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MIT GOV/LAB Generative AI & Democracy Mini Syllabus

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Overview

We live in an era where technology has changed the ways that we interact in a democracy, and generative AI accelerates that change. Kenya's protests over the 2024 Finance Bill gives powerful examples of how generative AI has become part of democratic action. During the protests, [custom GPT tools](#) like the "Finance Bill GPT" and "Corrupt Politicians GPT" were developed. The Finance Bill GPT gives people easy access to a difficult-to-digest government bill, and the Corrupt Politicians GPT gives people access to corruption scandals and cases of politicians. In India, generative AI is used to enable access to [public services](#) and to process high volumes of public grievance redressals in multiple languages.

This [impact paper](#) discusses the many ways that generative AI can bolster and improve deliberative platforms for strengthening democracy and researchers have found that generative AI can [increase civility](#) online. With generative AI, information to promote accountability, transparency, and awareness of issues can become much more accessible and available. Governments also have better tools for responding to citizens and providing public services. And citizens have improved tools to have discourse, express themselves, and make sure their views are represented.

At the same time, generative AI can easily pose threats to democracy. Just as it is a source of more accessible information, it is also a source for misinformation. During this presidential campaign season in the US, fake [AI-generated audio of President Biden](#) discouraged New Hampshire citizens from voting. In fact, [AI-powered misinformation campaigns](#) can easily flood social media and the information ecosystem, and it is only becoming cheaper and faster. People are suspicious of generative AI, but as it is used in more government transactions or used in deliberation platforms, growing distrust of government or discourse can also emerge.

This syllabus provides an opportunity to delve deeper into how generative AI can impact democracy, in ways that can strengthen democracy and that are socially and ethically responsible. The readings cover several topics related to generative AI and democracy to foster discussion around a healthy democracy and how generative AI affects them. This resource will also be updated as new research about generative AI and democracy come out. For suggestions of readings to add to this syllabus, please reach out to govlab@mit.edu.

Democracy

- Summerfield, C., et al., (2024). How will advanced AI systems impact democracy?. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2409.06729*. [Link](#).
- Christiano, Tom and Sameer Bajaj (Summer 2024 Edition), Democracy, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (Eds.) [Link](#). Read Section 1. Democracy Defined and Section 4. The Demands of Democratic Participation
- Christiano, Tom and Sameer Bajaj, Democracy, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2024 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.) [Link](#).
- Habermas, J. (2002). Three normative models of democracy: liberal, republican, procedural. In Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley (Eds), *Questioning Ethics*, (pp. 145-154). Routledge. [Link](#).
- Tocqueville, A. de. (1960). *Democracy in America*. Vintage Books.
- Levitsky, Steven and Daniel Ziblatt. (2023). How American Democracy Fell So Far Behind. *The Atlantic*. [Link](#).
- Allen, D., & Weyl, E. G. (2024). The real dangers of generative AI. *Journal of Democracy*, 35(1), 147-162. [Link](#).
- Kreps, S., & Kriner, D. (2023). How AI threatens democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 34(4), 122-131. [Link](#).
- The Digitalist Papers. [Link](#).

Generative AI

Google Crash Course: LLMs

- Introduction to LLMs. [Link](#).
- LLMs - Introduction: What is a language model? [Link](#).
- LLMs - What is a Large Language Model? [Link](#).
- LLMs - Fine-tuning, distillation, and prompt engineering [Link](#).
- Ovadya, A. (2023). Reimagining democracy for AI. *Journal of Democracy*, 34(4), 162-170. [Link](#).
- EU Artificial Intelligence Act. [Link](#).
- White House Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights. [Link](#).
- Andrej Karpathy, Intro to LLMs (1 hour talk). [Link](#).

Elections

- Jungherr, A., Rauchfleisch, A., & Wuttke, A. (2024). Deceptive uses of Artificial Intelligence in elections strengthen support for AI ban. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2408.12613*. [Link](#).
- Simon, Felix M., Keegan McBride, and Sacha Altay. (2024) AI's impact on elections is being overblown. *MIT Technology Review*. [Link](#).

- Yarhi-Milo, K., Schiller, V., Clinton, H. R., Jourova, V., Ressa, M., Hajdu, D., Pallero, J., Tu, E., Schiffrin, A., Agranovich, D., Green, Y., Watts, C., Benson, J., Chertoff, M., Lindenbaum, D., Makanju, A., & Schmidt, E. (2024, March 28). A.I.'s impact on 2024 global elections. The Aspen Institute. (Panel discussion). [Link](#). (Watch starting at 40:35)
- Bueno de Mesquita, E., Canes-Wrone, B., Hall, A. B., Lum, K., Martin, G. J., & Velez, Y. R. (2023, November 1). Preparing for generative AI in the 2024 election: Recommendations and best practices based on academic research. The University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy; Graduate School of Stanford Business. [Link](#).
- Simchon, Almog, Matthew Edwards, and Stephan Lewandowsky. 2024. "The Persuasive Effects of Political Microtargeting in the Age of Generative Artificial Intelligence." *PNAS Nexus* 3 (2): pgae035. [Link](#).

Information and Misinformation

- Costello, Thomas H., Gordon Pennycook, and David G. Rand. 2024. Durably Reducing Conspiracy Beliefs through Dialogues with AI. *Science* 385 (6714): eadq1814. [Link](#).
- Longoni, Chiara, Andrey Fradkin, Luca Cian, and Gordon Pennycook. 2022. News from Generative Artificial Intelligence Is Believed Less. In *Proceedings of the 2022 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency*, 97–106. FAccT '22. New York, NY, USA: Association for Computing Machinery. [Link](#).
- Goldstein, Josh A, Jason Chao, Shelby Grossman, Alex Stamos, and Michael Tomz. 2024. How Persuasive Is AI-Generated Propaganda? *PNAS Nexus* 3 (2): pgae034. [Link](#).
- Bai, H., Voelkel, J. G., Eichstaedt, J. C., & Willer, R. (2023). Artificial intelligence can persuade humans on political issues. OSF Preprints. [Link](#).
- Gautam, S., Venkit, P. N., & Ghosh, S. (2024). From melting pots to misrepresentations: Exploring harms in generative ai. *arXiv preprint arXiv:2403.10776*. [Link](#).

Government Responsiveness

- Kreps, Sarah, and Douglas L. Kriner. 2023. The Potential Impact of Emerging Technologies on Democratic Representation: Evidence from a Field Experiment. *New Media & Society*, March, 14614448231160526. [Link](#).
- Peixoto, Tiago C., Otaviano Canuto, and Luke Jordan. 2024. *AI and the Future of Government: Unexpected Effects and Critical Challenges*. Policy Center for the New South. [Link](#).
- Haesevoets, T., Verschuere, B., Van Severen, R., & Roets, A. (2024). How do citizens perceive the use of Artificial Intelligence in public sector decisions?. *Government Information Quarterly*, 41(1), 101906. [Link](#).

Deliberative Technologies

- Tsai, Lily L., Alex Pentland, Alia Braley, Nuole Chen, José Ramón Enríquez, and Anka Reuel. 2024. Generative AI for Pro-Democracy Platforms. *An MIT Exploration of Generative AI*, March. [Link](#).
- Argyle, L. P., et al. (2023). Leveraging AI for democratic discourse: Chat interventions can improve online political conversations at scale. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 120(41), e2311627120. [Link](#).
- Tsai, Lily and Alex Pentland. Rediscovering the Pleasures of Pluralism: The Potential of Digitally Mediated Civic Participation. *The Digitalist Papers*. [Link](#).
- Bakker, M., et al. (2022). Fine-tuning language models to find agreement among humans with diverse preferences. *Advances in Neural Information Processing Systems*, 35, 38176-38189. [Link](#).
- Horton, Chris. (2018). The simple but ingenious system Taiwan uses to crowdsource its laws. *MIT Technology Review*. [Link](#).
- Karacapilidis, N., Kalampokis, E., Giarelis, N., & Mastrokostas, C. (2024). Generative AI and Public Deliberation: A Framework for LLM-augmented Digital Democracy. *Proceedings EGOV-CeDEM-ePart Conference*. [Link](#).