ACTIVATING LESSON SCENARIO
developed as part of the project

'INNOVATIONS IN SCHOOL EDUCATION'

TOPIC
Fake News in Politics – When Lies Change Democracy. The Impact of Disinformation on Elections, Political Campaigns, and Public Opinion.

1. Lesson Objectives

The student:

- Understands what political fake news is and how it differs from ordinary false information.
- Can explain how disinformation can affect elections and political campaigns.
- Learns examples of propaganda and manipulative activities in politics in Europe and worldwide.
- Learns to critically analyse political news and recognise manipulation.
- Develops the attitude of a conscious citizen who verifies information sources.

2. Target Group

Primary school students

3. Teaching Methods

- Brainstorming
- Mini-lecture with presentation
- Group work with case cards
- Analysis of real examples of political fake news
- Guided discussion
- Individual reflection

4. Teaching Aids / Sources

- Blackboard / flipchart or projector
- Set of political fake news headlines or excerpts (printouts or presentation)
- Infographic: *"The Cycle of Political Fake News"*

- Access to fact-checking websites (Demagog.org.pl, EUvsDisinfo, Manipulátoři.cz, Demagog.sk, StopFake.org – Ukraine)
- Coloured reflection cards

5. Lesson Plan (45 minutes)

1. Introduction – Do Politicians Always Tell the Truth? (5 min)

- Brainstorming: students share associations with the phrase *"lying in politics"*.
- Guiding questions:
    o Do false statements occur in politics?
    o Why can lying be a "political tool"?
    o Can fake news change election results?

Substantive Information

In politics, fake news is not random mistakes or innocent slips. Very often, it is a tool of influence deliberately used to change voters' decisions, weaken opponents, create fear, or cause social divisions. They can have a real impact on election campaigns, trust in state institutions, and even the election outcome.

Why does this happen?

- Politics relies on public support – the more people believe in a candidate or party, the more likely they are to win. Some actors use manipulation to gain votes or damage an opponent.
- False information spreads quickly – especially online and on social media. A single sensational headline can reach hundreds of thousands of people within hours before anyone can fact-check it.
- Emotions influence voting decisions – news that provokes fear, anger, or outrage often leads people to decide based on feelings rather than facts.

Types of Political Fake News:

- **Attacks on opponents** – e.g., fabricated scandals, false quotes, manipulated photos or videos (deepfakes) to damage a candidate's or party's reputation.
- **False promises or "revelations"** – untrue information about political plans, programmes, or poll results to influence elections.
- **External disinformation** – campaigns run by foreign groups or states to weaken democracy and create chaos in another country.

Why is this a threat to democracy?

- Democracy works well only when citizens make decisions based on facts – if they vote based on lies, election results may not reflect their true interests.

- False news undermines trust in media, politicians, state institutions, and the electoral system.
- It causes social polarisation – dividing people into "us" and "them" makes dialogue and political cooperation more difficult.

Examples from Europe and the world:

- During election campaigns in various countries, there have been false reports about alleged crimes committed by candidates, which never took place.
- In some elections, fabricated information about vote rigging or threats from refugees was spread to influence voters' emotions.
- In certain European countries, foreign "troll factories" were detected, aiming to stir up social conflict before elections.

2. Mini-Lecture: Political Fake News and Its Effects (10 min)

Goal:
To provide students with basic knowledge on how political fake news is created, what forms it can take, who creates it, why, and what effects it may have on democracy and society.

1. Types of Political Fake News
The teacher explains that political fake news can take many forms, all with the same goal – to influence how we think and vote, often without us realising.

- **False quotes attributed to politicians** – made-up statements or real quotes taken out of context to provoke outrage or ridicule.
- **Manipulated photos or videos (deepfakes)** – content showing a politician in situations that never happened; deepfakes may add someone's voice or face into a fake video that looks very realistic.
- **False data about candidates or election results** – publishing fake polls, fabricated scandals, accusations, or statistics to sway voters' decisions.
- **Conspiracy theories about "secret plans" of parties or governments** – stories without evidence portraying politicians as participants in hidden plots to harm citizens.
- **False information about social threats** – e.g., sensational claims about bringing in dangerous refugees, banning certain rights, designed to incite fear.
- **Manipulative memes and slogans** – emotional, simplified images or phrases that spread quickly online, often based on lies or half-truths.

2. Purposes of Political Fake News
Creators of political false information plan their messages to achieve specific effects:

- **Gaining voter support** – spreading untrue information favourable to one candidate or party to make them look better.
- **Discrediting political opponents** – destroying the competition's reputation through accusations of scandals, treason, illegal actions, or immoral behaviour.

- **Stirring fear or hostility towards specific social groups** – e.g., immigrants, ethnic or religious minorities, to manipulate voters' emotions.
- **Discouraging citizens from voting** – publishing false reports about "electoral fraud" so people believe voting is pointless.
- **Shaping public opinion in the long term** – repeating false narratives for months or years until they become "commonly accepted truth".
- **International manipulation** – actions by foreign states to weaken democracy through information chaos, deepening political divisions, or undermining trust in institutions.

3. Consequences for Democracy

Political fake news is not just gossip – it can change a country's course. Its effects can be serious and long-lasting:

- **Voter decisions based on lies** – when people vote based on falsehoods, the election outcome is distorted.
- **Loss of trust in politicians, institutions, and media** – repeated lies erode faith in the political system and journalism.
- **Social divisions and conflicts** – fake news often splits society into hostile camps, making cooperation harder.
- **Manipulation by foreign states or interest groups** – some disinformation campaigns are coordinated from abroad to influence domestic politics.
- **Permanent distortion of public debate** – repeated lies are taken as facts, while real information is ignored.
- **Weakening democracy itself** – when people stop believing elections are fair, the system loses legitimacy.

3. Group Exercise – "Who Benefits from This Fake News?" (15 min)

Exercise goals

- Make students aware that political fake news is created deliberately to serve someone's interests.
- Teach analysis of political messaging in terms of sender, purpose, emotions, and social effects.
- Develop teamwork, argumentation, and critical thinking skills.

Exercise procedure – step by step

1. **Group division:** The class splits into 4–6 groups of 3–5 students.
2. **Distribute materials:** Each group receives a card with an example of a political fake news item (fictional but realistic). This may be a printed headline, a short social media post, a meme, or an article excerpt.
3. **Task instructions:**
   Groups analyse the message by answering:
   - **Who** might have created this information?

- o **What** was the author's goal?
- o **What emotions** does this message evoke in readers?
- o **What short-term and long-term social effects** could the spread of this information have?
4. **Work time:** 8–10 minutes for group discussion and writing down bullet-point conclusions.
5. **Presentation of results:** Each group presents its conclusions in 2–3 minutes.
6. **Teacher's wrap-up:** A brief discussion of common findings, emphasising that fake news is created so that someone gains while someone else loses.

Sample cards for the exercise
Each card may include:

- **Headline** (false information)
- **Short description of the situation** (context – where the message appeared, who is sharing it).

Card 1:
Headline: "Party X plans to take free textbooks away from all students – secret document revealed!"
Description: A social media post with a sensational image of an alleged document, with no source or verification.

Card 2:
Headline: "Candidate Y met with foreign agents – photos leaked online!"
Description: Several photos circulating on the internet, no information about time and place, repeated by anonymous accounts.

Card 3:
Headline: "The election was rigged – we have proof of result manipulation!"
Description: A video circulating in messaging apps; author unknown; no data confirming the material's authenticity.

Card 4:
Headline: "A group of refugees plans to take over our country – politicians are hiding it!"
Description: An article on an unknown website, replicated across many discussion groups, causing panic and hostility.

Card 5:
Headline: "The ruling party secretly wants to sell state forests to foreign companies!"
Description: A chain message in mobile apps; no sources; references to an "anonymous insider."

Card 6:
Headline: "Candidate Z's campaign is buying votes in small towns – residents reveal

details!"

Description: A rumour on a local internet forum; quotes with no names; repeated by several anonymous accounts.

Guiding questions for groups

- Is it clear who authored this information?
- Who could benefit if people believe it?
- Are strong emotions used (fear, anger, outrage, pity)?
- Is the message clearly aimed **against** someone specific?
- How could this message affect the election outcome or trust in state institutions?

Options for summarising group work

- **Conclusions board:** The teacher draws a table with columns "Who benefits?", "Purpose", "Emotions", "Social effects". Each group adds its answers.
- **Risk ranking:** Students vote on which fake news example could have the greatest impact on elections or democracy — and justify their choice.
- **Final reflection:** "What surprised us most today in analysing political fake news?"

4. Discussion – Can Fake News Change an Election Result? (10 min)

Form: Guided class discussion

Purpose of the discussion:
To help students understand that fake news in politics can influence real-life decisions, such as how people vote, their trust in institutions, or their views on social groups.

Discussion procedure
The teacher facilitates an open conversation, ensuring every student who wishes to speak has the chance to do so.
The discussion may be conducted in a circle to encourage equal participation.

Sample questions for students:

1. Do you think a single fake news item can influence an election result? Why or why not?
2. How could a large number of similar fake news stories influence people's decisions?
3. Why might some voters believe fake news without verifying it?
4. How might fake news affect young people who are just starting to participate in elections?

5. Is it easy to change someone's mind if they have already believed in political fake news? Why?

Key points for the teacher to highlight during or after the discussion:

- **Cumulative effect:** One piece of fake news may not change much, but dozens or hundreds of similar messages can shape public opinion over time.
- **Targeting emotions:** Fake news often aims at fear, anger, or hope — strong emotions that can influence voting behaviour.
- **Information bubbles:** People tend to see content that matches their existing views, which reinforces their beliefs (confirmation bias).
- **Impact on trust:** Even if fake news is later debunked, it can still leave doubts in people's minds, weakening trust in candidates, parties, or democratic institutions.
- **Difficulty of correction:** Once false information has spread widely, correcting it takes more effort and may never fully reverse the damage.

Teacher's conclusion:
Fake news in politics is not just an online joke or an innocent rumour. It can influence public life, affect political stability, and shape the decisions of entire communities. Understanding this is the first step toward responsible participation in democracy.

5. Summary and Reflection (5 min)

Form: Individual work

Procedure:
The teacher hands out small slips of paper or asks students to write in their notebooks a short reflection after the lesson.
Students choose and complete one of the following sentences:

- *"The most important thing I learned today is…"*
- *"From now on, before sharing information I will check…"*
- *"I was surprised that political fake news can…"*
- *"I realised that emotions in political news can…"*
- *"In the future I will try to…"*

Willing students read their sentences aloud (or the teacher may select a few to read anonymously if collected earlier).
Students can also post their reflections on a "knowledge board" (e.g., a flipchart or wall), which will remain in the classroom.

Extended teacher's summary (key conclusions):
Fake news in politics is a serious issue — it can influence our thinking, voting decisions, and trust in institutions. Even a single false story can change people's attitudes, especially if it is repeated and spread widely.

It is important to remember that emotions can be a tool of manipulation, and we are all responsible for what we share online.
In a democracy, the power lies in informed citizens — and this means developing the ability to:

- verify sources,
- question suspicious information,
- think critically before reacting emotionally.

Glossary – Political Fake News and Disinformation

Term	Definition
Fake news	False or manipulated information presented as if it were a genuine news story. In politics, it is often aimed at influencing public opinion or damaging the reputation of a candidate or party.
Disinformation	The deliberate spread of false, partial, or manipulated information to influence audiences. In a political context, it may be used to gain votes, weaken opponents, or destabilise public trust.
Clickbait	An emotional, exaggerated headline designed to grab attention and encourage clicks, regardless of the truthfulness of the content.
Deepfake	Fake video or audio content created using artificial intelligence, imitating someone's speech or behaviour. In politics, it may be used to discredit or impersonate public figures.
Fact-checking	The process of verifying facts and the truthfulness of information by independent organisations or platforms. In politics, it helps identify false or misleading statements by politicians or media.
Information bubble	A situation in which a person is mainly exposed to content that matches their existing views, limiting contact with diverse perspectives and reinforcing their current beliefs.
Confirmation bias	The tendency to believe information that supports one's existing views and to ignore information that contradicts them. This phenomenon helps political fake news spread more easily.

TEACHER'S METHODOLOGICAL GUIDE

(supports the implementation of the lesson plan and allows adaptation for different groups)

General lesson objectives

- Develop digital and media literacy skills.
- Strengthen critical thinking abilities.

- Raise awareness of the threats posed by political disinformation and the impact of emotions on how information is received.

Adapting to the target age group (14–18 years)

- Use examples relevant to older students — include political news stories from national and international contexts, but avoid current internal political disputes to prevent polarisation in the classroom.
- Students in this age group are often more aware of political processes and may already have formed opinions — encourage them to analyse content from multiple perspectives.
- Provide them with opportunities to explore fact-checking tools independently.

Methodological tips – how to run the lesson

Introduction:

- Start with well-known concepts (e.g., news portals, political ads, social media posts about elections).
- Use a short brainstorming session to assess what students already know.

Group work:

- Select headlines that are realistic but not offensive.
- Make sure each group has at least one student who can use a search engine effectively.

Discussion:

- Moderate the conversation to keep it respectful and fact-based.
- When students disagree, ask *"What evidence supports your opinion?"* instead of evaluating their views yourself.
- Highlight that even experienced adults and journalists can be deceived by well-made political fake news.

Reflection:

- End the lesson with a constructive message: students have the ability to influence what circulates online by making responsible choices about what they share.

Materials to prepare / use

- Infographics: *"Life cycle of a political fake news story"*, *"5 questions to ask before sharing political information"*.
- Sets of political headlines for analysis – adapted to the language and political culture of the group.

- List of fact-checking websites (national and international).
- An interactive quiz or game (Kahoot, Wordwall) to consolidate knowledge.
- Small cards or sticky notes for reflections and for creating a classroom "knowledge board".

Possible extensions / additional tasks

- **Homework:** Find a political article/news item and check its accuracy using reliable sources.
- **Class project:** Create a joint poster of "10 Rules for Spotting Political Fake News".
- **Mini-drama:** Act out a short scene "A voter receives political news – true or false?".

Scientific and educational sources (international and EU)

- **EDMO – European Digital Media Observatory**
  https://edmo.eu
  – Source of knowledge about disinformation mechanisms, European fact-checking collaboration, and media literacy education.
- **EUvsDisinfo – project of the European External Action Service**
  https://euvsdisinfo.eu
  – Database of analysed fake news stories, typology of disinformation, educational tools, and campaigns countering false information.
- **UNESCO – "Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teachers"**
  https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000192971
  – Definitions and global context of fake news, deepfakes, algorithms, and information bubbles.

National fact-checking and educational sources

- **Poland – Demagog.org.pl** – Largest Polish fact-checking portal
  https://demagog.org.pl
  – Definitions: fake news, disinformation, clickbait, fact-checking; analyses of specific cases.
- **Poland – Konkret24** – TVN24 verification newsroom
  https://konkret24.tvn24.pl
  – Analyses of misleading information, including in the fields of politics, health, and science.
- **Czech Republic – Manipulátoři.cz**
  https://manipulatori.cz
  – Educational-analytical portal specialising in detecting manipulation, conspiracy theories, and disinformation.
- **Czech Republic – Demagog.cz / Slovakia – Demagog.sk**
  https://demagog.cz / https://demagog.sk
  – Verification of politicians' statements and media news in Czechia and Slovakia.

- **Slovakia – Infosecurity.sk – Institute for Security Policy**
  https://infosecurity.sk
  – Analyses of disinformation in Slovakia and the Central and Eastern European region, including reports on youth and fake news.