**AI and democracy: risks and rewards**

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Democracy is a form of government where citizens have a say in the decision-making process through their elected representatives. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and technology are changing the world we live in at an unprecedented pace. These advancements have transformed our lives and are increasingly having a significant impact on the way democracies function. The question of whether technology and AI will be beneficial or detrimental to democracy is complex. One of the most significant benefits of technology and AI for democracy is the improvement of access to information.

Technology has made it easier to obtain information on political processes, voting records, and the activities of elected representatives. This transparency has helped citizens to hold their governments accountable and to make informed decisions about political issues. Technology and AI can enhance citizen engagement by enabling greater participation in the decision-making process. For instance, social media platforms and online forums allow citizens to express their opinions and concerns to policymakers, while online voting platforms enable citizens to participate in voting processes without the need for physical presence. Technology and AI can also help to promote greater transparency and accountability in a democracy. For example, online databases can make it easier to track political donations and spending, while AI-powered tools can help to detect corruption and fraud. One of the most significant risks of technology and AI for democracy is the potential for information manipulation. Social media platforms, for instance, have been criticised for their role in spreading fake news, propaganda, and hate speech.

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These platforms use AI algorithms to curate news feeds, and these algorithms can be used to manipulate public opinion and undermine democratic processes. The Cambridge Analytica scandal is a high-profile example of how data mining and profiling can be used to manipulate public opinion in politics. Cambridge Analytica, a British political consulting firm, was hired by the Trump campaign during the 2016 US Presidential election to use data from Facebook to target voters with tailored political ads. The scandal exposed the risks of collecting and using data without the knowledge and consent of users and raised concerns about the role of data mining and profiling in politics.

AI can be used in political campaigns to analyse voter data and preferences and to identify trends and patterns in voting behaviour. This can help political parties to tailor their messages and campaign strategies to appeal to different groups of voters. However, there are also concerns that this type of data analysis could be used to manipulate public opinion and undermine the democratic process. As AI becomes more advanced, it may play an increasingly important role in decision-making processes in politics. For example, AI could be used to analyse policy proposals, evaluate the effectiveness of different strategies, and forecast the outcomes of different scenarios. However, there are also risks that AI could be biased, or that its decision-making processes could be opaque and difficult to understand. As AI becomes more powerful, it has the potential to disrupt traditional political structures and power relationships. For example, AI-powered tools could be used to organise political movements and coordinate protests and demonstrations. This could challenge the existing power structures and lead to a more decentralised and grassroots approach to politics.

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One of the most significant threats is the possibility of governments abusing technology to control their people. Governments around the world have always been looking for ways to maintain their power and control over their citizens. With the advent of AI, they have a new tool at their disposal that can be used to keep a watchful eye on the population. This can lead to a scenario where privacy is a thing of the past, and people’s every move is monitored. The use of AI in surveillance can have detrimental effects on society. It can lead to the erosion of democratic norms, where people are afraid to express their views or engage in political activities for fear of being monitored. This can have a chilling effect on free speech, which is the cornerstone of any democracy.

For example, In China, the “social credit system” is like a persistent online nanny, constantly monitoring citizens’ behaviour and handing out grades like a tough elementary school teacher. This AI program assigns each person a score based on their actions, which can affect their ability to travel, buy a house, or even get a date. But while the Chinese government hails this system as a marvel of modern technology, it raises serious concerns about neglecting democratic norms. After all, the social credit system is essentially a way for the government to control citizens’ behaviour and punish those who deviate from the norm—even if the “norm” is subject to the whims of those in power. Imagine if your entire life was reduced to a single number, like a credit score, that determined your access to basic necessities like transportation, housing, and employment. And imagine that this number was determined not just by objective factors like your income or credit history, but also by your social behaviour—like who you associate with, what you say online, and how you behave in public. It’s easy to see how such a system could be abused by those in power to suppress dissent, punish minorities, or reward loyalists. And because the social credit system is run by an AI program, there’s little room for transparency, accountability, or even appeal. In a true democracy, citizens have the right to freedom of speech, association, and thought. They have the right to dissent, to challenge authority, and to live their lives as they see fit—as long as they don’t harm others. The social credit system, however, turns these democratic ideals on its head. It’s a tool of authoritarian control, not a mechanism for citizen empowerment.

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The impact of AI on democracy and democratic norms is complex and multifaceted, with both positive and negative effects. On one hand, AI can help to increase efficiency, transparency, and accuracy in democratic processes, such as election monitoring and vote counting. However, there are also concerns that AI could be used to manipulate public opinion and undermine the democratic process, as well as exacerbate existing inequalities and biases. It is clear that the impact of AI on democracy will depend on how it is developed and deployed. Policymakers, researchers, and technologists must work together to ensure that AI is used in a responsible and ethical manner that respects and upholds democratic values and principles. This may involve developing new regulatory frameworks, promoting transparency and accountability in AI systems, and ensuring that the benefits of AI are distributed fairly across society. Ultimately, the impact of AI on democracy is a complex and ongoing conversation that will require ongoing dialogue, research, and collaboration. By working together, we can harness the power of AI to strengthen and uphold democratic norms, while mitigating any negative impacts that may arise.