

# Generative AI and Democracy

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## Generative AI 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

The image displays two side-by-side screenshots of the ChatGPT 4o interface. The left screenshot shows a user prompt: "Please sketch a communication plan for the last seven days of a mayoral campaign." The AI response provides a structured plan for "Day 1: Kick-Off – 'Final Stretch Launch'", including objectives, tactics, and specific actions like a press conference, social media campaign, and video message. The right screenshot shows a user prompt from a liberal candidate asking for messaging advice. The AI response provides a framework for positioning as a practical, solutions-oriented candidate, with a numbered section "1. Highlight the Urgency and Practicality of Bridge Renovation" containing specific messaging and tone advice.

ChatGPT 4o

Please sketch a communication plan for the last seven days of a mayoral campaign.

For the last seven days of a mayoral campaign, a focused communication plan can create momentum, mobilize undecided voters, and reinforce key messages. Here's a day-by-day breakdown:

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**Day 1: Kick-Off – "Final Stretch Launch"**

- **Objective:** Set the tone for the last week, signal urgency, and increase visibility.
- **Tactics:**
  - **Press Conference:** Announce the "Final Week Push" and outline goals.
  - **Social Media Campaign:** Begin daily countdown posts, focusing on achievements and promises. ↓
  - **Video Message:** Publish a short video from the candidate, setting a positive,

ChatGPT 4o

I am a liberal candidate for state office. My strongest competition is a candidate from the local greens. The biggest issue in my district is the planned renovation of a large highway bridge essential for commuters. But there is not money. What should messaging be during the campaign?

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Your messaging can position you as the practical, solutions-oriented candidate who understands the bridge's importance to local commuters and the economy, while addressing fiscal challenges in a constructive way. Here's a suggested framework:

**1. Highlight the Urgency and Practicality of Bridge Renovation**

- **Messaging:** Emphasize that the bridge is essential for keeping daily life and local commerce moving and that inaction risks safety, longer commutes, and economic setbacks.
- **Tone:** "This is a must-do, not a nice-to-have. Neglecting infrastructure jeopardizes the community's future." ↓

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.

## AI-enabled disinformation? (1/2)

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

- Generative AI 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 AI 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.

## AI-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). AI-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).

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

## What can we expect from AI-enabled interfaces?

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

## AI-enabled interfaces might hide as much as they show

- AI-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, AI-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 AI 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 AI 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 AI.
- Also, AI might lead to power shifts in various fields, which could have knock-on effects on democracy. One example is AI's effect on news as an institution.

## Further reading

- AI and democracy: Jungherr (2023).
- AI and the public arena: Jungherr and Schroeder (2023).
- AI 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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- Simon, Felix M., Sacha Altay, and Hugo Mercier. 2023. "Misinformation Reloaded? Fears about the Impact of Generative AI on Misinformation Are Overblown." *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review* 4 (5): 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.37016/mr-2020-127>.
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