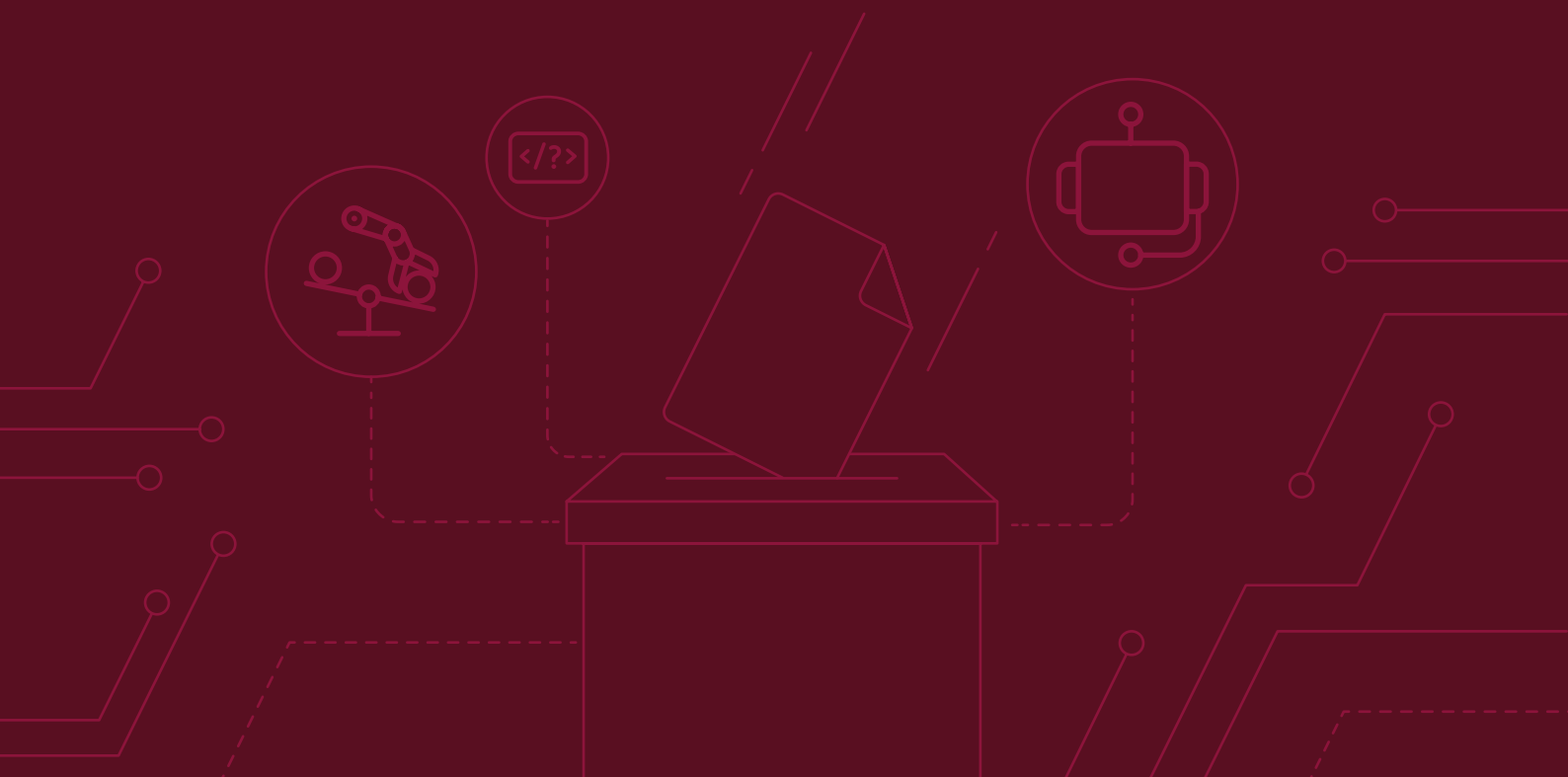


Sri Lanka's Elections in a Machine-Mediated Age:

Assessing GenAI-Related Risks
to Electoral Integrity



About Democracy Reporting International

DRI is an independent organisation dedicated to promoting democracy worldwide. We believe that people are active participants in public life, not subjects of their governments. Our work centres on analysis, reporting, and capacity-building. For this, we are guided by the democratic and human rights obligations enshrined in international law.

About the project Strengthening Resilience Against Disinformation in Sri Lanka

The Strengthening Resilience Against Disinformation in Sri Lanka project is co-funded by the European Union and implemented by Democracy Reporting International and Factum. The project aims to reinforce Sri Lanka's democratic and electoral frameworks and protect human rights by prioritising inclusivity and responsible political discourse on social media through monitoring and debunking online harmful content. Leveraging collaborative efforts of civil society organisations in Sri Lanka, this initiative capacitates fact-checkers and media outlets, creates counter-narratives, and strengthens the technical expertise of the Election Commission of Sri Lanka (ECSL).

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Executive Summary

Elections in Sri Lanka are increasingly shaped by fast-moving digital information environments in which political content is fragmented, difficult to verify, and highly susceptible to manipulation. As online platforms have become central arenas for political communication and voter mobilisation, longstanding vulnerabilities, such as weak safeguards, polarisation, and limited oversight, have placed growing strain on electoral integrity. The rapid diffusion of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has intensified these dynamics by enabling the production of synthetic political content and mediating voter access to information through large language model (LLM)-based tools, further blurring the boundaries between authentic and fabricated political communication. In Sri Lanka's current political, institutional, and media context, these developments make assessing GenAI-related electoral risks both timely and essential.

Within this context, this report assesses the current and emerging risks that GenAI poses to Sri Lanka's electoral environment. Building on DRI's Digital Democracy Risk Assessment framework, the study examines how structural and contextual conditions shape GenAI-related risks across four analytical dimensions – regulation, politics, media, and society.

Overall, our assessment indicates that Sri Lanka faces moderate to high risks to electoral integrity related to the misuse of GenAI, with vulnerabilities present across all four dimensions.

There is a high-risk in the regulatory environment, driven by persistent rule-of-law weaknesses, fragmented online content regulation, and inconsistent platform self-regulation. Key risks include the **widespread circulation of unregulated GenAI-generated political content, targeted harm against vulnerable and marginalised groups in the absence of binding safeguards and consistent platform responses, and delayed or ineffective detection and removal of harmful GenAI-enabled content**, particularly in Sinhala- and Tamil-language contexts.

There is a moderate but escalating risk in the dimension of politics, as growing reliance on social media, early adoption of AI-assisted campaigning tools, and historically low public trust in political parties create fertile ground for GenAI-related manipulation. Key risks include the **strategic use of GenAI by political actors to influence voter perceptions, increased targeted harassment or disinformation against candidates, and the escalation of negative campaigning**.

There is a moderate to high risk in the media dimension, as expanding internet penetration and widespread social media use increase exposure to GenAI-generated content, while severely constrained press freedom weakens the media's corrective and accountability functions. Key risks include **limited capacity for independent media to counter or correct misleading AI-generated material and an increased exposure of voters to GenAI content, followed by a heightened risk of distorted voter decision-making.**

There is a moderate to high level of vulnerability in the societal dimension, as political polarisation, low media literacy, and limited public awareness of misinformation heighten citizens' susceptibility to GenAI-driven manipulation.

Key risks include reduced individual and collective capacity to critically evaluate political information, and the progressive erosion of trust in information sources and democratic discourse.

Taken together, these findings underscore that GenAI-related risks to electoral integrity in Sri Lanka are cross-cutting. While technologies such as GenAI do not operate in isolation, their impact is shaped by the social, political, and cultural contexts in which they are deployed. Against this backdrop, this report sets out targeted recommendations to support key stakeholders, including the Parliament of Sri Lanka, the Election Commission of Sri Lanka (ECSL), civil society, media, and technology companies, in managing AI-related risks during elections, with a focus on transparency, accountability, and citizen empowerment.

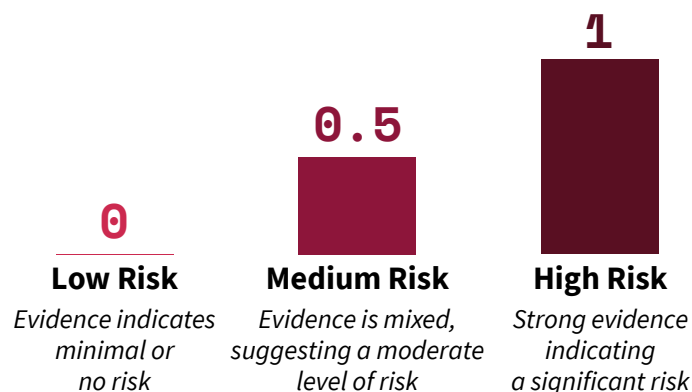
Methodology

To assess the use of GenAI in Sri Lanka and its risks to the electoral process, this study builds on DRI’s Digital Democracy Risk Assessment framework.¹ We adapted the framework to examine how structural and contextual factors shape the risks posed by GenAI to electoral integrity.

The report organises these factors into four analytical dimensions - regulation, politics, media, and society, each composed of three indicators, whose underlying assumptions define pathways linking contextual conditions to GenAI-related risks to electoral integrity. Together, these dimensions capture key areas of vulnerability in electoral processes, enabling the identification of current and potential risks and informing the development of targeted policy recommendations. While analytically distinct, dimensions are empirically interconnected, and certain risks may therefore cut across them.

To inform this risk identification, we collected data for each indicator from both secondary and primary sources. Secondary sources included well-known indexes, regulatory documents, and relevant desk research. We gathered primary data through semi-structured interviews with local experts and stakeholders, including journalists, civic activists, and tech-policy experts. We selected interviewees based on their technical expertise in digital technologies, media, gender and politics, and electoral management.² A detailed summary of sources is provided in the Appendix.

We assessed the four dimensions based on three indicators for each. We scored these indicators on a scale of 0 to 1, reflecting the likelihood that a given condition increases exposure to and impact of GenAI-related electoral manipulation:



¹. DRI, “[Risk Assessment – Digital Democracy Monitor](#)”.

². Participants were granted anonymity to enable open and candid participation.

To assign scores, we relied on the following guiding question: *“Given the available evidence, how likely is this condition to increase the exposure to and impact of GenAI-related manipulation on electoral integrity in Sri Lanka?”*

We discussed and validated the scores collectively to account for the varying nature of the data. Where possible, we compared Sri Lanka’s indicators with global and regional averages to provide additional context. An overview of the risk assessment scores is provided in the Appendix.

Limitations

While the indicators provide a structured overview of key risk factors, they are not fully exhaustive, nor are they entirely mutually exclusive. Regulatory, political, media, and societal conditions are closely interconnected, and some indicators overlap or reinforce one another. In addition, the scoring process relied partly on expert judgement, particularly where qualitative evidence was used, and data quality and availability vary across indicators. Some secondary sources may also lag behind recent or context-specific developments in the rapidly evolving GenAI landscape.

Additionally, the analysis represents a snapshot in time, and may not capture shifts in risk dynamics, especially during election periods. Some indicators related to online activity may not accurately reflect unique individuals or actual exposure to GenAI-generated content. Given the fast-changing nature of digital platforms, AI technologies, and political communication strategies, levels of risk may shift rapidly, especially during election periods. Future research could strengthen this approach, by expanding and refining indicators, addressing overlaps between dimensions, and incorporating longitudinal and more context-specific data to better assess evolving GenAI-related electoral risks.

Introduction

Elections today are shaped less by traditional campaign spaces, and more by contested, fast-moving digital environments where political information is fragmented, weaponised, and increasingly difficult to verify. As online discourse becomes the primary arena through which citizens encounter political narratives, the integrity of electoral processes depends on the resilience of this information ecosystem. Weak safeguards, polarised communities, and opaque platform dynamics collectively heighten the susceptibility of elections to manipulation and the erosion of public trust.³

Sri Lanka illustrates how these global transformations play out within a politically volatile and institutionally fragile context. The country is undergoing a period of transition, marked by heightened public demands for accountability and shifting political alignments, culminating in the 2024 electoral transfer of power to the National People's Power (NPP), a newcomer to national government. Within this context, digital platforms play a significant role in political communication and mobilisation; they are an important source of political information for many voters, while also shaping how political views are formed and shared, including the circulation of polarised, misleading, or harmful content.⁴ For instance, research by Hashtag Generation⁵ documented political actors' use of GenAI to produce deepfakes and synthetic campaign materials without clear disclosure, while complementary DRI research has found that major LLMs can generate inaccurate or biased responses to election-related queries.⁶

As social media and content platforms struggle with large volumes of unverified or misleading content, the introduction of AI-generated outputs has altered both the scale and complexity of the issue of ensuring information integrity in online democratic debate. GenAI-enabled campaign tools, synthetic images and videos, and Large Language Model (LLM)-driven chatbots already shape how political messages are created and how voters search for information, and this trend is only expected to continue at an increasingly accelerating pace. Much research already shows that these systems deepen information asymmetries, accelerate the circulation of mis- and disinformation, and blur the

3. Vladan Lausevic, [“Democracy worldwide faces its ninth year of net decline: IDEA report”](#), Democracy Without Borders, 22 September 2025.

4. Camila Weinmann, Ognjan Denkovski, Prihesh Ratnayake & Aingkasran Kugathasan, [“Democracy in Disguise: Inauthentic Online Influence on the 2025 Sri Lanka’s Local Government Elections”](#), DRI, 17 July 2025.

5. #Generation, [“Electoral Shifts and Digital Dynamics: Sri Lanka’s 2024-2025 National Elections in Review”](#).

6. Camila Weinmann, Duncan Allen, Ognjan Denkovski, Shivashanti Sivalingman, Mohamed Shafkath & Pahani Weerakkodi, [“Biased by Design? Chatbots and misinformation in Sri Lanka’s 2025 local elections”](#), DRI, 14 May 2025.

boundaries between authentic and fabricated content, further complicating efforts by institutions, regulators, and civil society to safeguard electoral integrity.⁷

These developments show that GenAI is reshaping political discourse and elections in at least two key ways, arguably with more to come – by enabling the production of synthetic political content (which may or may not be misleading), and by mediating voter information through LLM-driven chatbots that are prone to biases and hallucinations. These emerging patterns underscore that GenAI is not merely an incremental technological shift, but is already a factor into the information environment, acting upon an already pressured electoral ecosystem.

Against this backdrop, this report assesses the risks that GenAI does and could pose to Sri Lanka’s evolving electoral environment, identifying the key vulnerabilities through which this technology may undermine information integrity and democratic processes, and by offering evidence-based recommendations to strengthen institutional and societal resilience.

7. Floriane Foos, [“The Use of AI by Election Campaigns”](#), LSE Public Policy Review, 4 November 2024.

Structural and Contextual Drivers of GenAI-Related Risks in Sri Lanka

Drawing on the risk assessment framework outlined above, this section provides an overview of the overall score for each analytical dimension, and outlines main GenAI-related risks to electoral integrity.

Figure 1 shows that Sri Lanka faces moderate to high risks to electoral integrity from the misuse of GenAI, driven by intersecting regulatory, political, media, and societal factors. Weak rule-of-law conditions and the absence of clear, enforceable regulations on online political and AI-generated content limit the country's capacity to prevent or respond to AI-enabled manipulation. Platform self-regulation mechanisms remain inconsistent and insufficient, particularly during election periods.

Figure 1. Final score distribution across dimensions



Additionally, these institutional gaps are compounded by increasing reliance on social media for political communication and low public trust in political actors, which heighten susceptibility to misleading or manipulative AI-generated content. At the same time, limited press freedom undermines access to credible information, reducing the effectiveness of corrective narratives and fact-based countermeasures.

Lastly, societal factors further amplify these vulnerabilities. Moderate to high polarisation, coupled with limited media literacy and uneven awareness of misinformation, weakens citizens' ability to critically assess political content, particularly when AI-generated material is designed to appear authentic or emotionally compelling.

Taken together, the convergence of weak regulation, constrained media freedom, low institutional trust, and limited digital literacy creates an enabling environment for GenAI-driven electoral manipulation. Across dimensions, these risks reflect governance and enforcement gaps, the strategic misuse of GenAI in political competition, the amplification and limited correction of deceptive political content within the media environment, and heightened societal vulnerability to manipulation. These risks are likely to intensify during election periods, when information asymmetries are greatest and oversight mechanisms are under the greatest strain, underscoring the need for strengthened governance, media independence, and public-facing resilience measures.

Analytical dimensions and associated risks

The following section moves from this general assessment to a more granular analysis of each analytical dimension, detailing the specific drivers and risks through which GenAI-related threats to electoral integrity materialise.

While analytically distinct, the dimensions are empirically interconnected, and certain risks therefore cut across multiple dimensions. In each dimension, these risks are analysed from a different perspective, focusing on the specific mechanisms and levels of impact relevant to that domain.

Regulation

This dimension examines how Sri Lanka's legal and institutional environment can mitigate risks associated with the misuse of GenAI in elections. It considers the strength of the rule of law, the existence of national digital policies, including those related to AI and GenAI, and the extent of platform self-regulation and response mechanisms. Weak governance frameworks, limited regulation, and/or the absence of platform guidelines increase the system's vulnerability to GenAI-driven manipulation and disinformation.

According to our assessment, Sri Lanka scores 2.5 out of 3.0, placing it in the high-risk category for weaknesses in its legal and institutional capacity to mitigate GenAI-related election risks. Persistent gaps in the rule of law and the absence of robust digital content-moderation regulations of digital platforms leave the country highly vulnerable, while technology companies' inadequate and inconsistent response mechanisms and self-regulatory frameworks further threaten Sri Lanka's electoral integrity.

Figure 2. Indicator-level scoring for the “Regulation” dimension



1. Rule of Law

The rule of law denotes the presence of a clear, predictable, and consistently enforced legal framework. Beyond the existence of laws, it requires that legislation, including electoral laws, is adopted through democratic processes, aligned with human rights standards, and applied impartially, and is supported by effective access to justice and independent, capable investigative and judicial institutions.

Where the rule of law is weak, the risks posed by GenAI are heightened. Limited oversight, selective enforcement, and restricted access to justice reduce accountability, enabling actors to use GenAI to manipulate information or undermine electoral integrity without facing meaningful consequences.

Sri Lanka presents a moderate rule-of-law risk (0.5) in its electoral environment. While the V-Dem Rule of Law Index 2024⁸ assigns the country a relatively strong score of 0.7, above both the global (0.5) and regional (0.4) averages, these aggregate indicators mask persistent structural weaknesses. In practice, domestic legal instruments such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights Act and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) have been selectively applied to suppress dissent, target minority communities, and intimidate journalists,⁹ alongside repeated postponements of elections¹⁰ and continuing unequal access to justice.

8. Our World in Data, “Rule of Law Index, 2024”.

9. Human Rights Watch, “‘In a Legal Black Hole’, Sri Lanka’s Failure to Reform the Prevention of Terrorism Act”, 7 February 2022

10. Maheesha Mudugamuwa, “Provincial Councils: Gov’t drags its feet on delimitation”, The Morning, 14 September 2025.

Recent actions, such as the holding of local government elections in 2025 and ongoing reviews of the PTA and Online Safety Act, signal reform potential, but accountability mechanisms remain fragile. Persistent inequalities in access to justice compound these challenges. As noted by a gender, technology, and policy researcher interviewed for this assessment, “*Legal processes are often difficult and inaccessible for individuals who lack power or influence.*” These conditions heighten Sri Lanka’s exposure to GenAI-related electoral risks by limiting the state’s ability to oversee and regulate political uses of emerging technologies. Weak oversight and unequal access to justice create gaps for political actors to deploy GenAI to target vulnerable and marginalised groups, undermining electoral integrity in the absence of robust legal safeguards.

2. Regulation of online content

Regulation of online content refers to the legal and policy frameworks governing digital publishing and sharing. Social media’s capacity for precise targeting can be misused to spread hate speech, discriminatory messaging, and manipulative content, threatening democratic discourse and electoral integrity. Effective regulation therefore requires clear, enforceable, and human-rights-based frameworks that balance content moderation with freedom of expression, privacy, and due process. While jurisdictions such as the EU have introduced robust obligations, through instruments like the Digital Services Act, many countries rely on vague or inconsistent rules. Weak regulation, particularly in relation to GenAI, constrains the ability of authorities and platforms to identify, label, and/or sanction harmful political content.

Sri Lanka presents a high level of risk (1) related to the regulation of online content in its electoral environment. The country relies on a fragmented and limited regulatory framework, with the Online Safety Act¹¹ serving as the primary legal instrument. The Act has been widely criticised for vague definitions and broad discretionary powers.¹² While the Election Commission’s Media Guidelines¹³ and Code of Conduct¹⁴ include references to AI-generated content, these remain non-binding.

11. Parliament of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, “[Online Safety Act, No. 9 of 2024](#)”, 1 February 2024.

12. Shannon Hardy, “[Gendered Dimensions: A Critical Look at the Online Safety Act of Sri Lanka](#)”, Oxford Human Rights Hub, 6 June 2024.

13. The Gazette of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, “[Media Guidelines under Article 104B\(5\)\(A\) of the Constitution of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka](#)”, 25 September 2024.

14. The Gazette of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, “[Code of Conduct Issued in Pursuance of Section 8\(8\) of the Parliamentary Elections Act, No. 01 of 1981 as Amended by the Parliamentary Elections \(Amendment\) Act, No. 58 of 2009](#)”, 25 September 2024.

Although Sri Lanka is bound by international human rights standards on freedom of expression, there are no enforceable mechanisms to address emerging GenAI-related electoral risks. Institutional capacity gaps further constrain oversight. A representative of the Election Commission noted during an interview that current “*legal frameworks are insufficient for proactive monitoring or addressing GenAI misuse*”, highlighting institutional capacity gaps. As a result, weak and incomplete regulation limits the ability of authorities and platforms to detect, label, or sanction harmful political content, increasing the risk of disinformation and AI-enabled manipulation during elections.

3. Platforms’ Self- Regulation Mechanisms

Platform self-regulation involves the internal policies, safety mechanisms, and enforcement practices that technology companies use to manage harmful content, including GenAI-generated material. Strong self-regulation includes detecting synthetic media, labeling AI-generated content, moderating misinformation, enforcing political advertising rules, and ensuring transparency. Its effectiveness often depends on market incentives, with larger or strategically important countries receiving more investment in local-language moderation and election-focused safeguards. Weak or insufficient self-regulation increases the likelihood that GenAI content spreads undetected, unlabeled, or unremoved, heightening the risk of distorted electoral discourse.

Our assessment rates Sri Lanka at a high level of risk (1) from the harmful impacts of GenAI, due to persistent weaknesses in the self-regulatory mechanisms of major social media platforms. Platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok regulate harmful content primarily through their terms of service and content moderation systems, within which GenAI-specific measures, including labelling requirements, disclosure obligations, and restrictions on synthetic political content, have recently been introduced. These include Meta’s requirements for AI disclosure in political advertising,¹⁵ YouTube’s disclosure rules for realistic synthetic content,¹⁶ and TikTok’s labelling and prohibitions on deceptive AI-generated media.¹⁷

In practice, enforcement of these measures remains inconsistent, particularly during elections and in Sinhala- and Tamil-language contexts.¹⁸ While documented GenAI-specific cases in Sri Lanka remain limited due to the uneven adoption of these

15. Moika Bickert, “[Our Approach to Labeling AI-Generated Content and Manipulated Data](#)”, Meta, 5 April 2024.

16. Jennifer Flannery O’Connor & Emily Moxley, “[Our Approach to Responsible AI Innovation](#)”, YouTube Official Blog, 14 November 2023.

17. TikTok, “[Integrity and Authenticity](#)”, 17 April 2024.

18. Soorya Balendra, “[Meta’s AI moderation and free speech: Ongoing challenges in the Global South](#)”, Cambridge University Press, 16 May 2025.

technologies, monitoring during the 2024 elections¹⁹ revealed persistent gaps in the detection and removal of harmful political content across major platforms, indicating structural moderation weaknesses likely to extend to GenAI-enabled content as its use expands. Without stronger, locally grounded enforcement, GenAI-enabled manipulation and AI-amplified disinformation are likely to pose growing risks to electoral integrity.

Resulting risks within the regulatory dimension

Based on the weaknesses identified across the rule of law, online content regulation, and platform self-regulation, this dimension captures the following key risks to electoral integrity in Sri Lanka:

- **Increased circulation of unregulated GenAI-generated political content**, including disinformation and deceptive synthetic media, due to fragmented legal frameworks and limited enforcement capacity.
- **Heightened risk of targeted harm against vulnerable and marginalised groups**, enabled by weak oversight, inconsistent platform responses, and the absence of binding safeguards for AI-generated political content.
- **Delayed or ineffective detection and removal of harmful GenAI-enabled content**, particularly during election periods and in Sinhala- and Tamil-language contexts, amplifying the impact of misleading narratives on voters.

Politics

This dimension assesses the extent to which political parties and candidates rely on social media and GenAI in their campaigns, as well as the level of public trust in these actors. Greater use of AI-generated content by political campaigns increases the risk of voter manipulation, disinformation, and deepfake content, while low trust in political institutions amplifies citizens' susceptibility to such manipulation and undermines electoral integrity.

Sri Lanka's moderate but rising political use of social media and the adoption of GenAI in political communication, combined with low public trust in political parties, create a landscape where AI-driven disinformation could increasingly influence voter perceptions

19. #Generation, "[Electoral Shifts and Digital Dynamics](#)", op. cit., note 5".

and undermine electoral integrity. Thus, Sri Lanka’s risk is rated at 2.0 out of 3.0. While current GenAI use in elections remains limited, the trajectory indicates growing risk, particularly if political actors weaponise AI or fail to safeguard candidates from vulnerable groups.

Figure 3. Indicator-level scoring for the “Politics” dimension



1. Political use of social media

Political use of social media refers to how parties and candidates communicate with voters, mobilise support, and shape public narratives during campaigns. While this can enhance participation and engagement, in highly polarised or negative campaign environments this also creates vulnerabilities. The adoption of GenAI in political communication can distort debate, inflame tensions, mislead voters, and/or target politicians themselves with synthetic disinformation. Greater social media use by political actors during elections increases the likelihood of GenAI-driven content entering the information environment, posing risks to electoral integrity.

Sri Lanka presents a moderate level of risk (0.5) associated with the political use of social media. The Digital Society Project²⁰ assigns the country a score of 1.7 out of 3 for party and candidate use of social media in electoral campaigns, indicating a moderate level of digital political engagement.

Rising internet penetration and expanding social media use have led political actors to increasingly integrate platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, into campaign strategies, particularly to reach younger voters.²¹ While traditional campaigning remains relevant, social media now plays a central role in political communication and voter mobilisation.

²⁰ Digital Society Project.

²¹ Hiyal Biyagama, “Rise of digital campaigning: How social platforms shaped Sri Lanka’s elections”, DailyFT, 16 January 2026.

As reliance on these platforms grows, so does the likelihood of GenAI-driven content entering the information environment for political purposes. Although current use remains moderate, increasing digital engagement creates expanding opportunities for AI-generated content to influence political narratives and voter behaviour, contributing to a gradually escalating electoral risk profile.

2. Political use of GenAI

Political use of GenAI refers to how parties and candidates employ GenAI tools during electoral campaigns. These tools may be used for legitimate campaigning and political communication, but can also facilitate harmful practices, including generating synthetic images, audio, or video, automating text for messaging, producing micro-targeted content, and/or enabling large-scale AI-driven persuasion or mobilisation. Monitoring political use of GenAI is essential to identify emerging threats. Greater reliance on GenAI in campaigns increases the risk of producing and spreading deceptive or manipulated content, in particular in cases where the nature of the content is not openly disclosed, which can distort voter perceptions, deepen polarisation, and undermine electoral integrity.

Sri Lanka’s political use of GenAI currently places the country at a moderate risk of generating and disseminating deceptive or manipulated content that could undermine electoral integrity. While evidence from the 2024–2025 election cycle indicates that GenAI use remained limited and largely experimental, monitoring by Hashtag Generation²² documented early instances of AI-assisted deepfakes and disinformation across political actors, alongside reports of anticipated AI use prior to elections.

During key informant interviews, a journalist observed that “AI was still quite new in the last elections. I didn’t notice widespread use”. Similarly, a representative of the Election Commission noted that “current use of GenAI during elections is limited, mostly to media creation; however, it could pose a potential threat in future elections”. These perspectives suggest that, while GenAI use during the 2024–2025 election cycle was relatively limited, key stakeholders expect its adoption to increase as the technology becomes more accessible and cost-effective.

This emerging trajectory heightens future risks, as expanded GenAI use could distort voter perceptions, amplify polarisation, and create new avenues for electoral manipulation in the absence of proactive safeguards.

22. #Generation, “[Electoral Shifts and Digital Dynamics](#)”, op. cit., note 5”.

3. Trust in Political Parties

Trust in political parties refers to citizens' confidence in parties as democratic institutions and key actors in elections. Parties structure political debate, represent societal interests, and mobilise voters, but they are also frequent targets of disinformation campaigns aimed at undermining legitimacy and public confidence. Low trust in parties makes electorates more susceptible to narratives that question credibility or intentions, especially when delivered via persuasive or synthetic GenAI-generated content. Consequently, low trust increases societal vulnerability to AI-driven disinformation, facilitating the spread of manipulative content and further eroding electoral integrity.

The assessment finds that low public trust in political parties in Sri Lanka constitutes a high-risk factor for manipulation through AI-generated content. Declining trust acts as an accelerant for GenAI-driven disinformation, increasing public susceptibility to synthetic narratives that further undermine electoral confidence. Data from the Centre for Policy Alternatives shows that trust in political parties declined sharply, from 56 per cent in 2011 to 19 per cent in 2024, reaching a historic low.²³

In this context, citizens are more likely to be misled by AI-generated political content, particularly where parties fail to provide safeguards or actively weaponise GenAI. As noted by a gender, technology, and policy researcher, “*trust can be undermined if parties weaponise narratives or fail to protect candidates from marginalised groups*”.

Overall, persistently low trust significantly heightens vulnerability to AI-enabled manipulation, increasing the risk of distorted voter perceptions and weakened electoral integrity.

Resulting risks within the political dimension

Based on the patterns identified across the political use of social media, the adoption of GenAI, and low public trust in political parties, this dimension highlights the following key risks to electoral integrity in Sri Lanka:

23. Centre for Policy Alternatives, “[Survey on Democracy and Reconciliation in Sri Lanka: Key Findings](#)”, March 2024.

- **Strategic use of GenAI by political actors** to manipulate voter perceptions, including through synthetic media, AI-generated messaging, and/or deceptive campaign content, particularly during highly competitive electoral periods.
- **Increased risk of targeted harassment or disinformation against candidates**, where GenAI tools are used to intimidate, discredit, and/or suppress political participation.
- **A growing escalation of negative campaigning and polarisation**, as GenAI lowers the cost and increases the scale of producing misleading, inflammatory, and/or personalised political narratives.

Media

This dimension examines internet access and social media usage among the population, alongside press freedom. High levels of connectivity and social media usage expand the potential reach of GenAI-driven manipulation, particularly in environments where press freedom is constrained.

Figure 4. Indicator-level scoring for the “Media” dimension



Sri Lanka is rated 2.0 out of 3.0 for the risk associated to electoral integrity in the “Media” dimension, due to the use of GenAI. Sri Lanka faces a moderate risk from GenAI exposure, due to growing internet penetration and social media usage, which increases the potential for citizens to encounter AI-generated content. Perhaps more importantly, the country is at high risk regarding the impact of GenAI on electoral integrity because of very limited press freedom. Strengthening independent journalism and ensuring access to verified information are critical to mitigating the risk of AI-driven manipulation during elections.

1. Internet Penetration

Internet penetration measures the share of the population with online access and indicates the potential influence of digital platforms on public debate. Higher connectivity broadens exposure to information, accelerates circulation, and amplifies the reach of harmful content, including GenAI-generated material. Conversely, limited connectivity may contain online manipulation. Higher internet penetration thus increases the risk that synthetic or deceptive content will reach larger audiences, heightening the vulnerability of electoral discourse.

Sri Lanka's moderate internet penetration (59.7 per cent, 13.9 million users)²⁴ places the country at a moderate risk of exposure to synthetic or deceptive content. The addition of 3.8 million new users over the past five years²⁵ reflects rapid digital growth, increasing citizen exposure to online environments where GenAI-generated content can spread quickly and with limited verification. While penetration remains below global (73.2 per cent) and regional (64.3 per cent) averages,²⁶ continued growth indicates a trajectory towards higher exposure risk.

Rising connectivity exposes more citizens to online ecosystems where AI-generated content can spread rapidly, placing Sri Lanka at moderate exposure risk with a trend toward higher risk.

2. Social Media Usage

Social media usage reflects how extensively the population engages with platforms and channels through which they access information. High reliance on social media for political news increases exposure to misleading or harmful content, including GenAI-generated material. Greater social media use therefore raises the risk that synthetic or deceptive content reaches and influences larger segments of the population, increasing vulnerabilities in the electoral environment.

The risk assessment categorises Sri Lanka as facing a moderate risk of GenAI exploitation, primarily driven by the rapid expansion of social media use. Approximately 9 million Sri Lankan user identities (account-level, not verified individuals, with minimal duplication),²⁷ around 38.7 per cent of the population and

24. Simon Kemp, "[Digital 2026: Sri Lanka](#)", Datareportal, 8 November 2025.

25. Simon Kemp, "[Digital 2020: Sri Lanka](#)", Datareportal, 18 February 2020.

26. [Datareportal](#).

27. Social media user identities' refers to accounts rather than verified individuals. The calculation methods have been refined to reduce duplication (e.g., multiple accounts per person). Despite these adjustments, figures may still overestimate unique users due to duplicate or false accounts. Datareportal, "[Notes on Data Variance, Mismatches, and Curiosities](#)".

64.8 per cent of internet users are active on social media.²⁸ While this remains below the global average for social media penetration (68.7 per cent) and the share of internet users active on social platforms (93.8 per cent), it exceeds the Southern Asian average of 34.5 per cent, and reflects a significant increase from 6.4 million users in 2020.

This upward trajectory indicates a structural shift in information consumption, increasing the reach and potential impact of AI-generated content on public opinion and political narratives. As social media becomes more deeply embedded in electoral communication, the exposure to GenAI-related manipulation is likely to intensify, supporting the assessment of Sri Lanka's current risk level as moderate.

3. Freedom of Press

Press freedom measures the ability of journalists and media outlets to operate independently and report without political interference, intimidation, or censorship. A free and diverse media ecosystem supports informed voting by enabling open access to reliable information. When media freedom is restricted through legal constraints, political pressure, and/or limited editorial independence, the information environment becomes narrower and more vulnerable to manipulation. Lower media freedom reduces citizens' access to trustworthy sources and fact-checking, increasing exposure to GenAI-driven disinformation on social media and other digital platforms.

Sri Lanka faces high risk of GenAI-driven electoral manipulation due to severely constrained press freedom. Ranked 139 out of 180 countries on the Freedom of the Press Index,²⁹ with conditions rated as “very serious,” Sri Lanka's media landscape is characterised by limited diversity, high concentration, and dependence on major political clans.³⁰ This restricted media environment undermines public trust and creates structural vulnerabilities that amplify susceptibility to AI-generated disinformation. Without access to independent verification mechanisms or diverse information sources, citizens lack the capacity to critically evaluate synthetic content, making them more vulnerable to misleading narratives targeting voters or candidates.

The absence of press freedom not only limits transparent dissemination of information, but also creates conditions where AI-generated content can circulate unchecked, directly threatening electoral integrity in Sri Lanka by influencing voter decision-making through false or manipulated information.

28. Simon Kemp, “Digital 2026: Sri Lanka”, op. cit., note 24.

29. Reporters Without Borders, “Asia-Pacific Authoritarian regimes use economic pressure to control the press”.

30. Reporters Without Borders, “Sri Lanka”.

Resulting risks within the media dimension

Based on the levels of internet penetration, widespread social media use, and severely constrained press freedom identified above, this dimension captures the following key risks to electoral integrity in Sri Lanka:

- **Increased exposure of voters to GenAI-generated disinformation and deceptive content**, as expanding connectivity and social media use broaden the reach and speed of synthetic political narratives.
- **Limited capacity for independent media to counter or correct AI-generated misleading content**, due to restricted press freedom, media concentration, and political influence over editorial agendas.
- **Heightened risk of distorted voter decision-making**, as citizens lack access to reliable verification mechanisms and diverse information sources capable of challenging AI-generated political content.

Society

This dimension examines societal polarisation, media literacy, and public awareness of misinformation, and how these factors shape citizens' vulnerability to GenAI-driven manipulation. Low levels of media literacy and high degrees of polarisation tend to heighten susceptibility to misleading or synthetic content, while limited public recognition of misinformation as a problem weakens collective resilience against AI-generated information threats.

Figure 5. Indicator-level scoring for the "Society" dimension



Sri Lanka faces a mix of moderate and high societal risks that increase its vulnerability to GenAI-driven electoral threats. Moderate political polarisation creates opportunities for AI-amplified disinformation, while low media and digital literacy leaves citizens more susceptible to engaging with or spreading misleading content. Thus, Sri Lanka is rated at 2.0 out of 3.0. Despite civil society efforts, media literacy remains limited, and rapid digital adoption further deepens these vulnerabilities. Critically, low public awareness of misinformation places the country at high risk, as many citizens struggle to distinguish fact from fiction, making it more likely that GenAI-generated narratives could manipulate voter perceptions and undermine electoral integrity.

1. Societal Polarisation

Societal polarisation refers to the degree of political or social division within a society. High polarisation amplifies the spread and impact of digital manipulation, as social media ecosystems in divided societies are more reactive, conflict-prone, and responsive to emotionally charged content. Such environments facilitate the circulation of and engagement with misleading or AI-generated content. While polarisation is not caused by GenAI, higher levels of division increase vulnerability to GenAI-driven disinformation.

Sri Lanka faces a moderate risk of GenAI-driven electoral manipulation, due to political polarisation rooted in ethnic divisions, competing political ideologies, and the economic crisis in 2022. With a Digital Society Project³¹ polarisation score of 0.2 (2024), Sri Lanka ranks in the moderate-to-high range globally.

Polarised societies are more susceptible to AI manipulation, as they demonstrate heightened reactivity to emotionally charged content that social media algorithms amplify along existing fault lines. As one journalist noted, “*everyone is equally vulnerable*”, as AI-generated disinformation transcends societal background or ideology. The convergence of moderate polarisation, expanding digital engagement, and widespread social media use creates conditions where divisive AI-generated narratives can exploit social cleavages and influence electoral outcomes.

2. Media Literacy

Media literacy refers to the ability of individuals to identify sources, verify information, and recognise manipulative techniques. Strong media literacy equips citizens to navigate complex information environments and resist disinformation. As synthetic content becomes more realistic and widespread, limited media literacy increases the

31. [Digital Society Project](#),

difficulty of distinguishing authentic from AI-generated content, such as deepfakes or fabricated news. Lower media literacy therefore heightens susceptibility to GenAI-driven manipulation, while education and public awareness programmes can enhance resilience, although they do not eliminate the risk entirely.

Low media literacy rates position Sri Lanka at moderate risk of GenAI-driven electoral manipulation. In a rapidly digitising environment, many citizens use social media without understanding its complexities,³² leading to unintentional disinformation spread. As a gender, technology, and policy researcher noted during key informant interviews, *“There is a limited understanding of GenAI among the general public, political actors, and even some election monitors.”*

Rising digital consumption, combined with inadequate media literacy, creates exploitable vulnerabilities for malign actors. Despite civil society’s efforts to strengthen media literacy, overall levels remain low. This deficit limits citizens’ capacity to identify, evaluate, and/or challenge AI-generated content, making them particularly susceptible to synthetic disinformation during elections, when misleading narratives can directly influence voter decision-making.

3. Awareness of Misinformation

Public awareness of misinformation influences how citizens interpret and respond to online content. When people recognise misinformation as a risk, they are more cautious, verify sources, and respond better to fact-checking. Low awareness, however, reduces scrutiny, making citizens more likely to accept misleading material. With GenAI, misinformation is often more sophisticated and harder to detect. In contexts of low awareness, AI-generated content is likely to circulate more easily, increasing overall vulnerabilities.

Sri Lanka faces high risk of GenAI-driven electoral manipulation, due to low public awareness of misinformation. Research by LIRNEasia indicates a widespread inability to recognise misinformation as a concept among the general public.³³ A journalist interviewed emphasised that *“there is a general lack of public awareness about misinformation and its potential to mislead voters, with many citizens unable to distinguish fact from fiction, making them highly vulnerable to its influence.”*

32. Deeksha Udupa, [“The Battle Against Disinformation and Push for Digital Literacy in Sri Lanka”](#), Center for the Study of Organized Hate, 12 March 2025.

33. Sukitha Bandranayake, Vino Lucerno, Vikas Badhauria, Ibrahim Kholilul Rohman, Helani Galpaya & Shenalie Bamaramannage, [“Election Misinformation in South and South-East Asia: The phenomenon and measures to counter it”](#), LIRNEasia, September 4 2024.

This awareness deficit reduces critical scrutiny of online content, enabling sophisticated AI-generated disinformation materials, which are inherently harder to detect, to circulate unchecked. Without the conceptual understanding and awareness to identify misleading content, citizens are more likely to accept and amplify GenAI-generated material, allowing it to shape voter perceptions, erode trust in information sources, and compromise electoral integrity.

Resulting risks within the societal dimension

Based on the levels of societal polarisation, limited media literacy, and low public awareness of misinformation identified above, this dimension highlights the following key risks to electoral integrity in Sri Lanka:

- **Reduced individual and collective capacity to critically evaluate political information**, reflecting limited media literacy, high polarisation, and repeated exposure to AI-generated narratives.
- **Progressive erosion of trust in information sources and democratic discourse**, as citizens struggle to distinguish authentic political communication from synthetic or deceptive content over time.

Recommendations

Technologies, including GenAI, are not applied in isolation. Their impact is shaped by the social, political, and cultural contexts of deployment. As users interpret, adapt, and resist these tools, their influence remains contingent and unpredictable. The following recommendations are meant to inform key stakeholders, including the Parliament of Sri Lanka, the Election Commission, civil society, media, and tech companies in managing AI-related risks and opportunities during elections, prioritising transparency, accountability, and citizen empowerment.

Parliament of Sri Lanka

1. Establish Binding, Human Rights based Election Regulations on GenAI

- Introduce legally enforceable rules for political actors, media, and digital platforms governing the use of GenAI during election periods
- Mandate clear disclosure of AI-generated or AI-manipulated political content; and
- Prohibit the use of GenAI to impersonate candidates, fabricate statements, or manufacture synthetic crises without verification.

2. Reform and Clarify Platform Regulation

- Amend the Online Safety Act through a transparent, consultative process involving civil society, technical experts, and legal scholars, ensuring that any amendments are grounded in a human right-based approach: and
- Strengthen safeguards against misuse, while enabling targeted action on deepfakes, AI-generated disinformation, and coordinated inauthentic behavior.

Election Commission of Sri Lanka

1. Strengthen Institutional Oversight and Monitoring Capacity

- Build institutional capacity to detect and monitor AI-generated political content, including deepfakes and synthetic media
- Establish formal partnerships with fact-checking organisations, research institutions, and digital rights groups to support real-time verification
- Establish rapid public alert mechanisms when AI-driven disinformation is detected
- Create a cross-agency Task Force with clear roles, mandates, and coordination protocols, including collaborating with stakeholders such as the Sri Lanka Computer Emergency Readiness Team; and
- Convene a multi-stakeholder coordination platform connecting the Election Commission, platforms, media, civil society, and election observers.

2. Enhance Platform Accountability and Collaboration

- Advocate for major online platforms (Meta, TikTok, YouTube, and X) to strengthen Sinhala- and Tamil-language content moderation, particularly during election periods
- Push for transparent election integrity operations in Sri Lanka, including early-warning systems for identifying synthetic content
- Establish dedicated communication channels between the Election Commission and platform teams, to enable:
 - Swift removal or clear labeling of AI-generated political deepfakes
 - Crisis-response coordination during misinformation spikes; and
 - Regular reporting on platform actions, trends, and enforcement outcomes; and
- Assess risks, regulatory measures, and electoral impacts, by considering both AI applications and the underlying LLMs.

3. Mandate AI Content Labeling and Political Advertiser Transparency

- Require all political actors to disclose the use of AI-generated imagery, audio, video, or text in campaign materials or advertising
- Mandate transparency in the use of AI-driven microtargeting, including audience segmentation and data sources; and
- Require political entities to declare the use of automated bots or AI tools for voter outreach or influence operations.

4. Expand Nationwide Media and Information Literacy Initiatives

- Scale nationwide media and information literacy programmes that equip citizens to identify and critically assess AI-generated content; and
- Support civil society and community-based organisations working on digital literacy, misinformation awareness, and safe online engagement.

Tech Companies

1. Strengthen Content Moderation and Detection

- Invest in the detection, labeling, and moderation of AI-generated political content, including deepfakes
- Ensure moderation is effective in Sinhala and Tamil, especially during elections; and
- Proactively identify coordinated AI-enabled influence operations.

2. Enhance Transparency and Accountability

- Provide mechanisms for users to disclose AI-generated content and political advertising, and enforce compliance when users fail to do so; and
- Publish election-period transparency reports on content moderation, on the impact of recommender systems on the dissemination of AI-driven political deepfakes and disinformation, and on enforcement actions.

3. Collaborate with Stakeholders

- Partner with election management bodies, civil society organisations, media outlets, and fact-checking initiatives to share data and risk intelligence, and to establish coordinated rapid-response mechanisms; and
- Support capacity-building initiatives for users, journalists, and local communities to recognise and report synthetic content.

4. Develop and Enforce Responsible AI Practices

- Integrate ethical AI guidelines into training and content filtering to prevent GenAI outputs from being used for political manipulation; and
- Consider both AI products and underlying LLMs when assessing risks, potential harms, and electoral impacts.

5. Promote Digital Literacy and Public Awareness

- Support initiatives that help users distinguish between satire, political commentary, and manipulative AI-generated content
- Provide in-platform educational resources or alerts during election periods to increase public awareness of AI risks; and
- Provide clear, accessible explanations of the data sources, decision factors, and logic underpinning AI-generated election-related outputs, and ensure users, particularly those adversely affected, can question, contest, and seek redress for those outputs.

Civil Society and Media

1. Protect and Empower Journalists

- Ensure journalists can work free from intimidation, violence, or censorship, particularly during sensitive electoral periods; and
- Provide specialised training for media professionals to detect, verify, and report GenAI-driven manipulation, including deepfakes and synthetic narratives.

2. Strengthen Trustworthy Information Ecosystems





- Encourage media organisations to adopt AI-detection tools and newsroom protocols for identifying synthetic media
- Establish clear editorial standards for AI use and verification
- Expand collaboration between media outlets and fact-checking organisations to verify political narratives and rapidly debunk false or manipulated content; and
- Promote awareness of the differences between satire, political commentary, and manipulative AI-generated content.

3. Build Community-Based Early Detection Networks





- Train community leaders, youth groups, teachers, and local journalists to identify emerging indicators of:
 - I. Polarising synthetic narratives
 - II. AI-enabled influence operations; and
 - III. Viral deepfakes targeting specific communities; and
- Support local monitoring networks that can flag suspicious content early and feed information to national watchdogs or fact-checkers.

Appendix

1. Overview of sources used for risk assessment

Dimension	Indicator	Source	Type of indicator	Year
 Regulation	Rule of Law	V-Dem, Indicator Name: v2x_rule	Quantitative	2024
	Regulation of Online Content	Interviews, Desk Research	Qualitative	2025
	Platform Self-Regulation Mechanisms	Platform Documentation, Interviews, Platform Response Report	Qualitative	2025
 Politics	Political Use of Social Media	Digital Project Dataset, Indicator Name: Political Use of Social Media, Code: v2smcamp	Quantitative	2025
	Political Use of GenAI	Interviews, Desk Research	Qualitative	2025
	Trust in Political Parties	Survey on Democracy and Reconciliation in Sri Lanka	Quantitative	2024
 Media	Internet Penetration	Data Reportal	Quantitative	2024
	Social Media Usage	Data Reportal	Quantitative	2025
	Press Freedom Index 2025	Reporters without Borders	Quantitative	2025
 Society	Societal Polarisation	Digital Society Project, Indicator Name: Polarisation of Society, Code: v2smpol soc	Qualitative	2024
	Media Literacy	Interviews, Desk Research	Qualitative	2025
	Awareness of misinformation	Desk research	Qualitative	2024

2. Overview of risk assessment scores

Dimension	Indicator	Indicator Score	Dimension Score
 Regulation	Rule of Law	0.5	2.5
	Regulation of Online Content	1.0	
	Platform Self-Regulation Mechanisms	1.0	
 Politics	Political Use of Social Media	0.5	2.0
	Political Use of GenAI	0.5	
	Trust in Political Parties	1.0	
 Media	Internet Penetration	0.5	2.0
	Social Media Usage	0.5	
	Press Freedom Index 2025	1.0	
 Society	Societal Polarisation	0.5	2.0
	Media Literacy	0.5	
	Awareness of misinformation	1.0	