



THE AAPC FOUNDATION AI VOTER STUDY

Seen, Not Sought

How Voters Encounter AI
in the 2026 Election



2026 Baseline: A National Survey of Likely 2026 Voters

4%

of voters **went looking** for election information from an AI tool in the past month.

38% at least

have **received** election information from AI anyway, through the summary at the top of their search results.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

Voters are meeting artificial intelligence every day, often without realizing it. To understand what that means for elections, the AAPC Foundation commissioned a national survey of 1,568 likely 2026 general election voters, conducted September 14–22, 2026.

The study asks how voters use AI for election information, how much they trust it, and what they think of campaigns using it. This is the first edition. The Foundation will repeat the study to track how voters' use of and trust in AI change over time.

The study at a glance

1,568 likely 2026 voters, nationwide
September 14–22, 2026
 Text-to-web and live telephone
 Margin of error **±2.7** points

Commissioned by the AAPC Foundation and conducted by Inquoro, Inc., The Tarrance Group, and AMM Political Strategies.

Made possible with support from SparkFire Technologies.

KEY FINDINGS

AI reaches voters through the side door

61%

AI is already routine.

Six in ten voters use AI tools at least a few times a month, and a quarter (25%) use them daily. Three in four (76%) ran into AI-generated content in the past month without necessarily looking for it.

4%

Few seek AI out for election information, but many get it anyway.

Just 4% used an AI tool for election information in the past month (11% this cycle, 19% ever). Yet at least 38% have gotten election information from an AI search summary, and only about half of them (53%) know it was written by AI.

1%

Voters do not trust AI on elections.

Only 1% name AI tools as their most credible source of election information. Given conflicting accounts from a news organization, a search engine, and a chatbot, just 4% would believe the chatbot. By 45% to 20%, voters say AI does more harm than good.

57%

False information is the leading concern.

A majority worry that AI tools spread false or misleading information. A 43% plurality say AI is inaccurate on elections and voting; 25% say it is accurate.

95%

Deepfakes are out of bounds, disclosed or not.

Nearly all voters say it is unacceptable for a campaign to make a fake video of an opponent; 93% still say so when the video carries an AI notice. Voters worry far more about others being fooled (66% very concerned) than themselves (33%).

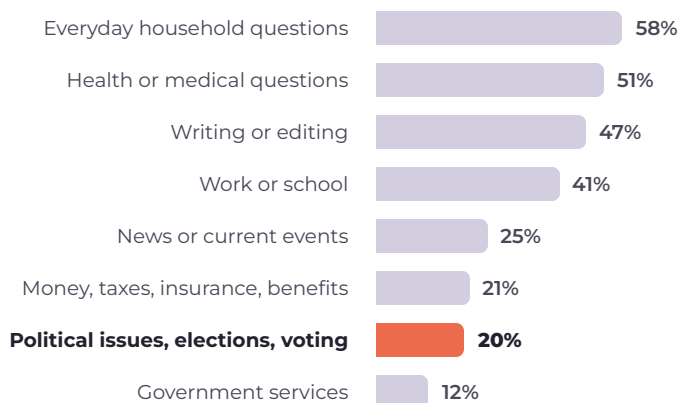
FINDING 01

Whether they like it or not, AI is part of voters' everyday lives

A quarter of voters (25%) use AI tools daily, and 61% use them at least a few times a month. Use is practical: household questions, health, writing, and work or school. Only a quarter of users turn to AI for news, and one in five for politics, elections, or voting. Most sessions are short. Seven in ten users ask one question or a few follow-ups.

Republicans and Democrats use AI tools at about the same rate, but they judge it differently. Republicans are split on whether AI does more good (30%) or more harm (34%). Democrats (54% more harm) and voters under 35 (59%) are the most negative.

What voters who use AI tools use them for



Q14. Among voters who use AI tools (n=919). Multiple responses allowed.

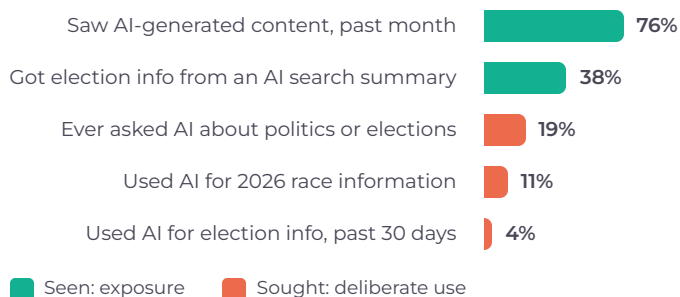
FINDING 02

Seen, not sought: voters get AI election information they never asked for

Deliberate use of AI for election information is rare. The bigger story is exposure. Three in four voters met AI-generated content in the past month, most often the summary at the top of search results (50%).

Half of those voters have used a search summary when looking up the election, candidates, or voting. That means **at least 38% of all voters** have received election information from AI through search summaries alone.

Share of all voters who...



Seen: exposure Sought: deliberate use

Q8, Q9, Q18, Q22, Q3. All voters (n=1,568). Search-summary figure is 50% of the 76% with ambient exposure, a minimum estimate.

53%

of these search-summary readers know the summary is AI-generated. Among seniors, **35%** do.

FINDING 03

Trust in AI-provided election information is lacking

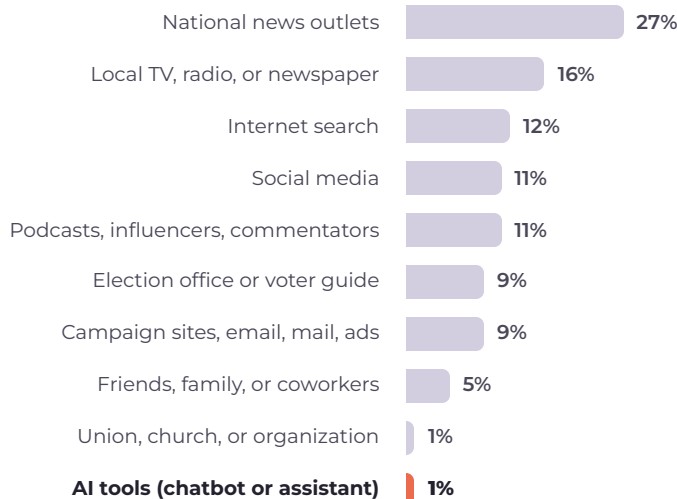
Nine in ten voters (90%) got election information from some source in the past 30 days. Asked which source they find most credible, just 1% chose AI tools, last on the list. National news outlets led.

The same holds for practical questions. For learning how and where to vote, and for deciding whom to vote for, 1% trust AI tools most. Election officials are the most trusted source on voting logistics.

4%

would believe an AI chatbot if it conflicted with a news organization and a search engine. 34% would believe the news organization.

Most credible source of election information



Q4. Among voters who got election information from at least one source (n=1,431).

FINDING 04

Concern about false and misleading information is significant

A 57% majority are concerned about AI tools spreading false or misleading information, second only to AI companies not being held accountable (59%). A 43% plurality call AI tools inaccurate on elections and voting; 25% call them accurate.

Experience does not ease the worry. Among the 19% who have used AI for election information, 57% are concerned about political bias in the answers. Among those who have not, 54% do not trust its accuracy and 42% worry about bias.

What voters think AI tools sometimes do when answering questions about politics or elections



Q40. All voters (n=1,568). Multiple responses allowed.

32%

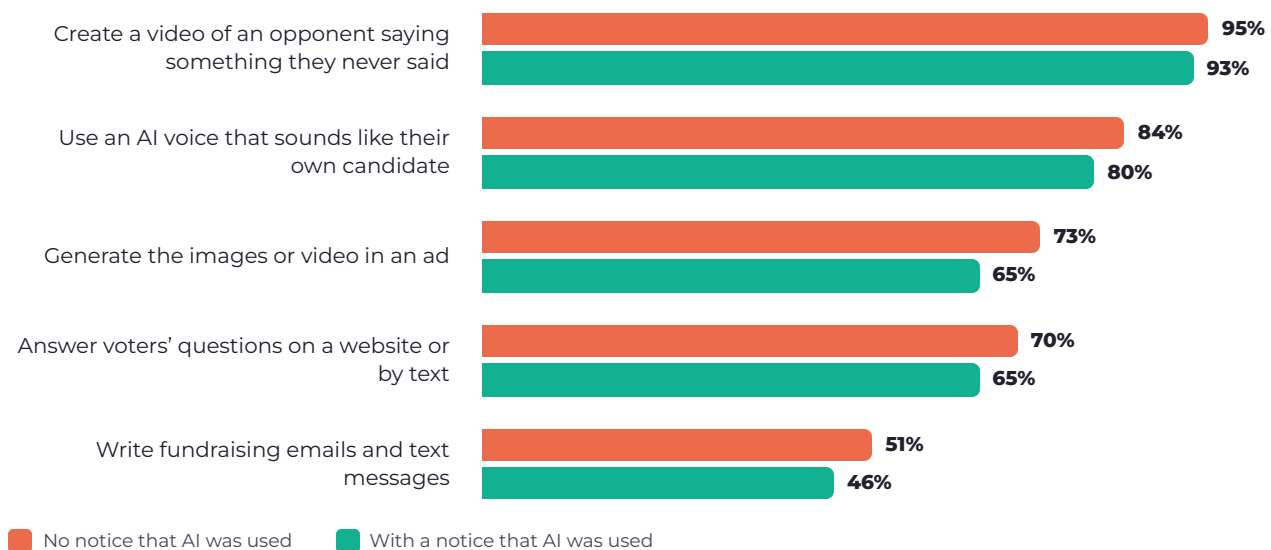
of voters who have used AI for election information say a tool has already given them wrong information.

FINDING 05

Voters reject most public-facing campaign uses of AI, and disclosure barely moves them

Half of voters accept AI writing fundraising emails and texts. Support falls sharply once AI speaks, appears, or answers for a campaign. Adding a notice that AI was used shifts opinion only a few points.

Unacceptable for a political campaign to use AI to...



Q27–Q36. Random split samples: no notice (n=757), with AI disclosure notice (n=811).

Deepfakes: voters fear for everyone else

66%

are **very concerned** deepfakes could change how **other people** vote.

33%

are **very concerned** deepfakes could change how **they** vote.

The gap matters for campaigns. Voters expect deepfakes to work on others, which means a damaging but genuine claim can be waved off as fake, and a real fake can travel far before it is caught. Both call for a plan made in advance.

Q41/Q42. Random split samples: about other people (n=754), about yourself (n=814).

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

What the findings mean for the people who shape elections

Voters say they rarely ask AI about elections, but AI is already answering for them. These lessons apply for the rest of the 2026 cycle and beyond.

FOR CAMPAIGNS AND POLITICAL CONSULTANTS

- **Watch what AI summaries say about you.** Ambient exposure is far broader than deliberate use. Check how AI overviews describe your candidate or issue, and know how to respond when they get it wrong.
- **Keep AI behind the scenes for now.** It may save money, but voters are wary. Over 90% reject deepfakes, and about half object even to AI-written fundraising emails and texts.
- **Do not count on disclosure.** Most voters call AI voice cloning and image creation unacceptable, even with a notice.
- **Plan for deepfakes and for accusations of them.** Have a response plan ready and practiced. When making a damaging claim against an opponent, expect it to be called fake and be ready to prove it is real.
- **Keep to the code.** The AAPC Code of Ethics states: "I will refrain from false or misleading attacks on an opponent." Voters agree.

FOR NEWS ORGANIZATIONS

- **Make verification visible.** When sources conflict, voters side with news organizations over search engines and chatbots by a wide margin. Showing how a claim or video was checked builds on that trust.
- **Cover where voters actually meet AI.** Public debate centers on chatbots and campaign ads. Far more voters encounter AI in search summaries.

FOR ELECTION OFFICIALS

- **Keep official voting information current and easy to find.** Election officials are the most trusted source on voting logistics, and AI summaries draw on what is published. Checking what summaries say about your jurisdiction is a low-cost safeguard.
- **Traditional sources still matter.** When voters doubt what they see, they turn to government election websites, regular search, and news outlets.

FOR RESEARCHERS AND POLLSTERS

- **Measure exposure separately from use.** Asking voters whether they use AI misses most of the contact, because the main point of contact is a search summary many do not think of as AI.
- **Ask about what voters see.** Recognition questions, such as showing respondents the summary itself, capture what self-reports miss.

METHODOLOGY

The AAPC Foundation AI Voter Study surveyed 1,568 likely 2026 general election voters nationwide. Interviews were conducted September 14–22, 2026, using a mixed-mode design of text-to-web and live telephone interviews.

Likely 2026 voters were identified using voter registration data and vote history. Results were weighted (raking) to targets for age, gender, race and ethnicity, education, urbanicity, census region, and party identification. Weighting efficiency is 83% (effective n = 1,295; design effect 1.21).

The design-adjusted margin of error is ± 2.7 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Margins for subgroups are larger. Questions on campaign uses of AI (Q27–Q36) and deepfakes (Q41–Q42) were asked of random split samples.

Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding or because respondents could choose more than one answer.

RESEARCH TEAM

Commissioned by the AAPC Foundation and conducted by a bipartisan research team: **Inquoro, Inc.**, **The Tarrance Group**, and **AMM Political Strategies**.

SUGGESTED CITATION

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ABOUT THE AAPC FOUNDATION

The AAPC Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit championing the right to political expression through research, education, and leadership development. All Foundation research is conducted by independent firms, and the Foundation retains sole editorial control over findings.

Findings from this study were first presented at the AAPC Foundation Forum, *Power, Politics & AI*, on October 5, 2026, in Washington, DC.

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