AI's Disinformation Capabilities Threaten Presidential Election—Highlighting Need for Action by Business and Government

New York, NY, September 26, 2023…Today, the Committee for Economic Development, the public policy center of The Conference Board (CED), issued a new **Solutions Brief**, *The 2024 Election: Rebuilding Trust*. The report provides a series of recommendations for business leaders and federal, state, and local governments for ensuring the 2024 presidential election is secure, credible, and accessible.

As CED emphasizes, doing so is all the more challenging—and paramount—given that the election season will be the first in which generative AI is widely available, enabling users to easily develop deepfakes to deceive voters and spread disinformation. And such a scenario is quite feasible, especially considering the current lack of guardrails from government. Moreover, the advancement of AI coupled with aging voting systems and software heighten the cybersecurity risks exponentially.

The Solutions Brief—which can be found here and is the latest in CED's *Sustaining Capitalism* series—examines 1) the continuing need to expand voting access by providing adequate opportunities for early in-person and mail-in voting, with business leaders playing a key role in providing trusted information on available processes; 2) trends in diminishing public trust in voting and ways to increase voter confidence; 3) measures to protect voting infrastructure from growing cybersecurity threats, including from AI; and 4) the business community's critical role in building trust and countering disinformation.

"A hyperpolarized environment, diminished trust in our nation's leaders, and AI's rapid advancement present the US with important challenges ahead of the 2024 presidential election," said Dr. Lori Esposito Murray, President of CED. "While states and local election administrators must bolster secure, credible, and accessible elections, the private sector must also play a key role. Elections serve as the cornerstone of democracy, and the trust of the American people in this fundamental aspect of the democratic process is essential to the functioning of our democratic institutions and the nation's long-term economic strength."

Key Recommendations

The report features a series of recommendations for election officials and leaders in the public and private sectors on how the US should be preparing now for the 2024 presidential election. Solutions include:

Secure Elections
- All voting machines should be required to produce a paper record of ballots cast to give voters confidence that the vote they cast was the vote recorded.
- Federal funding for election security should be robust and keep pace with national security threat levels. Congress should appropriate funding to the US Election Assistance Commission as soon as possible so election administrators can receive these funds early.
- Election administrators should conduct rigorous testing of voting equipment for security risks. Election administrators should make public election security measures.

- All election stakeholders, including election administrators, should use the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency's (CISA) cybersecurity toolkit to understand the range of risks they face and learn how to prioritize mitigation efforts.
- Administrators should ensure that all wireless components are prohibited in voting systems.
- States must be held accountable in the maintenance of voter registration lists and consider implementing automatically changing registrations when voters move.

Access to Voting
- States should provide at least 10 days early voting, including weekend and evening hours.
- States should use best practices regarding ballot and envelope design for mail-in and absentee ballots and establish and communicate clear guidelines for processing and counting ballots and handling errors.
- To ensure that mail-in ballots are received in time to be counted, USPS should continue to handle mailing and return of ballots at or above service levels for First Class Mail.
- Businesses could encourage employees to vote early or by mail-in and provide trusted instructions on how to facilitate those options.
- Election administrators should ensure an adequate number of convenient polling places for voters.
- To avoid poll worker shortages, administrators should recruit poll workers through recruitment initiatives.
- Election administrators should initiate policies which establish consistent policies relating to access to polling locations throughout their jurisdictions.

Credible Elections/Tackling Disinformation
- Government and business leaders should collaborate to expand efforts to understand how the public interprets AI-generated media and methods to best identify deepfakes.
- Congress, working with business leaders, should take the necessary actions to help voters to have the ability to identify misinformation and disinformation.
- Businesses should communicate best practices in identifying synthetic media.
- To build resistance to deceptive practices, business should communicate to employees trusted voting information resources as well as provide employees local voting policies, such as registration deadlines.
- Election officials and federal, state, and local government agencies should undertake voter education efforts to build resistance against election falsehoods and support public-private collaboration in using this funding.
- Ballots received by mail before Election Day should be counted before Election Day, with the results held confidential until polls on Election Day close, to speed the announcement of results and that all ballots postmarked by the close of polls on Election Day shall be counted.

Nonpartisan/Bipartisan Election Administrators and Volunteers
- Widespread poll monitoring on a bipartisan basis—with trained, partisan observers from both sides participating at the same polling locations—should be implemented; reasonable rules of decorum and prohibition of harassment should be established and enforced.
- Measures that increase partisan control should be opposed or reversed.
- States should expand protections for election administrators and increase penalties for those interfering with their duties.
- Government officials at all levels should provide information on how to report threats to election workers. The security resources on how to protect election workers provided by the FBI and the CISA should be made widely available to all election officials.
- Local governments should consider increasing funding for elections and apply for grant funding.

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