PREPRINT

Synthetic Campaign Communication and Election Confidence in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract

Generative AI raises at least two distinct questions when used in political campaigns: whether synthetic campaign material affects confidence in election results, and what citizens are willing to tolerate from candidates. We examine these outcomes using two quota-based online cross-sectional surveys of US adults, fielded during and after the 2024 presidential election (N = 1,003 and 1,059). Respondents who report more frequent exposure to suspected AI-generated campaign material have lower confidence in election integrity in both waves. Yet election confidence itself is not independently associated with tolerance for synthetic campaign material. The latter is instead strongly associated with technological familiarity and distrust of professional news media. Citizens with the greatest self-reported knowledge, personal AI use, and perceived AI literacy tolerate synthetic content the least, whereas those who distrust professional news media tolerate it more. The findings emphasize a major democratic consequence associated with the perceived profusion of synthetic campaign material in US elections: the more citizens believe they encounter such material, the less confident they are in the legitimacy of the democratic process.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; LLMs; election confidence; election integrity; political campaigns; public opinion

INTRODUCTION

Concerns about election integrity in the United States long predate the sudden emergence of generative AI. Despite persistent claims of fraud, instances of deliberate voter fraud remain extremely rare across all levels of US elections (Minnite, 2010). Regardless, elite allegations of fraud can reduce confidence in elections even when such claims are unsupported, and partisan evaluations of legitimacy often follow winner–loser incentives rather than the actual quality of election administration (Berlinski et al., 2023; Bowler & Donovan, 2024; Sinclair et al., 2018). Prior research has also found an association between social media use and low confidence in elections (van Ham et al., 2025). The public release of ChatGPT in November 2022 gave this crisis of confidence a new layer by changing the information environment in which these longstanding suspicions operate.

One prominent election-related incident involving AI occurred in January 2024. Thousands of Democratic voters in New Hampshire received a mysterious robocall impersonating President Biden asking them to sit out the state's primary election

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instead of voting for him (Matza, 2024). Authorities responded swiftly. However, the incident signaled that the rise of AI in political campaigns was rapidly outpacing the legal and normative guardrails that usually accompany technological innovation. In early 2024, major technology companies like Anthropic, OpenAI, Google, Meta, and TikTok pledged measures intended to curb deceptive uses of AI in elections (Ahmed et al., 2025). Even so, the 2024 US presidential race was riddled with accusations and verifiable instances of AI misuse.

The democratic risk is not limited to whether synthetic messages deceive their audiences. Research on political deepfakes shows that manipulated content can generate uncertainty and reduce trust even when most viewers are not persuaded by the false claim itself (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020). In an election already surrounded by fraud rhetoric, the belief that synthetic campaign material is pervasive could serve as a cue that the information environment, and perhaps the electoral process embedded within it, is even further open to manipulation than previously imagined.

This development coincides with rising public familiarity with generative AI. The share of US adults reporting they have used ChatGPT roughly doubled between 2023 and 2025 (Sidoti & McClain, 2025). On the one hand, familiarity may normalize–or trivialize–campaign uses of the technology. On the other hand, greater technological adoption also likely means greater awareness of its potential pitfalls and limitations.

AI is not a single policy problem. Its use in employment, public administration, weapons systems, consumer services and political communication all raise different questions and mobilize separate constituencies. Synthetic campaign content is a particularly concrete case. It concerns identifiable speakers, messages, disclosure duties, and electoral harms rather than diffuse claims about the future of AI–whatever the latter means. It is also a discrete and increasingly active domain of regulation. By September 2024, at least 19 US states had enacted laws addressing AI in political messaging (Hooshidary & Kuckuk, 2024). By June 2026, the National Conference of State Legislatures counted 31 states regulating political deepfakes: 28 required disclosures, while three relied on time-limited or year-round prohibitions (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2026). At the federal level, the Federal Election Commission declined in 2024 to write new rules on AI-generated campaign ads and instead clarified how existing technology-neutral fraudulent-misrepresentation rules apply (Federal Election Commission, 2024).

Despite this regulatory push, research examining public preferences towards synthetic campaign material and how the latter could affect election confidence remains sparse. Accordingly, we examine two related questions: *how perceived exposure to suspected AI-generated campaign material is associated with confidence in election integrity, and what factors are associated with citizens' tolerance for candidates' use of such material.* We analyze two separate US surveys conducted during the 2024 presidential election and in its aftermath. We find a negative relationship between perceived exposure and election confidence in both waves. However, election confidence itself is not associated with tolerance for synthetic campaign material once other predictors and controls are included. Lastly, we find a strong negative association between tolerance for synthetic campaign material and technological familiarity, and a consistent positive association between the former and distrust of professional news media. On balance, our findings

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emphasize a major democratic consequence associated with the perceived profusion of synthetic campaign material in US elections: the more citizens believe they encounter such material, the less confident they are in the legitimacy of the democratic process.

CAMPAIGNS, AI, AND ELECTION CONFIDENCE

Potential threats and opportunities

Elections act as a robust link between citizens and their representatives only insofar as both the former and latter accept the process as legitimate. In the United States, that acceptance has become sharply partisan. Confidence in the 2020 result was shaped more strongly by partisanship and elite rhetoric than by objective features of election administration (Bowler & Donovan, 2024), and experimental evidence shows mainstream corrections do not fully repair the damage of unsubstantiated voter-fraud claims (Berlinski et al., 2023).

Generative AI erupted in this already fragile setting in November 2022 as a new source of ambiguity. Proponents of AI often cite its potential to stimulate engagement among voters, not only in accelerating the dissemination of political information, but also in personalizing information about political candidates and public policy and microtargeting recipients (Foos, 2024; Kehinde et al., 2024). Simultaneously, many worry that AI could have adverse and unexpected consequences on the political process and, not least, elections. Asked about the impact AI will have on politics and elections, a majority of experts (67%) expressed that the net effect will be more negative than positive (Rainie & Anderson, 2024).

The technology's public launch resulted in a sudden collapse in both the cost of producing and the barriers to scaling deceptive content. However, its broader consequence may be to make authentic evidence easier to dismiss—a phenomenon Schiff et al. (2025) call "the liar's dividend." Vaccari and Chadwick (2020) show that political deepfakes can largely corrode how citizens perceive the political information environment, not via direct persuasion, but by introducing uncertainty around one's capacity to discern what is false from true. The perceived profusion of synthetic campaign material may operate similarly, as a heuristic of manipulation and election-tampering. A respondent who believes such material is common may infer that campaigns, platforms, or other actors can distort the election using forms of communication that are difficult to authenticate. The growing supply of conspiracy theories positing that AI and algorithms are used to manipulate vote tallies in favor of specific candidates is just one illustration of that phenomenon (Grimmer et al., 2024).

Concerns about the misuse of AI tools in elections are not limited to the United States. The problems of mis- and disinformation, cyber insecurity and other misuses of Generative AI are frequently described as some of the main threats to the global information environment (see for example WEF's Global Risks Report 2026 and the 2025 IPIE Expert Survey). A report from the International Panel on the Information Environment shows that 80% of countries that held elections in 2024 experienced AI-related incidents, with India, the United States, and France most affected (International Panel on the Information Environment, 2025). Of the incidents documented in the report, 69% were classified as harmful and 25% were attributed to political candidates and parties. These conservative estimates challenge accounts that describe AI-related

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election disruptions in 2024 as still relatively contained (Simon & Altay, 2025; Simon et al., 2023).

Tolerance for new technologies and AI

How the public feels can often condition or stifle the development, application, and regulation of technological innovations, including AI technologies (Ansolabehere & Konisky, 2016; Mahmoud et al., 2025). Recent work cautions against treating AI as a single attitude object. Across multiple policy-relevant applications, public attitudes vary by use, and experts hold more differentiated views than the general public (O'Shaughnessy et al., 2023). Campaign-specific evidence reaches a similar conclusion: citizens distinguish among operational, voter-outreach, and deceptive applications, with the strongest opposition directed toward deceptive or norm-violating uses (Jungherr et al., 2026). In the realm of politics, elite communication and democratic norms of authenticity and accountability may lead citizens to reject the use of AI-generated content in an election, even if they do not believe the technology alone can fundamentally alter the legitimacy of the outcome. Likewise, a citizen may believe that synthetic material is a significant threat to the political information environment while still accepting its routine use in other domains, including their personal life. Thus, one plausible foundation of tolerance for such content needs to be explored: *familiarity* with the technology.

Classic research on technological risk emphasizes that unfamiliar hazards often appear more threatening, suggesting that familiarity could increase tolerance (Fischhoff et al., 1978; Slovic, 1987). Yet research on emerging technologies has not found a uniformly positive familiarity effect. Exposure to balanced information about nanotechnology, for example, produced evaluations structured by respondents' cultural predispositions rather than a general movement toward acceptance (Kahan et al., 2009). Studies of AI similarly find that familiarity can increase or reduce support depending on the application and the extent to which it affects tasks people know well (Horowitz et al., 2024). Lower measured AI literacy has even been associated with greater receptivity to AI, particularly when systems appear to perform distinctly human tasks (Tully et al., 2025).

Evidence from political communication is especially relevant. In a representative German survey, Scherer et al. (2026) find that greater AI knowledge is associated with greater acceptance of editing and translation but lower acceptance of realistic visual generation. Related work shows that presumed effects on oneself and others contribute to preferences for regulating AI in election campaigns (Rauchfleisch et al., 2025). Familiarity may therefore sharpen judgments about particular campaign uses rather than generate diffuse enthusiasm or opposition. People who understand how easily plausible but unreliable content can be generated may be especially reluctant to accept that capacity in campaigns.

General trust orientations of the public and, more narrowly, *distrust in professional news media* constitute another likely contributor to public reactions to AI content in campaigns. In that respect, aggregate-level confidence in news media and democratic institutions has eroded to historically low levels just before the 2016 presidential election (Freelon & Wells, 2020; Rasul et al., 2025). That trend has continued: in

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September 2025, only 56% of US adults reported at least some trust in the information they received from national news organizations (Eddy & Shearer, 2025). That degree of erosion and the blurring of epistemic authorities has led a large part of the public in the US and analogous high-income liberal democracies to reach a state of epistemic vulnerability, afflicted by a confluence of epistemic challenges among which, the inability to translate the supply of political information into informed political action and confusion about what information is reliable and which is not (Labarre, 2025).

We recognize that trust and distrust are notoriously difficult to capture accurately. Our goal is not to weigh in on a complex conceptual and methodological debate (for competent reviews of these issues, see Engelke et al., 2019; Fawzi et al., 2021, 2027). Nevertheless, people who trust professional media are likely attached to a range of institutional guarantees around verification, attribution, correction, and accountability. Synthetic political content routinely bypasses those features. People who already distrust professional news media, on the other hand, are more likely to seek alternative news sources and information types (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003) or forego news consumption altogether (Rasul et al., 2025), and may be less attached to the communicative norms that synthetic campaign communication unsettles.

Taken together, this literature paints a quite nuanced account of the relationship between exposure to synthetic content, tolerance for such content from political campaigns and candidates, and perceptions of election integrity. Respondents may regard the perceived profusion of synthetic material as corrosive to election confidence without becoming correspondingly less tolerant of its use by candidates. Additionally, tolerance likely also depends on how citizens understand the technology and how much value they place on the institutions and communicative norms that synthetic content can bypass. We ask two organizing questions:

RQ1. How is perceived exposure to suspected AI-generated campaign material associated with confidence in election integrity?

RQ2. How are election confidence, familiarity with generative AI, and distrust of professional news media associated with tolerance for candidates' use of synthetic campaign material?

We also tentatively formulate the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: *Respondents concerned about the integrity of the election are less accepting of synthetic campaign material.*

Hypothesis 2: *Tolerance for synthetic campaign material is associated with distrust in the professional news media.*

We cautiously do not advance any formal hypotheses regarding how technological familiarity shapes tolerance for synthetic campaign material, as the literature does not point in a single direction.

METHODS

This study draws on two online surveys of 1,003 and 1,059 adults eligible to vote in the United States, conducted from October 30, 2024 to November 12, 2024;

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and from November 25, 2024 to January 8, 2025. Both waves were administered through Qualtrics. Recruitment was handled through Qualtrics' panel system, and only US citizens aged 18 or older were permitted to participate. To approximate the demographic profile of the voting-age population, we set quotas reflecting US census distributions for gender, age, race, Hispanic origin, household income, region, and—among respondents aged 25 and above—educational attainment. Participants received compensation worth roughly five US dollars.

Before beginning the questionnaire, respondents reviewed and signed an informed consent form. The instrument contained no deceptive or sensitive items. Participation was voluntary, responses were collected anonymously, and no personally identifying information was retained. To ensure data quality, we excluded respondents who completed the questionnaire in less than half the median completion time during the soft launch and retained only fully completed questionnaires.

Dependent Variables

Tolerance for synthetic campaign material We asked respondents: "How comfortable are you with political candidates using Generative AI to create content such as images, videos, speeches, campaign ads, or social media posts?" Responses were recorded on a five-point scale going from "very comfortable" to "very uncomfortable." For analysis, we reverse-coded the item so higher scores indicate greater tolerance.

Election confidence In both waves, we asked respondents to choose the proposition closest to their own viewpoint between the following: "The 2024 election [could be/was] influenced by fraudulent activities and stolen from the [legitimate winner/Kamala Harris]," and "I am not worried about the integrity of the 2024 election or the legitimacy of its outcome/The election and its outcome were legitimate." Respondents endorsing the latter received a score of 1, while those endorsing the stolen-election claim received a score of 0.

Predictors and Controls

Perceived exposure to synthetic political content Respondents estimated their frequency of exposure to political content which they suspected was AI-generated during the 2024 presidential campaign, whether on television, social media, the internet, or elsewhere. Response options ranged from "never" to "every day or almost every day." Respondents could also choose "I don't know." Those cases were excluded from the analysis.

Familiarity We built a composite familiarity index combining self-reported knowledge of generative AI, frequency of personal AI use during the previous six months, and confidence in one's own capacity to distinguish synthetic from human-crafted content. Instruments used to capture each indicator are available in the appendix, see Table A.1. All components of the index are oriented so higher values indicate greater familiarity. The index yields acceptable internal consistency in both samples (Cronbach's α = .717 in Wave 1 and .692 in Wave 2).

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Distrust in professional news media We measure distrust using a four-point scale with response options ranging from "totally trust" to "do not trust at all."

Ideology We measured ideology by asking respondents to place themselves on a standard eleven-point left-right scale.

Political interest We asked respondents: "How interested would you say you are in politics?" Responses were recorded on a four-point scale going from "not at all interested" to "very interested."

Vote choice We asked respondents who they intended to vote for or who they had voted for in the 2024 presidential election, based on survey completion date. Respondents could select from the following options: "I voted for Donald Trump (R);" "I voted for Kamala Harris (D);" "I voted for someone else;" and "I did not vote." We recode this into a Trump voter binary variable for use in our regression models.

White We rely on respondents' self-reported ethnic background. Respondents who identified as 'White or Caucasian" were coded as 1, and all others as 0.

Gender We coded male as 1 and female as 0, and dropped respondents who chose the "prefer not to say" option.

Age and Education We recorded each respondent's birth year and converted to age. Respondents indicated their level of education using the following options: "Graduated High School or GED;" "Some College (Graduated College – Associate's degree, Technical School or Vocational Training);" "Graduated College – Bachelor's degree;" or "Advanced degree/Postgraduate or Doctoral Degree (e.g., M.A. or Ph.D.)."

RESULTS

We estimate two sets of models corresponding to the study's two substantive questions. First, we use linear probability models to examine whether perceived exposure to AI-generated content during the course of the campaign is associated with confidence in the integrity of the 2024 election. Second, we estimate OLS models predicting tolerance for synthetic campaign material. Model diagnostics revealed no evidence of multicollinearity. Studentized Breusch-Pagan tests rejected homoskedasticity in all four models. For this reason, we report HC3 robust standard errors in all our outputs. Because the surveys are cross-sectional, the estimates should be interpreted as associations rather than causal effects.

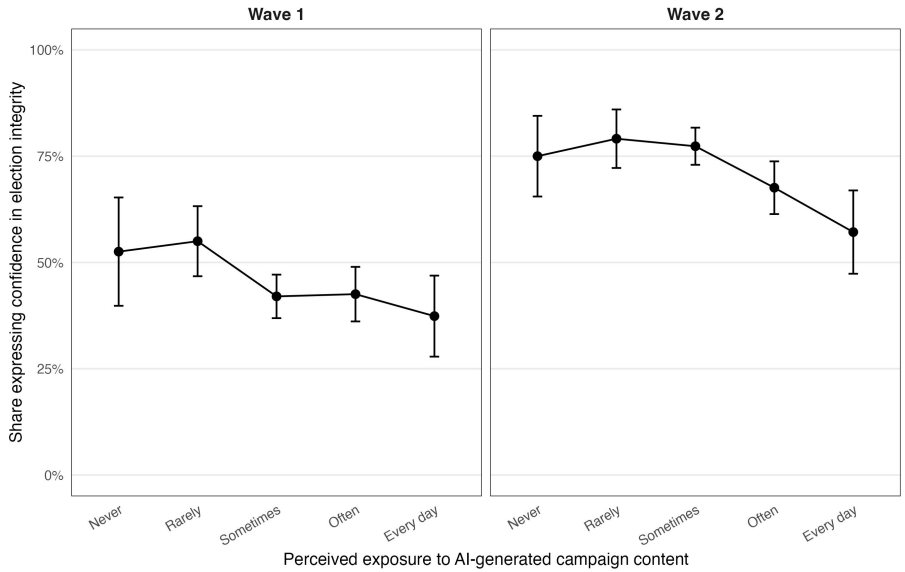
Perceived exposure and election confidence

We begin with the unadjusted relationship between perceived exposure to synthetic campaign material and election confidence. Figure 1 reports the share of respondents expressing confidence in election integrity at each exposure category. In Wave 1, 52.5% of respondents who reported never encountering suspected AI-generated

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campaign material expressed confidence in the election, compared with 37.3% among those reporting exposure every day or almost every day. Relative to the "never" category, this represents a 15.2 percentage-point difference ($b = -.152$, $p < .10$). The corresponding figures in Wave 2 are 75.0% and 57.1%, a difference of 17.9 percentage points ($b = -.179$, $p < .05$) that is not masked by a much higher baseline compared to Wave 1.

The descriptive relationship is not monotonic. Respondents reporting rare exposure, and those reporting occasional exposure in Wave 2, do not differ significantly from respondents reporting no exposure. Nevertheless, confidence is consistently lowest among respondents who believe they encountered synthetic campaign material every day or almost every day. Full estimates from the bivariate models are reported in Appendix Table A.2.

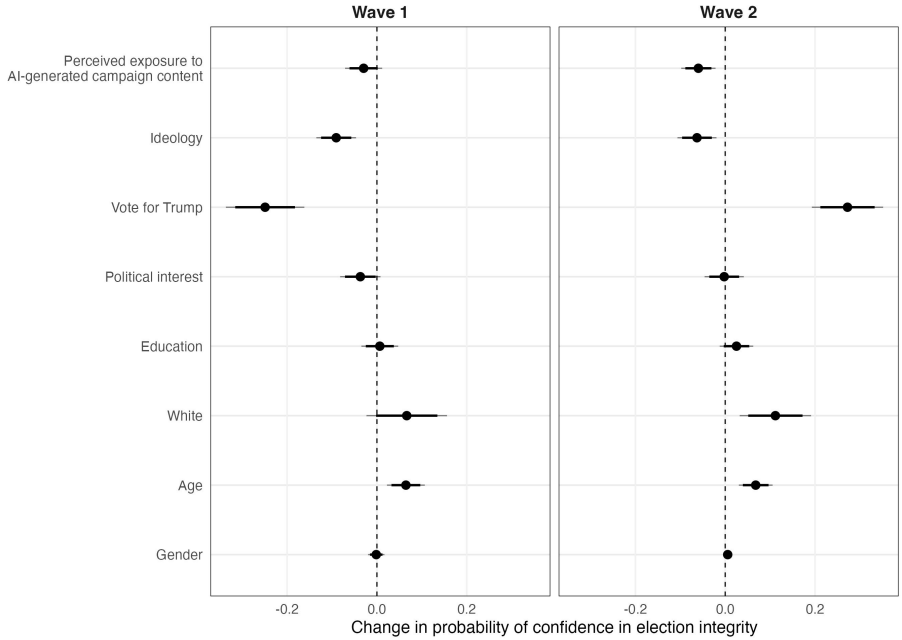


Note: Points report the share of respondents expressing confidence in election integrity at each reported frequency of exposure to suspected AI-generated political content. Error bars show confidence intervals.

Figure 1. Perceived Exposure to AI-Generated Campaign Content and Election Confidence

The adjusted models produce the same general pattern, as shown in Figure 2. Perceived exposure to synthetic material during the campaign is negatively associated with confidence in election integrity in both waves, although the Wave 1 estimate is only marginally significant ($b = -.030$, $p < .10$). The association is larger and clears conventional levels of statistical significance after the election in Wave 2 ($b = -.060$, $p < .001$). The two models explain 15.4% and 16.7% of the variance in election confidence, respectively. Thus, the negative relationship between perceived exposure and election confidence persists after accounting for ideology, vote choice, political interest, education, race, age, and gender, but the evidence is considerably stronger in the post-election wave. We interpret the results as evidence of a consistently negative

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Note: Points report coefficients from linear probability models predicting confidence in election integrity. Error bars show 95% (dark) and 99% (light) CIs with HC3 robust standard errors.

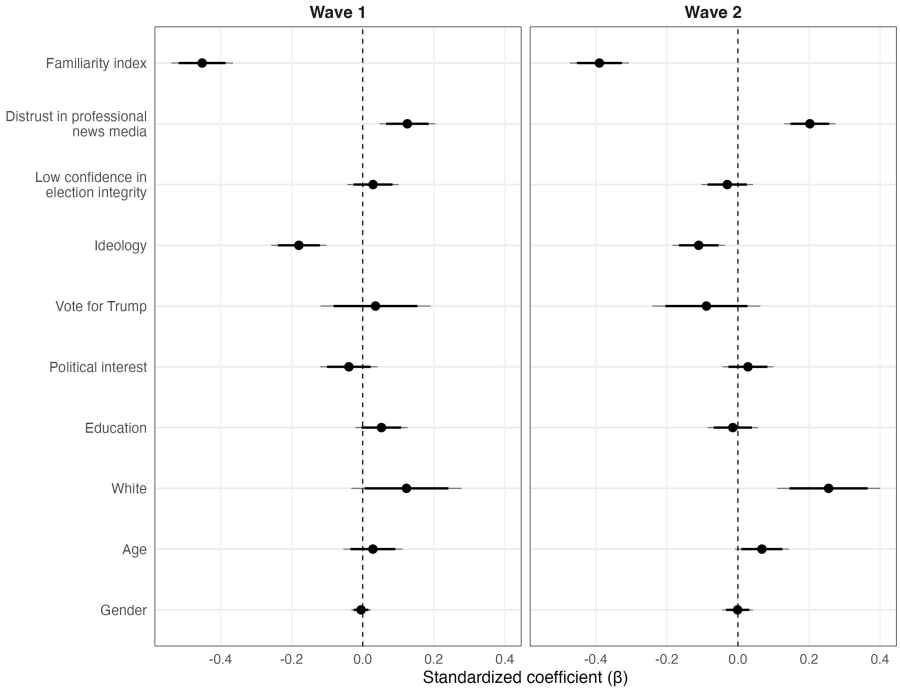
Figure 2. Predictors of Confidence in Election Integrity

association, with stronger evidence in the post-election wave, rather than evidence of a meaningfully greater association post-election. Careful readers will notice that, expectedly, Trump voters were substantially less likely to express confidence in the election in Wave 1 ($b = -.249$, $p < .001$), and much more likely to do so following his victory in Wave 2 ($b = .272$, $p < .001$). Full estimates appear in Appendix Table A.3.

Tolerance for synthetic campaign material

We next examine tolerance for candidates' use of generative AI to produce campaign material. Figure 3 displays the results. We did not formulate any hypothesis on the relationship between familiarity and tolerance for synthetic campaign material because the literature suggested several conceivable scenarios. Surprisingly, the empirical pattern in our data is less nuanced. Familiarity with generative AI is the largest and most consistent predictor in both waves. Substantively, it operates in the opposite direction from a simple normalization account. Respondents reporting greater knowledge of generative AI, more frequent personal use, and greater confidence in their ability to identify synthetic material are more likely to reject its use by political candidates (Wave 1: $\beta = -.452$, $p < .001$; Wave 2: $\beta = -.390$, $p < .001$). The consistency and relative magnitude of this association suggest that familiarity does not simply make synthetic campaign material appear routine or innocuous. In fact, we are reminded of third-person effects documented by Rauchfleisch et al. (2025): citizens who are most

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Note: Points report standardized coefficients from OLS models predicting tolerance for candidates' use of AI-generated campaign material. Error bars show 95% (dark) and 99% (light) CIs with HC3 robust standard errors.

Figure 3. Predictors of Tolerance for AI-Generated Campaign Material

familiar with the technology and its limitations are most skeptical of its deployment in campaigns, possibly because they fear others will be less equipped to deal with the risks it poses.

As hypothesized, distrust in professional news media is also consistently associated with tolerance, but in the other direction. Respondents expressing greater distrust of professional media are more accepting of candidates' use of synthetic campaign material in both waves (Wave 1: $\beta = .126$, $p < .001$; Wave 2: $\beta = .203$, $p < .001$). The relationship becomes somewhat larger in the post-election wave, although it remains substantively smaller than the association with familiarity.

By contrast, low confidence in election integrity does not independently predict tolerance for synthetic campaign material. This is somewhat of a surprise for us. Its coefficient is small and statistically indistinguishable from zero in Wave 1 ($\beta = .029$, $p > .10$) and Wave 2 ($\beta = -.030$, $p > .10$). The reversal in sign across waves further underscores the absence of a stable relationship.

Several additional associations are worth noting. Despite Donald Trump and his surrogates' reliance on AI-generated content during the campaign, we do not find any relationship between a past vote for Trump and tolerance for synthetic material. In fact, more conservative respondents report lower tolerance in both waves (Wave 1:

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β = −.180, $p < .001$; Wave 2: β = −.110, $p < .001$). However, once again, Trump vote is not independently associated with tolerance once ideology and the remaining predictors are included. The finding over ideology must be interpreted–fittingly–conservatively. The directionality of the relationship does not mean liberals feel positive toward synthetic campaign material, but rather that conservatives express greater discomfort comparatively. Lastly, White respondents report greater tolerance in both waves (Wave 1: β = .123, $p < .05$; Wave 2: β = .255, $p < .001$), and age is positively associated with tolerance only in Wave 2 (β = .067, $p < .05$). The models explain a similar share of variance across the two samples (R^2 = .310 and .322). Full estimates for this second set of models appear in Appendix Table A.4.

Taking a step back, our results point to two related but empirically distinct patterns: (1) perceived exposure to synthetic campaign content is associated with lower election confidence, and (2) tolerance for candidates' use of that material, however, is structured primarily by familiarity with generative AI and distrust of professional news media rather than by concerns over election integrity.

CONCLUSION

Generative AI poses a distinct challenge for democratic governance because it implicates both the informational conditions under which citizens evaluate elections and the norms they expect political campaigns to follow. As synthetic content becomes easier to produce and harder to authenticate, it is important to distinguish between its relationship with confidence in the electoral process and public tolerance of its use by candidates. That distinction is especially consequential as governments decide whether and how to regulate synthetic political communication.

We asked two simple questions: how perceived exposure to suspected AI-generated campaign material is associated with confidence in election integrity; and how election confidence, technological familiarity, and distrust towards the professional news media shape tolerance for the use of AI by political candidates. We notably hypothesized that distrust towards the professional news media would be associated with greater tolerance for synthetic content, as distrustful individuals may be less attached to norms of authenticity, traceability and accountability that governs how respected news brands deal with political information. We also anticipated that respondents with lower confidence in election integrity would be less tolerant of synthetic campaign material. We advanced no directional hypothesis regarding technological familiarity as literature points in competing directions.

Our results only matched these expectations partially. Across two surveys fielded during and after the 2024 presidential election, respondents who believed they encountered more AI-generated campaign content expressed less confidence in election integrity. Yet concerns over election integrity do not independently predict whether citizens accept or reject synthetic campaign material once familiarity, media distrust, ideology, and the remaining controls were included. In addition, we find that respondents most familiar with generative AI are the least tolerant of its use in campaigns. Conversely, citizens who distrust the professional news media are more willing to accept the synthetic media from political candidates.

The structure of our data imposes important limitations. Most centrally, these

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independent cross-sectional surveys cannot establish the direction of the relationship between perceived exposure and election confidence. Exposure to suspected synthetic material may reduce confidence in an election, but individuals already convinced that an election has been or will be stolen may also be more likely to classify ambiguous or authentic political content as AI-generated. Such a process would resemble the generalized predisposition to interpret political events through a conspiratorial worldview documented in prior research (Uscinski et al., 2016). Panel data, experiments involving verified synthetic content, and recognition tasks that distinguish actual from perceived exposure would be needed to adjudicate among these possibilities.

Our measures also capture broad perceptions rather than the full heterogeneity of AI applications. The familiarity index combines self-reported knowledge, personal use, and confidence in recognizing synthetic content. It should not be interpreted as an objective test of AI literacy. Likewise, the tolerance measure asks about several forms of campaign material together and cannot distinguish disclosed or assistive uses from deliberately deceptive ones. These limitations counsel against causal claims, but they do not alter the central pattern replicated across both surveys.

Our study suggests that the democratic consequences of synthetic campaign material extend beyond whether any particular message successfully deceives its audience. The belief that such material is pervasive may itself contribute to an informational environment in which authentic evidence is easier to question and electoral processes appear more open to manipulation. At the same time, attitudes toward whether candidates should use generative AI appear to have a different foundation. Familiarity may expose citizens to the technology's limitations as well as its utility, while distrust of professional media may weaken attachment to established norms of verification, attribution, and correction. Regulation and disclosure requirements may therefore be evaluated not only as responses to discrete deceptive messages, but also as possible safeguards against a more ambient erosion of confidence in democratic processes.

Acknowledgements The authors would like to warmly thank Bruce Bimber (University of California, Santa Barbara) for his help with brainstorming and generous feedback.

Declaration of Interest Statement The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Ethical Considerations The survey used for this manuscript was exempted from review by the Institutional Review Board at California State University, Dominguez Hills (number: IRB-FY2025-65).

Consent to Participate Informed consent was obtained and recorded in written form prior to participation. Participants were informed that their participation in the survey was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. No sensitive questions were asked, and no deception was used. All responses were collected anonymously and analyzed in aggregate. No identifying information about respondents was retained.

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Funding Statement No funding was received to support this work.

Data Availability Statement The data and replication materials will be made publicly available upon publication.

Declaration of Generative AI Use The authors used OpenAI's GPT-5 and Codex for copy editing and document production. The authors made all analytical and interpretive decisions. They reviewed and confirmed the originality and accuracy of the manuscript, and take full responsibility for its scientific content.

Biographical Notes **Julien Labarre** is a political scientist and Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Communication and Media Research at the University of Zurich. His research examines how digital platforms and emerging technologies interact with citizens' dispositions and political relationships, shaping whom they trust, how they interpret political reality, and whether democratic restraints remain binding in the United States.

Pierce Christoffersen is a PhD student in the Political Science Department at the University of California, Santa Barbara. His research focuses on American politics and political communication.

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Appendix 1. Supplementary analyses

Appendix 1.1 Familiarity index

Table A.1. Components of the Familiarity Index

Component	Survey item and response options
Self-reported knowledge	"Which of the following best describes your knowledge of Generative AI?" *Response options:* I have never heard of Generative AI; I have heard of Generative AI but do not know much about it; I have some understanding of Generative AI; I have a good understanding of Generative AI; I am very knowledgeable about Generative AI.
Frequency of use	"In the past six months, how often have you used Generative AI tools (like ChatGPT, Google BART, DALL-E, Midjourney, or Claude), whether for personal or professional purposes?" *Response options:* Never; rarely; sometimes; frequently; every day or almost every day.
Confidence in recognition	"How confident are you in your ability to distinguish between AI-generated content from human-created content?" *Response options:* Extremely confident; fairly confident; not too confident; not at all confident.

Note: Items and response options were identical in both waves. Each component was standardized within wave after being oriented so that higher values indicate greater familiarity. The index is the mean of the available standardized components and was itself standardized within wave. Higher values indicate greater familiarity.

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Appendix 1.2 Perceived exposure and election confidence

Table A.2. Perceived Exposure and Election Confidence: Raw Categorical Linear Probability Models

	Wave 1	Wave 2
(Intercept)	0.525***	0.750***
	(0.066)	(0.049)
Rarely	0.025	0.041
	(0.078)	(0.060)
Sometimes	−0.105	0.023
	(0.071)	(0.054)
Frequently	−0.100	−0.074
	(0.073)	(0.058)
Every day or almost every day	−0.152+	−0.179*
	(0.082)	(0.070)
Num.Obs.	883	884
R2	0.013	0.025
R2 Adj.	0.008	0.020
AIC	1271.4	1068.5
BIC	1300.1	1097.2
RMSE	0.49	0.44

Reference category: Never. HC3 robust standard errors in parentheses. + p <0.1, * p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001

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Table A.3. Linear Probability Models Predicting Election Confidence (Wave 1 and Wave 2)

	Wave 1	Wave 2
Perceived exposure to AI-generated campaign content	−0.030+	−0.060***
	(0.016)	(0.015)
Ideology	−0.091***	−0.063***
	(0.017)	(0.017)
Trump vote	−0.249***	0.272***
	(0.034)	(0.031)
Political interest	−0.037*	−0.002
	(0.017)	(0.017)
Education	0.006	0.025+
	(0.016)	(0.014)
White	0.066+	0.112***
	(0.035)	(0.031)
Age	0.065***	0.068***
	(0.016)	(0.015)
Gender	−0.002	0.006***
	(0.007)	(0.001)
Num.Obs.	883	884
R2	0.154	0.167
R2 Adj.	0.146	0.159

HC3 robust standard errors in parentheses. + p <0.1, * p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001

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Appendix 1.3 Tolerance for AI-generated campaign material

Table A.4. OLS Predictors of Tolerance for Synthetic Campaign Material (Wave 1 and Wave 2).

	Wave 1	Wave 2
Familiarity index	−0.452***	−0.390***
	(0.034)	(0.032)
Distrust in professional news media	0.126***	0.203***
	(0.031)	(0.028)
Low confidence in election integrity	0.029	−0.030
	(0.028)	(0.028)
Ideology	−0.180***	−0.110***
	(0.030)	(0.029)
Trump vote	0.036	−0.089
	(0.060)	(0.059)
Political interest	−0.039	0.028
	(0.031)	(0.028)
Education	0.053+	−0.014
	(0.029)	(0.027)
White	0.123*	0.255***
	(0.060)	(0.056)
Age	0.029	0.067*
	(0.032)	(0.029)
Gender	−0.005	−0.001
	(0.011)	(0.017)
Num.Obs.	1003	1059
R2	0.310	0.322
R2 Adj.	0.303	0.315

HC3 robust standard errors in parentheses. + p <0.1, * p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001

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