ROUNDTABLE SYNTHESIS REPORT

AI & DEMOCRACY

Exploring the **democratic** challenges, risks and opportunities brought by generative **AI systems**

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ABSTRACT

This report presents an in-depth analysis of the challenges and opportunities brought by artificial intelligence (AI) with regard to the democratic system. It summarises the insightful perspectives presented during the two roundtable discussions on AI & Democracy, especially regarding use of the AI in favour of democratic processes. Furthermore, it provides a deeper analysis of the issues surrounding AI's impact and influence on democratic processes, citizen participation, and governance.

Firstly, the current state of European regulation of the digital space, and civil society action in this field is outlined. The standing framework covers digital services and protection of civic rights, as well as enhanced citizen participation. Secondly, the ethical barriers and questions that arise with AI's growing presence in the democratic space are examined. We lay out the need to mitigate biases, ensure efforts for sustainable usage, transparency and human-centered approach, as well as promote literacy and further research. Consequently, the potential of AI's use to support democratic processes, specifically regarding the citizen participation, access to public institutions, or facilitated deliberation is explored. It is found that indeed, AI tools can enhance the democratic processes through improved assistance and inclusion. The discoveries of the report are illustrated by tangible case studies. It is equally pointed out that cooperation between the private and public sectors is significantly important to ensure the sound and reasonable development of AI tools and their employment.

At the end, we propose concluding remarks, as well as community takes that reflect on the topics formulated during the roundtable discussions. These help to further illustrate the assessments and views on the intersection between AI and Democracy.

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Authors

Hendrik NAHR
Constantin SCHÄFER

Laurenz SCHEUNEMANN
Constance ROTIN
Martin WILAM

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CONTEXT

In 2024, *Make.org* and *ifok*, both organisations engaged in citizen participation and democratic innovation, convened two high-level roundtable discussions addressing the intersection of artificial intelligence (AI) & Democracy. These roundtables brought together researchers, civil society representatives, public officials, and private sector stakeholders.

The first roundtable focused on how democratic AI systems can be enabled, while the second addressed the use of AI in democratic processes. These discussions generated insightful perspectives on both the opportunities and risks AI presents to democratic governance. This paper revisits those discussions, offering a deeper analysis of the issues raised and the potential benefits of generative AI (GenAI) in the context of democracy.

In the name of Make.org and ifok, we kindly want to thank the FARI - AI Institute for the Common Good for hosting the first roundtable discussion, as well as the Representation of the state of Hessen to the EU for hosting the second roundtable discussion. Find out more about the first roundtable and second roundtable discussions.

Hendrik Nahr
Head of European Affairs
Make.org
hendrik.nahr@make.org

Make.org is a civic tech organisation dedicated to promoting participatory democracy and empowering citizens to engage in decision-making processes, as well as the positive transformation of our societies. By providing innovative tools and platforms, Make.org facilitates dialogue between citizens and institutions, ensuring that diverse voices are heard and included in shaping policies and solutions to pressing societal challenges.

Constantin Schäfer
Director of EU Relations & Projects
ifok
constantin.schaefer@ifok.de

ifok is a strategic consultancy focused on facilitating social change through participatory approaches. By engaging citizens, businesses, and public institutions, ifok aims to create sustainable solutions that address the complexities of contemporary challenges. Their projects span various sectors, emphasising the importance of stakeholder collaboration and evidence-based decision-making. ifok helps to bridge the gap between governance and the communities they serve, fostering a more inclusive dialogue around policy development and implementation.

INTRODUCTION

The intersections of AI & Democracy

Thanks to technological advances, access to large amounts of data and increased computing power, AI has become increasingly powerful and disruptive. New tools released over the last years mark another breakthrough in this technological revolution, now allowing widespread access to such technologies. It demonstrated the vast range of possibilities involved in adapting general-purpose AI to a wide array of tasks.

AI and, more specifically GenAI, is rapidly becoming a dominant force in various sectors, including political and democratic spaces. As it reshapes the way societies interact, GenAI also has an impact on our democratic functioning. It brings new opportunities, new challenges and new risks. While risks associated with AI are prevalent in the public discourse (Jungherr & Schroeder, 2023, p.171), it is crucial to also consider the possibilities that AI offers in strengthening democracy. GenAI holds promise for improving inclusivity, accessibility, citizen engagement, and transparency in decision-making, but it must be approached with caution and ethical responsibility.

AI's integration into governance, political, administrative, participatory and deliberative processes raises significant concerns regarding transparency and accountability. Therefore, we must ensure AI serves democratic ideals without compromising fundamental rights, including ethical considerations.

STATE OF PLAY

The European Union's initiatives to regulate the impact of AI

The us of AI is becoming more and more frequent today all over the world. Lawmakers are reacting to that development. According to the AI Index 2024 Report (Maslej et al., 2024, 376), 148 AI-related bills passed in the world in 2023. While many legislations have been drafted, some countries also adopted regulations, providing a binding and more detailed set of rules. To mitigate the impact of AI on democracy, states should implement clear and binding rulebooks, ensuring the AI models implemented are fit for democracy. They must work in a transparent, accountable, safe, as well as fair way, and protect human rights. On EU level, many actions were indeed taken that do touch upon the intersections between AI and Democracy.

Increasing number of AI-related legislation worldwide

The European Artificial Intelligence Act

The European Union has been proactive in addressing the need to regulate AI models through the implementation of the European Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act). The AI Act, adopted in June 2024, represents the first comprehensive legal framework on AI globally, and the first of its kind issued by a major regulatory body. The Act lays down a comprehensive framework for the deployment of AI technologies, aiming to foster innovation while ensuring their deployment aligns with fundamental rights, such as transparency, fairness, accountability, and privacy.

AI Act provides risk-based framework

The AI Act categorises AI systems based on their risk level. This structured approach ensures that the most sensitive AI applications undergo thorough scrutiny while keeping regulation in lower-risk area to a minimum. The AI act distiunuges between applications that are prohibited practices, high risk, limited risk, as well as minimal or no risk.

The Code of Practice: A Collaborative Approach to AI Regulation

In the context of the AI Act, the European Commission is developing the Code of Practice, a guiding document for General Purpose AI (GPAI) providers, outlining support for compliance with the AI Act. Its development involves a multi-stakeholder consultation process, ensuring that the perspectives of academia, industry, and civil society are represented. By actively involving stakeholders and focusing on transparency, bias mitigation, risk management and governance of GPAI, the EU aims to create an ecosystem where innovation and ethics go hand in hand. Begun in July 2024 with the launch of the call for public input, the final draft is expected to be done in May 2025. As AI systems become more integral to society, this collaborative effort is essential to ensure that AI technologies are designed and used in alignment with democratic values, guaranteeing that AI benefits society, without reinforcing inequalities or biases.

General Purpose AI development supported by Code of Practice

The EU Digital Services Act

As harmful, inappropriate, and illegal content is crawling in digital platforms (some of which is AI-generated), content moderation is key for a safer digital environment and for citizens to recover trust and engagement. The EU colegistotars adopted the EU Digital Services Act (DSA) in 2022, binding digital platforms to enforce a better content moderation within the EU and to increase transparency measures. Specific rules are directed to so called Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPS) that have more than 45 million users per month in the EU. Non compliance with the DSA can lead to penalties up to 6% of the company's global revenue.

DSA sets rulebook for platform responsibility on content

Conference on the Future of Europe

Launched by the EU institutions in 2019, the Conference on the Future of Europe aimed at consulting citizens on their visions of the future of the EU. The European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU, enabled a series of citizen-led debates on the future of the EU. To successfully complete the participative process, the Conference was implemented based on four pillars: a multilingual digital platform, European Citizens' Panels, national citizens' panels and events, and Conference Plenaries. The digital platform gathered more than 50.000 active participants. The final report contained 49 proposals and 326 measures. A technical assessment carried out by the Council found that 95% of the proposed measures could be carried out within the current treaty framework. As a matter of fact, many of them are about to be implemented or have already been implemented.

CoFE established many democratic innovations on EU level

European Democracy Action Plan

In December 2020, the European Commission presented the European Democracy Action Plan with an aim to build more resilient democracies inside the EU as well as to empower citizens. The initiative, was set to also deliver several legislative texts, is supposed to strengthen European democracy and protect elections that take place within the EU member states. Its priorities are: protect the integrity of elections and promote strong democratic participation; strengthen pluralism and media freedom; and counter disinformation and foreign interference operations. The Action Plan complements the rule of law mechanisms, measures promoting and protecting equality, as well as the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

EDAP aimed to strengthen EU Democracy in 2020

Have Your Say Portal / European Citizen's Panels

To further enhance the participatory democracy aspect of the EU, the European Commission provides citizens with lasting possibilities to contribute to the policy-making process.

As a commitment of the Conference on the Future of Europe, the revamped Have Your Say portal hosts the Commission's digital participatory and deliberative processes.

Citizens and stakeholders can engage on selected upcoming EU policy strategies and reflect on certain aspects the Commission's work. The portal is composed of three gateways: Public Consultations and Feedback, the European Citizens Initiative and the Citizens' Engagement Platform. On the latter, it is possible to engage through submitting proposals and ideas, comment on other participants' contributions or directly endorse them. The online contributions can also feed into deliberations of European Citizens' Panels (offline). They bring together randomly-selected citizens from all 27 Member states to deliberate key proposals at the European level in a multilingual environment. By working in small groups and plenary sessions, citizens involved first learn about a specific topic, then deliberate over different solutions and eventually formulate concrete recommendations to the European Commission. So far, ifok together its partners have designed, implemented and facilitated 10 European Citizens' Panels on various topics, from reducing food waste to the EU's new long-term budget.

HYS portal & citizen panels provide constant tools for citizen participation

The European Democracy Shield

Coined in May 2024 by the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen in her speech at the Copenhagen Democracy Summit, the European Democracy Shield aims at strengthening democratic structures in Europe. Amongst others, a great focus is set to lie on countering Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) by enforcing the DSA and the AI Act, as well as by enhancing media literacy and an creating a European network of fact-checkers, "to boost the health of the information sphere" (Bentzen, 2024). The Commissioner for Democracy, Justice, the Rule of Law and Consumer Protection, Michael McGrath, as well as Executive Vice-President of the European Commission for Technological Sovereignty, Security and Democracy, Henna Virkkunen, are both in charge of the European Democracy Shield portfolio.

Democracy Shield to include diverse measures strengthening EU democracy

From the European Parliament side, a special committee on the European Democracy Shield has been set up. Members of the European Parliament

(MEPs) voted in favour of creation of the special committee on 18th December 2024. Consisting of 33 MEPs chairing for a twelve-month term, the special committee has set out a great list of objectives. Amongst others, they include evaluating the effectiveness of existing European legislation and identify loopholes, gaps and overlaps; promoting democratic resilience towards hybrid threats and attacks, including FIMI; contributing to overall institutional resilience; as well as maintaining internal and external relations between EU and non-EU actors to reinforce the fight against hybrid threat.

Legislative status quo and civil society action

Many EU initiatives aim to support both AI & Democracy

As it was shown, the EU is actively regulating the impact of AI through various legislative and collaborative initiatives. The European Democracy Shield presented as a part of the overall European Democracy Action Plan framework aims to strengthen democratic resilience. Moreover, citizens and diverse stakeholders are being actively involved in the processes, either through inclusion in the community of practice, or even directly via initiatives like the Have Your Say Portal. These actions thus address both AI and Democracy on the EU level and further efforts may be expected.

New Alliance enables work on AI & Democracy

In that light, Make.org launched the Worldwide Alliance for AI & Democracy in February 2025. The initiative seeks to unite key actors across civil society, academia, NGOs, innovators and institutions, in order to drive concrete initiatives that would help to enhance democratic resilience and amplify collective impact. The Alliance's main objectives emerge around building societal resilience to AI, strengthening democratic processes through participation and multilateralism. and safeguarding electoral integrity against hybrid threats.

The roundtables that are reflected upon in this report focused on similar topics. In the following three parts of the report (A: Ethical Groundwork, B: Practical Applications & C: Economic Structures), it will be outlined what was addressed during the discussions and what conclusions they brought along.

Roundtable Takeaways

Part A

ETHICAL GROUNDWORK

How to build AI that does good

As AI technologies become more embedded in societal frameworks, it is crucial that their design and deployment are guided by clear ethical principles. Understanding the AI training process, the sources of data used, and how these factors influence the outcomes and decision-making processes is crucial for a value-aligned AI system. To create and train AI systems fit for democracy, one of the challenges is to balance competing ethical values, such as transparency, inclusivity, privacy, and fairness. Finding the right balance between respecting the different values comes with a true challenge.

Addressing biases

A significant challenge in AI development is addressing the inherent biases in AI systems. They often reflect the values and perspectives of their creators and / or the data on which they are based. These biases can perpetuate inequality and exacerbate existing societal disparities. While it may not be possible to eliminate all biases entirely, the focus should be mitigating them. AI should be designed to promote more equitable outcomes, ensuring it does not reinforce harmful stereotypes or social imbalances. By prioritising bias mitigation, we can develop AI systems that better serve all individuals fairly and inclusively.

Biases must be mitigated as much as possible

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AI will shape our democracies in the years and decades to come. The key is to get it right and to make AI compatible with democratic values.

David Mas

Chief AI Officer, Make.org

Human-centered approach

It is essential to keep human decision-making at the forefront of AI systems. Final decisions and moderation should always remain human-driven (or at least with a human in the loop) to ensure accountability and ethical governance. Additionally, fostering cooperation between civil society, academic researchers, and industry is crucial. This collaboration ensures that AI technologies align with societal values and serve the public interest, creating a more inclusive and responsible approach to AI development.

Human in the loop principle is key for oversight

Transparency and Data

Data transparency is essential to building trust in AI systems. Under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), data used to train AI systems must be sourced responsibly, and the rights of individuals must be protected. Ensuring compliance with GDPR is vital to maintaining and reinforcing trust. Often, the internal workings of an AI system is opaque to its users. As a consequence, users do not have insights into the internal workings. They only see the inputs and outputs. To ensure a better transparency of AI models and to foster trust within users, the display of sources and underlying data is a central element.

Data governance and transparency are key for trust

AI literacy

As AI technologies become more prevalent, the need for AI literacy among both citizens and policymakers has never been more important. By developing AI literacy, societies equip individuals with the tools they need to make informed decisions, enabling them to navigate an increasingly AI-driven world with confidence. AI literacy is not just about understanding the technical workings of AI, but also about recognising its ethical and societal implications. Key areas of focus include the potential for biases, misinformation, privacy and sustainability. The need for transparency in data usage and the impact of AI on personal freedoms are also essential components of AI literacy, particularly as AI systems are used in sensitive areas like healthcare, law enforcement, and elections.

Knowledge on AI helps to make informed decisions

The European Union's AI Act does indeed highlight the responsibility of AI providers and deployers to contribute to the education and empowerment of users, ensuring they possess a sufficient level of AI literacy (article 4, chapter 1).

The environmental impact of AI

AI technologies, particularly generative models, have a considerable environmental impact due to the energy required for training, deployment, and use. Different AI models come with different levels of energy consumption, depending on their methodology, efficiency and underlying principles. The environmental cost of AI should not be overlooked, and efforts must be made to minimise these impacts. Implementing energy-efficient practices and sustainable technologies is crucial. Solutions like caching systems, which store recurrent requests, can help reduce the environmental footprint by limiting the number of calls to Large Language Models (LLMs). As AI becomes increasingly integrated into various sectors, it is important to balance the benefits with its environmental impact.

Efforts to minimise environmental impact are key

INFOBOX

EXISTING ETHICAL GUIDELINES

Ethical guidelines are necessary to build AI systems that mitigate risks for democracy.

- Alex Read, WFD Associate Expert, proposes a list to the various approaches to AI governance emerging at international level, including OECD AI Principles and Unesco 's Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (Read, 2023, p.24).
- Singapore's Model AI Governance Framework
- Canada's Guiding Principles for the use of AI in governments
- AI Guidelines for Parliaments (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2024)

Advancing the research

In light of these considerations, advancing research is key to the development of AI systems that are not only effective, but also ethical, responsible and aligned with democratic values. To ensure AI systems serve the common good while respecting fundamental rights, it is essential to focus on interdisciplinary research that integrates diverse fields such as technology, ethics, social sciences, law and others. This holistic approach will help design AI applications that can navigate the complex landscape of democracies. One key area of research involves examining the ethical implications of AI, including issues related to fairness, transparency, and accountability. As AI systems become increasingly integrated into public and political processes, it is crucial that these technologies operate transparently and with highly limited biases.

Interdisciplinary research for democratic AI systems

For this, such biases must be detected and consequently mitigated in AI models. Research must focus on identifying the ways in which biases are embedded within AI systems. By developing methodologies for bias detection and correction, researchers can help ensure that AI systems are more equitable, without perpetuating systemic inequalities. Furthermore, the development of a normative framework and clear guidelines for AI design is essential. This framework should provide ethical boundaries and operational standards for AI development, ensuring that AI systems are built to respect fundamental rights and democratic values. Such a framework could guide AI practitioners in creating AI systems that are accountable, transparent, and aligned with societal needs, particularly in areas like public governance, policy-making, and citizen engagement. Ethical research should also focus on understanding the environmental costs associated with the development and deployment of AI systems, ensuring that the pursuit of technological innovation does not come at the expense of sustainability.

Research to focus on ethical framework, biases and sustainability

Case Study #1

Democratic Commons

Research Programme on AI & Democracy

Coordinated by Make.org, together with Sciences Po, Sorbonne University, and the CNRS, the "AI For Democracy Democratic Commons" Research Programme" is the first global program for research, experimentation, and deployment of open-source GenAI solutions in service of democracy.

"This multi-disciplinary perspective is key to provide answers to the many scientific challenges posed by the study of the biases of generative AI and the control of their possible impacts."

Antoine Petitot, CEO of CNRS

Case Study #1 **Democratic Commons Research Programme**

This project is supported by some of the world's leading experts in ethical AI: Hugging Face, Mozilla.ai, Aspen Institute, Project Liberty Institute, and AI & Society Institute. The "Democratic Commons" program brings together over 50 researchers and engineers over a two-year period. Its primary objective is to develop and share a social science scientific framework for determining democratic principles applied to AI. The researchers will then identify corresponding democratic biases, create an evaluation model for LLMs and correction protocols based on these biases, and correct open-source LLMs accordingly. One of the programme's goals is to ensure AI technologies contribute positively to democratic participation. In short, to develop ethical AI applications for democracy. To ensure the quality and relevance of the work, a Scientific Supervisory Board has been established, bringing together international luminaries such as Audrey Tang (Taiwan's First Minister of Digital Affairs), Yochai Benkler (Berkman Klein Center / Harvard), Hélène Landemore (Yale), Karine Perset (OECD.ai), Constance de Leusse (AI & Society Institute), Raja Chatila (Sorbonne Université), Michelle Barsa (Omidyar Network), Josef Lentsch (Political Tech Summit) and Djamé Seddah (Inria).

Roundtable Takeaways

Part B

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Using AI tools to enhance democratic processes

AI applications hold significant potential to enhance citizen participation in democratic processes by breaking down barriers that often prevent broader engagement.

Improving access to public institutions

The integration of AI into participatory processes could allow for more streamlined communication between institutions and citizens, fostering a deeper understanding of complex issues. By making institutional information more accessible and understandable, AI can also contribute to the transparency and efficiency of democratic processes by providing citizens with real-time access to relevant data, policy discussions, and institutional activities.

AI can increase accessibility and transparency

Thanks to streamlined communication and real-time access to data, the use of AI tools can allow citizens to avoid an information overload. Sound use of AI could help to manage and filter vast amounts of information, providing citizens the most relevant and important updates. A format where citizens access the relevant information of their choice, based on their individual interests, can be imagined in that context. Furthermore, AI tools could be able to simplify the institutional jargon that is often used in official documents. AI could simplify the explanation or commentaries to the used language. Ultimately, AI can contribute to simplification of translation processes in the EU context. That counts for legislation, as well as communications in - potentially - even more than the 24 official languages.

Great amount of information can be processed to increase citizens' understanding

Enhancing participation

AI can facilitate more inclusive participation in democratic debates and decision-making, ensuring that all citizens - including marginalised groups - can take part in shaping public policy.

The political awareness among the marginalised groups can be enhanced by overcoming language barriers that exclude many citizens. By providing appropriate translations from the original language into all languages that citizens use within one country. AI tools providing automated translation or voice recognition could be useful especially in linguistically diverse societal setups like India, South Africa or the EU. Such technological support would be able to process inputs from different languages or dialects, ensure that all voices are heard in the policy-making process and can facilitate new forms of political participation. However, challenges remain with regard to training models for less widely used languages.

AI applications help to overcome language barriers

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AI can make deliberative participation processes more inclusive, equitable and efficient, because it has the potential to make these processes scalable and less resource-intensive, it can assist facilitators to do their job better and it allows for iterative learning and accessible deliberations among participants.

Constantin Schäfer,

Director EU Relations & Projects, ifok

Facilitating deliberation

LLMs can assist citizens to find common ground. Moreover, AI-driven platforms can help identify and address information gaps, enabling citizens to make more informed decisions and engage with political processes on a more equitable basis. By supporting these processes, AI has the potential to empower citizens and promote greater democratic inclusion. However, careful attention must be paid to ensure that AI tools are designed in ways that promote fairness, transparency, and accountability, avoiding the risks of misinformation or bias that could undermine the democratic values they seek to enhance. AI may also inadvertently marginalise certain perspectives, particularly those that are already underrepresented. It is therefore critical that AI models are designed to address these risks, ensuring that all voices are given equal weight in the decision-making process and that the diversity of opinions is upheld.

AI can support moderation and facilitation of deliberations

Countering polarisation

Polarisation is a growing challenge in democratic societies. It could be due to algorithms designed to maximise engagement, trapping users into 'echo chambers' or 'filter bubbles'. LLMs could be 'sycophantic', meaning that they follow the users' point of view. When provided feedback, people tend to reward the LLM when it replies when it echoes users sentiments (Summerfield et al., 2024, 6). In that sense, when correctly prompted for neutral responses allows the display of a spectrum of various opinions for the citizens. AI driven fact-checking, ideally on a predefined dataset or document basis, may help to mitigate polarisation by rapidly verifying information or by enhancing access to accurate and reliable sources. By identifying disinformation patterns, AI can support balanced public discourse.

Neutral provision of information and verification can decrease polarisation

Risks and Challenges

While AI systems hold significant potential for enhancing democratic processes, their use also brings several risks and challenges that must be addressed. One of the main concerns is the potential loss of the full participatory experience in processes such as voting or public decision making. Traditional democratic participation often fosters a sense of pride and belonging as citizens engage collectively in shaping decisions. However, when participation is mediated through technology, particularly in isolated settings, this communal experience can be diminished, leading to a loss of connection with the democratic process itself. It is essential that the design of AI systems takes this factor into account, ensuring that citizen engagement remains meaningful and connected to the participatory experience.

Direct connection between people and sense of belonging must be protected

Another key challenge is the risk of oversimplification in AI-driven processes. While AI can support functions like summarisation and translation, there is a risk of losing nuance and depth inherent in human interactions. Democratic decision-making is complex and multifaceted, and AI systems must be carefully designed to assist, and not replace human deliberation. Additionally, AI models should not undermine the deliberative nature of democracy. The process of deliberation should remain challenging and thoughtful, and not be reduced to overly superficial methodologies. The essence of democracy lies in its capacity for meaningful debate and reflection, and this must be preserved.

Oversimplification must be carefully addressed

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At Make.org we want to build AI tools that strengthen the links between institutions and citizens. Technology can help a great deal by making complex information more accessible.

Solène Lecuyer

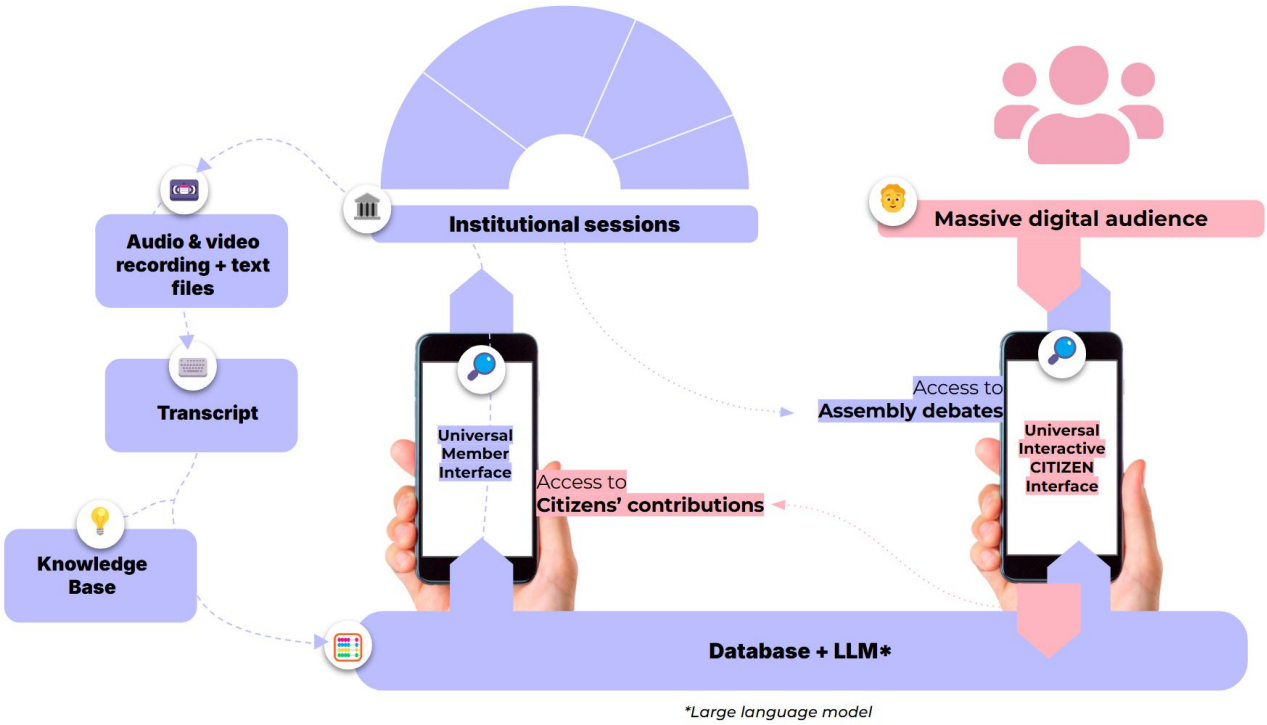
Lead Product Manager, Make.org

Case Study #2

Panoramic AI

bridging the gap between citizens and institutions

GenAI makes complex information, such as legal texts or parliamentary debates, more accessible, making it easier for the general public to understand them. As a European civic tech, Make.org has developed Panoramic AI, a GenAI platform that turns complex content - like institutions discussions - into understandable and accessible summaries. The Panoramic AI platform employs advanced data analysis and machine learning techniques to provide precise and relevant answers to user questions. It processes underlying data, intelligently links it, and ensures that responses are transparent and based on reliable sources. It enables citizens to understand institutional frameworks and actively participate in democratic discussions. Make.org's approach includes rigorous quality checks, human oversight, collaboration with researchers to address potential biases, and the full respect of GDPR and of our ethic charter.



Case Study #2 **Panoramic AI**

This platform has been developed for many different and diverse institutional settings:

- For the 2025 German federal elections, helping making sense of the election process and the party programs.
- For the Committee of the Regions within the scope of the EuroPCom 2024 conference, an inter-institutional conference for public communicators.
- For the French Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE) to make the work of the Citizens' Convention on the End of Life more accessible.
- The Panoramic AI platform also facilitates public engagement by bridging the gap between citizens and institutions. It is now being used in the context of France's nuclear power debate. The French National Commission for Public Debate (CNDP) employs Panoramic to foster informed discussions about building two nuclear reactors at the Bugey site. By providing simplified access to information, summarizing complex documents, and ensuring transparency with reliable sources, the platform enables broader and more inclusive public participation. It continuously updates its document base with responses to frequently asked questions, enhancing trust and encouraging active involvement in the debate.

This democratisation of understanding complex subjects is crucial to take a step forward when it comes to the role of citizens in decision-making and create the conditions for broader and more informed citizen participation at all levels.

Case Study #3

AI-driven deliberation

ifok, together with its European partners Missions Publiques, the Danish Board of Technology and deliberativa, designed and implemented five European Citizens' Panels for the European Commission. Each panel brought together 150 randomly selected citizens from across the European Union per panel to establish concrete policy recommendations. This initiative marks a significant contribution to establishing and further developing multilingual citizen participation at the EU level. Ifok enabled the use of diverse AI tools during the deliberation process, such as image generators to construct realistic looking personas on the basis of citizens' descriptions, as well as AI text generators that summarised the discussions and outputs of the citizens' group work.

Preparation & Learning

- Broad public participation
- Idea generation and agenda setting
- Participant recruitment and knowledge acquisition

Deliberation

- Discussion
- Moderation

Decision-making & Conclusion

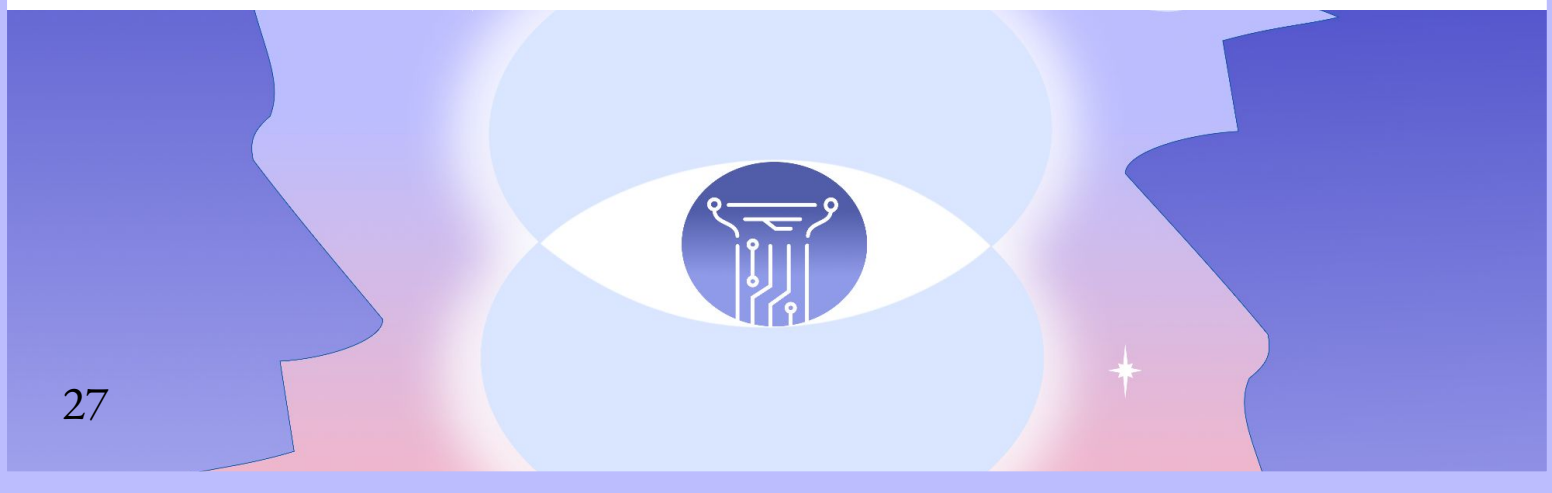
- Drafting or recommendations
- Documentation and analysis
- Communication of results

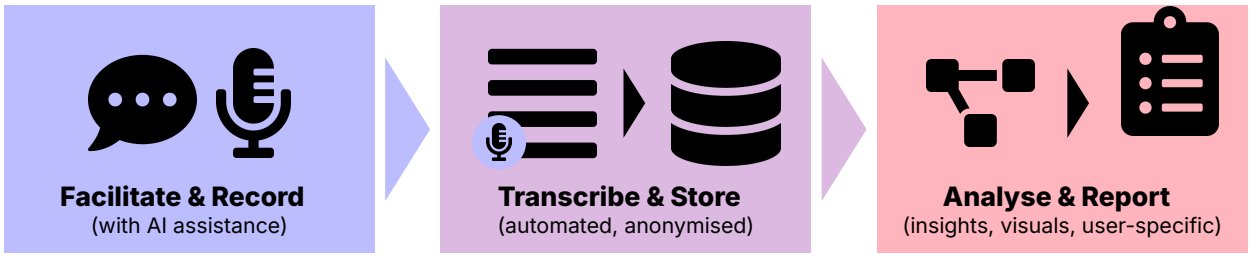
Case Study #4

DeliberAIde

Using AI to capture all voices and generate innovative insights from deliberations

deliberAIde, a German-British non-profit startup, is dedicated to reviving democratic engagement through AI-powered dialogue, ensuring that every voice is heard in shaping our collective future. Recognizing the significant challenge of inclusively capturing diverse perspectives and meaningful, actionable insights from citizen dialogues, deliberAIde harnesses advanced AI technology in a transparent and accountable manner to enhance inclusivity, and analytical depth in deliberative participation.





deliberAIde's platform provides a comprehensive AI-supported solution for summarising, analysing, and reporting on dialogue and co-creation formats, whether conducted online, offline, or in hybrid settings. Key functionalities include automated, anonymized transcription of discussions, comprehensive documentation of all ideas, intelligent categorisation, thematic clustering, and user-specific AI-assisted report generation. By leveraging GenAI, deliberAIde swiftly identifies and synthesises key themes and innovative insights, significantly reducing manual effort and enhancing the accuracy of capturing the richness of public dialogue.

Future enhancements, such as AI-assisted moderation, conflict analysis, and mediation will further broaden the platforms's applicability. Planned features include sophisticated AI-supported conflict analysis tools designed to identify agreements and disagreements, uncovering underlying causes for disputes such as differing interests, values, or worldviews. These insights will assist facilitators in proactively mediating conflicts and supporting consensus-building. Additionally, the platform will support the measurement of deliberative quality, providing moderators with real-time feedback on inclusivity, equality, respectfulness, and constructiveness, enabling timely adjustments to ensure consistently high-quality and inclusive dialogues.

deliberAIde emphasises rigorous compliance with data protection standards (GDPR), ensuring secure, anonymized data handling with EU-hosted services. Through this innovative approach, deliberAIde actively supports inclusive, evidence-based decision-making, enabling political stakeholders and citizens alike to co-create solutions for complex societal challenges.

Roundtable Takeaways

Part C

ECONOMIC STRUCTURES

Enabling AI systems for democracy and the public good

The development of AI technologies is largely driven by private companies. In that light, it is even more essential for the public sector to significantly invest into AI systems. Technologies must serve the public good and align with democratic principles. Public sector investments are necessary to counterbalance the dominance of private companies and make sure that AI developments are not driven solely by commercial interests. By fostering collaboration between the public and private sectors, the EU can steer AI technologies toward supporting democratic values, transparency, and equity. Additionally, there is a pressing need for public investments in civil society initiatives. Public institutions must allocate resources to support democratic engagement and ensure that AI development serves the common good. The role of "frontline bureaucrats" is essential in this regard, as they can help direct investments towards projects that foster civic participation, ensuring that the benefits of AI are broadly distributed and contribute to strengthening democracy.

Public investments are key to ensure public good AI systems

Procurement in AI development

Public sector procurement plays a crucial role in shaping the development and implementation of AI technologies. When procurement processes are designed with a user-centric approach, focusing on delivering tangible benefits for democratic engagement and societal benefits, they can drive the creation of AI tools that reinforce democratic values.

Procurement processes must be designed appropriately

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We need to build an interconnected, sustainable ecosystem of AI applications for the Common Good. For that to happen, public administrations should become ‘anchor clients’ to create demand for European solutions for the common good and make resources and procurement processes easier and more accessible. Moreover, we need to focus our efforts on capacity building for common good actors within the civil society.

Noah Damschke

Managing Consultant, ifok

Case Study #5

The Civic Coding Innovation Network

The Civic Coding Innovation Network brings together existing plans and projects in the field of AI for the common good. This innovation network is a joint initiative of three German federal ministries: the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (BMAS), the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) and the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV). Running its office, ifok works for the network mission to disseminate the use of AI that benefits society, to promote AI skills across the board, and to take up civil society impulses and ideas. It promotes the creation of structures enabling the emergence of social innovations from within society and the social adaptation of AI on a widespread basis. The initiative's working methods are based on four principles of cooperation: cross-departmental, needs-oriented, transparent, and participatory. Through network development, targeted funding opportunities, and the close involvement of stakeholders and civil society, the office designs social, sustainable and participatory AI applications.

COMMUNITY TAKES

Roundtable participants' sharing their views

The following paragraphs provide short inputs formulated by the roundtables' participants. They help to further illustrate what discussions were held during the sessions, as well as showing a more personalised view and argumentation on the topic of AI & Democracy.

Ioannis Galariotis, Researcher, European University Institute

GenAI has the potential to transform democratic participation by making governance more accessible and inclusive. AI-driven platforms can analyze public sentiment, generate policy summaries, and facilitate citizen deliberation on political issues. For example, AI chatbots could guide individuals through complex legislative texts, ensuring that more people understand policy implications and can engage meaningfully in decision-making. Additionally, AI-powered tools can create real-time feedback loops between citizens and policymakers, enabling governments to respond dynamically to public concerns.

However, this shift must be carefully managed to prevent AI from reinforcing biases or marginalizing certain groups. AI models must be designed to reflect diverse perspectives and avoid amplifying dominant narratives at the expense of minority voices. Transparency in AI-driven civic engagement tools is crucial to maintaining public trust. Moreover, democratic institutions should actively

involve civil society and citizens in AI governance to ensure that these. technologies enhance, rather than replace, human deliberation. If implemented responsibly, AI can help foster a more participatory democracy where decision-making becomes more responsive, inclusive, and reflective of public needs.

Christine Bel, Innovative manager AI, TU Delft:

In the light of AI & Democracy, several aspects need to be addressed. First is the fact that AI itself, or at least how it is implemented, fails to represent vast parts of the global population, whether these are women, people of colour, or even whole continents, because of the overrepresentation of certain parts of the world or dominant cultures, leading to biased systems. Second, AI is deliberately being used by certain (even state) powers to undermine democracy by using AI to create and spread misinformation. Then there's the fact that the most influential AI companies are big tech companies with too much power they can use to undermine democracy (or big tech companies can be forced to do so). Four: When, where and how to use AI is not democratically decided, but by the Big Tech companies that create them. The challenge is to turn this around and democratise AI. A final positive point might be that AI can also help strengthen Democracy by providing better access to political deliberation or justice.

Anna Colom, Policy Lead, Data Tank:

We are living through turbulent geopolitical times, marked by concentration of power in the hands of a small group of multibillionaire tech companies driving a fast-paced AI arms race in lagging regulatory contexts. This concentration of power is compounded in some contexts by democratic backsliding, the rise of securitisation and the far right or by narratives that relate the deployment of AI systems to efficiency and ideological austerity in public services.

In this context, the best we can do to strengthen democracy is to leave aside techno-solutionism and AI-hype. We need to be thoughtful and responsible about our democratic goods, principles and institutions. Questions about how

AI-driven technologies can help improve democratic practice need to start with questions about democracy, power, people, institutions, inclusion, representation, human connection, deliberation and accountability.

Decades of research and practice in deliberative democracy tell us what democratic goods are important to improve, protect, sustain and scale, like distribution of power, information and learning, inclusion, responsibility, deliberation, human connection, accountability and the sustainability of these goods. We also know how important civil and political rights are. Rather than starting with AI or the technology in trend as a fix for democracy, then, we should start with democracy and ask what are the affordances of technologies and AI-driven systems that can help improve, protect, sustain and scale these democratic goods and how.

Giulia Sandri, Associate Researcher, CEVIPOL - Université Libre de Bruxelles

The application of AI, both generative and predictive AI, in internal decision-making processes within political and civil society organizations has raised significant attention due to its potential to cut costs, increase process efficacy, and reshape traditional practices. AI technologies offer a range of opportunities that extend beyond routine administrative tasks to strategic political functions. For instance, AI systems can support internal decision-making by analysing the preferences of both members and potential supporters, predicting voter behaviours, and tailoring internal communication strategies to enhance engagement. AI systems further contribute to moderating internal discussions and recommending policy adjustments that are responsive to evolving political opinions of supporters and members. AI could also make political campaigning more effective by improving resource allocation, refining opinion polling, designing better audience segmentation on social media (through hyper targeting / hyper-personalized content), fast-tracking analysis based on large data sets, improving canvassing activities and conducting opposition research.However, the integration of AI into political decision-making raises significant risks. One major concern is the potential for power centralization within political organizations, which may lead to the erosion of internal democracy.

This risk is compounded by the lack of accountability and transparency in the management of algorithms and recommendation systems, highlighting critical gaps in current party and civil society organisations' legislation, domestic electoral laws, and AI regulatory frameworks. Furthermore, the use of AI in this context may exacerbate issues of epistemic cynicism and affective polarization among stakeholders, facilitate negative persuasion tactics, further weaken digital inclusion, and strengthen ethnic and gender biases. Privacy rights also could be undermined in an environment where sensitive data is extensively processed and analysed by foreign or commercial AI systems.

Lea Rogliano, Citizen Engagement Hub Lead, FARI

Further academic research shall be conducted regarding the design of citizen consultation platforms. They should be promoted, including in schools. Social networks have taken the place of institutionalized forums for democratic debate, defining their own standards (number of characters, hierarchization of content based on emotion, immediacy...). The massive use of social networks, particularly by young people, is creating a know-how, a habitus of discussion that can be confused with the standards required for enlightened democratic debate. Exploring the design of platforms, in particular to develop online benevolence, seems imperative. As the art of debate is a practice, citizens, especially younger ones, need to understand the difference that design makes to their discursive practices. This understanding needs to be practiced. To encourage democratic debate, attention needs to be paid to the content of discourse, as well as to the conditions under which it is produced. Multidisciplinary scientific research could play a key role in working on the conditions of debate production in democratic spaces.

François Vanhercke, Founder of SapIAnsis

Three fundamental principles must guide its development: transparency, explainability, and citizen participation. Without these, AI risks reinforcing technocracy and further alienating citizens from decision-making processes. However, when properly integrated, it could facilitate collective deliberation, strengthen democratic resilience against disinformation, and offer more nuanced and inclusive voting mechanisms.

Marlena Wisniak, Senior Legal Manager, European Center for Not-for-Profit Law Stichting (ECNL)

(1) Human Rights Impact Assessments: Conduct periodic assessments at all AI lifecycle stages, especially before development and deployment. Engage affected communities, particularly marginalized groups, and publish assessments with concrete risk mitigation measures. *(2) Inclusive and non-discriminatory use*: Make sure that minoritised and marginalised groups are not disproportionately affected when using AI-assisted content moderation and their input is sufficiently taken into account when AI-tools are used to analyse and summarise submissions, to prevent a "drowning effect" of minority voices and deviating opinions;

(3) Rights-Based AI Content Moderation: Refrain from automatically removed systems, and instead develop other machine learning-driven interventions such as improving notifications to users or flagging potentially violative content for further human review. Instances where legitimate content is wrongfully marked as harmful, violative or illegal (false positive) or where violative content is missed (false negative) should be tracked to improve the moderation function and findings should be made public. Efficient internal appeals/grievance mechanisms should be provided to users to request a review of decisions regarding their content; *(4) Accuracy & Transparency*: When AI summarizes content, provide references for verification. Disclose AI tool usage, accuracy reports, and moderation statistics beyond legal requirements.

(5) Multilingual Language Models: Address biases in automated translation for non-dominant languages. Improve datasets, hire diverse moderators, and collaborate with NLP communities. Conduct risk assessments for high-risk scenarios. *(6) Evaluation*: Continuously test AI accuracy with rigourous benchmarks. *(7) Data Protection*: Ensure chatbots do not collect or process sensitive information, refrain from inferring sensitive data, and ensure rigourous safeguards for data collection, storing, processing, and sharing.

(8) Civil Society Engagement: Involve civil society organizations in AI development and use, especially marginalized groups and affected communities. For more information, read our Framework for Meanginful Engagement in AI, as well as the blog post on AI and Participation.

Linda Warnier, Research Coordinator, Université Catolique de Louvain

AI in civic life resembles a soft magic system from a fantasy novel, symbolizing hope and potential while also demanding responsibility. It offers a means to address complex social issues, enabling us to believe that technology can help maintain societal stability. However, underlying power structures persist, and the hype surrounding AI can distract from serious inequities like racial bias in predictive policing and data exploitation by tech companies. As decision-making increasingly relies on opaque algorithms, the potential for reinforcing existing dynamics grows. Human accountability is not disappearing; it's merely being repackaged as an inevitability. AI, with its flawed models and data, remains useful, but we must focus on how and who uses it, maintaining accountability. The phrase 'the algorithm made us do it' shouldn't replace personal responsibility. For civic innovators, this is a call to action: don't let AI's allure overshadow real civic engagement. Civic platforms should strive to demystify their systems, promoting transparency and involvement from the public. Prioritizing user integration over mere scalability ensures democracy flourishes, with people—rather than algorithms—holding the power.

CONCLUSIONS

As Jungherr (2023) observes, while AI may not fundamentally transform democracy, there is a pressing need for more systematic research on how AI is employed in political and governmental contexts (Engstrom & Haim, 2023). Understanding these dynamics is critical as we assess the role of AI in democratic societies.

That is why the two high-level roundtable discussions addressing the intersection of AI & Democracy were organised. The first roundtable focused on enabling democratic AI systems, while the second explored the application of AI in democratic processes. These discussions provided valuable insights into both the risks and opportunities AI presents for democratic governance. This paper reviewed those discussions and provided an in-depth analysis of the tabled issues and the potential advantages of GenAI in the context of democratic processes.

Roundtables provided multi-stakeholder insights

As it was shown, the EU proactively aims to regulate digital services and AI through legal acts that intend to protect civic rights, democracy and limit potential negative impacts on EU citizens. Moreover, multiple frameworks aim to bolster citizen consultations on the matters of democracy such the European Citizens' Panels. Ultimately, initiatives like European Democracy Shield shall help to enforce and effectively enable the existing legislation in order to strengthen the EU's resilience.

EU regulations and initiatives aim to address both AI and democracy

The importance of guiding the AI by ethical principles is recognised by the goal to conform with the democratic values. It needs to be highlighted that inherent biases must always be mitigated, a human-centered approach must be maintained while remaining as transparent as possible about AI models. It's crucial to also promote AI literacy among users, be them citizens or policymakers. Finally, AI's environmental impact should be addressed to mitigate its negative impacts.

Multidisciplinary perspectives for ethical and value-based AI

To ensure value-based use of AI and continue addressing challenges linked with AI, it is indispensable to effectively support advanced research regarding AI systems. It is a crucial way to preserve AI's compatibility with fundamental rights of citizens around the planet and keep updated about potential implications of use of LLMs or other AI models. Social scientists, data scientists and practitioners must be brought together to provide a holistic view on AI and its consequences on democracy. Multidisciplinary perspectives are, for example, provided through the *Democratic Commons Research* project.

Diversity in AI applications in favor of democracy

AI tools are able to enhance the democratic processes in many ways. Citizens may be allowed to have an improved access to public institutions, their data and thus better understand complex institutional issues that concern them directly. AI tools may also serve to enhance inclusive participation in democratic debates and decision-making. Deliberation can be facilitated through LLMs assisting the citizens to find a common ground. What is more is that these tools can also counter societal polarisation in our democracies. Nevertheless, the use of such tools must be complementary to traditional participative methods, undergo a strict scrutiny and not oversimplify complex issues. Marginalisation of points of view is a risk. Yet, the case studies exhibit examples of AI use that provide us with successful deliberation processes, for example using the *Panoramic AI* tool. AI tools must be enabled through collaborative approaches between private and public actors, preserving sustainable financing of such tools.

Finally, the inputs from the community reveals that further discussions on the topic are crucial to sustain a holistic approach to a good use of AI tools. They highlight the challenges regarding the biases, implementation of the tools, their malicious use or concerns over centralisation of power. Nonetheless, positive application is supported in the fields of citizen participation on decision-making-processes, democracy strengthening, or guiding citizens and users through complex legislative texts.

Discussions on the topic continue from different angles

Make.org and ifok sincerely appreciate the active participation in the roundtables and the valuable input from stakeholders throughout the process. It was shown that a constructive, meaningful and evidence-based exchange between policy makers, civil society, practitioners and researchers is to the benefit of all. This report aims to secure the knowledge shared in the processes, as well as providing a starting point for further work in that context. More than ever, this is the moment to ensure public good applications of AI. Make.org and ifok are delighted to contribute to that process.

BACKGROUND

List of Roundtable Participants

Clarie Alspektor, *Make.org*
Christine Bel, *TU Delft & D66*
Jacob Birkenhäger, *ifok*
Fanny Bousquet, *Global Affairs Canada*
Elizabeth Calderón Lüning, *The Democratic Society*
Giulia Cibrario, *OECD*
Anna Colom, *The Data Tank*
Noah Damschke, *ifok*
Yves Dejaeghere, *Federation for Innovation in Democracy*
Bertrand De Longueville, *European Commission*
César Dro, *European Commission*
Julia Ferger, *European Commission*
Francisco Ferrera, *Sopra Steria*
Ioannis Galariotis, *European University Institute*
Julien Gosse, *Joint Research Centre*
Valentin Hillen, *European Economic and Social Committee*
Irene I. Aragon, *Justice for Prosperity & UK Mission to the EU*
Solène Lécuyer, *Make.org*
Elisa Lironi, *European Citizen Action Service*
David Mas, *Make.org*
Trisha Meyer, *Vrije Universiteit Brussel*
Hendrik Nahr, *Make.org*
Alvaro Oleart, *Université Libre de Bruxelles*
Carina Paju, *Open Government Partnership*
Marta Poblet Balcell, *The Data Tank*
Raphael Pouyé, *ECDPM & Sciences Po*
Eric Repetto, *Sciences Po*
Lea Rogliano, *FARI - AI Institute for the Common Good*
Constance Rotin, *Make.org*
Martin Sacleux, *European Commission*
Lukas Salecker, *deliberAIde*
Giulia Sandri, *Université Libre de Bruxelles*
Emanuele Sapienza, *UN Development Programme*
Constantin Schäfer, *ifok*
Laurenz Scheunemann, *ifok*
Steffen Schulz, *European Commission*
Colin Scicluna, *European Commission*
Krisztina Stump, *European Commission*
Federico Terrini, *European Movement International*
Silke Toenshoff, *European Committee of the Regions*
Linda Warnier, *Université Catolique de Louvain*
Marlena Wisniak, *European Center for Not-for-Profit Law*
Theresa Züger, *HIIG & UNESCO*
François Vanhercke, *Species Technica*
Diana Vlad-Câlcic, *European Commission*
Anthony Zacharzewski, *Democratic Society*

About the authors

Hendrik Nahr is the Head of European Affairs at Make.org, where he leads the organisation's representation at the EU level. His role focuses on coordinating the European initiatives, and advocating for enhanced citizen participation across Europe, as well as developing and implementing EU projects. He is also in charge of building European networks on democracy and technolgoy, including representing Make.org through the Association Civic Tech Europe. With a strong background in EU public affairs and civic engagement, Hendrik has held various roles in institutions, the private sector and in civil society organisations.

Constantin Schäfer works as Director of EU Relations & Projects in the area of Deliberation, Open Government and Democracy at ifok.. As Project Lead, he contributes to the design and implementation of the "European Citizens' Panels" of the European Commission, which he also did for the Conference on the Future of Europe and further innovative participation projects (e.g., the "Peer Parliaments" of the "EU Climate Pact"). Moreover, he holds a PhD in political science and acts as Senior Researcher in different Horizon Europe research projects (such as CLIMAS, which develops tools for Climate Citizens' Assemblies, and SCALEDEM, which focuses on scaling democratic innovations).

Photo: First Roundtable hosted by the FARI - AI Institute for the Common Good

Laurenz Scheunemann works as a consultant for deliberation and democratic innovation at ifok where his work centres on auspicious and participatory approaches to make policies and political processes more effective, evidence-informed and people-centred. He has been moderating, mediating and facilitating various forms of citizen engagement such as assemblies and the European Citizen Panels. Previously, Mr. Scheunemann worked in the Behavioral Science Team of the World Bank, the Policy Lab of the European Commission and the Behavioral Insights Team (BIT).

Constance Rotin contributed as EU Policy Officer at Make.org (September 2024 - February 2025), where she worked on EU-level advocacy and policy initiatives as part of the Governance and Democratic Innovation department.

Martin Wilam contributed as EU Policy Officer at Make.org (February 2025 - July 2025), where he worked on EU-level advocacy and policy initiatives as part of the Governance and Democratic Innovation department.

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Photo: Second Roundtable hosted by Representation by the State of Hessen to the EU

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Hendrik Nahr
hendrik.nahr@make.org

Constantin Schäfer
constantin.schaefer@ifok.de