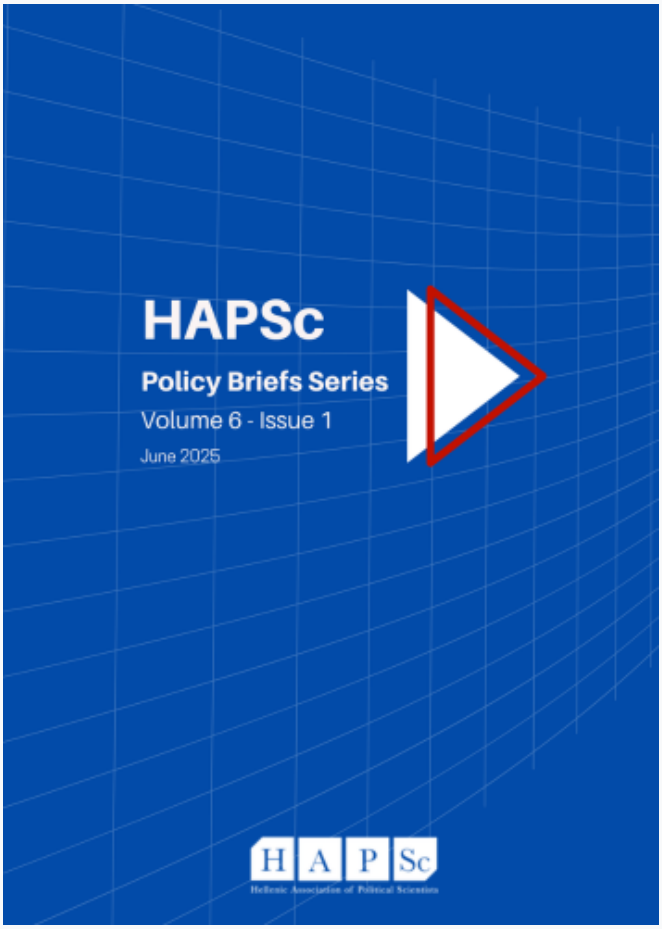
ePublishing

ΕΘΝΙΚΟ ΚΕΝΤΡΟ ΤΕΚΜΗΡΙΩΣΗΣ
EKT NATIONAL DOCUMENTATION CENTRE

HAPSc Policy Briefs Series

Vol 6, No 1 (2025)

HAPSc Policy Briefs Series



When Democracy Meets AI: The Digital Battle for Political Truth

Daniele Battista

doi: 10.12681/hapscpbs.43205

Copyright © 2025, Daniele Battista

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0.

To cite this article:

Battista, D. (2025). When Democracy Meets AI: The Digital Battle for Political Truth. *HAPSc Policy Briefs Series*, *6*(1), 191–197. https://doi.org/10.12681/hapscpbs.43205

https://epublishing.ekt.gr | **e-Publisher:** EKT | **Downloaded at:** 26/03/2026 16:03:28

When Democracy Meets AI: The Digital Battle for Political Truth[1]

Daniele Battista[2]

Abstract

Artificial intelligence represents one of the most significant technological innovations of our time, with profound effects on politics and its communicative dynamics. The ability to generate realistic and persuasive textual, visual, and audiovisual content, combined with the accessibility of generative tools, is transforming how political messages are crafted, personalized, and disseminated. This article explores the double-edged nature of generative AI in the political sphere: on one hand, it offers opportunities for innovation, inclusion, and civic participation; on the other, it raises critical concerns related to disinformation, manipulation of public opinion, and a growing crisis of trust in democratic institutions. In a context marked by media polarization and the weakening of traditional channels, there is an urgent need for a clear regulatory framework capable of ensuring transparency and accountability in the political use of AI. The aim of this article is to critically examine the potential and the threats of this emerging technology, while proposing policy solutions to safeguard the integrity of democratic debate in the digital age.

Keywords: Generative AI, Political communication, Disinformation, Democratic integrity, Algorithmic manipulation, Media regulation, Civic participation.

Introduction

In recent years, generative artificial intelligence has emerged as one of the most influential forces within the new informational and communicative ecosystem (Battista, 2024a). Tools such as ChatGPT, Midjourney, and other platforms based on generative AI models now allow anyone, regardless of technical expertise, to create high-quality textual, visual, and audiovisual content in a matter of seconds. This accessibility, combined with the AI's ability to mimic human language and communicative styles in a credible and often indistinguishable manner, has triggered a profound transformation in the way political, social, and commercial communication is conceived and disseminated. In the realm of political communication, the impact of generative AI is particularly significant. Candidates and political parties can now automate speeches, slogans, campaign imagery, personalized messages, and even direct interactions with voters through advanced chatbots or lifelike avatars. These tools offer unprecedented scalability and adaptability: leveraging big data analytics and psychometric profiling techniques, political messages can be tailored to individuals or social groups based on their preferences, emotions, and online behaviour. Political microtargeting, already deployed in the past (as in the case of Cambridge Analytica), is now augmented by language models capable of generating ideologically consistent, rhetorically persuasive, and emotionally engaging

[1] To cite this paper in APA style: Battista, D. (2025). When Democracy Meets AI: The Digital Battle for Political Truth. *HAPSc Policy Briefs Series, 6*(1), 191-197. https://doi.org/10.12681/hapscpbs.43205

[2] University of Salerno, Italy.

content. However, the transformative potential of generative AI is far from neutral. While it offers innovative tools for civic participation, inclusion, and the personalization of political messaging, it also raises urgent concerns regarding the manipulation of public opinion, the spread of disinformation, and the accountability of those employing such technologies. In particular, the ability to produce synthetic yet realistic content – such as deepfake videos, fabricated articles, or false statements – presents serious challenges to source verification and information authenticity. The speed at which these contents can be generated and disseminated via social media risks amplifying dynamics of polarization and distrust, already exacerbated by the crisis of traditional media and the fragmentation of the information landscape (Floridi & Chiriatti, 2020). The capacity of AI to produce content indistinguishable from human-generated material, in the absence of effective mechanisms for traceability and verification, undermines fundamental principles of democratic communication: transparency, accountability, and access to reliable information. During electoral campaigns, for instance, a synthetic video in which a candidate appears to "say" something they never actually said could spread rapidly, influencing voter perceptions and behaviour before it can be debunked. In loosely regulated environments, such as online platforms, the boundaries between legitimate political communication, propaganda, and manipulation become increasingly blurred. In light of these challenges, the need for a clear and up-to-date regulatory framework becomes imperative: one capable of guiding the political adoption of generative AI without compromising the foundational principles of public debate. At present, many countries lack specific laws governing the use of AI in political communication, leaving room for opaque or unethical practices. Some initiatives, such as the European Union's AI Act, contain provisions on transparency and traceability of AI-generated outputs, yet often do not directly address the political use of these technologies. Therefore, generative artificial intelligence represents both an extraordinary opportunity and a substantial challenge for 21st-century political communication. When used ethically, transparently, and responsibly, it can contribute to making public discourse more accessible, participatory, and tailored to diverse audiences. Yet without a proper system of rules, oversight, and public education, it risks becoming a tool of manipulation, fuelling distrust, disinformation, and informational inequality. It is thus the responsibility of institutions, academia, and civil society to build a digital ecosystem in which technological innovation consistently serves democracy, rather than threatening it.

Theoretical Background

In recent years, it has become evident that the increasingly intense interaction between digital technology and the political sphere has attracted growing attention from scholars in the social sciences (Battista, 2024b). This phenomenon of convergence has given rise to new dynamics of interaction

among political actors, media, and citizens, profoundly transforming the way politics is conceived, disseminated, and consumed. Within this context, the advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) represents one of the most significant milestones in this ongoing evolution (Floridi, 2022), to the extent that its introduction has assumed a paradigmatic role, resulting in a substantial transformation of various interactive dynamics. AI, with its ability to analyse complex data, process information in real time, and adapt to individual preferences, may fundamentally reshape how political leaders engage with the public and substantially contribute to the shaping of public opinion itself (Battista, 2023). It is now a widely accepted notion that AI, beyond being an area of significant interest in contemporary research and technological development, is oriented toward the creation of systems and devices capable of emulating specific cognitive functions of the human mind. This view aligns coherently with recent developments emphasizing that AI manifests itself through machines capable of mimicking certain cognitive functions typically attributed to humans. Likewise, popular culture (through media such as film, television, and traditional forms of communication) has promoted an interpretation of artificial intelligence centred on competition between machines and humans (Larson, 2021), embedding ideas, stereotypes, and expectations regarding the potential threats and dangers associated with developing machines capable of intelligent behaviour. This perception has even led some scholars to regard AI as a potential existential threat (Ballantine et al., 2024), in stark contrast to those who see it as ushering in a new era of innovation with the power to reshape society (Makridakis, 2017). Given these considerations, we are confronted with challenges related to source validation, information manipulation, equitable access to news, the creation of a trustworthy informational environment, and the potential of AI to serve as a tool for encouraging active participation in political life. These issues fall within a broader reflection on AI's capacity to shape and influence political processes and on how effective strategies can be adopted to ensure an informed and transparent debate in the age of artificial intelligence (Bareis & Katzenbach, 2022). This contribution, therefore, aims to clarify the potential role of AI within the contemporary political context, with particular attention to its influence on democratic processes and the formation of public opinion. It will examine the impacts, challenges, and opportunities inherent in its use, projecting its future influence on democracy. Contrary to media and cultural narratives often dominated by dystopian and negative visions of AI development, this approach seeks to move beyond the idea of AI as merely an existential threat by also highlighting its positive implications and potential opportunities in the political sphere. Considering the discussion above, there emerges a pressing need for a balanced and informed reflection on the diverse challenges associated with this integration. Such a perspective underscores the importance of conducting a comprehensive and nuanced evaluation of

AI's impact on the political domain, with the aim of enriching our understanding of this dynamic in all its complexity.

How Artificial Intelligence Is Changing Politics

It is now widely acknowledged that artificial intelligence (AI) is playing an increasingly central role in transforming the communicative dynamics of contemporary politics, intervening at multiple stages of the political process: from narrative construction to voter mobilization, and the management of public image of political leaders. One of the most evident applications lies in AI's ability to automatically and hyper-personalized generate textual, visual, and audiovisual content. In the United States, as demonstrated during presidential election campaigns, machine learning models have been used to analyse large volumes of data from social media and CRM (Customer Relationship Management) systems in order to segment audiences and send targeted messages designed to maximize engagement (Simchon et al., 2024). Looking back, a particularly significant example is the 2016 presidential campaign of Donald Trump, during which the company Cambridge Analytica employed predictive techniques based on behavioural analysis to profile millions of Facebook users, allowing them to anticipate the most effective messages to send to each group. Beyond textual communication, generative AI enables the creation of synthetic images and videos (deepfakes), which can be used both satirically and manipulatively (Battista, 2024c). In several cases of online circulation, politicians were shown making statements they had never actually made, sparking intense debate over the ethical implications and potential risks of these technologies (Farkas & Schou, 2023). One striking case occurred during the 2023 electoral campaign in Slovakia, when a manipulated video showing the opposition leader apparently confessing to electoral fraud went viral just hours before voting, potentially influencing the election outcome. These episodes illustrate how the accessibility of automatic content generation tools, combined with the speed of dissemination on social networks, can significantly alter public perception and contribute to political polarization. Nevertheless, generative AI is not solely a threat; it can also serve as a powerful tool to strengthen democracy and promote political inclusion. In Denmark, the Social Democratic Party introduced a chatbot named "Lisbeth," capable of answering questions about electoral programs and collecting citizen concerns in real time, thereby facilitating more direct dialogue between voters and parties. Similarly, in Taiwan, the platform "Pol.is," integrated with AI technologies, was used to support digital deliberative processes on controversial topics, successfully identifying points of consensus among polarized groups and improving the formulation of public policy. These examples show that, when properly regulated and responsibly deployed, AI can enhance civic participation, reduce communicative barriers, and promote greater transparency in political decision-making. In

conclusion, the use of generative artificial intelligence in politics presents a dual nature: on the one hand, it enables new forms of engagement and personalization of political discourse; on the other, it raises urgent questions about the authenticity of information, the manipulation of public opinion, and the risk of systematic disinformation. In light of this, it becomes crucial to develop a regulatory framework that mandates the labelling of AI-generated content, promotes traceability of the data used for political profiling, and strengthens media literacy tools among the population. Only through an integrated approach combining innovation, education, and regulation will it be possible to preserve the integrity of democratic debate in the digital age.

Risks and concerns

As we have observed, the advancement of intelligent systems in the political sphere raises broad ethical questions that challenge the very foundations of democratic communication. One of the main concerns relates to the loss of transparency regarding the origin and intent of digital content: when texts, images, and videos can be automatically generated by algorithms, it becomes difficult for voters to distinguish between what is real and what is fabricated. This phenomenon contributes to a polluted information environment (Gallo et al., 2022), where trust in traditional sources is eroded, paving the way for the rise of alternative narratives often based on misinformation or propaganda. If unregulated, AI can be used to reinforce preexisting biases, surgically target deceptive messages, or even suppress dissent through the massive production of "artificial" content that drowns out critical voices in digital spaces. From a regulatory standpoint, the current framework remains fragmented and insufficient (Battista & Uva, 2024d; 2025). At the European level, the Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act), approved by the European Parliament in 2024, represents an ambitious first attempt to introduce a risk-based classification system for AI usage, identifying political and communicative contexts as "high risk." However, although the legislation provides for transparency and documentation obligations for systems used in political settings, gaps remain in the ability to implement effective oversight and sanction violations – especially when the actors involved operate on a transnational scale. Outside of Europe, countries such as the United States and Brazil are debating similar approaches, though marked by sharp divergences between models focused on safeguarding individual rights and others that are more permissive in the name of technological innovation. The ethical implications also extend to the issue of voter autonomy—a core principle of liberal democracy. The use of AI to profile, persuade, and influence political choices risks reducing the citizen to a "political consumer," shaped by algorithmic logic that rewards emotionalism, simplification, and polarization. As Zuboff (2023) argues in her theory of “surveillance capitalism,” technologies that collect and manipulate behavioural data do not merely predict, but actively seek to shape future actions, thereby

gradually eroding decision-making freedom. In this context, it is essential to promote an ethics of AI that considers not only the technical functionality of systems, but also their social and democratic impacts. To address these challenges, experts advocate for the adoption of binding codes of conduct for digital political campaigns, mandatory visible labelling of artificially generated content, and the establishment of independent authorities with investigatory and sanctioning powers. Furthermore, civic and media education must be updated to include critical digital competencies, such as the ability to detect manipulation, interrogate sources, and understand how algorithms function. Without such interventions, AI risks becoming a tool of power concentrated in the hands of a few actors, rather than a means of expanding participation and strengthening democratic institutions.

Conclusions

Ultimately, the governance of generative artificial intelligence in the political sphere requires a multilayered strategy based on transparency, accountability, and digital literacy. The clear identification of AI-generated content is an essential prerequisite for safeguarding informational integrity, especially in democratically sensitive contexts such as electoral campaigns. The mandatory introduction of digital watermarks or certified metadata, harmonized through supranational standards, could serve as a technical measure to curb manipulation. At the same time, it is necessary to assign both formal and substantive responsibility to political actors involved in the use of generative systems: the establishment of independent auditing mechanisms, combined with the obligation to disclose the use of AI in communication processes in advance, would help strengthen traceability and the legitimacy of political action. In parallel, digital education, understood not merely as technical training, but as the critical development of media awareness, must be recognized as a political and cultural priority. Only through a structured dialogue between institutions, digital platforms, media, and civil society will it be possible to build a resilient communication ecosystem capable of reconciling technological innovation with the needs of a democratic and pluralistic public sphere.

References

Ballantine, J., Boyce, G., & Stoner, G. (2024). A critical review of AI in accounting education: Threat and opportunity. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 99, 102711.

Bareis, J., & Katzenbach, C. (2022). Talking AI into being: The narratives and imaginaries of national AI strategies and their performative politics. Science, Technology, & Human Values, 47(5), 855-881.

Battista, D., & Uva, G. (2025). Artificial Intelligence and Politics: Legal Dilemmas and Risks to Democracy. *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs Institute for Research and European Studies-Bitola*, 11(1), 42-61.

Battista, D. (2024a). Political reconfiguration in the social space: data analysis and future perspective. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 8, 1226509.

Battista, D. (2024b). The road to AI: Pathways and obstacles. *Sociétés*, 163(1), 55-72.

Battista, D. (2024c). Political communication in the age of artificial intelligence: an overview of deepfakes and their implications. *Society Register*, 8(2), 7-24.

Battista, D., & Uva, G. (2024d). Navigating the virtual realm of hate: Analysis of policies combating online hate speech in the Italian-European context. *Law, Tech. & Hum*., 6, 48.

Battista, D. (2023). In the Shadows of Disinformation: Fake News and Violations of Human Rights. *Review of Human Rights*, 9(1), 143-164.

Farkas, J., & Schou, J. (2023). *Post-truth, fake news and democracy: Mapping the politics of falsehood*. London: Routledge.

Floridi, L., & Chiriatti, M. (2020). GPT-3: Its nature, scope, limits, and consequences. *Minds and Machines*, 30, 681-694.

Floridi, L. (2022). *Etica dell'intelligenza artificiale: Sviluppi, opportunità, sfide*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore.

Gallo, M., Fenza, G., & Battista, D. (2022). Information Disorder: What about global security implications?. *Rivista di Digital Politics*, 2(3), 523-538.

Larson, E. J. (2021). *The myth of artificial intelligence: Why computers can't think the way we do.* USA: Harvard University Press.

Makridakis, S. (2017). The forthcoming Artificial Intelligence (AI) revolution: Its impact on society and firms. *Futures*, 90, 46-60.

Simchon, A., Edwards, M., & Lewandowsky, S. (2024). The persuasive effects of political microtargeting in the age of generative artificial intelligence. *PNAS nexus*, 3(2), pgae035.

Zuboff, S. (2023). The age of surveillance capitalism. In: Longhofer, W. & Winchester, D. (eds.), *Social theory re-wired*. London: Routledge, pp. 203-213.