Generative AI and Democracy

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Generative Al in politics

Generative AI provides many new options for political actors (Foos 2024; Jungherr, Rauchfleisch, and Wuttke 2024) and changes the economics of politics:

- Provides cheap access to standardized consultancy services.
- Provides options for cheap and quick content creation.
- Provides an interface to politics and the public arena.
 (Jungherr 2023; Jungherr and Schroeder 2023)

Professionalization on the cheap

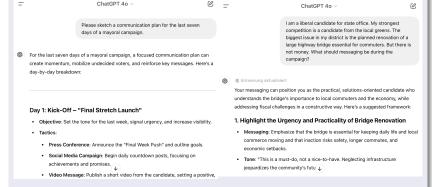


Figure 1: Generative AI opens access to many standardized consultancy services

Content on the cheap

Generative AI allows campaigns and activists to produce (variations of) content on the cheap and the quick.

This includes:

- Text (e.g., social media posts, emails, letters, websites).
- Images (e.g., illustrations of core campaign messages, social media ads).
- Audio (e.g., robocalls).

Do we want parties to become better at communicating and campaigning?

- Cheaper access to professionalized tactics and content generation opportunities is excellent if you believe parties should be allowed to compete for votes and interact efficiently with potential voters.
- But if you believe that parties are the core problem of democracy and mainly out to cheat and mislead, then cheaper means to do so better are not great news.

Who innovates?

- Challengers to the status quo have stronger incentives for innovation, experimentation, and iteration (Jungherr, Schroeder, and Stier 2019).
- This can lead to challengers (legitimate or not) gaining relative advantages over established parties.
- Depending on who innovates, associated gains can be used to strengthen or weaken democracy.

Al-enabled disinformation? (1/2)

Potentially, cheap content generation could contribute to a deterioration of the information environment:

- Generative Al might allow campaigns interested in influencing public debate to generate large amounts of content quickly that presents variations around their core message, thereby giving the impression of large and varied support online.
- Generative Al allows for the cheap creation of fake content.
 This can be the imitation of prominent politicians' voices or content for fake profiles or emails, which can mislead the public and the media.

Al-enabled disinformation? (2/2)

But for disinformation to become a pervasive threat, these activities would need to overcome structural limitations (i.e., the media would have to pick them up, and they would remain invisible to platform moderation of coordinated inauthentic behavior). Al-enabled disinformation might, therefore, not be the danger public discourse makes it out to be (Simon, Altay, and Mercier 2023).

Interfaces

Generative AI is set to become a dominant interface for interaction with the public arena (Jungherr and Schroeder 2022) and politics (Jungherr and Schroeder 2023).

- Al-enabled search provides summaries of the news.
- Party-provided Al-enabled chatbots answer people's questions about agendas and positions.
- Al-enabled monitoring services summarize daily events and people's views on social media.
- Al-enabled deliberation platforms summarize and surface people's positions and views.

What can we expect from Al-enabled interfaces?

- Al can help navigate large amounts of texts and surface views that otherwise might have gone unnoticed (Landemore 2024).
- Al might help present different political positions in ways that enable compromise and mutual understanding (Tessler et al. 2024).
- Al might help in re-gaining a handle on otherwise overwhelmingly fragmented media environments.
- But...

Al-enabled interfaces might hide as much as they show

- Al-based synopses of topics, accounts, and concerns are subject to the mechanisms of a data-driven pull toward the mean, which threatens to weaken idiosyncrasies and specific cultural signals within the public arena.
- By providing synopses instead of links to media sites,
 Al-enabled interfaces monopolize attention rather than
 distributing it to actors that produce and invest in information
 production, weakening their economic foundations in the
 process (Jungherr and Schroeder 2023).

Power of Al companies

- The growing role of AI in politics has increased the power of AI companies in democracies.
- While the theoretical breakthroughs in the current wave of Al began at universities, industry leads in their practical application, further development, and broad rollout (Ahmed,

Wahed, and Thompson 2023; Metz 2021).

 These companies have no commitment to normative demands on information environments that allow people to exercise democratic self-rule. They are notoriously opaque to outsiders and difficult to critically interrogate.

Where does this leave us?

- Generative AI brings many opportunities that could help strengthen committed political actors, institutions, and democracy more broadly.
- However, this presupposes committed actors should use active learning, experimentation, iteration, and innovation approaches. Currently, commitment is not a given.
- This introduces the risk that the wrong actors profit from Al.
- Also, Al might lead to power shifts in various fields, which could have knock-on effects on democracy. One example is Al's effect on news as an institution.

Further reading

- AI and democracy: Jungherr (2023).
- Al and the public arena: Jungherr and Schroeder (2023).
- Al in political campaigning: Jungherr, Rauchfleisch, and Wuttke (2024).
- Digital media in politics: Jungherr, Rivero, and Gayo-Avello (2020).
- Digital media and challenges to the political status quo: Jungherr, Schroeder, and Stier (2019).

Thank you!

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