

Congressional candidate becomes the first in the world to use an AI robot to call voters

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Pennsylvania congressional candidate Shamaine Daniels has a new campaign staffer named Ashley who has made thousands of calls to voters.

There's one catch: Ashley isn't a real person.

Ashley is an artificial intelligence character, and the companies that developed her say Daniels' campaign is the first in the world to use AI-powered interactive campaign calls customized to each recipient.

The robot's creators say they will soon offer the technology to more [political candidates](#)—a move that could shake up campaigning by streamlining voter outreach but would also bring concerns about the potential for [ethical issues](#) and misinformation.

Daniels, a Democrat and three-term Harrisburg City Council member, said the AI tool makes it easier for candidates who don't get large donations to do [voter](#) outreach.

"It makes reaching voters much more affordable," she said. "It also makes you able to communicate with voters much earlier on in the process, as you're developing your policies, as you're thinking about issues."

But using AI to contact voters is "a really, really double-edged sword," said AI expert Wasim Khaled, CEO and co-founder of Blackbird.AI, which helps companies protect themselves from artificial intelligence.

Daniels is one of several Democratic primary candidates hoping to unseat U.S. Rep. Scott Perry, who represents Central Pennsylvania's 10th District, in 2024. Perry, a leader of the conservative Freedom Caucus and a longtime ally of former President Donald Trump, is seeking a seventh term. Daniels won the Democratic nomination but lost the general election to Perry in 2022.

Getting campaign calls from a robot

After weeks of testing, Daniels' campaign began making AI calls to likely Democratic primary voters last weekend, her spokesperson Joe

Bachman said.

Ashley has already made thousands of calls, according to Ilya Mouzykantskii, the cofounder of Civox, which made the tool in partnership with Conversation Labs.

The robot can answer questions about Daniels' platform. It speaks multiple languages and discloses that it's an AI tool and that the call is being recorded. The calls can help recruit volunteers and get donations and feedback that can direct campaign messaging.

If Ashley doesn't have the answer to a question, it gives an option for a real person to contact them, according to Daniels.

Daniels' campaign staffers can access transcripts of the conversations to identify common themes, Bachman said, and can read the conversations and reach out to the constituent afterward.

Mouzykantskii said he expects to take on more Democratic and progressive candidates as clients soon.

"At this point, we have far more demand than we have supply," Mouzykantskii said.

Ashley was developed specifically for Daniels' campaign, and other campaigns will have their own characters.

While Daniels and the companies that created Ashley emphasized the affordability of the technology, neither would disclose how much the tool costs.

"We are significantly less expensive than human-paid phone bankers and we are more expensive than making dumb robocalls," Mouzykantskii

said.

Concerns over the use of AI as a campaign caller

Daniels said she and Civox both want to use AI "as more of a democratizing tool rather than a disinformation tool or a [tool](#) for other nefarious reasons."

Mistakes are inevitable, but Ashley keeps a record of why each decision was made throughout its conversations to help developers understand mishaps, Mouzykantskii said.

Tools like Ashley learn and improve as they're used. And as AI technology has rapidly developed, regulations lag behind, causing concerns surrounding misinformation and privacy.

Daniels acknowledged the potential dangers of artificial intelligence.

"We have to make sure that we are promoting responsible use because, whether I use it or someone else uses it, the technology is here, it's going to be used broadly, and we can either wait for my Congressman Scott Perry to develop ethical frameworks for dealing with AI or we can go ahead and do it ourselves," she said, "and hopefully make sure that voters are starting to familiarize themselves with the technology so that way they are not taken advantage of."

Khaled, of Blackbird.AI, said the technology has value if used by good actors, but also great potential for harm.

Even when developers train the model on what to talk about or avoid, it's impossible to think of all the cases that could come up and be immune to hacker groups who want to make a [campaign](#) look bad, Khaled said.

Khaled said that it's important for people to keep in mind that AI gives the "most probable answer to the sequence of words that you gave it," that is "likely to be approximately correct." It doesn't reason and think, similar to Google's auto-fill guessing the rest of your search when you start typing, he said.

"There is just a huge potential for getting this kind of thing wrong because everything is moving so quickly," Khaled said. "And there is an arms race right now for campaigns spending money to get their candidates the most exposure."

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