

Panel 31. AI & Democracy: A discourse demanding plurality

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Keywords: AI-enhanced democracy, Democratic engagement, Mediated participation, Public discourse, Sociopolitical implications

Context. In the contemporary technoscientific arena, the rapid development and integration of digital technologies such as AI, data analytics, and automation present a paradox of progress and peril. These technologies herald transformative potential for societal advancement yet provoke substantial fears concerning their impacts. They shape new public spheres and redefine democratic engagement, but also challenge the frameworks sustaining democratic societies. The emergence of genAI illustrates this dichotomy, presenting profound capabilities whose impacts on democracy are yet to be fully realised.

Challenge. AI promises to bolster democratic processes by enhancing the accessibility, dissemination, graspability and digestibility of information, potentially leading to more informed citizenry and participatory engagement. AI-enhanced tools can facilitate the aggregation of public opinion, streamline decision-making, and offer new modalities for citizen interaction with governments and institutions. However, the very attributes that make AI a boon for democratic processes also render it a potential threat, risking to undermine the very foundation of democratic societies. The erosion of public discourse through the proliferation of disinformation, the rise of algorithmic intermediaries that obscure transparency, and the opaque nature of algorithmic decision-making processes pose significant risks. Furthermore, the pervasive integration of AI in digital platforms can subtly shape political behaviours and opinions through mechanisms that prioritise engagement over accuracy, often amplifying sensationalist or divisive content.

Objective. This dual nature of AI places it at the heart of a critical discourse on the future of democracy. This panel engages with these themes, exploring how AI can both bolster and undermine democratic values and processes. It aims to bring a multitude of voices to the stage to represent a spectrum of disciplines. It invites contributions from philosophy of technology, sociology, democratic theory, AI engineering, and the design of democratic practices and tools, aiming to challenge the status quo and enrich the discourse, critically evaluate the ethical implications and practical applications of AI in democratic contexts.

Format. The panel welcomes contributions addressing two specific questions that will be discussed individually: (1) AI impacts on democratic processes; (2) Envisioning the future of AI-enhanced democracy. Experts from theoretical and practical spheres are encouraged to submit their proposals, as we aim at a panel that bridges gaps between theory and application, ultimately contributing to a more informed and thoughtful view on how to implement AI technologies in democratic settings. This format is designed to foster a series of comprehensive and enriching conversations, facilitating a robust debate that deeply explores the nuances and complexities of the topic.

Publication. This panel is the starting point for an international publication on the topic of AI and democracy, specifically in the form of an edited volume featuring contributions from the speakers. This book aims to expand the dialogue initiated during the panel and provide a lasting resource on the topic.



ID 165 - Framing Democracy in the AI Era: Media, Privacy, and Ethical Governance

Federica Fornaciari, National University, San Diego

Keywords: AI ethics, privacy, democratic engagement, framing, technological sublime.

What happens when the tools we create to solve problems begin to redefine the problems themselves? This presentation investigates the research question: How do media frames shape public understanding of the challenges and opportunities emerging in the AI era? The study uses critical discourse analysis (van Dijk, 2015; 2023) to explore how media narratives emerge and their potential to influence public opinion on privacy, governance, and societal inequalities.

Integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into societal landscapes can reshape public discourse, privacy, and citizen engagement, driving structural transformations that illuminate the complex interplay between AI, democratisation, and autocratisation. Research shows that AI-driven transformations can restructure political power, alter citizen-state dynamics through hyper-personalisation, deepen polarisation and apathy, and intensify global competition between democratic and authoritarian regimes over technological capabilities and governance norms (Cupać, Schopmans, & Tuncer-Ebetürk, 2024). Building on these premises, this presentation examines AI's dual role in enhancing participatory governance while exacerbating privacy commodification and societal inequalities. Drawing on longitudinal research into privacy in media narratives (Author, 2018; Author, 2024) and sociopolitical contexts, it critically assesses the ethical and democratic challenges posed by AI's rapid development, investigating how these issues are framed in media coverage.

Media narratives have historically shifted from framing privacy as a fundamental right to portraying it as a transactional commodity (Author, 2018; Campbell & Carlson, 2002; Fried, 1990; Moor, 1997; Warren & Brandeis, 1890). This commodification reflects an individualistic, interest-based perspective on privacy, reducing personal data to a quasi-economic asset (Allmer, 2011; Gavison, 1980). AI accelerates these trends, enabling large-scale data aggregation, predictive analytics, and behavioral targeting. The resulting erosion of privacy is compounded by AI's ability to shape public opinion through algorithmically curated content that often prioritizes engagement over accuracy. How are media narratives framing these evolving challenges?

Through the lens of the "Technological Sublime" (Nye, 1994), this presentation explores society's simultaneous awe and unease toward AI. This duality mirrors broader cultural narratives, where technological advances inspire optimism about progress and fears about their implications for autonomy, equality, and democracy. Technologies such as deepfakes and algorithm-driven misinformation further erode public trust, highlighting the urgent need for robust media literacy initiatives and regulatory safeguards (Chesney & Citron, 2019; Diakopoulos & Johnson, 2021; Meskys et al., 2020).

The presentation underscores the need to renegotiate ethical frameworks to address the challenges posed by evolving technoscientific landscapes. It advocates for a multidisciplinary approach—drawing on sociology, media studies, and AI ethics—that prioritizes transparency, accountability, and the intrinsic value of privacy as pillars of democratic resilience (Allmer, 2011; Gavison, 1980; Warren & Brandeis, 1890). Emphasizing the importance of balancing AI innovation with ethical governance, inclusive design, and systemic bias mitigation, the presentation highlights strategies to ensure AI serves as a tool for democratic empowerment rather than control. By situating the commodification of privacy within broader socio-political shifts, this work contributes to critical discussions on privacy, AI ethics, and democracy. It calls for reimagining privacy not as a transactional commodity but as a collective right essential to sustaining democratic engagement in the AI era.



13 JUNE 2025 09.00 - 11.00

SESSION 1

ID 624 - Journalism and AI: an ethnographic study of negotiating practices in knowledge production

Marco Rosichini, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore di Milano

Keywords: Algorithmic gatekeeping, Knowledge production, Journalistic ethics, Democratic implications, Ethnography

AI is fundamentally reshaping the timing and production practices involved in newsmaking, challenging the traditional role of journalists as intermediaries and gatekeepers of information. This shift has significant implications for democracy and citizen activism. The emergence of algorithmic gatekeeping alongside traditional practices raises critical questions: while such systems may enhance the accuracy and diversity of news, they also risk reproducing social inequalities and biases. This, in turn, threatens journalism's normative role as a facilitator of public knowledge.

Informed by Anthony Giddens's structuration theory, this research project investigates the recursive relationship between human and machine agency, exploring how journalists negotiate, resist, and adapt to AI tools in their daily workflows. Using an ethnographic approach, the study involves participant observation in two newsrooms based in Milan, selected for their openness to algorithmic tools, engagement with AI ethics research, and editorial orientation. Semi-structured interviews, conducted through theoretical sampling, and digital media diaries further capture journalists' reflexive interactions with AI systems. The findings are expected to highlight journalists as active agents, demonstrating their ability to negotiate and influence AI systems in ways that uphold journalistic ethics and autonomy.

Since the ethnographic research will only commence in February 2025, this contribution focuses on the study's theoretical framework and methodological design, providing preliminary reflections about the dual role of journalistic gatekeeping. The research aims to deconstruct how journalistic practices mediated by AI can either empower or constrain citizens' access to public knowledge, ultimately shaping the dynamics of democratic oversight, inclusion and participation.

13 JUNE 2025 09.00 - 11.00

SESSION 1

ID 771 - Designing for Democracy. Recommender Systems as a Challenge for Digitalized Democracies

Nikolaus Poehhacker, Universität Graz

Keywords: AI, Recommender Systems, Democracy, Publics, Discourse

Can a recommender system be democratic? And how can we understand such algorithms not only as technical, but also as social and political phenomena? Based on two projects on machine learning driven recommender systems I raise questions not only about organisational and technical implementation, but also about the possible compatibility of such an algorithmic system with democratic societies. The first project provides ethnographic insights on the development of a recommender system in a public broadcaster (Poehhacker, 2024) the second on conceptual questions about social media recommender systems for good (Lasser, 2024).

Public broadcasting is a central element of democracies (Jauert & Lowe, 2005). By distributing a broad and diverse compilation of news on political, social, and cultural events and debates, public broadcasting enables the citizens to make informed decisions and involve themselves in public debates. By doing so, public broadcasters fulfill their constitutional obligation, e.g. as defined in Art. 5 of the German constitution (Grassmuck, 2014). At the same time, the viewing habits of the citizens have changed and recommender systems are an integral part of the new media ecosystem. This creates a tension, as recommender systems are detrimental to the idea of a "diverse information diet" (Helberger, 2015). To the contrary, they are made to filter information out and provide information that matches the users' viewing patterns. Public



broadcasters are now facing the issue that they need and want to implement recommender systems, but need them to operate in a different way. At the same time, recommender systems on social media sites are built to bind users on the platform and favor emotional and extreme posts over more rational and toned-down ones. This has a detrimental effect on democratic discourse and some scholars argue that this leads to increased polarisation of the digital discourse (Stray et al., 2022). There are some efforts to build recommender systems "for good" (Helberger, 2011; Harambam et al., 2018; Poehhacker et al., 2018), but they are raising the question how we define good and more importantly, how we can root such an algorithmic design in a socio-technical theory of contemporary democracy and build recommender systems that are compatible with democratic ideals.

Based on the two outlined research projects I discuss the challenges of translating broad, ambiguous, and processual notions of democratic discourse and democracy into algorithmic design and how recommender systems challenge traditional conceptions of the public sphere. I will also touch on the question, how the formalisation of these otherwise discursively negotiated concepts, such as diversity in information provision, might create a need for modes of intervention in the changing institutionalisation of digital democracy.

13 JUNE 2025 09.00 - 11.00

SESSION 1

ID 339 - (Dis)empowering AI? Power Dynamics in AI-Based Citizen Participation Projects

Francesco Nasi, Università di Bologna

Keywords: artificial intelligence, democracy, democratic empowerment, power, citizen engagement,

Citizens' widespread feeling of political alienation, and especially of political powerlessness, is one of the main challenges liberal democracies are facing. This refers to the perception that ordinary people's voices have no influence and that their actions cannot effect change in the political landscape. Recently, one proposed solution (or, at least, mitigation) to this issue has been the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in citizen engagement and participatory processes. AI for democratic participation is often viewed as a means to address democratic malaise by bridging the gap between citizens and institutions. It can be incorporated into democratic practices in various ways, such as analyzing crowdsourced citizens' opinions, facilitating deliberative discussions, and generating consensus on public policy issues. While some research has explored the technical aspects of these initiatives, focusing on developing tools for new forms of citizen participation, there is a significant gap in understanding these phenomena as social processes. This approach would move beyond technical considerations to examine the imaginaries, meanings, and power dynamics associated with the use of these technologies in participatory processes, attempting to understand if the use of these tools will be able to foster democratic empowerment.

Democratic empowerment is far from a straightforward process, though. As scholars such as Clarissa R. Hayward and Barbara Cruikshank have argued, any empowerment process necessitates the existence of a power structure that both limits and enables specific areas of action. For example, in deliberative processes where AI is used as a facilitator, authority must be partially delegated to the algorithm. Similarly, while AI-driven crowdsourcing amplifies individual voices, it also confines participation to specific frameworks and topics. The issue of empowerment and disempowerment is particularly relevant in light of existing discussions about the power of algorithms and the complex power dynamics involved in AI use and production, as critical data scholars suggested in their research.

This work explores the dual role of AI technologies in both empowering and disempowering citizens within participatory projects. By relying on the literature on power and democratic innovations, I developed a framework for analyzing power in AI-based participatory process. I use this framework for comparing different uses of AI for citizen engagement, aiming to understand how power dynamics are negotiated within these initiatives and how they contribute to citizens' empowerment.



13 JUNE 2025 09.00 - 11.00

SESSION 1

ID 698 - Imperfectum Prototyping and Democratic AI Design: beyond technocentric solutions

Chiara Poletti, Swansea University

Ginevra Terenghi, Brunel University

Beatrice Gobbo, Politecnico di Milano

Keywords: Imperfectum Prototyping, Democratic AI Governance, Participatory Design, Deliberative Technology

On 13 January 2025, the UK Labour party unveiled a new AI plan aimed at positioning the UK as a global leader in technology, vowing to "mainline AI into the nation's veins" to revolutionise and rescue the country's weakened public services (UK Government, 2024). This reflects a broader trend in political justifications for AI's integration into democratic processes, often shaped by AI epochalism (Leslie, 2022): a technocentric, presentist perspective that portrays AI as uniquely transformative while overlooking its socio-historical contexts. However, a tradition of research started with big data and platforms (Gillespie et al., 2020), has demonstrated that these political views often ignore the inherent uncertainty, inequity and unaccountability of AI-driven governance (Eubanks, 2018; Dencik et al. 2018).

This paper introduces the concept of imperfectum prototyping as an alternative approach to AI integration in society, borrowed from design approaches (Gobbo et al. forthcoming). Imperfectum prototyping argues that AI integration in democratic settings should be treated as an evolving, contestable process rather than a fixed technical solution. It builds on participatory design traditions (Delgado, 2023; Gourlet et al., 2024) to conceptualise AI not as a finished system but as an iterative, open-ended democratic experiment (Gobbo et al. forthcoming; Marres et al. 2024). Through participatory design methodologies, we are interested in co-creating AI governance frameworks where citizens, policymakers, and technologists can collectively shape the governance of AI systems in ways that remain open to revision and contestation. By foregrounding democratic deliberation, pluralism, and reflexivity in the adoption and implementation of AI systems in democratic societies, this contribution aims to stimulate a discussion on concepts that counteract top-down, technocentric approaches to AI governance models.

13 JUNE 2025 09.00 - 11.00

SESSION 1

ID 772 - YouTube – a space for discussion or a tool for polarisation? The case of films starring Volodymyr Zelensky

Ilona Dabrowska, Uniwersytet Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej

Keywords: online discourse, mediated participation, social media, polarisation, bots and troll farms.

Political polarisation is an important phenomenon in today's democratic society. Understanding the degree of hermeticity of various environments allows us to determine the extent to which society is willing to discuss and seek common solutions. Modern social media is an area of operation of algorithms that lock Internet users in information bubbles. YouTube is one of the most important pillars of contemporary culture and metaculture. There are many options on this website that allow users to express their opinions - also on ideological or political topics. However, more and more often, the comments published there include the voices of not only real people, but also bots.

The aim of my presentation is to present the nature and specificity of comments posted in selected audiovisual materials presenting the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky, published on the Polish version of YouTube, and to try to answer questions about the occurrence and scale of polarisation in this area. The study used the case study method and content analysis. The scientific reflection aims to show the scale and nature of comments published on the Internet in the context of events related to Russia's armed attack on Ukraine, as well as to analyse the language used by YouTube users when posting comments.



The study covered 650 comments published on YouTube over twelve months - from May 2023 to May 2024. All collected comments were subjected to quantitative and qualitative analysis. The comments are described in terms of thematic scope. The indicated goal will be achieved by answering the following research questions: (1) Is there a clear polarisation of opinions in Internet users' comments published under selected films? Additionally: (2) Which of the comments included in the study constitute the largest percentage? (3) What are the characteristics of the comments included in the study? (4) Are comments posted by bots visible, and if so, what are their characteristics?

The study showed a clear division between pro- and anti-Ukrainian posts, with 51% of comments expressing criticism of Ukraine compared to 49% of comments expressing support. The comments included in the study include brutalisation and vulgarisation of language, as well as hate speech, which is often directed towards Ukrainian citizens. You can also see content that may have been generated by bots or internet troll farms. Thus, the discussions become specific - they intertwine the voices of real people with entries made "on request". Additionally, failure to remove comments containing hate speech means that this practice is becoming more and more common. The structure of modern social networking sites and the possibilities of conducting discussions on the Internet favor short exchanges of opinions, in which the more aggressive user usually wins the polemic - and this user more and more often turns out to be a "ghost" - an Internet user behind whom there is a computer system or a specific order.



ID 744 - Social justice implies a plurality of technologies that preserves the contingency of future

Teresa Numerico, Università Roma Tre

Keywords: Social Justice, pluralism, Algorithmic interpretation, decision-making procedures, discretionality of rule-following practices

Automated procedures rely on structured sets of instructions that render associated actions both predictable and inevitable. This approach seeks to transform complex tasks into computable operations, facilitating clearer anticipation and comprehension of their logic. Automation is often regarded as a means to reduce subjective discretion and mitigate the risk of discriminatory bias, particularly in decision-making processes that affect individual rights and opportunities, such as welfare distribution, loan assessments, hiring practices, recidivism risk evaluations, and insurance premium determinations (Numerico 2021).

For automation to function effectively, several foundational activities must be undertaken to establish the standards that guide various aspects of the process. Key elements requiring careful evaluation include: the formalized, quantifiable representation of the problem to be solved; the objective function that defines the optimisation criteria; the dataset used for machine training; the algorithms and latent spaces employed to predict future data patterns; and the similarity function used to align training data with the specific problem at hand (Hildebrandt 2021). These elements are neither purely objective nor strictly rationally definable; rather, they involve discretionary and variable choices (Arrow 2012). Automated systems shape the organisation of pattern research via algorithmic interpretation, that functions as an opaque decision-making entity, shaping interactions in ways that are not purely mathematical but rather the result of a series of undisclosed, discretionary choices (Longo 2023).

Lorraine Daston's *Rules* (2022), drawing on Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1953), underscores that following a rule inherently requires interpretation. Likewise, in machine learning applications, the pre-definition of numerous variables is a prerequisite for making predictions. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun's *Discriminating Data* (2021) highlights how algorithms cluster individuals based on correlated traits, often disregarding the historical and systemic factors underpinning these traits.

This analysis highlights the necessity of a situated, context-sensitive approach to judgment – one that ensures accountability, particularly when automated decisions shape individuals' futures and influence their ability to reclaim their rights. To uphold democratic principles, equity, and social justice, it is crucial to recognize the inherent power dynamics and positionality embedded in every decision. A genuinely democratic decision-making process must embrace a plurality of perspectives and intersectional subjectivities, rather than relying on ostensibly neutral computational methods. True justice demands politically accountable, negotiated choices rather than the illusion of objectivity provided by probabilistic and statistical models. The reliance on artificial intelligence as a universalistic decision-making framework risks reinforcing systemic biases and undermining the democratic imperative for transparency and responsibility.

Ultimately, decisions affecting individuals must acknowledge explicitly value-laden criteria that ensure accountability and recognize the uniqueness of each citizen—acknowledging that everyone is inherently singular, incomparable, "queer" in their irreducible singularity.

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ID 268 - Contesting AI Futures: Social Movements and AI Practices

Luigia Tricase, Università di Bologna

Alice Mattoni, Università di Bologna

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Social Movements, AI-Related Practices, Prefiguration

Dominant narratives about AI often come with promises of AI's potential for improving democracies, often depicting these emerging technologies as able to have a profound and positive impact on societies. In so doing, such dominant narratives sometimes frame AI as inherently revolutionary, mostly resting on the industry utopias, discursive closure and technological sublime of narratives that the tech companies behind AI development elaborate and that governmental actors also uncritically embrace.

If promises of democratic improvement are prominent among dominant narratives, they are problematized in the grassroots political arena. Civil society actors often develop critical accounts of how institutional actors, including governments, parliaments and public administration bodies employ – or plan to employ, AI technologies. Furthermore, they develop contentious and re-politicized visions of AI technologies, putting into question their overall revolutionary value for societies. Despite their relevance in challenging mainstream understandings and employments of AI technologies, grassroots political actors' takes on AI are yet to be explored in a systematic empirical manner, also concerning their ability to put forward novel ways of understanding the role of emerging digital technologies, such as AI, in sustaining and reshaping democracy.

This paper draws on empirical ethnographic research revolving around participant observation and in-depth interviews with activists to address this gap. Starting from the case study of a social movement network active in two Italian cities throughout 2023 and 2024, we observed and inquired about AI-related practices. Our aim was to discover to what extent AI permeates activist spaces, how it does so, and what alternative meanings about AI activists construct and embed in their AI-related practices. In so doing, we also evaluate the potential of AI-related practices to contest dominant promises and visions of AI, both at the individual and collective level of contention.

While individual AI-related practices were discussed with research participants during interviews, participant observation allowed us to explore collective AI-related practices. The analysis casts light on two types of collective AI practices: those oriented towards the present and those oriented towards the future. Through the former, activists in the social movement network under study elaborate alternative systems of meanings concerning existing forms of AI and its current value in societies, gathering in assemblies to collectively discuss existing AI errors in many sectors of societies, including labor, journalism, human rights and migration, and environmental impact; Through the latter, activists foster the prefiguration of potential AI futures through hands-on experimentation during workshops and labs, in which they not only imagine alternative forms of desirable AIs but also engage in its development through the platforming of prefigurative AI projects. While these AI practices are quite situational and far from implementing long-term alternative forms of desirable AI, their prefigurative orientation brings with it a rethinking of activists' grassroots political participation and engagement with democracy. Indeed, they contribute to combining critiques of dominant, commercially-driven sociotechnical imaginaries of AI with the experimental use of novel forms of AI capable of empowering activist and citizen engagement in AI-infused societies.



ID 513 - AI and climate action: strengthening democratic engagement

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Maximiliano Ernesto Romero, Politecnico di Milano

Keywords: climate change adaptation, deliberation processes, artificial intelligence

As part of its mission to foster inclusive, sustainable, and scalable climate adaptation and resilience solutions, the EU-funded project NEUROCLIMA (GA 101137711) explores the intersection of artificial intelligence (AI), climate adaptation governance, and deliberative democracy. By leveraging digital tools and participatory frameworks, NEUROCLIMA aims to enhance citizen engagement and support decision-making, ensuring that AI-driven climate solutions are transparent, equitable, and democratic.

Climate adaptation has long served as a testing ground for deliberative democracy, with structured public engagement mechanisms—both online and onsite—such as citizens' juries, deliberative polls, and climate assemblies playing a crucial role in shaping policies. Examples include ClimAdaPT in Portugal, European initiatives like Europolls, and global multisite consultations such as World Wide Views. More recently, participatory frameworks such as the Brighton and Hove Climate Assembly highlight the continued relevance of deliberative democracy in climate governance. These initiatives offer valuable insights into how deliberative frameworks can shape adaptive strategies that integrate public concerns and scientific evidence into policy processes.

AI-supported systems are transforming climate governance by enhancing early warning mechanisms, risk management, and resource optimisation across sectors such as agriculture, public health, and energy. However, despite advancements, AI-driven climate governance faces critical challenges, including digital (and climate) literacy gaps, stakeholder coordination issues, and the need to build public trust—an essential factor for engagement, policy adoption, and the effective integration of AI. NEUROCLIMA seeks to address these challenges, ensuring that AI technologies foster participatory and democratic decision-making rather than reinforcing hierarchical governance structures.

A priority of NEUROCLIMA is bridging individual and collective climate action. AI-powered tools can help individuals track their carbon footprints and adopt sustainable behaviors, while AI-driven platforms aggregate public opinion, facilitate social interactions, and inform policymakers. By leveraging machine learning and natural language processing (NLP), AI can enhance participatory governance by synthesizing diverse inputs into insights. This research underscores the role of AI-powered deliberative platforms in enhancing democratic systems, with initiatives such as BCAUSE and Decidim Barcelona demonstrating how AI can broaden participation through NLP, network analysis, and data visualisation techniques that improve transparency and public understanding.

This contribution presents a preliminary classification of methodologies and cases operating at the intersection of AI, climate change adaptation, and deliberation. The framework outlines how AI can support different stages of participatory governance, from citizen consultations to policy co-creation. Furthermore, this research contributes to the broader discourse on AI-driven climate governance: while AI offers new opportunities to improve accessibility, aggregate public opinion, and scale citizen engagement, it also raises critical concerns related to bias, transparency, and ethical accountability.

The question remains: How can AI be designed to empower democratic engagement rather than reinforce hierarchical decision-making? Moving forward, NEUROCLIMA's insights will be relevant in shaping AI-driven governance frameworks that are efficient, scalable, equitable, and participatory, ensuring that digital innovation strengthens rather than undermines democratic climate resilience.



ID 213 - Generated common sense: exploring the AI's preferred readings about polarising topics

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Donatella Selva, Università di Firenze

Keywords: common knowledge, foundation models, hegemony, AI agency

Recent scholarship has highlighted the nuanced ways AI platforms can systematically influence political narratives, with empirical evidence suggests systematic biases in political representation. We refer to the so-called "representational harms" (Katzam et al. 2023) that AI can cause by giving or denying visibility to specific social categories and by privileging some structures of meaning instead of others; likewise, Motoki et al. (2024) revealed that ChatGPT exhibits a systematic bias favoring Democrats in the US and the Labour Party in the UK.

Following this literature, we know that AI outputs result from probabilistic synthesis, reinforcement learning, and interaction setting, potentially mirroring and reinforcing existing hegemonic discourses. In this paper, we want to focus in particular on the role of the interaction setting in the production and reproduction of political narratives.

By focusing on surrogate maternity - a polarising topic in the Italian context - we propose an empirical study inspired by Gillespie (2023). Our approach adopts a triple perspective: 1) an experimental perspective that involves crafting prompts to interrogate two different language models (ChatGPT and Claude), exploring their narrative generation capabilities; 2) a performative perspective that consists in the development of three ideal-types of interrogator - the citizen, the journalist and the politician, as they are both the typical readers and producers of political discourse - to understand how AI vary based on the characteristics of the interrogators (i.e. their gender, nationality, professional status and political leaning); and 3) a discursive perspective, analysing the logic-argumentative strategies, the topics and the vocabulary deployed by LLMs in generating political discourse.

The research is based on 32 interrogations to generative AI models run during November 2024. The key findings highlight the nuanced ways LLMs construct political narratives. In terms of political bias, the research confirms significant left-leaning tendencies in ChatGPT, with political representations influenced by conversational settings and prompt framing. Also, both AI tend to adopt different argumentative frames depending on the user's profile, including legal, ethical, socio-economic, and medical perspectives, but also frames that are more context-specific such as the frame of culture war and the frame of the pluralism of values.

Notably, the research reveals that while AI maintains a semblance of political pluralism, it often reproduces conventional representations. Right-wing narratives consistently lean conservative, emphasizing traditional values, while left-wing discourses focus on social justice and human rights.

The study also exposed interesting model-specific variations. Claude and ChatGPT exhibited different approaches to radical political positions, with Claude more likely to refuse extreme narratives and ChatGPT repositioning them within moderate discourses.

Firstly, the research critically examines the "agency" of AI (Hepp et al., 2024) in narrative construction, investigating how these systems emphasize or marginalize specific aspects of political discourse. Secondly, we highlight how AI tends to reproduce conventional and stereotypical representations (i.e. what we call a "generated" common sense) while paradoxically maintaining a gloss of political pluralism.



ID 689 - AI-augmented public governance – a true chance to reinforce democracy

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Keywords: AI-augmented societies, Public governance, Democratic systems

From our research on the evolution of public governance and digital transformation, we found that digital technologies might be the only way to remain capable of ensuring transparency, fairness and accountability –fundamental pillars of democratic systems. Contrasting these findings with recent developments in AI reveals a set of dilemmas. For instance, how can we balance transparency and block box algorithms, or balance efficiency with accountability? And how can we promote inclusion and participation over centralising and controlling tendencies? These tensions are further amplified by the swift emergence of generative AI, as its widespread adoption raises new concerns about the impact on public governance and democracy. These challenges rise a key question: How can AI be deployed to both safeguard democratic values and improve decision-making?

From theoretical perspectives and practical experiences, we address this question in a twofold approach. First, we project findings about the impacts of (various forms of) AI onto democratic processes. Second, we apply our understandings of an AI-augmented future to identify opportunities to engage citizens and to enhance democratic processes and participation.

For AI impacts on democratic processes, we note the following:

- While misinformation and disinformation is widely discussed, efforts could focus on content that directly affects democratic values and processes.
- More attention is needed to assess whether AI-driven information truly enhances participation or simply reshapes existing engagement patterns.
- AI and digital technologies could be explored as tools to improve governance processes, making them more democratic and inclusive rather than reinforcing existing power asymmetries.

For the future, we envision AI-augmented societies across the globe – hopefully with people having a voice and choice in this. However, we see opportunities for democratic systems, where AI can enhance collective governance, revitalise citizen participation, promote social cohesion and improve public decision-making:

- Beyond the hype. As AI adoption matures, its integration into decision-making will include sustained human oversight to ensure transparency, accountability, and fairness.
- Political responsiveness. AI-driven insights will support democratic actors in aligning policies with societal needs while maintaining core political values (possibly leading to collective democracy).
- Civic engagement. AI will improve policy communication and create more inclusive mechanisms for public participation and feedback.

With these two perspectives we seek to contribute to a stimulating and insightful debate that will help disentangle the dichotomy between AI and democracy – as perceived today – identifying pathways and policies for its integration that reinforce and future-proof, rather than challenge democratic systems.



ID 193 - A polytopic approach to democratising decision-making on health data reuse in the EU

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Marta Poblet, *RMIT*

Keywords: datagovernance, democracy, participation, EHDS, STS

In an increasingly datafied world, reusing data requires rethinking consent and public participation processes about it. First, to ensure the legitimacy of uses, including normative aspects like agency and data sovereignty. Second, to enhance data quality and mitigate risks, especially since data are proxies that can misrepresent reality or be oblivious to the original context or use purpose. Using the case study of the European Health Data Space (EHDS), we propose a polytopic - a multidimensional framework with multiple intersections- approach to democratising decision-making and improving the way in which consent processes are conducted.

The European Data Strategy has inaugurated a suite of regulations for data reuse with the aim to become a global standard. Likewise, the EU AI Act has emerged as a blueprint for governing AI-related risks. Yet, it comes without clear guidelines for how the data underpinning these systems, especially general-purpose models and their 'scrap-it-all' approach to data, should be legitimately used. The pioneering EHDS should enable citizens to access their health data and share it with their healthcare professionals across countries but also enable these data to be reused by researchers, innovators and policy makers. The Interoperable Europe Act, National Data Spaces and federated data infrastructures like the European Open Science Cloud (EOSC) should support this effort. However, concerns about the gaps and potential contradictions across different regulations (e.g. the Data Governance Act, the Data Act, and the GDPR) and across different constituencies remain. This includes the issue of meaningful consent when data is to be reused and therefore applied to secondary uses, different from which consent may have been obtained in the first place. Moreover, as raised by scholars like Hildebrandt (2023), reusing data in an interoperable ecosystem can result in de-contextualised data or distorted interpretations of reality.

It is therefore becoming increasingly urgent to link democratic institutions and practices with data, technology and its users (Casanovas et al., 2017). If we conceive data as a public, non-rivalrous good, we need to make sure that it is exploited for the public good in a participatory, inclusive, and democratic way. In this paper, our theoretical framework combines deliberative and epistemic approaches to democracy as a basis to inform, draft and monitor governance and regulatory frameworks through iterative and multi-faceted public participation. This framework includes different dimensions and levels, such as the type of democratic process, the level of power redistribution in participation, the micro, meso and macro scope of governance (from transnational governance and regulation, to the governance of data collaboratives and intermediaries). The EU's vision of technological and data sovereignty can only be achieved through polytopic and interlinked two-way, inclusive, and participatory processes of deliberation and decision making.

ID 274 - Urbreath: AI and Participatory Sensing for Environmental and Democratic Resilience

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Keywords: AI-enhanced democracy, Participatory sensing, Environmental justice, Citizen engagement, Algorithmic governance

In the face of escalating environmental and democratic challenges, the Urbreath project pioneers an innovative integration of AI-enhanced participatory sensing to foster informed citizen engagement, public discourse, and evidence-based policymaking. By leveraging cutting-edge artificial intelligence, Internet of



Things (IoT) technologies, and collective intelligence methodologies, Urbreath empowers communities to monitor air quality, assess urban sustainability, and actively participate in shaping resilient and equitable urban policies.

Urban environments are increasingly subjected to air pollution, a pressing challenge that impacts public health, economic productivity, and overall well-being. Traditional air quality monitoring approaches, often centralized and sporadic, fail to provide the granularity and immediacy required for effective urban governance. Urbreath addresses this gap by deploying a decentralized network of AI-powered sensors and citizen-generated data streams, facilitating real-time environmental monitoring and fostering a democratic dialogue around urban air quality. The system not only provides open-access, real-time pollution data but also integrates AI-driven analytics to model urban dynamics, identify pollution patterns, and suggest mitigation strategies.

At the core of Urbreath is the democratisation of data access and decision-making. The project enhances citizen engagement by enabling individuals and local communities to contribute, interpret, and act upon environmental data through user-friendly digital platforms. AI-based tools translate complex environmental indicators into comprehensible insights, fostering broader participation and empowering citizens to co-design solutions with policymakers. By situating participatory sensing within the discourse on AI and democracy, Urbreath exemplifies how emerging technologies can both enable and challenge democratic processes. While AI enhances public awareness and deliberation, it also introduces ethical considerations regarding data ownership, algorithmic biases, and digital equity.

Urbreath aligns with the broader discussion on AI-enhanced democracy by illustrating how technological advancements can bridge the gap between environmental science and participatory governance. It contributes to the conference panel's exploration of AI's dual role in democratic processes by demonstrating how AI-driven public engagement can enhance transparency, accountability, and inclusivity. At the same time, the project critically assesses the risks associated with AI mediation, such as potential algorithmic distortions of public discourse and the digital divide in civic participation.

By embedding Urbreath within the framework of AI and democracy, this contribution seeks to unpack the sociopolitical implications of AI-driven environmental monitoring, offering empirical insights into how AI can either reinforce or erode participatory governance. The project presents a replicable model for integrating AI-enhanced sensing with deliberative democratic practices, advocating for responsible AI adoption in civic ecosystems. Ultimately, Urbreath reimagines the relationship between technology, democracy, and sustainability, offering a blueprint for a more resilient, data-driven, and participatory urban future.

