

COUNTERING #ELECTIONS2024 MIS- & DISINFORMATION



AI and the 2024 elections

Election-related mis- and disinformation content took many forms on social media and messaging platforms ahead of and around the presidential and parliamentary elections of November 2024. AI-generated content formed an important part of disinformation campaigns in these spaces throughout the year



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Fonds canadien d'initiatives locales

This project is supported by the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI)

How are AI tools used to spread mis- and disinformation?

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools can be used to spread mis- and disinformation in several ways:

- **Fakes and synthetic media:** AI-generated videos, images, and audio can create realistic but false representations of events or individuals, making it difficult to distinguish truth from fabrication.
- **Automated disinformation campaigns:** AI can be used to generate misleading articles, social media posts, and comments at scale, amplifying false narratives and manipulating public opinion.
- **Targeted manipulation:** AI-driven algorithms can personalise disinformation for specific audiences, exploiting biases and reinforcing misinformation.
- **AI-powered bots:** Automated accounts can flood online spaces with misleading content, making false claims appear more credible through repetition.

However, AI is also being used to **combat** misinformation by detecting patterns, analysing language, and moderating content. For instance, [Namibia Fact Check](#) partnered with British fact checking service Full Fact to use their Full Fact AI tool to identify and monitor elections-related mis- and disinformation across various social media platforms.

The challenge lies in balancing AI's potential for both harm and protection.

The following are examples of elections-related AI-generated content that circulated in social media and messaging platform spaces throughout 2024.

"Elections and generative AI have a special connection. This is because the actors involved in elections always pursue specific goals: to either win power for their allies or themselves or to influence a foreign country's political landscape. GAI enables such actors to create "unreality," and it's becoming a weapon in information warfare and influence operations. Such campaigns are mostly coordinated, concerted, evaluated, measured and funded by political or foreign actors."

- [Generative AI is the ultimate disinformation amplifier](#)

Politics and elections related AI-generated content

AI-generated election-related content started circulating in social media and messaging platform spaces in early 2024. The Namibian electoral information landscape was lucky in that deepfake disinformation content was not an issue this time, but cheapfake AI-generated content nevertheless made prominent appearances throughout the year. This clearly shows that disinformation actors were experimenting with AI tools to produce information manipulation and social media content. This suggests that deepfake-type content could become a serious issue in Namibian political and electoral information spaces down the line.

[Namibia Fact Check](#) had already cautioned about the spectre of AI-generated content on the electoral information landscape in early May 2024 following the viral circulation of two AI cheapfake video clips in Namibian WhatsApp and other social media spaces in April 2024.

AI, cheapfakes coming for Namibian elections



Screenshot of the headline and article image of a [Namibia Fact Check article](#) from 3 May 2024 cautioning about the emergence of AI-generated content on the Namibian political information landscape.

Deepfakes vs Cheapfakes

Deepfakes and cheapfakes are both forms of manipulated media, but they differ in how they are created:

- **Deepfakes:** These are generated using AI and machine learning techniques to create highly realistic fake videos, images, or audio. Deepfake technology can swap faces, mimic voices, and fabricate events that never happened. They require sophisticated algorithms and computing power to produce convincing results.
- **Cheapfakes:** These are manipulated using simpler, low-tech tools and methods like basic video editing, speeding up or slowing down footage, or cropping and recontextualizing clips. Unlike deepfakes, cheapfakes don't rely on AI. For example, a video of a politician might be slowed down to make them appear drunk or confused.

Both types of fakes can be used for misinformation, but deepfakes tend to be more advanced and harder to detect.

This information was generated with a prompt using Microsoft's Copilot.

What we saw?

In April 2024, a cheapfake video clip, generated using a free online image and voice generating AI tool, of former US president Joe Biden circulated virally in Namibian WhatsApp spaces, especially. The AI tool allows users to generate short videos of a US celebrity saying something that the user prompts. In this instance, US president Biden was commenting on the then recent oil finds off the Namibian coast and expressing support for the ruling Swapo Party and its then presidential election candidate, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah.



Screenshot of the AI-generated video clip in which a voice generator mimicking former US president Joe Biden was prompted to express support for the ruling Swapo Party and its presidential election candidate.

In May 2024 more elections-related AI-generated video clips started circulating online and in social messaging spaces. *Namibia Fact Check* [commented on some of these videos](#) in an article published in early July 2024.



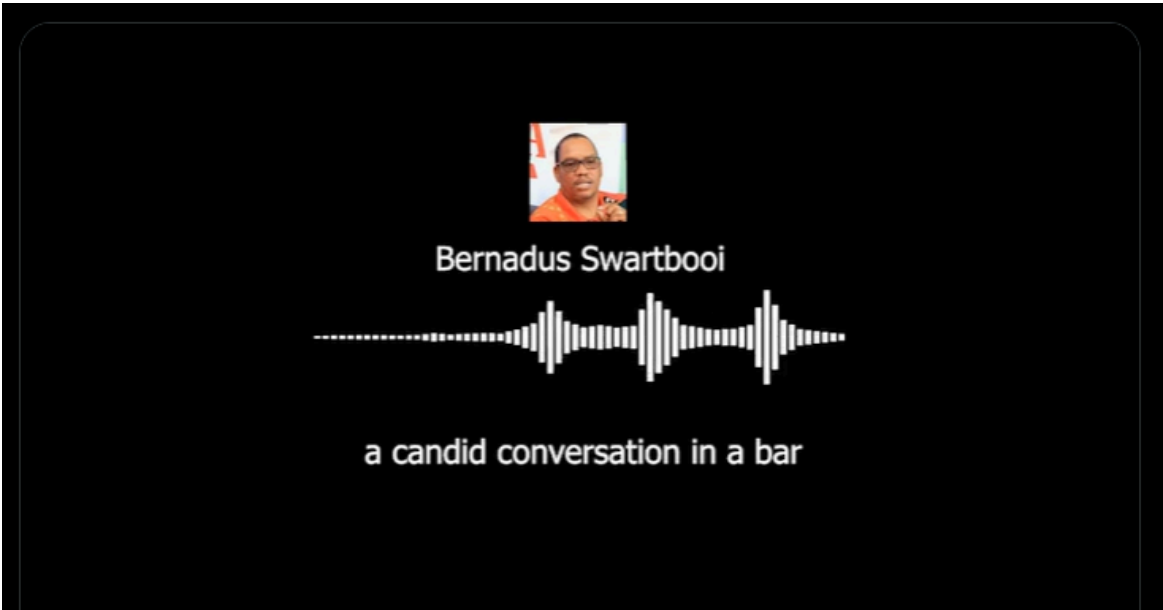
Screenshot of an AI-generated video that circulated in WhatsApp and other social media spaces since May 2024. The short video encouraged viewers to vote for the ruling Swapo Party, while repeating factual inaccuracies.



Screenshot of another AI-generated short video that circulated in social media spaces since May 2024 encouraging viewers not to vote for the Independent Patriots for Change (IPC) by promoting the false narratives that the IPC was controlled by the British government and that IPC leader Panduleni Itula was a British citizen.

In October 2024, AI-generated voice notes purportedly of Landless People’s Movement (LPM) leader Bernadus Swartbooi making vulgar and tribalist statements about IPC leader Panduleni Itula circulated virally in social media spaces. The virality of the fake voice message prompted the LPM to issue a statement later that month distancing itself from the viral message and denouncing it as fake.

For more on this, read this [Namibia Fact Check report](#).



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Screenshot of a post shared by an X (Twitter) account depicting the 'collapse' of the then ruling party presidential election candidate at a party event in late October 2024. The viral image was used to push the false narrative that the then candidate was unhealthy and too old.



Screenshot of the viral AI-generated video clip depicting the 'collapse' of the then ruling party presidential election candidate at a party event in late October 2024. The image clearly shows that the video was generated using a free online AI tool. The viral video clip formed part of a narrative campaign painting the then presidential election candidate as unfit, unwell and too elderly.

Some of the information in this document was gathered and compiled using Microsoft's AI app Copilot.

For more on this and other topics investigated, access the full report at www.ippr.org.na and www.namibiafactcheck.org.na

This bulletin was produced by **Namibia Fact Check**, a project of the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR).

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 Design & Layout: Eagle Designs and Ginola Nauseb



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