

Post-Truth Politics: The Challenge of Disinformation to the Quality of Electoral Democracy

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Inputted : December 27, 2025
Accepted: February 16, 2026

Revised : January 13, 2026
Published : February 23, 2026

Abstract

The phenomenon of post-truth politics has shifted the epistemic foundations of electoral democracy by placing emotions and identity above empirical facts. In the context of elections, digital disinformation not only influences individual political preferences but also erodes the legitimacy of democratic institutions and public trust in electoral outcomes. This article aims to analyze the mechanisms of disinformation, cross-national patterns, its impact on the quality of democracy, and policy responses during the 2021–2025 period. The study employs a Systematic Literature Review approach of 18 reputable international journal articles. The findings indicate that disinformation operates through a reinforcement effect, polarizing perceptions of electoral integrity, and is further exacerbated by the emergence of AI-generated content and deepfakes that create an epistemic crisis. Comparative analysis of the United States, Brazil, Indonesia, and the European Union reveals patterns of delegitimization, identity polarization, and manipulation of strategic issues such as migration and religion. Mitigation efforts include digital literacy initiatives, algorithmic transparency, and the strengthening of journalism, although their effectiveness is constrained by partisan polarization. This article argues that disinformation in the post-truth era constitutes a systemic threat to electoral democracy and requires a multidimensional and sustainable response.

Keywords: *Artificial Intelligence; Digital Regulation; Disinformation; Electoral Democracy; Post-Truth Politics*

1. Introduction

Digital transformation has fundamentally reconfigured the ways in which information is produced, distributed, and consumed within modern democratic systems. The rapid expansion of social media platforms, algorithm-driven digital ecosystems, and online communication infrastructures has accelerated the circulation of political information across geographical and social boundaries. Whereas in previous eras the flow of political information was largely mediated by mainstream media institutions functioning as gatekeepers, the digital environment now enables individuals to act simultaneously as producers and distributors of content. While this structural shift has broadened political participation and access to information, it has also created conditions highly conducive to the large-scale and rapid dissemination of disinformation. Within this context, the phenomenon of post-truth politics has emerged, referring to a condition in which emotions, identity, and personal beliefs exert greater influence over public opinion than objective facts and empirical verification (Bertoli et al., 2025). This phenomenon does not merely reflect a stylistic shift in political communication; rather, it signals a deeper epistemic transformation that reshapes how societies construct and interpret political truth.



In electoral democracies, the legitimacy of elections constitutes a foundational pillar of political stability. Elections are not merely administrative procedures for selecting leaders; they function as symbolic mechanisms that reaffirm the social contract between citizens and democratic institutions. Such legitimacy depends heavily on public trust in the integrity of electoral processes, transparency in administration, and the accuracy of electoral outcomes. However, empirical studies demonstrate that exposure to online disinformation is significantly associated with increased misperceptions regarding the fairness of elections, even among supporters of winning candidates (Mauk & Grömping, 2023). These findings suggest that disinformation has evolved beyond a campaign tool for persuasion and has become an instrument of institutional delegitimization capable of undermining public trust in democracy itself.

Moreover, disinformation in electoral contexts operates through systematic psychological and structural mechanisms rather than randomly. One key mechanism is the reinforcement effect, whereby individuals are more likely to accept and disseminate information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs (Syrovátka et al., 2023). Consequently, disinformation rarely transforms political preferences in a radical manner; instead, it intensifies existing polarization. This process is amplified by the algorithmic design of social media platforms, which prioritizes emotionally charged, controversial, and highly shareable content. Research by Rossini et al. (2023) and Adam (2025) indicates that platform algorithms accelerate the formation of echo chambers, wherein users are predominantly exposed to information reinforcing their ideological positions. Under such conditions, the public sphere becomes increasingly fragmented, cross-cutting dialogue diminishes, and rational deliberation the core of democratic practice gradually weakens.

The threat to electoral democracy becomes even more complex with the emergence of generative AI and deepfake technologies. Synthetic media enable the creation of highly realistic visual and audio content that is difficult to distinguish from authentic recordings (Pawelec, 2022; Chen, 2025). These technologies not only expand the capacity for producing disinformation but also generate broader epistemic uncertainty. The phenomenon known as the liar's dividend further exacerbates this situation, as political actors can dismiss authentic evidence by claiming digital manipulation (Pawelec, 2022). In this context, democracy faces a dual threat: the proliferation of fabricated information and the delegitimization of genuine evidence. As a consequence, the crisis of trust extends beyond political actors to encompass media institutions, electoral management bodies, and even fact-checking mechanisms.

Although numerous studies have examined disinformation within specific national contexts such as the United States, Brazil, Indonesia, and member states of the European Union there remains a limited body of integrative cross-national research that simultaneously incorporates technological developments, political polarization, and regulatory responses within a systematic comparative framework, particularly during the rapidly evolving 2021–2025 period. This timeframe has been marked by the rapid expansion of generative AI technologies, the introduction of digital platform regulations in Europe, and heightened political polarization across multiple regions. The absence of a comprehensive comparative synthesis risks constraining scholarly understanding of both the general patterns and contextual variations of disinformation's impact on electoral democracy.

Against this backdrop, this article aims to comprehensively analyze the patterns, mechanisms, impacts, and policy responses related to disinformation in electoral democracies across countries during the 2021–2025 period. By integrating psychological, structural, and technological dimensions within a comparative analytical framework, this study seeks to contribute conceptually to the understanding of democracy's epistemic crisis while offering practical implications for the formulation of adaptive and sustainable policy responses in the era of post-truth politics and artificial intelligence.

2. Method

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to comprehensively analyze the development of scholarship on disinformation and electoral democracy during the 2021–2025 period. This approach was selected because it enables the synthesis of empirical and conceptual findings from various national contexts while providing a longitudinal perspective on the evolving dynamics of the issue. The literature selection process was conducted based on three primary criteria: articles published in reputable international peer-reviewed journals; studies explicitly focusing on the relationship between disinformation and elections or electoral democracy; and research presenting empirical findings or conceptual analyses relevant to developments in digital technologies, including artificial intelligence and deepfakes.

A total of eighteen articles were selected after a screening process based on topical relevance and methodological consistency. The analysis was carried out using thematic analysis to identify patterns in the mechanisms of disinformation, followed by a cross-national comparative approach to examine variations in political contexts in the United States, Brazil, Indonesia, and the European Union. Subsequently, narrative synthesis was employed to formulate theoretical and policy implications. This approach allows for the integration of public perception dynamics, digital technological developments, and regulatory responses within a comprehensive analytical framework, thereby providing a more holistic understanding of the threat posed by disinformation to the legitimacy of electoral democracy.

The research procedure undertaken in this study is illustrated in Figure 1.

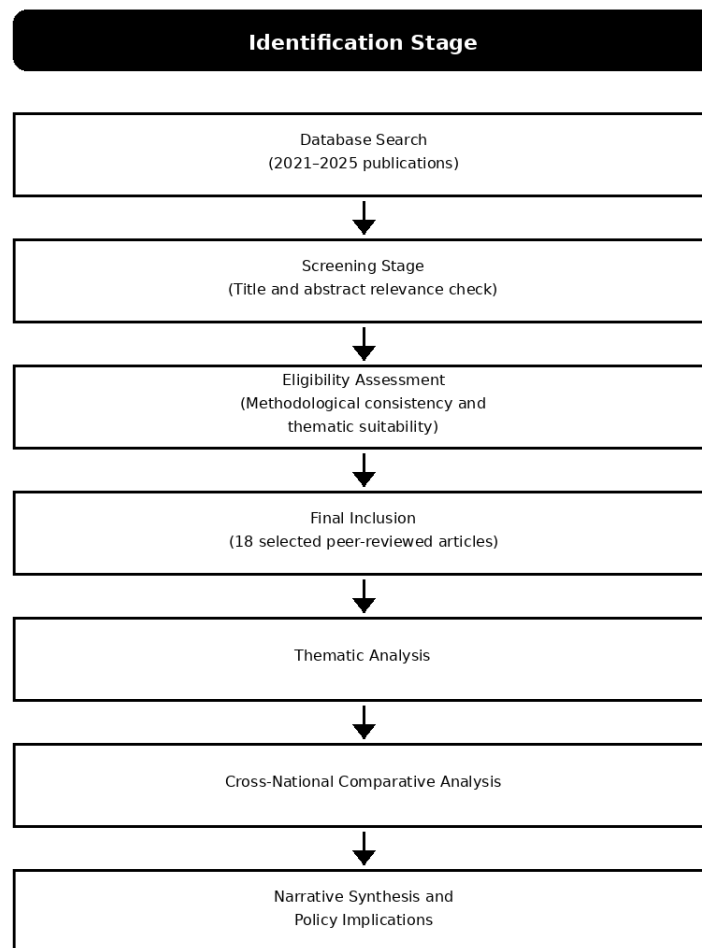


Figure 1. Research Procedure of the Systematic Literature Review

Figure 1 demonstrates the structured stages of the Systematic Literature Review process. The study began with the identification stage, where relevant publications from the 2021–2025 period were located through database searches. This was followed by a screening stage to assess relevance based on titles and abstracts. The eligibility assessment ensured methodological rigor and thematic alignment with the research objectives. After the final inclusion of eighteen peer-reviewed articles, thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring mechanisms of disinformation. A cross-national comparative analysis was then applied to explore contextual differences across countries. Finally, a narrative synthesis was developed to articulate theoretical contributions and policy implications.

This structured procedure enhances transparency, replicability, and methodological reliability, which are essential components for publication in peer-reviewed academic journals

3. Results and Discussion

The synthesis of the literature indicates that disinformation in the context of electoral democracy exhibits relatively consistent mechanistic patterns, despite emerging in different political environments. The primary finding suggests that disinformation operates predominantly through a reinforcement effect, defined as the tendency to strengthen pre-existing political beliefs rather than radically alter preferences (Syrovátka et al., 2023). Exposure to narratives concerning electoral fraud, vote manipulation, or institutional conspiracy is significantly associated with increased misperceptions regarding electoral fairness among both supporters of winning and losing candidates (Mauk & Grömping, 2023). This demonstrates that disinformation not only mobilizes political dissatisfaction among electoral losers but also reinforces systemic distrust toward electoral institutions as a whole.

In the contexts of the United States and Brazil, the literature indicates that electoral fraud narratives function as a primary instrument for delegitimizing electoral outcomes. Rossini et al. (2023) show that the use of social media and messaging applications significantly strengthened beliefs in electoral misinformation during Brazil's 2022 presidential election. A similar pattern was identified by Mauk and Grömping (2023), who found that exposure to online disinformation increased perceptions that elections were conducted unfairly. The subsequent consequences include declining trust in state institutions and, in some instances, the emergence of political violence.

In Indonesia, by contrast, disinformation tends to be identity-based, with religion and ethnicity exploited as instruments of political mobilization (Sulastri et al., 2025; Adam, 2025). These narratives do not always focus on procedural fraud but instead emphasize moral or identity-based delegitimization of particular candidates. The result is deep social polarization and the erosion of social cohesion that underpins electoral democracy.

Within the European Union, particularly in the lead-up to the 2024 European Parliament elections, disinformation frequently leveraged issues related to migration and supranational institutional integrity to strengthen populist and right-wing narratives (Casero-Ripollés et al., 2025; De Rosa & Criscitiello, 2025). Farooq et al. (2025) demonstrate that growing public concern regarding the use of generative AI during the electoral period further expanded the dimension of informational uncertainty. Thus, although the narratives differ across countries, the ultimate consequence remains consistent: the erosion of democratic legitimacy and fragmentation of the public sphere.

These comparative findings are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Comparison of Electoral Disinformation Patterns Across Countries (2021–2025)

Country/Region	Main Disinformation Pattern	Dominant Media/Channels	Democratic Impact	Key References
United States	Claims of electoral fraud and vote manipulation	Social media, video platforms, online forums	Delegitimization of electoral outcomes, institutional distrust, political violence	Mauk & Grömping (2023); Pérez-Curiel et al. (2021)
Brazil	Fraud narratives and conspiracy claims about the electoral system	WhatsApp, social media	Extreme polarization, mass mobilization, political instability	Rossini et al. (2023)
Indonesia	Religion- and ethnicity-based identity propaganda	Social media, messaging applications	Identity polarization, erosion of social cohesion	Sulastri et al. (2025); Adam (2025)
European Union	Migration hoaxes and delegitimization of supranational institutions	Digital platforms and online campaign networks	Strengthening of right-wing parties, institutional distrust within the EU	Casero-Ripollés et al. (2025); De Rosa & Criscitiello (2025); Farooq et al. (2025)

The explanation of Table 1 indicates that differences in political contexts shape the narrative form of disinformation but do not fundamentally alter its impact patterns. Countries characterized by high levels of ideological polarization, such as the United States and Brazil, demonstrate a tendency toward direct delegitimization of electoral outcomes. Indonesia exhibits a pattern of identity-based mobilization rooted in social and religious divisions. The European Union reflects disinformation dynamics oriented toward supranational issues such as migration, yet similarly produces heightened institutional distrust. Therefore, while disinformation narratives are context-specific, their impact on democratic legitimacy and stability appears to be broadly universal across electoral democracies.

Beyond cross-national patterns, the findings also reveal that developments in artificial intelligence technologies have expanded the complexity of the threat. Pawelec (2022) identifies the risks posed by deepfakes to core democratic functions, while Chen (2025) highlights the ethical implications of AI-driven visual manipulation. Farooq et al. (2025) further demonstrate that public concern regarding the use of generative AI in the 2024 European elections reflects

growing awareness of these emerging risks. These findings indicate that contemporary disinformation is no longer confined to textual or conventional narrative forms; rather, it has entered a phase of synthetic disinformation with the potential to undermine the credibility of visual evidence and political communication more profoundly than ever before.

Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce the argument that disinformation in the post-truth era represents a structural and epistemic crisis within electoral democracy. Rather than being confined to isolated instances of false information, disinformation systematically reshapes citizens' perceptions of political reality. Bertoli et al. (2025) conceptualize this condition as the "loss of a common world," in which shared epistemic reference points collapse, undermining democratic stability. This erosion of shared factual ground weakens the deliberative foundation of democracy, a concern echoed by Ecker et al. (2024), who argue that misinformation poses a more profound threat to democratic systems than commonly assumed due to its cumulative cognitive effects.

Empirical evidence strengthens this interpretation. Syrovátka et al. (2023) propose a model for measuring the impact of disinformation on elections, demonstrating that exposure does not primarily convert voters but reinforces existing attitudes through confirmation mechanisms. Mauk and Grömping (2023) provide robust comparative evidence that online disinformation predicts inaccurate beliefs about election fairness among both winners and losers. This finding is particularly significant because it challenges the assumption that delegitimization is confined to electoral losers. Instead, misperceptions become diffused across political camps, creating systemic distrust. Winger et al. (2023) further show that crisis communication strategies during electoral disputes become critical battlegrounds in the contest for legitimacy, illustrating how disinformation directly intersects with institutional stability.

The cross-national evidence also reveals contextual variations in narrative framing. In Brazil, Rossini et al. (2023) demonstrate that ideology, political trust, and the use of social media and messaging applications such as WhatsApp significantly predict belief in electoral misinformation. In Indonesia, Sulastrı et al. (2025) highlight the urgency of updating election law regulations to address cyber propaganda, while Adam (2025) demonstrates that digital disinformation intensifies polarization in both Indonesia and the United States. These findings indicate that disinformation strategies adapt to national sociopolitical structures but converge in their impact: institutional distrust and polarization.

Within the European context, Casero-Ripollés et al. (2025) show that the 2024 European Parliament elections witnessed systematic dissemination of false political content during campaigns, often strategically amplified through digital platforms. De Rosa and Criscitiello (2025) further examine how malign foreign information influence is framed within the electoral arena, emphasizing the geopolitical dimension of disinformation. Haapala and Roch (2025) add that radical political parties strategically instrumentalize post-truth narratives in media representations to reinforce anti-system sentiments. Collectively, these findings illustrate that disinformation operates not only domestically but also transnationally, challenging democratic resilience at multiple levels.

The technological dimension significantly intensifies this crisis. Pawelec (2022) explains that deepfakes threaten core democratic functions by destabilizing trust in audiovisual evidence. Chen (2025) elaborates on the ethical implications of AI-driven image manipulation, noting that technological advances blur the boundary between authentic and fabricated content. During the 2024 European elections, Farooq et al. (2025) report growing citizen concerns about generative AI, indicating heightened public awareness of emerging epistemic risks. The liar's dividend phenomenon further compounds these risks, enabling political actors to dismiss authentic evidence as digitally manipulated (Pawelec, 2022). In this environment, the crisis shifts from misinformation alone to a broader collapse of epistemic certainty.

Algorithmic amplification plays a crucial structural role in this process. Rossini et al. (2023) and Adam (2025) demonstrate that social media algorithms prioritize emotionally engaging and polarizing content, thereby facilitating the formation of echo chambers. This dynamic aligns with Yessimova and Ashirbekova's (2025) analysis of post-truth manipulation in electoral contexts, which underscores how emotional narratives override factual verification in shaping public opinion. Mizutani (2025) further highlights the cultural dimension of digital resistance, showing how satire and mockery emerge as counter-narratives against far-right disinformation machines, illustrating that the information battlefield is also symbolic and performative.

Policy responses identified in the literature reflect attempts to counter these dynamics through institutional adaptation. Ecker et al. (2024) emphasize prebunking strategies as preventive tools to strengthen cognitive resilience. Sivalo (2024) similarly stresses the importance of democratic education in mitigating the role of disinformation in elections. At the regulatory level, Guedes et al. (2025) provide insights into Portugal's qualitative experiences with disinformation regulation, while Schipper (2025) analyzes policy solutions implemented in the Philippines' 2025 election. These studies demonstrate that regulatory innovation, including co-regulation and algorithmic transparency, is gaining traction as a governance response.

However, Pérez-Curiel et al. (2021) remind us that even high-quality journalism faces structural limitations in countering entrenched fraud narratives when political polarization is deeply embedded. This underscores that technical interventions alone are insufficient. Effective responses require coordination among electoral institutions, digital platforms, media organizations, civil society, and international regulatory frameworks.

Overall, the integration of these findings suggests that disinformation in the post-truth era constitutes a multidimensional crisis encompassing psychological reinforcement mechanisms, algorithmic amplification, geopolitical manipulation, and technological disruption through AI. The threat is not limited to misinformation content but extends to the erosion of epistemic trust itself. Consequently, safeguarding electoral democracy demands not only procedural integrity but also the reconstruction of shared epistemic foundations capable of sustaining democratic legitimacy in the age of artificial intelligence.

4. Conclusion

This study confirms that disinformation in the post-truth era is not merely a sporadic phenomenon of political communication, but rather constitutes a systemic threat to the legitimacy of electoral democracy. Disinformation operates through reinforcement bias mechanisms that strengthen pre-existing political beliefs and intensify polarization in perceptions of electoral integrity. The findings demonstrate that delegitimization of electoral outcomes does not arise solely among electoral losers; it may also develop among supporters of the winning side, thereby generating cross-cutting distrust. In the long term, this dynamic risks eroding the normative foundations of democracy, as legitimacy is no longer grounded in shared acceptance of procedural outcomes but in fragmented subjective perceptions.

The cross-national analysis further reveals that although disinformation narratives vary according to political, social, and cultural contexts, their impact patterns remain relatively consistent. Across cases, disinformation contributes to declining trust in electoral institutions, deepening fragmentation of the public sphere, and weakening the social cohesion that sustains democratic systems. Thus, while disinformation exhibits contextual variation in narrative form, its consequences for democratic stability and legitimacy appear broadly universal.

The emergence of generative AI and deepfake technologies has expanded and intensified this crisis by introducing new epistemic challenges. When visual and audio evidence can no longer be fully trusted, democracy faces threats to one of its central pillars: accountability grounded in verifiable evidence. The phenomenon of the liar's dividend exacerbates this

situation by enabling political actors to dismiss authentic evidence on the grounds of alleged digital manipulation. In this context, safeguarding democracy can no longer be limited to procedural mechanisms such as electoral oversight and administrative transparency. Instead, it must extend to the protection of epistemic infrastructure, including information credibility, verification mechanisms, and public trust in institutions.

The policy implications of these findings call for a multidimensional and sustainable approach. Evidence-based digital literacy initiatives must be strengthened to enhance citizens' cognitive resilience against manipulative information practices. Algorithmic transparency and platform accountability should be developed through regulatory frameworks that balance freedom of expression with the protection of democratic integrity. Electoral regulations must adapt to the evolving dynamics of digital disinformation, including the use of artificial intelligence. Furthermore, the revitalization of independent journalism and the strengthening of credible media ecosystems are essential to restoring a rational and inclusive public sphere.

Ultimately, electoral democracy in the digital age can endure only if it succeeds in preserving the integrity of public facts as the foundation of political legitimacy. Without restoring this epistemic basis, democratic procedures will continue to face escalating delegitimization pressures accelerated by technological advancements. Therefore, protecting democracy in the twenty-first century requires not only institutional governance reforms but also a collective societal commitment to safeguarding truth as a shared public value.

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