	Country			
	Belgium	France	United Kingdom	United States
AI generated content (%)				
N=	15	40	95	55
Not at all credible	80	60	80	7.3
Slightly credible	0	0	8.4	23.6
Credible	20	40	11.6	69.1
Non-AI generated content (%)				
N=	9	36	66	88
Not at all credible	77.8	63.9	69.7	59.3
Slightly credible	11.1	16.7	13.6	24.4
Credible	11.1	19.4	16.7	16.3

Seeing is believing?



Ben
@b4sed7



Keir Starmer wants this photo removed from the internet. It would be a shame if you shared it. [#votereform](#)



6:42 PM · Jun 16, 2024 · 69.2K Views

181

2K

2.5K

44



Seeing is believing?



Europe Invasion @EuropeInvasionn · 15h ...
Nigel Farage:

“Reform UK will mass deport immigrants and stop all boats.”



336 2.6K 18K 299K +



Conclusion

- The nature of the network varies across different national contexts (Belgium and France look very different, less decentralised).
- The right appears to be generating more visual misinformation than the left (this replicates similar findings: see Törnberg and Chueri, 2025).
- A significant amount of misleading content was created using non-AI tools, and AI tools were not always employed to create such content.
 - However, this does not mean that they did not promulgate misleading narratives or act as visual cues to radical online networks.

Going forward

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Any questions?



Download the working paper

