

Republican primary challengers are lying to voters

Misinformation campaigns distort democracy



The Goddess of Liberty sits atop the Texas State Capitol dome in Austin, Texas, Thursday, December 9, 2021. Rep. Jared Patterson says the campaign tactics used by some Republican challengers this election cycle are undemocratic. (Tom Fox/The Dallas Morning News)(Tom Fox)

As one of the leading conservative voices in the Texas House, I've witnessed the evolving political landscape of our great state from a unique vantage point. This perspective offers me a clear view of the tumultuous currents shaping the 2024 Republican primaries — currents that are, unfortunately, poisoning our electoral process by taking the usual level of misinformation, vitriol and dishonest political propaganda to new heights.

The level of deceit and manipulation we are witnessing in the current

election cycle is not only unprecedented, but deeply concerning for anyone who values the sanctity of our democratic process. The most cynical tactics have been employed by a web of organizations funded by Texans United for a Conservative Majority, formerly known as Defend Texas Liberty PAC, who changed their name after their near-7-hour meeting with a self-proclaimed Nazi Holocaust denier.

This cycle, they've sunk to new lows, using conservative-sounding names like Texans for Strong Borders, Texas Family Project, Texas Gun Rights, Texans for Vaccine Choice, Texans for Fiscal Responsibility and others aimed at tricking voters.

Their relentless barrage of disinformation has been largely aimed at conservative incumbents in the Texas House.

We are not talking about a handful of misleading mailers or questionable commercials. Voters are facing a daily onslaught of dishonest materials being sent directly to their cellphones, televisions and mailboxes. Nearly all of them contain gross exaggerations and dishonest political spin. But worse, many involve sophisticated forgeries, including photoshopped images and AI-generated audio and video that portray incumbent House members as having said or done something that never actually occurred.

Imagine opening your mailbox or scrolling social media to find your representative seemingly shaking hands with the dictator of a hostile nation, or marching in a protest or holding flags of causes they vehemently oppose. Imagine being a community leader who turns on the television to see your image being used without your consent in a campaign commercial for a candidate you do not support. These are all real scenarios that have occurred in the current primary cycle.

This unethical use of technology and political spin is sowing discord among the electorate and undermining the trust between elected officials and the constituents they serve. It has crossed a line from campaigning-as-usual

into outright fraud, manipulating voters into believing blatant lies.

The individuals and organizations behind this have never been interested in a fair fight or honest debate, nor are they driven by a genuine desire to advance conservative principles. If that were the case, they would support the incumbent House members who delivered two of the most conservative sessions in modern state history.

Instead, their aim is to confuse, to lie, to create chaos and to profit at every stage of their operation, regardless of the cost to our democratic norms. It's their business model, a self-perpetuating cycle of misinformation and financial exploitation — the textbook grift. These actors stir up political conflict, then solicit big-money donations to fight in those conflicts, then make money off of every mail piece, every text, every social media ad and every commercial you see on television.

In fact, the consulting firm for Defend Texas Liberty PAC, Pale Horse Strategies, which also changed its name to West Fort Worth Management, has made hundreds of thousands off challenging Texas House incumbents. Quite the little business they're running off of unsuspecting voters.

The implications of this strategy are dire. It threatens not only the integrity of our elections but the very fabric of our political discourse. When lies are allowed to proliferate unchecked, when candidates can be maligned with impunity through forged evidence and deepfakes, we all lose.

This is not just an attack on conservative incumbents; it's an assault on the principles of truth, fairness and democracy.

To my fellow Texans, I urge you to approach the information you receive with a critical eye and question the sources of the political materials that are flooding our mailboxes. It's essential we stand together against tactics of manipulation and disinformation. The primaries should be a forum for debating ideas and truths, where candidates present their visions and

records for your informed decision, not a battleground for deceit.

Jared Patterson represents District 106 in the Texas House of Representatives.

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